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Descriptions of Reproductions of Previously Existing Works: Another View

Janet Swan Hill

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Descriptions of Reproductions of Previously Existing Works: Another View

by Janet Swan Hill

Under the provisions of AACR, description of microform republications was in terms of the original publication to which the data concerning microformat was subordinated. AACR 2, on the other hand, instructed that description of all types of materials be based upon the physical item being catalogued, subordinating information about the original publication to that of the present copy. As a member of a CC:DA task force studying the controversy, the author suggests reasons why the description of the original in microforms cataloging may not be the ideal solution to the problem surrounding reproductions.

When work began on the second edition of the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules* (AACR2) in 1974 there was little reason to expect that the new rules would incorporate significant departures from the first edition as amended up to that time. The objectives formulated at the meeting which resulted in the formation of the Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR appeared to be both harmless and laudable: 1) To reconcile . . . the North American and British texts of 1967, 2) To incorporate . . . all amendments and changes already agreed and implemented . . . , 3) To consider . . . all proposals for amendment currently under discussion [and] any new proposals . . . , and 4) To [facilitate AACR's] use in countries other than the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.¹

The Joint Steering Committee's own guidelines were also unalarming: 1) Maintenance of general conformity with the Paris Principles . . . , 2) Particular attention to developments in the machine processing of bibliographic records, 3) Continuance of conformity with the ISBD(M) . . . and commitment to the principle of standardization in the bibliographic description of all types of materials, and 4) Determination of the treatment of nonbook materials . . . primarily from a consideration of the published cataloging rules. . . .²

In 1978 review copies of the new text were made available beyond the Joint Steering Committee, and the differences between AACR2 and AACR began to be seen. That AACR2 rules would result in differences in form of headings, and that it would narrow the concept of corporate authorship had been known, and did not

excite immoderate distress. Something which had apparently not been expected, however, was that the "commitment to the principle of standardization in the bibliographic description of all types of material" had contributed to a virtual reversal of the historical approach to microform cataloging. Whereas AACR and its predecessors had mandated description of microforms in terms of the reproduced original, AACR2 instructed that description of all types of materials be based upon the physical item being cataloged.

It is not my purpose to trace the development of objections to the new rules, but a few events should be noted. In January, 1980, in response to objections being raised to the AACR2 rules for microform cataloging, ALA's RTSD/CCS Committee on Cataloging: Description and Access (CC:DA) formed a task force to propose revisions to AACR2 in an attempt to answer the objections raised. In June, the task force presented three possible sets of AACR2 rule revisions. None of the proposals satisfied a majority of the Committee. None, therefore, was forwarded to the Joint Steering Committee. In the ensuing months dissatisfaction with the AACR2 approach for cataloging microform reproductions grew. The Library of Congress announced that until the matter was settled, it would not apply the AACR2 approach to the description of the microform reproductions which it must catalog, but would continue to describe the original from which a reproduction was made.³ Other organizations, including the Association of Research Libraries⁴ and the Research Libraries Group⁵ soon followed with statements asking for a reassessment of AACR2. At the ALA Midwinter meeting in February, 1981, a hearing on microform cataloging attracted 27 presentations. A consensus against AACR2 was manifest, but there was no unanimity on an alternative. Unfortunately, the ques-

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