

**We  
Need  
To  
Talk  
About  
Cataloguing**

**Alissa McCulloch**  
@lissertations

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#NLS9s09



(This is a really good book!)

**‘Oh... is that still a thing?’**

*‘Why store data about an object,  
when you have the object itself?  
Because without data about  
the objects contained in a space,  
any sufficiently complex space is  
indistinguishable from chaos.’*

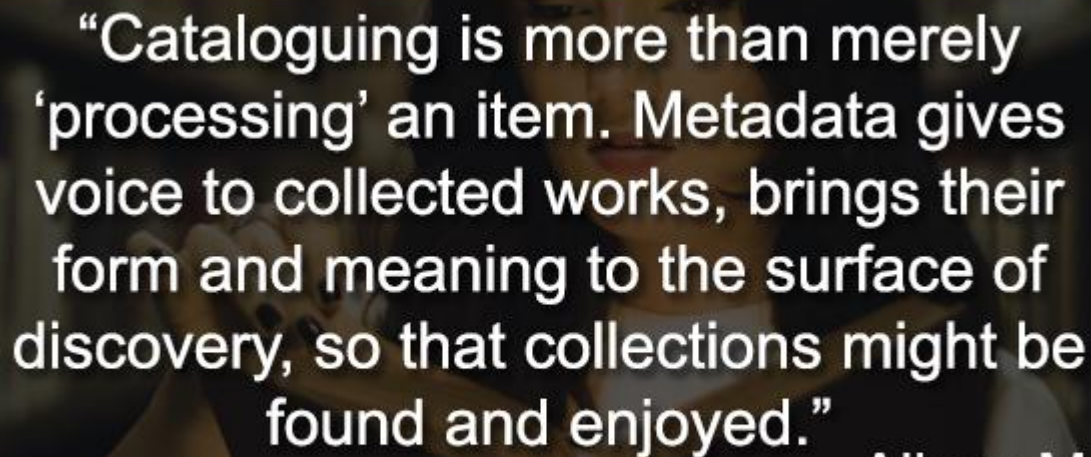
—Jeffrey Pomerantz,  
*Metadata (2015)*

**‘Cataloguing’  
versus  
‘Metadata’**

**‘That’s great. Why should I care?’**

*‘If you care about social justice  
or representation in libraries,  
you need to care about library metadata  
and how it is controlled.’*

—Hugh Rundle,  
‘Better out than in’ (2019)

A woman with dark hair is shown from the chest up, looking down at an open book she is holding. The background is a blurred library with bookshelves. The text is overlaid on a dark semi-transparent rectangle.

“Cataloguing is more than merely  
‘processing’ an item. Metadata gives  
voice to collected works, brings their  
form and meaning to the surface of  
discovery, so that collections might be  
found and enjoyed.”

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CATALOGUING  
IS  
POWER

*‘In terms of organization and access, libraries are sites constructed by the disciplinary power of language.’*

—Emily Drabinski,  
*‘Queering the Catalog: Queer Theory  
and the Politics of Correction’ (2013)*

*‘When an item is placed in a particular category or given a particular name, those decisions always reflect a particular ideology or approach to understanding the material itself.’*

—Emily Drabinski,  
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and the Politics of Correction’ (2013)

# **Authority Control Freaks**

**Radical Cataloguing?  
Critical Cataloguing?**

**Nah, it's just common sense**

**‘Important,  
complex and  
broken’**

*‘Information infrastructure, like all infrastructure, only becomes visible upon breakdown—as in frozen pipes or rifts between institutions. This reality often means that the people maintaining those infrastructures are also invisible.’*

*—The Information Maintainers,  
Information Maintenance as a Practice of Care (2019)*

**‘But what about AI and machine learning?’**



# What do you mean, 'quality metadata'?

- **'Standards-compliant' doesn't mean 'useful'**
- **Quality records are:**
  - informative
  - accessible
  - respectful
  - accurate
  - empowering

# What do you mean, 'quality metadata'?

- **Compare a record with the resource it describes**
  - Right title?
  - Right author?
  - Right year?
  - 'Authority control'?
- How would a user describe this?
- Are those words or phrases in the record?

# What do you mean, 'quality metadata'?

- **Compare a record with your OPAC's display**
  - Is anything missing?
  - Are there MARC fields that your OPAC displays strangely, or not at all?
  - What is searchable?
  - What facets are available?

*‘Tech services work requires  
a certain comfort with ambiguity  
and fearlessness in the face of power  
that needs education to understand why  
our jobs are important.’*

—A. Scarlet Galvan,  
‘The Revolution Will Not Be Standardized’ (2018)

# Mind Your Language

- What you can **think about**
  - How does bad metadata make your job harder?
  - What problems or queries could be solved with better metadata?

# Mind Your Language

- What you can **talk about**
  - ‘Good metadata makes materials findable:  
it’s a return on investment’
  - ‘Just because LC uses this term, doesn’t mean we have to’

# Mind Your Language

- What you can **do**
  - Suggest terminology or data enhancements to your vendor, such as Austlang codes from AIATSIS for First Nations language material
  - Join ACORD, the (new) ALIA Community on Resource Description

**You Can Change The Rules**



You Can **BREAK** The Rules