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Hypertextual Library Manifesto Version 1.0

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Hypertextual Library Manifesto Version 1.0

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Introduction

This manifesto is a bridge between two texts:

- The *Digital Libraries Manifesto*, written by AIB Study group on digital libraries (in *AIB-WEB* since December 2005 at <http://www.aib.it/aib/cg/gbdigd05a-e.htm3>), henceforth cited as MAN.
- My book *La biblioteca come ipertesto (The library as hypertext)*, published by Editrice Bibliografica in October 2007, contents and abstract available at <http://www.bibliografica.it/catalogo/ridi-ipertesto.htm>), henceforth cited as IPER.

The aim of this manifesto is, on the one hand, to comment analytically on MAN and to arrange it more rationally, and, on the other hand, to summarize and propose an alternative index for IPER. For each of the first 20 theses, I have indicated the corresponding theses of MAN and the chapters of IPER in which the subject is dealt with, to allow the reader to verify at the source the respective argumentations, excusing the apodictic tone assumed here by the actual theses. For the last five theses, which were not dealt with by MAN, I have pointed out only the relative chapters of IPER. For a general comment and a bibliography concerning MAN, see chapter 3.7 of IPER; for an introduction to the concept of hypertext, see chapter 1.4 of IPER. In the appendix are "the five laws of the hypertextual library," inspired by Ranganathan and translated from chapter 1.9 of IPER.

In the rearrangement of MAN, the original division into principles, models, and functions has been abandoned. The 30 theses of MAN have been reduced to 20 because some of them have been unified:

5, 21, 28: 8;

8, 22, 23: 12;

9, 25, 29, 30: 9;

18, 19: 19;

22, 26: 2;

and some have been split:

17: 2, 4;

20: 1, 8.

Comments and suggestions for a revised version of this manifesto are welcome at: ridi@aib.it.

The 25 theses

1. Libraries are hypertexts (MAN: 1, 20 - IPER: 1.8, 1.9, 3.7)

Books, serials, databases, catalogues, bibliographies, blogs, and conversations are all examples of hypertexts with a generally rather simple structure. In contrast, libraries are particularly complex hypertexts, which absorb and assimilate various types of simpler hypertexts.

2. Libraries manage collections of documents (MAN: 17, 22, 26 - IPER: 2.2, 2.14, 3.4)

Libraries collect, select, organize, catalogue, preserve, and make accessible collections of documents. Particular libraries have responsibility for the legal deposit of publications, both analog and digital, and their long-term conservation.

3. Libraries' collections are selective but hospitable (MAN: 6 - IPER: 2.10)

Inclusion in a library collection always occurs through an explicit criterion. All typologies of documents, including the most experimental and "borderline" (grey literature, software, games, open archives, blogs, websites, etc.), can be part of these collections.

4. Libraries provide document and information services to users (MAN: 2, 17 - IPER: 2.19, 2.20, 3.8)

Using staff and infrastructure (buildings, furniture, computer technology, other technology) libraries provide services (reading, loan, reproduction, reference, document delivery, etc.) centred on the documentary and informative resources.

5. Libraries exist to allow users to determine the existence of relevant documents and use their contents (MAN: 3, 30 - IPER: 1.9, 3.8)

The primary function of libraries is to allow all citizens to verify the existence of documents with particular characteristics, which they are for any reason interested in, and to help those same users access the contents of those documents, even if they are not included in libraries' collections. This function is not performed exclusively by libraries, but also by other entities (archives, museums, publishers, web search engines, etc.) with which libraries can usefully collaborate.

6. Libraries are a means, not an end (MAN: 15 - IPER: 3.8)

Libraries are created and maintained by society to help identify and access documents. Whether and when this aim were (locally or globally) abandoned or pursued with more effective means, libraries could be peacefully dismantled. In that case, their structures and their staffs should be safeguarded and used in a different way, for obvious reasons of economy and fairness, but without pretending that they continue to be real libraries.

7. Integrally-analog libraries, integrally-digital libraries, and hybrid libraries are all libraries. (MAN: 4 - IPER: 1.7)

The basic objectives, the main practices, and the fundamental values of libraries remain the same, independent of the percentage of analog and digital documents treated and of the modalities of interaction with users (in person, by telephone, online, etc.).

8. Libraries support interoperability and standards (MAN: 5, 20, 21, 28 - IPER: 2.5, 2.15)

Interoperability is the ability to exchange and profitably reuse data and information between and within different systems and organizations. Interoperability consists of technical, semantic, interinstitutional, intersectorial, legal, and international interoperability. It is based on the sharing of standards and is a fundamental tool for the pursuit of the objectives of libraries. Among the many possibilities offered by interoperability there is also the interaction between data provider and service provider expected by the OAI-PMH protocol. Among many possible interoperability initiatives is the adoption and the promotion of open source software.

9. Libraries cooperate (MAN: 9, 25, 29, 30 - IPER: 2.15, 3.2, 3.8)

Library goals are not attainable without strong cooperation among libraries and with other institutions, such as schools, universities, research bodies, archives, web search engines, etc. Among the possible spheres of cooperation are interlibrary loan, cooperative cataloguing, consortia for digital acquisitions, legal deposit, creation of shared directories and standards, assignment of stable identifiers to information resources, e-learning, etc.

10. Libraries adopt the Net as a model, both organizational and technological (MAN: 9, 10 - IPER: 1.8, 2.11, 2.12)

Libraries make good use of the Internet for access to information, and as development and dialogue tools with users and among librarians. The network hypertext model, however subjected to the structure of library collections and services, may also be usefully applied to the internal organization of work and to the articulation of the interlibrary cooperation.

11. Libraries respect the rights of both producers and users of documents (MAN: 7 - IPER: 2.18)

In intermediating between producers and users of documents, libraries hold a "third party" position that guarantees both equity and lack of discrimination. Libraries, by respecting copyright regulations, support initiatives such as open access that help strengthen the right of the users to access information. Libraries respect the privacy of their users and do not exercise censorship.

12. Individual libraries have differentiated communities of reference users, for which and with which they can autonomously develop collections and services (MAN: 8, 22, 23 - IPER: 2.10, 2.23)

By supporting interoperability, standardization, and cooperation, libraries remain diverse, in order to meet the requirements of the different communities (professional, scientific, territorial, institutional; and with different ages, languages, cultures, interests) of users in the best way. Each library or group of homogeneous libraries will develop collections and specific services for its users, engaging in dialogue or, if possible, active collaboration with them. These specific collections and services must not be a reduction, but an enrichment, of general library services.

13. Libraries personalize their services (MAN: 24 - IPER: 2.9, 3.2, 3.6)

Within the limits of available resources, equity in the treatment of users, and the range of documentary services, services will tend to be configured in order to satisfy the information needs of single users or of homogenous groups of users in the most precise way, saving their time and maximizing their satisfaction.

14. Libraries are accessible (MAN: 11 - IPER: 2.11, 2.12, 2.13)

The principle of the right to access by anyone to any kind of public information or document is central for any type of library. This means that libraries must follow this principle in all aspects of activity, applying its various facets (from the W3C rules on websites to the elimination of architectural and linguistic barriers) to all their services.

15. Libraries make themselves known (MAN: 12 - IPER: 2.19)

Possessing rich collections and providing excellent services is useless if no one, or almost no one, knows it and uses them. Libraries must strive to make their existence, their function, and their services known to all potential users, without basking in the satisfaction of adequately serving a small percentage of users.

16. Libraries evaluate, assess, and improve their collections and services (MAN: 13 - IPER: 2.17, 2.21)

There is no perfect service and all services are always perfectible. Constantly and coherently evaluating both the objective parameters of collections and services and the subjective perceptions of users is the indispensable basis for periodically assessing the quality and quantity of collections and activities that will guide the library toward always better and up-to-date performance on the basis of these evaluations.

17. Libraries are expensive, but they also have positive economic effects (MAN: 14 - IPER: 2.2, 2.22)

Maintaining and developing an effective document and information service is economically demanding, but it is not merely a charity for the poor and a luxury for the cultured. It is rather an extremely good investment if considered with the right foresight, calculating the long-term educational, social, and professional consequences.

18. Libraries follow flexible models (MAN: 16 - IPER: 1.8, 1.10)

Documents continue to increase enormously both both in type and number, as well as increasing their granularity and changeability. Users make more and more demanding, diversified, and mutable requests. Technologies change constantly. Financial resources are more and more scarce and less and less automatically renewable. In this scenario it is inconceivable to expect to deliver adequate services using rigid functional and organizational models. It is better to use models like the hypertextual one that presuppose both the persistence of basic values, objectives, and techniques, and the possibility of passing easily from one organizational structure to another according to the variables at stake.

19. Library collections and services can be heterogeneous, but they are integrated and made homogeneous by the same libraries (MAN: 18, 19 - IPER: 2.13, 3.2)

Although heterogeneity of collections and services is not a logical necessity, it is a growing reality. Individual libraries must strive to improve users' experience by giving them clear and consistent procedures for accessing collection and services, which integrate them and facilitate their use, but leaving

users the choice of what and how to search. The perfect bibliographic integration is neither lacking nor excessive, but modular.

20. Further levels of integration and homogenization can be developed at a territorial, disciplinary, or institutional level (MAN: 2, 27 - IPER: 3.2, 3.4, 3.5)

Besides the integrations suggested to individual libraries, it is desirable for further forms of meta-aggregation to be created at a territorial, disciplinary, or institutional level, avoiding duplication and aiming at interoperability and modularity. For example, in Italy, this is represented by every step toward an organic national library system that does not limit itself to [SBN](#), and the amplification and the strengthening of [MICHAEL Italia](#), which could evolve into the "Digital Libraries National Portal" with metasearch functions hypothesized by MAN: 27.

21. Libraries need librarians (IPER: 2.23)

Professionally-prepared librarians are indispensable for planning and managing all library services, including those in a digital environment. They must have decent working conditions, adequate salaries, continuing education, and adequate career opportunities.

22. The universe and the docuverse coincide, but only in one facet (IPER: 1.1)

Documents are not entities with particular objective characteristics, but simply objects seen as information sources. Everything can be considered a document, under certain conditions and in certain contexts. What identifies the nature of libraries are not the objects treated, but the documentary point of view with which they treat their own objects and manage their own services.

23. Every text is a hypertext (IPER: 1.4)

The characteristics of hypertextuality (granularity, multilinearity, multimediality, integrability, and interactivity) are present, to a greater or lesser degree, in every document. Scantily hypertextual documents are "hypotexts".

24. Digital libraries will put themselves at the centre of a scientific document triangle consisting of open archives, e-journals, and digital bibliographies (IPER: 3.5)

It can be assumed that in the future scientific literature will rely more and more on open archives for access, on e-journals for selection, and on bibliographies for indexing. Digital libraries could put themselves at the centre of this triangle, focusing on long-term conservation and on services addressed to specific communities of users.

25. If there were enough resources, libraries could deliver services related not only to reading but also to writing (IPER: 3.8)

Since in the hypertextual environment it is more and more difficult to separate reading from writing, completely hypertextual libraries could deliver to users services related not only to the search, selection, and the use of documents, but also to their production and distribution. It would be, however, a very demanding change of paradigm, with consequences not only for the services delivered and the consequent necessary resources, but also for relationships with other institutions, the management of staff, professional training, and the defence of the rights of users.

Appendix: the Five Laws of the Hypertextual Library

1. Nodes are for reading, passing through and writing

Every document that acts as a node in a hypertext - as a document - is born with the aim of being used by at least one person who decodes its content. Moreover, as a node of a hypertext, it is also the place where the reader can choose a path towards other nodes. In completely hypertextual nets the user's freedom is not limited to the choice of path and the possibility to read or not, but the reader becomes a writer in the complete sense, modifying not only the paths but also the nodes.

2. Every user his/her path

Thanks to freedom of choice of paths, to the full accessibility of the single nodes, to the plurality of links, to the appropriateness and efficiency of the systems of orientation, navigation, and retrieval, to the sagacity of the user, and to the possible reference services offered by the library, every user will be able to move among the nodes choosing his/her favourite individualized path.

3. Every path its user

In the creation of links and in the management of systems of orientation, navigation and retrieval, the librarian (or anyhow the author of the hypertextual nets) must not activate all the links and the logically possible paths, but only those for which it can be assumed that it will exist at least one user who will include it sensibly in an individual path of his/her own.

4. Create more direct links

In the creation of links and in the management of systems of orientation, navigation, and retrieval, the librarian (or author of the hypertextual nets) will make the more rational, economic, and useful choices for users, avoiding vicious circles, uselessly long or complex paths, dead ends, and labyrinths. The aim will always be to maximize freedom and to minimize the risk of the user getting lost.

5. The library is a growing hypertext

Every library offers to its users a hypertextual net of access and circulation among documents possessed or accessible, and of connected services which can do nothing but tend to expand indefinitely - also cooperating with other libraries and agencies - because this is the intrinsic nature of libraries on the one hand and hypertexts on the other.