

BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

Knitting the Semantic Web. Edited by Jane Greenberg and Eva Méndez. New York: Haworth Press, 2007. 257 pages (hard cover). ISBN 13 987-8-7890-3591-2. US\$75.00.

Knitting the Semantic Web, edited by Jane Greenberg and Eva Méndez, thoroughly explains and explores the history and future of the Semantic Web (SW), while uniquely focusing on its application and connection to the world of library and information science (LIS). Written from a variety of library and Web industry perspectives, the reader is left with an understanding of SW and its potential.

Although the book is obviously for those interested in a deeper understanding of SW, this is not entirely an introductory text. Given the nature of the topic itself (and the depth and detail that many of the chapters go into), the book is best suited for an audience with both a basic knowledge of current Web technologies and terminology, as well as a familiarity with cataloguing and classification standards and issues. A knowledgeable (or at least strongly motivated) reader will learn much about the theory, standards, and practice of SW. Authored by a range of experts on a variety of topics, this book is well organized; each chapter flows cohesively into the next. Part I covers “Foundations, Standards, and Tools”, while part II deals with specific “Projects and Perspectives”.

The best two chapters in this book are also the two of most interest to you, the JCHLA reader. The first chapter, entitled “The Birth of the New Web: A Foucauldian Reading of the Semantic Web”, by D. Grant Campbell, provides a fascinating start for this subject, aligning Foucauld’s 3-part history of medical practice with corresponding 3-part models of both SW and library catalogues. The other chapter of note (in part II), entitled “Biomedicine and the Semantic Web: A Knowledge Model of Visual Phenotype”, by John Michon, discusses SW in the context of being able to connect information about observable characteristics to genetic differences. Not only are these two chapters health related, but they are also excellent examples of the two halves of this text, theory and practice, respectively.

What makes this work unique and important is its focus on the connection between SW and librarianship. Although an explicit mention of LIS is not present in every chapter, over half of them directly address library applications or roles, and both editors and almost half of the authorship are LIS professionals or academics.

A few messages ring loud and clear in this book: (1) SW can be exploited for library purposes, (2) SW issues are similar to many of those in the library world, and (3) libraries and librarians must have important roles in SW preparation and implementation. The fact that LIS people, practices, and institutions can and will be part of cutting-edge and practical technological steps forward, such as SW, is not mentioned enough in the LIS literature. This work contributes well to the effort to make our contribution clear to the nonlibrarian world.

Greenberg and Méndez’s book is very optimistic about the future value of SW, nearly claiming that all our search engine and Internet woes will be solved by it. Even with half of the book devoted to actual applications of SW, the reader is still left with questions of whether a true SW is possible and if it might require too much effort. Of course, SW is still relatively new, with few fully formed examples, so perhaps such questions are unavoidable and maybe even vital to the movement at this early stage.

Looking beyond the text, there are several other elements of this book that illustrate that it has been well put together by its authors and editors. The wealth of colour and black-and-white illustrations, tables, and code examples help to communicate the more technical and abstract details of SW. The index is more than sufficient in providing access to the content from that direction, but there are some pages at the beginning that may serve as a barrier to the initial navigation of the work. (Because this monograph has been co-published as an issue of the journal *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, there are several pages devoted to other monographs in their collection and the indexing and abstracting services that provide access to the content.) The short biographies of the authors and editors are valuable in allowing the reader to judge the authority of the book as a whole.

Knitting the Semantic Web is an absolutely vital addition to any collection covering either information organization and cataloguing or Web technologies and trends, and the connection between the two in particular. Its discussion on both the theory and the application of SW would serve as an excellent primer for students, as well as a good resource for professionals considering the use of SW in their own projects.

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