Beyond the reading room

In recent years, some outstanding art libraries have resurrected in particularly impressing, if not overwhelming renovated architectures, for example the Riksmuseum's Cuyper Library and the INHA Library in the „Salle Labrouste" in Paris. The splendour and the historic dignity of such settings are without doubt of great benefit for our discipline art history and for the art libraries community's international standing in general.

However, can the shelves of even the best traditional libraries still convey adequately the information that a scholar may need to deal with a given subject in a satisfactory manner? This could already be doubted decennies ago when the inflation of publications started that today seems to be far from having reached its peak. It is even more doubtful with the ever increasing number of pertinent online resources. Are our physical shelves and also our virtual shelves, i.e. our online catalogues and also or union catalogues like the Art Discovery Group Catalogue, still able to mediate even the print publications, including of course articles, in an efficient manner? Is the reading room library finally still functioning well?

Or is scholarly practice nowadays not rather divided into a library part and an electronic part that is done independently of the libraries' resources and their reading rooms? In any case, we know from our daily experience that scholars are expecting ‚their' special libraries to take also their online publications into account as part of their pertinent scholarly achievements. But too often we have to deceive them, for different reasons. At the same time, the users' knowledge of what libraries have to offer as research tools, among them our Art Libraries Discovery Group Catalogue, seems to be poor and steadily decreasing. Tools like the Karlsruher Virtueller Katalog are unknown to an important part of the scholarly community. Inquiring how many percent of the German art historians know und use the Art Discovery Group Catalogue would yield staggering results. Positively formulating, we could say that our patrons are concentrating on very few tools which they judge particularly useful as bibliographic tools and/or means to access reachable holdings, as they are concentrating on Google and a few others for genuine online resources.

Existing catalogue environments of (art) libraries, even the most renowned, are struggling hard to come to terms with these internet resources. Whereas normal E-books and digitizations of printed publications are less a problem, there is a real gap between the conservative world of institutional or union catalogues, with the corresponding print and electronic holdings behind, and the world of the ‚normal' internet with its ever-changing content and new publishing typology. The libraries' situation is furthermore complicated by the fact that already the sheer mass of more or less academic publications seems to require more efficient tools of mediation than our familiar catalogue result lists and shelving according to venerable classification systems.

After this initial statement and in order to caracterize current ways of art libraries'_reactions to the internet challenge, let me just cite two examples from Germany. There, we have the national system of ‚Fachinformationsdienste (FID)', formerly called ‚Virtuelle Fachbibliotheken' (‚virtual special libraries'), which is based on the portal concept and funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG). The university libraries of Dresden and Heidelberg are responsable for the FID for the history of art, arthistoricum.net (www.arthistoricum.net). It contains an ambitious search function centered on the resources of these two and other libraries and furthermore offers a bundle of services as thematic sub-portals for digitizations, transregional licensing services of some important resources. But above all, arthistoricum.net offers a complete and sophisticated infrastructure for electronic publishing which to my knowledge is unique in our discipline. Thus, arthistoricum.net is a poweful tool to promote open acess electronic publishing within our conservatice community. arthistoricum.net is a very active producer of online publications and of metadata. But arthistoricum is not pretenting to deal systematically with the problem of indexing all kinds of art-related resources in the web, as for example artists' websites, online exhibition catalogues from galleries and art institutions, online catalogue raisonnés and other reference works. For these, we all rely on Google, much more than on other tools like WorldCat or our Art Discovery Group Catalogue where such materials are only present in so far as they are accidentally catalogued by the participating libraries or contained within bibliographic databases. I do not even speak of image resources. But also in this field, Google seems to lead the way, although Artstor and the new combined text/image search in JSTOR provide excellent discipline-specific services. Within the old artlibraries.net project, we had

made some experimental efforts with images, but they remained marginal. Within the successor project Art Discovery Group Catalogue, images are so far just a theoretical topic. We have in Germany also the well known 'kubikat' union catalogue of the libraries of our four German research institutes in Florence, Munich, Paris an Rome (www.kubikat.org). Daily feedback from our users and the users statistics confirm that kubikat is one rare example of a universally appreciated and exceptionally well-known discipline-specific bibliographic service. This is even confirmed by kubikat's new status as a ‚database' within the Art Discovery Group Catalogue, although this seems to be a somewhat enigmatic work in progress. The kubikat partners are aware of their catalogue's role for the discipline but also of the fact that the current Aleph interface is far from the state of the art. Therefore, they have recently initiated a project aiming at last partially to treat the problems I mentioned previously. Our goal is provide within some months a beta-version of a new kubikat named ‚kubikat-LOD' (= ‚kubikat linked open data') modeled on the BIBFRAME-based SHARE-VDE project realized by a group of prestigious North American libraries together with Casalini/@CULT (www.share-vde.org). This interface will allow us finally to integrate some additional resources and to have a smoother, discovery-system-like interface. But the linked open data concept pushes the boundaries of data handling further and enables us for example to present informations from authorities in a previously unknown completeness. In addition, pertinent Wikipedia data will immediately be displayed online, thus making the library catalogue a starting point fur further internet searches. Informations concerning published works can be displayed in a more structured and comprehensible way than before. If the project can be carried out successfully, it will probably present new ways of making use not only of author/title data, but also of the immense mass of authorities used by the kubikat libraries for subject indexing of literature concerning artists, works of art and monument.

All this does not mean that kubikat will be able to solve the aforementioned problem of indexing all kinds of art-related resources in the web better than others do it (or not), far from that. But the potential of the BIBFRAME format as a LOD ontology is still largely unexplored, and we care for preparing the integration of our data with what is outside our catalogues. And the project carried out with @CULT provides us with a creative freedom which we were lacking since we had to abandon the incomparable software Allegro-C developed by Bernhard Eversberg between 1980 and 2015. Thus, we hope to have an ever

increasing presence beyond our reading rooms, in an information world which is not necessarily conceived and controlled by libraries.

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