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artlibraries.net, WorldCat and common initiatives for the future of art bibliography

Summary:

The paper summarizes the current state of discussions concerning the future development of the international meta catalogue www.artlibraries.net. After the critical analysis presented two years ago at the IFLA conference in Gothenburg and thanks to discussions undertaken in the context of the 'Future of Art Bibliography initiative (FAB)' as well as by the international artlibraries.net partners, there seems to be a real chance to overcome well-known weaknesses of the current artlibraries.net federated search by clustering targets, augmenting the bibliographical scope and the number of participating institutions, improving significantly the response time and the presentation of the results as well as by allowing a seamless transition from the relatively small art history planet to the wider universe of information. The scenarios for renewing the artlibraries.net meta catalogue are based on technical proposals coming from OCLC/WorldCat and from the KIT Karlsruhe, creator of the 'Karlsruher Virtueller Katalog'.

Two years ago, at the IFLA Art Libraries Section's Open Session in Gothenburg, the so-called Future of Art Bibliography initiative (FAB), aiming at creating a new search tool for art libraries holdings worldwide as well as for other resources related to art and art history, has already been presented by Kathleen Salomon from the Getty Research Institute (see http://www.getty.edu/research/scholars/research_projects/fab/index.html). This initiative, made possible by the support of the Getty Research Institute and a grant from the Kress Foundation, was at that time a direct reaction to the (temporary) disappearance of the 'Bibliography of the History of Art (BHA)' in 2009, by the way: fourty years after the important international conference 'Bibliographie d'histoire de l'art' (Paris, March 24-26, 1969), organized by the CNRS, the CIHA and others, the proceedings of which are still worth studying (Bibliographie d'histoire de l'art : Paris, 24, 25, 26 mars 1969 / Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris. - Paris : Ed. du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1970. - XII, 237 S. : Ill. (Colloques internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique : Sciences Humaines).

Although the BHA was resuscitated soon afterwards on a new commercial basis by ProQuest as the 'International Bibliography of Art (IBA)', part of the big ProQuest portfolio of databases, the FAB initiative continued. The recently inaugurated 'Getty

Research Portal', a registry of pertinent digitized publications, may also be seen in some way as a conceptual off-spring of discussions begun within the FAB initiative.

These discussions have always centered around the question whether it would make sense to provide the international art history community with a specialized bibliographic tool serving to aggregate most of the internationally available information for pertinent print and online publications, not to forget archival and image resources. In the meantime, without a formal statement having been released, there seems to be a consensus that the most realistic approach is not to aim immediately at a kind of all-embracing superportal but rather to work on a cluster of components which would be able to become reliable standard tools for the whole community. The meta catalogue artlibraries.net (www.artlibraries.net) is certainly predestinated to be one of these components. Therefore the FAB initiative has from its beginning largely converged with discussions concerning this meta catalogue and the two projects have become closely associated.

artlibraries.net – Virtual Catalogue for Art History (www.artlibraries.net), formerly the VKK, is an international specialized meta catalogue allowing the integrated retrieval of bibliographic records and other objects of distinctive art historical databases. Currently, artlibraries.net gives access to more than 12 million records, including a high percentage of records for articles in periodicals, conference papers, festschriften, exhibition catalogues and exhibition books, etc., and an increasing percentage of records for archival and photographic materials as well as for online resources. artlibraries.net is not only a meta catalogue, but also an international working community of more than 100 art libraries from currently 14 countries worldwide.

Already at the time of the IFLA conference 2010 in Gothenburg, it had become quite clear that artlibraries.net, based on the technique of the well-known 'Karlsruher Virtueller Katalog (KVK)', needs to be improved and renewed. At the memorable joint artlibraries.net and FAB meeting at the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon 2010, I had the opportunity to explain the functional desiderata. My paper is part of the proceedings of the Lisbon conference published in Art Libraries Journal 36.2011, 3 (Special issue: The future of art bibliography). As has been stated repeatedly, our federated search meta catalogue is suffering among others from the fact that only a part of the results is immediately available, that the hitlists produced for the targets furnishing positive results cannot be aggregated and that the reaction time is sometimes quite annoying, not the mention time-outs.

We also have to acknowledge that artlibraries.net so far has never attained the visibility and the acceptance it probably deserves. This is evidenced by the user statistics which are more or less uniform since a longtime and do not improve despite the steady increase in participating institutions: on average between 6,000 and 7,000 monthly visits and around 12,000 monthly page views. Even if statistics are to be

read with caution, these figures seem to be rather low and also seem to indicate that continuing with the present model will be difficult to justify in the long run.

When the artlibraries.net committee and the FAB initiative were reflecting upon the best technical solution for the future, we first came of course to the conclusion that up-to-date search engine technique would be most suitable to 'reconstruct' the artlibraries.net building on a new scale and even more to realize an ideal all-encompassing art bibliography in the broadest sense, a unique 'discovery' tool for art historians. Search engine technique would also be able to give access to commercial databases, where applicable, not only to open access resources like library catalogues. It would be incomparably fast. It would allow sophisticated faceting and ranking. As we all know, search engine technique is currently a big business hype in librarianship and institutional library catalogs are increasingly supplemented by institutionally defined accesses to search engine products as Ex Libris Primo, most often sold together with licenses for huge bibliographic and full-text databases. Recently, a Primo based search engine for art history resources was inaugurated by the Saxon State and University Library Dresden within the portal arthistoricum.net as an explicit alternative to our good old artlibraries.net (see: http://www.arthistoricum.net/en/search/). So far, this search engine encompasses only a rather restricted number of mainly German data sources. Indeed, constructing and sustaining an ambitious specialized search engine is apparently a big financial, organizational and technical challenge. We already became aware of this when Joe Shubitowski, Head Library Information Systems at the Getty Research Institute and member of the FAB task force, who never shares an effort, had prepared a Solr/Lucene-based search engine prototype for art resources at the artlibraries.net/FAB conference in Lisbon 2010 (see: Joseph Shubitowski and Bruce Washburn: Imagining the future of art bibliography: using prototypes to evaluate technical approaches. – In: Art Libraries Journal 36.2011, 3, pp.40-45). After unsuccessful attempts to get the funding necessary to continue working on this prototype, the FAB task force and the artlibraries.net committee concluded: As the artlibraries.net project is based on a rather informal co-operation, so far not involving a real institutional and financial basis, and as it has so far not been possible to secure third-party financing for such a search engine, pursuing this solution seemed not practicable for the near future, especially because of the enormous organizational efforts and also because we would probably not be able to guarantee that all present artlibraries.net partner institutions could participate in such a solution.

It is certainly recommendable to remain realistic and not to abandon too quickly artlibraries.net's current pragmatic, democratic and low-cost approach.

It should be mentioned that a federated search software of a younger generation than the KVK technique temporarily seemed to provide a more attractive solution, although not based on genuine search engine technique. The artlibraries.net committee and the FAB task force had indeed the opportunity to examine Deep Web technology's Explorit system, see: http://www.deepwebtech.com/products/explorit-

overview/). Compared to the current KVK technique, the main difference was that the Deep Web solution is producing just one unified hit list whereas we currently show individual result lists for each target. The test queries done by the artlibraries.net committee confirmed that most of the time results from always the same targets would be displayed on the first search screens whereas other targets would hardly ever be visible at this level. This fact has been judged by the artlibraries.net committee as a serious problem and a contradiction to the artlibraries.net policy rooted in the plurality and multiplicity of the partners, since the equal visibility of all the participating targets' contributions is one of the principle goals of the project. The artlibraries.net committee was grateful to Deep Web technology for having prepared a prototype, but finally decided not to pursue this proposal, convinced that it would not be a way to obtain a really fundamental improvement of the artlibraries.net project, not to speak of the non negligible financial and organizational efforts requested.

Instead, good advice from Geert-Jan Koot, head of the library of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, led our discussions back to a proposal made by OCLC, in the person of Jim Michalko, Vice President of OCLC Research, at the FAB supplemental meeting in June 2010 in Los Angeles, and presented as another prototype at the meeting in Lisbon in the same year (see article by Shubitowski and Washburn in the Art Libraries Journal special issue, as cited above): aggregating discipline-based information, in this case information pertinent to art history, in the OCLC environment. OCLC's WorldCat Search API enables in fact a specialized community to design and administrate a specialized union catalogue interface based on data provided by OCLC/WorldCat. On this basis, OCLC has produced a prototype called 'Art Libraries Discovery Experiment' (accessible at: http://experimental.worldcat.org/aldp/).

It covers of course only a part of the existing artlibraries.net targets and therefore cannot be regarded as an immediate alternative. On the other hand, it adds outstanding additional art libraries, mainly in North America, which for some reason are not part of the artlibraries.net network but participants of OCLC/WorldCat. The question if and how it will be possible to integrate also holdings from non-OCLC members is of course crucial. But otherwise, the WorldCat proposal presents some assets which constitute real advantages compared to other possible solutions.

In contrast to search engine or federated search approaches, 'Art Libraries Discovery Experiment' is based on a real database, i.e. the WorldCat viewed through special filters. The results are immediately complete: no need to switch to individual target system in order to see the entire lists. The number of participating libraries has no importance for the retrieval process, whereas it is evident that the current artlibraries.net with its federated search technique has more or less attained its usability limits. What is most interesting is the fact that the records produced by the art libraries search API can be intertwined with the whole WorldCat world: Thus it is possible to search for holdings anywhere and to link seamlessly the art libraries planet to the rest of the library and information universe. Furthermore, 'Art Libraries

Discovery Experience' benefits from additional data pools available through WorldCat: Articles, Auction Sale Catalogues, Digitized Texts. Not every resource may be accessible for every user everywhere but at least the basic bibliographic information is made available.

OCLC's 'Art Libraries Discovery Experiment' may finally prove to be a very promising alternative to the existing artlibraries.net, but for the moment it is still a project just begun. Therefore, we are very grateful that it has been possible to realize an interimary (or not so interimary?) solution taking so to say the best currently availabler from both worlds and allowing a seamless transition from artlibraries.net to OCLC/WorldCard. We owe this idea to Uwe Dierolf, head of IT at the Library of the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT). He has realized it together with his collaborator Ernst Rotzinger and thanks to the very active cooperation of Bruce Washburn from OCLC.

We have called this experimental solution 'Art libraries in WorldCat'. It is online since June 2012. In fact, it is nothing but a new target within artlibraries.net (see http://artlibraries.net/allg_infos_en/KUNST_ALN_WORLDCAT.php). It has deliberately been qualified as 'beta'. You are all kindly invited it to test it and to share your remarks.

This solution uses first of all the normal artlibraries.net search interface. The limited short-title list produced by a search corresponds to what we already know. The short-title result list comprises title from all participating libraries. But when we switch to the target system, we are in face of a real discipline-specific WorldCat access, realized within the KVK environment in Karlsruhe with the WorldCat API mentioned above. There is a complete sequence of browsable short titles, with possibility to switch to the full title display. The specific full title display gives the complete bibliographic date but informs also about the holding libraries, with links to their catalogues. A link at the top allows to extend the search to the whole WorldCat. The Back button leads back to the short-title list. There is even an own 'Art Libraries in WorldCat' search interface (http://www.ubka.uni-karlsruhe.de/kvk/worldcat/artlibraries-opac.php?searchmask=1).

Compared to OCLC's genuine 'Art Libraries Discovery Experience' prototype, this solution is in some ways less sophisticated. For the moment, it does not take into account the special features for articles, auction catalogues (SCIPIO) and digitized texts search contained in the OCLC prototype (which does not necessarily mean that none such materials are not taken into account). But it functions.

The choice of libraries taken into account as a first step has been based upon the choice done previously for the OCLC prototype. Some art libraries for which an OCLC code could be identified, have been added. The libraries and their codes can be displayed from the search page. Records from other pertinent art libraries may be already or soon part of WorldCat due to their participation in national or regional union catalogues. This will for example be the case for the kubikat libraries which cooperate since 2011 with the Bavarian library network BVB. Therefore, the choice

made for the test target must be regarded as provisional. It has to be completed with the help of OCLC and of the library networks involved. The target realized by Uwe Dierolf has also shown that the links between WorldCat and the library catalogues are broken in some cases. Such problems are being communicated to OCLC and are being treated immediately.

For the moment, there is an important overlap between the new collective target and several pre-existing individual targets. At least 13 targets of the current 44 artlibraries.net targets could theoretically be eliminated immediately because they are also part of WorldCat. To these we can probably add HathiTrust which has its own artlibraries.net target, whereas HathiTrust URLs seem to be part of the WorldCat records anyway. But at the same time, the number of participating libraries increases considerably. Having less targets would improve the overall reaction time and lower the probability of time-outs. It would also allow to reduce the general maintenance costs, for the WorldCat target is considered by the KIT Karlsruhe as one single normal target, no matter how many library holdings it may cover.

For the reasons enumerated, already the 'hybrid' solution realized in record time by Uwe Dierolf with the help of Bruce Washburn from OCLC, opens the way to considerable improvements for artlibraries.net, independently of an eventual 'bigger' solution provided directly by OCLC.

Anyhow, all the technical, financial and organizational questions concerning 'Art libraries in WorldCat' as well as 'Art Libraries Discovery Experiment' shall be discussed and hopefully answered at the next artlibraries.net/FAB conference in Paris on September 27-29, 2012, in Paris (http://www.artlibraries.net/artlibrariesnet_Paris_conference.pdf). Uwe Dierolf from Karlsruhe as well as Bruce Washburn and Eric van Lubeek from OCLC will give a first-hand analysis of the technical implications as well as describe possible models for future developments. In any case, already what has been achieved so far thanks to the fruitful cooperation between KIT Karlsruhe and OCLC is quite amazing.

However, some questions remain:

The bibliographical problems are far from being on a solely technical level. Cataloging and subject indexing of such important materials as articles and reviews (print or online), sales catalogues and gallery catalogues (especially online), doctoral dissertations (print or online), electronic resources in general is not really carried out by the (art) libraries, and therefore these materials are far from being sufficiently accessible through artlibraries.net. We have to analyze to which degree cooperating with OCLC/WorlCat can improve the situation. We also know that bibliographies as BHA/IBA or ARTbibliographies Modern (ABM) are indexing, and even in a rather deep manner, materials, especially certain types of articles, which are not to be found in any of our library catalogues. We also have to acknowledge that the new International Bibliography of Art (IBA) is benefitting enormously from being embedded in a much larger database context comprising a whole series of other

databases which are not specific to art history: interdisciplinary bibliographies, bibliographies concerning other subject areas and collections of digitized resources. Especially the ProQuest collections of digitized historical periodicals and newspapers with their access to the full text make available a bunch of materials which has supposedly been beyond the horizon of art historians for too long. The fact that currently 'discovery systems' are sold as a kind of gigantic tuning kits for OPACs, even partly reselling library made data to their producers, and that these products are eagerly accepted by the libraries, is finally based on the libraries' and the research institutes' incapacity to produce themselves sufficient quantities of pertinent information for certain kinds of resources. On the other hand, library holdings and catalogs (and of course library money) are still an essential basis for the commercial bibliographies. And library catalogs, compared to bibliographies, have the big advantage to be 'closer' to the user, at least in art history where physical holdings are still prevailing, already because of the fact that is here where the shelf numbers are to be found. But how will the connection to our discipline's bibliographies be organized in t

In this somewhat paradoxal, uncertain historical situation, it seems that community projects like artlibraries.net and related common initiatives like FAB appear almost as a professional duty in order to assure a maximum degree of open access, discipline-specific, reliable information retrieval and long-term availability. The future development of artlibraries.net will prove if we are really able to act together as an international community and to conceive a customized product which meets the needs of our users.