

**Henryk Hollender,  
Union Catalogs for Poets**

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Edited by

Andrew Lass and Richard E. Quandt

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## Chapter 12

# Union Catalogs for Poets

Henryk Hollender

Je ne sais pas de lecture plus facile, plus attrayante, plus douce que celle d'un catalogue.<sup>1</sup>

While terminology relating to those catalogs that 'centralize' libraries, i.e. encompass collections of various institutions or merely physically distributed collections, is far from uniform, life will go on and not wait for a unique name. In the near future, most catalogs that are actually consulted will have to be labeled union catalogs, joint catalogs, consortial catalogs or central catalogs, catalogs *collectif* or *gesamt*, and advanced users will not even know that other types might exist. Those users will search catalogs expecting them to provide guidance through vast holdings, electronic or otherwise, not only because offering seamless passages between collections will become a standard, but also because there will actually be no libraries: there will be fabulous buildings on the one hand, and business-like organizations responsible for transmission of knowledge on the other. Organizations will need a headquarters, and public buildings will serve communities and visitors. No user will care whether the building called 'library' at the market square or shopping mall belongs to the same corporate entity as the library that she uses next to her dorm, and would be puzzled if the OPAC offered only locations like 'second floor', 'closed stacks' or 'special collections'.

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<sup>1</sup> Anatole France, *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard, Membre de l'Institut*

When we design union catalogs, we want to address as broad an audience as possible. We agree that they will be as immune to learning bibliography as poets and arts students were once considered immune to learning physics,<sup>2</sup> but at the same time we do want them to have an impact on the country's cultural policy, and we think that they have to derive knowledge and joy from catalog searches. We want to reach school students and people of divergent lifestyles.<sup>3</sup> We want to provide a common foundation for multidisciplinary studies. For some of our users, the union catalog will be the summa of the nation's culture, while the others, not necessarily able to write creatively, will read it as a text and not as a finding tool. The national union catalog in particular, once well introduced into schools, libraries, and homes, will evoke a number of disputes, and will be analyzed from religious, political, or scientific points of view. The quality of the union catalog has to be unique, as there is much more at stake in designing it than there is with the catalog of any single library.

The quality of union catalogs conceived and operating in such settings seems to depend on two sets of conditions. The first is that merging catalogs changes their scope, and the scope is not neutral but has a value; we are adding to it by introducing changes, and the better the changes are controlled, the more substantial the addition is. Any information resource has its contents and its community of expected users, and digital libraries do not seem to change much in this respect.<sup>4</sup> Technically, however, it is easier to include new resources in an electronic file, to merge files, or to augment a file rapidly than it is with printed works; contrary to any printed

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<sup>2</sup> R. H. March, *Physics for Poets* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970).

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/documents/ACFs3Rv.89.pdf> for information on a recent conference which covered the area of 'lifestyle' in library users and helped launch a Bertelsmann Foundation project in Eastern Europe.

<sup>4</sup> While it is only this author who can assume responsibility of the ideas and terms deployed in the paper, some of them might have been inspired by the book by Christine L. Borgman, *From Gutenberg to the Global Information Infrastructure: Access to Information in the Networked World* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001). On contents and communities of digital libraries, see 123–129.



multivolume national union catalog, neither the compiler nor the end-user can visually and conceptually encompass the contents in one viewing. When we search an online file, we do not find out quickly what its character is like, for instance whether it is sufficiently scholarly (or popular or educational) for our purpose—an uncertainty we would be saved when dealing with a printed work. This invites a reduction in quality: if the inconsistency of a file can go unnoticed, why care?

The second set of conditions pertains to the user's skill and cognitive style. Users who are not advanced are backward, and the level of backwardness may vary. In my educational environment, a card catalog will long remain the mother of all catalogs. Some users on the premises of the library do not turn to the online catalog at all, and they do not want to hear that they are thus isolating themselves from the only currently updated finding tool we provide. And the card catalogs are different. The future of catalogs as tools for encompassing collections of more than one library is actually the opposite of what we currently see in Poland: there are more catalogs than libraries! In research libraries that still have no online catalog, or in which the online catalog is just a special addition to the set of manual finding tools, users and librarians have a predominant peculiar feeling that the material covered by the catalog should all be of one kind; if it cannot, it is better to maintain more catalogs, one for each type of material. Thus the card catalogs seem to divide, not unite, and this because they are organized according to the habits of users who cannot tolerate the fact that divergent materials may be covered with one uniform finding tool.

Of course, this attitude emerges from the very essential link between the contents and the access points. While we do not know whether library history has explored these issues, we can guess that psychologically, cards in a catalog are equivalents to the title pages of actual books. There is more sense of order in browsing similar title pages than in browsing title pages that do not match. If the collection is well-rounded, the card catalog is correspondingly well-rounded. One collection, one catalog. Material that is foreign to one collection makes another collection, and the second collection requires a separate catalog. One does not put into a single catalog materials that do not belong together, and one hardly even cross-references them. What we see around us is a tacit consensus that having a set of catalogs in a library is normal. Even tools that are currently used and

growing in importance carry this historic badge of compartmentalization, such as the Library of Congress Classification, which is more like a set of classifications, related rather than united. When we try to win support for union catalogs, we have to take into account that for those who still prefer to divide rather than to join, projects like NUKat are simply ugly. And the argument concerning the superiority of local files over union files that we have experienced in Poland might also have this hidden cultural dimension.

The library culture in which I grew up provides some examples of how ill tolerated modern catalogs might be, no matter in what format. For instance, librarians of languages represented at the library of the Institute of Iberian Studies, Warsaw University, requested separate catalogs, and the librarian I met there, herself a scholar, saw to it that Spanish and Portuguese files remained separate forever. And when we interfiled our Russian and non-Russian serials in one card catalog at the Warsaw University Library, some users rose up with fierce objections. But it was not the feeling for the Russian language that fueled the argument. As all the Russian headings were transliterated,<sup>5</sup> there was no need to know Russian in order to use the old 'divided' catalog, and no specific satisfaction from using it for those who were proficient in Russian. I really do not know whether our reference staff used to respond regularly with the information that in the online catalog, things have gone much further: serial titles were merged with other materials' titles into one index. But there was and still is a delay in recataloging all the serials into the online format, so users kept practicing their searching skills and styles on the manual tool.

What would make sense here would be some in-depth research on how the amalgamated online catalog felt in the hands of those raised on the following set of tools: one alphabetical card catalog for books (author searches only, no title searches), one subject catalog for books, the alphabetical catalog for Russian-language serials and the alphabetical catalog for non-Russian-language serials. In some cases, preserving strict separation among files may be a pragmatic solution. We can think of an impressive example of a union catalog in which a sophisticated mechanism

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<sup>5</sup> It happened after Warsaw University, Russian from about 1870, had switched back in 1915 to Polish as the language of instruction.

achieves interfiling of languages and alphabets: this is ULI, the Israel Union Catalog.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the resulting display may be unclear for the user who does not know Hebrew. It has to be admitted, however, that ULI must have been designed for a 'bilingual' user. We have to pay close attention to solutions adopted in numerous countries of the world in which libraries are full of literary and scholarly collections in one language and alphabet, while the current publishing output is mostly in another language and alphabet.

Generally, however, the very notion of a union catalog tends to endanger the time-honored feeling of order that prohibits catalogs from becoming too wide in scope. We have to respect this feeling and take it into account in our planning, in our public relations, and in our display design, as any textual habit should be respected by librarians who are serious toward their audience. While not necessarily poets, most of our users are, and will long remain, people with a background in the humanities, whose attachment to information-seeking behavior, once acquired, is stronger than in scientists. It also has to be admitted that OPACs in Poland have long contained only traditional 'bibliothecal' types of materials, and until recently no electronic publications, nor music, maps, video recordings or microforms, and few journal titles. Even if they were in common use in most libraries, even if they contained the retrospectively converted material, those 'books-only' OPACs would help to educate rather conservative users, who might sense discomfort when exposed to more diversified contents.

By way of an invitation to explore this issue, we have to ask ourselves whether the multi-contents type of OPAC, which we as librarians want—for we naturally do want a big file—is really as easy to search as an OPAC that contains only a specific type of materials. It seems obvious that inclusion of various formats, genres, or provenances does not make it more difficult to search, because the search results depend directly only on the catalog's functionalities. But indirectly? Let us examine a case. Our (Warsaw University Library) current OPAC, supported by VTLS99, does not permit searching journal titles only. Never mind; a user that looks for a

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<sup>6</sup> See <http://libnet1.ac.il/~libnet/uli/uli.htm>, last consulted September 2, 2002.

journal title and does not care about monograph titles or video recording titles uses the title search option and locates the journal required, or not. As a response, most systems will probably generate a title index, and if there is no hit, there is at least a good proximity-based orientation among similar titles. If there is no hit, some systems point to a place in the index, saying something like “your [searched word or phrase] title would be here”. If the search result is a list, some catalogs inform the user as to which of the titles retrieved are actually serials. What happens next is some kind of manual filtering; it requires discipline, but is not likely to mislead the researcher.

On the other hand, such searches must have been problematic to users, since in today’s OPACs we increasingly encounter sophisticated automated filtering functionalities. We can guess that with more and more contents in catalogs, such functionalities are in larger demand, and that their introduction was made possible by the progress in software engineering. Designed to limit the search scope, they seem to feed the natural need of OPAC users to acquire some kind of ‘clearer view.’ In NUKat,<sup>7</sup> supported by VIRTUA, we can decide on a Journal Title immediately after selecting Browse Search, so it is probable that theoretically a Russian Journal Title would also be possible (and, in some specific contexts, desired). Then, from the Keyword Search display, we can go to a selection of filters: Location, Publication Date, Nature of Contents (a list of over 20 items, but restricted to monographs and serials only), Format (almost 60 items!), Language, and Place of Publication. In some systems we are offered a choice of search for Journal Title Word, Phrase, or Journal Exact Title. While this functionality seems to belong to a wide range “of tradeoffs between recall and precision,”<sup>8</sup> it does not necessarily, as in some cases, require entering a word as the only way to get a hit (for example, when you remember the name of the institution but do not know whether it published *zhurnal* or *vestnik*—the card catalog would be helpless here). In VIRTUA, you can also search for words in journal titles, but you have to switch to Keyword

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<sup>7</sup> NUKat, or *Narodowy Uniwersalny Katalog*, is a project in Poland described by Maria Burchard in “Union National Universal Catalog in Poland,” *Slavic and East European Information Resources* 2 (2001): 15–16. Free access to the emerging file is at <http://www.nukat.edu.pl>.

<sup>8</sup> Borgman 122.

Search first, which I like better, since I do not think an inexperienced user will avoid jamming the searches if they can all be initialized from the first display.

All in all, in online union catalogs, as in all modern OPACs, the power to compartmentalize has somehow returned, and there is no need to consider it a clumsy vestige of the card catalog. The file can contain a number of records unthought-of in the era of the card catalogs, but on request it can also yield subsets. It can even be designed so that it meets the need not to mix materials where mixing is prohibited by some prejudice or taboo, or just by the highly focused interest of the researcher. An example of material that should preferably not be mixed is clandestine literature, published under communism in several Eastern European countries. In Poland, the printing of such literature was very intensive and grew semi-professional in the 1980s, to eventually become tolerated by the authorities at the end of the decade and legal with the fall of communism. Since then, it has been reflected in several bibliographies and exhibits. Should it be covered by the national union catalog? It certainly should. And what do we do to make researcher notice that she is dealing with a product of an underground press? We can include notes in respective bibliographic descriptions, assigning some collective name to items, or pointing to peculiar formats, technology, or textual features of those dissident publications. Without some easy filtering, however, this literature will never be covered by a separate list, and the scholarly usefulness of such a list is obvious. We thus either have to devise adequate filtering criteria or link respective items to another bibliography, digital or not. If we fail to do so, we confirm the need for a separate publication and deprive the union catalog, no matter how rich in contents, of some of its intellectual dimensions.

Moreover, union catalogs do, and will always, offer subsets that are not fully integrated into the file. A telling example of this can be found in the Hand Press Book Database (HPB). This file, established by the Consortium of European Research Libraries (CERL) and hosted by the Research Libraries Group, Inc.,<sup>9</sup> currently contains over 1 million records from 15

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.cerl.org>.

libraries (half of them *Bayerische Staatsbibliothek* records) and is searchable only by RILIN users or CERL members. The contributions from various libraries make this material of the utmost value for scholarship, yet very diversified. Editing these contributions in order to make them fully consistent, a task to be undertaken some day, will take decades. As a result, the user must keep in mind all the time the uniqueness and limitations of each file. A variety of alternative search tools, search strategies, and different characteristics of each contributor's file make navigation a task for the qualified few. The HPB labyrinth is supported by only one thesaurus, for variant place names. There is no authority control imposed over the whole file, and some of the members also contributed files lacking any authority control. The experience of my library is that with early imprints, it is arduous enough to provide authority control for authors' names; and in the file that we contributed to HPB, we had omitted the owners' and users' names—although those were recorded in our local file—to bypass the common index of personal names. We felt that in this case, authority work would make the project never-ending.<sup>10</sup>

The manual for searching the HPB has 60 pages and seems indispensable for serious searches, and reading it is a job in itself, but again only for a very competent user.<sup>11</sup> That user is given a separate set of recommendations for searching each of the files. File descriptions normally explain the cataloging practice, coverage of the file, present and absent fields, mode of cataloging, and treatment of multivolume works. A separate chapter is devoted to working with search results.<sup>12</sup> A master researcher can certainly crop the HPB to an extent hardly possible with the manual or printed file, and with comparable pleasure. Discovering individual libraries behind the aggregated material can provide some additional excitement, but it is only when all the records become really uniform that there is more room for precise and far-flung comparisons.

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<sup>10</sup> The project, funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, is described in the current CERL materials; see footnotes 8 and 11.

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.cerl.org/HPB/manual2.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Karen Coyle, "The Virtual Union Catalog," chapter 2 in this volume.

Moreover, the complexity of HPB sheds light on what national union catalogs will look like when they absorb more antiquarian material. And it is still open for discussion how one can live with the essential tension between coverage and simplicity. Wide coverage is an obvious necessity for a real national catalog, as for a national bibliography, but so is the user-friendliness of the file. A catalog that includes all publications in divergent formats, types, and languages, is much less likely to be user-friendly. But in this century we can no longer believe that the national union catalog can remain esoteric. It has a new task, unheard of in the trend-setting nineteenth century: it supports shared cataloging and must percolate through the Web; otherwise the term “information society” becomes an empty buzzword. It may be that national union catalogs of the future will have at least two versions, basic and scholarly, and only the former will be in wide use in schools and public libraries. Moreover, there will be still a demand for a printed version, impressively bound; again, it will not aggregate the material exactly the way the online version does, but will offer all the possible searches. Still, the textual habits of prospective readers of the printed edition will make them expect much more sophisticated a material than the short online version might provide.

The example of the HPB helps us return to the issue of the database coverage. The idea of creating a file that would cover the publishing output of Europe up to 1830 (in the first phase) seems the most daring project in librarianship since OCLC. In a sense, this would also end up as a world catalog. But the project is progressing step by step, absorbing a collection at a time, and the file downloaded is seldom the whole collection of early imprints in a given library. The outcome of the project is not very likely to quickly reflect the real mass of printed items in libraries, not to mention the data of those publications that have not survived. No statistics applied to HPB will have much to reveal before the file fully reflects some hypothetical complete publishing output of Europe.<sup>13</sup> The fuller the HPB is,

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<sup>13</sup> Compare H. Hollender, “Quantification, National Heritage, and Automation Strategy,” in L. Hellinga (ed.), *The Scholar & The Database. Papers Presented on the 4 November 1999 at the CERL Conference Hosted by the Royal Library, Brussels* (London: Consortium of European Research Libraries, 2001: 38–43).

the more research opportunities it provides, but the more difficult it becomes to prepare it for successful searches. When the file reaches saturation, and search and display techniques grow with it, it may be used by very expert scholars as well as by undergraduates and sensitive members of the general public. Serving those diversified groups provides the national union catalog with the justification for the costs of having the file compiled and published on the Internet.

And in this case, we may be content to belong to a smaller nation. Poland has more of a chance of a full national bibliography and a national catalog, because it is smaller than Germany or the United Kingdom. With its printed book production from the beginning to the middle of the previous century only slightly exceeding a probable 400,000 titles,<sup>14</sup> and with current annual publishing output of about 21,000 titles of books and over 5,500 titles of serials,<sup>15</sup> we have more of a chance of a successful and complete central national database than the giant publishing countries. Of course, it does not solve the problem of what should go into the union catalog first, and what last. If we concentrate on printed materials, we may some day lose our grip over the cultural mainstream. To reflect the culture of the nation, we can think today of several types of materials and types of contents which already make a substantial contribution to the life of a country. And we can no longer stick to the sixteenth-century definition of publications. Include Web pages? Problematic, they come and go. Include printed ephemera? There has never been an adequate definition of a unit of ephemera. Include sub-cultural newsletters called fanzines? They are hopelessly local by definition, but some artistic magazines started as fanzines, and there is no fringe in culture that should be avoided by a cataloger. On the other hand, tomes of devotional literature, flooding deposit libraries in Poland today, might as well be excluded with no harm to either scholars or the general public. But when we see how difficult it is

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<sup>14</sup> Estimation based on: M. Czarnowska. *Ilościowy rozwój polskiego ruchu wydawniczego 1501–1965* (Development of publishing output in Poland in numbers). Warsaw: Biblioteka Narodowa, 1967: passim.

<sup>15</sup> Estimates provided by the Department of Acquisitions, Warsaw University Library. WUL is a legal deposit library.



to impose standards of cataloging and compile a national catalog of books and periodicals, I think that those phenomena which are traditionally perceived as “off” will long be left for specialized bibliographies and inventories.

The politics of the national union catalog is an area we in Poland have hardly touched upon in our discussion of what NUKat should look like. NUKat is heavily oriented toward supporting shared cataloging, and in the absence of real retrospective conversion, whatever little shared cataloging the libraries will perform retrospectively will create retrospective resources. The scope of this inclusion will not be clearly understandable to the public. Libraries will merely recatalog items that they need, and those items will go into NUKat. The job may be done semi-automatically, by applying OCR procedure to old catalog cards, as we do in Warsaw with our early imprints.<sup>16</sup> Are early imprints a priority? Well, in some Polish libraries they are treasures, largely unexplored. But some other priorities could also be identified. If there is no discussion and decision, libraries will probably continue the recat by progressing backwards, and flood the file with items from the post-war period, dominated by works nobody ever wants to consult anymore. We can also focus on items requested by users, which received the fast lane in processing. Then, however, we receive a national union catalog that reflects the users’ needs but has little impact on those needs, and does not reflect the national publishing output.

The alternative policy is to select areas that are perceived as the strength of the country. In the case of Poland, this would be, for instance, mathematical logic, and indeed there is an ongoing project to get that heritage digitized; if digitized, it must also be recataloged for inclusion in NUKat.<sup>17</sup> The other area could be poetry, because Polish poets, with two Nobel Prize winners, apparently have some appeal to international

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<sup>16</sup> Hollender 39.

<sup>17</sup> The project is coming into being on a grant from the State Research Committee for the Interdisciplinary Center of Mathematical and Computational Modelling, with the cooperation of the Warsaw University Library. See “On the Warsaw Scientific Virtual Library,” <http://vls.icm.edu.pl> (Polish version only on the date of the last consultation, September 17, 2002).

audiences. Anyway, there will certainly be choices, and there will be mistakes, too. A sample mistake is a choice of titles to be recataloged for Poland's Central File of Journal Titles.<sup>18</sup> Traditionally, Polish journals were given priority. What turned out to be missing, however, were modern, expensive international scientific journals. When recently the subscription funds became smaller and deliberations were necessary to decide which titles should be canceled, which should be kept, and which should be obtained in electronic format only, it was very inconvenient not to have them all included in our online catalog. Also, the decision taken ignored the actual habits of readers of international scientific journals, of consulting the online and not the card catalog.

Of course, union catalogs are not only national union catalogs. We do need the other types. They do exist and they will continue being published in various formats. If the information world does not set up priorities in this area and submit convincing projects to where the funding may come from, the initiative will be taken up by local historians, who will fill the gaps with their non-professional printed catalogs and bibliographies of small scope, with little chance of completion anyway.

In fact, the region of Central and Eastern Europe, due to its complicated history, should be a grateful field for union catalogs of international scope. According to an informal message from the British Library, the Incunabula Short Title Catalog may some day soon include the locations of all the libraries owning the item, thus producing the world incunabula catalog. Other ideas may be of more limited scope and cover material focused on some specific research needs. There is, for instance, an increasing interest in the geopolitical situation of Kaliningrad, the Russian enclave on the Baltic Sea. Books from dispersed German libraries in Königsberg are to be found in numerous libraries in Russia, Poland, Belarus, and several other countries. It would be beautiful to have them listed in one union catalog. Another example is the project titled Better Access to Prints from Polish-German Cultural Borderlands in the Collections of Polish Libraries, funded

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<sup>18</sup> In the Main Library, University of Gdańsk, in cooperation with the Center for Formats and Authority Files, Warsaw University Library, currently in the process of migration into NUKat.

initially by the *Bosch Stiftung* and coordinated by the National Library of Poland. The project resulted in a number of microfilms, which can now be identified and located via a union file, available online from *Biblioteka Narodowa*, and entitled a little differently: “Early Printed Books Published Mainly Within the Territory of Silesia, Eastern Prussia and Pomerania”.<sup>19</sup> We have to admit that books printed in Silesia have always been collected by libraries in Poland, so the coverage criterion can hardly be considered clear. Moreover, the file cannot be searched by the name of the library holding the item. Nevertheless, the project provides access to some 12,000 items, is scheduled to encompass 17,000 items, and the file provides the index of search names, so it will probably be welcomed by historians. The whole undertaking really wants just one finishing touch: the step back from microfilm to the original, and the creation of a file of Germanica held by libraries in Poland. Eventually, it would have to cover items not only printed in Silesia, Eastern Prussia and Pomerania, but also elsewhere in the German language, or in historic Germany, and offer the international scholarly community access to materials from German libraries taken over by the government of Poland in 1946. I see no political reason that could prevent us Polish and German librarians from completing the first phase of such a project in 2004, to celebrate Poland’s access to the European Union as well as the 60th anniversary of the ending of World War II. Also worth considering are the prospects for union catalogs (or a catalog?) of books from Polish libraries nationalized in territories lost by Poland after 1945. Raising this issue requires some polemic with a bias among librarians, who even today voice the opinion that finding lists of any kind, when published, will support restitution claims.

With regard to increased numbers of union catalogs and their adjustment to more diversified scholarly and general audiences, which we briefly discussed under the issue of CERL and Hand Press Book Database, we will have to acknowledge, respect and influence a range of cognitive cultures. In designing catalogs—as in the case of NUKat in Poland and other possible projects—we will have to depart from our only regular customers: the university student. We will have to admit that this customer has never

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<sup>19</sup> See <http://139.59.172.222/info/info18a.htm>.

attempted to give us a hard time: she learned quickly, worked in a hurry, asked for help if in doubt or trouble, and in most cases came to the university with some basics of computer literacy. She has mostly searched for titles or authors from reading lists. She has not understood subject searches and avoided them, thus surpassing her professors, who had hardly ever known that the subject searches existed. Yes, our student users can handle online catalogs. Still, observing the totality of our patrons, we could not help repeating after Christine Borgman: Why are online catalogs still hard to use?<sup>20</sup>

We certainly do want our union catalogs to become easier to use. To this end, we can draw on Borgman's analysis of the problem and follow her advice. That is not to say that most catalog interfaces are perfect; they should and can be improved. On the other hand, they may improve without becoming operable for everybody. This is probably a somewhat different point of view than that of Borgman.<sup>21</sup> Note that while we are increasingly depending on our skills to use sophisticated high-tech equipment, which is actually Borgman's point of departure in her most recent work, we need not make a point of making information searches literally easy. The information society will not go as far as to require identical qualities from a vacuum cleaner operator and from the author of a term paper. A catalog cannot be simplified beyond a certain point, and since what we want to retrieve is a document—a written work, a visual object, or a piece of music—we have to be ready for some textual operations. In fact, online services, permeated by conceptual, semantic, syntactic, and technical hardships, no matter how complex, will always be easier to 'read' than a medieval manuscript, because online searches are based on algorithms and after some experience we can master them, while annotations on parchment

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<sup>20</sup> This title of Borgman's 1996 paper, published in *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, 47(1996), 493–503, refers to her other paper, entitled "Why Are Online Catalogs Hard To Use? Lessons Learned from Information Retrieval Studies," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 37 (1986), 387–400.

<sup>21</sup> Christine L. Borgman. *From Gutenberg to the Global Information Infrastructure: Access to Information in the Networked World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 2001: 116–141).

are not, and no experience can equip us against the unknown. There is no hardship if online services are based on effort, on learning, on the joy of discovering. It is all right if the acquisition of information requires some ritual, and a serious ritual is never for pleasure.

Of course, the kind of online searches that are easy have already been designed and can serve as a pattern. If we engage in Internet shopping, we are likely to be guided step by step; each step is explained without shortcuts, and once taken, it is confirmed. It might also be manageable to organize library displays the way Amazon.com is organized. We may guess that businesses generally provide easier-to-use portals because they can afford better designers, and information workers employed by libraries will always be behind in their funding and achievement. But it is our personal and intuitive opinion that designers are generally seldom good because they have a background in computing and have learned to live with texts of quite a different format and purpose than those we find in traditional finding tools: catalog cards, tables of contents, charts, and diagrams. For a patron with a long background in using a catalog with regular cards, like those required by AACR2, any screen display will seem redundant and chaotic. The display always contains some additional elements, which look as important as any other on the screen, but in fact open only some secondary option or provide some secondary message. The title page of the book, the layout of a bibliography took shape decades after the invention of printing, and we have to wait until the electronic information enters the same age of maturity.

If we again draw on personal experience, we have to admit that most catalogers and format experts, no matter how proficient, are rather insensitive to display issues, and that most Web page designers are computing experts with little understanding of a printed book layout. Indeed, in the work of many of those two groups, centuries of book design are immediately lost! Also, this has been an area in which there has been little feedback from the public. Moreover, the designer of OPAC displays has a more difficult a job to do than a person who is responsible for an ordering routine in an Internet store. There are hardly any subject searches in Internet shopping (those in Internet bookstores are on a very trivial level). And last, there are security reasons involved in commodity searches and ordering—money, credit card numbers, etc.—so avoiding mistakes is

and will always be more crucial than in information searches. It is, and perhaps always will be, a psychological issue: a person searching a union catalog will not want to devote as much time to a single search as a person deciding on an item which has to be paid for.<sup>22</sup>

However, when we look at a modern OPAC with the eye not necessarily of a poet, but of a sensitive and literate person, we have to understand why such a person feels at a loss so often. Without our own in-depth study, and in the conviction that it will be very difficult to add much to the analysis by Borgman,<sup>23</sup> we can only mention that, for instance:

- Diacritics are seldom transmitted properly, which will have an especially bad impact in catalogs containing multilingual material;<sup>24</sup>
- The lack of authority control generates noise which can be ignored in small files, but paralyzes searches in big ones;<sup>25</sup> and
- Boolean operators seem to remain a tool for the brave few, and the systems designers still prefer to make those in need activate a help screen or to turn to some help desk, which actually few will do, while only some displays show adequate advice on the same screen in which a query is to be entered or in which the search results appear.

Another problem is with subject searches. With card catalogs and with the first generation of online catalogs, it was obvious that subject searches would be avoided by most users. Those who have learned how to enter a

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<sup>22</sup> As a result of some convergence process, however, a subset of selected items is called a ‘cart’ in Chameleon iPortal in Virtua.

<sup>23</sup> See note 18.

<sup>24</sup> If we are looking for a bad experience, we are sure to have one in searching online, for instance, for the capital of Ukraine. While the Russian version of the name of the city, Kiev, transmits well between systems and networks, the Ukrainian version as a rule comes to us with some unwanted symbols unless it is simplified as Kyiv.

<sup>25</sup> I cannot understand why a search for, say, the Ukrainian poet Oksana Zabuzhko in my otherwise favorite OhioLINK Central Catalog has to end up with the foolish advice “Your entry zabuzhko oksana would be here—Change search to oksana, zabuzko”, while in the line above Ms. Zabuzhko is properly listed as Zabuzhko, O. S. (Oksana Stefanivna).

subject query were normally satisfied with interesting findings. In big files those findings can be really exciting. But no union catalog—and indeed, no national union catalog—will have subject headings assigned in all the records in which, according to the cataloging rules, it would be appropriate. The Israel Union Catalog, for instance, does not offer subject searches at all. And in practice, there is no chance that subject headings will soon be assigned to any but a minority of NUKat records in Poland, unless there is no retrospective material and the file grows only with current cataloging.

In the future, we are likely to replace subject indexing with advanced automated indexing techniques. But the handling of subject searches is changing at present. In the first generations of OPACs, as well as in card catalogs, we had to know or just guess the actual subject term or select it from the thesaurus. It was difficult to end the search with a hit, but it was generally semantics, and not grammar, which led to noise. Currently, in most union catalogs, the system understands ‘subject’ as a ‘subject word,’ and generates a long list of supposed hits. This new trend leads toward more hits, but also more redundancy. Few OPACs are as user-friendly as that of OhioLINK,<sup>26</sup> which lists the subject headings retrieved before directing the user to bibliographic records. This is undoubtedly a nice functionality, but it does not help much, because it leaves the researcher flooded with subject terms, in which the search term actually plays the role of a qualifier or a subdivision. To retrieve what we really want (and we mostly want a supposedly proper subject), we have to either limit the search result, or activate the search template and select the search usually named ‘exact subject.’ In some newer union catalogs, ‘exact subjects’ are hidden under some separate type of search, such as “Power Search” in the California Digital Library’s Melvyl-T.<sup>27</sup> The notion of power probably refers here to productivity, and not to precision. In COPAC there seems to be no way to activate the ‘exact subject’ type of search, and due to the file size, most of the searches, especially for proper names, produce very

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<sup>26</sup> See <http://www.ohiolink.edu>.

<sup>27</sup> See <http://mel-t.cdlib.org>, as consulted directly before the Conference.

redundant material.<sup>28</sup> It becomes clear that the designers wanted to remake the functionality of search engines like Google, where in advanced searches we always have a choice of ‘all words’, ‘phrase’, and ‘exact match’. This way we certainly make sure that no relevant material ever remains undiscovered, even in the hands of a very novice user. But we are also likely to discourage those who understand what the subject is and will turn their backs on a service that is not acting according to the accepted terminology. In NUKat, we are hoping the issue will be solved in the localization of displays; articulate guidance of the user may require adding some words of explanation that subject searches by words are actually not subject searches, but free searches within the whole field of subject heading.

Some features of new union catalogs, however, will satisfy people with ‘bookish’ textual habits. Adding a table of contents is one example; providing notes to help in better understanding the subject and type of publication is another. While the former is a novelty, the latter has always been used in cataloging, but we have seen very little of it in automated cataloging. At least one catalog—OhioLINK—offers the functionality of retrieving authors not listed in the responsibility statement. For instance, when we are looking for a poet, we can expect to find his poems included in a collection of works of various authors.

All in all, what catalogs will be understood by those who feel like strangers in the information society, or who are just beginners? What union catalogs have to be organized to meet and augment the creativity of our poets and intellectuals? Certainly the union catalog is not a field for experiment; its advanced technologies should serve a conservative purpose. It has to show the ambition to provide a database with some predictable contents and structure. It has to have clear, transparent criteria for the inclusion of material. It has to explain as much as possible to an eager reader and provide shortcuts for those in a hurry. It has to offer some kind of contract with the user: the better you learn how to operate me, the more I may assist you in depth. It has to use authors, titles, and subjects as the

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<sup>28</sup> See <http://www.copac.ac.uk>. Let us use Kiev as an example again: as a subject it generates 1686 records, of which no more than one-fourth would have Kiev as a subject.



basic entries, and to offer author word, title word, and subject word searches with the necessary explanation, without which the lay user will never understand what a subject is. It has to produce subsets and tolerate, again with a clear explanation, that different search methodologies may be needed for each. It has to lead to the full text as quickly as possible, by providing lavish, uncontrolled information on the item contents, or by linking to the digital object, and also by facilitating shelf searches and inter-library loan. It has to look well and read well. It has to be edited. It is a publication, or even a poem in itself.

