

December 2016

# Toward Augmented Document: Expressive Function of Catalog

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## Recommended Citation

Courbieres, Caroline; Roux, Sabine; and Berthou, Benoît (2016) "Toward Augmented Document: Expressive Function of Catalog," *Proceedings from the Document Academy*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 2 , Article 6.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35492/docam/3/2/6>

Available at: <https://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/docam/vol3/iss2/6>

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## Introduction

Over the centuries, the catalog has become the main communicational vector about books and documents. It constitutes an info-communicational device that contributes to the circulation of knowledge. Our work in progress is part of a more general semiotic investigation about information and the document. We propose here to consider the reconstruction of the information object through the bibliographic systems used to identify and describe it.

We will first consider document access, and we will qualify the catalog as a communicational tool for signaling and locating a collection of documents. Second, we will take up the question of the catalog through its successive operations on the document. Today, catalogs have to be more integrated to the Web and have started extending the description of documentary units. This evolution goes along with new cataloging standards and the entanglement of traditional functions of the catalog. We will end in opening up a discussion on the emergence of and the issues surrounding what we called an *augmented* document.

### 1. Document access

The catalog can be considered a communicational tool for signaling and locating a collection of documents. It takes part in the realization of “the universal organization” envisioned by Paul Otlet in 1934 and constitutes the “nucleus” of an information system. For the most part, the function of a catalog is to characterize a collection in order to make it available for a public. So, a catalog fits into a singular situation of communication between its production at some point and its later uses, which are not necessary planned or controlled. The history of library catalogs is old: For nearly twenty-five centuries, the principle of cataloging materializes itself in different forms and on various supports. Its using goes together with the indexing of documents in order to allow access to their content.

We immediately think of the pioneer of indexing, who was also a poet, Callimachus in Alexandria. He wanted to structure the documentary collection according to a classification that was consistent with the worldview of intellectuals who attended the institution.

Callimachus divides the library in shelves or tables (*pinakoi*), organized into eight classes or subjects: drama, oratory, lyric poetry, law, medicine, history, philosophy and miscellaneous. He shares long works by making the copy into several smaller sections called “books” in order to obtain smaller and more convenient scrolls to handle. (...) All *pinakoi*, or tables—whose official title is: *Table of Those Who Were Outstanding in*

*All Areas of Culture and Their Works*—apparently have 120 scrolls. (Manguel, 2006)<sup>1</sup>

Another pioneer Paul Otlet—and his Universal Bibliographic Repertory (RBU)—has collected nearly 18 million cards written between 1895 and the end of the the 1930s. The goal of this Repertory was to “contain both the bibliography of the past and the present. It should also be able to keep up with future production” (Rayward, 1990, p. 24).



Figure 1: Universal Bibliographic Repertory (Source: Mundaneum)

If cataloging records on cards, arranged alphabetically by author, subject or title, in reading rooms, have almost disappeared, to the benefit of digital catalogs, the principle of identifying documents in order to transmit and share knowledge still goes on. These pioneers helped in the necessary organization of knowledge from the identification of informational objects themselves. In this way, as Christian Jacob told us, “the library gives body and materiality to a virtuality of knowledge” (Jacob, 2001).<sup>2</sup> In the same perspective as the “social epistemology” of Jesse Shera (Shera, 1973) or as in the work of Jean Meyriat (Meyriat, 1978), Bertrand Calenge considers the library as “a social space energized around knowledge” (Calenge, 2012).<sup>3</sup> According to him, “information is not data; it is a set of signs built in a context of specific production: a book, an article, a discourse, or a movie, music, data basis etc. But for a librarian, that information only exists through a subject who has taken

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<sup>1</sup> « Callimaque divise ainsi la bibliothèque en rayons ou tables (pinakoi), organisés en huit classes ou sujets: drame, art oratoire, poésie lyrique, législation, médecine, histoire, philosophie et divers. Il partage les œuvres longues en les faisant copier en plusieurs sections plus courtes appelées « livres », de manière à obtenir des rouleaux plus petits et plus commodes à manipuler (...). L'ensemble des pinakoi, ou des tables – dont le titre officiel est: Table de Ceux qui furent remarquables dans tous les Domaines de la Culture, ainsi que leurs œuvre –, occupe apparemment cent vingt rouleaux. » (Manguel, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> « La bibliothèque donne corps et matérialité à une virtualité de savoirs » (Jacob, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> « un espace social dynamisé autour de la connaissance » (Calenge, 2012).

possession of and then appropriated it.”<sup>4</sup> This perspective questions the status of the catalog and its fundamental ambiguity. Catalogs have been directly impacted by the development of digital supports. And if a document could be defined as a virtual object that doesn’t exist before someone uses it, the catalog actualizes this object through its paradoxical recomposition.

## 2. Reconstruction of document

The catalog may be grasped by the dialectic of presence/absence. Every catalog contributes to the circulation of knowledge in the absence of the actual objects that constitute knowledge. The identification of a document in a catalog implies that the document is first recognized by the librarian as informational object. The object attains the status of document through its actualization (Courbières, 2008). And this particular status is expressed in the catalog where the document is identified and described according to the applicable international standards. The bibliographical record provides information specific to the document as a material and intellectual object, and the catalog card completes this, as an item of its own in the library or information center, in order to allow the document to be located. This referencing consists in deconstructing documents according to principles of standardization. The document is actualized but it is decomposed in a list of distinct characteristics in the catalog. In this way, the catalog has a double status: It states the existence of documents by referencing them as informational objects, and at the same time it erases documents.

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<sup>4</sup> « L’information n’est pas une donnée, c’est un ensemble de signes construits dans un contexte de production spécifique: ici un livre, là un article, là encore un discours, ou encore un film, une musique, une base de données, etc. Mais pour un bibliothécaire cette information n’accède à l’existence qu’à travers le sujet qui s’en est emparé et se l’est approprié. » (Calenge, 2012).

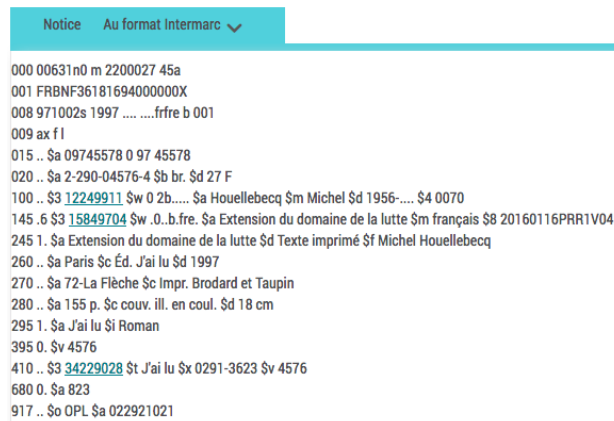


Figure 2: Librarian view of the notice dedicated to a Houellebecq’s novel (OPAC of France National Library)

Figure 2 shows how a document is identified through a list of elements that represents it. Those descriptive elements are gathered to form a documentary unit. Different semiotic levels must be then distinguished: the documentary unit provides information on the support of the document (its material description or its price), on its form (title and statement of responsibility), on its content (terms used for indexing), contextual information (shelf mark), and “publisher data”<sup>5</sup> or “bibliographic metadata”<sup>6</sup> (the ISBN<sup>7</sup> that characterizes a book, for example). The restricted space of the catalog record describes the document by breaking it down into parts. So the catalog reconstructs the document with a set of data that draws a recomposed image of it. Those different characteristics can be viewed as some sketches on tracing paper of the details of the document. They just constitute virtual documentary traces. Those documentary traces are increasingly completed with paratextual elements like the book cover or table of contents that display a contingent figure of the document. The introduction of peritextual, harder elements accentuates the absence/presence of the document (Courbières, 2008). In addition to its identification data, the catalog can also enrich the document’s description with the help of external information that represent themselves documentary objects. In Figure 3, we can see for example the catalog record of a novel for which some video interviews with its author are shown.

<sup>5</sup> « Données éditoriales » (Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France).

<sup>6</sup> « Métadonnées bibliographiques » (Source: Agence bibliographique de l’enseignement supérieur).

<sup>7</sup> International Standard Book Number.



Figure 3: Informations on a Michel Houellebecq's novel (OPAC of Toulouse Library)

Lastly, we see more frequent epitextual elements that go along with the identification of the document: The documentary unit provides a significant space for comments on the document. Professionals and users can express themselves: Librarians can add critics' reviews and recommend similar documents<sup>8</sup>; users can note, assign a grade to a document or associate a tag. Those new features highlight expressive functions of cataloging: The catalog is not only used to identify and locate informational objects; it also allows the gathering and spreading of diverse opinions on the document. The whole of this subjective expression concerns its substance and pertains to its reconstruction in the form of an *augmented* document. The entire process of actualization, disintegration and (re)composition of documents through the catalog leads us to observe the specific communicational or mediating functions linked to this professional tool.

### 3. Communication or mediation

With the development of Online public access catalog (OPAC), catalogs diffuse their own content beyond the documentary space that they are supposed to represent. This deployment of the catalog beyond the document is at the heart of the new cataloging standard Resource Description and Access (RDA) based on the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR), a relational conceptual model; this model is designed to pool the resources associated with a given work. "Designed for the digital world and an expanding universe of metadata users,"<sup>9</sup> RDA succeeds the last Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR2):

RDA is the result of a thorough deconstruction of AACR2 and a rebuilding into a new standard. RDA uses many of the old building blocks, but rearranges them in a new structure and context that is based

<sup>8</sup> Cf. The King County Library System, offering lists of readings recommended by librarians.

<sup>9</sup> Source: <http://www.rdatoolkit.org/>

on a sound and explicitly delineated theoretical framework, and thus quite different from AACR2. (Oliver, 2009)  
 This standard is based on an atomization of the document in attempt to aggregate its data.

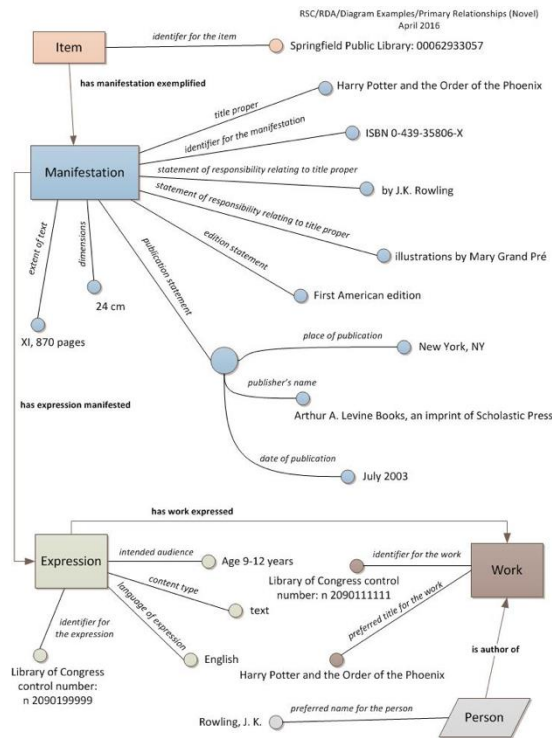


Figure 4: Example of RDA primary relationships (RSC) for a novel (Source: RDA Toolkit)

RDA allows libraries' and documentary data to circulate on the Web. The implementation of these new rules is not yet effective in France and is currently being discussed by the two national bibliographic agencies: ABES<sup>10</sup>, the bibliographic agency for higher education, and the BNF<sup>11</sup>, the national library of France. This new stage in the history of the catalogs is part of a digital horizon and challenges the traditional model of the library catalog.

Up to now the catalog has combined two models: the model of visibility inherent to a catalog's function, and the model of authority that emanates from the expertise of the professional. A catalog can be linked to a documentary showcase: It contributes to add value to a collection if not in a logic of mediation, at least in a logic of communication. The difference between the concepts of communication and mediation constitutes an ongoing debate in France and is finally inherent in the history of the institutionalization of the scientific field of Information and Communication Sciences (SIC) in France. Communication would refer to a linear data transmission, *versus* mediation that

<sup>10</sup> Agence bibliographique de l'enseignement supérieur.

<sup>11</sup> Bibliothèque nationale de France.



would imply a work of recontextualizing information. But this distinction is valid only within the context of a theory of communication inherited from Shannon and Weaver (Shannon, 1948). It may be recalled that any info-communicational process must be apprehended within a semiological framework (Courbières, 2012). In fact, the catalog bridges these two logics—the communication of data and the mediation of information as a signifying datum—and the task of the professional (librarians and archivists) is to ensure relevant and reliable information and data for identifying the document. But the catalog has now to integrate the model of hospitality (Berthou, 2016) that is related to the possibilities around users’ comments.

This community activity can be supported by identified websites like the French Babelio or the American Goodreads that users supply by entering their readings, giving notes and writing reviews. These websites allow libraries to enrich their OPAC by importing content produced by members of their community of readers.



*Figure 4: Additional Info from Community Activity  
(OPAC of Denver Public Library)*

This user participation is one of the tools that make possible what Ron Day called “the documentary indexing of the subject” (Day, 2004). Thus by giving its opinion in a catalog, the user certainly feels like an actor in his research and seems to be involved in a semblance of documentary community. But his involvement also allows targeting his personality to sell products, to arouse his desire. Moreover, if the augmented document enables users to participate in indexing, a new kind of prescription appears then apart from the legitimate prescription of the professional.

## Conclusion

The evolution of those professional tools that are the catalogs highlights an augmented document. Catalog 2.0 circulates many data of different types that produce several discourses on the document. The catalog combines now a traditional model of authority to a participative one. If the evolving



documentary process of the catalog stays exciting, a lot of questions arise: What is the value of the discourses about the document? And what is the link with its identification? Is it a real enrichment? How to leverage the expression of users? And on what criteria? Finally, is it really the role of the catalog?

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