UNITING THE CORPUS OF OUR COLLECTIONS THROUGH VISUALISATION

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IFLA 2012 Helsinki:
Acquisitions and Collection Development Section
Open Session
Tuesday, 14 August 2012 from 13:45-15:45
CHALLENGES

- Visualising digital and physical collections to enable discovery and use
- Challenge to present collections, digitised versions and contemporary print, media and born digital materials as a discoverable corpus for researchers, students and the public
THE PHYSICAL CORPUS

- Alexandrian measures
  - How big
  - How old
  - How many incunables
  - How extensive
  - How specialist ...
STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

- 5.5 million items
- 1.1 million photographs
- 11.2 linear km of manuscripts
- 234,000 prints, drawings, paintings and maps
- 114,000 architectural plans
- Talking books, postage stamps, coins and books
- Assessed value of AUD2.142 billion (EUR 1.7 billion)
THE QUESTION

How can we and our clients visualise such extensive and varied collections kept in myriad formats and in so many storage systems?
THE EMERGING DIGITAL CORPUS

- Digitise heritage collections
- Capture born digital material
  - intangible *digitalia*, an aggregation of intangible and evanescent items
THE CHALLENGE OF VISUALISING COLLECTIONS

- Questions that go to the heart of our understanding of twenty-first century libraries as collecting institutions
- Integral to the challenge of moving public identification of the library beyond the physicality of the book/ liber/ βιβλίο
SOME CONTEMPORARY ARGUMENTS FOR LIBRARIES

- The ‘living room of the community’ (Haskell 2010)
- A ‘third space’ which is welcoming and available to all (Bauer 2009)
- A ‘learning commons’ which facilitates interaction and study (Holmesglen 2009)
A library may be without books but it cannot be a library without being a vehicle for transmitting knowledge
- Items of enduring value
- Items ‘held’ only as long as they are current
- Items ‘held’ only while they are of interest and used
It is the processes of selection - and deselection - coupled with organisation which makes a collection.

Tampere Public Library, Finland
TRADITIONAL MODES OF VISUALISING COLLECTIONS

- Arrangements of clay tablets and papyri
- Particular needs of manuscript, numismatic and other special collections
- An arrangement on bookshelves
COMPREHENDING COLLECTIONS AS SHELF ARRANGEMENTS BREAKS DOWN

- For very large, dispersed collections
- Closed stacks
- Automated storage and retrieval systems
- Digital materials only viewable on screen, printed or converted to audible or other format
OTHER MODES OF VISUALISING COLLECTIONS

- Bibliographic description
  - in accession order
  - in classification order
  - author-title listings
  - sorted by format or age
  - by popularity
  - limited only by available metadata

- Substitutes an artefact, the bibliographic record, for the desired collection item

Toronto Public Library
A MARC RECORD

- Does not convey the physicality of a book: mass, colour, texture, smell, quality of paper, typography, binding, ...
- Nor the ideas or their quality
- Simply enables discovery and initial assessment of relevance and usefulness
Improving Catalogue Based Discovery and Visualisation

- Thumbnail images of book covers and icons derived from logos, titles, etc
  - Kindle Fire bookshelf
  - iPad virtual bookshelf has a timber appearance
WEB 2.0 TO THE RESCUE

LibraryThing [http://www.librarything.com](http://www.librarything.com)
“connects you to people who read what you do”

Shelfari [http://www.shelfari.com](http://www.shelfari.com) is “a community-powered encyclopedia for book lovers” to “create a virtual bookshelf, discover new books, connect with friends and learn more about your favorite books - all for free”
ZOOMII.COM (CANADA) & SHELFUV.COM

- zoomii.com, a visual bookshelf browser, offered a powerful way of selecting books online via Amazon but is now defunct (Thiessen 2012)

- Shelfuv http://www.shelfuv.com, “create a virtual bookshelf of your books”
PICCLICK, GOODREADS, LIVEPLASMA

- **Picclick** [http://picclick.com/Books](http://picclick.com/Books) offers a basic display of thumbnail images but, disappointingly, it can be searched only by keyword, not visually.
- **Goodreads** [http://www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com)
- **Liveplasma** [http://www.liveplasma.com](http://www.liveplasma.com) has a basic search interface but, interestingly, shows books, movies or music as items within a web of associations.
CHRIS GAUL’S BOOK BABBLE

http://www.chrisgaul.net/utslibrary/prototypes/book-babble
ALICIA MARTIN, INSTALLATION, CASA DE AMERICA, MADRID

http://cubeme.com/blog/2012/03/19/alicja-martins-biografias-installation
BRONIA SAWYER, BOOK SCULPTURES

Books presented as sculptures, wall-based collages, artists' books, and photographs
MAKING TANGIBLE THE INTANGIBLE

Enabling our clients to see knowledge in place of objects