Guest Editorial

Knowledge Organization in the Humanities

Hanne Albrechtsen

The humanities present special challenges to knowledge organization. The humanities constitute a varied and heterogenous set of more or less specialized studies and educations. Hjørland (1995) suggests a division into different dimensions: i) the historical dimension, for instance *history*; ii) the communicative dimension, for instance *linguistics*; iii) the aesthetical dimension, for instance *fiction*; and iv) the epistemological dimension, for instance *philosophy*. General theory for organizing knowledge in the humanities and its special domains of knowledge is scarce. In her monograph on abstracting and information searching in the humanities and in history in particular, Tibbo (1993) says: "Despite the apparent differences among the content and structure of scholarly writing in the sciences and the humanities, no one has yet to question the validity of national and international abstracting both scientific and humanistic literatures".

Tibbo's critique of the applicability of universal standards for abstracting in the humanities could equally well apply to, for instance subject analysis, indexing and thesaurus construction. The international and national standards claim universality across the sciences, social sciences, and the humanities, but actually they primarily support knowledge organization in the sciences. Scholarly writing and concept formation in the humanities are much less explicit and exact, and they are much more dynamic, though much more ambigous than scientific writing. The humanities usually build upon a hermeneutic research approach, involving a high degree of reflection and even scepticism on the relationship between the researcher and the research object. Describing the evolvement and transformation of concepts is more important than providing exact definitions. Often, there are numerous schools and approaches within one domain, such as in psychology and literature studies, whose terminology may be very different, very plastic and subject to constant interpretation. Consequently, it can be very difficult to analyse the subject of a document from these areas automatically, or to analyse them using a content analysis according to the ISO standard for indexing. The meaning of terms will vary from document to document and also within one document. Likewise, the concepts do not always lend themselves to a conventional classificatory structure – for instance, Madsen & Jensen (1995) found that for a thesaurus to function for subject access in psychoanalysis, the appropriate structure for knowledge organization should be clusters of terms around each ground-breaking theorist in the field.

At the same time, the conditions for research, including the sciences, are changing from being defined solely by the disciplines and their institutions, towards being defined by the context of application, and they are often carried out by interdisciplinary research teams (cf. for instance Gibbons et al, 1994). In such settings, different research cultures meet. Dissent on terminology and knowledge structures will often be the rule rather than the exception (Star, 1993). The participants have to reflect on their approaches, concepts and knowledge structures in a way that is very similar to research approaches and scholarly writing in the humanities. Thus, I believe that a more thorough and creative concern with knowledge organization in the humanities will be central to developing a more general theory for knowledge organization in the future — the aim being, of course, to support analysis of concepts and structures from the new production of knowledge and to pave the way for developing new theory and practice in knowledge organization.

In November 1996, the partners from the Nordic Book House consortium arranged a seminar at Royal School of Librarianship, to investigate some important issues in knowledge organization in the humanities (Albrechtsen & Beghtol, 1997). The seminar was sponsored by the Nordic Council of Ministers and ISKO. The title "Fiction, OPACs, Networks" reflected a special interest in subject access to fiction,

but the seminar brought together professional from many different fields in the humanities. One of the main results of the seminar was new insight in how to create knowledge organizations that can respect the values of different cultures and domains, based on both theory and concrete experience in various humanistic fields.

In this Issue

The first three papers in this issue, originally presented at the above-mentioned seminar, have been invited as important contributions to knowledge organization in the arts and humanities. All three papers have implications for knowledge organization in general, as well.

In the first article, **Clare Beghtol** discusses how narrative discourse analysis can be applied to knowledge organization outside the arts (fiction, music, pictorial art). She analyses and compares narrative documents in different disciplines. And, based on Werlich's work on text types, she proposes a typology of documents of a narrative or non-narrative nature, going across different domains of knowledge. Beghtol demonstrates convincingly, how concepts and methods are borrowed between different fields of knowledge and how methods from the humanities — for instance, discourse analysis — can be applied in other disciplinary domains.

In the second article, **Rebecca Green** analyzes how well relational indexing, based on syntagmatic relationships between terms, may function in the humanities. She proposes a frame structure for capturing the concepts that enter and are transformed in the narrative discourse of works of art, such as music, fiction etc. Like Beghtol, Green is concerned with how to give subject access to the particular feature of a narrative, namely the progression and transformation of its actors, including people, things, and concepts, rather than to the more conventional lexical relationships between the concepts etc. mentioned in the narrative. In addition to contributing to indexing in the arts, Green also contributes to theories for the syntagmatic aspects of indexing, in the tradition of, for instance, S. R. Ranganathan and Derek Austin. Green's approach, however, builds on a broader socio-cognitive framework for text analysis and language understanding, in particular on the American linguist George Lakoff's theories of language and culture (1987).

According to the international standards for thesaurus construction, multilingual thesaurus construction is primarily about mapping more or less well between the individual words, concepts and structures of the languages involved. In the third article,

Michèle Hudon warns against this approach, which promotes one language culture and one point-of-view, in favour of other language cultures and points-of-view. She argues for separate analysis of each language and culture and for a subsequent reconciliation of them in bridging languages. Hudon's approach to thesaurus construction, based on cultural studies and communication theory, thus paves the way for new approaches to reconcile and present conceptual structures in heterogenous domains, such as the humanities, and in the modern crossdisciplinary discourse communities and research groups.

In the fourth article, we shift our focus from the humanities to the natural sciences. With the recent death of Thomas S. Kuhn, **Henry Burger** provides a timely reassessment of Kuhn's contributions to our understanding of knowledge development in the history of science. Burger offers many clear examples of the phases, "way-stations" and "choke points" of discovery, and he provides interesting and insightful elaborations on Kuhn's original observations of the dynamics of scientific innovation.

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Note from the Editor

I am pleased to intro-duce our latest member of the Editorial Board. **Michelle M.** Foss will be serving as the Assis-tant to the Editor-in-Chief, and in that capac-ity she will assist in edit-ing some of the articles and book reviews. In addition, she will be the principal editor of the *Reports and Communications* section.

Ms. Foss received her Master of Arts degree in French, specifically in translation, from the Institute for Applied Linguistics at Kent State University where she taught French. She subsequently graduated from the School of Library and Information Science where she also received a masters (MLS) degree. After graduation she held the position of reference librarian at Bowling Green State University-Firelands College, and then as Coordinator of Information Services for the Eisenhower National Clearinghouse at The Ohio State University. Currently, she is a medical librarian at Rainbow Babies & Childrens Hospital for the De-partment of Pediatrics. Her responsibilities include establishing a new digital library for the medical fac-ulty, Internet training, collection development, and online searching. Her research interests focus on in-formation retrieval, indexing, terminology manage-ment, and bibliographic instruction.

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<div align="right">Charles Gilreath</div>