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EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN CONSERVATION

How to encourage conservators to produce knowledge. The CeROArt 'lab': Looking back at ten years of experience

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge transmission through a scientific publication is something that can be taught and learned. The CeROArt journal started a project that it has supported and developed over the past ten years to provide educational support to first-time authors who have graduated in conservation, to encourage them to publish their work. This experience, conducted in Open Access with the support of several European training courses, highlights the skills acquired at the end of their studies in terms of scientific communication. It can also be used to consider several avenues for stimulating knowledge production outside the academic environment.

INTRODUCTION

Sharing knowledge is perhaps the ultimate skill to be acquired by increasingly well-trained young conservators through ever more increasingly homogeneous courses – particularly in Europe, standardised in accordance with the recommendations of the European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Organisations (ECCO) and the European Network for Conservation-Restoration Education (ENCoRE). The path that, in just a few decades, has led restorers trained in the workshop to university lecture theatres has not always paid attention to teaching the specific features of scientific communication. For a long time, many conservator-restorers refused to communicate, or modestly sat among the co-authors endorsed by an academic authority. A change is certainly perceptible, but pitfalls remain and the question arises: how can these be smoothed out?

THE CURRENT SITUATION

At the outset, it is important to remember that many European training courses in conservation originate from vocational courses focused on workshop practices. While educational reform has balanced the relationship with the sciences and humanities the production of written works within training courses can too often be limited to a condition report, a dissertation or a master thesis; i.e. 'grey' or unpublished literature. Few courses, apart from university courses, teach the basics of scientific writing. Through their bibliographical research, students are confronted with models, the codes of which they do not necessarily incorporate, hence their difficulty in finding an outlet in traditional scientific publications.

Almost all the research centres focusing on heritage or museums (Institut Royal du Patrimoine Artistique, Centre de recherche des musées de France) have their own scientific journals in which they publish, often as a team, studies by the institution's qualified researchers, who receive guidance in editing scientific texts (by copywriters and/or text editors). The 'historical' journals (*Studies in Conservation, JAIC, Restauro, Corê*) enjoy a prestigious past, bringing together texts of the highest scientific level, the authors of which are primarily from academia or have a double degree (e.g. art history and conservation, or sciences and conservation). Their requirement level is extremely high and selection is severe. Less specific journals on history or art history, which dedicate features or special issues to restoration,

rarely include restorers on their reading committee; this is reflected in the selection of contributions, which are often very theoretical. Mention should also be made of the symposiums, conferences and study days that result in publications. It was through this process that a first breach was made and restoration practitioners began to publish. ICOM-CC, in particular, played a truly remarkable role. However, we must not be blinded: participating in symposiums and conferences has a cost in terms of time and money (registration, travel and accommodation expenses) and few young or self-employed conservators can afford to attend them. How can we prevent them from becoming isolated in their private workshops, from losing their intellectual curiosity and their desire to continue training? How can we make them understand that their experience is valuable and deserves to be shared?

THE CeROArt PROJECT

The CeROArt project was born of these different observations and very close contact with various training stakeholders. The original idea was to offer a conservation journal with special emphasis on conservator-restorers, thus on 'first-time authors'. The aim was to remove the inhibitions of the more mature individuals and encourage the younger generation, giving them the opportunity to speak and, through a wider readership, initiate a snowball effect.

The professionals to whom we were open about the project, including prominent figures – Paul Philippot, Roger Marijnissen, Gaël de Guichen, Catheline Périer-D'Ieteren, Anne Van Grevenstein and Ségolène Bergeon – all responded positively to our approach. They lent their reputation and their signature to the project to endorse the first issues. Some have agreed to join the reading committee.

The total lack of financial resources and the idea of a wide distribution led the project to digital publishing. A great deal of personal investment and time has helped the project grow and develop. Today, CeROArt has become a journal widely distributed on Open Access and referenced internationally. A momentum was born, which allowed the initial project to evolve, now divided into regular publications (on a predefined theme), special issues (featuring study days, symposiums and other events) and finally EGG (European Graduates Generation) publications, exclusively for young graduates (Figure 1). This paper primarily focuses on these young graduates.

After a brief presentation of how the journal operates, the issues encountered as part of our project, as well as practical teaching proposals, are discussed.

CEROART, THE STRUCTURE

The first issue of CeROArt was coded in 2007, in html, by someone who was self-taught on a Mac computer, using a trial version of the Dreamweaver software package. The logo and banner still used today have the same 'home-made' origin. Search engine optimisation was done manually and advertising for the publication focused on a mailing list of contacts collected by different stakeholders. The authors in the first issue

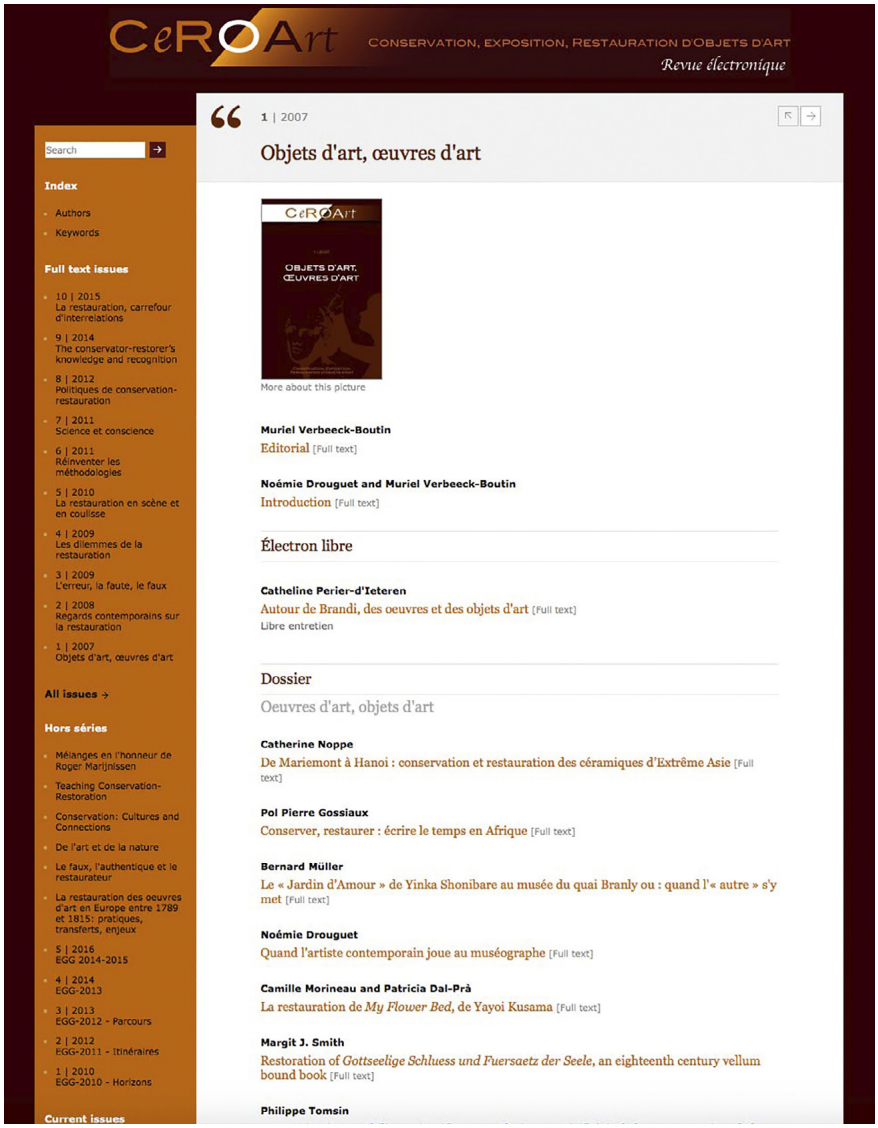

Figure 1. First special issue of the European Graduates Generation (EGG), 2010 – summary

were personally asked to contribute. A call for articles was immediately launched for the second issue, clearly establishing the editorial policy and operating rules, particularly that of peer review.

Editorial committee

The journal works with two reading committees: the first is internal and is comprised of editorial committee members (the journal's founders and one representative from each of the institutions providing financial support). They perform a first selection on receiving the articles, which includes relevance in relation to the issue's theme, intrinsic quality, references and compliance with the editorial charter. Articles deemed to be satisfactory on these points are sent to a member of the peer review committee, selected according to their field of expertise.

Peer review committee

Peer reviewing is provided free of charge; it is considered a service to the scientific community. The first people who agreed to be peer reviewers were academics, mainly art historians. Among them, those who had a close link with the world of conservation-restoration were favoured, especially those working in institutions (e.g. IRPA).

Recruiting professional conservators was more difficult; a few of them had been widely published individually and therefore had sufficient knowledge of editorial processes. Excellent practitioners, with detailed knowledge of certain subjects and therefore quite capable of judging content, are reluctant to judge format and expression, or even correct bibliographical references, sometimes conscious of not completely understanding the standards. It should also be remembered that a self-employed restorer uses their working time, and therefore their earnings, to make their skills available.

The reviewing process is double-blind: the reviewer does not know the author and vice versa. Once an article has been proofread by the reviewer, the comments and the evaluation sheet are returned to the editorial committee which returns them to the authors, sometimes with a few additional details. The author and the reviewer are rarely in direct contact, except at the reviewer's suggestion in order to support the author in a 'complicated' correction.

The author

The author has approximately two weeks to send their amended version which is checked by a member of the editorial committee. The editorial process can be stopped at this stage if the correction does not meet expectations. This is the case with 10% of the articles submitted. If all goes well, there is less than a month between the final return of texts and publication (which is subject to a final proofreading by the author and the editor before it is posted online).

Publishing and posting online

The Open Access platform Revues.org, supported by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) at the University of Aix-Marseille and the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, chose CeROArt's application to integrate its new portal for human sciences journals from its second issue onwards. From that moment (2008), the project benefited from free logistics and support from this outstanding team, which was fully invested in distributing through Open Access (Figure 2).

The template for our journal and the shared publishing software for the portal (Lodel) have been made available to us. There is also technical support (via telephone and/or email) in case of a problem. The tasks for which the project team remain responsible are the receipt and management of texts, verification of styles, spell checking, formatting, checking annexed documents (tables, photographs, captions, credits), coding and online posting.

The editorial process and the language problem

Publishing texts in French does not pose any particular problem; there are several proofreaders and powerful tools, including the Antidote software package to help with tedious tasks.

From the beginning of the project the aim was to open the review up to contributions in English. This was the only way of meeting our goal: by

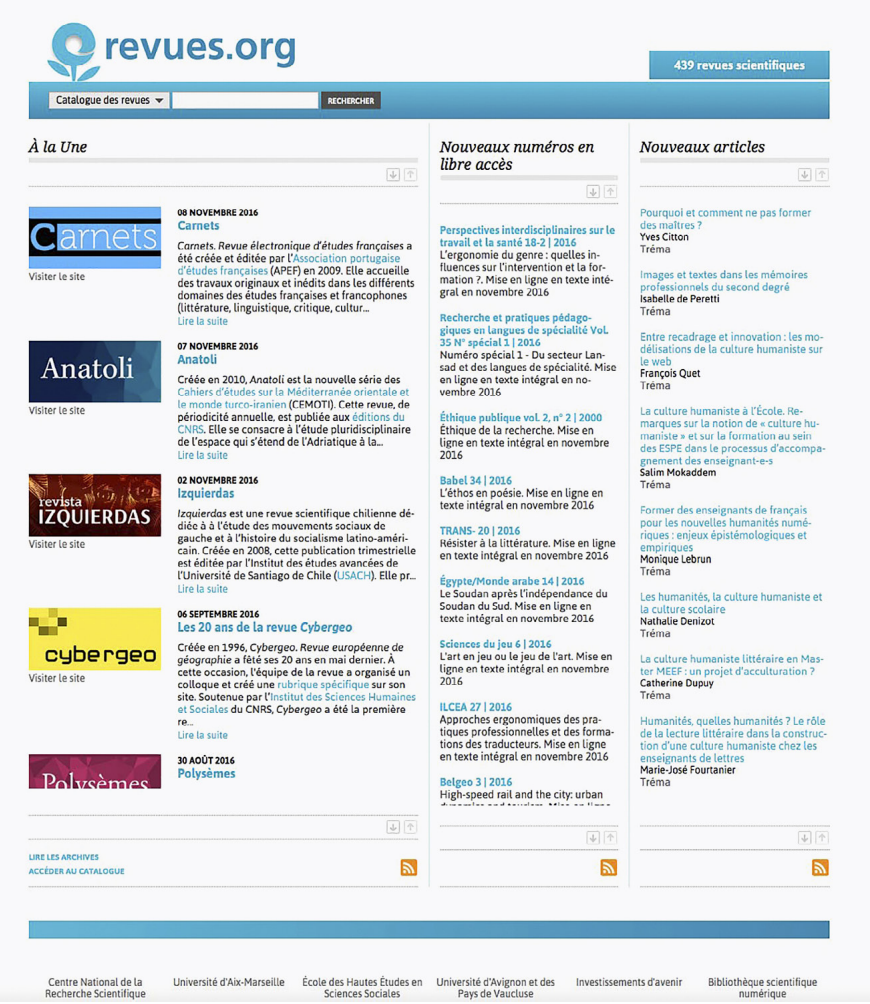

Figure 2. Internet portal: Revues.org

going beyond the language divide, which, in conservation, often corresponds to different methodological cultures. This decision left us with a sizeable problem: the language level was often insufficient. Remember that, for the issues by young graduates, the project publishes authors from all over Europe and for many of them English is not their native language. Peer reviewers are able to judge content, but not necessarily to edit the format in a language that is not their own, hence the excessive workload for native English reviewers.

THE CeROArt LABORATORY

CeROArt is a tool for a project. This project concerns education and training; learning, as highlighted elsewhere, to communicate as a conservator-restorer in accordance with the standards of scientific publishing. In this sense, CeROArt is a laboratory, and we, as lab technicians, *also* learn by teaching. In fact, we are holding up a mirror in which the face of the training is very clearly reflected. Sometimes, it has a dull complexion (a morning face); other times it looks beautiful (the face for big occasions). Let us try to sketch this image without photoshopping it.

Learning to read

Those who wish to write do not always know how to read. Calls for articles always refer to the editorial charter, each point of which is designed solely to optimise the work. It seems that for many authors, the concept of the

'editorial rule' (unless it is the very word 'rule') is culturally difficult to incorporate. Sometimes, the reason for the rules has to be explained to stubborn authors, and they even need to be justified to more obstinate individuals. We have tightened our policy in this regard and immediately reject texts that do not follow the instructions. We also now use a check list to be completed and signed by the author. Furthermore, deadlines, usually well respected in the Anglo-Saxon world and widely in Northern Europe, lose their importance as one heads south towards the Mediterranean. These problems are not anecdotal; they reflect an essential quality in conservation-restoration: that of rigour. It is clear that it is acquired at very mixed levels.

Learning to write

Students in conservation-restoration are faced, during their studies, with writing reports and condition reports. There are templates for these that they are often happy to reproduce, the description taking precedence over the analysis. Training courses that require the writing of a thesis demand more ambitious skills: an essay of between 50 and 100 pages, a plan, contents, references, notes and a bibliography.

But the qualities required for a scientific article are quite different; there is no need to write a description, let alone an abstract. The article must target a problem, setting it out clearly, with a logical sequence, making good use of references. It is a difficult exercise and many struggle to extract the essential from the incidental, to formulate a concise account. Too often, despite a very broad framework (12,000 words), authors show themselves unable to 'relinquish' swathes of their research in order to go into greater detail and end up sticking to a superficial approach. The concept of illustration – which clarifies the text in an etymological sense – is sometimes misunderstood with some images seemingly chosen to decorate the article.

A scientific article is primarily a structure. We believe that a poster would be a good preparatory exercise for training courses. This graphic presentation in A0 format requires a methodical approach (introduction, problem, operating method, analysis, results, conclusion) in an extremely concise (200 words) and illustrated presentation. The PechaKucha exercise (presentation of 20 PowerPoint slides shown for 20 seconds each) may also prove interesting.

It should be emphasised that, in addition to a structure, a good article includes original reflection and an approach which is communicated through a (if possible attractive) composition. Young conservators must be encouraged to read the classical texts (e.g. from *Historical and philosophical issues in the conservation of cultural heritage*; Stanley Price, Talley Jr. and Vaccaro 1996), as well as the leading journals. As part of their studies, they must be asked to write essays on theoretical and ethical issues. Need we point out that conservation-restoration training is based on sciences *and* humanities? The humanities do not depend on a theoretical culture, but on a practical ability to think and theorise, which should also be exercised practically, by producing a written work. Thus, beyond simply writing, it is essential to be able to write well.

Learning to reference

It might be surprising to see messages from young restorers on social networks asking for help. 'Bibliography needed' is a common cry on the forums, Facebook or LinkedIn. It is essential to teach about existing resources, the methods of database research, the principles of Boolean query… and the benefit of extensive literature. Courses do not always make room for lessons on documentary research methodology. For those that do, or plan to, many exercises should focus on writing a 'state of the art review', which seems poorly mastered. Eighty per cent of submitted articles are critically lacking in their bibliography and its critical approach. All too often, our reviewers note that bibliographical choices are made according to the language; this is a critical bias, all the more inexcusable because there are now translation tools to help with the task. It is important to reject this ease, which lies in specific methodological cultures and which is also a form of intellectual arrogance.

Learning humility

The assessment that the author of this paper is making here is not only as the editor of CeROArt, but also as a teacher. Many young authors react irritably to criticism. If they have achieved a good result during their course, they tend to overvalue and overestimate themselves. They find it difficult to tolerate simply lukewarm assessments on what they have produced. It is thought-provoking to read their reactions in the face of distinguished opinions given by experts. Some prefer to withdraw their text rather than amend it. Others express their disagreement inappropriately (in terms of manner and even politeness) or downright aggressively.

Humility is an essential quality in conservation-restoration and it should be constantly referred to within the courses. There is every reason to fear intellectual arrogance and presumption, because the mind guides the hand and too much self-confidence means taking risks and making mistakes – on a practical level too.

Questioning the educational support

With regards the EGG publications, there are in fact three levels of peer review: the article submitted by the first-time author must be endorsed by an appropriate professor from the institution (thesis sponsor, professor of methodology), who checks the content and format. In fact, there are surprising disparities between the texts that are submitted to us, which is evidence of very different requirement levels depending on the institutions… or more often demonstrates the personal involvement of a professor, who voluntarily takes on the revision. Some training courses understood that the publication was a showcase for their course.

Regardless of the stated 'failings', the improvement in quality, in ten years, is obvious. The reason for this is simple: in 2007 there was not a single publication of this type which could be used as a model. Today, the journal is to a certain extent self-referential in this approach and the best articles of the previous issues act as emulators.

The development is not unrelated to the outstanding work of the reviewers, some of whom have performed miracles in terms of educational methods. They have commented, annotated, conducted several revisions and sometimes guided the re-writing of the same text, the initial quality of which left something to be desired. Some authors, as has been already pointed out, prefer to withdraw their text rather than agree to significant revisions. This is totally unacceptable and shows great contempt for the time invested by the reviewer. Since this behaviour tends to be repeated, the team now impose APC (article processing charges) in the case of withdrawal. Other authors express their lack of understanding, their discouragement and doubts. The support for scientific publishing within CeROArt requires multiple talents, including psychology to manage the irascible, support the demoralised, calm the anxious and encourage the shy. In some particularly complex cases, psychoanalysis would be a great help.

Daring to be generous

Training courses should emphasise the fact that a young graduate restorer has not 'arrived', but that they are simply beginning a career in which they will constantly have to train and help to train. Teachers of practical and theory lessons should remember this fundamental truth and set an example. They too must read, gather information, publish and communicate. Do they have the time or the opportunity? That's another question, and it is crucial.

The editorial process is a tough school, but it is a chance to have the opportunity to be challenged. It allows you to have your work evaluated by your peers and to disseminate what you have learned for the benefit of all and at an international level. In addition to 'consumers of knowledge', conservator-restorers should be encouraged to be producers of it. This is why this not-for-profit publication in Open Access was created dedicated to them. We must dare to be generous with shared knowledge.

CONCLUSION

This analysis – which is admittedly critical – can be tempered by the results. Without pride, but without false modesty either, we consider them to be broadly positive. The contents of CeROArt – i.e. mainly scientific publications by conservator-restorers – are widely referenced and the most distinguished publications are quick to quote its pages. AATA uses the abstracts, BCIN indexes its articles.

In less than ten years, the project has opened its pages to nearly 300 authors, 95% of whom are restorers, and, among these, more than 30% are young first-time authors. The EGG publications have opened their pages to graduates from 14 countries and 26 different training courses, totalling 111 articles. All issues total over 250,000 visits annually, with 153,000 unique visitors. The largest number of readers come from France, followed by the USA and then Germany. Mainly French-speaking countries appear in the top 10.

Alongside these first-time authors, we would like to thank distinguished names for their unfailing and totally free commitment. Whilst in the beginning the project suffered a few haughty or disdainful appraisals,

they were never made by these 'peers', who have always enthusiastically supported this initiative. We are proud of that.

A tool has been created and, through training, the desire to use it must be developed. CeROArt is not just a knowledge source or resource, but should be primarily considered a place where knowledge is shared.

Conservators do not yet sufficiently see themselves as 'producers' in terms of scientific literature. However, they have a workshop of fantastic knowledge sources and resources. The culture of secrecy is no doubt dead, but now it is time to end the sort of aphasia, muteness and cowardice that exists in terms of scientific writing. Conservators must dare to publish.

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