

Letter

I am writing in my capacity as Librarian of Liverpool Polytechnic and not as Honorary Secretary of Copol, regarding "Art Libraries in Polytechnics", *Art Libraries Journal*, Spring 1979. I would like to comment on various sections:—

"3.2.1 – A library conveniently sited"

Yes, of course. Use does fall off with distance as I have shown for this Polytechnic where one study indicated that if a student were more than 15 minutes distance from a library his use of that library could very well be nil. I think this affects practically every teaching area. It may be more critical in Art and Design. It is, unfortunately, one of the factors that one has to be sacrificed, to a lesser or greater extent, if one decides to centralise.

"4.2 – Scope and relevance of stock"

The problems you outline here seem to be relatively easy to overcome. You seem to describe a library organised strictly by classification. This need not be the case. One can round out collections. In our case, should our libraries ever come together, for both the reasons you outline and sheer administrative convenience I would simply merge with libraries as they stood (apart from some minor movements) disregarding any advantage in having stock arranged from 000 – 999 in one sequence.

Much of your criticism seems to stem from a situation where a library has committed itself to a computerised system and to BNB classification. "4.3 – Acquisition of stock and 4.4 – Organisation of stock" are cases in point. Surely if a good case can be made to retain a specialist supplier then there is no need for centralisation or any other administrative decision to affect this supplier. I know at least one art librarian who may order a book but, because the system adopts MARC entirely, the accident of classification may lead to that book appearing in another part of the Polytechnic library. The art librarian may never see it. The solution is very simple, either change one's policy on adopting MARC classification or route the book on receipt to the art librarian. In Liverpool classification is, generally subservient to site needs. Indeed site staff are involved in classification.

I do not see what an art librarian can do about DDC schedules. Of course, one should not apply them rigidly but in view of the lack of adequate schedules (not unique to art) what would art librarians do? Invent their own? Flexibility on the local level is an internal matter to be argued.

“4.4.4 – The scattering of related material by form”

There are pressures on space which may oblige some libraries to house material by form. On the other hand I feel that it is important to integrate one's stock on the sound principle that subject rather than format should be the primary division. This section, again, suggests simple administrative solutions. Centralisation may have produced these situations but one should not condemn centralisation totally in that sheer economics, not least the problem of staffing, may make it the best solution overall.

”4.6 – Staff”

I would like to have seen some quantification of your contention that art college librarians were, and are, accorded full academic status. Similarly substitution of larger staffing teams needs evidence to back it up.

“4.6.4”

I cannot accept that “an art librarian responsible for advising art students and for providing them with user education is likely to be relatively uninvolved in policy-making . . .” If the organising principle is subject then any subject specialist should be part of senior management. If the art librarian is not part of senior management (irrespective of grading) then he or she should argue for such a place. Strength of character, professional reputation and sheer competence are, obviously, important factors.

Much of what you say is, I believe, entirely a matter of internal management structures and the extent of participative decision-making. It is not an inherent fault unique to art libraries as you yourself recognise on the final page.

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Directory of Art Libraries in Europe, or libraries with important art holdings: a preliminary list. IFLA Round Table of Art Librarians, 1979. £3.00.

The idea of an international directory of art libraries was first mooted as an important task for the newly established Round Table of Art Librarians at the inaugural meeting in Brussels in 1978. For a year it lay in abeyance, but work started on it at the second meeting of the Round Table at the 1979 IFLA meeting in Štrbske Plesó. It was decided then to prepare the directory in parts, covering different regions of the world in turn. The plan was to start with Europe but to exclude, for the time being, libraries in the UK since the ARLIS Directory already existed.

A simple questionnaire was sent out and met with a good response. The results were published in August 1979 in a preliminary list containing some 508 libraries from 22 different European countries.

In the next two years it is hoped to publish two further sections of the directory: another one on Europe with those libraries not listed in the first part and British libraries, and one covering libraries in the Far East and Africa.

The first fascicule contains the following information on the 508 European libraries listed:

- Address
- Telephone number
- Opening hours
- Annual closure
- Director
- Person to contact
- Size of the collection

It costs £3.00.

If you would like a copy, please make your cheques, postal- or money-orders payable to: *Round Table of Art Librarians*, and send it to:

- John Matthews
- Librarian
- Faculty of Art & Design
- Bristol Polytechnic
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