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The Social Role of Public Library Classifications

Abstract

This paper seeks to understand the interaction between library knowledge organization practices and the social role of public libraries through an examination of the development of the Dewey Decimal and Soviet Library-Bibliographic classifications. I show that in spite of significant differences in the ideologies motivating the ontological design of the classifications themselves, the methods and motivations behind creating these classifications were very similar, whether the location was late nineteenth century America or early twentieth century Soviet Russia. Both classifications are highly instructive as snapshots of thinking contemporary to their creation, and in the Soviet Union, library classification was construed as one more layer in the process of information control and indoctrination in Marxism-Leninism. As products of a modern (as opposed to postmodern) intellectual climate, the overall tendency of these classifications to serve as a public common ground, a set of generally accepted knowledge principles, makes sense, however misguided any particular set of principles might have been. Today's society, however, no longer wants or needs the kinds of unifying narrative that public library classifications speak to, raising questions as to how appropriate these modern classifications are for a postmodern world whose priorities have shifted radically in the last thirty years.

Introduction

Classification is crucial to library practice for both librarians and patrons. The classification and its accompanying catalogue—the former arranges the physical objects on the shelf, whereas the latter is the list of bibliographic surrogates for those physical objects—enable librarians to maintain bibliographic and inventory control over their holdings; furthermore, without a classification scheme or at the very least, a catalogue of some kind, there is nothing to distinguish a library from a simple collection of books and magazines. Libraries are valuable to the public not only because their holdings are freely available, but also because the element of bibliographic control allows patrons to quickly and easily locate the resources they are looking for, whether they have a title, an author name, or a simple topic about which they wish to find more information. More importantly, classifications also play an ideological role that is entirely separate from their technical role because their hierarchies describe a definite and embodied view of the universe of knowledge, which they organize in microcosmic form through their organization of individual libraries' holdings.

This paper examines the role of library knowledge organization practices in supporting the social role of the public library through a discussion of the formation of the Dewey Decimal and Soviet Library-Bibliographic classifications. I show that in spite of significant differences in the ideologies motivating the ontological design of the classifications themselves, the methods and motivations behind creating such classifications were very similar, whether the location was late nineteenth century America or early twentieth century Soviet Russia. Both classifications are highly instructive as snapshots of thinking contemporary to their creation, and in the Soviet Union, library classification was construed as one more layer in the process of information control and indoctrination in Marxism-Leninism.

A social role was possible for these classifications because they were conceived of and first spread in a modern world, where the idea of a single and knowable truth and its discoverability was more or less universally accepted (Olssen 2008). Both people and scholars were comfortable with the idea of a single set of laws underpinning the universe and were not accustomed to question it for questioning's sake. The advent of postmodernism, however, with its emphasis on interrogating monolithic myths, systems or 'truths' (Cook 1995), has changed that attitude, while the advent of the Internet and the ever more personalized search algorithms that sort through millions of full text documents, audiovisual resources, and images has negated the library's monopoly as the only real purveyor of information available to the general public. In a world where uniting myths are neither needed nor wanted and information is at most of our fingertips, what role can the classification play? How can a modern classification organize a postmodern world? To answer these questions, I will first examine the formation of the Dewey Decimal and Library-Bibliographic classifications, then show the similarities between the two in terms of methods and motivations, before concluding with a discussion of the continued relevance of universal classification schemes in public libraries.

The Dewey Decimal Classification

Melvil Dewey first unveiled the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) at the inaugural conference of the American Library Association in 1876. Almost immediately, the DDC caused a sensation among librarians, not because of its intellectual innovations as an ontology—indeed, Dewey took his top level hierarchies from an earlier scheme published by William Torrey Harris and drew heavily on the syllabi and coursework of his professors at Amherst College to flesh out the lower levels (Comaromi 1983; Wiegand 1998)—but because of its revolutionary approach to classification practice. Up to this point, books had been shelved in the order in which they were purchased and only classed by subject in the printed catalogue, if at all; Dewey, however, used decimal notation to signify both books' contents *and* their shelf order, meaning that shelf order and subject collocation were united in a single scheme for the first time (Comaromi & Satija 1989). Hence, when a patron located a book in the catalogue and went to the stacks to find it, he would see both the book he had chosen and surrounding it, books of a similar topic, improving the odds of serendipitous discovery and allowing purposeful browsing in the stacks for the first time. The notation itself was deliberately devised as a mnemonic system to further aid discovery: for example, the 0 was always used to signify the general aspects of a class or division. Thus, class 000 was *Generalia*, division 200 was *General religion*, and section 220 the *Bible*, with its following 9 sections discussing specific sections such as the *Old Testament* (221), the *New Testament* (225), and the *Apocrypha* (229), among others. The system's internal logic ensured that librarians could quickly learn to apply it to the various books in their collections, as could alert patrons who paid attention to the subject-specific call numbers of the books they wished to borrow.

No less important was the Relative Index, a list of alphabetized subject terms corresponding to key terms from the tables and accompanied by that term's decimal

signifier in the classification (Comaromi & Satija 1989). The inclusion of the Index countered some librarians' objections to a classed catalogue (namely, the difficulty of finding an item when the patron had only a topic in mind), and greatly facilitated browsing in the newly-emerging open stack libraries (Robinson 1876), as a subject term in the Index pointed to the shelf location where all the books on that particular topic might be found.

Melvil Dewey was not seeking to create a most-perfect ontology to describe the world; he was seeking to create a most-efficient method to manage and organize the books in a library, and on this front he was a resounding success. The DDC's technical innovations and its real advantages in terms of time savings and ease of implementation were the driving force behind its rapid adoption in public libraries in the United States and globally (see Rayward 1983 for a fuller explanation); as to its actual hierarchies, at the time of its introduction, it was probably enough that Dewey's scheme corresponded to the way that American librarians, most of whom would have come from a similar middle to upper-middle class Protestant and educated background like Dewey (Wiegand 1996), saw the world.

The Library-Bibliographic classification

In contrast to the DDC, the Soviet Library-Bibliographic Classification (BBK), was motivated by and conceived of almost entirely in ideological terms. Libraries in the Soviet Union were seen as major partners in the ideological education efforts of Vladimir Lenin and other Soviet leaders, the most efficient way to extend and cement the limited schooling the state was able to provide its millions of illiterate citizens (Raymond 1979). The liquidation of illiteracy was one of Lenin's most pressing initiatives, for an illiterate population could neither mobilize Soviet industrialization nor attain the political consciousness that was crucial to the forward movement of history (Lenin 1966a; Lenin 1966b).

Although the ideological leader of the Soviet library movement was Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaia, a trained librarian and dedicated Bolshevik, the man who 'Sovietized' decimal classification was librarian L. N. Tropovskii, who drafted his edits to the European adaptation of the DDC in 1934 and published the complete tables in 1938 (Delougaz 1947). His methodology was fairly simple: to collect categories pertaining to Communism where they were scattered across different subsections, and to privilege Marxism-Leninism or Russia at the head of a table. An excellent example is his treatment of Table 3, Social Sciences. The first section became 3K, *Marxism, Leninism, Communism, Socialism*, with subsections like 3K1, *Marx and Engels—Works*; 3K5, *Collected works of other writers on Marxism*; 3KI, *Communist International*; and 3KIM, *Communist International Youth* (Delougaz, 1947). Section 32, *Political science*, was given subsections dealing with internal struggles against counter-revolution and the war against Nazism (32:343 and 32W). Section 33, *Economics*, was divided between economic matters pertaining to capitalism (33B) and those pertaining to socialism (33S), with the latter class given subdivisions like *National economy of the USSR during WWII* (33S27) and *Organization of socialist economic enterprises* (33S6) (Delougaz 1947).

Throughout the scheme, Tropovskii's revisions emphasize the dichotomy between the Soviet Socialist and bourgeois capitalist ways, reflective of the constant struggle in which the two are engaged according to dialectical materialism, and his efforts were lauded in the journal *Krasnyi Bibliotekar* "as a good example of what public-minded Soviet librarians should try to achieve by way of 'Sovietizing'" the bourgeois UDC (Delougaz 1947: 51).

Having examined the mechanics of the development of the DDC and BBK, we may now turn to a comparison of the social roles these classifications played in the United States and the Soviet Union. What is most interesting about these two classifications taken together is that in spite of their opposing philosophical standpoints, the DDC codifying 19th century Protestant classical education and the BBK codifying Marxism-Leninism and Soviet thought, the two classifications served nearly the same purpose socially in their respective national contexts, even if they were not necessarily written with that purpose in mind. The motto of the American Library Association, also one of Dewey's creations, is a useful framework for analysis: "The best reading for the greatest number, at the least cost" (Wiegand 1996).

The Best Books

The basic goal of any library classification is to provide a structure that enables access to the library's resources, no matter the format of the material. In both Dewey and Krupskaia's time, the idea of access also had a distinctly ideological cast in that it was about both providing access to the resources in the library and ensuring those resources were appropriate for the reading public. Librarians in nineteenth century America and twentieth century Soviet Russia had very specific ideas about what constituted worthwhile reading and how to encourage it. In the United States, the enemy was the novel. Novels were seen as frivolous and sensational, with no worth in terms of self-improvement or the cultivation of a superior moral character (Quincey 1876). Ironically, novels of a didactic sort were first promoted in church libraries where they were seen as a good way to bring young adults into the reading fold, the gateway drug, as it were, to more serious inspirational and aspirational literature (Kaser 1983); more often, novels, like a drug, proved addictive. Their pernicious influence, especially among young adult and female readers, was a subject of frequent lamentation among mid nineteenth century librarians, including Dewey himself, although he was less censorious than many (Fletcher 1876; Kaser 1983). This was a society that valued works of religion and theology, history and biography, and even travelogues over plain fictive literature (Quincey 1876), which is reflected by literature's position in the 800 class near the bottom of the table. The original purpose of the free public library was not to give people access to books for entertainment, but to give them access to books that would help them to better themselves in line with classical Protestant ideals of self-improvement and morality (Harris 1975). In other words, the library was to be analogous to a museum, not a carnival.

However, because American public libraries were funded by public money, librarians had little recourse for removing novels from their stock altogether, however much many of them may have wanted to do so. Taxpayer-funded libraries that did not stock what their

readers wanted to read ran the risk of losing part or all of their funding at the polls, leaving them less able to buy any books at all and rendering useless the whole basic justification of the public library as a collection of material for public access. Instead, librarians relied on thoughtful collection development to keep a good stock of "good reading" available in addition to novels and contented themselves with recommending what they saw as worthwhile (Fletcher 1876; Perkins 1876).

A similar situation prevailed in the Soviet Union, with a difference in attitude and methodology. In the Soviet case, the best reading was that which was ideologically appropriate, reading that would raise workers' class consciousness and also bolster their technical skills so that they could farm and manufacture using to the newest and most advanced methods and technology (Clark 2000). The desire on the part of Soviet librarians for ideologically appropriate reading was far more acute than American librarians' distaste for novels; while there were American librarians ready to admit that it was better for people to read novels than to read nothing at all, there was no alternative to Marxist-Leninist education, especially given that the modernization of Soviet society and the spread of the revolution depended on the massive education—and reeducation—of its people (Megill 2005; Lenin 1966b). The Soviet librarians also had an advantage over their American counterparts because in the Soviet Union, it was perfectly reasonable to purge monarchist, superstitious, anti-Marxist, or pro-bourgeois book stock either to simply be rid of it or to replace it with approved reading (Raymond 1979). The problem, of course, is that purges, once started, can be difficult to stop, and mass libraries could end up with card catalogues holding more annotations than bibliographic records, particularly in the Stalinist era (Baumanis & Rogers 1958). The frequency and ferocity of purges also varied by the type of library. Rural mass libraries were the most heavily regulated because they were patronized by ordinary people, upon whom it was most necessary to keep a tight rein. In contrast, large, urban mass libraries in Moscow and Petrograd would often retain books deemed inappropriate for the masses for research purposes, in which case access would be regulated through closed stacks and a special public access catalogue listing only items considered ideologically appropriate for access (Baumanis & Rogers 1958).

In both the United States and the Soviet Union, the idea of the best books was bolstered by the classification. One could almost read down the top level tables to see the priorities for reading in each society. In the United States, born out of a very specific mixture of republicanism, crossed with Lockian views on education and Smithian views on commerce, and fertilized with a healthy sense of Christian religious attachment (Wood, 1993), the 100 class was *Philosophy*, the 200 *Religion*, the 300 *Social Science*, with literature in the form of the 800 class, *Fine arts*, coming almost at the very bottom. Compare this to the top level classes in the BBK, which were *Philosophy, Dialectical materialism and Historical materialism*, followed by *Antireligious literature* and the Socialism-dominated *Social science*. In the case of the DDC, the agreement of the tables with the prevailing elite attitudes towards the proper kind of reading is almost an accident, in the sense that, as above, Dewey was not trying to create a most-perfect description of the universe but a most-perfect system of library classification. His concern was for the system; he adopted

Harris's hierarchies because they were representative of Dewey's intellectual milieu, and Dewey, like all of us, was a man of his time.

The Soviet librarians, on the other hand, made a deliberate marriage between their classification and their intellectual environment, for two related reasons. First, there was no reason for them to recreate the system of decimal classification Dewey had already created. Second, because an efficient and relatively easy to use system was already in place, Soviet librarians could concentrate on editing the hierarchies that were immediately and glaringly anathema to their way of thinking.

In spite of their avowed commitment to providing the best reading, librarians themselves, whether in the United States or the Soviet Union, did not take on the task of deciding what that best reading was—in other words, although they were responsible for collecting and providing access to the best reading, they were not its arbiters. In the United States, this was due in no small part to the direction in which Dewey took librarianship when he opened the first library school at Columbia University in 1887. First, Dewey remained primarily concerned with improving the technical aspects of librarianship, namely, creating standards and bolstering library infrastructure and facilities, rather than expanding its intellectual components (Wiegand 1996). This was partly due to Dewey's systematizing nature and partly to an existing infrastructure in college librarianship wherein faculty members were responsible for choosing or defining the bibliography of their various specializations for their libraries (Wiegand 1989). Dewey, trained in a college library setting, accepted this view without question, and when it came time to appoint lecturers in specialized bibliography, chose Columbia's faculty specialists to do so (Miksa 1988; Wiegand 1996). Dewey saw the librarian's contribution to the library as technical rather than intellectual, and because it was Dewey who founded the first school of librarianship and oversaw the training of the first generation of professional librarians in the United States, it was this view which came to be instantiated in practice and teaching (Wiegand 1989; Miksa 1988).

In the Soviet Union, of course the best reading was defined by the prevailing political winds. As government figures were purged, so too were their works from the library, or at the very least, their catalogue cards; librarians were the custodians of these collections, but they had no intellectual authority over them. Furthermore, like many humanities fields, librarianship was reconceived from a technical standpoint in the Soviet era so that its overall intellectual efforts were centered on building the centralized technical infrastructure that was largely nonexistent when the Soviets came into power (Volodin 2000).

For the Greatest Number

Just as American and Soviet librarians took similar stances towards the necessity of the best books and the external location of authority for defining those books, in both the Soviet and American cases, public library collections and the classifications that organized them were intended to support the greatest number of readers possible, with a special focus on supporting public education.

The public library was seen as a natural partner with the public school system, a view that went more or less unquestioned by both mid nineteenth century American and

twentieth century Soviet librarians and educators. In the American case, it was taken for granted that students—especially immigrant and working class children—could enrich and flesh out their then-limited formal schooling with books from the local library, an assumption that went hand in hand with the uniquely American belief in the self-made man (Ditzion 1947; Quincey 1876; Wood, 1993). On the Soviet side, although public schooling and access to books outside the classroom had been linked long before the Soviet era, when the Soviets came to power, it assumed greater and more practical proportions (Eklof 2010). Literacy rates had been climbing since the 1880s, but there were still a great many illiterate men and women in Russia when the Soviets came to power and very limited resources to train them in formal schooling situations; here, the supplementary nature of the mass library and rural reading huts were a necessary follow-up to limited and often haphazard public schooling efforts (Eklof 2010; Clark 2000). Thus the library was a means not only of bolstering the education already received, but also, through the classification hierarchies that were the required access point to books, of reinforcing political lessons.

A second way in which public library classifications bolstered educational objectives was through their broad, national reaches. The DDC was and is used in the vast majority of public libraries in the United States; the BBK was the only option for mass libraries in the Soviet Union. This meant that a far-flung and diverse population was accessing books via the same mechanism more or less regardless of location. The book stocks may have been different but the classification remained essentially the same, ensuring that anyone who used a public library was being shown the same ontology for public knowledge, even if they were reading different books.

Similarly, even if each individual person approached the classification with a different idea of what a particular term it used might mean, the controlled nature of the classification ensured that all those people connected the term they used to the term used by the classification if they wished to find a book in the library. Imagine that Elie Wiesel wished to locate a copy of the Tanakh, the Hebrew bible, circa 1938. In an American public library, he would locate the Tanakh under the DDC division for the Old Testament in the *Religion* class; in a Soviet mass library, under the heading for religious works as reference sources in the *Antireligious literature* class (*BBK Online*). Although Wiesel's Tanakh, the DDC's Old Testament and the BBK's reference work all refer to the same intellectual composition, all three have a different concept of what that work is and how it fits into the greater world of knowledge—but it is the seeker who must adjust his terms to the classification, and not the classification to the seeker. Whether or not Wiesel agrees with how the classification defines the Tanakh, he must still adjust his concept of it and the terminology he uses to refer to it in order to successfully locate it within the DDC (or BBK, as the case may be). Similarly, although works on the Mormon church are now found under the 280 heading for *Christian denominations and sects*, the first several editions of the DDC placed the Mormons under the 290 heading for *Non-Christian religions* (Comaromi 1976), a classification that would require a significant mental readjustment on the part of any Mormon who seeking a book pertaining to his faith. Again, whatever this Mormon might think of how the classification conceived of his faith, in seeking a book in the public

library, he would be forced to approach it in the classification's terms in order to find what he wanted.

It is in this way that the public library classification serves its greatest practical unifying function: because it is used in public libraries across the country, regardless of the surrounding community's ethnic, religious or sociocultural makeup, it forces everyone to approach it on its own terms. However any one person defines or conceives of a subject, he must correlate his terminology to the terminology used in the classification when seeking a work on that subject.

The Least Cost

A final similarity between American and Soviet public libraries is their attitudes towards and the classification's support of standardization. It is probably fair to say that American librarians as a body were less concerned about standardization than Dewey himself, but once again, because Dewey took on the role of inventing the American library profession and professional, both have been defined largely in his terms. Once again, Dewey's primary motivation for creating what would become the DDC was the idea of a system that would streamline both cataloguing and shelving for the librarian, as well as helping patrons more easily navigate a library's holdings. Efficiency was the key goal, and the DDC accomplished just that. It was relatively easy to implement for librarians and equally easy for patrons to use, and was only as successful as it has been because of those qualities. It is important to recall that the success of the DDC was not inevitable: both before and after it was published, it was only one of several competing classification schemes among which librarians could choose to implement in their libraries, the best known of these being Charles Cutter's Expansive Classification (Comaromi 1976). The DDC quickly became the favored choice, with the result that the DDC became the de facto classification standard in American public libraries, and as we know, it is much easier to buy into a system that everyone is already using.

In contrast, the BBK was a mandated standard, just one small part of the wholly centralized and planned machine of the USSR. Once again, however, mandating the use of the same classification scheme over the entire Soviet Union made it much easier to implement across the entire system, as it required training librarians in only one standard, as well as easing the process of ideological editing of the tables (Whitby 1956).

Thus we can see that in terms of goals and aspirations, the DDC and BBK were very similar. Both were intended to support access to the best kind of reading as defined by an authority external to professional librarians, and their hierarchies reflected to a certain extent the values placed on different kinds of books. Public libraries were equally important in public education in both settings and in the Soviet Union, the BBK was construed as a teaching tool almost on a level with the books in the libraries themselves. In addition, both classifications were more or less the standard access method for public libraries either by fiat or decree, which had the effect of cementing the correctness of their hierarchies in the public mind as well as of cutting costs and increasing efficiency for librarians.

Finally, at the time of their creation, both classifications supported the formation of a specific kind of idealized person in their respective societies. In the United States, this person was a voter and a taxpayer, a churchgoer and a hard worker who sent his children to school and worked to better himself. In the Soviet Union, it was a worker who understood Marxism-Leninism, believed in the party and who understood his place in the forward movement of history. In this way, calling the library an "arsenal of democracy" (Ditzion 1947) is the same as calling it an "arsenal of socialism:" in both contexts, the library was conceived of as a socializing and normalizing force for the 'other,' whether the other was an Irish immigrant or an illiterate farm worker.

There were two levels at which it was conceivable and not unnatural for the public library to play this socializing role. On a prosaic level, for the majority of the history of public (in the sense of tax-supported) libraries they held a monopoly on providing access to information resources. For average people with an information need, there was little choice but to consult the public library because other resources simply were not available, particularly when individuals had limited abilities to purchase books or magazines for their personal use. Hence, elites *could* assign libraries a normalizing, socializing role in the public sphere: they knew that once opened, the public or mass library would almost certainly be the only source of books and information freely available to the average immigrant, worker or peasant. Similarly, in both the United States and the Soviet Union, the use of the same classification scheme across almost all public libraries further supported this role.

Intellectually speaking, public libraries flowered and the great universal classifications were conceived of within a modern—as opposed to postmodern—intellectual climate. The hallmark of modernity is its conviction that the universe is rational and discoverable, and that there is a single knowable truth uniting it (Olssen 2008); hence the ease with which a man like Melvil Dewey, a quintessential nineteenth century reformer, could conceive of there being one way to organize all knowledge. It is no coincidence that the great universal classifications—the DDC, the Library of Congress Classification, the Universal Decimal Classification—are all products of the modern era. But times have changed. The modern worldview is no longer a viable intellectual construct, and the public library now faces stiff competition from the Internet as a provider of information resources, leaving the social role of the contemporary library and its antique classification in question.

Future Challenges

The social role of public libraries today is at once distinct from and clearly an outgrowth of the role they have played historically. Public libraries have lost their monopoly as information provider to the public at large, but in being forced to compete with Google and the Internet, have diversified their offerings, most notably in the form of free, basic computer literacy classes that teach patrons how to set up an email account or apply for a job online, skills that are as crucial today as basic literacy was in the 1820s. This is in addition to classes that teach knitting or Japanese print making, teen movie nights and children's story times that have been part of the public library's social life for some time.

Public libraries are also being explicitly reimagined as spaces centered around the community rather than the information resources to which they provide access. Newer library buildings often include increased space for small groups to meet and interact, promoting an image of libraries as spaces for people to interact with one another, rather than strictly with information resources.

The role of the classification in this reimagined public library is less clear. Patrons searching for a work today are not routed through a paper Relative Index or card catalogue; instead, they use a Google-style single search box in the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), where they use natural language keywords to search across authors, titles, subjects, or all of the above. Although the vast majority of American public libraries still use the DDC to organize their holdings, the DDC has become at once less visible to patrons—generally intruding no further than the call number indicating the location of a work retrieved via a keyword search of the OPAC—and increasingly maligned by librarians and the knowledge organization community.

Philosophically, postmodernism, with its "incredulity towards metanarratives" and emphasis on acknowledging one's perspectives and biases (Cook 1995; Haraway 1988), makes universal classifications like the DDC troublesome, even presumptuous, in their supreme confidence that the world is knowable, rational and defined by their hierarchies. An intellectual climate built on questioning assumptions and always-have-beens almost requires dissatisfaction with systems like DDC, and the DDC's length of time in service exacerbates its flaws. Practically, a small but vocal contingent of librarians, arguing that patrons find the scheme intimidating, its call numbers confusing, and its support for browsing minimal (Fister 2009), has asserted that the DDC has outlived its usefulness. A handful of libraries have abandoned the DDC entirely in favor of a bookstore-style arrangement, collocating books by topic based on the Book Industry Standards and Communications classification used by the publishing industry (Wingett 2007; Ambrosius 2012). Librarians have argued forcefully for both scrapping and retaining the DDC, and while the DDC still has many supporters who cite the scheme's precision in sorting works by subject and decry compromising established library practices, the most important lesson here may be that individual libraries and librarians are willing to take radical and economically costly actions to provide the access they feel will best support their patrons.

More measured but less immediately effective proposals for mitigating the hubris of the DDC and systems like it have been put forward by scholars. Mai (2000) has called for a more transparent process in editing the DDC and classifications like it—for an explicit recognition of the backgrounds and affiliations of its editors at the Library of Congress, who are the source of its cognitive authority. Feinberg (2007), extending Hjørland's (1995) work on domain analysis, has argued for the creation of multiple domains, each of an acknowledged perspective, for any given subject area. Both are entirely valid and would go a long way to mitigating the philosophical difficulties of universal classifications and the DDC, but suffer from challenges in implementation. In Mai's case, it is difficult to imagine that greater transparency in the DDC editing process would make a difference to

individuals outside the professional library community. Feinberg's remedy falters against the hundreds of thousands of subject areas that exist in the universe of knowledge.

To the question of whether modern classifications can organize a postmodern world, the answer in real terms must be yes, but not optimally. In ideal terms, the answer is a resounding no. Our societal makeup and priorities have shifted radically since Dewey's time, and at this stage, no amount of sub- and sub-sub-class edits to the DDC can make it appropriate for the place the United States has become in the 136 years since the DDC's original publication. It is difficult to imagine a viable top down solution, even in the form of a radically updated or rewritten DDC, given the context and priorities of postmodernity, within which any and all potential authors would surely be working. It may be that the time has come for individual libraries to take responsibility for organizing their resources to suit their individual communities—whether their solution is to adopt a BISAC-based classification or even create their own (possibly Dewey-based) classifications.

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