Classification and the Social Transcript

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by

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Abstract

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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. Such a 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 was both acceptable and a worthy goal to pursue. The advent of postmodernism, with its emphasis on questioning monolithic myths, systems or 'truths,' has changed that attitude, and the advent of the Internet, search filters and personalized information has removed the library's former

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?

Table of Contents

I. The Public Library and the Public Classification

There are many interlocking interpretations of what it means to be a library, and especially a public library, funded by taxpayer money and open to everyone in a given community. At their most mundane, libraries have for a long time been linked to the public education system as a supplement for students who wish to learn outside of school, especially when formal schooling was more limited than it is today. Others have defended the public library as a public good, a good or service from which everyone can benefit at the same time without diminishing other's ability to benefit, but which is prohibitively costly for an individual to provide for himself and/or his neighbors; the classic examples of public goods are roads and education. Public libraries generally account for approximately 2% of a municipal budget and are used by 50% of the population, by any metric an excellent return on investment.[1]

More broadly, libraries are repositories of our cultural heritage, of our accepted wisdom, of our published historical and contemporary context, a role which Charles Osburn has called the stewardship of our social transcript.[2] A related and classical American idea calls libraries "arsenals of democratic culture"[3] that help to mould responsible and civically-minded citizens who would be educated enough to participate in the democratic process, institutions that support intellectual freedom and universal information access unconditionally, a view best codified by the American Library

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[1] John N. Berry III, "The Public Good: What Is It?", in *Libraries, Coalitions and the Public Good*, ed. E.J. Josey (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc., 1987), p. 8-11

[2] Charles Osburn, *The Social Transcript: Uncovering Library Philosophy* (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2009), p. 203, 208-209

[3] Sidney Ditzion, *Arsenals of a Democratic Culture: A Social History of the American Public Library Movement in New England and the Middle States from 1850 to 1900*, (Chicago: American Library Association, 1947).

Association's Library Bill of Rights.[4] These latter two claims are probably the most common and least examined glosses on the public library.

However, libraries, like voting, only support democracy insofar as they are implemented to do so; if a library is stocked with resources speaking to all or most of the shades of the political spectrum, if it truly is open to anybody who wishes to use it, if its catalogue is an accurate reflection of its holdings, then it will, indeed, support a democratic way of being. But there is no requirement that libraries be used in such a way, and one striking example of this is the ideological use of libraries in the Soviet Union. There, libraries were conceived of as being primarily ideological, places where the newly-educated Soviet masses would have access to the great works of Marxism-Leninism and the latest technological literature in order to ensure that both rural and urban workers were sufficiently ideologically educated to complete the revolution and also technically educated enough to bring about rapid industrialization. Just like early public libraries in the United States, these libraries were intended as resources primarily for the working classes, and even with a similarly strong desire to educate them in the manner seen most fit. In the United States, the library would support a democratically-educated and morally responsible population; in the Soviet Union, a population with the proper political consciousness. The aims were the same, the difference purely philosophical.

I would further argue that the role of the classification scheme and its accompanying catalogue are important parts of libraries' ideological imperatives. Classifications as knowledge organization systems are powerful because their hierarchies give us a starting point to categorize what we do and do not understand, a way to

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[4] "Library Bill of Rights," accessed July 11, 2012 at
http://www.ala.org.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill

prioritize between subjects and a way to negotiate their relationships. It makes a difference whether one finds Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* at 335.42, in the Dewey Decimal Classification's 3rd class *Social sciences*, third division *Economics*, fifth section *Socialism and related systems*, versus being in the Soviet Library-Bibliographic Classification's head class *Marxism-Leninism*, head division *Classics of Marxism-Leninism*.[5] In the DDC, the *Communist Manifesto* is one among many political philosophies, although it is clearly based primarily on economics; it is neither privileged nor hidden in the classification. In the Soviet classification, the *Communist Manifesto* is of considerable importance, a "classic of Marxism-Leninism," clearly a founding philosophy to which where are no readily apparent alternatives. While we may not realize it, the classification scheme that sits behind the public library does a great deal to set that library's agenda and, as the only standardized part of library practice with which the public interacts, the way in which we interact with the library's resources.

Different libraries have different bodies of resources depending on the makeup of their surrounding communities; public library patrons are also wildly varied in terms of demographics, tastes and information needs. The only factor that is overwhelmingly common across public libraries is the classification scheme, which in 95% of American public libraries is the Dewey Decimal Classification (henceforth DDC).[6] Although we are not accustomed to thinking about libraries in terms of classification systems, the importance of the DDC to public library practice cannot be underestimated. Whether a person walks into a library in Buffalo, New York; El Paso, Texas; or Mendecino, California, books on religion will be shelved in the 200s, and Harold Kushner's popular

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[5] "BBK Classification Outline," Slavic Cataloging Manual, accessed July 10, 2012 at http://www.indiana.edu/~libslav/slavcatman/bbkover.html
[6] Straight Dope, "What's So Great About the Dewey Decimal Classification?," published January 31, 2006, accessed June 24, 2012 at http://www.straightdope.com/columns/read/2238/whats-so-great-about-the-dewey-decimal-system

work on Jewish living, *To Life!*, will be located at 296 (Class *Religion*, division *Other religions*, section *Judaism*). We all have different purposes, priorities and reasons for using the public library, but the classification ensures that we all have a common starting point in locating the resources we seek and that we all navigate the resources held by the public library in the same way, even if those resources are different and even if we disagree with the classification's categorization of a particular work.

Like it or not, it is the classification that both sets the priorities for the library in terms of what it privileges and what it does not and encapsulates the best and worst of the time in which they are created. Indeed, there is no choice for a library classification except to be an expression of its time, because otherwise it would not be of any help in locating resources. A classification based on the rules and vocabulary of the Harry Potter universe, for example, would be nearly useless in an average public library; the vocabulary and relationships expressed would be entirely different, grounded in a wholly different reality where magic was the basic force of nature instead of science.

Classification is also crucial to library practice, both for librarians and for 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. What makes a library valuable to the public is not simply that its holdings are freely available, but that patrons can quickly and easily locate the resources they are looking for, whether they are in possession of a title, an author name, or a simple topic about which they wish to find more information. The classification and catalogue are a deliberate bibliographic net thrown over the body of resources in a library that serve

to render access manageable, that help patrons to narrow their searches and find the resources they want.

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. Both classifications were also created just as new eras were beginning: in the United States, the DDC was first published in 1876 when the Civil War was ten years gone and Reconstruction was coming to an end, giving a different and relatively non-partisan way to view the world in general and America in particular, a perspective that was not dependent on one's political beliefs. In the Soviet Union, the Library-Bibliographic Classification was meant to aid people's understanding of the priorities of Marxism-Leninism and how it viewed rival political systems; it was intended as part of the ideological web spun by the Soviet leadership to ensure that people thought what they were supposed to think.

Such a 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 was both acceptable and a worthy goal to pursue. 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 the sake of questioning. The advent of postmodernism, with its

emphasis on questioning monolithic myths, systems or 'truths,' has changed that attitude, and the advent of the Internet, search filters and personalized information has removed the library's former 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?

The remainder of the paper is divided into six parts. The second and third parts describe the origins of public libraries in the United States and the Soviet Union, the ideologies surrounding libraries in those countries, the motivations behind the creation of the two classifications, and how they were developed. The fourth section discusses the social role of the two classifications in their time, with an emphasis on the similarities between the two, and the fifth section discusses how changes in the intellectual and technological climate have broken that social role down. The sixth section examines the different ways that library access mechanisms may be modified to support the role of libraries in a postmodern world, and is followed by the conclusion.

II. The Dewey Decimal Classification: Context and Development

The purpose of this section is to show the historical and ideological contexts surrounding the creation of the DDC by Melvil Dewey in 1876. I will first discuss the historical development of public libraries in the United States and the ideological motivations behind their creation; I will then discuss the influence of Melvil Dewey on the classification. I will next show why the DDC was so revolutionary, the key to its practically unimpeded spread across the United States and even internationally. I will conclude with a discussion of the influence of the DDC over us and over the development of the Soviet Library-Bibliographic Classification.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN THE UNITED STATES TO 1876

The American public library is rooted in the colonial society and free town libraries. Society libraries were libraries created by the subscription funds of a group of people who, by dint of their subscription fee, had borrowing privileges of the books their money had collectively purchased. Free town libraries had a somewhat shakier heritage; although there were libraries that were free and open to the reading public as early as 1700, often the result of a bequest from a wealthy townsman,[7] they were prone to failure due to lack of funding and typically reopened as subscription libraries.[8] Another type of public library not uncommon in the colonies was a free library for apprentices.

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[7] Edward Edwards, *Free Town Libraries in Britain, France, Germany and America* (London: Trübner and Co., 1869), p. 275
[8] Edwards, *Free Town Libraries*, p. 338

Free town libraries were initially concentrated in the northeast but quickly spread across the colonies, especially in the mid-eastern colonies in Indiana and Ohio, and in the southern colonies of South Carolina and Virginia.[9] For America's first seventy-five years, however, the spread of public libraries was fairly haphazard, propelled by the desires of individual communities; in other words, there was nothing that could be called a national library movement. It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century when, galvanized by legislation requiring children to received a fixed amount of schooling at the public's expense, that true public libraries—libraries funded by taxpayer money and open to everyone in the community—started becoming more prevalent. Legislation requiring the establishment of public secondary education began to pass in the late 1820s; by 1852, all children in Massachusetts were required to attend at least a few years of public school, and similar requirements spread quickly to New York state and the rest of the northeast.[10] The free provision of legally required education and the subsequent increase in the base level of literacy created a larger reading public on the one hand, and a larger body of voters willing to support public libraries as an auxiliary to their own and their children's education on the other.

Accordingly, the number of public libraries increased dramatically in the second half of the nineteenth century; according to the US Bureau of Education's monumental 1876 report on American public libraries, while there were 25 public libraries established between 1800 and 1850, between 1850 and 1875, nearly 250 new libraries with a

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[9] Edwards, *Free Town Libraries*, p. 325-326

[10] Arnold K. Borden, "The Sociological Beginnings of the Public Library Movement," *The Library Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1931), p. 279.

combined collection of 1.5 million volumes were established.[11] In 1875, there was no state or territory without at least one public library, and nationwide there were about 3,000 public libraries with a combined 12 million volumes in their collections.[12] By 1890, that number had increased to 4,000 libraries and an aggregate collection of 27,000,000 volumes.[13]

Similarly, as the library network expanded and the government began systematically supporting libraries through its newly-formed (1868) Bureau of Education, an awareness of librarianship as something akin to a profession also began to spread. The first library conference was held 1853, although it was a performance not to be repeated until the formation of the American Library Association and its inaugural Philadelphia conference 1876. The conference and the inauguration of the ALA and its accompanying publication, the *American Library Journal*, did much to foster the burgeoning sense of community among American librarians, but there would be a long way to go before librarianship could be called a profession akin to that of medicine or law.

THE IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF AMERICAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

In addition to the structural factors encouraging the spread of public libraries, there were also significant political and ideological motivations underpinning the public library movement. Communities that were already paying for public education generally supported public libraries as places where working class children especially could go to

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[11] "Library Reports and Statistics," in *Public Libraries in the United States of America: Their History, Condition and Management*. Special Report, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1876), p. 779-791
[12] "Library Reports and Statistics," p. 795, 796
[13] Borden, "Sociological Beginnings," p. 278.

cement and expand upon their formal schooling—and stay off the streets. Benjamin Franklin had defended apprentices' paying for access to subscription libraries on the grounds that what the boys had scraped and saved for they would better appreciate, but by the 1850s, this view was no longer tenable.[14] If taxpayers were to support the general education of their children then it made no sense not to also support their children's ability to continue learning once their schooling was completed. One writer went so far as to call public libraries "people's colleges," whose breadth of educational possibilities stood opposed to classical schools which taught a more limited set of courses designed to prepare students for college.[15]

A second important ideology surrounding American public libraries in the nineteenth century was the idea of moral and spiritual uplift through access to the 'best books.' One key impetus behind the establishment of the Boston Public Library, generally regarded as the project that kickstarted the public library movement, was the concern of elite Bostonians over the large numbers of uneducated Irish immigrants pouring into the city.[16] For them, the public library was one corner of an institutional triangle, along with public schools and the church, that would educate immigrants, teach them the basics of morality and hygiene, and ultimately prevent them from being led astray by unscrupulous men whose politics were not in tune with those of the incumbent

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[14] Ditzion, *Arsenals*, p. 20

[15] J.P. Quincy, "Free Libraries," in *Public Libraries in the United States of America: Their History, Condition and Management*. Special Report, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1876), p. 400

[16] Michael H. Harris, "The Role of the Public Library in American Life: A Speculative Essay," University of Illinois Graduate School of Library Science Occasional Papers no. 117 (1975), p. 6

elites.[17] Thus, public libraries were both to be as open as possible in order to reach the greatest number of people, and were to be stocked primarily with the 'best books,' books that would support the classical and Protestant ideals of hard work, morality, thrift, and spiritual uplift. Libraries were to be "conducive to the higher ends of good citizenship," an alternative to the streets for young people seeking entertainment and a more cost-effective method to mold a good society than prisons and reformatories.[18]

The Boston Public Library was thus not a project borne out of benevolent concern for the poor in terms of entertainment opportunities, nor out of any high-toned ideals of spreading knowledge for knowledge's sake to the common man. Rather, it was an effort on the part of Boston elites to nurture a society that thought the same way they did in order to assure their continued political dominance of the city; it was a project about control, if a diffuse control, and one whose eventual outcomes were far from assured. What saved the Boston plan from being coercive was the broader American context of freedom, upward social mobility, and hostility to outright censorship. The Boston elites could stock their library with all the Thomas Paine they liked; they did not force library patrons to choose those works over novels.

As the elites of Boston, so city fathers across the nation, all of whom, it must be remembered, were part of the same context. The library would not only extend limited

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[17] Harris, "The Role of the Public Library," p. 6-7

[18] J.P. Quincy, "Free Libraries," p. 395; William F. Poole, "The Organization and Management of Public Libraries," in *Public Libraries in the United States of America: Their History, Condition and Management*. Special Report, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1876), p. 477

formal schooling but also provide for the most appropriate socialization of immigrants and the children of the working class into the American ideal.

DEVELOPING LIBRARY PRACTICE

Amid the external pressures of the significant social role assigned to the public library were more practical concerns internal to librarianship surrounding library practice, particularly in terms of bibliographic organization. As noted above, what makes the library different from a simple collection of books is that a library's holdings are classified and controlled and useful relationships between works suggested. Today, whatever library we enter, we may browse the stacks, choose our books or movies, and check them out at the circulation desk, either by the grace of the librarian or an automatic book scanner. This was not the case in the 1850s, 60s and 70s, however, when in spite of or more probably because of the rapid expansion of the library network, there was very little that was standardized about library practice. Different libraries had different systems for loaning books—some libraries kept loan slips in desk drawers, others required a letter of guarantee from a local notable or clergyman promising to replace the book if it were lost by the borrower[19]—for managing their collections, and even for shelving.

Above all, there was no standard system for managing collections, either in terms of the best way to classify the books themselves or even to classify the catalogue, the

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[19] See, for example, William F. Poole, "The Organization and Management of Public Libraries" and F.B. Perkins, "How to Make Town Libraries Successful," both in *Public Libraries in the United States of America: Their History, Condition and Management*. Special Report, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1876)

bibliographic surrogate for the library's holdings.[20] At this time, the location of a book on the shelves was fixed and there was no allowance for the collocation of new books of a similar subject with their fellows; books were shelved where they fit as they were purchased and their location by shelf and range noted separately in the catalogue.[21] In other words, only the catalogue itself, the collection of bibliographic records of the library's holdings, was classed or divided by subject, and even then not universally.

In a final twist, at this time, libraries were just beginning to make the transition from closed to open stacks. In a closed stack library, patrons had to rely solely on the catalogue to find out whether the item they wanted was held by the library in question, or, if they were seeking a book on a particular topic, to rely on the librarian to turn their reference request into a book from the collection that met their needs without ever being able to browse the stacks themselves.[22]

The combination of frequently closed stacks and fixed shelf order put significant pressure on the catalogue, as it was the only way that librarians could organize their collections by subject as well as the only way any patrons of a closed stack library would ever interact with the collection; consequently, cataloguing was seen as one of the most challenging aspects of library practice. In the words of librarian William F. Poole, "The inexperienced librarian will find the cataloguing of his books the most difficult part of his

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[20] Charles Ammi Cutter, "Library Catalogues," in *Public Libraries in the United States of America: Their History, Condition and Management*. Special Report, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1876) p. 529-530, 564-566

[21] John P. Comaromi and M. P. Satija, *Dewey Decimal Classification: History and Current Status* (New Delhi: Stirling Publishers Private Limited, 1989), p. 5

[22] Otis H. Robinson, "College Library Administration," in *Public Libraries in the United States of America: Their History, Condition and Management*. Special Report, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1876), p. 516

undertaking, even after he has made a diligent theoretical study of the subject. He will find after he has made considerable progress that much of his work is useless, and scarcely any of it correct."[23] Accordingly there were several extent methods for creating catalogues, all of which had different affordances. One could create a catalogue alphabetized by title or author (or both), known as a dictionary catalogue, but this was most helpful for a known-item search and would not aid the patron interested in several books by different authors on a similar subject.[24] Alphabetical subject indexes added to dictionary catalogues solved that problem, but were not always embraced by cataloguers themselves.[25] Catalogues could also be classed—in other words, divided by subject matter according to some philosophical system.[26] Parts and pieces of these catalogue types could be combined to produce alphabetico-classed catalogues, which possessed both an alphabetical index to authors and titles with a classed title catalogue.

This was the maelstrom into which Melvil Dewey stepped when he published his classification scheme in 1876. Although a number of American librarians were publishing articles on the question of classification at this time, including some full-blown schemes akin to Dewey's, it was Dewey's eponymous classification that would become the de facto standard for public and school libraries, for reasons that we will see shortly.

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[23] Poole, "Organization and Management," p. 490
[24] Cutter, "Library Catalogues," p. 530-531
[25] Cutter, "Library Catalogues," p. 532
[26] Cutter, "Library Catalogues," p. 529

MELVIL DEWEY AND DEWEY DECIMAL CLASSIFICATION

Although it is no longer in vogue to discuss history in terms of the 'great man,' it is difficult to underestimate the individual influence of Melvil Dewey on American and world librarianship. He not only created the Dewey Decimal Classification, he also played a significant role in the formation of the American Library Association (serving as its secretary from 1876-1890, and its president from 1890-1891 and 1892-1893), was the founding editor of its journal, was the first to market supplies such as shelving, book carts and standardized index cards for cataloguing exclusively to libraries, and founded the world's first professional library school, the Columbia School of Library Economy, in 1887.[27] Unlike most librarians, Dewey came to librarianship not through a passion for books and learning but through a zeal for educational reform and efficiency; in other words, his interest in librarianship was not intellectual but practical. His love of reform was in large part the legacy of his middle class Protestant parents, who, as was typical of their class and religious background, believed in humility, hard work, and the power of education to form one's moral character. Dewey's father was also active in local politics, setting an example of informed and involved citizenship which Dewey was to follow; he had settled on reform as his life's goal by the age of 16.[28] Rather than focusing on reform through political means, however, Dewey saw reform through the lens of efficiency, finding faster or better ways to achieve the same ends: he would be a lifelong advocate of adopting the metric system and also of reformed spelling, maintaining that English was

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[27] John Comaromi, *The Eighteen Editions of the Dewey Decimal Classification* (Albany: Forest Press, 1976), p. 1-2

[28] Wayne A. Wiegand, *Melvil Dewey: Irrepressible Reformer* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1996), p. 6-7

too idiosyncratic a language for immigrants to learn easily, and that simplified spelling ought to be adopted as a remedy.[29] Learning by rote memorization all the varied spellings of the English language wasted time, he argued, that could be spent more profitably on other educational pursuits. Above all he hated wasted time. Wayne Wiegand has speculated that this obsession resulted from Dewey's expectation of an early death following a severe bout of pulmonary illness as a teenager. Having thus learned the value of time and the brevity of it we spend on earth, Dewey spent the remainder of his life working to help others get as much out of their time as possible.[30]

Although Dewey was unique in ambition to realize reform through efficiency, he was not alone in its pursuit; the quest for efficiency was part of the tenor of the times. As Francis Miksa has argued, one of the overriding questions of the late nineteenth century was how to run non-business enterprises like businesses—in other words, how to create the greatest output for the least cost, an idea that is not unfamiliar to us today.[31] Dewey did not intend for his classification scheme to be a grand ontological statement, although its popularity eventually made it one; it was intended to be a time-saving and easy-to-use method of organizing the books in the library and the catalogue on paper, one that would leave librarians more time to attend to other matters in the library and that would help patrons to find the books they wanted more quickly. As he would write in a review of a rival classification scheme in 1882, "The practical thing is to put every book on the same subject in the same place, and to be able to find it with speedy certainty when

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[29] Wiegand, *Irrepressible Reformer*, p. 16-17
[30] Wiegand, *Irrepressible Reformer*, p. 10-11
[31] Francis Miksa, "Melvil Dewey and the Corporate Ideal," in *Melvil Dewey: The Man and the Classification*, ed. Gordon Stevenson and Judith Kramer-Greene (Albany: Forest Press, 1983), p. 54-55

wanted…Libraries need a practical working scheme, and can ill afford to tinker it here and there to secure what seems to the tinkerer important [philosophical] improvements."[32]

Dewey's entree into librarianship came in his last year at Amherst College, where he began working as a bookkeeper in the college library to help pay off his student debts.[33] He quickly began to see the library as an efficient means of public self-education and consequently determined that his reformatory efforts should be dedicated to the expansion and improvement of the public library network; as he wrote in his diary in December of 1872, "The free school and free library I conceive to be the great engines…My World Work—Free Schools & Free Libraries *for every soul*."[34] Although public education had made great strides in terms of an expanded legal mandate for its provision, in practical terms, public schooling remained a rather loose affair in late nineteenth century America, particularly in secondary schools. For Dewey, as for the elites of Boston in the 1850s, the library was the most efficient and least costly means for individuals to continue their education at their own pace and in their own way by providing them with free access to the 'best books,' belief in the efficacy of which was more or less universal across the library profession, whose members had been educated in the same tradition.[35]

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[32] Comaromi, *Eighteen Editions*, p. 108-109
[33] Wiegand, *Irrepressible Reformer*, p. 17
[34] Wiegand, *Irrepressible Reformer*, p. 18
[35] Wiegand, *Irrepressible Reformer*, p. 19

But rather than grappling with the intellectual questions of what the best books might be or how to encourage their use, Dewey with his penchant for efficiency focused his efforts more practically on improving access though improving the primary means of entry to a library's holdings: the library catalogue. An improved catalogue would both shorten the time it took for librarians to find books for patrons as well as the time it took for patrons to find their own books in open-stack libraries; for someone with the systematizing nature of Melvil Dewey, starting with the catalogue made perfect sense. Consequently most of Dewey's 1872 winter vacation was spent visiting prominent public libraries, particularly those in Boston, and reading what classification and cataloguing literature he could get his hands on, for as yet, classification still took place at the level of the catalogue and not at the level of the items on the shelf. Among other titles, he reviewed publications by William Torrey Harris on book classification, which argued for an alphabetical subject index to aid in discovery, and perhaps most importantly, an 1856 pamphlet by Nathaniel Shurtleff titled *A Decimal System for the Arrangement and Administration of Libraries*. Although Dewey took umbrage at Shurtleff's emphasis on the decimal system over the efficiency of the overall scheme, Shurtleff's application of the decimal system to book classification clearly made an impact.[36]

The story of Dewey's classification epiphany while at church at Amherst College one Sunday in the spring of 1873 has passed into library legend; suffice it to say that Dewey very quickly developed the outline of his classification for approval by the Amherst College Library Committee, which was sufficiently impressed to both hire him

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[36] Wiegand, *Irrepressible Reformer*, p. 20

as college librarian upon his graduation that year, and then to give him full leeway to implement his classification in the college library.[37]

THE STRUCTURE AND INNOVATIONS OF THE DDC

It should be emphasized that while the Dewey Decimal Classification was certainly groundbreaking, what made it unique was the way its organization was physically implemented in the library itself and not the way its classes were organized. The DDC, like most classifications proposed in this time, was a hierarchical classification, meaning that its categories began at the broadest level of abstraction and narrowed to the specific, and that the order of the classes had a meaning.[38] The DDC's class order came from William Torrey Harris, who had developed his classes based on the work of Edward Johnston at the St. Louis Mercantile Library, who in turn had inverted and expanded Francis Bacon's departments of learning, namely history, poetry and philosophy.[39] Harris' hierarchy moved from Science (philosophy) to Art (poetry) to History, essentially switching Bacon's first and last categories. While it has been speculated that Harris took this inversion from Hegel, the connection has been shown to be vague at best, piecemeal borrowings rather than a systematic influence.[40] Regardless, this was the hierarchy which Dewey adapted and expanded into his own nine classes, headed by Generalia, and followed by Philosophy, Theology, Sociology, Philology,

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[37] Wiegand, *Irrepressible Reformer*, p. 21-22

[38] Francis Miksa, *The DDC, the Universe of Knowledge and the Postmodern Library* (Albany: Forest Press, 1998), p.41

[39] John P. Comaromi, "The Foundations of the Dewey Decimal Classification: The First Two Editions," in *Melvil Dewey: The Man and the Classification*, ed. Gordon Stevenson and Judith Kramer-Greene (Albany: Forest Press, 1983), p. 136-137

[40] Comaromi, "The Foundations of the DDC," p. 138

Natural Science, Useful Arts—all of which fell into Harris' category Science—Fine Arts, Literature—Harris' Art—and finally History.[41] Each of the head classes was numbered from 1 to 9 (Generalia was 0) and was itself subdivided into 9 classes headed by a 0 class for generalia on that subject; each subdivision could be divided into 9 again, and so on practically infinitely. This ensured that the classification was expandable to account for new subjects or developments in current ones, a capacity which has served it well.

Although the top level of the hierarchy was taken from Harris, the second, third and lower-order divisions were derived from Dewey's Amherst education, not only in terms of how it taught him to conceive of the world but also because of the connections it brought him when it came time to create the subdivisions for each of the head classes. First, the education he received at Amherst, which was rooted in both the Western classics and Protestant orthodoxy, confirmed in every way how Harris had conceived of the general philosophical world order, and Dewey, who was neither educated to ask questions nor a particularly inquisitive student, saw no need to alter or question it.[42] He drew more practical guidance from Amherst faculty, notably the historian John W. Burgess and the philosopher Julius Seelye, when it came to creating the separate class hierarchies, utilizing both faculty members themselves to look over his schedules, but also drawing on reading lists from different courses offered.[43]

As has been discussed and criticized somewhat ad nauseum in the library literature of the last twenty years, the DDC, the archetypical WASP classification, is

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[41] Comaromi, "The Foundations of the DDC," p. 140-141
[42] Wayne A. Wiegand, "The 'Amherst Method': The Origins of the Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme," *Libraries and Culture*, vol. 33, no. 2 (1998), 182
[43] Wiegand, "Amherst Method," p. 186-187

completely and unapologetically a creature of its time and intellectual context; the DDC's tables were not what was revolutionary about the DDC, and indeed, it is highly likely that if Dewey had attempted a radical reinterpretation of world order in his classification, it would not have been the success that it was, for all its practical advantages. Where Dewey revolutionized library classification was in his use of decimals to number his classes, an innovation suggested by Shurtleff's 1856 pamphlet. Although the use of decimal numbers to classify books was certainly not unknown before Dewey, Dewey used the notation to signify both the books' contents *and* their shelf order, meaning that shelf order and subject collocation were united in a single scheme for the first time.[44] 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 the books surrounding it of a similar topic, improving the odds of serendipitous discovery and allowing purposeful browsing in the stacks for the first time. The notation was also significant in that it was deliberately devised as a mnemonic system: for example, the 0 was always used to signify the general aspects of a class or division. Thus, for example, class 000 was *Generalia*, division 200 was *General religion*, and section 220 the *Bible*, with the following 9 sections of that division being reserved for the *Old Testament* (221), the *New Testament* (225), and the *Apocrypha* (229), among others. The internal logic of the system 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.

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[44] Comaromi and Satija, *History and Current Status*, p. 8

Another significant aspect of the DDC was its Relative Index. Initially Dewey conceived of the Index as being the primary method of ingress to the schedules, writing that "an essential part of the subject index is the table of classification," because it was the Index that was to be consulted where a patron had only a topic in mind and wished to browse the stacks or consult the librarian.[45] Simply put, the Relative Index was a list of alphabetized subject terms corresponding to key terms from the tables, accompanied by that term's decimal signifier in the classification.[46] The inclusion of the Index countered the objections of some librarians to a classed catalogue, that being the difficulty of finding an item when the patron had only a topic in mind, and made browsing in an open stack library far easier, as a subject term in the Index pointed to the location on the shelves where all the books on that particular topic might be found.

Dewey first unveiled his classification to the at-large library public at the 1876 library conference—a conference that he played no small part in organizing—and also published parts of it in the landmark Bureau of Education report of the same year on public libraries in America.[47] What would become known as the first edition of the DDC was fairly short, only 44 pages consisting of the tables and accompanied by a two thousand term Relative Index. By the time the second edition was published in 1885, it had grown to 180 pages of tables and ten thousand index terms. Several tables were expanded upon and the decimal point added after the third digit, allowing the longer

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[45] Comaromi and Satija, p. 98
[46] Comaromi and Satija, p. 100
[47] W. Boyd Rayward, "The Early Diffusion Abroad of the Dewey Decimal Classification: Great Britain, Australia, Europe," in *Melvil Dewey: The Man and the Classification*, ed. Gordon Stevenson and Judith Kramer-Greene (Albany: Forest Press, 1983), p.153.

numbers of more detailed subjects to be read more easily.[48] The system spread quickly throughout the American public library network both due to its ease of implementation—the classification's mnemonic features made this particularly acute—the resulting efficiency of cataloguing, as books had only to be catalogued once to list them in their shelf and catalogue order, and Dewey's aggressive and convincing promotion of the classification in published articles, talks, and at his library school, as above, the first of its kind in the United States and the world. Students at the Columbia School, who would become the first trained librarians, were taught Dewey's classification method, and they in turn would teach it to their junior librarians and in their own schools, were they to go on to teach. All these factors helped the DDC to spread quickly across the United States.

SPREADING DEWEY'S GOSPEL

The system spread just as quickly abroad. The DDC was a known quantity in Great Britain as early as 1877, when Dewey himself presented the scheme at a London library conference in October of that year. While it generated heated discussion at the conference and in years following, it was not until the 1890s that the DDC was implemented in Great Britain, by Stanley Louis Jast at the public library in Peterborough.[49] In the years leading up to the first World War Jast advocated tirelessly for detailed classification by the DDC, showing in its implementation at a second library in Croydon that it was as effective as it was touted, for all its American centrism. By

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[48] Comaromi, "The Foundation of the DDC," p. 144-145
[49] Rayward, "Early Diffusion Abroad," p. 153-154

1910, the DDC was the classification used in more than half of British classified libraries.[50]

Another significant factor in the spread of the DDC was its adoption by Paul Otlet and Henri La Fontaine of the Belgian International Institute of Bibliography (IIB) as the basis for its own classification scheme, the Universal Decimal Classification.[51] The UDC was to be a European adaptation and expansion of the American-centric DDC to support the IIB's objective of producing a catalogue of recorded human knowledge.[52] Officially sanctioned by Dewey and the DDC editorial board, the first edition of the UDC was published in 1905 after ten years of work. The UDC was very heavily promoted by the IIB and spread rapidly across Europe, winning converts from Switzerland to Russia, although some scholars argue that it was used more for bibliographic purposes—i.e., for classifying the entries in printed bibliographies—than for the classification and shelving of actual books in libraries, where the DDC was more popular.[53] This was the case in Russia in particular, where in spite of a vocal advocate for the UDC in the form of librarian B.S. Bodnarskii, the DDC was favored for its ease of implementation by public libraries, particularly those which were in the process of moving to open stacks, and ease of use by library patrons. It continued to spread after the Revolution of 1917, but was stamped out by the above-mentioned Bodnarskii when he was appointed head of the Russian Book Chamber.

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[50] Comaromi and Satija, *History and Current Status*, p.30
[51] Rayward, "Early Diffusion Abroad," p. 161
[52] Rayward, "Early Diffusion Abroad," p. 167
[53] Rayward, "Early Diffusion Abroad," p. 169

It is interesting that a classification which took only a year to write would become the single most popular and thus influential library classification in the world. Dewey's hierarchy would be most readers' first exposure to an overarching knowledge organization system, one that was not only easy to use but also corresponded with how the majority of people at the time probably conceived of the world being organized, whether they were aware of it or not. The classification thus became both a way of organizing the resources in the library and also a subtle suggestion for how an individual might categorize the world himself, or at least a starting point, especially given that the public library was for most people for most of its history the only free and open general information source. In this sense, the library was a microcosm of the world of knowledge, and the only world to which most people had regular and unfettered access; it was both authoritative and trusted, and in this way, the classification that organized that world gained its own measure of authority. As an inseparable part of the library ecosystem, the classification also played an important if subtle role in the educational objectives of the library; the classification organized the books that the people came to read, and as they browsed the shelves of open stack libraries or consulted the Relative Index to discover the subject term that best described their information needs, they gained a sense of the way the library, like the world, was organized. The DDC's mnemonic features made it easier to remember the hierarchies.

Dewey probably had no particular intention of creating an educational tool specifically by his classification; unlike the Soviet librarians, who saw library

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classification as an ideological pursuit almost from the very beginning, Dewey was concerned about classification only to the extent that he could use it to expedite the process of cataloguing and thus free up a larger portion of librarians' time for other necessary work. He used the ordering he did because it felt right and natural, and ultimately, in spite of the DDC's very specific intellectual location in late nineteenth century America, its advantages in terms of efficiency and ease of implementation were significant enough that it was often used in places as far afield and culturally different as India and Africa, where unauthorized local adaptations could make the hierarchies more appropriate to those places. The Soviet adaptation of the DDC, drawn itself principally from the UDC, was one such adaptation, but was also much more self-aware of its double-edged nature as a tool for library access tool and ideological education.

III. The Library-Bibliographic Classification: Context and Development

This section will discuss the formation of and ideological influences on the Soviet Library-Bibliographic Classification (henceforth BBK). I will begin with the historical development of public libraries in tsarist Russia and the impact of the 1917 revolution on public library development. I will then discuss the distinctive views the early Soviets had towards public libraries both practically and ideologically. Finally, I will discuss the process of developing the BBK's library classification from the UDC tables in the 1930s, and how both classification and cataloguing were used for ideological ends in the Stalinist era.

RUSSIAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES TO 1917

The first public library in tsarist Russia opened in 1814 in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars. Located in Moscow, it was an official deposit library and served as the national library until the revolution in 1917, but the degree to which it was truly public is debatable: although it was financed by the government and was technically free to use, it was really oriented towards research and patronage by the aristocracy and was not a hospitable environment for the intelligentsia and educated middle classes.[54] Those groups reacted by forming lending libraries, which, like the American subscription libraries, guaranteed access to a circulating collection of books on the yearly payment of a small fee, plus a deposit to ensure the return of the book. While these societies were first

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[54] Francoise des Bonnieres, "Libraries in Pre-revolutionary Russia," trans. George Toth, in *Books in Russia and the Soviet Union: Past and Present* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1991), p. 107, 109

created by foreign literature reading societies, they quickly spread outward to booksellers who also stocked significant collections of Russian literature.[55]

It was not until the 1830s that the idea of a truly public library began to gain currency, particularly in political circles, where they were seen as a means of bringing books to rural areas and of supplementing an educational system generally perceived as inadequate in and of itself to train the next generation of bureaucrats.[56] With the reforms of Alexander II and the creation of the zemstva, or local government councils, in the 1860s, public libraries began to spread in earnest. Significant inroads were made in the creation of school libraries, which were often publicly accessible, in the 1880s, and indeed, these libraries were not infrequently requested and maintained by villages several years before the local government councils began to manage them.[57] Public libraries—although they are perhaps better called "public book collections" after Ben Eklof, given that collections of publicly accessible books were found in dedicated public libraries as well as in schools and churches[58]—were subject to varying amounts of political interference over time and were administered from 1867 forward by the Ministry of the Interior, which also oversaw the Censorship Office. The ministry could forbid the circulation of certain books or even close a library if it so chose, and restrictions were

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[55] Des Bonnieres, "Libraries in Pre-Revolutionary Russia," p. 109
[56] Des Bonnieres, "Libraries in Pre-revolutionary Russia," p. 111
[57] Des Bonnieres, "Libraries in Pre-Revolutionary Russia," p. 111-112; Ben Eklof, "The Archaeology of 'Backwardness': Assessing the Adequacy of Libraries for Rural Audiences in Late Imperial Russia," in *The Space of the Book: Print Culture in Russian Social Imagination*, ed. Miranda Remnek (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 114-115
[58] Eklof, "Libraries for Rural Audiences," p. 126

particularly close between 1890 and 1905, a state of affairs which would prove influential in the Bolsheviks' policies towards libraries.[59]

There are varying estimates of the number of public book collections in the Empire; although Soviet figures differ drastically from modern estimates, not all the difference is necessarily propaganda, as many official statistics counted only public libraries and did not include libraries in schools or churches whose collections could also be used by the general public. For example, one Soviet account puts the number of public libraries in Russia in 1913 at 13,876, with a total circulating collection of 9,442,000 volumes—about seven books and periodicals in public libraries for every one hundred Russians.[60] Current archival research accounting for other public access collections estimates the number of libraries open for general use as being closer to 80,000. Similarly, although Russian figures estimate that more than seventy percent of Russia's population between the ages of nine and forty-nine was illiterate when the Communists took power in 1917, there is a general scholarly consensus that in fact much of the progress towards Russian literacy was achieved between 1897 and 1920, and that if anything, the upheaval of the Revolution disrupted the process rather than speeding it up.[61]

Library practice prior to the revolution was in a state similar to that of American library practice before Dewey: little if anything was standardized, there was virtually no

[59] Des Bonnieres, "Libraries in Pre-Revolutionary Russia," p. 112

[60] M. M. Poluboyarinov, "Library Affairs in the Soviet Union—Statistics," in *Libraries in the USSR*, ed. Simon Francis (Hamden: Linnet Books, 1971), p. 107, 131

[61] George Chandler, *Libraries, Documentation and Bibliography in the USSR* (New York: Seminar Press, 1972), p. 23; Charles E. Clark, *Uprooting Otherness: The Literacy Campaign in NEP-Era Russia* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 2000), p.16-17.

arena for formal training in librarianship, and no generally accepted method for classification, cataloguing or even national bibliography.[62] The first dedicated library school opened in 1908 in St. Petersburg and held its first library conference in 1911, but given the size and dispersion of the Empire's population, a single school could not have kept up with the need for trained librarians across the countryside. Rural libraries were often staffed by local teachers in their spare time who were paid a pittance if at all, and even proper buildings were not guaranteed.[63] What trained librarians there were worked in the great academic and public libraries of Moscow and St. Petersburg, where they grappled with a lack of technical infrastructure.

After the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, libraries suddenly assumed great political importance. Vladimir Lenin's new government was faced with an immediate host of problems—Russia's participation in the First World War was only the beginning—but one of the most pressing in terms of the revolutionaries' desire to bring Russia to her proper place in Europe was the underdevelopment of her human capital. Although literacy rates had been improving steadily from the 1880s, the fact remained that there were more illiterate Russians than literate ones, especially in the vast swathes of rural territory where most people lacked access to meaningful education. In their conviction that the tsarist government had purposefully kept the working classes uneducated and docile, party leaders tended to overestimate illiteracy levels, although it was certainly true that the majority of the peasants were illiterate; regardless, illiteracy was perceived as an

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[62] Reynolds, "Introduction and Use," p. 436
[63] Des Bonnieres, "Libraries in Pre-revolutionary Russia," p.113

enormous and critical problem, particularly ideologically. Russia in 1917 was technologically and industrially backward, but an industrialized economy required educated workers who were able to read the latest scientific and technological literature and apply it to their own work, whether it took place in the fields or in the factories; hence, the desire to eradicate illiteracy was an immediate priority for the first generation of Soviet leaders, including Lenin himself.[64]

The eradication of illiteracy was to be accomplished through the expansion of public schools and the creation of a public library network that would extend into rural areas. The first generation of Soviet leaders were themselves self-educated revolutionaries, patrons of the underground libraries of radical literature who had formed their beliefs through reading and discussing illegal Marxist texts; hence they were fully convinced of the efficacy of books and the ideas they carried as a valuable tool for self-education.[65] Libraries stocked with the right kind of books were seen as the most efficient way to bring the masses the resources they needed to solidify their reading skills and at the same time, attain the requisite political consciousness and awareness of modern technological trends and methods.[66] Lenin's early, emphatic and frequent written and spoken support of libraries in adult education cemented their place in the Soviet hierarchy

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[64] Clark, *Uprooting Otherness*, p. 19; V. I. Lenin, "The New Economic Policy and the Tasks of the Political Education Departments," in *Collected Works* (Moscow, 1966), Vol. 33 (October 17, 1921), accessed November 28, 2010 at http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/oct/17.htm; V. I. Lenin, "Speech delivered at an All-Russia Conference of Political Education Workers of Gubernia and Uyezd Education Departments," in *Collected Works* (Moscow, 1966), Vol. 31 (November 3, 1920), accessed November 29, 2010 at http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/nov/03.htm

[65] Boris Raymond*, Krupskaia and Soviet Russian Librarianship 1917-1939* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1979), p. 29-31; Boris Raymond, "Libraries in the Soviet Union," in *Books in Russia and the Soviet Union: Past and Present* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1991), p. 120

[66] Raymond*, Krupskaia,*, p. 45-46

even after his death, but it was his wife, librarian Nadezhda Konstantinova Krupskaia, who turned that support into programs, buildings and books as head of the Adult Education division of the Commissariat of Education, which had oversight over all cultural institutions.[67]

THE IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF SOVIET MASS LIBRARIES

In addition to their practical advantages in bringing extracurricular educational opportunities to undereducated or uneducated populations, libraries in the Soviet Union were the subject of significant ideological imperatives. It was not just that libraries offered a practical and relatively inexpensive extension to the inadequate public education network; it was that libraries could and would be stocked with resources that spoke exclusively to Marxist-Leninist ideology in order to ensure that the people were educated correctly. It was equally important for workers to be able to read the latest technical literature so that they could apply it to their work in the cities or in the countryside as it was for them to be properly ideologically aware and advanced. Lenin firmly believed that the masses would never attain the political consciousness necessary to bring about the socialist paradise that was to be the culmination of history without the guidance of the party elite. In other words, the library was seen as a crucial element in the development of good Soviet socialist citizens, citizens who understood the ideological priorities of the government and the socialist movement. It was therefore imperative that

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[67] Raymond, *Krupskaia,*, p. 47

the proletariat be taught the correct knowledge from the correct books from the very beginning.[68]

The person who would be responsible for orchestrating the creation of the mass library network to create good Soviet citizens was Nadezhda Konstantinova Krupskaia. As a trained librarian and devoted Marxist-Leninist—she was, in fact, Lenin's wife—Krupskaia's interpretation of the library's role in education was the guiding light of Soviet librarianship. For Krupskaia, adult education meant less reading, writing and arithmetic than the doctrines of Marxism-Leninism as explicated by Party leaders.[69] Collection development had a particularly important role to play. Collections already in existence had to be nationalized, purged of their monarchist and religious material and restocked with all the Marxist works the tsarist censor had forbidden; after the initial purges, collections were developed in accordance with the government's ideological objectives. Because Krupskaia believed wholly that there was no such thing as objective book, she was determined that her libraries be stocked with books that supported the party line and the ideology to which she had given her life.[70] In taking this line she actively worked against the tradition of Russian librarianship dedicated to the pursuit of objectivity in collection development, which had been influential prior to the Revolution but which was slowly watered down and finally destroyed by Krupskaia's efforts.[71]

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[68] Alan Megill, "Marxism: Overview," in *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas,* vol. 4, ed. Maryanne Cline Horowitz (Detroit: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2005), p. 1360
[69] Raymond, *Krupskaia*, p. 39; Lenin, "Political Education Workers"
[70] Raymond, *Krupskaia,*, p. 63
[71] Raymond, *Krupskaia,*, p. 63

A second ideological impulse that would become more important as time progressed came from the technologist focus of Soviet Marxism. Marxism as implemented in the Soviet Union took a particularly virulent pro-technology stance, believing resolutely in the power of science and technology to create the new society the Communists dreamed of and to do so at a rate that would outstrip the West as quickly as possible.[72] Although a Soviet classification scheme was not a display technology on the level of atomic power stations, massive river diversions or the construction of enormous prefabricated research parks, creating a national library classification spoke to the Soviet love of standardization for efficiency and belief in the power of structures to alter behavior, and in that way, national and recommendatory bibliography came to be seen as indispensible to the Soviet library network.[73]

The need for a national classification was also a practical one, for underlying the dearth of libraries and books to stock them was a more serious lack of technical library infrastructure. Although decimal classification had been making inroads in Russian libraries prior to and immediately following the Revolution as the primary cataloguing tool, there was no standard Russian version of decimal classification, which would be essential if the national, centralized library system Krupskaia desired and Lenin supported were to become a reality.[74] Not having a standardized access mechanism would be the greatest stumbling-block to libraries fulfilling their educational, ideological purpose in the Soviet Union. Rural areas could be served by small, cheaply-constructed

[72] Paul Josephson, " 'Projects of the Century' in Soviet History: Large Scale Technologies from Lenin to Gorbachev," *Technology and Culture*, vol. 36, no. 3 (1995), p. 520
[73] Josephson, "Large Scale Technologies," p. 521-522
[74] Raymond, *Krupskaia*, pp. 60-61; Chandler, *Libraries in the USSR*, p. 18

reading huts carrying the classics of Marxism-Leninism; private libraries could be nationalized and their stocks collected, purged of 'bad' literature, and redistributed, but classification systems required deliberate and careful creation, for without them, the library system would not function.[75]

BODNARSKII, TROPOVSKI, AND THE CREATION OF A SOVIET CLASSIFICATION

As we have seen, there was little in the way of standardized library practice in Russia prior to the revolution, with library classification being no exception. Decimal classification, which could refer to any scheme that relied upon decimal notation for its classes, was according to a contemporary librarian more or less unknown in Russia prior to 1895, the year that Paul Otlet and Henri LaFontaine founded the International Institute of Bibliography and hosted the first International Conference of Bibliography. No Russian librarians attended but enough were aware of the proceedings to ensure that the UDC began to creep into Russian bibliographic circles.[76] It was not until 1900 that the UDC was actually implemented in a library, and by 1907, there were only five Russian libraries using decimal classification, three of those using the UDC.[77]

The spread of the UDC was hampered both by the lack of full translations of its tables and an attitude on the part of the Russian library community that it was more suitable for classifying published bibliographies of reference works, such as the *Bibliographic Yearbook* or the *Classified Index of Russian Literature on Photography*

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[75] Raymond, "Libraries in the Soviet Union," p. 121, 122
[76] Dennis Reynolds, "The Introduction and Use of Forms of Decimal Classification in Russia, 1885-1921: The DDC, the UDC and the Normal Plan," *The Library Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 4 (1977), p. 433-434
[77] Reynolds, "Introduction and Use," p. 435

than it was for classifying books on shelves. Nor were many librarians convinced that the UDC was appropriate for the Russian context, citing its inhospitality to Russian subjects—all of Russian literature, for example, was located at 891.7, when according to one librarian, belles-lettres made up 75% of public access collections[78]—and its complexity and excessive specificity as rendering it unfit for use in the majority of Russia's public libraries, whose patrons were seen as not educated enough to understand the classification, and whose collections were too general to be profitably classified by it anyway.

In spite of these objections, the UDC had one great advocate in librarian B.S. Bodnarskii, who promoted the system aggressively in published works as being both scientifically objective and a clear division of knowledge.[79] In 1911, the UDC's detractors replied with the Normal Plan, a rival Russian decimal classification that privileged Russian life and culture and was designed specifically for smaller, general public access collections.[80] Although it was probably true that the UDC was structurally unsuited for Russian public library collections, whether the classification was too complicated is up for debate. Adoption of the conceptually similar DDC at the Moscow City Library in 1911 had proven to be a great success with patrons and librarians alike within a span of two years, and after the revolution, it was the DDC that was most often implemented independently in the years before a native Russian classification was written, partly because of the success of the DDC at the Moscow library, and partly

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[78] Reynolds, "Introduction and Use," p. 443
[79] Reynolds, "Introduction and Use," p. 439
[80] Reynolds, "Introduction and Use," p. 440

because the UDC was never able to shake its image as a classification for printed bibliographies. Ultimately, however, with the appointment of Bodnarskii to the position of director of the Russian Book Chamber, the UDC was declared the national classification of Russian libraries, and thus it was the UDC that was amended to better reflect the reality of a Socialist society.[81]

The need to modify the UDC to better fit the Soviet socialist reality was never really in question for the Soviet librarians. As one librarian wrote in the journal *Bibliotekar* [*Librarian*]: "Bibliography is in the realm of ideological work. The basic principle of Soviet bibliography is partisanship. Soviet bibliography is deeply alien to neutralism and lack of partisanship."[82] The catalogue as a form of knowledge organization underpinned not only the library but also the Soviet view of the world, and more importantly, the view of the world they were trying to imprint onto its millions of citizens. According to the Committee in Charge of Institutions for Cultural Enlightenment, the catalogue "should be, in the hands of librarians, a keen ideological weapon and a means for Communist education", *not* "a channel for inimical, reactionary literature"; therefore simply using translated tables of the UDC would be impossible.[83] The UDC, although intended to be a universal classification able to be used anywhere, was for the Soviets a bourgeois, capitalist system filled with the biases and ideas of Western imperialist society, and as it stood would not be appropriate for organizing the

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[81] Reynolds, "Introduction and Use," p. 447-448

[82] Artur Baumanis and A. Robert Rogers, "Soviet Classification and Cataloging," *The Library Quarterly* vol. 28, no. 3 (1958), p. 173

[83] Baumanis and Rogers, "Soviet Classification," p. 182

books or the bibliography of the Soviet Union.[84] Two separate systems of cataloguing were ultimately created, one for classifying library catalogues and another for classifying the books and pamphlets in the national lists; both systems are heavily edited versions of the UDC and both were created with the explicit intention of formulating a Marxist-Leninist knowledge organization system, although this analysis will not discuss the classification scheme for bibliography. Together, the two classifications were known at the Library-Bibliographic Classification, or BBK.

'Sovietizing' Decimal Classification

The library classification was the work of L. N. Tropovskii, who drafted his edits to the UDC in 1934 and published the complete tables in 1938. Citing librarians' familiarity with the tables as they were ordered, he declined to reorder them (although he did outline a preferred order of tables for library classification that placed philosophy and dialectical materialism at the head, followed by the applied and social sciences, and ended with literature and art).[85] Instead Tropovskii concentrated on expanding those tables which contained material on Communism and Marxist thought. Table 1, *Philosophy*, was renamed *Philosophy, dialectical materialism and historical materialism*, with *Dialectical materialism* and *Historical materialism* as the first two sections in the table, sections 1M and 1M1. *Logic* and *Ethics* were moved into a third new section, *History of philosophy*, 1F, and following 1F were classes 1FB, *Bourgeois philosophy of*

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[84] Natalie Delougaz, "Adaptations of the Decimal Classification for Soviet Libraries," *The Library Quarterly* vol. 17, no. 2 (1947), p. 148
[85] Delougaz, "Adaptations," p. 152

the 19th and 20th centuries, and 1F1, *Bourgeois philosophy of history*.[86] Table 2, *Religion*, became *Antireligious literature*, with a special section reserved for religious texts to be kept as reference materials, section 2R. The UDC subclasses for the different Christian denominations were collapsed into a single section named *Christian doctrine and sects*, and *Comparative religions* at 291 became *Primitive religions*, with the sections for Buddhism, Parseeism, Judaism and Islam left untouched.[87]

Tropovskii reserved his most exhaustive and ideologically-thorough emendations for 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*.[88] 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).[89] Finally, in the cultural tables— 4, 8, and 9, *Philology*, *Literature*, and *History*, Tropovskii inserted a new division to head the table for Russian language, literature and history, denoted by the table number

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[86] Delougaz, "Adaptations," p. 152, 153
[87] Delougaz, "Adaptations," p. 153, 154
[88] Delougaz, "Adaptations," p. 155, 156
[89] Delougaz, "Adaptations," p. 156-157

followed by an S—4S, 8S, and 9S. Table 9 received a further rearrangement, a redivision of European history such that each period began with a revolution.[90]

The BBK was a significant ideological achievement by any measure, an explicit and far-reaching reflection of the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism, supporting the efforts of Soviet librarians to educate the masses in its tenets. In the officially atheist Soviet Union, works on religion were found under the class *Antireligious literature*, showing the ideological disdain for faith; similarly, the social science table was overwhelmingly dominated by the 3K divisions enumerating all the different aspects of Marxism-Leninism, the biographies of socialist theorists, and the history of the Communist and Bolshevik movements. The sections of division 32, *Political science*, were defined in value laden terms that showed their clear subordination to Soviet socialism: *Political science in capitalist countries*, *Fascists and other parties of extreme reaction*, *Bourgeois and petty bourgeois movements*. The revolution-based division of European history emphasized the Marxist-Leninist conviction that violent struggle was the practical agent of historical change.

Both the library and bibliographic classifications created after the Revolution were clearly embodied in the Marxist-Leninist perspective, and furthermore were evaluated based on how well they promoted a Marxist-Leninist viewpoint in their knowledge organization. Indeed, a UDC revision published in 1944 by the librarian N. V. Rusinov was summarily rejected because it was "anti-Communist," hewing too closely to the 'objective Western' viewpoint of the original UDC tables rather than properly

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[90] Delougaz, "Adaptations," p. 155, 158-159

privilege dialectical materialism, Party history, or Russian language and literature.[91] In other words, although the tables were clearly partial to Marxism-Leninism, their partiality was clearly token, and indeed, Rusinov's objective, rather like Dewey's, was not to create a Marxist-Leninist classification but to create a usable one, one that did not deviate as radically from the original UDC tables to enable an easier switch on the part of libraries themselves.[92] Tropovskii's tables, on the other hand, are wholly partial to the Marxist-Leninist viewpoint and for that reason were lauded in the professional library journal *Krasnyi Bibliotekar* [*Red Librarian*] "as a good example of what public-minded Soviet librarians should try to achieve by way of 'Sovietizing'" the UDC.[93]

While both Tropovskii and Rusinov adhered to the same basic methodology in revising the UDC for use in Soviet libraries—to collect categories pertaining to Communism where they were scattered across different subsections, and always to privilege Marxism-Leninism or Russia at the head of a table—it is Tropovskii's revisions that best reflect a Marxist-Leninist ontology. His revisions show a pervasive emphasis on 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; there is also special emphasis on particular struggles, notably in the section 32, *Political science*, where the war with Nazi Germany is given more than one subsection, further supporting the idea of constant struggle against reactionaries.[94] The decision to bring

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[91] Delougaz, "Adaptations," p. 150
[92] Baumanis and Rogers, "Soviet Classification," p.172
[93] Delougaz, "Adaptations," p. 151
[94] G. N. Volkov, *The Basics of Marxist-Leninist Theory* (Moscow: Progress Press, 1982), pp. 28-29, 40-41

Russian language, literature and history to the forefront of their respective tables is unsurprising and also most innocent of ideological implications; presumably any nation undertaking to create their own version of the UDC would do the same, although Rusinov, with his librarian's eye, chose not to do so.

Control through the catalogue

Although Marxism-Leninism in the BBK was both all-encompassing and explicit, it quickly became seen as inadequate in and of itself to impress the Marxist-Leninist worldview upon the people. As Soviet librarians came to have a more sophisticated understanding of the ideological power of the catalogue to reveal and mask designated relationships and the Stalinist personality cult progressed, more and more information began to be circumscribed, edited, and purged in order to more tightly define the Soviet universe of knowledge. As government figures were purged by the Stalinist regime, so too were their written works, leaving great gaps in the card catalogues that were often filled with sheaves of analytic cards describing the basic works of party theorists, as well as descriptions of party decisions and speeches by party leaders.[95] Beginning officially in 1949, after criticism that library catalogues "simply enumerate[d] the books to be found in the library, instead of promoting only the 'best' books", a new sort of catalogue was created for the large mass libraries in the cities that were also home to reactionary literature for the purposes of scholarship: the public catalogue, which listed only those books judged fit for public consumption. The official catalogue, which listed a library's

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[95] Baumanis and Rogers, "Soviet Classification," p. 174, 177, 180

entire holdings including its foreign literature, was kept from view.[96] Given that the public catalogue was the chief means of accessing a mass library's collection, this kind of censorship hid vast amounts of material from Soviet readers, all in the name of properly educating the "general reader" (although even the scholarly researcher was hard-pressed to access these restricted works, foreign works in particular).[97] Just in case any general reader was left in doubt about what books were appropriate to read, starting in 1951 any cards in the public card catalogue for books dealing with the Soviet Union or Communist doctrine were filed first to ensure that the 'best' books were not mixed with those that were 'inferior.'[98]

SUMMATION

The BBK is a prime example of how libraries and their access mechanisms may be manipulated to ends that are far from democratic. The DDC was intended to be a most-efficient system in terms of use for the patron and activity for the librarian; the BBK, a most-efficient system for organizing the basic ideological stance of the Soviet Union. It is also an excellent counterargument to anyone who posits the classification as being innocent of ideological implications. In spite of its definite ideological location, however, the BBK retains a startling amount of congruence with the DDC in terms of the role it was expected to play, as will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

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[96] Baumanis and Rogers, "Soviet Classification," p. 181; Thomas J. Whitby, "Libraries and Bibliographical Projects in the Communist Bloc," *The Library Quarterly* vol. 28, no. 2 (1958), p. 280
[97] Baumanis and Rogers, "Soviet Classification," p. 185, 183; Whitby, "Bibliographical Projects," p. 294
[98] Baumanis and Rogers, "Soviet Classification," p. 178-179

IV. The Contemporaneous Social Roles of the DDC and the BBK

Having examined the mechanics of the development of the DDC and BBK, we may now turn to a comparison of the social roles those 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. We may use the motto of the American Library Association, also a creation of Dewey's, as the framework for analysis: "The best reading for the greatest number, at the least cost."[99]

THE BEST READING

The basic goal of any library classification is to provide a structure enabling access to the library's resources, no matter the format. In 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 books and periodicals in the library and ensuring those books and periodicals 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 great

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[99] Wiegand, *Irrepressible Reformer*, p. 217

bugbear of librarianship was the novel. Novels were generally seen as frivolous and sensational, with no worth in terms of self-improvement or the cultivation of a superior moral character.[100] 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.[101] Instead, novels often proved addictive, and their pernicious influence among young adult and female readers in particular was a subject of frequent lamentation among mid nineteenth century librarians, including Dewey himself, although he was less censorious than many.[102] This was a society that valued works of religion and theology, history and biography, and even travelogues over plain fictive literature,[103] as we can see from the deliberate and immediately accepted inversion of Bacon's original departments of learning, which moved Art from the top of the hierarchy to the bottom. Librarians' attitudes towards fiction reading fell in line with that view. The original underlying purpose of the free public library was not to give people who could not afford books access to them for the purposes of entertainment, but to give them access to books that would help them to better themselves in line with a particular set of beliefs surrounding what that better self might look like, a force for education: in other words the library was to be analogous to a museum, not a carnival.

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[100] Quincy, "Free Libraries," p. 393

[101] David Kaser, "The Dewey Era in American Librarianship," in *Melvil Dewey: The Man and the Classification*, ed. Gordon Stevenson and Judith Kramer-Greene (Albany: Forest Press, 1983), p. 11

[102] William I. Fletcher, "Public Libraries and the Young," in *Public Libraries in the United States of America: Their History, Condition and Management* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876); Kaser, "Dewey Era," p. 11

[103] Quincy, "Free Libraries," p. 395

However, because 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 liked to do so. A library that did not stock what its readers wanted to read would not be patronized and thereby find its funding cut, leaving it less able to buy any books at all, which would belie 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. [104]

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 the class consciousness of the workers and also bolster the technical skills of both urban and agricultural workers so that they could farm and manufacture according to the latest technology.[105] The desire for Soviet-appropriate reading was perhaps even more acute than the American distaste for novels; while there were 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

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[104] William I. Fletcher, "Public Libraries in Manufacturing Communities," in *Public Libraries in the United States of America: Their History, Condition and Management*. Special Report, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1876), p. 420; F.B. Perkins, "How to Make Town Libraries Successful," in *Public Libraries in the United States of America: Their History, Condition and Management*. Special Report, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1876), p. 420-423
[105] Clark, *Uprooting Otherness*, p. 27

massive education—and reeducation—of its people.[106] 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 what was approved.[107] 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.[108] Purges were also dependent on the type of library in which a book was held. 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. The large mass libraries in Moscow and Petrograd would often retain books deemed inappropriate for the masses for research purposes, however, and there, access would be regulated through closed stacks and the catalogue, as we have seen.

In both the United States and the Soviet Union, the idea of the best books was underpinned 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, borne 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,[109] 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—contrasted with the

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[106] Megill, "Marxism," p. 1361; Lenin, "Political Education Workers"
[107] Baumanis and Rogers, "Soviet Classification," p. 182

[108] Baumanis and Rogers, "Soviet Classification," p. 174, 177, 180
[109] Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993) PAGE

top level classes in the BBK, which were first and foremost *Philosophy, Dialectical materialism and Historical materialism*, *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 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' hierarchies because they were representative of the intellectual milieu of the time 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, they had no need of recreating the system of decimal classification Dewey had already created, whether they used it in the form of the UDC or DDC. 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 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. 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 was primarily concerned with improving the technical aspects of librarianship, with creating standards and bolstering library infrastructure and facilities,

rather than expanding the intellectual components of librarianship.[110] This was partly due to Dewey's systematizing nature and partly to an existing infrastructure in college librarianship wherein faculty were responsible for choosing or defining the bibliography of their different areas for their libraries.[111] 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.[112] In Dewey's view, the librarian's role was to master the technical areas of librarianship rather than the intellectual ones, 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.[113]

The definition of the best reading was also mediated outside librarianship in the Soviet Union. Like many humanities fields, librarianship was reconceived from a technical standpoint in the Soviet era,[114] so the intellectual efforts of librarianship were centered on building the centralized technical infrastructure that was largely nonexistent when the Soviets came into power. Furthermore, what was best was a creature of politics and its prevailing 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.

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[110] Wiegand, *Irrepressible Reformer*, p. 94-95

[111] Wayne A. Wiegand, "The Development of Librarianship in the United States," *Libraries and Culture*, vol. 24, no. 1 (1989) , p. 101

[112] Francis Miksa, "The Columbia School of Library Economy, 1887-1888," *Libraries and Culture*, vol. 23, no. 3 (1988), p. 255-257, 260-261; Wiegand, *Irrepressible Reformer*, p. 88-89

[113] Wiegand, "Development of Librarianship," p. 203; Miksa, "Columbia School," p.262-263

[114] Boris Volodin, "History of Librarianship, Library History or Information History: A View From Russia," *The Library Quarterly*, vol. 70, no. 4 (2000)

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

The public library's role as a support for the public school system was conceived of as natural and went more or less unquestioned by both mid nineteenth century American and twentieth century Soviet librarians and educators. It was taken for granted in the American case that students could enrich and flesh out their 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.[115] 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 much greater and more practical proportions.[116] There were a great many illiterate men and women in Russia and only 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, where teachers were themselves frequently poorly trained teenagers, and rural students, especially rural adults, were no always

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[115] Wood, *Radicalism*, p. 341
[116] Eklof, "Public Libraries for Rural Audiences," p. 17

willing to learn the way the party would have liked.[117] 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 nevertheless accessing books by 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 approaches the classification with a different idea of what a particular term it used might mean, the controlled nature of the classification ensures that all those people connect the term they use to the term used by the classification if they wish to find a book in the library. Take, for example, a hypothetical religious Jew who wants to find 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. Setting aside the improbability of a religious Jew walking into a Soviet library to consult a copy of the bible in 1938, it is clear that that while his Tanakh, the DDC's Old

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[117] Clark, *Uprooting Otherness*, p. 118, 122, 140-146

Testament and the BBK's reference work are all referring 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 this Jewish man 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 web of 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*,[118] a classification that would require a significant mental readjustment on the part of any Mormon who wished to find 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 their ethnic, religious or sociocultural makeup, it forces everyone to approach it on its own terms. However any one person defines a concept, he must correlate that concept to the way it is used in the classification when seeking a work of the same subject.

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[118] Comaromi, *Eighteen Editions*, p.49

A final similarity between American and Soviet public libraries was their attitudes towards and the classification's support of standardization. It is probably fair to say that American librarians were less concerned about standardization as a body than Dewey himself, but once again, because Dewey also took on the role of inventing the American library professional, the profession has been defined largely in his terms. As we have seen, Dewey's primary motivation for creating what would become the DDC was a system that would streamline cataloguing as well as shelving for the librarian. 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 remember that the success of the DDC was not inevitable; both before and after it was published, it was one of several competing classification schemes among which librarians could choose as the standard for their libraries, the best known of these being Charles Cutter's Expansive Classification.[119] The DDC quickly became the favored choice with the effect 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 the Soviet Union, of course, 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

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[119] Comaromi, *Eighteen Editions*, p. 117

much easier to implement across the entire system, as it required training librarians in one standard only as well as easing ideological edits to the tables.[120]

Thus we can see that in terms of goals and aspirations, the DDC and BBK were in fact 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, both classifications were, at least at the time of their creation, supporting 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" is the same as calling it an "arsenal of socialism:" in both contexts, the

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[120] Thomas J. Whitby, "Evolution and Evaluation of a Soviet Classification," *The Library Quarterly* 26(2), (1956), p. 123

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.

It is important to remember that for the majority of the history of public libraries—public in the sense of tax-supported—the public library held a monopoly on providing reliable, publicly available information. Not only was the access mechanism in the form of the card catalogue and DDC classification more or less standardized, but for people with an information need, there was little choice but to consult the public library because other resources simply were not available. Hence elites *could* assign this kind of role to libraries; they knew that once opened, the public or mass library would almost certainly be the only source of books freely available to the average immigrant or peasant. Whether this person sought leisure or educational reading, he would have to get it from the library, and if he could afford his own books, would have more immediate access to a greater variety of material at the library: the public library, for most people and for most of its history, represented the universe of knowledge, and the classification scheme the best way to make sense of it. The difficulty is that the universe of knowledge is no longer contained by the library; it has sprung outwards into the ether, and that is where the challenge of the public library lies.

V. Philip Marlowe's Smartphone

I have argued that the DDC and BBK provided the ontological link between libraries with different holdings and people of different attitudes because they forced all comers to navigate the body of knowledge in the same way. Those who agreed with the hierarchies as the classifications presented them likely saw no reason to consider the classification at all; those who disagreed with the hierarchies were disagreeing with the majority view, the broadest conception of society there was at that time. Whether the library classifications excited disagreement or confirmed individuals' perceptions of how the world was organized, they did so on the same terms. But while classifications bolstered the public library's unifying role in this manner for many years, they do so no longer. This is due to a pair of interlocking forces, one philosophical and the other technological: the advent of postmodernism and the Internet.

POSTMODERNITY

I have argued that Melvil Dewey did not question the order of Harris' hierarchies when he adopted Harris' classification for his own because that hierarchy corresponded to Dewey's own idea of how the world worked. More broadly, however, the idea that there could be a single, logical and correct classification for the natural world was both accepted and sought after in the modern world. A product of the French Enlightenment, modernity was predicated on the idea that there was a single knowable truth behind the natural world and a series of laws with which the natural world was in conformity—that the world was rational and discoverable through science. While it was possible for there

to be conflicting interpretations of which postulated knowable truth was correct (witness the conflict between Marxism and Western democracy: both claimed to have broad explanatory power across time, but in a modern world, only one could actually fill that role), it was assumed that there was some totalizing narrative with the power to explain it all.[121] It is no coincidence that many of the great library classifications—the DDC, the Library of Congress Classification, the Universal Decimal Classification—were conceived of and created in the modern world, for it was a time when the impulse to classify and bring order to natural chaos was strong, especially in the natural sciences.[122] A universal classification like the DDC was the product of modernity; while Dewey would probably have sacrificed complete epistemological correctness for efficiency of cataloguing, it was easy for him to conceive of both a most efficient and most correct way to order knowledge, and for library users to engage with his classification as a logical way of organizing the knowledge universe.

The social and political upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s began to fracture intellectuals' loyalty towards totalizing narratives; the feminist, civil rights, student and labor movements made it clear that the narrative as it was written was alienating significant sectors of the population; at the same time, Communism was spreading instead of collapsing, eroding the explanatory claims of the single narrative.[123] Postmodernism was the result of this disillusionment. Perverse and often baffling, as a

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[121] Michael Russell Olsson, "Postmodernism," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, ed. Lisa M. Given (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc, 2008), p. 656.
[122] Francis Miksa, *The DDC, the Universe of Knowledge and the Postmodern Library* (Albany: Forest Press, 1998) , p. 33-35
[123] Olsson, "Postmodernism," p. 657

movement and an intellectual stance, it can be broadly defined as "incredulity towards metanarratives,"[124] and is distinguished by its overwhelming antipathy to the idea of objective knowledge and a single, most rational way of knowing. The postmodernists, exemplified by the writings of Donna Haraway, rightly criticize the modern reliance on science and rationality, contending that all people are situated in their times and that it is therefore misleading to call a man-made system 'objective' simply because it was arrived at through science; science is as situated as any other discipline, as the eugenics movement of the early twentieth century confirms.[125] As one writer puts it,

> In postmodern thought, there is no final arbiter. There is no universal reality against which truth claims may be verified. Any imagined reality is transient, unstable, and mutates over time. While any version of reality may gather local adherents and culturally-affiliated subscribers, with respect to one another these realities are incommensurable, or more optimistically, contestable within pluralistic public discourse.[126]

In practice, postmodernism is about questioning what we take for granted intellectually, about breaking down unifying "modern" myths that come from nowhere and interrogating them from acknowledged and often localized perspectives. Hence one might critically examine the DDC as a Jewish lesbian, a Muslim feminist, and more importantly, have the ability to do so in a way that was not simply sectarian carping but as part of a legitimate, if contentious, intellectual movement. Postmodernism also encourages the creation of alternatives to metanarratives.

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[124] Jean-François Lyotard, quoted in Terry Cook, "Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives," *Archivaria* 51 (1995), 22-23
[125] Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspectives," *Feminist Studies*, vol. no. (1988)
[126] Hugh T. Miller, "Postmodernism," *Encyclopedia of Governance*, vol. 2 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Reference, 2007), p. 731

Clearly, a postmodern world is not one which is conducive to broadly normative or unifying narratives or ontologies like the DDC; a viewpoint that encourages not only questioning but also creating alternatives has the effect of fracturing broader social cohesion rather than supporting it. Similarly, if the most socially pertinent role of authority is for it to be questioned, it is questionable what purpose authority has at all. Instead of a central public discourse from which minority views deviate, postmodernism facilitates a series of separate minority discourses that may or may not communicate with one another. Modernity, such as it was, promoted unity and cohesion at the societal level to the detriment of individuals or communities who did not fit the normalized narrative; postmodernity promotes a society of splinter cells with no normalizing narrative at all. The standardized library classification will not and cannot provide the kind of subtle cohesive social force in a postmodern society that it was wont to do in modern society, from which follows the question of how the library is to remain socially relevant, given that its central unifying mechanism is no longer relevant itself.

THE INTERNET

This question is compounded by the rise of the Internet as the primary tool for casual and even scholarly information seeking. The library was conceived of and built around the idea of preserving humanity's published cultural heritage, the sum of its accepted knowledge, what Charles Osburn after Kenneth Boulding has called our social transcript, for the purpose of consultation by contemporary scholars and information

seekers and preservation for future generations.[127] This model has worked because for the majority of recorded history (human or library) because our social transcript, as it were, has been defined mostly by published works, with publication taking on a gatekeeper function, a basic evaluation of potential for cultural relevance that has separated the basement manuscript from the bestseller. That which remains unpublished remains outside the realm of the social transcript: if Led Zeppelin had never been more than a garage band playing in Jimmy Page's basement, had never made or sold a record, the band would not be part of our cultural landscape today.

The Internet has changed all that, rendering much of what is culturally significant in intangible bits. Rather than passing through the rite of publication to gain entry to the land of possible cultural relevance, individuals with a modicum of Internet knowledge and a connection can digitally publish as much of and anything they like, bypassing the mediation of the unknown publisher. Today, Jimmy Page could make a MySpace page and upload Led Zeppelin's output, and if enough people listened to, liked and shared their music, they could easily become part of the bigger cultural conversation for a month or a year or ten, even if the band refused to sign with a label on principle. The social transcript is increasingly dictated online, is increasingly fleeting and ephemeral, and above all, is not what libraries are designed to collect and preserve.

This is not to suggest that culture has only become fleeting with the creation of the Internet and the World Wide Web; there have always been similarly ephemeral sources of information and culture. Robert Darnton, for example, discusses the role of

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[127]Osburn, *The Social Transcript*, p. 134

weekly gossip sheets, improvised songs about current events and pamphlets in the 18th century French information economy.[128] The difference is that while at that time, the library was still the only real source of reliable general or specialized information for any kind of research or fact-checking purposes, now, that general information source is the Internet. Libraries can no longer trade on being the only reliable source of publicly available information because they are neither more convenient nor more up to date than sites like Wikipedia or the Huffington Post, updated daily or even hourly. Imagine, for example, a contemporary rendering of the scene in *The Big Sleep* in which detective Philip Marlowe stops in at his local library to look up a handful of facts on rare books with which to test the clerk at Geiger's bookstore. Today's Marlowe would undoubtedly google the facts in question on his smart phone, leaving the public library's door undarkened—and, if upon meeting the charming clerk in the bookstore across the street, Marlowe had a genuine desire to read up on the world of rare books, he would almost certainly seek that information from Google as well, maybe even on his smartphone in the cab home.

Convenience is not the only factor in our reliance on the Internet to facilitate both fact-finding ("Where was Jimmy Page born?) and information-seeking ("What kinds of musical influences did Led Zeppelin draw upon in the making of their early albums?"); the affordances of the Internet are also far more in tune with our general intellectual and philosophical context than the affordances of the library. The Internet allows the searcher

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[128] Robert Darnton, "An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth Century Paris," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 105, no. 1 (2000)

to bypass the metanarrative in the form of the classification to search for information on his own terms and sort out himself what is relevant and what is not; it is networked and localized, it is transient and infinitely malleable as pages and websites are created and abandoned. Personal computers and the Internet have been linked to the postmodern mindset by Sherry Turkle, who has argued that in contrast to centralized and highly controlled mainframe computing with its single brain, complex mechanics and access limited to dumb terminals, personal computers are individual, personalized and programmable, and able to be tinkered with and altered depending upon the needs or desires of the individual. The Internet is equally important because it allows people to create decentralized identities across multiple online platforms, thus freeing them from having to maintain a single socially acceptable personality.[129]

Regardless of any particular person's familiarity with postmodernism as a term or an intellectual movement, its social influence has been pervasive and in many ways, our culture today is defined by its rejection of the meta, the centralized, the industrial. We eat local and shop local, reject agribusiness for organic foods, national brands for the handcrafted and unique. The entire hipster subculture is based on the rejection of the mainstream in favor of music, eateries, and clothing of which one's peers are unaware. Political parties are increasingly collections of polarizing interests and increasingly unable to come to any kind of bipartisan consensus. This kind of society, our own, no longer needs or desires the single unifying social narrative that modernity and the public

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[129] Olsson, "Postmodernism," p. 656; Douglas Kellner, "Postmodernism," *Encyclopedia of the Social and Cultural Foundations of Education*, ed. Eugene F. Provenzo, Jr., vol. 2 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 2009), p. 607

library upheld; even if it did, the DDC, firmly rooted in its late nineteenth century WASP values in spite of its edits, is not the knowledge organization scheme to provide that narrative. Nor can the library fall back on its former functional monopoly as the only source of reliable general information, as that role has been largely usurped by the Internet. All this means that libraries must find other margins on which to compete. What, then, is the role of the public library in the twenty-first century?

VI. Reimagining Relevance for Library Classification

In spite of being a modern institution conceived in and for a modern world, neither the public library nor the public library classification is irretrievably irrelevant. Libraries have existed almost along as there have been written documents to collect, and it is unlikely that they will disappear while we continue to produce those documents. Our social transcript, however diverse and outward bound, is still our culture and we will still feel the impulse and the desire to preserve it. The public library—as a publicly accessible collection of information resources, not necessarily as a brick and mortar location—is going nowhere, and indeed, public libraries have consciously shifted their priorities and public offerings in response to the changing society around them.

First, there has been a definite shift in the role of libraries in individual communities from serving primarily as a repository of print and multimedia material where people come, consult and then depart again to a sort of community center where people can come and meet, study, and otherwise engage with others as well as engaging with the library's information resources. Newly-built libraries often make a conscious effort to provide an increased amount of space for small groups to meet, and there is also a renewed emphasis on providing free classes for the public, especially on topics of computer and Internet literacy. This focus on teaching the Internet can be seen as an continuation of public libraries' traditional role in supporting public education: where public libraries were once expected to bolster students' reading skills and teach them how to navigate the world of print to find the best resources, they now focus on basic computer literacy, including how to set up and use an email account, how to create a

resume, and how to apply for a job online, skills which are equally important today as reading was in the mid-nineteenth century.

Through these kinds of offerings, libraries serve to unify at the local community level rather than at the national level. They are also encouraging people gathering together in a face to face environment, leaving behind their former reputation as places strictly for research and silence; libraries now may be quieter than the bustling outside, but they are hardly ever silent. In a time when we are more likely sit, atomized, in front of our personalized computer screens, this is hardly to be scoffed at.

But if public libraries are adapting to new ways of existing, what of the classifications through which readers find their books? If, as I have argued, the classification is the unifying factor across public libraries in a world where public libraries no longer serve to unify the national public, what greater or broader relevance does the library classification have today? While library classifications may not have the same national ontological relevance they once did, the level to which the DDC is embedded in library practice and instantiated in shelf orders means that it is highly unlikely it will ever be scrapped entirely, regardless of its inappropriateness as a knowledge organization system for today's society. To use the example of the DDC's 200 class, *Religion*, even now, some hundred and thirty years after its composition, 7 of the 10 divisions in the 200 class are still reserved exclusively for various aspects of the Christian faith—and this in the classification used in some 95% of American public and

school libraries.[130] Some of its tables have fared better; the 000 class has been expanded to contain computer science, for example, and unassigned sections remain in all divisions to leave room for further unanticipated expansions of knowledge. This is one of the few major revisions to the top level hierarchy; although many edits have been made at the lower levels of the classification, more often in terminology than in order, edits to the top three levels have been to a certain extent off limits due to an emphatic commitment by Dewey himself upon publication of the second edition of the DDC that the order of the main classes would not change. His pledge was intended to ensure that the classification was not drastically changed on the publication of every edition, thus necessitating the reclassification of vast numbers of books, and for the most part, the editors of the DDC have held true to his word.[131] This has had the effect, however, of miring the DDC ever more firmly in its specific and parochial world view, which becomes less relevant to contemporary society every year that passes.

It is worthwhile to question why, if the DDC is so outdated, a greater public clamour for its removal has not been heard. The reason is that although the failings of the DDC are the bread and butter of certain scions of the academy, the public at large is less informed, largely due to the changes in library practice since the DDC was first created. The number corresponding to the book's position in the classification, the number indicated its class, division, section and so on, has for many users virtually ceased to be anything but a call number, a simple way to locate books on classed shelves because we

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[130] Straight Dope, "What's So Great About the Dewey Decimal Classification?"
[131] Comaromi and Satija, *History and Current Use*, p. 8

are no longer exposed to the top-level hierarchies the way we used to be. Browsing for a book in the days of the card catalogue meant browsing through the Relative Index whose terms were drawn from the classification itself, in which case one was exposed to the classification's terminology and see also relationships, or wandering the shelves, which, for a topical search, required at least a basic familiarity with the classification as it was applied on the shelves in order to find the correct shelf. Now this browsing generally takes place through the online public access catalogue, or OPAC, which typically consists of a Google-style single search box, with a link to an advanced search interface if the user wishes to try it. Although the library catalogue is most profitably searched by using the Library of Congress subject headings, a controlled vocabulary which has supplanted the Relative Index as the source of subject terminology and which is used across libraries and archives to catalogue works by subject, users generally see the search box and use a keyword search, as we have been conditioned to do by Google and other search engines. Unfortunately, search techniques that work in Google, a means of searching across a universe of full-text documents, maps, music, videos, and pictures, do not translate to the OPAC, a universe of bibliographic surrogates for resources that must be found in the catalogue and then physically retrieved. The OPAC and Google are two fundamentally different entities, and although the search techniques that work in the one environment will not bring optimal results in the other, they are generally searched in the same way.

The inadequacies of the DDC for today's society and of the OPAC for search and retrieval the way we typically envision it suggest that there are two levels at which we

might alter the information access mechanisms for the public library: we could work with the classification itself, or with the catalogue as instantiated in the OPAC.

BLOWING UP THE DDC

As above, the shortcomings of the DDC are by no means unknown to knowledge organization scholars, and multiple suggestions have been proposed in the literature as partial solutions to the problem of postmodern knowledge organization. Arguing along the lines of Donna Haraway, Jens-Erik Mai 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.[132] Although this would certainly be a step in the right direction, it does not seem as though simply recognizing the minds behind the hierarchies would have much effect on their appropriateness or inappropriateness for today's society, although it would provide an address to which patrons might send their angry letters, whether paper or electronic—assuming the patron cared, or knew where to find the information, or even knew to look. Mai's suggestion is one that would probably make more sense for and have more of an impact on professional librarians, people in the field for whom the names and affiliations of the DDC editors would have meaning.

A better solution is hinted at in Feinberg's extensions of Hjørland's work on domain analysis;[133] Feinberg, asserting that Hjørland's domains, while encompassing many different points of view within them, still seem to be based upon discoverability by the classificationist, has argued for the creation of multiple domains, each of an

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[132] Jens-Erik Mai, "Classification in a Social World: Bias and Trust," *Journal of Documentation*, vol. 66, no. 5 (2010)

[133] Birger Hjørland, "Toward a New Horizon in Information Science: Domain Analysis," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, vol. 46 (1995)

acknowledged perspective, for any given subject area.[134] Although it is difficult to imagine this solution being feasible as proposed, it does suggest a way to make the DDC more appropriate for the different kinds of communities it serves: local adaptations. These kinds of provisions are routinely adopted in foreign translations of the DDC, when it makes no sense for a Turkish edition, for example, to dedicate the 200 class to Christianity.[135] Although there are options for such local adaptations that accompany the DDC, they are not always extensive or flexible enough to make the classification speak properly to local needs, resulting in improvisation at the local level that, while it does not always preserve the ideal level of vocabulary control or accuracy, does result in a classification that is better adapted to Turkish, Indian or Arab Muslim needs.[136]

This kind of sensitivity to diversity could be fruitfully applied to the DDC in American public libraries. A public library in the Hasidic Jewish neighborhood of Borough Park and the overwhelmingly Hispanic city of El Paso serve very different constituencies, and for the DDC to reflect those differences in its tables dealing with religion, art and literature could be nothing if not helpful to those communities. Just as libraries tailor their collections to their constituencies, a certain amount of flexibility to similarly tailor the DDC could only benefit library patrons. More localized instances of the DDC tailored to individual communities would probably also make the DDC easier to use and navigate when browsing shelves. Some public libraries, responding to criticism of the DDC being out date and its call numbers not indicative of subject matter, have abandoned the DDC altogether, moving to a bookstore-style arrangement with books

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[134] Melanie Feinberg, "Hidden Bias to Responsible Bias: An Approach to Information Systems Based on Haraway's Situated Knowledges," *Information Research* vol. 12, no. 4 (2007)

[135] Mahvash K. Momeni, "Adaptations of the DDC in the Middle East," University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science Occasional Papers, no. 170 (1985), p. 28

[136] Momeni, "DDC in the Middle East," p. 29, 32

arranged by topic (for example, Gardening, Food, or American History—labels are usually based on BISAC, the Book Industry Standards and Communication classification used in publishing) and demarcated by large signs.[137]

This kind of arrangement, while very friendly to browsing, is often frustrating to the person seeking a particular book; some libraries will retain the Dewey numbers within categories to mitigate this problem, while others simply label the books with a category signifier and shelf number and show patrons a color-coded map to identify a book's location if it is found through the OPAC.[138] Librarians whose systems have chosen to move to a bookstore-style arrangement argue that the strings of numbers making up the DDC's call numbers are confusing and that most of their patrons are browsing to begin with; opponents respond that the DDC could be made more accessible by using its terminology in signage rather than rearranging the entire library, and that it is a mistake to assume patrons cannot understand the DDC or that the library needs to be dumbed down for its users.

Localized adaptations of the DDC would detract from its utility as a de facto standard; that being said, it seems that it would be preferable to allow more flexibility in arranging the DDC around a community than to end up with a nation full of libraries arranged like bookstores. The locus of the library, what sets it apart from private and commercial book collections, is bibliographic control: its collections are catalogued to allow their discovery in the catalogue, and arranged on the shelf in a way that highlights

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[137] Yvonne Wingett, "Gilbert Library to be First to Drop Dewey Decimal," *The Arizona Republic*, May 30, 2007, accessed July 22, 2012, at
http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/local/articles/0530nodewey0530.html; Andy Ambrosius, "Libraries Rethinking the Dewey Decimal System," *Sussex County Patch*, January 12, 2012, accessed July 14, 2012 at http://sussex.patch.com/articles/libraries-ditching-or-doctoring-the-dewey-decimal-system?dispatches
[138] Robert McCoppin, "Who's Killing the Dewey Decimal System?," *The Chicago Tribune*, February 18, 2011, accessed July 22, 2012 at http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2011-02-18/news/ct-met-drop-dewey-20110218_1_dewey-decimal-system-main-library-newer-books

the subject relationships between different works. It is ironic that Dewey's classification, originally envisioned as a time-saving measure for librarians and an exercise in bringing business-style efficiency to the library, is in some instances being replaced by the discovery model used in businesses selling books for profit. It is true that to locate a known item in the library requires several steps: it must be located in the OPAC, the desired edition selected and the call number written down, and only then can the patron finally head to the shelf and take the book in his hands to the circulation desk—but libraries take time. It is not necessarily a failure.

Regardless, the obvious drawback to adopting local adaptations as a general strategy to make the DDC more hospitable to different communities is that it will disrupt the classification's utility as a standard, and would also disrupt the widely-entrenched system of copy-cataloguing that allows libraries to take catalogue entries from WorldCat and upload them to their own databases, rather than assigning DDC numbers to every book it acquires by hand. I would argue, however, that in an age of competing and interlocking metadata systems, it should not be an impossible task for a library to create a set of call number crosswalks between DDC numbers and the call numbers they assign in a modified DDC instance once such an instance was more or less settled. Ultimately, the success of this kind of strategy would depend on the willingness of individual libraries or library systems to adopt it, and while it would probably only be adopted in library systems serving communities whose demographic characteristics were drastically different than the kind of community envisioned by the DDC, those are also the communities who could benefit most from a localized adaptation.

The strategy that would go furthest to creating a knowledge organization scheme that would be meaningful and appropriate to contemporary society is also the strategy least likely to be pursued: abandoning the DDC altogether in favor of a new classification

designed to speak to our current societal priorities. A reorganized DDC optimized for the way we view the world today would go a long way toward making the DDC relevant again; it would give us a new starting point, a way of building in enhanced capabilities for local adaptations, and above all, would create a classification that the library community could use because-of rather than in-spite-of.

But although this is the ideal outcome to the unsuitability of the DDC to contemporary society, it is also by far the least practical in terms of implementation. First, there are obvious philosophical challenges with a project designed to classify the world when the intellectual climate is hostile to such projects. A related issue comes from the circumstances that would surround this classification's creation: it would be the work of a committee, probably a very large committee optimized for diversity, and it would take years. It could not be the product of a Melvil Dewey scribbling in his room, or even of a sacred conclave, the cardinals of librarianship locked in a room, isolated, until some consensus was reached; a new national classification would be messy, almost certainly plagued by outreach efforts, perhaps paralyzed by the requirement of sensitivity to every demographic niche. Indeed, the difficulties that would inevitably surround this kind of effort suggest that the preferred route might be the creation of a skeleton classification and a set of modules or extensions that might be moved in and out of the scheme depending on the demographics of a particular area, thus officially sanctioning the ability of libraries to optimize the classification for their own constituencies and allowing the Library of Congress to avoid the trials of making a system that could not make everyone happy.

More practically, the DDC is highly embedded in library practice, at least as embedded as the infamous QWERTY keyboard in computing. While starting over from scratch would almost certainly produce a superior classification, the cost of libraries in

switching from one system to the other would be enormous. The cost for libraries to move from the DDC to a bookstore-style arrangement has been quoted as between $10,000 and $25,000,[139] a change that as most typically implemented requires physically reshelving books and adding labels corresponding to their BISAC labels—in other words, the library is not being recatalogued, only reorganized.[140] The costs associated with recataloguing an entire library, let alone a library system, would be astronomical. Given that American public libraries are not required to use the DDC—hence their ability to scrap the system in favor of a bookstore arrangement—it is difficult to imagine the average public library choosing to inflict a classification changeover on their staff and budgets.

In spite of the benefits that could come from overhauling the DDC, the costs associated with such a move—whether in terms of the intellectual and philosophical challenge of creating an updated classification or the difficulty of actually reclassifying an entire library or library system to conform to a new scheme—are, ultimately, prohibitive. But if the overall objective is to improve retrieval, a better classification is not the only option; an alternative method would be to work through the more hospitable environment of the OPAC, through which the majority of patrons who are actively searching for a book on a particular topic or a particular title will find resources.

BLOWING UP THE OPAC

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[139] McCoppin, "Killing the Dewey Decimal System"; Ambrosius, "Rethinking the Dewey Decimal System"
[140] Barbara Fister, "The Dewey Dilemma," *Library Journal*, vol. 134, no. 17 (2009), accessed July 22, 2012 at http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6698264.html

I would like to note at the outset that while the failures of the OPAC are many and varied, many of those issues are technical and related to failures in the software itself (see, for example, part two of Karen Schneider's blog series on "Why OPACs Suck"[141]), issues that fall outside the scope of this paper. What I am more concerned with here are ways to make the OPAC easier to navigate and understand conceptually, at a level of abstraction above problems like poor relevance ranking and spell check features.

One modification that can and has been made to some OPAC software is a link between specific titles or subjects searched for and the Dewey category that work can be found in. For example, searching "Tanakh" as a keyword in the Austin Public Library's online catalogue brings up a typical page of search results, beginning with *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*. A box in the upper right hand corner notes that "You found titles in categories: *The Bible*" and then suggests, "Try these too: *Bible. O.T.*", or Old Testament. Clicking on the link for *Bible. O.T.* brings the searcher to a set of 745 results scattered across adult and juvenile fiction (*Sarai: A Novel*, *Heroes and Villains of the Bible*), non-fiction (*The Bible Now*, *The Torah Revolution: How Fourteen Truths Changed the World*) and film (*The Ten Commandments*), as well as a new suggestion box with subjects ranging from *Asia* to *Judaism* to *Practical theology*. Clicking on the link for *Judaism* brings the searcher to the set of results—a highly manageable set of nine—catalogued under both *Bible. O.T.* and *Judaism*. This box facilitates browsing by subject across the OPAC in a way that is both more visible and more intuitive than clicking on

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141 Karen G. Schneider, "How OPACs Suck, Part 2: The Checklist of Shame," ALA Tech Source blog, April 2, 2006, accessed April 23, 2012 at http://www.alatechsource.org/blog/2006/04/how-opacs-suck-part-2-the-checklist-of-shame.html

hyperlinked LCSH terms appearing on separate items' catalogue records. A similar instantiation at the level of the individual record might suggest the searcher examining the catalogue record for Harold Kushner's *To Life!* in the OPAC browse in the section of the library classified at 296, *Judaism*. This kind of functionality would also serve to link the individual item record to a category of resources in the classification in a way that emphasizes the item's membership in a particular class of books.

A more radical reimagining of the OPAC comes from a fourteen year old model of the bibliographic relationships between works. The FRBR (Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records) model, first proposed in 1998 by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, is a way of conceptualizing the relationships, not between different subjects (this is covered in the most recent report from the FRBR model, the Functional Requirements for Subject Authority Data, or FRSAD), but between the work and its various instantiations. The model consists of four entities sometimes referred to as the WEMI constellation: the work, the basic intellectual unit of composition; the expression, the realization of the work, (in print, film, music, etc); the manifestation, the physical realization of the work; and the item, the individual copy of a manifestation.[142] To use a concrete example, Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* is the work, its original French text and Woody Allen's English translation are expressions, the Penguin edition of the Allen translation is a manifestation, and my personal copy of the Allen Penguin edition is the item. Applying this model in the catalogue setting adds a

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[142] IFLA Study Group on the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records, *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records: Final Report*, UBCIM Publications (2009), accessed June 29, 2012 at http://www.ifla.org/files/cataloguing/frbr/frbr_2008.pdf

second level of hierarchy; in addition to the classed hierarchy, which is largely invisible, there is a hierarchy of work to expression to manifestation to item which helps users to find the particular type of item they are searching for.[143] Searching one regular catalogue for *Les Misérables*, for example, produces 147 separate results ranging from electronic resources to English translations of the original French work to films to critical works. The same catalogue FRBRized might return a single work, *Les Misérables*, and two related works, the film *Les Misérables* and the musical soundtrack *Les Misérables*, plus the various critical versions; the work *Les Misérables* would then have perhaps a dozen expressions listed under it for the various translations, a single translation would have two or three editions, and under each edition would be listed the individual items held by the library in question. What a FRBRized catalogue enables is not only more precise searching, as it clearly disambiguates between different versions of the same work, making it far easier for a person to find a specific edition, but also a way to recapitalize on the tight bibliographic control that libraries maintain over their holdings.

To use a second example related to *Les Misérables*, imagine that in searching for *Les Misérables*, a person wishes to find a copy of the 1998 English language film starring Liam Neeson, but as he scrolls through the list of related works, finds that there is also a six hour French language miniseries starring Gerard Depardieu and a 1958 French language film version starring Jean Gabin, among many other film adaptations, both of which are more congenial to his purist love of the original novel. A FRBRized OPAC

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[143] Marie-Louise Ayres, "Case Studies in Implementing Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records [FRBR]: AustLit and Music Australia," *ALJ: The Australian Library Journal*, 54(1) (2005)

supports this kind of searching in a way that a standard OPAC does not, and it facilitates browsing across related works in a way that is not unlike clicking through links from article to article in Wikipedia.

Implementations of the FRBR model have become more and more prevalent in the last several years; while the most complete and ground-up implementation is probably the AustLit Gateway, developed by the National Library of Australia in conjunction with eight Australian universities to highlight the publication histories and author contexts of Australian literature.[144] FRBR has spread to the extent that not later than January 2013, the three American national libraries (the Library of Congress, the National Library of Medicine and the National Agriculture Library) will be finally abandoning the second edition of the Anglo American Cataloguing Rules, first implemented in 1981, in favor of the new cataloguing standard Resource Access and Description or RDA. RDA is a set of cataloguing rules that was developed with the stated intent to support FRBRized resource discovery in the OPAC, as well as to accurately describe the web-based and multi-format resources that libraries are increasingly likely to hold.[145] While the national libraries' adoption of FRBR is the most institutionalized US adaption to date, many individual libraries have been working to FRBRize their own catalogues independently, whether it be through a faceted search capacity that displays the number of records matching a

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[144] Kerry Kilner, "The AustLit Gateway and Scholarly Bibliography: A Specialist Implementation of the FRBR," *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly*, 39(3/4) (2005)

[145] "RDA (Resource Description and Access) and School Libraries: Where are We Going and Why Can't We Keep AACR2?" Ohio Private Academic Libraries, accessed June 29, 2012 at http://www.opal-libraries.org/resources/cataloging/CAT_Technicalities_29_2_RDA_handout.pdf

keyword in print, film, music, and so on in a sidebar display, or through software billed as being itself FRBR compliant.[146]

It should also be noted that while FRBRized catalogues have the potential to revolutionize the user's search and retrieval experience, the revolution is most applicable in the case of a known item search. Whether users would derive the same utility from the WEMI constellation in the case of a keyword search based on subject is unclear; nor is it clear whether the FRBR subject authority model is such a great departure from subject authority files as they are currently conceptualized. The FRSAD model envisions a two part model for subject authority data, made up of a thema, the subject of a work, and the nomen, the alphabetico-numerical or character string by which a thema is known. A single thema may have many nomens, just as a single work may have many subjects, but a nomen, which is here substituting for the controlled vocabulary term itself, can apply to only one thema.[147] Although the thema-nomen model was originally envisioned as a model of a controlled vocabulary, Mitchell, Zeng and Zumer have also demonstrated its applicability to describe library classifications, where the class heading serves as the thema and its "notational surrogates" as the nomen.[148] It is unclear to the author, however, whether a catalogue that was optimized for the FRSAD model as well as the

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[146] David Mimno, Gregory Crane and Alison Jones, "Hierarchical Catalog Records: Implementing a FRBR Catalog," *DLib Magazine* 11(10) (2005)

[147] IFLA Working Group on the Functional Requirements for Subject Authority Data, *Functional Requirements for Subject Authority Data (FRSAD): A Conceptual Model* (2010), accessed June 28, 2012 at http://www.ifla.org/files/classification-and-indexing/functional-requirements-for-subject-authority-data/frsad-final-report.pdf

[148] Joan S. Mitchell, Marcia Lei Zeng and Maja Žumer, "Extending Models for Controlled Vocabularies to Classification Systems: Modeling DDC with FRSAD," in *Classification and Ontology: Formal Approaches and Access to Knowledge: Proceedings of the International UDC Seminar, 19-20 September, 2011, The Hague, Netherlands*, ed. Aida Slavic and Edgardo Civallero (Wurzburg: Edgon Verlag, 2011), p. 4

FRBR and FRNAD model would actually offer any significant innovation outside pulling together the WEMI constellation in a known item search. It may be that the model remains to be truly exercised and stretched in implementation; the final report on FRSAD having only been issued in 2010, little serious work towards implementation seems to have been done thus far, with the exception of some theorized applications published by the report's original authors.[149]

SUMMATION

I have posed two sets of solutions to the irrelevance of modern library classifications to postmodern life, a first set based on the overhaul of library classification itself, and a second based on changes to the OPAC, which represents the usual typical access point to a library's holdings, with both solutions imagined in terms of the DDC. While it would be theoretically preferable to redo the entire classification, either to reimagine its hierarchies in a way that corresponds to contemporary visions of society or to create a classification more hospitable to local adaptations, practically, it is difficult to imagine this kind of solution being implemented. Conversely, while changes to the OPAC to highlight its subject- or work-based relationships do not address the failings of the classification to describe the world we live in, they have the advantage of being relatively easy to implement and also of drawing attention to the value libraries add to their holdings as opposed to a bookstore: the dense and complex net of bibliographic control, which enables multiple entry points into a catalogue depending on one's needs.

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[149] Mitchell, Zeng and Žumer, "Modeling DDC with FRSAD"

VII. The Future of Library Classification

This paper has examined 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 have shown 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 the DDC and the BBK 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. Both classifications were also created just as new eras were beginning: in the United States, the DDC was first published in 1876 when the Civil War was ten years gone and Reconstruction was coming to an end, giving a different and relatively non-partisan way to view the world in general and America in particular, a perspective that was not dependent on one's political beliefs. In the Soviet Union, the BBK was meant to aid people's understanding of the priorities of Marxism-Leninism and how it viewed rival political systems; it was created as part of the ideological web spun by the Soviet leadership to ensure that people thought what they were supposed to think.

Such a role was possible for these classifications because they were conceived of and created in a modern world, where the idea of a single and knowable truth was both acceptable and a worthy goal to pursue. 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 the sake of questioning. The advent of postmodernism, with its emphasis on questioning monolithic myths, systems or 'truths,' has changed that attitude, and the advent of the Internet, search filters and personalized information has removed the library's former 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, it is highly unlikely that library classifications can continue to fill the important social role they filled heretofore. The public library as it was originally conceived was optimized for the role it played in the modern world; the library that is emerging will be optimized for the role it has yet to settle into in our postmodern one, a role that is localized and contextual rather than overarching and grandiose.

It therefore stands to reason that the classification, too, will play a different part in contemporary practice. It will not disappear, but its societal relevance will dissipate, taking a backseat to the OPAC, which, like the Internet, is never seen in its entirety but only through the returned search results that are different every time a search is run. Indeed, returned search results, filtered according to our search histories and personal tastes, may be the closest we can come to an optimal postmodern classification, a classification that speaks to how we define terms as individuals and finally abandons the fig leaf of objectivity to stand as the unadorned product of our own world view, or at least, the product of our world view as its discovery is enabled by the skills of remote and anonymous software engineers. A single standardized classification for public libraries

may be the optimal outcome in terms of library practice, but in terms of contemporary social practice, it is far from desirable. While leaving the DDC and its editors at the Library of Congress for the programmers at Google, Yahoo, and other search engines may only be the exchange of one set of gods' eyes for another, they are the gods of our time, and one way or another, we are bound to honor them.

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