Summary

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What we attempt here is in no sense a formal summary of content. We seek rather, in the tradition of the previous Allerton Park Institutes, to catch and record, through a series of informal observations and impressions, the sense and feel of the Institute as it developed at the hands of the hundred or more participants who, for three days, paused to reflect upon the role of classification in the present-day library and to exchange with one another their thoughts on this topic of mutual and (for the moment, at least) intensive concern.

From the inception of planning for this Institute, it was obvious that it would be a study in contrasts, both within itself and in comparison with the earlier Institutes. The very wide net which we spread with our first announcement made such contrasts all but inevitable. In that opening announcement, you will recall, the invitation to attend was extended to all librarians who had an interest in classification—whether classifiers, administrators, or staff members from other departments, whether college, university, public, or school librarians, whether working in a very large or a very small library. This, then, was our first contrast (in comparison with earlier Institutes)—a very wide spread in sizes of libraries and types of library work represented. A junior high school librarian sat next to several librarians from the Library of Congress; ranged about them were small town and city public librarians, college and university librarians, other school librarians, and even a special librarian or two. This factor, in turn, produced a second (and related) contrast with earlier Institutes— a decrease in the amount of public, or audience, discussion and participation—a decrease which we may hope was compensated for in some degree by an increase in the more private corridor conferences, table talk, and coffee chats.

As for what was said, thought, expressed at the Institute, here again one must record the feeling of a study in contrasts. There is no need to recapitulate here in vertical summary the contents of the papers, ranging in time from Aristotle to Shera and Taube and in topic from the theory to the practice of classification, with side glances and digressions in time and topic along the way. Here it may be more appropriate to look horizontally at the papers, to mark the contrasts, to hint at the recurrent themes, to give a quote or two from papers and discussion, and to add a word or two about the rather considerable

number of problems whose ghosts were raised, rather than laid, during the past three days.

Our first series of contrasts was born of the persons themselves who are involved in classification, either directly or indirectly. On the library side of the picture, there was the skepticism of the administrator over the costs and values of classification arrayed against the enthusiasm of the professional classifier who saw classification as the necessary, inescapable, and invaluable adjunct of the library operation. On the user side of the picture, the adequacies of classification for the non-specialist were contrasted with the adequacies (and shortcomings) of classification for the specialist. As if this weren't enough, librarian and user were met in contrast, when a sharp dichotomy emerged between what was termed the vertical approach of the librarian versus the horizontal approach of the subject specialist to the whole matter of classification. Even in the matter of word-usage that contrast between librarian and subject specialist came to light; you will recall that when our mathematician looked at what librarians call "series," he saw them more properly as "sequences" ! And for librarian and user alike, it was averred that the need and nature of classification in a closed shelf system could differ considerably from that in an open shelf system, especially as related to the use of a classed catalogue, a dictionary catalogue or a reader interest arrangement.

The theory of classification, too, as presented and discussed in this Institute, presented a series of contrasts. We heard of Gessner's "necessary" versus "embellishing" courses; we heard of Bacon's "divine" versus "human" knowledge. The schemes themselves were a series (or should it be a sequence?) of contrasts; there were the "practical" versus the "philosophical" schemes, variously expressed as the "practical" versus the "logical," or the "practical" versus the "systematic"; there were (in the applied sense) the "special" or "relative" or "special purpose" schemes versus the "universal" schemes. This matter of breadth versus specificity, or simplicity versus complexity, of schemes attracted a good deal of attention, especcially in relation to costs (the administrator speaking), up-to-dateness versus obsolescence (the subject specialist speaking), size and type of library wherein they were used, purposes of use, and backgrounds (and indeed happiness!) of users.

When our speakers and our registrants looked at the purpose and role of classification and its effects, several further contrasts were thrown sharply into focus. Is classification in the modern library a subject approach—or is it simply a shelving device? Is it a "systematizing of knowledge" or is it a "promotion of reading"? Does it, after all, succeed only in "bringing together unrelated materials" and "tearing asunder related materials"?

And, before we leave this matter of contrasts, we should note a few oddments wherein the element of contrast was evident. One speaker noted the penchant of librarians—and most people, for that matter—to regard the present pinnacle of *now* as "civilized" in contrast to all

that has gone before as "primitive." Recurrently noted was the "sophistication" versus the "simplicity" of machine approaches to knowledge, along with the relative slowness versus speed which is inherent in each. And lastly there was of course the matter of John versus Melvil Dui!

It is perhaps an inevitable consequence that, in the course of a protracted examination of a specific topic such as the one before us for the last three days, many topics are hinted at, or suggested, without being fully developed. Let us attend to these for a moment. Perhaps the most persistently recurring suggestion, in one form or another, was that any classification scheme, whether broad or close, has what one might call built-in weaknesses. More than once it was hinted that, under present-day conditions, a single, universal, comprehensive, non-overlapping classification scheme, whether broad or close, to cover a universe of content and a universe of user, is no longer realizable. Along with this (and as a result of it) the emergence of a multiplicity of special classification schemes for special purposes, along with the development of sections of existing schemes for special purposes, was noted. More than once, too, it was hinted that detailed, elaborate, close classification was costly and confusing, inadequate for any user, and likely to be short-lived. Keep the classification broad, someone suggested, and let the catalogue, via its multiple subject headings, do the job of close classification. Another put it this way: The larger the class, the longer its life; the more specific the class, the more limited its use and users and the shorter its life. Whether broad or close, in another's words, classification schemes are currently inadequate to reveal "pockets of knowledge" to those users who want all material on a subject, from the major group straight down through the minor subgroups; their net effect is to splinter, rather than to solidify, the library's holdings on a subject; the user is equally dissatisfied, or at least unsatisfied, whether he approaches the subject from a general number (which rules out the splintered subjects) or from a splintered number (which rules out other splinters and the general number as well).

There were other suggestions, too: that a classification scheme in the very large library tends to be (perhaps unavoidably) uneven, with some badly overcrowded numbers hard by others that are unfilled; that, for the closed shelf collection whose key is the classed catalog, a shelf notation would be quite adequate; that a library does not *make* classes, it *discovers* and *identifies* them; and, finally, that classification schemes should be much more truly the joint product of librarian and subject specialist.

Any gathering of a hundred or more librarians is likely to produce a fair share of assorted definitions, quotes, quotes within quotes, and general miscellany. In this, we were no exception. In fact, at times we all but went out of our way to prove the old Latin adage: *Tot homines, quot sententiae*—as many folks as you have in a room, so many the opinions you can expect. First off, everybody had something to say

about classification, of course. One faculty member was quoted to this effect: "Classification exists to locate a book quickly and with as little fuss as possible." One of our speakers observed seamily: "The reader doesn't mind classification if it doesn't get in his way." The same speaker voiced the futility of the classification enterprise in these words: "Classification, like the value of the mathematical π is never perfect, no matter how far extended." Another speaker reminded us of a foreign librarian's description of one of the leading classification schemes of our day: "A primitive gap notation of integers." Yet another pronounced a malediction on present-day classification: "Classification in the 20th century is utilitarianism at its lowest level; L.C. and D. C. are an address book for the library staff." The subject specialist had some harsh words about the process of assigning a classification number to a series as a whole: "This is a library gimmick . . .an evasion of proper classification and merely a classification by color and binding of book." We heard Dewey alluded to as "not something we must endure, but something which has enduring qualities"; we heard also the words of the weary faculty member, "Well, Dewey may be enduring, but he certainly needs pruning and streamlining." We even heard a touch of poetry in the words of a visiting Indian librarian, describing the reader interest grouping of the Detroit Public Library: "The arrangement itself communes with life." But we were jarred back to reality with the following definition of a book: "A book is the physical embodiment of what the author thought he said."

I referred earlier to the ghosts we raised. Let me return to them for a moment as we recall some of the unresolved problems we carry with us from this Institute. What is the true value of classification: is it greater for the specialist or the non-specialist; is it, in fact, great at all for the user; or is it a kind of outmoded toy of the librarian, to take its place beside other "library gimmicks"? Is a broad or a close classification to be preferred, or are there sets of circumstances in the face of which one is at times preferable over the other? Is there a point at which, in the length of notation symbols, the law of diminishing returns sets in? Is an "unbearably long" notation a revelation as to the degree of obsolescence of the scheme? Does simplicity in notation really mean ease in handling, flexibility, adaptability; is it less expensive; is it preferable because more easily understood and more useful and satisfying to the specialist? Is a classification scheme in the present-day library a help or a hindrance to library use? What will by the place of classifcation in the library of tomorrow? When will the machines take over?

This, then, was the Institute. To me, a non-classifier, but a person deeply interested in classification, it has been an exciting and interesting experience—and so, we hope, it has to everyone who came. We have prodded, poked, pricked, and perhaps at time provoked each other for these three days. We have heard, among other things, a mathematician "grumbling out loud" about a classification scheme; we have heard a Texan talking on Dewey's durability; we have heard a self-

styled sacrificial goat blandly reassure us in the midst of his mechanistic machinations that "classification is here to stay." And, by the way, while you're worrying about Shera's machine of tomorrow, keep your eye on today—and, when the machine comes, in the now-classic words of our Tennessean, "Don't forget to punch for turnip greens!"