

The Cataloguing Code of Ethics 2021: conception, community and continuation

Jane Daniels AND Diane Rasmussen Pennington

Cataloguing has existed for millennia but until January 2021 there was no formal code of ethics for this branch of the information profession. But what is the Code? Who created it and why? How was it produced? Is the Code immutable and what relevance does it have in day-to-day cataloguing work now? Can institutional experiences of encountering and resolving ethical dilemmas in creating, sharing, enriching and maintaining metadata be shared for mutual benefit? This article, based on a presentation delivered by the authors as part of the *ARLIS UK Cataloguing and Classification Ethics* series delivered online between April and June 2022,¹ provides examples of how the ten ethical statements of principles can be used to inform cataloguing in art libraries.

The *Cataloguing Code of Ethics*² published in January 2021 marked the end of a two-year collaborative project spearheaded by a joint USA, Canadian and UK steering committee but informed by the collective wisdom of cataloguers working across the globe. It has been produced by the community for the community; and is particularly relevant in the context of ongoing discourse regarding decolonisation and the requirement for diversity, equity and inclusivity to be reflected in both metadata and within the workforce that creates it.

Conception

A detailed history of the Codes' conception and creation has recently been published by the Cataloguing Ethics Steering Committee (CESC) members³ but it is important to highlight the influence of radical, later renamed critical, librarianship in this context. This early 21st century movement, with its' emphasis on critiquing culture and society and actively challenging power structures, provided an opportunity for cataloguers to examine their own practice. An offshoot, critical cataloguing, emerged and is still a vibrant and guiding force for cataloguers as can be evidenced by *Critcatenate*⁴, a regular free-to-access online listing of resources and events created and maintained by Violet Fox.

Library associations have created professional codes of conduct, which include ethical responsibilities, for librarians and information professionals. However, the work of Hope Olson (2002)⁵ Sheila Bair (2005)⁶ and Elizabeth Shoemaker (2017)⁷ caused cataloguers to question the ability of the generic statements contained in these professional codes to provide the requisite guidance for the specific and special ethical responsibilities of cataloguers. i.e. the task of describing, indexing and organising resources to facilitate search, discovery and access.

Cataloguing has always been influenced by each wave of conquest and colonisation that has broken across the shores of the globe. The dominance of the conquering civilisations and their prevailing World view have impacted on how people, countries and cultures have been described and resources about them organised. This has inevitably created bias in cataloguing standards and raised societal barriers to participation in cataloguing by marginalised communities.

At two seminal events, initiated by the Cataloging and Metadata Management (CaMMS) special interest group of the American Library Association in 2017⁸ and 2018⁹ the need and desire for a separate code was identified and a mandate was received to create one. In 2018 a request from the CILIP Cataloguing and Indexing

1. ARLIS UK Cataloguing and Classification Cataloguing Ethics series https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mv0WRyeFwxg&list=PLkiDR50VJ_2aV3eYUFvGGx52VZn716y5

2. Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee (2021) *Cataloguing Code of Ethics*, https://docs.google.com/document/d/1IBz7nXQPfr3U1P6Xiar9cLakzoNX_P9fq7eHvzfSIZ0/edit (Accessed 16/01/2023)

3. May Chan, Jane Daniels, Sarah Furger, Diane Rasmussen, Elizabeth Shoemaker & Karen Snow (2022) *The Development and Future of the Cataloguing Code of Ethics*, *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, DOI: 10.1080/01639374.2022.2134247

To access the preprint of this article <https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/82579/>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ALA_Code_of_Ethics

4. Violet Fox. Critcatenate: #critcat in December 2022 [Web page] Available at: <https://cataloginglab.org/2023/01/03/critcatenate-critcat-in-december-2022/> (Accessed 16/01/2023)

5. Hope Olson. (2002) *The Power to Name: Locating the Limits of Subject Representation in Libraries*. Springer, 9789048160846.

6. Sheila Bair. "Toward a Code of Ethics for Cataloging," *Technical Services Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (2005): 13-26.

Group (now Metadata and Discovery Group) to be part of the task force was accepted. This prompted an invitation to the Canadian Federation of Library Associations / Fédération Canadienne des associations de bibliothèques (CFLA-FCAB) to join the initiative. Discussions continued around what the code should include but opinions were also sought on what format the document should take and how it should be created. It became evident that transparency and inclusivity were to be central pillars of the project.

To manage the anticipated large-scale community participation a joint USA/UK/Canadian Cataloguing Ethics Steering Committee was formed consisting of six members bringing their own experience as educators or practitioners, often both, to bear on the project.

A community endeavour

The Code had to accurately reflect the ethical values and concerns that had surfaced at the CaMMS forums and which was already prevalent in the published literature. It was essential to tap into the collective wisdom and varied experiences of the cataloguing community of practice so that there was a sense of ownership and a willingness to engage with the Code and apply it in day-to-day practice. This would pave the way for endorsement by the professional library organisations who had initially signalled their support for the creation of the document

An open invitation was issued by the Steering Committee in April 2019 for volunteers to participate in six focused working groups looking specifically at the ethical issues pertaining to: authority work; classification; subject headings and controlled vocabularies; access scope and infrastructure, the issues and pressures affecting decision-making by both cataloguers and their managers; staffing and working conditions, including access to relevant training and CPD; and finally, resource discovery and accessibility, considering the range of resources requiring cataloguing and the need for data interoperability.

Between July and December 2019, the working groups, comprising seventy-four members drawn from a range of library sectors and residing predominantly in the USA, UK and Canada, but also including colleagues from Australia, Israel and Mexico, collaborated online. Their reports, all accessible via the CESC website, formed the basis of the first draft Code produced by the Steering Committee.

Eventually, following the creation of a second draft and after two open consultations during 2020, the *Cataloguing Code of Ethics* was published in January 2021 and the work of publicising the resource and seeking endorsement by the USA and UK professional bodies began.

The Code structure and content

The Code is an intentionally short document because the community wanted a practical tool.

Part 1 provides an introduction which includes an important scope note *'To create systemic change, cataloguers require institutional support. We accept that every workplace is different, and responses to ethical situations are necessarily framed by those local contexts.'* This clarification is important. It reassures cataloguers that whilst there are ten Statements of Ethical Principles, contained in part 2 of the document, there is no compulsion to use these as a checklist. Cataloguers should apply them with reference to their organisations' *raison d'être*.

The Statements are *'... a framework for approaching cataloguing work that will be a useful tool for practitioners, employers, standards' developers, vendors, students, and educators when ethical situations arise.'* Metadata is not created in a vacuum nor is it the exclusive preserve of libraries. However, all the agencies involved in the metadata ecosystem can use the Statements as an ethical lens for reviewing their policy, practice and service provision.

Originally the Steering Committee anticipated adding case studies to the document. These would be contributed by the community of practice and be short summaries of the ethical dilemmas encountered in day-to-day cataloguing practice and the strategies used to resolve them. Recognising that contributors might need to update their case studies to reflect changing policies and practices the decision was taken to make the case study bank a separate resource available

7. Elizabeth Shoemaker. "No One Can Whistle a Symphony: Seeking a Catalogers' Code of Ethics," *Knowledge Organization* 42, no. 5 (2015): 353-57.

8. Billie Cotterman. (2017) *CaMMS Forum: Power That Is Moral: Creating a Cataloging Code of Ethics* [Web page] Available at: <https://alcts.ala.org/news/2017/ac-camms-forum/> (Accessed 16/01/2023)

9. Carol Robenstine Miller. (2018) *CaMMS Forum: Cooperatively Conscientious Cataloging* [Web page] Available at: <https://alcts.ala.org/news/2018/mw-camms-forum/> (Accessed 16/01/2023)

via the CESC website.¹⁰ An open call for case studies exists and they can be contributed at any time.¹¹

However, the first step in the practical application of the Code is reading the Statements of Ethical Principles and considering how they can be used to inform cataloguing policy and practice in your organisation.

The following section seeks to demonstrate the relevance of the Statements when applied to the art and design library sector and is based on the authors' experience of cataloguing and classifying art resources.

The Ethical Statements applied in art libraries

We catalogue resources in our collections with the end-user in mind to facilitate access and promote discovery.

Art, design and the creative industries are rich in primary resources such as art works, artists' books, exhibition catalogues and zines. Contextual information about how and why resources have been created, or exhibitions curated, will be invaluable for the end-user. Arguably it is as important as the intellectual content, but enriching records to include contextual information is expensive.

But there are opportunities to collaborate regionally, nationally or internationally on the creation, enrichment and maintenance of metadata for art and design resources. A good example being the *Zine Libraries* initiative.¹²

We commit to describing resources without discrimination whilst respecting the privacy and preferences of their associated agents.

The recent creation of a UK NACO funnel¹³ (Name Authority Cooperative program) provides an opportunity to fill the gaps in provision of name authority records for artists, designers and creatives, especially those from underrepresented groups. But cataloguers must do so with sensitivity and defer to the agents' preferences regarding what information is recorded about them. This is particularly important with regard to people's gender identity. A problem aired is a problem shared and a solution devised. In 2022 the Program of Co-operative Cataloguing DEI Advisory Group and Task Group announced that gender will no longer be recorded in NACO records.¹⁴

We acknowledge that we bring our biases to the workplace; therefore, we strive to overcome personal, institutional, and societal prejudices in our work.

This is a key tenet of the Code. Acknowledging and confronting bias is essential. We are all the product of our environment. It can be difficult to recognise and challenge bias especially when your lived experience does not match that of the communities for whom you are cataloguing. Setting aside the message that resources seek to convey how do we ensure that groups, and their chosen media for promoting their views, are catalogued to ensure discoverability? Nic Caldwell's blog post¹⁵ on critically cataloguing Black Arts Movement materials provides some insights regarding these complex issues.

We recognise that interoperability and consistent application of standards help our users find and access materials. However, all standards are biased; we will approach them critically and advocate to make cataloguing more inclusive.

In January 2022 the ARLIS NA Cataloging Advisory Committee launched a form¹⁶ to propose changes to problematic art Library of Congress Subject Headings. E.g., Fetishism, Primitive art. Perhaps there is an opportunity for UK art libraries to review and propose changes to existing headings, and fill gaps in provision, as a collaborative initiative.

We support efforts to make standards and tools financially, intellectually, and technologically accessible to all cataloguers, and developed with evidence-based research and stakeholder input.

There is an RDA 3R project¹⁷ by DACH (Austria, Germany and German-speaking Switzerland) to review RDA and produce guidance for cataloguers. Expert groups

10. Cataloguing Ethics Steering Committee website [Web page] Available at: <https://sites.google.com/view/cataloging-ethics/home?pli=1> (Accessed 16/01/2023)

11. Cataloguing Ethics Steering Committee *Case studies* [Web page] Available at: <https://sites.google.com/view/cataloging-ethics/home/case-studies> (Accessed 16/01/2023)

12. zinelibraries.info [Web page] Available at: <https://www.zinelibraries.info/running-a-zine-library/zine-cataloging/> (Accessed 16/01/2023)

13. Martin Kelleher. (2022) *Launch of the UK NACO funnel : the start of something wonderful* [Online video] <https://youtu.be/3rZRhOxsmEE> (Accessed 29/12/2022)

14. Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC) (2022) [Twitter] 16 April. Available at: https://twitter.com/PCC_Chair/status/1514966981300137998 (Accessed 29/12/2022)

15. Nic Caldwell. (2022) *Critically Cataloging Black Arts Movement Material* [Weblog] Catablog ARLIS/NA Cataloging Section. 21st January. Available at: <https://catablogweb.wordpress.com/2022/01/21/critically-cataloging-black-arts-movement-material-by-nic-caldwell/> (Accessed 29/12/2022)

16. sehamerman. (2022) *CAC launches form to propose changes to problematic art subject headings*. 20th January. [Weblog] Catablog ARLIS/NA Cataloging Section. Available at: <https://catablogweb.wordpress.com/2022/01/20/cac-launches-form-to-propose-changes-to-problematic-art-subject-headings/> (Accessed 29/12/2022)

17. B. Behrens, B. Pfeifer. (2021) *RDA in DACH – Where are we and where do we want to go?* [PDF] Available at: http://www.rda-rsc.org/sites/all/files/DACH_3R_Behrens_Pfeifer.pdf (Accessed 29/12/2022)

on special resources have been established e.g., Art books (including artists' books.) The project ended in Dec 2022 but the possibility of reviewing and adopting the resulting guidance, subject to agreement and translation, presents obvious mutual benefits for art libraries in Europe and beyond.

We take responsibility for our cataloguing decisions and advocate for transparency in our institutional practices and policies.

There are practical reasons why institutions cannot act immediately to apply reparative and remedial cataloguing in response to decolonisation and DEI initiatives. However, making cataloguing policies publicly visible on catalogue landing pages, or linking to them via collection management and development policies, as the University of Trinity St David's¹⁸ and the Huntingdon¹⁹ have done provides an opportunity to signal intentions and publicise work-in-progress.

We collaborate widely to support the creation, distribution, maintenance, and enrichment of metadata in various environments and jurisdictions.

The existence of the ARLIS UK community provides a powerful spring board to collective action as does contributing holdings to aggregated data services for mutual benefit e.g., Jisc Hub services.²⁰ Contributed metadata can be used to boost collections exposure; shared, subject to licence agreements, for copy cataloguing; and used for collection assessments and development. Cataloguers now have more opportunities than ever to share their expertise and advocate for the metadata that they create to be compiled to FAIR principles;²¹ and licenced for equitable distribution and use with statements such as that produced by the International Coalition of Library Consortia in 2022²² providing a powerful rallying call.

Art libraries can also harness the power of linked open data using both Wikipedia, Wikimedia and Wikidata^{23,24} to expose and make connections between their collections.

We insist on diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace. We promote education, training, equitable pay, and a fair work environment for everyone who catalogues so that they can continue to support search and discovery.

It is essential for our workforce to be representative and reflective of our diverse Society and by extension our user groups. There is legislation in the UK that protects workers from discrimination.²⁵ But some institutions, such as the Tate, have gone much further and publicised their strategies in support of DEI.²⁶ As a community of practice we can review, analyse, challenge and initiate change. Perhaps promoting the CILIP endorsed Code provides a useful starting point for instigating discussions with managers and employers.

We advocate for the value of cataloguing work within our organisations and with external partners.

A full appreciation of the day-to-day work of cataloguers and metadata managers and in particular their role in providing enhanced search, discovery and access experiences for users, can be rare. However, there are networks such as the ARLIS UK Cataloguing and Classification Committee²⁷ that advocate for the fundamental importance and purpose of cataloguing; creates CPD opportunities; and offer avenues for showcasing work.

Outside of the organisation it is important to cultivate existing, or forge new, commercial relationships with the companies or publishers that sell or licence systems, content, or services e.g., records, record enhancement or digitisation. What can be done better, and together, for the benefit of users?

We work with our user communities to understand their needs in order to provide relevant and timely services.

As mentioned previously the fields of art and design are rich in primary resources. These can be difficult to catalogue due to the variety of formats and media used in their creation. Artists' books are a prime example of resources that often defy conventional description. It can be difficult to interpret the artists'

18. University of Wales, Trinity Saint David. *Collection Development Policy. Cataloguing Code of Ethics* [Web page]

Available at: <https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/help-and-support/support-for-staff/collection-development-policy/cataloguing-code-of-ethics/> (Accessed 29/12/2022)

19. The Huntingdon Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens. *Statement on harmful content in the collection and its description* [Web page] Available at: https://researchguides.huntington.org/usingthelibrary/content_statement (Accessed 29/12/2022)

20. Jisc Library Hub Discovery [Online catalogue] Available at: <https://discover.libraryhub.jisc.ac.uk/> (Accessed 29/12/2022)

Jisc Library Hub Cataloguing [Online database] Available at: <https://cataloguing.libraryhub.jisc.ac.uk/> (Accessed 29/12/2022)

Jisc Library Hub Compare [Online database] Available at: <https://compare.libraryhub.jisc.ac.uk/> (Accessed 29/12/2022)

Jisc Archives Hub. [Online catalogue] Available at: <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/> (Accessed 29/12/2022)

21. Go FAIR. FAIR Principles [PDF] Available at: https://www.go-fair.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/FAIRPrinciples_overview.pdf Accessed 16/01/2023)

22. ICOLC (2022) Statement on the Metadata Rights of Libraries [PDF] Available at: https://icolc.net/system/files/ICOLC%20Statement%20on%20the%20Metadata%20Rights%20of%20Libraries_0.pdf (Accessed 16/01/2023)

23. National Library of Wales (2020) *An Introduction to Wikidata* [Online video] Available at: https://youtu.be/m_9_23jXPoE (Accessed: 29/12/2022)

24. Will Kent. (2020) *Wikidata at the Art Institute of Chicago* [Weblog] Available at: <https://wikiedu.org/blog/2020/02/13/wikidata-at-the-art-institute-of-chicago/> (Accessed: 24/04/2022)

25. HM Government. *Discrimination: your rights* [Web page] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/discrimination-your-rights> (Accessed 16/01/2023)

26. The Tate (2022) *Diversity and inclusion* [Web page] Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/working-at-tate/diversity-inclusion> (Accessed 16/01/2023)

intentions in creating the 'book.' Throughout 2021-2022 the Scandinavian Artists' Books Partnership Project,²⁸ created a collaboration of artists and librarians to engender greater understanding and awareness of the genre. An opportunity to pool the knowledge of both creators, curators and cataloguers for the ultimate benefit of the intended audiences.

What next for the Code?

Since January 2021 the Steering Committee has continued publicising and advocating for the Code to be adopted and incorporated into cataloguing practice. This task has been made much easier by the endorsement of the Code by ALA in November 2021²⁹, and CILIP in March 2022.³⁰ In Canada there is an on-going regional consultation which ends in December 2023. With endorsement by all three professional bodies the CESC intend presenting the Code to IFLA with a request that the document be used to facilitate discussions regarding the creation of a truly international cataloguing code of ethics.

In the meantime, the Code has already been translated into Greek and Arabic, and there is also the possibility of a Portuguese translation for the benefit of the Lusophone community. The Cataloguing special interest groups in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa have followed the Codes' journey with interest and reached out to CESC to learn more about it. The Steering Committee continue to promote the Code and advocate for its use across sectoral boundaries.

Conclusion

When the Steering Committee presented the Code to the community of practice it was with the full acknowledgement that it was a first, but not the last, attempt to articulate the specific ethical responsibilities of cataloguers and metadata managers. The Code acknowledges that cataloguing practice is continually evolving in response to societal, cultural and technological change and that cataloguers must ensure that our standards and tools reflect these changes. The Code can facilitate discussions across local, regional, national and international stakeholder communities in pursuit of these aims. It also urges us to be equally cognisant of the need to diversify, train and develop our workforce so that the response that we make is timely and informed by the lived experience of our diverse user groups. The net result being diversity, equity and inclusivity in theory and practice.

Jane Daniels

*Formerly Bibliographic Librarian,
Cardiff Metropolitan University
Email: catmetcymru@gmail.com*

Diane Rasmussen Pennington

*Professor of Social Informatics
Edinburgh Napier University
10 Colinton Road
Edinburgh EH10 5DT
UK
Email: d.pennington@napier.ac.uk*

27. ARLIS UK & Ireland Cataloguing & Classification Committee [Web page] Available at: <https://arlis.net/committees-groups/cataloguing-classification-committee/> (Accessed 16/01/2023)

28. Scandinavian Artists' Books Partnership Project [Web page] Available at: <http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/sabpp/> (Accessed: 30/12/2022)

29. Jenny Levine. (2021) *Core endorses the Cataloguing Code of Ethics*. [Web page] Available at: <https://alacorenews.org/2021/11/10/core-endorses-the-cataloguing-code-of-ethics/> (Accessed: 30/12/2022)

30. Jane Daniels (2022) *Cataloguing ethics code backed by CILIP* [Web page] Available at: <https://www.cilip.org.uk/news/609394/Cataloguing-ethics-code-backed-by-CILIP.htm> (Accessed: 30/12/2022)