

editor's note

As I compile the articles for this issue, I'm noticing something that is striking now but that would have probably gone unnoticed just a couple months ago. I'm writing this note in late April, but when I first planned this issue months ago, the world was a very different place. Our institutions have largely been shuttered and many of us have been asked to work remotely. I won't attempt to pontificate on the details of the impact of COVID-19 on our profession, because we are all living through it, and we all already know it too well.

What I noticed about the articles contained in this issue is that most frame the library or archive as a physical entity. They focus on a collection – how to navigate around it, how it is used, what it contains. They focus on the conception of a library or archive that we all remember from several months ago, when the authors agreed to contribute articles for this issue, and not the space we find ourselves operating in currently. I'm certainly not trying to in anyway disparage what is contained in these articles. The authors all did an excellent job of describing aspects of art librarianship and scholarship. It is just striking to be reminded of the role physical collections play in our profession.

Obviously art librarianship is more than just using, building and maintaining a physical collection. At my library we hold dozens of times the electronic resources as we do physical resources – a collection that has proven invaluable since we have been forced to work remotely. Librarians and archivists who have been tirelessly building and maintaining digital collections should, now more than ever, be lauded for their efforts. However, in being locked away from the physical collection, I'm becoming more acutely aware of how much extra value is lost in addition to the loss of the information the collection contains.

Caroline Marchant-Wallis, in her article for this issue, describes the importance of the physicality of the Paris Commune collection at the University of Sussex: 'finding materials/collections which can support [object based learning] is always exciting, and the Paris Commune collection is one such example. With its wealth of posters, photographs and pamphlets, it encourages one to pick up, touch and feel the history within the objects.' Granted, the items at my library generally don't carry the historical weight of the Paris Commune collection, they are still objects that require a beneficial physical interaction that hasn't been adequately replicated in the digital environment.

In this issue, in addition to the article by Marchant-Wallis, you will find another exploration of an archive by Mela Dávila-Freire. In 'Reading the archive against the grain: Power relations, affective affinities and subjectivity in the documenta Archive' Freire reads the documenta archive 'against the grain', looking for the subjective biases that all archives contain. In an analysis of feminist publications, 'Mapping second wave feminist periodicals: Networks of conflict and counter-publics, 1970-1990', Bec Wonders analyzes letters to the editor to visually map feminists' conflicting opinions surrounding the 1982 Lebanese War. Cait Peterson discusses how inspiration and creativity are related to theories of information and the library in general in "'Inspiration" and how it is found: Exploring psychological and information behaviour theories'. In 'Not just a collection of old books: Making the most of donations at the Paul Mellon Centre Library', Emma Floyd describes how donations have shaped the collection and provided new avenues of outreach. Finally, Danica Jalees, a graphic designer as well as a librarian, discusses library signage and provides advice on how to improve it in 'Design thinking in the library space: Problem-solving signage like a graphic designer'. In addition to the articles this issue also contains a thorough review of the *Bloomsbury architecture library* (electronic resource) by Eleanor Gawne and Simine Waliyar.

As this issue is scheduled to come out in the middle of the summer, I certainly hope that, as you are reading this, the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic is now behind us and that we are planning to return to our collections, institutions and patrons. Ultimately, I think this difficult time will teach us much about our collections and our profession, and the *Alj* editorial team will strive to facilitate communication and exchange in that regard. I have no doubt will come out stronger for what we have endured.

Michael Wirtz
Associate Editor