Categorisations are not bad, but for what are they used for?

In 2013 we started to meet and discuss the classification and collection of books, magazines and zines at different spaces in Munich. The Kafe Marat Infoladen was one, Lothringer13_laden another, the Salong space at Munich Art Academy and also the Munich Art Academy library in some way. We, a changing group of students, artists and organisers in activist work, came together to catalogue the books collected at the Infoladen, Lothringer13_laden, and Salong space using an online service called Library thing. The idea was to explore and share the books we have, and discuss the books we want to have, as an intentional move towards gaining more specific knowledge and challenging ourselves to get organised.

During several work meetings we asked questions like, who owns the books and how do you buy or find them? Is it possible to lend them, how is the collection accessible to others? How would you describe the books in general - the categorisation, or specific focus? What would you like to develop or discuss in terms of which books are left out, and how would you like to address this? Are the books you collected a reflection of your position? Where do you get books? How can people access the books, what are your opening times? How do you understand the system? Are there labels?

The process of meeting, working and talking revealed that there were different levels of intention in how each books came to be there. Some are bought, some found, some are there on loan or borrowed. When we looked at the Art Academy library, we could see many different interests at work, from the professors to previous librarians, and how decisions and resources impacted on what is available in different places. Also the categorisation or if you can take the book out of the library impacts enormously on what you might end up reading.

We were very interested in developing the books we have in the different spaces and making these more accessible to more people, and linking our different interests together and sharing this work. We were given a grant of €1500 to support us, and so we have talked about how to spend this money and which books to buy, and where they should be and how they should be accessed. We discovered it is not easy or necessarily desirable for a group who has formed out of many different conversations, and circumstances, to formalise itself into a more organised structure. Somehow wanting to keep the loose and discreet approach whilst getting the work done has been our goal. Like the categorisation system in the library, it can be important to make transparent these different intentions, whilst remaining open to adding more categories.

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