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And They Were There

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And They Were There

Column Editors: **Julia Gelfand** (UC-Irvine)
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II FORO BINACIONAL DE BIBLIOTECA ES UN GRAN EXITO! SECOND TRANSBORDER LIBRARY FORUM IS SUCCESSFUL!

by **Rhonda L. Neugebauer**
(Latin American Area Specialist,
Arizona State University)

The Second Annual Transborder Library Forum/Foro Binacional de Bibliotecas was held in Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico, March 20-21, 1992. Nearly 50 estadounidenses, including several SALALM members, joined close to 150 Mexican library professionals for two full day of lectures, round table discussions, exhibits and receptions. The conference was hosted by the Sonoran Library Association (ASBAC) and co-organized with members from the Arizona State Library Association, the Mexican Library Association (AMBAC), the National Librarians College of Mexico, and the U.S. Mexico-Committee (ALA).

The conference format included several formal lectures by authorities in their field from both the U.S. and Mexico, group meetings by type of library, and talk table sessions co-moderated by Mexican and U.S. library professionals. The overall theme of this conference was the North American Free Trade Agreement (Tratado de Libre Comercio) between the U.S., Mexico, and Canada.

Dr. Julio Javier Cristiani, an attorney and specialist on the agreements, gave a very detailed and informative lecture on authors' rights and copyright laws, and highlighted the legal and economic ramifications of the Free Trade Agreement. **Mtra. Margarita Almada de Asoencio**, of CICH-UNAM, gave a paper focusing on the possibilities and advantages of information exchange between the U.S. and Mexico, especially specialized, technical and scientific information, due to its potential as political and scientific information, due to its potential as a political and strategic resource for a country's growth and prosperity. Other keynote speakers, **Dr. Jesus Lau Noriega** (Instituto Tecnológico de

Durango) and **Mtra. Sheila Milam** (UN-Reno), provided insightful commentary on how librarians cooperate, through their local libraries or through international organizational efforts for joint international activities.

The talk table discussions focused on topics suggested at the first Forum/Foro, held in 1991 in Arizona. There was reporting on the actions taken since last year's Forum and discussions of new projects and directions. Some of the successful recommendations of the talk tables included cooperative preservation and educational efforts focusing on the use of alkaline paper for publishing in Mexico; use of the internet and other new information technologies and their impact on libraries; international library exchanges and organizations; library education and bibliographic instruction; collection development for linguistic minorities; cooperative cataloging activities; and creative marketing techniques to increase library use and to attract community support and involvement.

Another important aspect of the conference was the strengthening of relationships between library professionals in both countries. Since the last Foro, strong friendships and solid professional working relations had been established. Many new friendships were made this year. There was also an eagerness from both sides to see how topics of interest could continue to be advanced and how to improve planning and publicity for the 1993 Foro. Working relationships and goals were outlined and ambitious plans were made to increase attendance at the 1993 El Paso conference.

The language differences posed little or no problems: for one thing, a very capable interpreter worked diligently to provide simultaneous translations during the lectures and plenary sessions. In addition, students from a nearby bilingual college provided interpretation services during the talk tables. Finally, many of the attendees came well prepared with dictionaries, newly-enlarged vocabularies, and goodwill to handle

the situation.

The young students who volunteered their time to help with the interpretation were quite impressed with the Forum. So much so, that when they finished the last talk table session on Saturday, and were told that their job was completed, they refused to leave because they "wanted to see how it all came out." One of these students became so enthusiastic that he decided to go into librarianship, to pursue a field with so many opportunities and "cultured people."

The meeting was not solely oriented toward work, since we also enjoyed an evening of folk dance and music at the Sonora Central Public Library on the first night, and a delightful banquet with splendid closing ceremonies the second night.

It is important to continue the enthusiastic support and over-whelming success of the 1992 Hermosillo Foro. So, please consider this your invitation to attend next year's III Foro Binacional/3rd Transborder Library Forum. It will be held in the Spring 1993 (date to be announced) hosted by the University of Texas at El Paso, and organized by **Bob Seal**, University Librarian (UTEP). Bob has a very tough act to follow, but lots of volunteers are ready to help. If you would like to join this team effort, please contact Bob Seal directly: UT-El Paso, El Paso, Texas, 79968-0582. Tel: (915) 747-5683. BITNET: FG00@UTEP.

THE INCREDIBLE NEW FRENCH NATIONAL LIBRARY by **Jack Kessler** (UC, Berkeley)

The Bibliotheque de France came to Berkeley several weeks ago, with grace, flair, and a Gallic panache which would have made Cyrano proud. A team of well-informed, well-spoken, enthusiastic representatives of the giant library project overcame obstacles of light, heat, language and technology to convey their message, to a three-day audience of 2-300 polite and admiring, although at times skeptical, architects, professors, and professional librarians.

The first session presented the B. de France. Session #2 presented other projects, including that of San Francisco Public Library (which has both provided and received inspiration to and from the B. de France in interesting ways). Session #3 saw some interesting thinkers consider where all this is headed, and #4 saw some famous thinkers consider what it all means. For many of us, it was our first venture beyond the large and growing but still limited world of US-dominated Internet libraries.

First, a few current numbers: the new French library,

1) will occupy a site measuring over 500 by 1200 feet, or nearly 650,000 square feet — 15 acres — of central Paris: larger than the Palais Royal, nearly the size of the Place de la Concorde,

2) will contain over 3 million square feet of floorspace, in subterranean levels and in four 250-foot towers, the latter becoming among the tallest points in Paris;

3) will house a collection of 12 million books in nearly 250 miles of stacks, employing 2000 personnel to care for them and for users;

4) will offer this collection to 4000 seated readers (the new British Library provides places for 45), and innumerable dial-in users via networks using the latest library technologies; and,

5) is under way, lest you think all this is a dream — the architect proudly showed us pictures of foundations being poured.

UC Berkeley professors and conference organizers **Howard Bloch** and **Carla Hesse** introduced the first session, comparing the underlying concept of the B. de France to moments such as antiquity's development of the papyrus roll, the 4th century's of the codex, the Middle Ages' of the chained library, or the Renaissance's of the printed book: each involved, said Bloch, "a mutation in our ways of perceiving and thus of our understanding our world."

Professor Roger Hahn of UC then introduced the first French speaker, who reinforced Bloch's emphasis on the new library as being a new concept, and not just a new building: **Helene Waysbord**, "Delegue Scientifique" to the B. de France, delivered an eloquent and ar-

ticulate keynote address. She first focused upon current events, noting that construction began March 23, and that, "the free exercise of the creative mind always is in conflict with the calendar:" she said that compromises had been made, but that now the time for realization had arrived. She described the project history, from the Miquel Report, to President Mitterand's announcement at the Bastille Day Anniversary, to the noisy but ultimately productive debates which caused many alterations in the original plan (from the historians' revolt which caused the President to drop plans to divide the collection at the year 1945, to the recent removal of the top two floors of the towers).

Waysbord then emphasized that throughout, two purposes are to be served — 1) conservation of the famous collections, and, 2) an entirely new approach to disseminating information to the public, relying largely on new electronic technologies — with neither purpose taking precedence over the other. She mentioned several of their techniques for this, but only to say that the others who had come from Paris would explain more. Her role, she thought, was more to assure the audience that this double purpose — "*conservation et diffusion*" — is uppermost in the minds of all who now are working on the project. It is their hope that their new library, furthermore, can become one of the "nerve centers" of the expanding information network which is growing around the globe. But she warned that, although their library will be open for use by 1995, the broader concept of which it is a part may never be finished, "like all the great adventures of the spirit."

Dominique Perrault — looking very much the wild-eyed creative architect, with wavy black hair, black tie and shirt, and much Gallic passion — then enthusiastically described his dreams for his monument and a functioning library service center, all the while housing and caring for an enormous and unwieldy collection of books. His idea is that this home of the "*patrimoine culturel*" of France should be symbolized by these four great towers — which others have said resemble four open books — while services for readers are provided below, in congenial reading rooms opening into a beautiful garden. Perrault is proud of his combination of wood with steel and

concrete: throughout, views will open onto wood architectural features, or onto large live trees in the garden, giving visual relief from the impressive but overpowering massive forms of the building.

Gerald Brunberg, head of library management for the project, then described how they foresee Perrault's building working, as a library. His is an unenviable task. The librarians in the audience began sharpening their knives during his talk, bringing them out a bit during his colleague **Alain Giffard's** talk the next day. One could hear them chanting under their breath, "how will they keep it warm?", "how will they keep it dry?", "how will readers find anything and how long will they wait?", and, of course, "how will they keep it quiet?"

Grunberg insists that, in keeping with Mme. Waysbord's "*conservation/diffusion*" ideal, the project management will serve, simultaneously, both the researchers whom the old BN has served so well, and their new "study" clientele, composed of the school and public users who have not been able to penetrate the BN in the past. He outlined the new subject classification system, which **Jacqueline Sanson** discussed in greater detail later. He described, with slides, the three divisions of the new library space: 1) reception — including bookshops, exhibition halls, restaurants and, "*naturellement*" he says, cafes; 2) reading rooms — public areas, including newspapers and journals and popular literature, and including a 12,000 square foot area with 300 seats just for children; 3) research rooms — providing all the old amenities of the BN, and more, for the scholarly use of the collections.

Grunberg also described preservation at the B. de France. Their acid-paper problem, he says, involves 2.6 million volumes, their emergencies-in-need-of-microfilming 500 million images, their rebinding and reconditioning problems 1 and 4 million volumes each: not a single day's work, he pointed out. Their double approach is, 1) maintenance — preservation of the existing collection, which will be handled both in ateliers at the library and in a hi-tech conservation center being constructed at Marne-la-Vallee, outside Paris, and, 2) prevention — digitization and other preservation

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techniques to be used on all new materials to be acquired. All new approaches to materials-handling, microfilming, photocopying, dust removal, and digitizing are being considered. (Information on this can be found in my PACS-L/EXLIBRIS posting of January 13, more copies of which I'll be happy to send out.) Grunbery raised the tantalizing point that the B. de France might negotiate fee-for-service site licences with online publishers.

A few questions and problems became apparent this first day. **Dorothy Gregor**, UC Berkeley's new head librarian, turned in a stellar performance as emcee-with-a-malfunctioning-mike. Every time she uttered the word "sound" — several of us wondered whether, if she said "*lumiere*," the lights would go out as well — although she herself remained cool and composed. The more general point occurred to most of us though, that the French were saying nothing about backups: if they convert their *patrimoine culture* to electronic formats, and someone or something pulls the plug, accidentally or otherwise, how will they provide against a devastating loss?

Then too, this building has begun to resemble a horse-assembled-by-a-committee. The bold concepts remain — both the library idea and the architectural idea — but it gets hard to imagine how the combination of high-minded research with democratic public access will work. French public libraries collect comic books — the famous *bandes dessine'es* — French public readers are not much more quiet or well-behaved than are their US counterparts, as any visitor to the BPI library at the Centre Pompidou can attest: the combination of these activities with those of painstaking academic research inherited from the old BN is going to be a neat trick if they can make it work. They may need reminding of Abe Lincoln's aphorism about the difficulty of pleasing all the people all the time.

Finally, as to M. Perrault's building, it is easy but simple-minded to find fault. It is easy, for example, to call it an "upside-down table," or "four-big-books-in-search-of-a-shelf" — easy to laugh; or it is easy to bemoan the wind-swept plaza which the structure will become winter, or the furnace that it will be in summer, when most US visitors

will see it. It is hard to imagine the neighborhood boulangerie in which will fit in with this giant megalith next door, as Perrault so whimsically suggests one might.

Their building is being built, however, which is more than can be said for most library dreams elsewhere. Its design also represents, to a European, a dream very difficult for Americans to understand. Urban open space is a priceless commodity in their ancient, dense cities. It has been won only at great expense, usually by urban totalitarians like Haussman, who arranged great boulevards down which cannons could be shot in case of insurrection. US cities take their great parks and wide avenues for granted. In Europe, the vast space of Perrault's design will give much-designed relief for the densely-packed quarters which border it. The point which Mme. Waysbord emphasized, though, ultimately seems to be the key: that what the French are constructing is not just a building, but also a new approach to library service, realizing dreams which many have had, both in and outside of France. ☛