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Libraries as the Spaces Between Us

Recognizing and Valuing the Third Space

James K. Elmborg

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Much has been written recently about the "library as place." This essay approaches the question of library space philosophically, arguing that developing commercial attitudes toward space leads us away from more productive ways of conceiving libraries. A concept called Third Space is introduced, and its relevance to libraries and librarianship is explored. Third Space is defined and applied to various library concepts, especially information literacy. The article contends that thinking about Third Space can help libraries and librarians develop ways of working with increasingly diverse populations in increasingly dynamic contexts.

> "Question: What is the first thing that you think of when you think of a library?
>
> Answer: a place of mild climate where I can find adventures"[1]

As Charles Osburn notes, "there has been a decided surge of interest in our professional literature about 'the library as place.'"[2] This interest reflects various trends and emphases in libraries, especially the transformative social and technological changes that have demanded increasingly innovative thinking about what a library and a librarian should be. Collections, technology, and services can no longer be conceived in traditional twentieth-century terms. Libraries, with their historical ethos of free access for all, struggle to justify their existence in a world of 24/7 access increasingly evaluated by profit-based, commercial metrics. As we think about what library space and librarians should be and become, we need to think broadly and creatively about our options. We have barely begun to develop sophisticated frameworks for thinking about the future of the library as physical space. Libraries are complex institutions, and they need to respond to the demands of the present by adapting in a variety of ways. No doubt we need to justify our existence to our various funding agencies, which will involve economic arguments, but we also need to develop theories about library space that go beyond marketing services and managing buildings. We need to think about intentionally producing unique library spaces. I believe we must be conscious and ambitious about developing guiding theories and that a critical concept called *Third Space* can help us to do so.

THE CONVERSATION IN PRACTICE

When we talk about library space, we are usually talking about buildings.

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Library buildings give form to the collections of libraries by providing appropriate space specifically designed to house and provide access to the holdings. They also provide other more "mythic" functions by intentionally symbolizing through architecture and design the values that libraries espouse. A number of converging forces have intensified recent questions of library space. Changing technologies have forced reconsideration of how buildings accommodate the new machines that provide service to modern libraries. Along with technical imperatives have come a series of human questions about the impact of new technologies on our ways of teaching, learning, and thinking. An entirely new vocabulary has emerged around learning spaces and how to conceptualize and create them. As Brown and Lippincott note, "New conceptions of the classroom are being driven by the emergence of new methods of teaching and learning, made possible by the rapid evolution and adoption of information technology."[3] We have come to think of learning as a constructive process, which has encouraged us to redesign schools and libraries to foster collaborative learning and active learning, and we are exploring digital environments as spaces we structure and design for learning, as well.[4]

Much of the energy behind these new conceptualizations has been fueled by fundamental questions of library legitimacy. The digital world is replacing libraries, this narrative argues. If we intend to remain relevant (or exist at all) we must adapt quickly to the technological challenges to library legitimacy. This adaptation demands that we compete with various entities that provide desired goods and services in our market. These entities include Google, which has claimed the information market, and also the bookstores and coffee shops that have capitalized on the market for comfortable physical space to interact with books. Space is therefore conceived as both physical and virtual, and libraries face competition in both realms. Consequently, during the past decade, much has been written about how libraries can respond to questions of space. Woven throughout the discussion we find a common anxiety about the changing nature of library space and what will happen as we continue to develop and deploy new technologies that displace or transform traditional libraries, demanding that we justify our stewardship and management of it.

In response to our challenges, we are regularly told that we need to run libraries more like businesses.[5] ALA Editions' advertisement for Hernon and Altman's *Assessing Service Quality* reflects the concerns outlined above:

> Because of technology, the old measures of service quality no longer apply. If libraries are to succeed, they must see themselves in competition with other institutions and sources of information—especially the Web—and make customers feel welcome and valued. [The authors] integrate the use of technology into the customer experience. They offer solid, practical ideas for developing a customer service plan that meets the library's customer-focused mission, vision, and goals, challenging librarians to think about customer service in new ways.[6]

Another author makes the point that "The Internet, coffee shops, restaurants and even homes are all invading the territory once exclusive to libraries. Bookstores are consciously attempting to recreate the library atmosphere, encouraging customers to linger. . . . As a result, patrons are abandoning libraries for more favorable environments. Library users are choosing plush recliners and the aroma of coffee over the squeaking of wooden tables and buzzing of fluorescent lights."[7] We should note the level of threat implied in these comments. Librarians are "challenged" to think about customer service. Other competitors are "invading" library territory. They are "consciously" imitating libraries. Patrons are "abandoning" us. Anyone following the library literature recognizes such anxious claims, which have been with us for at least the past decade.

In responding to these threats, The Denver Public Library decided to become a "destination library." To do so, they decided to implement "best ideas and practices in consumer merchandising and marketing and apply these to the library space." Behaving more like a business meant that "new multiple copies of best sellers and media would be available quickly, displayed more like the local bookstore. Comfortable seating would be available, perhaps with a cafe nearby. The goal would be a popular customer-driven collection in an appealing space that would encourage visits."[8] Journals and conferences are infused with this perspective as we focus on marketing services with campaigns like @yourlibrary. Again, this idea of treating libraries like businesses is not new. The managerial segment of the profession has been borrowing techniques from business management for years. However, the idea that we need to market library space as a product that will attract library users seems new. In pointing to this phenomenon, my goal is not to raise the question of whether libraries should behave like businesses. Rather, I want to suggest that when we do, we

create a specific kind of space. When we aim to compete with businesses, we infuse the building with advertising and the upbeat signage that "customers" know and recognize. In effect, rather than manage employees or collections or the physical plant, we are managing ambience, trying to create a place that feels familiar and good to the consumers of library services.

A large part of this effort goes into the aesthetics of library space. Demas and Sherer note that "after a generation of intense focus on building the virtual library, librarians have reawakened to the place-making role of the library building." These authors advocate what they call "esprit de space." They suggest that libraries should pursue "the timeless design goal of creating *transcendent* and *transportive* spaces: *transcendent,* in the sense of buildings that delimit physicality through imaginative understanding and application of virtues; and *transportive,* in design that uplifts the patron and enhances the unique experience of sensing past, present, and future simultaneously. It is this *transcendent/transportive* co-existence, with particular reference to its local, place-specific manifestations that distinguish a library with . . . *esprit de place,* or spirit of place."[9] Again, it is worth noting that libraries have long been concerned with the aesthetics of their buildings. *Library Journal* devotes one issue annually to photographs of the most innovative and beautiful new library buildings. Various consultants provide guidance in how to work with architects to develop buildings that both function well and also provide beauty and form that embody library values. Once again, though, we see the emerging emphasis on the feeling of library space and the importance of managing that space to attract and hold library users.

Younger users cause special anxiety, apparently, as a good deal of thinking goes into imagining aesthetically pleasing spaces for them. Kuzyk suggests that libraries need to "put the WOW back in children's rooms."[10] Farrelly suggests that we need to compete with the bookstores for the loyalty of teens, noting that "libraries need to be more appealing to teens than Borders, Starbucks, and Barnes and Noble to attract young adults. We also need to do them one better."[11] Gallo suggests that her experience working in a bookstore has provided her with strategies for using displays to attract teens. She suggests that we identify display areas creatively and use color to attract attention.[12] Bolan has been a prolific adviser to libraries about designing teen space. She asks us to consider what would happen "if teens suddenly found the library warm and inviting?"[13] She has abundant advice about how to make the library an attractive destination for teens. She suggests seeking input through a teen advisory board, noting that "it's crucial to make room for youngsters' ideas in everything from creating an advisory board to planning a design team."[14] She suggests "finding that ambiguous teen style."[15] Ultimately, Bolan declares, "we're in the midst of a teen revolution design-wise, that is."[16] Indeed, as libraries continue to market their services to young people, we see intense focus on the issues played out more generally in the library literature competition with bookstores and coffeehouses, design with the aesthetics of the customer in mind, and the general need to hold on to the library users of the future. The stakes are high.

TOWARD CRITICAL CONCEPTIONS OF SPACE

Two recent publications have approached space philosophically, and they have established a foundation for looking at libraries in the context of critical theories of space. Both these works aim explicitly at providing an alternative to the "library as business" way of looking at space. Interestingly, both these works depend on importing the interdisciplinary research on place studies into librarianship. Place studies can be understood as an effort to bring multiple critical perspectives to bear on the problem of how we use and define the spaces we share and manage. These studies are animated by awareness that when we create and occupy space, we define and develop that space (consciously or unconsciously) to embody cultural codes. Indeed, these studies share a fundamental assumption that place must be understood as the interaction between humans and natural forms. Culture creates space, and once we realize that fact, we can become more conscious and more intentional about what we create.

In "Regaining Place," Charles B. Osburn argues persuasively that "place is worthy of the most serious consideration, especially at a time when so many fundamental options present themselves for the future of the library."[17] Osburn goes on to argue that space is "endowed with powerful properties . . . only by the beholder whose awareness of the experience generates it."[18] Ultimately the images people have in their minds about space "can have much or little to do with reality, for they are partial and may be either exaggerated or understated."[19] Osburn provides a useful perspective in that he acknowledges the subjective nature of experiencing space, which moves us past thinking that space is a stable commodity and that we can control how people experience it. Following Osburn's logic,

whatever we do with library space, people who enter libraries will experience that space in their own ways, perhaps as we intend, and perhaps not.

A more critical and more guided discussion of space occurs in the book *Library as Place: History, Community, and Culture*, edited by Buschman and Leckie. In their introductory essay, the editors summarize a range of theories that provide ways of thinking about space. This survey provides a valuable, concise introduction to the current state of space theories and libraries. Ultimately after presenting a range of critical perspectives, the authors suggest that Jürgen Habermas's idea of the *public sphere* should form the central theoretical perspective for how libraries can define themselves and the space they construct. "It is Habermas," they argue, "who allows us to make normative and democratic claims about libraries as places."[20] This argument aligns with Osburn's claim that places are social, cultural, and personal constructs that we hold in our minds. In brief, Habermas argues that the rise of the middle class from the eighteenth through the nineteenth centuries involved the development of public spaces where citizens discussed and debated the issues of the day. These debates followed rules of reason and persuasion (in the best Enlightenment tradition), so the most rational argument would prevail. This public sphere formed a critical function providing checks and balances on the powers of government, and it constituted a crucial element of early democracy and a way for the middle class to establish its influence and to define and express its public will.

In summarizing Habermas, Buschman and Leckie acknowledge "crucial problems" with the bourgeois public sphere. They note that in Habermas's analysis, "the public sphere arose among a highly educated, cohesive class."[21] In his analysis of Habermas's theories of the public sphere, Douglas Kellner succinctly summarizes the most problematic critique of Habermas. He contends that "while [Habermas's] concept of the public sphere and democracy assume a liberal and populist celebration of diversity, tolerance, debate, and consensus, in actuality, the bourgeois public sphere was dominated by white, property-owning males."[22] Any consensus achieved in such a forum only legitimately reflects the opinions and interests of this narrow class. Summarizing Habermas, Buschman and Leckie suggest that the public sphere began to lose its sway when "democracy became a mass affair during the nineteenth century."[23] With this change, politics became less reasoned, and competing interests became more effective at undermining the seriousness of conversation in the public sphere. Ultimately, despite its limitations, the authors note that "what we today understand of libraries as public space with democratic undertones is deeply embedded in the historical processes Habermas identifies."[24] Our challenge today, it seems, lies in finding a new way to constitute a truly inclusive public sphere, one broadened beyond the homogeneity of the property-owning bourgeois class.

Habermas traces the decline of the public sphere to increasingly sophisticated capitalist practices that transformed critical citizens into uncritical consumers. These new capitalist practices emerged in the nineteenth century, and as a result, commercial space began to replace the intellectual space of the public sphere. Capitalism has grown increasingly more effective at defining space during the twentieth century. David Harvey argues convincingly that a new, faster form of capitalism began to emerge in 1971. Since then, this new and increasingly sophisticated capitalism has more powerfully defined cultural space. The new capitalism (sometimes called hyper-capitalism, fast-capitalism, or simply late capitalism) compresses space and place by developing increasingly sophisticated ways to collapse time and space to increase the rate of profit. This observation accounts for the fact that toward the end of the twentieth century, we began to experience "an intense phase of time-space compression." Harvey asserts that "accelerating turnover time in production entails parallel accelerations in exchange and consumption."[25] In other words, the faster we produce, the faster we need to consume to keep inventory from backing up. Profits depend on increasing speed.

Historically, space has presented a primary obstacle to this acceleration. Railroads, the telegraph, highways, steam shipping, the Suez Canal, the telephone, and ultimately the Internet, all these technologies have been deployed and perfected to "shrink" space to more rapidly move goods to market to drive commerce.[26] Ultimately, Harvey argues, capitalists learned to think of space as broken into distribution nodes connected by communication systems. The resulting fragmentation achieved "the annihilation of space through time."[27] By finding ways to shrink space to speed up commerce, we have arrived at a point where space and time are transformed. Modern communications technologies now allow us to do almost anything almost instantly from almost anywhere. This annihilation and fragmentation of space has had profound consequences for culture. In capitalist culture, we now create disposable spaces and places that can be rapidly "turned over" for profit. Property can be bought, sold, and converted to new uses once it has been fragmented. Place can

be played against place for profit.

Harvey argues that what we understand as postmodernism—the fragmentation of place and acceleration of time—results from these advanced capitalist practices. Harvey notes that one strategy for resisting postmodernism has been to "re-launch the Enlightenment project of universal human emancipation in a global space bound together through mechanisms of communication and social intervention."[28] In this response, the autonomous human exercises rationality and free will and can marshal these resources to resist the effects of postmodernism. Habermas's identification and promotion of a reconstituted public sphere in "global space" represents one such effort to "re-launch the Enlightenment project." This solution, however, misses the source of the problem of postmodernism. Postmodernism is not a theoretical invention of the academy to be resisted intellectually. The condition of postmodernism results from the very real transformations in culture wrought by increasingly sophisticated capitalism. The Enlightenment project of human emancipation has been increasingly ineffective as a means to resist the capitalist restructuring of culture (hence the transformation of the public sphere chronicled by Habermas). While we might see ourselves as autonomous and rational, the culture we live in undermines our autonomy and subverts our rationality. This new postmodern context must be understood as the defining reality of our age, and within this reality, we must work to define our spaces.

Henri Lefebvre's work, *The Production of Space,* recognizes the same historical processes outlined in Harvey's analysis. Lefebvre's work sees the transformation of space described by Harvey as a transformation in how humans interact with public space, a movement from what he calls *absolute* space to *abstract* space. In early modern societies (the time of the rise of city states in Europe), structures built by humans began to replace natural sites of cultural significance. The evolution of symbolically important natural spaces (like groves, valleys, buttes, and mountaintops) to absolute sites of meaning (like cathedrals, courthouses, and schools) involved replacing socially significant natural sites with material, constructed ones. To Lefebvre, "absolute space, religious and political in character, was a product of the bonds of consanguinity, soil and language."[29] With increasingly efficient capitalism, these absolute spaces have gradually become generic abstract spaces (like mini-marts, Wal-marts, McDonalds, and malls). Thus absolute space—symbolic and cultural, religious and political becomes commercial, devoid of all intrinsic absolute meaning, except, of course, economic meaning. This abstract space, which according to Lefebvre has evolved from absolute space, becomes "the space of the bourgeoisie and of capitalism, bound up as it is with the exchange (of goods and commodities, as of written and spoken words, etc.)."[30] As part of the rapid turnover of spaces for capitalist purposes, space has increasingly become generic and empty, hence abstract. Especially in urban environments, we live in abstract spaces that we constantly repurpose based on what realtors call "highest and best use."

With this long view of history in place, Lefebvre proposes a framework for understanding contemporary space as experienced by humans. He describes a three-part framework for space, three ways of thinking about and experiencing space. Lefebvre's three conceptual categories can be experienced at any one place at any given time. These ways of perceiving might best be understood as "perceptual registers," consciously or unconsciously activated by various stimuli. These three ways of conceiving space include the following:

Spatial Practices are the practices of the body. We experience space through senses (like smell, taste, and hearing). We feel space with our skin. Spaces in society are distributed, but we connect them with our bodies as we move through them. Certain structures (roads, paths, fences, etc.) exist to facilitate the movement of our bodies through space. At the level of spatial practice, a culture's environment accommodates its human inhabitants. We have benches where people may want to sit. We have roads where people may want to go.

Representations of space are conceived spaces. Those who manage public space develop conceptions of the uses space will have. They imagine the rules that will govern the use of space, and they create conceptual structures that will help make sense of that space. These planners—city planners, technocrats, urban engineers, and librarians—measure what is happening against what they think should be happening, and they manage toward that vision. Conceived spaces are planned rationally for certain kinds of desired effects. Lefebvre refers to highly produced space (that is, highly defined conceptual space) as *dominated* space. Rules in such spaces govern appropriate behavior. In addition to rules, we also have social structures that facilitate desired activities. Unlike rules ("thou shalt" and "thou shalt not"), these structures channel human activity and give shape to the lives of people. They do not explicitly prohibit action, though they do define normal activity.

Representational spaces involve complex symbolism. These spaces link to underground or

clandestine sides of social life and to art. This kind of space "overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects." In moving from representations of space to representational space, we move the site of interpretation from the "planners" to the "livers." Representational space is directly lived space, created in the imaginations of people in their immediate contact with the world. Representational space arises when imagination seeks to change and appropriate dominated space. Individual citizens experience the spaces of the culture, and they produce meaningful events for themselves claiming space as their own arena for enacting their values and their lives. Unlike the second category of represented space, representational space does not depend on an understanding of the codes and structures envisioned by space planners. Representational space is individual, perceptual, intuitive, and symbolic.[31]

As his title suggests, Lefebvre contends that cultures produce spaces and places, and a culture's values and priorities direct how appropriate use of space is conceived and managed. The collective vision of planners gives rise to structures and rules intended to harmonize with and express the spirit of the people and to achieve the goals of society. That process is encapsulated in Lefebvre's represented space. In Western societies increasingly dominated by capitalist values, citizens are increasingly defined as consumers, and the structures that matter tend to be commercial. We may wish to resist or ignore our designated roles as consumers, but that choice means living in tension with the explicit structures of represented space. Tensions like these are inherent in Lefebvre's taxonomy of space. Given the power of represented space to establish norms to direct human activity, freedom is not exactly available to citizens. Instead, we have agency. If we have agency, we understand that our choices are limited by various structures, and we acknowledge that we have choices only within limits. The ability to understand our choices and the structures that define us derives from our knowledge of our culture. To the extent that we understand structures, we can work within them to take meaningful action.

Holland et al. argue that humans exercise agency in *figured worlds*, a term very near in meaning to Lefebvre's represented space. These figured worlds are populated by social structures and by other people seeking agency, and they "rest on people's abilities to form and be formed in collectively realized 'as if' realms."[32] The authors argue that in figured worlds, human activity is structured through institutions and practices that we follow "as if" they were real. Holland et al. refer to these figured worlds as "narrativized," in that an entire as if story makes them natural.[33] Indeed, our most important choices in life are structured by such as ifs, which most of us accept as key elements in a natural life story. In Western cultures, a common life narrative involves birth into a nuclear family, a structured upbringing and education, the selection of a mate and career, the accrual of economic goods, and the bearing of children to inherit those goods, thereby perpetuating the family. Whether we are liberated through this narrative or enslaved has little to do with its acceptance or normalcy. Holland et al. argue that "humans' capacity for self-objectification—and through objectification, for self-direction—plays into both their domination by social relations of power and their possibilities for (partial) liberation from these forces."[34] By this, I take the authors to mean that understanding our selves through a received narrative might provide us with relative freedom or lead us into domination. To pursue liberation, we may need to deviate from the dominant narrative, which involves significant risks.

MOBILE HUMANS, MOBILE CULTURES, UNSTABLE SPACE

We live in an age of human migration. In 2003, the United Nations convened the Global Commission on International Migration to study the phenomenon of human movement, which it attributes primarily to the global economy and the migration of workers to find employment and to the recruitment of skilled labor to the centers of international commerce. This commission notes that in 2005 (at the time of its final report) there were "200 million international migrants, a number equivalent to the fifth most populous country on earth, Brazil."[35] This study goes on to note that "some of the largest concentrations of migrants are to be found in 'global cities', dynamic, innovative and highly cosmopolitan urban centres that are enabling people, places and cultures in different parts of the world to become increasingly interconnected."[36] Indeed, fueled primarily by a global economy, urban centers are increasingly diverse in all senses of that word. This diversity generates an increasingly complicated relationship between migration and space. Each migrant carries from his or her past various assumptions about space, and especially about Lefebvre's represented space. If agency is learned, driven by narrative, and developed over time, how does a migrating human connect a narrativized past with a lived present? How does a migrating human conceive a narrative future without understanding the conceptual

structures that form the scaffolding for getting there? What we might consider uncomplicated ways of thinking about space—the rules we think are obvious, or the structures we think make sense of space—these categories of represented space are not obvious to migrating humans who bring with them different structures from their home cultures.

This phenomenon has given rise to theoretical questions about migration and border crossings and how these historical developments are transforming our lived experiences with space. Gloria Anzaldúa's groundbreaking book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, explores Anzaldúa's life as a native of the borderland between Texas and Mexico. In the preface to this work, she declares, "I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory). I have been straddling the *tejas*-Mexican border, and others, all my life. It's not an easy place to live in, the place of contradictions."[37] She claims that "the borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory."[38] For Anzaldúa, the borderland is more than a geographical place. In addition to the "actual physical borderland . . . the Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border," she also explores "the psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands."[39] Anzaldúa's book goes on to build a new mythical and geographic narrative (a representational space) for what she calls the "new Mestiza." Borderland study, deeply indebted to Anzaldúa's work, originated as a way of understanding how hybrid identities develop along the border between Mexico and Texas. Soon, however, the "borderland" became a metaphor for all kinds of boundary crossings, and studies of the borderland began emerging in academic studies of space. Borders, which once simply meant lines on maps that separated countries, are now recognized to be cultural and interpersonal, and perhaps most importantly, mobile. We all have borders that we carry with us and share with each other.

The situation of migration and the need for adaptive and flexible identity to negotiate the complexity of modern spaces has thus given rise to many important themes in theories of space. Irving and Young suggest that "to negotiate diverse, often conflicting sets of personal, political and professional worlds and to speak to issues of diversity, identity and subjectivity, the constructs of Third Spaces, perpetual liminality and Borderlands hold out considerable promise."[40] These concepts, liminality, borderlands, and Third Spaces, all depend on recognizing that space in an age of migration has no permanent privileged center. Culture is not a stable entity when each of us carries fragments of culture as we move through space and traverse borders. Homi Bhabha has written extensively about cultural difference, migration, and space, building on Lefebvre's theories of space to describe what he calls *Third Space*. For Bhabha, the borderland between representations of space (spaces dominated by structures and concepts) and representational space (the symbolic and personal) gives rise to a dynamic new kind of space called Third Space.

Third Space, according to Bhabha, is a distinct kind of postcolonial phenomenon that occurs when two distinctly different representational schemes or frameworks come into play in the space occupied by people who hold those schemes.[41] These schemes, in the flow of time, combine and separate in shared space, and they create new kinds of spaces, Third Spaces. One common concern of Third Space as defined by Bhabha involves the power differentials that two cultures may occupy in one space. Bhabha's work deals with the concept of "cultural difference," which "focuses on the problem of the ambivalence of cultural authority: the attempt to dominate in the name of a cultural supremacy which is itself produced only in the moment of differentiation."[42] When one culture and its conceptual framework dominates a space inhabited by the holder of a less powerful framework, that person needs to negotiate his or her identity (through resistance, accommodation, appropriation, or other negotiation strategies) within the context of that more powerful conceptual system.

For Bhabha, the "act of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space."[43] While the Second Space of conceptual systems, structures, and rules is highly articulated and often policed with vigor, the Third Space of contact between individual humans is never so controlled. It tends to give rise to what Bhabha calls *hybridity*, as migrating humans introduce new symbolic systems and new ways of reading and experiencing space into these stable and articulated zones. Bhabha admonishes us to "remember that it is the 'inter' the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *inbetween* space that carries the burden of the meaning of a culture. . . . And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves."[44] For Bhabha, Third Space is the space of potentially meaningful contact between cultures and people. It is also a place of transformation where we can

transcend polarity and give rise to new selves. Represented space is rigid, controlled, policed, and defined. Third Space is (at least potentially) open, symbolic, playful, and generative. It can also be contested space if power differentials force confrontations between conceptual systems.

Generally speaking, Third Space theory has developed to address the cultural and political situation of postmodernism, postcolonialism, and ongoing global inequality, all driven by the spread of increasing sophisticated global capitalism. Third Space provides a concept whereby people with less obvious social, political, or military power can still exert influence on space by resisting the represented structures of dominant cultures. They do so by simply occupying space and appropriating it for their own purposes. They carry with them social and cultural borderlands that create the need for negotiation and the refashioning of meaning. Their presence forms a critique of the structures of intellectual domination that often mark our institutional practices in Western societies. The existence of their situation creates Third Space.

LIBRARIES AND THIRD SPACE PRACTICE

Theories of Third Space have been incorporated into various fields of practice. Ed Soja has been an advocate for using Third Space in the planning of urban environments. Soja discusses Los Angeles as what he calls a "real and imagined place."[45] He describes his method as "postmodern geographical praxis," which he argues "offers greater possibilities for theoretical and practical understanding and progressive political practice than does any of its alternatives."[46] In leisure studies, Hollingshead has argued that Bhabha's Third Space provides a "fine-point requestioning of the forms of human agency, and also of the styles of habit that characterize the structures of domination and power that constitute the public exhibition of people and the chauvinistic portrayal of place."[47] In challenging the field of leisure studies, he suggests that "Bhabha's work stands as a hugely important warning that, in tourism and travel, the field just does not think deeply enough (individually or collectively) about the complexities of ethnic identity, of collective social agency, and of national affiliation, and is impoverished in terms of the awareness of the unequal, asymmetrical worlds which are captured to become the stuff of tourism appeal."[48] The field of library and information science might be charged with a similar failure to think deeply about these problems and about how our management of space reflects this failure.

If we bring the questions of Harvey, Lefebvre, Bhabha, and Third Space to bear on the ways libraries manage space, we might start with the observation that library space is historically absolute space. Like cathedrals, temples, and other culturally symbolic spaces, libraries evolved to fill one sociocultural function, and they are so filled with the essence of their identities that they tend to resist appropriation or reinvention. Through the rhetoric of those who resist library change, we hear the fear that the library might become something other than the absolute institution it has always been. The evolution currently underway in libraries involves the possible loss of the absolute identity embodied in libraries as conceptual constructions. According to Lefebvre's analysis, introducing capitalist practices into absolute space naturally creates abstract space, space emptied of all intrinsic meaning, fragmented and given over to commercial use and generic identity. Indeed, the passion of those who resist the library-as-business model might be understood as a rational fear of this transition and the consequent loss of the absolute library.

As absolute space, the library presents itself as a highly articulated, powerfully constructed institution. Overlaid with both organizational schemes and behavioral rules, library space is what Lefebvre calls dominated space. Dominated space is so defined by intellectual structures and behavioral rules, so dominated with its sense of its own identity, that it effectively crowds out alternative uses. The Library of Congress Classification System (or whatever classification scheme the library uses) provides an intellectual structure played out in space. The floors and rooms in libraries are organized by call numbers, and the various ranges might be viewed as urban or rural neighborhoods, where like-minded people can mingle with their own kind. As Hope Olson has persuasively argued, these classifications are not neutral. They evolved from philosophical notions of sameness and difference; so are, in the most profound sense, Western constructions "reflective of both the epistemological and ontological presumptions of Western philosophy."[49] Rules also structure our use of space. In the library I work in every day, signage informs students about who is allowed to use which space, how much talking is allowed, and where food and drink are permitted. No matter where one stands in the building, clear markers indicate what is there and what is allowed there. Both conceptual, explanatory schemes and rules and regulations provide the means for library and librarian concepts to dominate the space. At their best, these concepts make the library useful, and as we invest in more signage intended to advertise the library

(to be more like businesses), we tend to make guidelines and uses of space more explicit, which means we aim to dominate it more completely.

Yi-Fu Tuan observed that "place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other."[50] This fundamental assumption helps explain a confusion in the way we discuss space in libraries and culture. On one hand, libraries are places. They are "settled" in the sense that all the space has been defined, and we can feel security and comfort from this sense of control. However, many users obviously feel drawn to the library for the spirit of freedom and adventure embodied in space. The epigraph that begins this essay comes from a recent study of college library use. When the researchers asked students what they liked about the library, one student responded that it was "a place of mild climate where I can find adventures."[51] Indeed, for many users the extreme orderliness of the library provides a thin veneer over an otherwise seemingly endless and sometimes chaotic context for discovery of the unknown. Using Lefebvre's categories and the implications of Third Space, we might argue that while the library is dominated by classification systems and rules for behavior and use, it also, at least potentially, can function as the ultimate Third Space. Every user of the library can be understood as a borderland person, intellectually crossing boundaries and moving between what she or he is and what she or he hopes to become. The library is therefore either a highly articulated and settled place, with librarians as enforcers of the codes and orders of behavior, or an indeterminate and open space with the potential for adventures and surprises. The distinction exists in the mind of the user and the librarians.

As librarians think about this dichotomy, we might recognize a choice between two visions of the practice of librarianship. In the first scenario, the librarian represents the order and codes of the place by embodying the categories and structures of Lefebvre's represented space. Depersonalized and decontextualized, such a librarian subsumes her or his human identity in the institutional role, becoming not truly there in a human sense. To some extent, the "policing" and "shushing" that have come to define librarians derives directly from this understanding of the librarian's role. Alternatively, if we conceive the library as a space for adventures and surprises, the librarian might function as a companion or guide for the adventurer or the displaced. Librarians who practice in this way might strive to see the library from the view of the cultural other, which means librarians must seek out the encounters of the Third Space, to encourage and vicariously share its pleasures, surprises, anxieties, and struggles. In the first scenario, the librarian is part of the machine of the library. In the second, the librarian is part of the game, the quest, and the adventure.

Following Holland et al., the choice between these two visions of the library might be framed as the choice between two narratives. The first narrative might be called the bibliographic narrative. In this story, the library is the collection of materials and the set of tools that provide access to it. Librarians exist to provide a human interface to the collection and, by proxy, to manipulate the tools to facilitate access. The bibliographic narrative reflects a modernist, mid-twentieth-century mentality. It accepts the structures of the library (its classifications and conceptual structures) as real, natural, and useful. In that narrative, the librarian functions as one bibliographic tool among many. The librarian expects to be used knowledgeably, and the point of bibliographic instruction is to educate people to use the tools of the library, including the librarian, effectively. We might call the second narrative the literacy narrative. It involves understanding the socially coded nature of the library and its tools. In the literacy narrative, the librarian is positioned between the highly constructed world of the library and the borderland searcher. The library is understood as a collection of cultural codes that must be translated across borders. Information literacy, as distinct from bibliographic instruction, involves learning to see information within the library in the context of the real life needs of the searcher. In the literacy narrative, the tools and structures of the library recede in importance. The librarian becomes a cultural worker, aware of cultural and personal borders, aware of the nature of people as constantly between stages of development and struggling toward fulfillment. The library provides context for this struggle. Echoing Lefebvre's notion of abstract space, Templeton suggests that unless libraries evolve collaboratively with the people who use them, they must either be "the site of domination or a hopeless utopian dream, literally 'no place.'"[52] This statement frames the choice as a stark binary: libraries can choose between domination and abstraction. The bibliographic narrative involves domination of space and people. Abstraction results from instituting generic commercial practices like customer services and advertising. Between these two binary choices, Templeton holds out collaboration as a third way. I understand the literacy narrative to provide that third way by creating the potential for a Third Space.

Milgrom, using Lefebvre's theories to speculate

on the implications of dominating space in the ways that libraries do, quotes the architect Lucien Kroll, who says,

> There are two ways of organizing social space. The first aims at a single, predetermined objective. It is authoritarian, rational, and reductive. It corresponds to the desire to control events and people on the part of those whose task it is to conceive, organize and produce. . . . Some people like this. . . . The other way of making social space . . . is a living process which imparts only key centers of activity in a clear spatial configuration and with an intensity of form and meaning that favors (and expresses) what we believe essential; living relationships and activities that spring from diversity, unexpected initiatives, and above all, that something in social man that leads to the creation of community.[53]

As Kroll suggest, the more we dominate space with explanations about the library and how to use it, the more we enact an authoritarian worldview about space and its acceptable uses. Despite the best intentions of librarians following the rational path of the bibliographic narrative to make the library clear and transparent (that is, to *teach* it), we encounter several potential problems if we aggressively pursue this agenda. If we think of the library as a Third Space where real human interactions create new positive and generative realities, then we work against that agenda by dominating space with monocultural rules and systems. Lefebvre contrasts the domination of space with its alternative, *appropriation*, arguing that people are morally obligated to appropriate dominated space. One might reasonably conclude that the difference between highly conceived space and Third Space is the difference between a monologic and imposed space and an indeterminate and flexible space that invites appropriation.[54] This perspective would suggest that fewer explicit structures imply openness to improvisation and invite community, a willingness to be appropriated by library users for their own ends.

LIBRARIES AS LEARNING SPACES

Like libraries, schools have traditionally been dominated spaces with educators' conceptual structures and rules defining acceptable and right activities. Many of the concepts central to the organization of schools exist in ways designed to provide pedagogical structure. Classes relate to subjects in the ways that library classification systems articulate subjects. Students move through classes governed by subjects under study, and the curriculum defines the spaces of the classroom. In addition, schools impose rules of conduct. No running in the halls. Use your inside voice. Stay in your seat unless you have permission to get up. Raise your hand before speaking. These kinds of rules discipline students to behave in space according to teacher and school expectations. Like libraries, concepts designed to be intellectually useful exist alongside rules that discipline bodies. Together, the useful and the disciplinary combine to create dominated space, which intentionally produces school culture.

Many educators have begun to ask what effect this disciplining has on borderland students whose cultural pasts are shaped by social structures that differ from the school norm. Bhabha's notion of hybridity has been invoked to explore how classroom language use might draw on student culture: "Hybridity theory . . . examines how being 'in between' several different funds of knowledge and Discourse can be both productive and constraining in terms of one's literate, social, and cultural practices and ultimately one's identity development. . . . The notion of hybridity can thus apply to the integration of competing knowledges and Discourses; to the texts one reads and writes; to the spaces, contexts, and relationships one encounters; and even to a person's identity enactments and sense of self."[55] The authors of this statement suggest that "third space can be viewed as a space of cultural, social, and epistemological change in which the competing knowledges and Discourse of different spaces are brought into 'conversation' to challenge and reshape both academic content literacy practices and the knowledges and Discourses of youth's everyday lives."[56] Irving and Young describe the challenges of teaching with an awareness of Third Space. In suggesting new pedagogies for teachers in schools of social work, they suggest that "Third Space can encourage reciprocity, break-up the ossification of culture, and encourage exchange and creative instability. What so often perplexes us in social work is how to destabilize the boundaries between and among various groups of people and their cultural identities and further, how to disrupt the rigid, inflexible and restrictive theoretical perspectives we use to represent them."[57] Throughout the educational landscape, fields are struggling with the same questions of space, rigidity, and cultural difference.

What would librarians gain by thinking about librarianship as a Third Space practice? We now openly accept that theories of pedagogy can be

seen as infused across the professional roles that librarians play, especially in educational settings. Jacobs has suggested that

> thinking about pedagogy in this broadly conceived way is of particular importance for librarians since a significant amount of the pedagogical work we do happens outside of the traditional classroom setting. When we think about our pedagogical work, we need to include not only the work we do in classrooms but also our work in reference situations, collection development, library and campus committees, professional organizations, campus and community groups as well as formal and informal conversations with students, colleagues, peers, administrators, and community members.[58]

With this broadening of pedagogical roles, the possibilities of Third Space challenge us to reconsider our professional priorities and concepts. When we teach information literacy, whether in classrooms, reference work, collection development, or elsewhere, what do we think we are teaching? Following the bibliographic narrative, we might answer that we teach the controlling concepts librarians understand as structuring the library (Lefebvre's representations of space). Viewed this way, the content of information literacy includes controlled language searching, the construction of Boolean search statements, a knowledge of classification systems and call numbers, how to read MARC records and indexes, and all the other intricacies of library tools and concepts. Another way of answering the question based on the literacy narrative involves unscripted Third Space. From this perspective, teaching information literacy involves understanding who people are, what they care about, and how to engage them with adventure, play, and the struggle to find personal meaning in information. This shift in perspective also means that librarians need to see themselves as personally engaged with the personal lives of library users. Jacobs suggests we consider Freire's "problem posing" pedagogy as a starting point:

> Perhaps the first set of questions we need to consider is what we—both as individuals and as a profession—can do to foster the kinds of dialogues that can chip away at the teacher-student dichotomy. . . . How might we facilitate or nurture problem-posing education on our campuses in regard to information literacy? How might we facilitate problem posing for our students and encourage them to find problems related to themselves in the world and with the world so that they will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to those very real challenges?[59]

Indeed, in defining library practice as Third Space praxis, we diminish the distance between "them" and "us," and we make their concerns and desires, rather than library concepts, the defining goals for the pedagogical work we do.

To return to Habermas, we can perhaps see Third Space as a new way to constitute the public sphere for the twenty-first century. Rather than attempt to recapture a past ideal of highly rational debate by a cohesive class of property owning white males, we can aim for a kind of new democratic space where librarians and library users work together to create real and meaningful conversation about information and how we use it to make our points and live our lives. In seeking the real shared spaces between us and de-emphasizing the structures and rules of the library, librarians can be attuned to the imaginative and transformative potential of the library for those who come seeking adventure in its mild climates. However, this vision brings us to the problem of how theory enters into practice. While the library literature is almost entirely silent on the possibilities of Third Space work, there is abundant attention paid to the library as *Third Place*.

Popularized by Ray Oldenberg, Third Place is often invoked to help us see libraries as alternatives to home and work (the first two places). Oldenberg argues that we need these Third Places to gather to enact democratic rituals. These Third Places (taverns, coffee shops, local cafes, etc.) feature prominently in Habermas's idea of the public sphere. They encourage conversational give-and-take. They are populated by regulars who keep up a high level of conversation. They function as community centers where all are welcome.[60] Certainly, libraries would do well to see themselves in such company. As librarians think about taking up this vision of Third Place as the library of the future, it might be easy to avoid or miss some of the critical questions that arise. First and foremost, how do we convey to library users that this is our mission and identity? The current answer returns us to the way space has been handled in the library literature. The solution is that we market the library as a direct competitor to the coffee shops, bars, and cafes more typically identified with the Third Place. We must produce this library space as commodity and market it in competition with

retail outlets that form the basis for Oldenberg's *The Great Good Place*. Interestingly (and tellingly) the index to *The Great Good Place* lists fifteen entries for tavern, nineteen entries for coffee houses, but no entries for libraries. According to Lefebvre, adopting commercial practices in space will transform the library from an absolute space to an abstract space, one devoid of any real meaning or purpose. Following the Third Place model seems destined to take us in that direction.

Perhaps even most importantly, focusing on the library as Third Place distracts us from a central critical question: in its effort to define itself as a Third Place of leisure and conversation, is it possible for a library to stop being a library? As we examine the difference between a Third Place and a Third Space, we have a clear choice. We can choose to become more like commercial entities with products and customer bases, or we can aim to be socially meaningful institutions with a higher role and calling. We can become bookstores in an effort to beat bookstores, or we can work to build libraries and librarianship around the concept of shared social space where real people engage in real struggle for meaning and purpose in a landscape of increasingly rapid human movement and social change.

CONCLUSION

Even with the advent of place studies, we still primarily think of space as empty until we fill it with things, and we continue to think about space as a problem of mapping and describing surfaces. We have new, sophisticated tools that describe space empirically. Google Earth's ability to zoom in and out from the planet, and its ability to overlay topography with boundaries and categories and classifications stands out as dramatic evidence of technology's power to provide insights into space and to dominate it by imposing our structuring concepts upon it. Alongside Google Earth, we see the rise of other geographical information systems with the ability to generate new understandings of space by linking maps with databases with seemingly endless amounts of information. These tools give us new ways of representing demographics, historical mappings, human movement, flood plains, etc. As these tools give us increased power for objectifying and analyzing with empirical methods, they perpetuate the sense that space is something we can describe and control with sophisticated technical tools. They also give us the sense that we can manage what happens in and to space if only we can harness the immense amount of data we have toward our goals. Most of all, these tools turn space into an object, rather than a human arena for movement, action, and experience.

We have challenges. The technologies of our times are truly revolutionizing the ways we use and access information. Those of us who care about libraries should be concerned about how having all library services out in the "cloud" will affect our ability to continue to justify libraries as physical space. It is also reasonable to see retail establishments that facilitate sociability and reading in comfortable spaces as potential competitors for "market share." And most of all, it is crucial for libraries and librarians to continue to "market" the library, in the sense that we need to make sure libraries are seen as an important presence in our communities, especially to those who fund us. However, it is crucial that in our competition with commercial entities we keep our focus on being libraries and librarians, and it is especially crucial that we not give up on the search for understanding what those concepts mean. A library is a fundamentally different place than a bookstore or the cloud, and one profound difference is the presence of librarians. If we allow our space to become abstract, then we will lose that difference. Third Space is not a panacea for all that is wrong with the world or libraries. However, it does form a realistic way of understanding what is going on in the world right now, and it leads the way to an intellectually rigorous way of thinking about librarianship in a world of borderlands, migration, hybridity, and the ongoing effort to create a more fair and just world.

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