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The library as heterotopia: Michel Foucault and the experience of library space

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Abstract

Purpose – Using Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia as a guide, the purpose of this paper is to explore the implications of considering the library as place, and specifically as a place that has the "curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (Foucault, 1986a, p. 24).
Design/methodology/approach – The paper draws upon a range of literary examples and from biographical accounts of authors such as Alan Bennett, Michel Foucault, and Umberto Eco to show how the library space operates as a heterotopia.
Findings – The paper finds that drawing together the constructs of heterotopia and serendipity can enrich the understanding of how libraries are experienced as sites of play, creativity, and adventure.
Originality/value – Foucault's concept of heterotopia is offered as an original and useful frame that can account for the range of experiences and associations uniquely attached to the library.
Keywords Space, Place, Heterotopia, Michel Foucault, Umberto Eco, Library
Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction – the library as place

> A library in the middle of a community is a cross between an emergency exit, a life raft, and a festival. They are cathedrals of the mind; hospitals of the soul; theme parks of the imagination (Moran, 2012, p. 92).

What is a library? The obvious and most immediate response would be to answer the question in terms of a particular kind of place, a place where books are collected and stored, or a place one might visit to consult these books. One's interactions with the library are inevitably structured by the library as place. Many childhood memories of the library are contained in stories of "being taken to the library," usually by parents, to pick out a picture book or listen to a story being read aloud (see Anand, 2012; Bennett, 2012; Brooks, 2012; Fry, 2012; Kohli, 2012; McDermid, 2012; Rai, 2012; Smith, 2012). The library is the place the student will go to in order to research and write, or that the scholar will visit to consult archives of rare materials. Invariably, one's memories and

experience of the library are shaped and structured by the library's characteristics as a particular kind of place.

The notion of place forms the foundation of the definition of the term "library" as found in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. "Library" has ten senses and 28 sub-entries, and the initial entry listed is "*A place* set apart to contain books for reading, study, or reference" (italics added) (Library, 2014). In the first sub-entry (1.A.), library is defined as: "a room in a house" and "the designation of one of the set of rooms ordinarily belonging to an English house above a certain level of size and pretension" (Library, 2014). So not only is the library a place, it also invokes a specific set of privileges and status symbols, conjuring images of an old English country house with the Lord and Lady, reposing in the library, perhaps sipping a sherry. Who else, after all, can afford to designate a room solely for the storage and display of books? In the second sub-entry (1. B.), the definition of a library is a more familiar one: "A building, room, or set of rooms, containing a collection of books for the use of the public or of some particular portion of it, or of the members of some society or the like" (Library, 2014). This definition, like the ones before it, emphasizes physical place: a specific room, a set of rooms, or a building, which contains a collection of physical artifacts, the books. In these contrasting constructions of place, we can already detect the range of associations that the library can call forth – private vs public, privileged containment vs open access, status symbol vs do-it-yourself empowerment.

A consideration of the library as a particular kind of place has the potential to reveal much about the nature of the library experience. Think back to the time of a previous visit to the library, whether it be the public library in a local community, or the academic library at a university. What feeling did the prospect of entering this building evoke: excitement, comfort, awe, or even dread? Now, recall entering the library building. The books can be seen, arranged on the bookshelves. There are computers, book displays, the circulation desk, the reference desk, and perhaps the reference librarian. What feeling was experienced upon entering this particular environment? There are many accounts in literature and in popular culture that have explored such reactions (see Radford and Radford, 2001, 1997), and perhaps none more radical than Jorge Borges' (1962) *The Library of Babel* (see Radford and Radford, 2005). An admittedly exaggerated, but thought-provoking description can be found in horror-writer Stephen King's (1990) short story, *The Library Policeman*:

> The old fashioned latch-plate depressed under his thumb, and the heavy door swung noiselessly inward. Sam stepped into a small foyer with a marble floor in checkerboard black and white squares […]. The library was deserted. Shelves of books stretched above him on every side. Looking up toward the skylights with their criss-crosses of reinforcing wire made Sam a little dizzy, and he had a momentary illusion: he felt that he was upside down, that he had been hung by both heels over a deep pit lined with books (pp. 415-417).

It is not suggested here that the typical library user feels this way upon entering the library, yet the connection of description of library spaces with feelings of fear and anxiety is not uncommon (Atlas, 2005; Jiao and Onwuegbuzie, 1999). As a place, whether it is a small-town branch of a public library, or the main reading room at the Library of Congress, the library seems to have the power to evoke significant and memorable responses for those who enter and interact with it.

Despite the powerful connection that space has with the library experience, little scholarship has been done to articulate the experience of the users within that physical environment, although there is evidence of significant movement in recent work

(see Aabo and Audunson, 2012; Aabo *et al.*, 2010; Audunson, 2005, Buschman and Leckie, 2007). Bawden (2013) has suggested that a consideration of the library as a physical space can have implications far beyond understanding the experience of the library user. It can also play a role in understanding the ways in which the functions of the library institution come to be shaped, understood, and utilized.

In this paper, the relationship between space and experience, and its implications for articulating and understanding the library experience, are explored using a short but provocative lecture delivered by French philosopher Michel Foucault to an audience of architects in March, 1967 (Defert, 1997). Foucault's lecture was an explication of his notion of heterotopia, meaning "different" or "other" (Hetero, 2014) "places" (Topia, 2014). Foucault's concept of heterotopia is offered here as an analytical frame that accounts for the range of experiences and associations uniquely attached to the library, both in terms of place and affordances, the things called forth by being in the library. The library experience itself will be articulated and explored through the analysis of selected narratives; i.e., stories or accounts of library experiences, both factual and literary. Narratives, the stories that are told, are the means by which one is able to make sense of an experience (e.g. to address the question, what just happened here?), and to communicate that experience to another (see Chase, 2005; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Reissman, 2008). The narratives drawn upon here are those of fiction writers, playwrights, and theorists reflecting on their experiences within libraries. Each of these narratives will be used to articulate the relationship between the library space and one's experience within that space, as well as the synthesis between heterotopia and serendipity, or the extent to which the library as place provokes experiences of surprise, adventure, and play (see Makri and Blandford, 2012a, b; Radford, 1998). Before turning to these narratives, however, Foucault's concept of heterotopia will be introduced as an articulation of the relationship between place and experience.

Of other spaces

Although delivered in 1967, the text of Foucault's lecture on heterotopia was not released into the public arena until shortly before his death in 1984 (Genocchio, 1995). It was published in English with the title of "Of Other Spaces" in 1986, where it sparked the interest primarily of scholars interested in postmodern approaches to urban planning and geography (see Boyer, 2008; Crampton and Elden, 2007; DeCauter and Dehaene, 2008; Faubion, 2008; Foucault, 1986a; Heynen, 2008; Knaller-Vlay and Ritter, 1998; Sohn, 2008; Teyssot, 2000) and, in particular, Edward Soja's (1989) *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*.

The concept of heterotopia addresses "real places – places that do exist" (Foucault, 1986a, p. 24) as opposed to "utopia," or non-places, created by the imagination and representing a place "ideally perfect in respect of politics, laws, customs, and conditions" (Utopia, 2014). Heterotopia is neither imaginary nor by any means perfect. It refers to physical places in the real world where all people reside. Such places are never without value. For example, one's home is a physical space with walls, a roof, doorways, and so on. But it is known that one's home is different from the office where one works, even though both are ultimately physical spaces, built with similar materials, having similar dimensions, and having similar contents. The differences between these two spaces do not lie in their physical reality, but rather are bound up in a number of oppositions that enable one to make sense of where one is, and one's role within that particular space. Such oppositions include those between private and public space, family and social space, leisure and work space. Placement within a given

physical space is also placement within a contingent set of relations that enable people to identify the space as a specific social site. People are able to distinguish such places as the street, the café, the cinema, the beach, the school, the prison, or the church, as all being different. Each of these sites is imbued with particular expectations, rules of conduct, and power relations that tell people who they are in this space, how they should relate to this space, and how they should relate to others who are sharing this space.

Foucault builds upon these observations to introduce his notion of heterotopia, his "other spaces." For Foucault (1986a), a defining feature of a heterotopic space is its capacity to give rise to "a sort of mixed, joint experience" (p. 24) where one is neither in one place or another, but where one has the potential to experience multiple places at once within the same physical space. Foucault describes the joint and mixed experience of the heterotopia in a very practical way by asking the reader to consider the experience one has when looking in the mirror. Foucault (1986a) writes, "In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface" (p. 24). Foucault is describing looking in the mirror as an experience; the sensation of seeing oneself in a virtual place which does not exist physically, but which nevertheless has the appearance of being present. The physical mirror functions as a heterotopia because it "makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it" (p. 24). However, at the same time, the mirror also renders this space as "absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there" (p. 24). With the mirror example, Foucault is attempting to capture the feeling of a "mixed, joint experience" which arises when one knows that one is in a real physical space (e.g. in front of the dressing table in your bedroom), and yet the perception of that space passes through a point (the mirror) which is an unreal, virtual space. The mirror that is on the dressing table also contains the contents of your bedroom, but those contents are captured in the unreal and virtual space of the mirror's reflection. One is privy to two different worlds: the world of the bedroom and the world of the bedroom as contained in the mirror. Lewis Carroll (1910) famously developed this theme of a world within (or beyond) the mirror in his "Through the Looking Glass," a tale in which Alice is described as passing through the threshold of the mirror and actually entering the "virtual world that opens up behind the surface" (Foucault, 1986a, p. 24). Defert (1997) notes that heterotopias share this characteristic of "being places where I am and yet I am not" (p. 275).

This mixed, joint experience of the mirror is also explored Escher's "Hand with Reflecting Sphere," in which the artist is pictured as a reflection in a glass sphere being held in the artist's hand (see Plate 1).

What is interesting about Escher's image is that all the detail in the room (the tables, chairs, paintings on the wall, books on the bookshelves) is contained in the reflection contained in the virtual space of the sphere. However, the hand holding the sphere is set against a monochrome grey background with no details at all. Presumably, the hand of the artist, holding the sphere, should be located in the actual space, and should indicate some aspects of the environment in which it is located. But Escher has flipped these positions, with the virtual space becoming more "real" than the presumably real space inhabited by the hand, which in Escher's image is no space at all and is just a featureless void. This juxtaposition and swapping of real and virtual spaces captures something of the "mixed, joint experience" that Foucault is attempting to convey in his description of heterotopia.
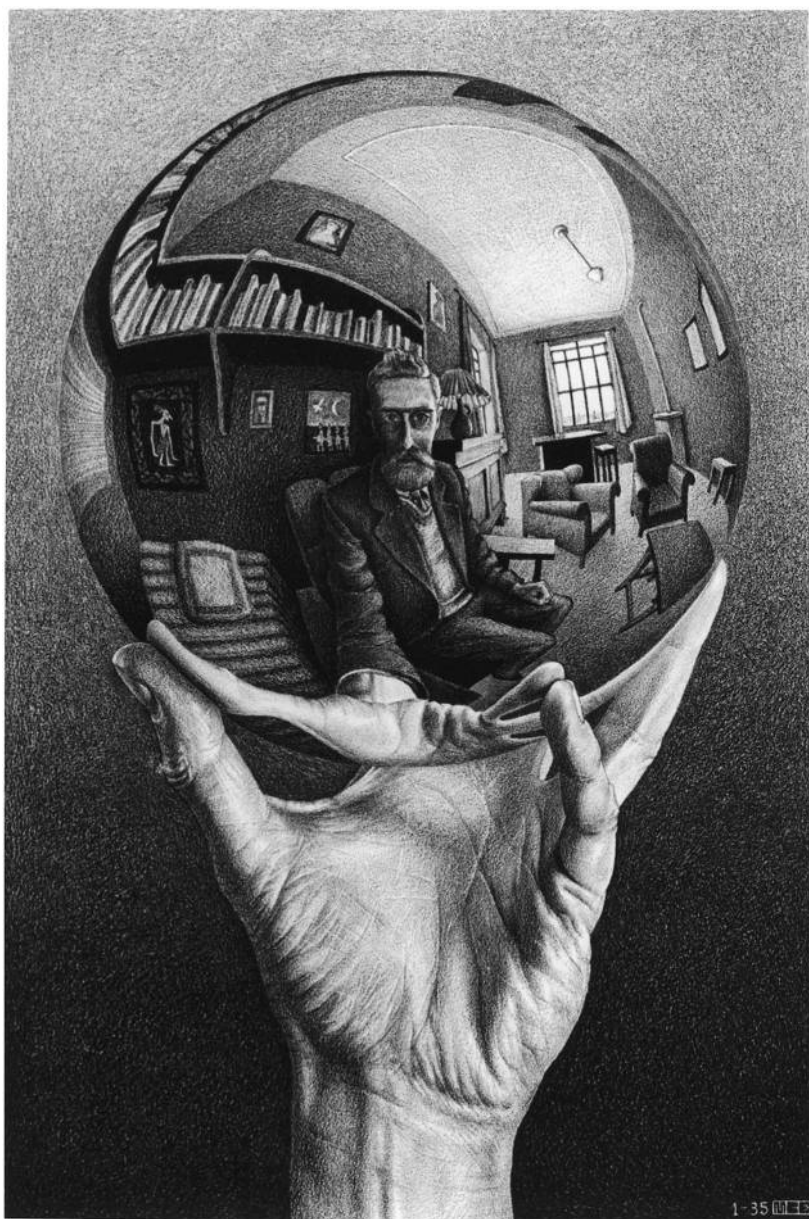
Plate 1.
M.C. Escher's "Hand
with Reflecting
Sphere"

Examples of places that give rise to the "mixed, joint experience" of the heterotopia
given by Foucault (1986a) include: the cemetery (the space of the living and dead, see
Johnson, 2008), the church (the space of the mortal and the divine, see Shackley, 2002),
the museum (the space of the past and the present, see Lord, 2006), and the motel

(the space that is both "home" and "away from home," see Wood, 2003; Foucault 1986a, French, 2000). More recent scholarship has extended Foucault's concept of heterotopia to virtual spaces and to people's experiences within those spaces (Chun, 2006; Veel, 2003), including distance-learning (Krikonis and Valsiner, 2008), online encyclopedias (Haider and Sundin, 2010), online communities such as Second Life (Harrison, 2009), cyber-cafes (Liff and Steward, 2003; Liu, 2009), internet pornography (Jacobs, 2004), and virtual fan communities (Bury, 2005; Meyer and Tucker, 2007). However, of interest here is Foucault's identification of the library as a space which embodies the properties of heterotopia, and this connection is addressed in the following sections using examples from narratives.

The library as heterotopia

Authors, playwrights, and scholars have written about the ways in which the space embodied by the physical building plays a significant role in the way libraries are experienced, of what it feels like to be "in the library." Kohli (2012) argues that "to reduce a library to simple architecture, bricks and mortar, is a mistake. Similarly, to suggest a library is defined by the books on the shelf is erroneous" (p. 20). On the contrary, the library building, its architecture and its design, constitute "part of a 'semiotically loaded' communicative moment" (Thomas, 1996, p. 27). For example, the childhood recollections of British playwright Alan Bennett (2012) of his local public library in Leeds, UK, are dominated by descriptions of the library space and architecture, in contrast to the library books themselves, of which he claims to remember little:

> The Armley library was at the bottom of Wesley Road, the entrance up a flight of marble steps under open arches, through brass-railed swing doors panelled in stained glass which by 1941 was just beginning to buckle. Ahead was the Adults' Library, lofty, airy and inviting: to the right was the Junior books which, regardless of their contents, had been bound in heavy boards of black, brown, or maroon embossed with the stamp of Leeds Public Libraries (p. 27).

Relatively small details about the library space have a prominent place in Bennett's narrative. Features such as the buckled stained glass and the heavy book bindings "embossed with the stamp of Leeds Public Libraries" (p. 27) dominate Bennett's memories. The same is the case with Bennett's reflections of his high school library, which are similarly dominated by descriptions of, and reactions to, the actual space:

> When I was in the sixth form at the Modern School I used to do my homework in the Leeds Central Library in the Headrow […]. It's a High Victorian building done throughout in polished Burmantofts brick, extravagantly tiled, the staircases of polished marble topped with brass rails, and carved at the top of each a slavering dog looking as if it's trying to stop itself sliding backwards down the banister. The reference library itself proclaimed the substance of the city with its solid elbow chairs and long mahogany tables, grooved along the edge to hold a pen, and in the center of each table a massive pewter inkwell. Arched and galleried and lined from floor to ceiling with books, the reference library was grand yet unintimidating (pp. 31-32).

Again, attention to physical details and features pervades the narrative. Bennett singles out the polished brick, the extravagant tiles, the staircase of solid marble, the carvings of slavering dogs, the solid chairs, the long mahogany tables, and the massive pewter inkwells. Bennett's narrative should not be considered unusual. Architecture has long dominated our experience and understanding of the library space. Dickson (1986) notes that the nineteenth century "featured marvelous, ornate open spaces that

offered their patrons a cathedral-like atmosphere" (p. 14) and Boorstin (1996) remarks how libraries have been described as "those temples of learning, those granite-and-marble monuments" (p. 107). The Thomas Jefferson building of the Library of Congress offers the supreme symbolism of a grand domed reading room "gilded on the outside and topped by a golden torch" which serves to inspire "some of the awe and sanctity usually associated with houses of worship" (Cole and Reed, 1997, p. 19) (see Plate 2).

Foucault (1986a) ascribes to the library space a number of characteristics that make it an example of heterotopia. He claims that such a space is a realization of "the will to enclose in one place all times, all forms, all tastes" (p. 26). He writes that the library is "a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages" (p. 26) and embodies "the project of organizing […] a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile space" (p. 26). The picture Foucault paints of the library is akin to the TARDIS in the BBC television series *Doctor Who*, the narrative of which involves a renegade Time-Lord traveling through space and time in a time-machine, the TARDIS, which has the form of a police telephone box from the 1960s. From the outside, the telephone box/TARDIS looks as if it contains just enough space for a single person to step inside and make a telephone call. However, when the inside of the TARDIS is revealed, it becomes clear that the TARDIS is much bigger on the inside than it appears on the outside. The TARDIS is able to defy the constraints of physical space and contain a virtual space of potentially any size as well as transport its occupants to any point in time or space ("Let me get this straight. A thing that looks like a police box, standing in a junk yard, it can move anywhere in time and space?" (Chapman, 2006, p. 1)). Foucault's characterization of the library is of a space similar to the TARDIS. It is finite space, like the space of the police box, constrained by the

Notes: View from above showing researcher desks. Library of Congress Thomas Jefferson Building, Washington, DC (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, photograph by Carol M. Highsmith (reproduction number, LC-DIG-highsm-11604))

Plate 2.
Main Reading Room

physical reality of walls and rooms. However, like the TARDIS, the space inside of the library is much bigger (in a virtual sense) than the outside. To quote Foucault (1986a), the space of the library lies "outside of time" and contains within its walls "a perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time" (p. 26) that could, in principle, be explored forever. On one level, the library is like the police box, a mundane everyday place that users visit typically for quite short periods of time for specific reasons. However, both the TARDIS and the library provide "a distance, a space outside the everyday for engagement with other times, other histories, other cultures" (Kapitzke, 2001, p. 450). It is, to use Foucault's (1986a) term, a "mixed, joint experience" of the finite and the potentially infinite.

This finite/infinite experience is borne out in the recollections of the library experience provided the writers and playwrights in The Library Book (2012) which was collated and published as a justification and defense of library spaces in the face of proposed spending cuts by the UK Government (see Morris, 2012). For example, Anand (2012) writes that the library is a place where "you could lose your mother and then lose yourself in a book of Greek myths, or somebody's struggle to find love in class 5C or the life cycles of a ladybird" (pp. 5-6). Moran (2012) recounts a similar childhood experience: "The shelves were supposed to be loaded with books – but they were, of course, really doors; each book-lid opened was as exciting as Alice putting her gold key in the door" (p. 92). The space of the library, with its collections of books, falls neatly into Foucault's metaphor of the mirror; one really can go through Alice in Wonderland's looking glass into the Looking-Glass House (Carroll, 1910) and, indeed, to countless other virtual places where readers can lose their mothers and themselves and spend "days running in and out of other worlds like a time bandit or a spy" (Moran, 2012, p. 92). Anand (2012) writes that "the library was the best place in the world" (pp. 5-6) and that "the library became the cathedral where I would come to worship and the stories were as precious to me as prayers […]. The library was my partner-in-crime […]. We were naughty together, the library and me. I would show it my membership and it would show me the world" (pp. 6-7).

Novelist China Mieville (2007) explores this experience in the library in his children's book, *Un Lun Dun* written from the perspective of a 12-year old girl named Deeba. The story posits the existence of a realm that "opens up behind the surface" (to use Foucault's words). This theme of "worlds existing behind the surface" is one found in much classic children's literature, including Lewis Carroll's (1910) *Through the Looking Glass*, Lewis's (1950, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954, 1955, 1956) *Chronicles of Narnia*, and Phillip Pullman's (1995, 1997, 2000) *His Dark Materials* trilogy. In Mieville's novel, the virtual world inherent in the real space to be explored by the young protagonists does not exist behind the surface of a mirror (Carroll), or a wardrobe (Lewis), or a portal (Pullman), but behind the surface of the books contained in the library. This virtual place is *Un Lun Dun*, an alternate version of the real London, which can be reached through the "booksteps" and "storyladders" of the library:

When she came to school the next day, Deeba's bag was packed […]. That morning she didn't talk to anyone […]. At lunchtime she went to the school library […].

"Right," whispered Deeba. She checked the contents of her bag one more time. "Enter by booksteps," she said, reading her hand. "And storyladders."

No one was watching. She stepped up carefully and put a foot on to the edge of a shelf, then reached up and took hold of another. Slowly, carefully, she began to climb the bookshelves like a ladder. One foot above the other, one hand above the other […].

In front of her was a book called *A London Guide for the Blazing Worlders*. Deeba kept
climbing. She was definitely beyond where the ceiling had been. Still she didn't look anywhere
but straight in front.

She clung to the edges of the shelves and climbed for a long time. A wind began to buffet her.
Deeba tore her gaze from a book called *A Bowl for Shadows* and at last looked down. She gave
a little scream of shock.

Far, far below her she saw the library. Children walked between the shelves like specks.
The bookshelf she was ascending rose like a cliff edge, all the way down and as far to either
side as she could see[…].

She stopped being aware of time. She was conscious only of an endless succession of titles
and of wind growing stronger and louder and of darkness around her. Deeba's fingers closed
on leaves[…].

I might be climbing the rest of my life, she thought, almost dreamily. I wonder how far this
bookcliff goes. I wonder if I should start moving left. Or right. Or diagonally.

It was growing slowly lighter. Deeba thought she heard a low noise of talking. With a sudden
shock, she realized that there were no more shelves.

She had reached the top. She reached up and hauled herself over the top of the wall of books
and looked out over UnLondon (Mieville, 2007, pp. 178-187).

Mieville (2007) articulates the experience of moving from the space of the real to the space
of the virtual (the worlds "in the books"), while remaining in the confines of a real physical
space, the library and its real library shelves. The use of the terms "booksteps" and
"storyladders" juxtaposes the real and the virtual. They seem to be referring to solid, real
objects, at the same time as they operate as metaphors of a virtual journey. Is Deeba really
climbing storyladders, or is this an expression of a virtual journey "through" the reading
of a story? In Mieville's story, the distinction is not clear, and deliberately so. It is not the
descriptions of what Deeba actually does here (i.e. climbing the booksteps and the
storyladders), but rather how Mieville attempts to capture in Deeba's breach from the real
into the virtual an experience something akin to Foucault's "mixed, joint experience."

As can be seen from these narratives, the library as place is much more than a room
or building that contains a collection of objects; it is a place which makes possible
particular kinds of experiences. It is precisely the notion of the experience of being in
the library space and the experiences that this space makes possible that is at the heart
of Foucault's (1986a) notion of heterotopia.

The (anti)library and serendipitous encounters

Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same (Foucault, 1972, p. 17).

It is practically a cliché for scholars to accrue collections of books into personal libraries
that reflect their academic interests. This is especially so of Italian semiotician Umberto
Eco, whose literary success writing best-selling books such as *The Name of the Rose*
(1983) has enabled him (like the Lord and Lady referenced above in the discussion of
library definitions from the *Oxford English Dictionary*) to amass approximately 50,000
volumes, including 1,200 rare items. These are housed in two libraries at his homes in
Milan and Rimini (Carriere and Eco, 2011, p. 328).

Eco's personal libraries are points of great interest to visitors, frequently provoking
the question, "how many of your books have you read?" Eco's playful responses vary
between "These are just the books I'm planning to read next week" (Carriere and Eco,

2011, p. 270) and "I haven't read any of these books. Why would I keep them otherwise?" (p. 271). What is telling about Eco's rejoinders is his focus on the books he has not read, or at least claims to have not read, underscored by another observation that "we all own dozens, or hundreds, or even thousands (in the case of the extensive library) of books that we haven't read" (p. 271).

The point Eco seems to be making in these responses to his visitors is that his extensive library is not simply a place (as in the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition) to store books he has already read. In fact, the value of Eco's library lies in the books he has not read. Taleb (2007) notes that, "read books are far less valuable than unread ones" (p. 1). He continues: "You will accumulate more knowledge and more books as you grow older, and the number of unread books on the shelves will look at you menacingly. Indeed, the more you know, the larger the rows of unread books. Let us call this collection of books an *antilibrary*" (p. 1). The antilibrary seems, at first, to be an odd idea. How can a collection of unread books be considered more valuable than a collection of read books? But as Eco (2005) makes clear, it is the unread books that form the joy and delight of the library experience:

> I can decide to pass a whole day there in bliss: I read the papers, take the books down to the bar, then I go and look for some more. I make my discoveries. Having gone in to work on, say, British Empiricism, I start to follow commentaries on Aristotle instead. On getting the floor wrong, I find myself in an area I hadn't thought to enter, on medicine, but then I suddenly find works on Galen, and hence complete with philosophical references. In this sense the library becomes an adventure (p. 11).

What Eco describes as an adventure, Foucault (1977) will describe as a "fantasia of the library" (see Radford, 1998). More recent scholars refer to this as serendipity (Makri and Blandford, 2012a, b). The order that is embodied in the physical space of the library (in its shelves, its floors, its sections, and so on) makes possible the disorder and the creativity of the imagination. Foucault (1977) writes that "the imaginary is not formed in opposition to reality as its denial or compensation; it grows among signs, from book to book, in the interstice of repetitions and commentaries; it is born and takes shape in the interval between books. It is a phenomenon of the library" (p. 91). The "interval between books" is not metaphorical. Considered in terms of the heterotopia, the spaces between books are real spaces, as is the space between shelves, the space between the floors in the library building, and the space Eco must traverse in his wanderings from the newspaper section to the section on British Empiricism, and there to end up on the wrong floor perusing the works of Galen. Susan Hill (2012) recounts a similar experience browsing the book stacks of the London Library: "There is something extraordinarily liberating and exciting about being let loose in such a place, allowed to wander, pick out this and that, read a bit here, a page there, take out the book, then wander to another bay in search of something related to it" (p. 111). The physical movement from book to book, shelf to shelf, and floor to floor are all made possible by the physical space of the library, forming the basis of Eco's "adventure" and Hill's "liberation." Eco (2005) writes that it is precisely this meandering or wandering toward an unexpected discovery that is the most apt description of the experience that many people have in the library:

> One of the misunderstandings that dominate the concept of libraries is that you go into one to look for a book whose title you already know. In reality, it often happens that you go to a library because you want a book whose title you do know, but the principal function of the library, at least the function of the library in my house […], is to discover books whose existence we never suspected, only to discover they are of extreme importance to us (p. 10).

Eco (2005) further asserts that he discovers books in his own library: "There's nothing more revealing and exciting than exploring the shelves that contain a collection of all the books on a certain subject […] and to find another book beside the book you want to find, one that you weren't looking for but one that emerges as being of fundamental importance" (pp. 10-11). Eco here points quite neatly to the advantages of open stacks and more specifically, to stacks arranged to foster serendipity. Finally, he writes eloquently that: "In other words, the ideal function of a library is to be a bit like a second-hand bookseller's stall, a place where you might make a lucky find" (p. 11).

The reason one encounters the library space, then, is not to find something that is physically there (a book on a shelf). Rather the book is a portal to something or somewhere else, the virtual space inherent in the heterotopia. In the shadow of the real library bookshelves are virtual bookshelves, booksteps, and storyladders of the virtual space within the real space. This is the space Eco wishes to discover and explore. However, to get there, one needs to make a "lucky find," a key that will enable access across the threshold. Foucault (1986b), in an interview with Charles Raus, recounts an anecdote about such a lucky find, the world that this find opened up to him. Foucault is talking about his book entitled "Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel" (Foucault, 1986c) and how it came to be written:

> I wrote this study of Raymond Roussel when I was quite young. It happened completely by chance, and I want to stress this element of chance because I have to admit that I had never heard of Roussel until the year 1957. I can recall how I discovered his work […]. I went to the *libraire* José Corti to buy I cannot recall what book […] José Corti, publisher and bookseller, was there behind his enormous desk, a distinguished old man. He was busy speaking to a friend, and obviously he is not the kind of bookseller that you can interrupt with a "Could you find me such and such a book?" You have to wait politely until the conversation is over before making a request. Thus, while waiting, I found my attention drawn to a series of books of that faded yellow color used by publishing firms of the late nineteenth, early twentieth centuries; in short, books the likes of which aren't made anymore. I examined them and saw "Librairie Lemerre" on the cover. I was puzzled to find these old volumes from a publishing firm as fallen in reputation as that of Alphonse Lemerre. I selected a book out of curiosity to see what José Corti was selling from the stock of the Lemerre firm, and that's how I came upon the work of someone I had never heard of named Raymond Roussel, and the book was entitled *La Vue* […]. At that point José Corti's conversation came to an end. I requested the book I needed, and asked timidly who was Raymond Roussel, because in addition to *La Vue*, his other works were on the shelf. Corti looked at me with a generous sort of pity and said, "But, after all, Roussel […]" I immediately understood that I should have known about Raymond Roussel, and with equal timidity I asked if I could buy the book since he was selling it. I was surprised or rather disappointed to find that it was expensive […] Slowly and systematically I began to buy all of his works. I developed an affection for his work, which remained secret, since I didn't discuss it (Foucault, 1986b, pp. 171-172).

Foucault's "lucky find," to use Eco's terms, was to be the beginning of one of Foucault's most pleasurable writing experiences. Foucault (1986b) writes, "I wrote about Roussel because he was neglected, hibernating on the shelves of José Corti's bookshop" (p. 184). However, he continues, "it is by far the book I wrote most easily, with the greatest pleasure, and most rapidly […]. My relationship to Roussel, and to Roussel's work, is something very personal, which I remember as a very happy period […]. No one has paid much attention to this book, and I'm glad; it's my secret affair. You know, he was my love for several summers […] no one knew it" (pp. 184-185). Foucault's description echoes Eco's accounts of accidental encounters, as well as the sequence of fictional narratives constructing the library as portal to a surprising elsewhere-than-expected.

The delight in surprise points to a paradox of serendipity in the library – the deliberate arrangement of the library in ways that foster surprise, the distribution of assets in a ways that reveal multitudes of experiences. Serendipity is thus the mechanism through which heterotopia operates.

In his anecdote about his experience at José Corti's bookshop, Foucault speaks lovingly about the consequences of his lucky find of a single (perhaps overpriced) volume. However, Foucault spent significant amounts of his working life in the heteroptia that is the Bibliothèque Nationale's Library in Paris (see Plate 3).

Unlike Umberto Eco, there are no first-hand accounts of Foucault's experiences within the library space. However, David Macey's (1993) biography provides an account of Foucault's routine of working in the library in what can only be described as heterotopic terms. The Bibliothèque Nationale was to be Foucault's primary place of work for 30 years and, Macey (1993) writes, he "pursued his research here almost daily, with occasional forays to the manuscript department and to other libraries, and contended with the Byzantine cataloging system: two incomplete and dated printed catalogs supplemented by cabinets containing countless index cards, many of them inscribed with copperplate handwriting" (p. 49). Macey talks about Foucault's favorite seat in the library, in the hemicycle, which he describes as "the small, raised section directly opposite the entrance, sheltered from the main reading room, where a central aisle separates rows of long tables subdivided into individual reading desks" (p. 49). One wonders what the experience of working in such a space would have been like, especially for one working there on a daily basis for so long. Macey's language choices in describing Foucault at the library are instructive. He writes of Foucault making "forays" into the manuscript department, evoking the military connotation of Foucault scouring and pillaging a hostile terrain in search of booty (Foray, 2014) and

Plate 3.
The reading room of the bibliotheque nationale, Paris

Notes: By Vincent Desjardins (CC-BY-2.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0)), via Wikimedia Commons

"contending" (striving, struggling) with the Byzantine cataloguing system, as if it were some creature from which knowledge has to be forcibly yielded. Following these adventures, Foucault is then able to return with his spoils to the relative safety of the hemicycle, where he will be "sheltered" from the main reading room and he can plan his next expedition into the stacks.

The dominant image from Macey's description of Foucault's activity in the library is that Foucault is treating his research as play (such as playing at soldiers or playing at being an explorer), and the library is the terrain in which the play can take place, and which makes the play possible. This should not be surprising, since the notion of play is critical to Foucault's concept of heterotopia. The main characteristic a space must have if it is to be considered as heterotopia is "the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (Foucault, 1986a, p. 24). Having spaces become or contain "other spaces" is what children do in their games. Mundane spaces such as "attics, backyard corners, the Indians' tent or the parents bed" (Defert, 1997, p. 274) become forts, spaceships, and other sites of imaginative adventure. As Johnson (2006) notes, "The children's inventive play produces a different space that at the same time mirrors what is around them" (p. 76). This idea is beautifully explored in Bill Watterson's comic strip "Calvin and Hobbes" where the space inside a simple cardboard box can become a time machine, a transmogrifier, or a "cerebral enhance-o-thon" (see Godinho, 2007). Calvin can use his cardboard box to transport himself to faraway places and experiences. As Busby and Lufkin (1992) note, "He climbs into the box as a kid and climbs out, transformed into alien creatures or elephants" (p. 450) (see Figure 1).

Foucault's experience in the heterotopia of the library is an example of this kind of experience. The library as heterotopia is a place one enters with the objective of being transformed. Foucault (1988) famously said that "The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning" (p. 9) and that "there are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all" (Foucault, 1985, p. 8).

The heterotopia makes possible the imagination of the child at play, transforming one space into another. The library is a grander version of Calvin's cardboard box/time machine. The box, the mirror, and the library make imagination and creativity possible. There is no limit to the library as heterotopia. Like Calvin, both Umberto Eco and Michel Foucault are children run amok, having adventures and embarking on forays. They are Deeba climbing the booksteps and the storyladders, which go on seemingly forever but then tip us into the new realm that is UnLunDun.
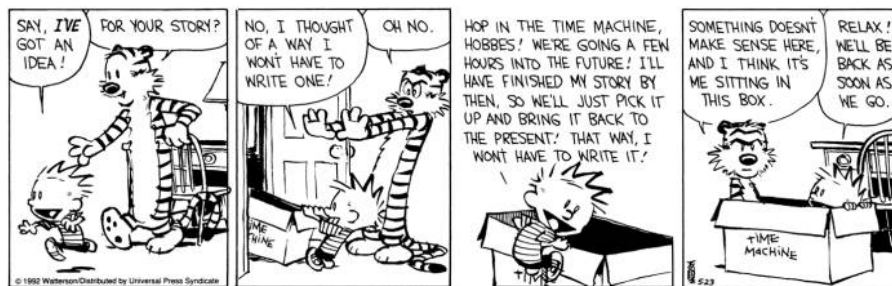

Figure 1.
CALVIN AND
HOBBES © 1992
Watterson

Conclusion

Using Foucault's (1986a) notion of heterotopia, a view of the library as space has been presented that is intended to challenge prevailing views of the library experience. It is clear that the library is much more than a space where certain things happen: reading, checking out materials, research, and so on. That is the very least of it. Soja (1995) remarked that the library as heterotopia has much more in common with "fleeting, transitory, precarious spaces of time, such as festival sites, fairgrounds, and vacation and leisure villages" (p. 16). Both the theme park and the library can be understood as "compressed, packaged environments that seem to both abolish and preserve time and culture, that appear somehow to be both temporary and permanent" (Soja, 1995, p. 16) such the Westinghouse and Futurama exhibits at the 1939-1940 World's fair in New York City as discussed by Wood (2003). Both the library and the theme park are spaces "whose existence sets up unsettling juxtapositions of incommensurate 'objects' which challenge the way we think, especially the way our thinking is ordered" (Hetherington, 1997, p. 42). Further, according to Hetherington: "It is the juxtaposition of things not usually found together, and the confusion that such representations create, that marks out heterotopias and gives them their significance" (Hetherington, 1997, p. 42).

The library as heterotopia, then, does not embody permanence, although at first glance the grand architecture of the library would certainly imply such permanence. The experience of the library and the theme park is not that everything is fixed and unchanging. Rather, these two spaces are constitutive of experiences of continual change, excitement, surprise, and discovery. In the library, as in the theme park, one never knows what experience is going to come next, and revels in the excitement of moving from one extreme experience to another. The thrill of the theme park experience and, by extension, the library experience, is that one enters into it with the expectation of surprise, of not knowing "what will happen next," of encountering situations and characters one does not and cannot encounter in so-called "real life." The library as heterotopia has the potential "to fascinate and to horrify, to try and make use of the limits of our imagination, our desires, our fears and our sense of power/powerlessness" (Hetherington, 1997, p. 40).

This discussion of libraries as examples of heterotopia has explored the nature of the library experience through a consideration of the library as a physical space. The concept of heterotopia provides a means to rethink traditional ways of articulating and understanding the library experience. It demonstrates that the library is much more than just a life-less repository of books or a static monument to knowledge. We advocate for further conceptions of the library and the library experience that embrace this spirit of joy, serendipity, and adventure contained in Foucault's notion of heterotopia.

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