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The library assemblage: creative institutions in an information society
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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to provide a theoretical analysis of the concept of an "institution" in order to understand the potential of the library as an institution.

Design/methodology/approach – The work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari is used to build a theoretical foundation from which to construct a vision of institutions, particularly libraries, as a tools for social justice rather than market forces.

Findings – It is possible to analyse institutions and libraries in particular, in terms of codes and rules that constrain behaviour. The concept of institutions as assemblages can be used as an alternative in order to emphasise the creative and transformative potential of institutions.

Originality/value – The paper contributes to a small body of critical literature that examines the theoretical principles that can ground library services as tools for advocacy.

Keywords Libraries, Philosophy, Information society, Social justice

Paper type Conceptual paper

"There is a whole order of movement in 'institutions' that's independent of both laws and contracts" (Deleuze, 1995, p. 169).

There is a model for institutions, with origins in social contract theory, that see institutions as suppressive or oppressive. There are moments in library history where the library has exhibited some tendencies to attempt to constrain individuals. Gilles Deleuze offers us an alternative conception of the institution that can be a useful tool for thinking instead about the creative and transformative potential of institutions. The theoretical work of Gilles Deleuze is mobilised in this essay to demonstrate precisely how we can conceive of institutions as creative and provide a theoretical foundation for library advocacy work. The library can further be construed as a creative assemblage and permit us to build libraries for the purpose of social justice. Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's concept of the assemblage is employed to develop a theory of the institution that highlights the library's potential to resist forces of domination.

Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy has been employed occasionally in LIS. Philosophy, according to Deleuze and Guattari, involves the creation of new concepts. The purpose of philosophy is not to accurately represent the world but to create new concepts (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 82). It is not a matter of creating any new concepts but concepts should be used to intervene in the world to bring about new and better form of social organisation (Deleuze, 1996, p. 136). Burnett and Dresang (1999) employ Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome in an attempt to better understand the practices of young readers; Robinson and Maguire (2009) also examine the value of the concept of the rhizome for our understanding of information organisation particularly within a network. Day and Lau (2010) see real potential for the Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis in LIS.

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The introduction of the concept of the assemblage will further add to the critical perspective in LIS by highlighting the creative potential that is embedded in Deleuze and Guattari's work and by employing their tools in LIS.

Escaping institution

We can use Deleuze's conception of the institution as an intervention into an existing debate about the social roles of government institutions, including the library. More specifically, Deleuze's theory of institutions is derived from Hume's work and responds to social contract theories popular in liberal political philosophies. Deleuze (1991) writes:

> What Hume criticizes in contractarian theories is precisely that they present us with an abstract and false image of society, that they define society only in a negative way; they see in it a set of limitations of egoisms and interests instead of understanding society as a positive system of inventive endeavours. That is why it is so important to be reminded that the natural human being is not egoist; our entire notion of society depends on it. What we find in nature, without exception, are families; the state of nature is already more than a simple state of nature (p. 39).

Early modern philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes and Jean Jacques Rousseau, explain state power in terms of a social contract. Social contract theory defines society negatively; the aim of the social contract is the suppression of base instincts. Hobbes presumed, for example, that humans are driven by their ego and self-interest. These natural tendencies must be limited for society to function. Otherwise, we live in a perpetual state of war and non-cooperation as we each pursued our own interests. Because humans are reasonable by nature, they can recognise the state of nature as one of war and destruction. They enter into a social contract in which they collectively give up their freedom to pursue their self-interest, allowing themselves to be governed in exchange for relative peace and long-term stability conducive to pursuing the satisfaction of their needs. Though Rousseau was much more generous in his characterisation of the state of nature (humanity was endowed with purity and morality), he observed that over time inequalities arise that required a prescription similar to that proposed by Hobbes. The social and moral ills produced in the development of society need to be remedied by a social contract.

One trend in the early library literature was to present institutions as means by which to produce model citizens through suppression of their most basic instincts. One purpose of the early public library was articulated in terms of its capacity to normalise behaviour. One of its hopes was that social ills could be eradicated through the provision of "good" literature (Larned, 1902; Stevenson, 1897, pp. 134-135). The library could offer alternatives to the natural human tendency towards base and immoral behaviour: trivial material pursuits, penchant for alcohol, dishonest and lazy tendencies, and crime (Mellen cited in Bruce, 1996, p. 101; Hallman, 1882, p. 31). The library's purpose was defined in negative terms insofar as it was understood as an institution which must repress habitual practices that make it difficult or impossible for individuals to live together peacefully.

Creative institutions

In light of Hume's critique of social contract theory, Deleuze offers an alternative model for understanding the institution, including the State, social institutions (i.e. marriage and property), and governmental institutions (i.e. prisons, schools, hospitals,

and libraries). The following passage indicates the potential of institutions; they are not repressive forces that limit action but are productive:

> Law is a limitation of actions, institution a positive model for action. Contrary to theories of law which place the positive outside the social (natural rights), and the social in the negative (contractual limitation), the theory of the institution places the negative outside the social (needs), so as to present society as essentially positive and inventive (original means of satisfaction). Such a theory will afford us the following political criteria: tyranny is a regime in which there are many laws and few institutions; democracy is a regime in which there are many institutions, and few laws. Oppression becomes apparent when laws bear directly on people, and not on the prior institutions that protect them (Deleuze, 2004, pp. 19-20).

Deleuze finds a new set of questions in Hume's analysis of social contract theory. He sees an opportunity to conceive of institutions in a positive and inventive manner rather than focus on why humans would give up power or permit themselves to be governed and legislated. For Hume, human nature is defined by sympathy, which is limited to empathy for those similar to us. The task is to find how to extend sympathies to society as a whole. Deleuze expresses little interest in Hume's theory of sympathies, but he follows Hume's general premises to maintain that society and its institutions do not play a negative role. They are not suppressive but positive and creative. Society can consist of a series of social institutions that do not suppress our natural instincts but play a positive and creative role.

Deleuze wants to reframe political questions so as not to position individuals as foundational units. In Hume's writing, he finds a valuable critique of the notions of human nature and culture (or society) and a critique of the assumption that the individual is the base unit of analysis. He claims that the "state of nature is already more than a simple state of nature" (1991, p. 39). His claim bears directly on the nature of subjectivity. The subject is already infused by culture (or artifice) because it is natural to create. According to Deleuze, "humanity is an inventive species, even the artifice is nature" (1991, p. 44). He also claims that although no specific habit is natural, it is natural to take up habits.

Hume replaces the dualisms of passions and reason, and nature and artifice with a distinction between the whole of nature, including artifice, and the subject affected and determined by this whole (Deleuze, 1991, p. 44). The new political and moral questions no longer have any bearing on how an artifice such as society (or institutions) limits natural passions or desires. The problem of ascertaining the relation between nature and society is replaced by the problem of discovering how the subject is constituted by the given which includes both nature and artifice.

It follows that the role of the state is not to change or suppress human nature or to represent a set of given individuals. The implication of Deleuze's theory is that the pre-given individual of the liberal political tradition upon which the public libraries purpose is based does not exist. Take for example, the shift in library services that emphasise the importance of the human subject. There is a new model that it shifts the library and librarians away from a hierarchical domineering model. Currently models used in library services are championed by librarians precisely because they have moved information providers away from a model where the librarian is an expert and focused upon the information needed to answer the reference question. The reference interview now is often referred to as a dialogue or a partnership with much more of an understand of the collaborative nature of the enterprise (Kerr and Woodard, 2011, p. 57)

According to Deleuze, the subject given in human nature, though, does not need to be the base unit of analysis. We should not assume that the subject comes to society or social institutions ready-made. Subjects emerge from experiences in their surroundings, which include the library. We should think of institutions as creative entities. According to Deleuze's theory of institutions, the library is not best understood as an institution that represses natural base instincts; it is not merely a tool of repression. Instead, the library is best understood as a productive space where subjects are produced. As the State is increasingly used as a means to ensure capital appropriation, the library can also be used to play that role. This theory explains how the library is one space amongst many in which subjects can be produced for capital but there are also other possibilities.

Library as assemblage

If the institution is a creative rather than repressive force, it is possible to think of it in its potentiality to produce new social networks. Instead of employing liberal theory to understand the library, we could choose assemblage theory. Deleuze's conception of the institution and the assemblage helps resolve issues of determinism and agency. If the library, as an institution, is understood as an assemblage then its component parts are defined by their relations of exteriority.

Assemblage theory presupposes that each entity is defined by relations of exteriority; different components of the assemblage are not determined or defined by the whole or assemblage of which they are a part. Parts can, therefore, be detached and removed from the assemblage and connected to another one. Furthermore, the assemblage is more than merely the sum of its parts. A new entity can emerge out of the assemblage. This is a total rejection of the relations of interiority that presupposes that the whole determines the parts or that social relations determine the individual or that the information society shapes the development of libraries.

In order to understand assemblages, let us take the book as an example. According to Deleuze and Guattari, documents are best understood as assemblages with the world:

> As an assemblage, a book has only itself, in connection with other assemblages […] We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities […] (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 4).

If we understand books according to relations of exteriority then they are not eternally defined by their relationship to the author (the one who manifests it), nor their relation to the actual world that they attempt to represent, nor their relation to ideas they communicate. Books in libraries and in our culture are defined by their relationship to the author and to the idea or subject of the book. These relations are even protected and reinforced in law: copyright in a work subsist for the life of the author plus 50-80 years (depending on the jurisdiction). Using assemblage theory we can examine how book and documents are assembled with other parts of the world in order to understand how and with what they function. The ideas, the photographs, statistics, charts, and personal stories therein are all parts a larger assemblage: the book. Portions of a book or image, for example, can be removed from the assemblage and connected to another image in an attempt to create a new form of material relations.

The implication is that the various parts of the assemblage are not determined or defined by the whole or assemblage of which they are a part. It is possible that the

library could be assembled with other institutions, forces or people, etc. They can, therefore, be detached and removed from one assemblage and connected to another one. The library is not determined by economic or political forces alone. It is not defined by its relation to capital, for example. The library can be removed from that assemblage and can be assembled with other movements.

New movements can also emerge from existing assemblages, just as subjects produced in the given are capable of transcending it. Brian Massumi's example of the soccer game illustrates the concept of emergence theory well (2002, p. 71-88). The soccer field is the condition of existence, the goals are limits and the ball is the subject. We typically believe that rules are the foundation of the sport. Massumi suggests we think of the game in terms of movement. In the movement of the game and the displacement of the ball, potential is realised. How the players interact emerges from the relations (assemblage) of all these components. New rules are codified and applied as necessary. Even as they are codified, they are open to change. Exceptional players push the limits of these codes in an attempt to gain advantage or achieve something new. Codifying stops variation and preserves games for repetition, but repetition allows for variation to arise. The manoeuvres of Canadian lacrosse legend Gary Gait are a very good example of variation and codification in sport. His acrobatic movements are said to have revolutionised the game. One manoeuvre, known as "air Gait," involved approaching the net from behind and jumping over the goal to score. Though the move was temporarily banned by the National Lacrosse League in which both Canadian and American teams play, it is now permitted with certain restrictions (National Lacrosse League, 2006). The limits of rules and codes are continuously challenged producing new codes that permit challenge us to develop new opportunities and abilities.

The concept of emergence helps us understand Deleuze's observation that "creation takes place in bottlenecks" (1995, p. 133). New relations (possibilities) emerge from existing assemblages (be they institutions, organisations, or people). There are strict rules of behaviour or rigid structures, yet like the sports players, we can play around these rules to create new possibilities. We are not wholly determined by any of the given structures. The structures themselves, coupled with our nature "to become" (i.e. change), results in our in attempts to find ways around rules.

Institutions are known for rules. Take the library as an example. There are a myriad of rules and regulation around the circulation of materials, the use of space and staff responsibilities, for example. The use of space is regulated on the basis of whether one is noisy, eating or a child. The materials are organised according to cataloguing rules, and assessed based on its value in a discipline, the status of the author and ownership of the publication. Given that Deleuze is known for championing "becoming," it may come as a surprise that he does not provide an all-out rejection of institutions. Ultimately, what Deleuze warns us about is the privileging of stasis over movement. As a productive assemblage, institutions are assessed by the degree to which it has become ossified, dogmatic, and oppressive. The point is not that we do not analyse or even value some of the rules, models, and codes. Deleuze reminds us there is no assemblage that does not include rules and codes (2002, p. 96). The illusion is that they are the only entities worth analysing and that they (the State, institutions, etc.) determine the social. Every assemblage includes codes but also the means of transformation, what Deleuze refers to as "deterritorialization". Consider, for example, the assemblage of the class of workers. Workers are a diverse group of individuals who come together for the purposes of attaining a different relationship with their work, their employer or

establishing new social assemblages. When the concept of class becomes ossified and naturalised, it can be used as a tool to limit its potential; it becomes a reactive force.

In the library at the end of the nineteenth century, for example, the notion of class was not understood as an assemblage of component parts (an assemblage of individuals, concepts, relations, tools, etc.) but as a kind of natural human state. In some instances, what could have been a tool for liberation or for inventing new social formations became a justification for maintaining the status quo. The notion of class was used in the library to justify the prevailing forms of human relations; each class had its own interests and natural position in the hierarchy of human relations. For example, William Kite was concerned that libraries be stock with appropriate literature to ensure that the working class men and women would remain "content with their lowly but honest occupations" (Kite, 1877, p. 278). Individuals were not to connect to books that might disrupt the status quo; the working class was not supposed to use books to create fantasies about new possibilities or new futures.

The importance of understanding class formation is that it was a real phenomenon, a segment of society, and it did determine social structures. Yet there was also movement away from this form of organisation. Deleuze argues that "society, but also a collective assemblage, is defined first by its points of deterritorialization, its fluxes of deterritorialization" (1995, p. 101). Our social structures are assembled into different segments including the myriad of institutions and cultural formations that constitute us: class, gender, race, etc. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 208). These forms of organisation are codes that organise, regulate, and give meaning to movement. Deterritorialisation is a movement away from these strict social codes. Problems that arose during the "great fiction debate" illustrate this phenomenon. Stevenson argues (1897), for example, that a community should not be assessed or defined by the quantity of fiction circulated. He was concerned because, at the end of the nineteenth century, librarians compared fiction circulation statistics to evaluate their patrons' reading habits and the librarian's success improving them. "The theory that the character of a community is indicated by the percentage of fiction circulated from the public library does not seem to be well founded" (Stevenson, 1897, p. 135). Stevenson observed that the libraries of cities populated by "good Presbyterians" and the well-educated had high portions of fiction circulation. The so-called high standards of reading were not maintained even in communities that were well-educated, wealthy and "morally sound". The community's actions could not be wholly determined by their class. The upper class was a rigid category; its members had access to a good education, employment opportunities, and resources. There was movement that escaped its rigidity, such as the desire for fiction reading that did not fit the category of "high mindedness" associated with a good education. The pleasure of fiction reading was a line of flight that determined the trajectory of the public library despite many attempts to create different readers through the bureaucratic organisation of the library.

The concept of an assemblage can be very useful for understanding how social organisations are formed to attain a particular goal and how problems arise when they become rigid and restrict movement. The answer is not to dissolve institutions and rush into a black hole, but to ensure that they permit new and positive connections or facilitate new projects.

Old concepts in new ways

The library can achieve new potential not by dissolving but by inventing new projects and concepts or using old concepts in new ways. Montreal's Mobilivre-Bookmobile

project is an example of such a project. The organisers of the Mobilivre employed a very typical library initiative to distribute books: the travelling library. Starting in 2002, with a grant from the Federal Government, organisers loaded a van with books and travelled across the USA and Canada. The traditional use of bookmobiles and reliance upon government funding make this project sound like a very traditional library initiative. But the purpose of the project was to resist a very typical library tendency: the over reliance upon established publishers and canonical literature. The mobilivre collection gives access to a "traveling collection of approximately 300 book works ranging from handmade and one-of-a-kind to photocopied and small press publications"(Mobilivre, 2006). The Mobilivre's frequent stops at libraries attests to it employing the bookmobile concept in a new way.

It might also be possible to conceive of the concept of "authority" in a new way. In LIS, as well as in other disciplines, the concept of authority is employed to facilitate access to documents and as a tool to judge their value. Antonio Pasquali notes that "the Frankfurt School had emphatically insisted half a century ago that the concept of authority would be one of the most important interpretative categories of our time" (1997, p. 34). It is also increasingly a site of contestation. Notions of authority have been critiqued in many disciplines because of increasing awareness of the lack of objectivity in assessments of authority. It is common to see critiques of authority because of its alliance with economic, political or patriarchal structures, yet authority has not been adequately addressed in LIS. For example, the tendency to value and judge the authority of material based on its origin from a large (and therefore supposedly reputable) publishing house is still a standard evaluation method used in collection development (Bopp and Smith, 2011). There has been little acknowledgement that in making this form of assessment librarians are supporting economic power structures. It remains unclear whether librarians can maintain a concept of authority without the current economic and social hierarchies it currently implies. As intermediaries in the dissemination of information, librarians have always assessed authority, but their assessments require involvement in a system that favours large publishing houses.

As an alternative, some librarians have endorsed Open Access and have been active in the construction of institutional repositories (Shearer, 2004, pp. 89-98). Unfortunately, such initiatives depend upon the use of such systems, which is unlikely given current university faculty performance evaluations are based in part on publication in peer-reviewed high-prestige journals. It may be time for librarians to become more directly involved in the production process and thereby be more effective in creating new ways of constructing authority.

New connections

If we understand the library as an assemblage, we no longer seek to establish the autonomy of the library from political and economic spheres. Freedom is not a matter of autonomy from external forces but rather about creating new connections. It is not necessary to reproduce the current political and economic environment. Nor does the library need to continue to strive for independence. The point is to make new connections.

The American Library Associations' (ALA) statement on Darfur is an example. The resolution adopted in June of 2006 observes that the media and institutions, such as the library, that deliver information have not done adequate work to raise awareness and disseminate information on the situation in Darfur, where hundreds of thousands of civilians have been killed and millions have been displaced by violence. The ALA

resolved to urge its member organisations to disseminate information on the crisis and to urge publishers to produce material on the crisis.

As Al Kagan (2007) explains, this resolution shows that librarians have moved beyond their position on neutrality. He implies that the dissemination of information is not sufficient; librarians need to take a stand against government. The American government does not want to jeopardise its diplomatic relations with Sudan because it appreciates its cooperation in handing over potential terrorists and in the Sudanese commitment to the International Monetary Funds strict restructuring plans. Foreign interest in Sudan, such as oil investments and military expenditure, make it economically unwise to interfere in the Sudanese conflict (Kagan, 2007).

The situation is more complex than Kagan admits. The Bush administration adopted the situation in Darfur as an election issue to pander to a diverse electorate: fundamentalist Christians, the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People and multilateral liberals all of whom were concerned about Darfur (Hallward, 2004). In 2004, the American government went so far as to label the events in Darfur "genocide". Totally, 10 per cent of China's oil currently comes from Sudan while 80 per cent of Sudan's oil revenue flows to the purchase of arms, many coming from China (Goodman, 2004). China has made huge investments in pipelines and refineries. American interests and influence in Sudan are seriously challenged by China's expanded trade and influence in the region. These might be reasons for the Bush administration's increasingly hard stance against the Sudanese government.

If we take the ALA's resolution on Darfur as an example, the library cannot be understood as a civil society institution which mediates between people and the state, nor merely a mechanism of capitalist interests. Despite the American administration's support for activists, the ALA resolution was not an expression of support for American interests in Sudan. As Kagan argues, librarians were not merely disseminating information on the Sudanese conflict but building new connections, with people, groups, and publishers with the intent to oppose state- and capital-sponsored violence. According to Kagan the ALA must, if only temporarily, collaborate with student groups, African-American and religious groups to resist the economic and military forces driving the Sudanese crisis. The Darfur resolution demonstrates how the library can be assembled with other entities in society and direct movement away from control mechanisms.

The Friern Barnet Library, in north London, was kept alive but members of the community, library supporters and members of the Occupy movement who banded together to save a public library. The library was closed in 2012 but was very quickly taken over by squatters who were part of the Occupy movement. The Occupy movement, generally committed to economic and social equality, was frequently criticised for lacking clear goals and tactics. In this instance, the library supporters in the community banded together with members of the Occupy movement. Together they collect 10,000 volumes to refill the library shelves and started a variety of workshop typically offered by public libraries (Taylor). They also put pressure on city council to put off the sale of the building. The library, community supporters and members of the Occupy movement banded together, even if only briefly, to respond cuts to public services increasingly being seen during these times of austerity.

Conclusion

By introducing the concept of the library as an assemblage, we have a new theoretical framework from which we can understand the place of the library in society. The impact of the development of ICTs and the arrival of the information society has many

library scholars wondering about the shifting role and purpose of the library. Deleuze's theory of the institution provides libraries with a theoretical perspective from which we can understand that librarians and library patrons are not determined by the economic and social milieu in which their library exists. Rather libraries are assemblages and books, information, library workers that can all be assembled in a multiplicity of different ways to achieve social justice.

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