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Nailing Jelly to the Wall: Understanding Postmodernism's Influence on Library Information Science

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Introduction

How did we get into this anyway? "Defining" postmodernism.

Q: What do you get when you cross a postmodernist with a Mafia boss?

A: Someone who will make you an offer that *no one* can understand!

(Cook, 2001(b), p. 18)

This is the attempt to define something which by its very nature avoids definition. Before we can speak of the influence postmodernism is having on library and information areas, we have to at least make the attempt to understand what postmodernism is. Several of these "definitions" are what postmodernism is not while others focus on what postmodernism seeks to be.

What it is not: the Enlightenment rationalistic tradition. Postmodernism is a critique of all that the Enlightenment stood for. Rationalism, logic, reason, and scientific method (to name a few), are questioned by postmodernists who throw the Enlightenment's entire presuppositions out the window. Deodato (2006) calls it a "critique of Enlightenment rationalism and universalism which emphasizes the role of underlying structures and power relationships in the construction of truth and knowledge" (p. 52).

Old methods of discovering truth and reality are questioned, as are those so-called "experts." Walter Truett Anderson (1991) calls it a threat to all existing constructions of reality, and people aren't going to like it. For many, the collapse of their belief system is the end of the world itself. This is a collapsing of our social roles as well as our concepts of personal identity. People go crazy when they don't know who they are. (pp. 26-27).

Kruk (2002), in a less-than-flattering view of postmodernism, says:

> For post-modernists, grand questions about the nature of reality and our place in the universe are pointless. There is no Truth; there are only provisional statements that are neither valid nor invalid.

> Distinctions between good and evil, beautiful and ugly and true and false are not discernible any more. There are no good books and no bad books. No one has the authority to make such judgments. Consequently, there is no canon. No group of people can claim that they know what reality is. We apparently *create* meaning and do not discover it. Post-modernist librarians do not pay much attention to collection development. Books are to be read here and now because they will soon be superseded by new books. Books resemble newspapers in their ephemerality and unimportance. Reading is not a serious engagement and does not lead to the discovery of truth. It is rather like a distraction. (para. 20)

Despite his critique, Kruk's analysis seems to illustrate postmodernist themes very well. For the postmodernist, knowledge does not exist apart from human construction. We need a paradigm, a reality, a set of truths and creeds, so we create this "reality." Reality comes via our humans searching for some type of meaning, and we convey these myths and tales in our storytelling, and these limited local narratives differ from group to group. (Yoder, 2003, p. 383) Postmodernism ultimately has no final answer. There are no "universal" truths. When we have one conception of knowledge, another layer of thought is introduced. (Ibid, p. 385)

Postmodernism is not Positivism, a philosophy which arose in the 19th Century modernist era. As Flew (1984) defines it:

> The term "positive" has here the sense of that which is given or laid down, that which has to be accepted as we find it and is not further explicable; the word is intended to convey a warning against the attempts of theology and metaphysics to go beyond the world given to observation in order to enquire into first causes and ultimate ends. All genuine human knowledge is contained within the boundaries of science…whatever answers cannot be answered by scientific methods we must be content to leave permanently unanswered. (p. 283)

Positivism traditionally pigeon-holed reality into what could be observed and "proven" through the Scientific Method and would not go beyond this boundary. Librarians were also pigeon-holed into two images. The first saw the librarian as expert of obscure facts they pull up instantly. Librarians even "get a kick" from fact-finding of the trivial, and get something like a drug-induced "high." (Radford, 1998, p. 409) Another model from positivism comes via the novel *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco, which portrayed librarian monks as a bunch of OCD, all-powerful guardians. (Ibid) I guess we in the LIS world hate to admit it, but we know people such as these. Both images, according to Radford, are accurate depictions, but even more so are examples of positivism in that "knowledge, as contained in texts, constitutes an independent object that can be stored, classified, and arranged in an objective manner…in both accounts, the assumption and implicit acceptance of an objective view of knowledge is crucial to the understanding of the descriptions and the power they possess." (Ibid, p. 410)

The library is burdened with these images from positivism, and librarians are perceived as system-oriented rather than person-oriented. Library "science" in fact is viewed exactly as that: it "operates according to the ideals of the scientific method, the a priori principles that define the relationship between data and hypothesis… to provide a theoretical and rule-governed basis with which to make library practices more effective intermediaries…to develop general and a priori rules with which to build systems that permit efficient and accurate access to knowledge." (Ibid, pp.412-413) The library, burdened with this positivism worldview, has become known more for its structure and classification system than for its usefulness. We memorize Dewey numbers so we can speak a jargon no one else does, and then shake our heads at the ignorance of our patrons. Perhaps

we are so proud of our structure and system so we can appear as experts. Maybe we view our classification as a neurosurgeon views the brain as their special area of expertise no one but them really understand. "In a predominantly positivistic conception, a library system is concerned with knowledge (its acquisition, coding, and retrieval) and only marginally concerned with users and their problems." (Ibid, p.413)

Postmodernism is not the Scientific Method. Foucault replaced the word "knowledge" for "knowledge claims" and questioned any behavior or thought "perceived as self-evident, natural, and unproblematic." (Ibid, p.416) Systems of study change through time and change the criteria by which something is observed. (Ibid, p.417) Whatever is considered scientific truth at the moment is based on whatever scientific system is dominating at that point in time. What we claim as truth is actually a product of the system we are using to determine truth at that given moment. One only has to imagine the truths of medicine using a medieval handbook to realize truth not only evolves (along with us) but also depends on the current criteria for study.

Rationality, objectivity, and universal truth are questioned and ultimately rejected. The Scientific Method is an incomplete science because the observer can never be a completely rational, objective individual who is free from subjectivity. Postmodernists question any "proven fact" coming out of the Scientific Method and consider it another flawed, biased, and inconclusive finding. An adequate conclusion is impossible because no one can speak of the world from an objective standpoint. (Stark, Stepanovich, Poppler, & Hopkins, 2008, p. 259)

As rationalism and scientific inquiry dominated the Enlightenment, so the rejection of such "truths" has dominated the thinking of postmodernism. We wrestle with the eternal questions of whether there is external truth and reality beyond us or whether we simply create these. Much of our Western society is based on the assumption that there is a truth beyond us and it is documented in literature and history. Ideas such as "Manifest Destiny," as well as other nationalistic, social, political, or religious ideals, tell of heroes who have been guided by an "invisible hand" to fulfill the wishes of a deity or the longings of a people.

"Whereas modernism has been characterized by the extension of human reason based upon (imperfect) theoretical understanding, postmodernism is characterized by diffidence about knowing anything and a lack of possibility for broad based effective change- a seeming abandonment of hope." (Buschman & Brosio, 2006, p. 411) Not only do we see the postmodern emphasis on the lack of knowing absolute truth, but there is also suspicion of those who do claim any kind of authority. Gergen (1991) in *The Saturated Self* puts it this way:

> Where modernism prepared the way for the suspicion of authority… postmodernism finishes the coup de grace. For if the subject of knowledge is deconstructed, and telling cannot in principle be true or false, then all authoritative claims (and claims to authority) are placed in doubt. Scientists, elder statesmen, Supreme Court justices, ministers, rabbis, business leaders, medical doctors, psychiatrists, economists, professors…all those traditionally granted status as "knowing something" are brought into question…They are victims, like the rest of us, of communal tastes, values, and ideologies, all of which color the ways they understand the world. (p. 124)

Libraries were born in the modern world (roughly defined as 1750-1950), and could be called the "engine room of the project of modernity, with the librarian, both educator and technician, as a kind of enlightened mechanic." (Muddiman, 1999, p. 4) The public library is defined by the modern era and its industrialization, urbanization, and other movements. (Rasmussen and Jochumsen, 2007, pp. 45-46) This is why, it seems, the public library of today is wandering without a sense of direction. "The book is dead." "No it isn't." "The library should go all to cyberspace." "No, libraries need a physical presence." (Ibid, p. 46) Who are we and

where are we going? We are leaving modernity behind, but do not know what is ahead.

Modern librarians are comfortable with stability, postmoderns are more comfortable with "fluidity in communication, organizational dynamics, and information seeking… Certainty is preferred by modern librarians; postmodern professionals tend to feel more comfortable with uncertainty. Modern scholars seek a degree of distance in interactions…postmodern professionals seek participation." (Frank, 2004, p. 415) Modernists favor design, totalization, the individual, and determinancy, while postmoderns are like chance, deconstruction, relationships, and interdeterminancy. (Ibid, pp. 415-416)

Postmodernism is not metanarratives. Metanarratives seek to classify all of life into one grand, overarching scheme. Whether they are religious, political, social, cultural, or gender-based, metanarratives frequently exclude "the other." "The other" is defined as those whose race, gender, religion, socio-economic status or other factor excludes them from the metanarrative. These are the "others" whose culture is exterminated by the "heroes" of history, or whose beliefs and culture simply die out. When one metanarrative becomes the norm of a culture, several of these smaller metanarratives are lost or obliterated. Those unjustly excluded from fair treatment, those called "the other," are subjects who suffer by those in power. (Buschman & Brosio, 2006, p. 410)

Engagement with the world forces us to become aware of more narratives, voices, worldviews, and realities making a metanarrative obsolete. Narratives come from many sources, as Cook (2001b, p. 23) describes, which involve the "other," or those who have a different race, class, gender, or sexual orientation different from the metanarrative. Metanarratives had incomplete views of social reality. Postmodern sees documents, text, discourses, etc. as only one aspect of reality, and one narrative among many so that nothing is neutral or objective (Deodato,2006, p. 54). "What was once perceived to be natural, self-evident, or just plain normal is revealed to be socially and culturally constructed and thus in need of deconstruction …" (Ibid).

Postmodernism focuses on "the other." It seeks to hear the lost voices of the marginalized and oppressed- whose mere existence proves metanarratives are a lie (Ibid, p. 53).

Deodato (2006) cites the work of Lyotard (1984) in describing postmodernism as "incredulity towards metanarratives." Metanarratives refer to any type of "sweeping explanations premised on some version of monolithic human experience" (Deodato, 2006, p.53). Postmodernists emphasize the many narratives that have survived over the course of human history, including those who aren't dead white males. (ibid.)

Postmodernism eschews metanarratives, those sweeping interpretations that totalize human experience in some monolithic way, whether it be capitalism, patriarchy, imperialism, the nation state, or the Western 'canon' in literature or philosophy- almost anything that reflects the past or present 'hegemony' of dead white males. For example…Western literature was, until recently, a vehicle for buttressing patriarchy or colonialism. In contrast, postmodernism seeks to emphasize the diversity of human experience by recovering marginalized voices in the face of such hegemony, and hence its emphasis across a whole range of academic disciplines on issues of gender, race, class, sexuality, and locality. (Cook, 2001b, p. 17)

The big metanarratives offer a distorted and incomplete view of human nature. The right-brain irrational and subjective disciplines which favor passion, imagination, sexuality, art, etc. (which are a major part of the human soul), were absent from the left-brain scientific rationalism in Enlightenment-based metanarratives. And they are all conspicuously absent from the archives, as they were deemed unimportant (Ibid).

Postmodernism is pluralism. Postmodernists seek to dismantle the power structures and systems that have placed people into the categories which created "the other," including persons of color, women, and gay men and lesbian women (Buschman & Brosio, 2006, p. 410). Walter Truett Anderson (1990) saw three emerging trends related to postmodernism: 1) an unregulated marketplace of belief systems for public consumption 2) a new polarization, and 3) globalization which spreads multiple belief systems. (p. 6) Of course this is not entirely a recent phenomenon, as conflicts over belief systems through the centuries led to crusades, inquisitions, and revolutions, as well as concepts of human rights and separation of church and state. But through all the bloodshed, people have gained the ability to make their own choices about reality. They in fact became consumers of reality who have the ability to create new realities for themselves. (p. 7) Humans create reality rather than find it, (Stark et al., 2008, pp. 261-262) and there is no "objective reality" to point to as both the observer and the observed are interdependent of each other. You cannot objectively study something when you yourself are another study.

Postmodernism is not Platonism. Platonists see the universe as intelligible and understandable through reason and language. Humans naturally seek and share beauty, truth, and good. Knowledge is different from opinion; truth and knowledge transcend culture. Libraries store and disseminate knowledge as well as store knowledge and truth. Lastly, the "primary concern of librarians is how to serve truth and not their political masters nor the multitude." (Kruk, 2002, para. 17)

A Platonist librarian builds a book collection not based on what a patron wants, but on a desire for discovering truth. Reading for mere entertainment is nonsense: the quest for the best in humanity is a far better goal. Only books that make people think are worth reading. (Ibid, p. 19)

"Attention please: The Postmodern Library will not be closing at this time as we will be deconstructing until further notice. Please bring any narratives you have to the front desk at a time that is flexible for you." Postmodernism and the Public Library

Davis (2008) gives some glimpses on what postmodernism means for librarians and the public library. Public libraries need to be places of community building with flexible and open boundaries with clear missions. (p. 77) Librarians need to focus on relationships, collaboration and community-building as well as critical and synthetic thinking, moving from being guardians of knowledge to postmodern enablers. (Ibid)

Public libraries provide a safe place in the local community. Libraries can build trust and relationships in the community and librarians can collaborate with other community members who share the same vision. (Ibid, p. 78)

"That belongs in the archives . . . at least I think it does according to my perspective of reality. Maybe it's really just junk?" Postmodernism and archives

Archives are based on respect des fonds, provenance and original order. Care had to be taken to ensure records were kept in their proper context and did not get mixed with records of other creators. Postmodernists call this organization and arrangement system a metanarrative: the archivist is creating the reality. The archivist misses the complex realities of the records which have "multi-provenancial" characteristics and is seeking a simplified record of a complicated source (Deodato, 2006, pp. 55-56). How archivists arrange and describe records influences how they will be interpreted by others (Ibid). "In short, the process of arrangement and description construct a metanarratives of the record, which

privileges one reading of the record- one version of reality- over all others" (Ibid, p. 56). Or, put in another way, "archives can no longer be viewed as windows to the past" (Ibid).

Nesmith (2002) discussed the interplay of archives, postmodernism, and language. The modernist view, based on the Enlightenment, saw rational and dependable communication as the foundation of a world with unlimited intellectual, material, and social progress. Postmodernism rejects this because language itself is limited because it too is a social construction. There is no way language can be considered an objective source from which truth and reality are revealed for it too is a biased, subjective construction. Language cannot perfectly represent the world, so confident assumptions about social, political, or religious truths are questioned. Language is simply the mediation we have to construct these "truths" so they are not certainties. Language constructions shape our understanding of the world, whether accurate or not. They are all we have, and we are stuck with them with all of their flaws. (p. 26)

Language does not describe the human condition, but creates it. (Stark et al., 2002, p. 262) The common view sees the archivist receiving and storing records which reflect society and that is all they do in their daily work. Archivists, however, are actually co-creating and shaping the knowledge in records, and are thus helping to form society's memory. (Nesmith, 2002, p. 26) Archivists traditionally are viewed as guardians and preservers of records, a passive role in which they "do their duty" with what is handed to them. They list, describe, copy, and retrieve the records and their information. Intervention was minimal, and not needed, and anything that distorts the original meaning was opposed. Archives accumulated naturally, and the archivist was the guardian, doing their best to remain invisible. (Ibid, pp. 27-28) Postmodernism questions this static view.

In the twentieth century, philosophers began to see reading, interpreting, expressing, recording, transmitting, preserving, and recalling as all subjective acts. Everything we do with a text is a creating of a reality. Whatever truth we attempt to communicate is dependent on the format we use to communicate, and that is limited to words and images. "Our understanding of reality is powerfully shaped by the particular forms and media of communications in which we are immersed, and by our efforts to transmit ideas and experiences with them." (Ibid, 2002, p. 29)

Nesmith (2002) cites Derrida's *Archive Fever* (1994), which explores Freud and his father's wishes to pass down his Jewish heritage, itself an archive, to his son. This desire is to transcend the archive and experience the truth itself, but the archiving process actually gets in the way. For the archivist "their personal backgrounds and social affiliations, and their professional norms, self-understanding, and public standing, shape and are shaped by their participation in this process." (p. 30) Archivists shape the archives and are not passive, as their work has a contextualizing role. As contexts change over time, so does our interpretation, which leads to continually evolving archives. Archivists re-create the records for the purpose of preservation. (Ibid, p. 31)

Documents are not of historical, societal, or cultural importance to the memory of civilization unless archivists say they are. They declare what national treasures are. Like an umpire who has the power to determine what is a ball or strike, so archivists have the capacity to create reality and preserve what is considered significant. Consider women's records, which only in recent history started to be archived. (Ibid, p. 33) How many treasures could have influenced our worldview and history but were never preserved? On the other hand, the Gettysburg Address, not considered important at the time of its delivery, grew in importance through being archived. After all, it is called the Gettysburg Address, not the Gettysburg chat. (Ibid, p. 36) "This new recognition changed the context for understanding these records, and thus changed what they are." (Ibid.) Archives are less about the static recorded product and more about the dynamic process of recording. (Ibid, p. 35)

Postmodernists see archives as the place where social memory is constructed, and not as an absolute. Does this mean nothing is true or that all of reality is meaningless relativism? No. Postmodernists say "meaning is relative to the context of the creation of the record, that behind the text there are many other texts being concealed, and that mediation by the archivist in setting standards …is critically important in shaping that meaning." (Cook, 2001b, p. 27)

So how can archivists come up with orderly, usable, and responsible standards for description? Archivists can open the door to a new world of openness, visibility, and willingness to question and be questioned. Through postmodernism they can not only realize but also celebrate their own historicity and biases, as well as their own contributions. (Ibid., p. 28) We also get some help from Deodato who cites Duff and Harris (2002) who came up with the following guidelines:

- Standards must refrain from being considered natural, and the biases of its creators made explicit.
- It must emerge from a process that is inclusive and transparent.
- It must affirm a process of open-ended making and remaking of the record.
- It must consider the needs of diverse user groups by allowing different ways of searching, interrogating, organizing, and interpreting records.
- It must require engagement with the marginalized and the silenced and create spaces for sub-narratives and counter-narratives.
- It must seek ways of troubling its own status as a metanarrative by embracing a "politics of ambiguity and multiplicity" and opening spaces for other telling and re-tellings of competing stories. (cited in Deodato, 2006, p. 61)

"You're taking Intro to Postmodernism with professor who?" Postmodernism and the Academic Library

Harley, Dreger, and Knobloch (2001) share their perspectives of the influence of postmodernism on the academic library. The combination of a web-driven world and postmodernism leads them to summarize that postmodernism is "consumerism, superficiality, and knowledge fragmentation." (p. 23) However, academic librarians can devote more time towards student critical thinking rather than showing them how to use library resources. (Ibid) Use of the web has completely changed the dynamics of how students use the academic library. (Ibid, p. 24)

Postmodern consumerism has created a compromise of quality for cheap and fast. Students look for drive-thru information they can grab and go. There is little regard for appreciating where the information is coming from or evaluating the sites it that provided it. Students approach the Web like an ATM machine looking for fast cash. (Ibid, pp. 24-25) Postmodernism also creates knowledge fragmentation, as the subjective dominates with there being no absolute truth or reality version to cling to. The Web also creates its own knowledge fragmentation with personal web pages and other forms of "information" that anyone can create. Everyone can roll their eyes and say "Wikipedia" at that one. Students, lacking the critical thinking skills, consider all of these as equal in value. (Ibid, p. 25)

At one time, if you worked behind a desk in the library, you would be approached with questions on research. Now, since so much research is done independently through the Web, how can librarians make a difference? Harley, Dreger, and Knobloch (2001) point out several areas in which this can happen.

Academic librarians need to find new ways to attract students into the library and find ways to engage them when they are inside. Thinking outside the library box is the challenge presented. Academic librarians need to deliver resources and services to students outside of the library. Seeing the library staff in other contexts symbolizes that librarians are part of the entire community. Meeting students in the virtual world through email, chat, or other electronic means is also valuable in

breaking down the barrier of students and the library. "Academic library services should be people-rather than commodity- driven." (Ibid, p. 26)

Despite the trend for online library interaction, there is a critical need for trust, responsibility, and critical thinking that can only happen in person-to-person contact. Our value to students is not so much in how many resources are offered, but in the nature of those services, activities, and programs provided. The task of the academic librarian is in facilitating student critical thinking skills (Ibid, p. 27) and not the teaching our tedious classification schemes and search techniques. Search strategies are easily taught, but critical thinking skills develop over an indefinite amount of time. (Ibid, p. 28) Students, albeit imperfectly, know how to search and locate information, but have huge gaps in critically thinking about the nature and origin of this information, and this is where librarians are desperately needed.

Another area is the architectural impact of postmodernism. Art is one of the major disciplines in which the term postmodernism was born. There are some practical ideas put forward by Harley, Dreger and Knobloch (2001), who mention several ideas for the academic library: welcoming service points, study areas for laptop use, media commons and cybercafé, comfortable reading areas, counseling and advising areas, and exhibit areas. One-on-one contact can happen in all parts of the library. Less restrictive internet use policies and 24/7 library access are necessary. Collaboration makes sure the collection is built to the needs of the students and faculty. Librarians who are calm, non-judgmental, flexible, and responsible are the most effective, along with listening and making time for students. (Ibid, pp. 29-30)

Rasmussen and Jochumsen (2007) believe the traditional design of a library actually looks like an 18th Century prison. An "inspection house" was a prison around an inner tower so unseen jailers were able to watch the prisoners, who were never sure when they were being watched and lived with the possibility of constant surveillance. Discipline came from their own self-consciousness. This was also the design in military barracks, factories, and even the classroom. Modern library design has the circulation desk primarily placed so staff can observe the entire library, a design only begun when shelves became open and there needed to be assurances the books would not be stolen. (p. 49) Libraries are beginning to tinker with postmodern designs for a much more inviting atmosphere.

"Can you please help me find some truthful information that is not influenced by my biased, subjective, and culturally-shaped white, male, 21st century tarnished perspective on reality?" Postmodernism and Reference Services

Postmodernism and today's Web culture have put the role of traditional reference services in doubt. Questions to Google have replaced questions to the reference librarian. Some say reference is dead, never to recover, while others think it can adapt under a new set of features and services. If this is so, what will reference look like in an increasingly postmodern world?

Martin (2009) explores the postmodern dynamic on academic reference services. Postmodernists cherish relativism, distrust authority and order, and believe universal truth cannot be attained, since one's truth can't be valid to everyone. This is a major conflict with reference services which has always been based on "the expert." Are these challenges or impossibilities? Since postmodernists view information as power and classification systems and expertise as suspect, what can reference services do?

Google and Wikipedia, among other sites, can answer questions more comfortably, quickly and effectively than the librarian. The library is no longer the sole sacred tkeeper of all information. The library looks clunky and awkward in its resources

(including electronic ones) compared to the speed with which the internet provides information. (Ibid, p.4)

There are a few ways reference services can adapt to this environment and do more than just keep their heads above water. One of these is in some of the new online catalogs many libraries have. The ability for items to be "tagged" not just by the librarian but also for the patron, allows for more connections to resources beyond the MARC and subject heading systems. Patron created book reviews or "stars" like those of Amazon.com and other websites allow the user to read to see what others have said. Another way is through social networking and bookmarking. Libraries, and even reference librarians, having a presence on Facebook and other social networking sites, puts them into the conversation with the Web-connected world. Volume of activity in social networking sites is not as important as simply "being there," which can make a huge difference. "Social networking sites can also help us shed the library's stuffy image and cater to postmodern sensibility. Social networking sites offer libraries an online space in which we can interact with members of the information society in a playful, non-authoritarian way." (Ibid, p. 5)

The attitude of the reference librarian is important in aiding students in their research. Presenting an attitude that says the students don't know how to search (even though they have been searching online for years and can often find things faster than librarians), or giving them instructions that are completely contradictory to the way they search, will continue to erode the image of the librarian and the library. The differences between how they and we search and should be celebrated for what they are: diverse methods of finding information, and not be presented in a right vs. wrong divide. (Ibid)

Promoting the library and its reference services are also a possibility (and a free one) through social networking. Even the much maligned Wikipedia, which many librarians shudder to think about with its open creating and editing features, has been used by librarians to link to their collections. "By embedding links to library resources – especially digital collections – in related Wikipedia articles, we can not only increase traffic to library sites but also enrich the information available on Wikipedia." (Ibid) Academic reference librarians also connect with students on campus by becoming "roving" librarians, where instead of waiting for students to come to them, they go to the students. (Ibid)

Reference librarians can also provide valuable help in instructional areas amidst the online world of chaos. We can provide life-long information literacy skills which go far beyond how to use a database (which is something most will probably never use again). "Instead of guiding patrons in an open-ended exploration through the universe of information, too often the library plays the part of the overprotective parent…we can encourage information literacy while embracing postmodernism. Information literacy is about exploration, not information control…learning skills and ways of thinking, not particular tools." (Ibid, p.6) Librarians must make patrons aware that our collection of resources is for the express purpose of sharing different opinions, theories, and truths which postmodernism values, almost a playful place where not one idea dominates (Ibid, p. 7)

Librarians cannot present themselves as an "expert." By embracing relativism and denying universal truth, postmodernists deny any notion of an expert. If there is no absolute truth, how could an "expert" claim to know what is right for all people? (Ibid, p. 3) Expertise is actually a modern idea, with roots in ancient philosophy which predominated the Middle Ages. Modernism has the knower and the knowledge separate from each other. The postmodernist sees expertise tied to knowledge and knowledge to power. Knowledge becomes a system of haves and have not's which includes specialized knowledge, and technical mumbo jumbo can make this knowledge unintelligible to the layman. (Stover, 2004, p. 277) In postmodernism, expertise evolves and adapts to circumstances and is based on the need of the patron. (Ibid) Librarians, in fact, are non-experts. (Ibid, p. 289) "The postmodern librarian will recognize that professional resources and

professional knowledge are not secret commodities to be protected or monopolized. Instead, this librarian will seek to share these gifts with patrons in a relational, interdependent, and non-hierarchical manner." (Ibid, p. 292) Postmodernism promotes the transparency of information, as all ideas and systems of truth need to be experienced and available.

"Can I sue the catalog for discrimination?" Postmodernism and our classification systems.

Librarians know well the biases the Library of Congress Subject Headings and the Dewey Decimal System display in their presentation of reality. For instance the LOC Subject Headings discriminate against women with headings such as "Women in Politics," "Women in Engineering," or "Women in Management," which imply these are unusual occurrences. Because there are not subject headings referring to men in these fields, it is presumed that men fulfill the roles. (Deodato, 2006, p.57) Postmodernists show cataloging and other descriptions are heavy on the Western, white, Christian, heterosexual, male worldview. It is the job of the archivists and catalogers to review their descriptions and headings to ensure equal representation of all persons (Ibid, p. 58).

Archives and libraries are indebted to the work and thought of Melvin Dewey. Dewey was a product of nineteenth-century rational positivism, from which he built the modern library foundations. A classic example of positivism is the Dewey Decimal System, created in 1870 and still used heavily today. Dewey saw all of life and knowledge fitting within a logical hierarchy system of ten main classes of subject headings, and from these came ten further divisions, then ten sub-sections. All that was known and ever could be known fit neatly into these sections. (Heald, 1996, p.90) Everything had a static, logical place. This universal classification system reflects modernity's attempt to separate expert areas so questions can be answered according to religious, technical, or social-scientific answers. (Rasmussen & Jochumsen, 2007, p. 51)

Over time, the works of Derrida and Foucault influenced some historians, and a new type of historical perspective emerged. The historian combined facts and interpretation into one entity instead of being an objective outsider only presenting facts. Postmodernists conclude all we can really "know" is that historical experience is unknowable and all we can surmise from the past is the domination of one version of events over another. (Buschman & Brosio, 2006 p.410) Some certain perspective was considered canonical and the official record of the culture. Historical writing is all then a work of fiction. (Ibid, pp. 91-92) Archives are just as culturally-determined as everything else, and our very understandings of them change as well. However, we are a document-based society and need the very documents which are preserved, flawed or not. (Ibid, p. 95)

Postmodernists consider all classification systems as disingenuous and flawed to begin with. "The complete world of knowledge will never fit tidily into our fabricated organizational schemes." (Martin, 2009, p. 3) Librarians are criticized for creating a grand narrative in which all of our resources fit, and our privileged understanding forced onto all knowledge and patrons. Davis (2008) reveals Library of Congress Subject Headings where "man" represents "human beings" and "women" are found at the bottom of the hierarchy:

Man
UF Human Beings
Humans
Mankind
BT Primates
RT Anthropology
Human-Animal relationships
SA headings beginning with the word Human
NT Economic Man

Ethnology
Human Biology
Human-plant relationships
Men
Persons
Philosophical anthropology
Women (pp. 66-67)

It is little wonder feminists for quite some time have called for a new system.

Where do you find the postmodern books? Postmodernism and collection building

In traditional library work, collection building has been according to the laws and structures of classification. Librarians follow the proper format already established and any variance was usually looked at as poor procedure. Everything in the library had its proper place and limited access points. (Bodie & Maier O' Shea, 2005, p. 143) Today the collection is no longer dominated by print, and the physical location of the library no longer contains all of the possible information available. We now have sources that are paper and electronic, local and remote. The collection says more about the subjective opinions of the collector than about the volume of materials. (Ibid.)

Postmodernism resists hierarchy and control found in classification. Librarians, using their subject headings, collect, name, and organize their objects. There is little or no flexibility in library organization, rather there is consistency across the board. There is no flexibility for works of an interdisciplinary nature or other items which fit different categories. (Ibid.) Modern day tagging and online catalogs aid in the retrieval process, however, e-resources are also ephemeral and librarians are powerless to retrieve information from the web or a database which may not be there tomorrow. (Ibid, p. 144) As books move more and more online, librarians become more of an online travel agent than a curator of volumes.

Nonlinear thinking is postmodernism's response to the Western world's preoccupation with linear and logical thinking as well as a narrative view. In the web-connected world, linear and orderly thinking don't exist. One hyperlink leads to another, and avenues unanticipated are discovered. Text is not fixed but fluid and connections are made which wouldn't have been made in a linear perspective. (Ibid)

Postmodernism blurs the boundaries of information. In the Web world, "this blurring of boundaries is expressed in interdisciplinary texts and in the morphing of categories and formats in an electronic environment, making it difficult to distinguish among e-journals, full-text databases, indexes, catalogs, Web sites, and multimedia. We move seamlessly among documents without knowing if we are navigating within or between documents, one database or several, scholarly journals, or popular magazines." (Ibid) We have moved from a collection-centered world to a user-centered world. No longer can libraries boast of their thousands of print volumes (most of which are probably obsolete or at least unused today). "What we are suggesting is developing a collection, regardless of format, that meets curricular needs but also addresses the interdisciplinary nature of learning outcomes; recognizes the disparate intellectual, cultural, and social needs of a diverse student body; and supports the library's outcomes for information literacy. The postmodern blurring of boundaries inspires us to develop and manage a coherent collection, one that makes sense and has guiding principles." (Ibid)

"Is this your first time in the Postmodern Library? All are welcome here." Concluding remarks about the future of the library as it interacts with postmodernism

To be true to postmodernism, there cannot be, in essence, a "conclusion" to the discussion as if several points or universal truth statements are given as absolutes which every library can follow. We walk away with more questions than answers, and what seems to be understood today becomes questioned tomorrow. There cannot be a "Top 10 ideas" list to sell a magazine or for someone to tweet as if these are profound thoughts by an "expert."

So then, does this paper simply end with a "Good night and good luck" wish for the reader or are there actually some conclusions worth noting? The very nature of postmodernism means there are no "truthy" statements to promote as it cannot be cataloged, classified, or defined. While this is all fine and dandy, our brains still want order, structure, and conclusion so we can feel complete. While the conversation continues, we are still left with the handshake and the "Until next time" promise to engage in discussion again. We must truly take a stab at wrapping it all up in the here and now of our understanding of libraries, information services, and postmodernism. So I guess that is where we go from here, but I don't feel right numbering them, putting them in any type of order, or even using bullet points to show some type of rational, logical thought.

A "Great Good Place"

Here then is an idea to ponder from Shuler (2006) talking about libraries, revolutions, and the 21st Century:

The library is one of societies "great good place"…distinctive and necessary social spaces for people to meet, discuss, and interact outside the constraints of where they might work or live…many public and academic libraries seek to remake themselves into lively places where people can come to visit, sip drinks, interact, debate the issues of the day, or use a computer, find they remain popular within their community. But this popularity is not based on traditional books and reading; the barrier reef uses some other binding agents other than paper or print, and users find them useful to their primary purposes: to build and sustain relationships-in other words, a new kind of literacy is evolving not around texts and the ability to read and understand (though that is still a critical element)…Information literacy and critical thinking are no longer determined by inanimate objects (printed materials). The information and knowledge are embedded in the interchange among people…The successful library in this world is less a lake (self-contained) and more of harbor (sheltering, but still wide-open to the fluid changes of the sea). (p. 542)

While the library may look different, still its role as a place of ideas, learning, community, and open access to information are still intact. While online communities are easy to find, there is still the need for a physical place to read, study, research, collaborate, and get something for free. Libraries represent the communities they are a part of, and an unfunded library represents the community's commitment to learning. One of the great strengths of the library is found in reflecting and supporting the individual cultural search process of postmodernity. An all-embracing library can accommodate many ideas, beliefs, and groups, and the present support in various communities when those libraries lose funding verifies their importance. (Rasmussen and Jochumsen, 2007, p. 54) If there is one thing for certain in all of this, librarians who are more comfortable with control as a motivational or organizational tool have very little chance of being effective in a postmodern library. (Frank, 2004, p. 418)

The "Cyborg Librarian"

An interesting model is the one proposed by Yoder (2003), whose context is that of the academic library. She introduces the sci-fi sounding "Cyborg" librarian model, a merging of the artificial and the human. The academic librarian becomes a

"human machine" who meaningfully engages with students while also navigating a world of online resources, web links, and search engines. Patrons interact with this "cyborg librarian" who is the bridge between student life and the life of media and text, as well as "a teacher, a guide, a machine, a consultant, a specialist, a salesperson, and much more. The cyborg librarian is the interface between the library and its users and the vast potential of the technological reorganization of the postmodern world." (p. 390)

So, how do you finish this?

Many other ideas presented in this paper also reveal what a postmodern library looks like. Catalogs, classifications, and structures of the past are not needed today as they once were. The day of absolute truth and metanarratives seem to be disappearing as we find more pluralism and diversity. The library, like many institutions, whether they are educational, political, religious, or public, is slow to respond to change. But the library is in better shape than most as its very nature is service to its patrons based on their needs and perspectives. The library has the advantage in being accessible to all, as long as public funding continues. Even though archives and collection development will always be subject to the biases of those who make the decisions, we can make a much greater concerted effort than others worried about political or religious pressure. We are the ones who seek to hear the voices of the "others" lost under the domination of metanarratives. Our structures and formats change, but the library of postmodernism will continue to let the many narratives be told.

Explaining postmodernism's influence on the LIS world, however, is like trying to nail jelly to the wall. Its scope is large and complex, and oozes out everywhere. Just "defining" postmodernism is itself a difficult measure because "by definition" postmodernism can't be defined. Yet libraries of all types are not what they used to be. Our place is that of fellow traveler, not tour guide; fellow student, not scholar; adventurer, not expert; and lay, not clergy. We are no longer experts, but we still know the value of information, with its origins and narratives. Libraries and information areas of all types will be hard pressed to not only make sense of it all, but also be willing to put aside and deconstruct the modernist cataloging, classification, and other structures which no longer apply to 21st century patrons.

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