POSITIVISM, FOUCAULT, AND THE FANTASIA OF THE LIBRARY: CONCEPTIONS OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE MODERN LIBRARY EXPERIENCE[1]

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This article argues that modern conceptions of the library are informed by a particular view of knowledge grounded in early twentieth-century positivism. From this standpoint, the ideals of neutrality and access have achieved prevalence as the basis for understanding the institutionalized practices of modern libraries. This view of knowledge also serves to structure significantly the library experience of individual librarians and library users. The view of scientific knowledge developed in the works of Michel Foucault is described and from it the library experience is reconceptualized. From the Foucauldian perspective, the library is seen as a dynamic site for the possibility of new knowledge as well as a passive storehouse that provides access to individual facts. The library community is encouraged to consider such alternative views of knowledge as potential bases for viewing the modern library experience.

Consider the following two descriptions of librarians. The first is taken from a widely used undergraduate textbook in speech communication. It addresses readers who are probably about to engage in their first serious interactions with a modern academic library environment: "A good Reference Librarian can be your best assistant in preparing your speeches. If you give speeches fairly often, it would be worth your time to go to your library and meet the Reference Librarian in person. Generally, he or she is someone who *enjoys digging out obscure bits of informa-*

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tion. Such specialists *get a kick* out of finding out the real name of that famous movie star, or the cost of our first aircraft carrier, or how high in the sky those satellites are that relay our TV programs" [1, p. 290; emphasis added]. A number of images are given in this description. The reference librarian is represented to the undergraduate as operating in a universe of individual facts, obscure or otherwise, that require locating or "digging out" in response to a specific information request from a library user. Information is a commodity for which the librarian is both guardian and broker. The metaphor of "getting a kick" from fact-finding likens the librarian's experience to one of taking a drug or flying a hang glider.

The second, quite different, description is taken from Jeffrey Garrett's reading of Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose* [2, 3]. Here the librarian monks are portrayed as "all-powerful" guardians of the "ultimate vanity of all human intellectual striving" "clinging to an outdated, quasi-sacred mission" [2, pp. 374, 377].

What is the relationship between these two images, one portraying the librarian as an eager seeker of individual facts and the other as a quasi-mystical guardian of a great temple of knowledge? It would be comforting to say that both are simply caricatures that exaggerate stereotypical, as opposed to actual, features of the library profession. However, the place of the first description, in the context of an undergraduate textbook describing library research skills, does not warrant this interpretation. As for the second description, Garrett claims that Eco has "drawn liberally and with gusto on his own experiences with modern research libraries . . . and has made these experiences and the (real) libraries in which he has had them a subject of his literary reflection" [2, p. 376]. Both descriptions, then, are made with the explicit claim that they reflect a true state of affairs in the modern research library environment.

If one accepts that these descriptions are "accurate," at least to some degree, several questions are raised: (1) What is the basis for such representations? (2) What implications do they have for the experience of the modern library for the librarian and the library user? And (3) What alternative bases might be developed as ways of viewing the modern library experience? The two representations seem consistent across a large range of individual accounts of the library experience in all types of libraries. Examining specific accounts of particular experiences may not help in understanding the roots of such conceptions since it may also be that the conceptions structure the account that is reported. In other words, the reality of the library experience is understood through the framework of images provided by the prior conception, as well as the other way around.

The major claim of this article is that such images are fundamentally grounded in a positivist view of knowledge. This view holds that knowledge, as contained in texts, constitutes an independent object that can be stored, classified, and arranged in an objective manner. Thus, in the first description, the librarian's purpose is to search this store of knowledge containers (texts, indexes, databases) to retrieve specific facts or references. In the second, the librarian's purpose is to protect and preserve this store. 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.

I will argue that the perceived reality of a library to the people who operate within the limits of its institutionalized practices is implicitly informed by a positivist orientation toward knowledge. Further, different views of knowledge have the potential of providing alternative frames of reference from which to re-create the perceived reality of the library experience and the roles of the librarian and library user within it. The argument will be developed in two sections. The first addresses the positivist view of knowledge, from which arises the perceptions of the library described above. The second develops an alternative view of knowledge, formulated in the work of Michel Foucault, from which a different view of the library experience can be articulated. I believe that such alternative views of knowledge deserve serious consideration from the library community.

The Positivist View of Knowledge and the Modern Library Experience

Garrett has claimed that there exists a "collective belief, unchallenged until recently, in the existence of a scientifically derived and classifiable body of knowledge" and that the library is "one of the most visible and important temples that society has erected to this belief" [2, p. 382]. Whether or not libraries are created as temples to some deity known as Science is not of direct interest here. However, Garrett's assertion of a relationship between a particular view of knowledge and the library experience is central to the major claim developed in this section: that is, that modern perceptions of the library experience are grounded in a positivist view of knowledge.

Richard Miller describes the dominant conception of scientific knowledge known by the term *positivism:* "The positivist analysis makes explanation . . . a matter of subsumption under general laws. A valid explanation of an event must describe general characteristics of the situation leading up to the event and appeal to general empirical laws dictat-

ing that when such characteristics are realized, an event of that kind always (or almost always) follows" [4, p. 15]. The positivist approach aspires to discover the generalizable something else: systems of laws and rules that lie beyond the realm of the immediately observable. The objective is to describe the underlying schemes in which an individual event or observation fits and from which future events can be predicted. These systems are expressed as theories, which become the basis of hypotheses to be tested against empirical evidence. The purpose of formulating general laws and theories is to provide the world with a language in which its assumed natural laws and structures can be expressed. As Mary Hesse puts it, "Science is ideally a linguistic system in which true propositions are in one-to-one relation to facts, including facts that are not directly observed because they involve hidden entities or properties" [5, p. xi]. Similarly, Bas Van Fraassen describes this orientation as assuming that "the picture which science gives us of the world is a true one, faithful in its details, and the entities postulated in science really exist: the advances of science are discoveries, not inventions" [6, pp. 6–7]. The ultimate objective of a positivist view of science is to match the structure of linguistic propositions to the real structures of the world so they will become, in Richard Rorty's terms, a "mirror of nature" [7, p. 12]. Reports of individual observations and experiments become building blocks of knowledge from which further tests can be developed and further knowledge of nature discovered. Positivist knowledge is able to grow because individual discoveries reveal specific parts of a single coherent picture, that is, nature. Over time, science eventually will reveal the properties of this totality by discovering the relationships among its individual parts in the form of covering laws. Such a view is made feasible by the collective assumption that the methodological notions by which positivism discovers knowledge are applied according to rules that are the same for all sciences and historical periods; that is, they are valid a priori. Such rules are realized in the tenets of the scientific method.

The positivist view of science is one among several, and many observers, even within the Western philosophical tradition, question whether it accurately portrays the progression of scientific knowledge [6–16]. Within the scientific community itself, following the impact of the work on relativity by Einstein and the development of the uncertainty principle by Heisenberg in the first half of the twentieth century, conceptions of knowledge have developed on the premise that all knowledge is fundamentally uncertain and relative to the frame of reference of the observer, even when that observer is a "scientist" [17–20].

Such work leads Miller to note that very few modern scientists ever would call themselves positivists [4, p. 3]. Yet the "collective belief in a

scientifically derived and classifiable body of knowledge" that Garrett alludes to, and which lies at the foundation of the descriptions of the librarians presented earlier, has a very strong affinity to the positivist conception of knowledge [2, p. 382]. The dominant image of the modern research library is a depository of objective knowledge that scientists have captured in the structure of their language and have preserved as manuscripts, books, articles, and other media. Texts are coded and cataloged and placed on shelves, in racks, on tapes. The library organizes these texts alongside other discoveries by other scientists. Taken in its entirety, the library elicits a sense of awe as one stands in the presence of all that has been discovered.

However, the relationship runs deeper than this. The dominant positivist viewpoint structures the library's role in terms of two ideals: access and neutrality. The ideal of access is essential if the work of a user is to build upon and add to the knowledge discovered by others. This is explicitly acknowledged by *The ALA Glossary of Library and Information Science,* which defines the goal of the library as providing "a collection of materials organized to provide physical, bibliographic, and intellectual access to a target group" [21, p. 130]. Ideally, the library has no vested interest in the content of those materials. It is indifferent to questions of truth, objectivity, and value. The practices of the library make texts available so that the users of the library—researchers, faculty, and students, among others—can address these issues. In the division of intellectual labor, the role of the library is, first and foremost, to facilitate access to texts. As Jesse Shera wrote, "a library . . . is an organization, a system designed to preserve and facilitate the use of graphic records" [22, p. 455].

The ideal of neutrality represents another facet of the library that is structured by the positivist outlook. Not only is the library a depository of scientific knowledge but it also operates according to the ideals of the scientific method, the a priori principles that define the relationship between data and hypothesis. An academic library is like science in its aspiration to complete neutrality with respect to the knowledge it classifies and makes accessible. John Buschman and Michael Carbone note that, in its ideal form, "librarianship serves the rights and interests of people through the neutrality of the services and collections provided" [23, p. 15]. Librarianship also claims the title of science in this respect. Thus Michael Harris refers to library science as aspiring to a "physics of librarianship" which, like the physics of matter, claims the ideal of total impartiality with respect to its object of study [24, p. 217]. The goal of library science in this context is to provide a theoretical and rule-governed basis with which to make library practices more effective

intermediaries between knowledge and the needs of library users who wish to access it. Like positivism, library science attempts to develop general and a priori rules with which to build systems that permit efficient and accurate access to knowledge.

Given this conceptualization of the library, it is possible to see potential sources of estrangement for librarians or users. The system can be perceived as emotionless, cold, and ultimately mechanistic in a manner similar to some stereotypical depictions of science. The library is perceived as system- rather than person-oriented. It concerns itself with catalogs, indexes, and other information retrieval technologies that enable it to represent and retrieve specific texts more effectively, and its success is quantifiable using such standard measures as precision and recall [25]. In this environment, the relationship of the librarian and the user becomes characterized as a "fairly straightforward matter of an informed person imparting knowledge to a less informed one" [26, p. 397] and the evaluation of the librarian's competence and the system's effectiveness is in terms of their ability to "find the right answer" without explicitly taking into account the human dimension [27–30]. This view of the library is reflected, and possibly reinforced, by certain sections of the library literature's treatment of the librarian/user relationship. In a predominantly positivist conception, a library system is primarily concerned with knowledge (its acquisition, coding, and retrieval) and only marginally concerned with users and their problems. The librarian/user relationship becomes characterized in terms of inequality in which the user's problem is perceived as being subordinate to the greater knowledge and expertise of the librarian [26, 31]. A persistent image of librarians as being fact- or source-oriented, rather than user-oriented, also has been noted [32]. Librarians have been perceived by users to be stern and forbidding [33] and to have a "latent hostility . . . toward the patron" [2, p. 376]. According to Mary Jane Swope and Jeffrey Katzer, users indicate that the help of the librarian is often sought as a last and desperate resort [34].

The relationship between the positivist orientation and library experience inevitably has become a major issue of theoretical and practical concern for library and information science. Brenda Dervin and Michael Nilan argue that a "major tension" exists between predominantly positivist conceptions and the behaviors that users and systems display in practice [35, p. 5]. There is a growing awareness of the need to examine "conceptualization, and more particularly, a concern for the nature of basic assumptions and definitions" [35, p. 4]. Nicholas Belkin expresses the same concern for the field of information retrieval (IR). He argues that "most work in information retrieval has managed to

proceed without any such explicit statements [of concepts and assumptions]. In particular, IR research and practice seem rarely to have considered this question at all" [36, p. 62].

This awareness explicitly addresses the foundations of the positivist view of library and information science research that has, until recently, largely been taken for granted. Such questions as What is the nature of knowledge and information? are being raised [36–39]. Library and information scientists are also addressing the human component of the library, the user. What are the reasons people seek information? What is the nature of their needs? To what use is the information put? Such questions raise the need to view the role of the library in a more sophisticated manner than simply as a depository of texts. A fuller understanding must explicitly take into account the characteristics of the users of those texts. Thus Peter Ingwersen and Mark Pejtersen have written: "If we wish to reach the stage where capabilities of the present technological developments are used to design information systems which support people's problem solving efforts, we must improve our understanding of *how* man seeks and processes information" [40, p. 111]. Thomas Wilson has argued that library and information science should develop a fully articulated conceptual base for the understanding of human information-seeking behavior, regardless of whether it demonstrates the potential to be applied immediately to technological systems: "The study of information-seeking behavior can stand on its own as an area of applied research where the motive for the investigation is pragmatically related to system design and development. A different motivation is involved if we wish to understand why the information seeker behaves as he does. This is an area of basic research and, although the resulting knowledge may have practical applications, there is no necessity that it should" [41, p. 7]. A major conceptual shortcoming of a purely positivist approach to the library experience as raised by Ingwersen, Pejtersen, and Wilson is that it must, by necessity, regard the characteristics of users as factors that need to be controlled and generalized to all potential users. Consideration of the individuality of each user in terms of problems and goals inevitably leads toward subjectivism and an inability to make positivistic, lawlike statements about what is happening. The same problem can also be seen with the inherent individuality of librarians and information searchers. The recent work of Tefko Saracevic and his colleagues [42–44] found that the subjectivity of individual searchers has profound effects on the nature of the documents that are retrieved from a search. As Saracevic and Paul Kantor describe, "the disparity in what the searchers were looking for and what they retrieved for the same question was quite large. Searchers tended to see different things in a question and find different answers" [44, p. 215]. Reflecting on

these findings, Saracevic and Kantor conclude that "searching for information is far from being a science, and as yet the present heuristic rules or principles of searching as stated do not take into account some important aspects of what seems to be really going on. As yet, a plausible algorithm or even a reasonably comprehensive set of heuristic rules reflecting human information searching does not exist. Searching is still an art and a very imprecise art at that" [44, p. 215]. Saracevic and Kantor's conclusion is instructive because it highlights their initial intent to formulate a theory of searching in terms of general rules, that is, a positivist explanation. However, the results of their study forced them to conclude that there are significant limits to the positivist approach. The claim that human information searching is "far from being a science" and that it be considered an "imprecise art" explicitly recognizes the difficulty in considering such behavior in a strictly positivist framework [44, p. 215].

Saracevic and Kantor's conclusions suggest that there are only two directions that might be taken out of the apparent impasse. The first is to relegate the human dimension of the user or the searcher to the category of "imprecise art" and thereby exclude it from the realm of legitimate subject matter for scientific research in the library environment [44, p. 215]. The second is to redefine radically the criteria against which the legitimacy of knowledge claims about the library environment is to be judged. In other words, to initiate, to use Thomas Kuhn's terms, a "scientific revolution" and a "paradigm shift" [9]. The subjectivity of the individual user or searcher only becomes a problem if the tenets of the positivist conception of knowledge are being employed as the standard for acceptable practice and legitimate knowledge claims. However, recent work has redefined the problem in alternative terms. The subjectivity of the user and the searcher is being recognized by some as an integral part of the library experience rather than something that is extraneous to it. Dervin has argued that human subjectivity needs to be accounted for rather than controlled out of the situation [45]. Such work has culminated in her claim that a new paradigm of library and information science is emerging, one that "posits information as something constructed by human beings. . . . It focuses on understanding information use in particular situations and is concerned with what leads up to and what follows interactions with systems. It examines the system only as seen by the user" [35, p. 16]. Such a paradigm is typified in information science by the work of Belkin [36, 46–48], in library science by Carol Kuhlthau [49–51], and in the growing trend of theorists in library and information science to look to the conceptual frameworks of other disciplines, such as communication studies [32, 52–56] and artificial intelligence [57–60]. The positivist foundations of the library

experience are currently undergoing scrutiny and revision, but the project remains in its early stages. Changing the very foundations against which knowledge claims are deemed legitimate or not is a fundamental and global task that will, if successful, penetrate all areas of the discipline and its neighbors. However, it is a project that needs to be continued if library and information science is to progress beyond the limits of the positivist view and develop a more sophisticated account of the modern library experience.

Foucault's Fantasia of the Library: Reconceptualizing the Modern Library Experience

It is against this growing awareness that the work of the late French philosopher Michel Foucault is introduced. The recourse to Foucault's work is not an arbitrary choice but one determined by the nature of the problem addressed in this article. That problem is to question the self-evidence of a still dominant acceptance of a positivist conception of knowledge and its relationship to the modern library experience. The thrust of Foucault's work is to question, at the most fundamental level, aspects of contemporary thought and behavior that are commonly perceived as self-evident, natural, and unproblematic. As such, Foucault's perspective may have much to offer library and information science in its attempts to deal with the nature of our underlying assumptions, which until recently have remained largely unexamined.

Edward Said describes Foucault as "the central figure in the most noteworthy flowering of oppositional intellectual life in the twentieth century West" [61, p. 1]. Foucault refuses to take any contemporary practice, such as those of science [62], institutionalized medicine [63, 64], or sexuality [65–67] at face value. His analyses suggest alternative ways of seeing and provide the basis of reconceptualizations and, ultimately, the potential for change in practices that otherwise would be viewed as fixed and unquestionable.

Foucault's view of scientific knowledge holds in abeyance the self-evidence of an objective world that positivism addresses. This entails substituting for the term *knowledge* (of the world) the term *knowledge claims* (about a world). A scientific theory makes a particular kind of claim that is considered valid only under certain conditions, such as when it can predict other events observable under controlled conditions or satisfy some mutually agreed upon criteria of significance. At its most fundamental level, however, a claim to knowledge is always an appearance of discourse, manifest, to use the terminology of Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, as a "serious speech act" that is produced with re-

spect to other claims [68, pp. 45–56]. Taken together, these claims form particular arrangements that define the boundaries of a scientific discipline. Knowlege is contingent upon the manner in which claims to objective knowledge are arranged and organized. New claims to knowledge are incorporated and legitimated by a prevailing system of knowledge claims in which they subsequently fit. This view is similar to that of Kuhn, which argues that any scientific theory makes sense with respect to a prevailing paradigm that is essentially social in nature [9]. Knowledge claims acquire their force and meaning by virtue of particular discursive and social contexts.

For a particular proposition, theory, or statement to be considered part of a particular scientific discipline and achieve the status of scientific knowledge, it must conform to certain structures and rules. Foucault argues that scientific disciplines "constitute a system of control in the production of discourse" [69, p. 224]. They inevitably establish constraints on what can and what cannot be said, the way it is said, and where it should be said if it is to count as an instance of scientific knowledge. Even one's vocabulary, grammar, and text structures are explicitly prescribed, by style manuals. The discourse of scientific knowledge is defined very precisely, and, for Foucault, this precision represents a mechanism of control. He argues that "in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures" [69, p. 216].

The key to understanding the production of scientific knowledge is not the phenomena comprising the world but the prevailing systems of speaking, of discourse, in which certain propositions about the world can count as objective and others cannot. Foucault's work analyzes ways in which such systems arise and produce science, objectivity, and ultimately, the nature of truth. He argues that such systems change and mutate through historical periods and consequently change that which is considered objective and true [70, 71]. For example, the human sciences of sociology and psychology are relatively recent manifestations in the history of thought, each becoming established around the turn of the nineteenth century. Foucault argues that this is because man as an object of inquiry did not exist in the prevailing systems of scientific discourse prior to that time. Foucault's *The Order of Things* is an account of the emergence of systems of discourse through which certain statements about man could be counted as scientific, and how this made possible the disciplines of psychology and sociology, which could investigate man as an objective fact [62]. Foucault concludes this study with the speculation that just as man as an object of scientific inquiry was made possible by the emergence of a particular arrangement of discourse, it is possible that a similar change in the future could result in

the disappearance of man as a valid object of scientific inquiry: "If those arrangements [of discourse] were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility—without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises—were to cause them to crumble . . . then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" [62, p. 387]. According to Foucault, scientific knowledge is primarily structured by the limits of what it is possible to say at a given historical point with respect to a particular system of discourse. For Foucault, there is nothing tangible that lies beyond discourse that can be objectively described by a value-free scientific language. Foucault's accounts of madness [64], medicine [63], and the human sciences [62] are all accounts of such changes in discourse, of what it is possible to say, and the subsequent changes in the nature of objective facts. For Foucault, objectivity and truth are sites of struggle among competing systems of discourse. What is scientific at any particular historical juncture is determined by which system is dominant and not which system is true: "There is a battle 'for truth,' or at least 'around truth'—it being understood once again that by truth I do not mean 'the ensemble of truths which are to be discovered and accepted,' but rather 'the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true' " [72, p. 132].

At any point in history, institutions attempt to legitimate the current version of knowledge and truth by controlling the manner in which texts are ordered with respect to each other. A scientific knowledge claim relies "on institutional support: it is both reinforced and accompanied by whole strata of practices such as pedagogy—naturally—the book system, publishing, [and] libraries" [69, p. 219]. The library, as an institution for arranging texts, becomes a component in the legitimation of a particular order of discourse. It enforces the "ensemble of rules according to which the true and false are separated" [72, p. 132].

In Foucault's conception of scientific knowledge, the library institutionalizes the arrangement of texts that provides the appropriate spaces in which new knowledge claims can be located and given meaning. Truth is discovered not only in the library through the location of a particular text, as is implied by the positivist view of the library, but it is also made possible by their arrangements and in the "spaces" that these arrangements make possible. I have argued that to comprehend the nature of a discipline such as psychology, for example, it is not enough simply to collate the finite number of facts that psychologists claim to have discovered; rather, one must immerse oneself in the discourse of psychology to grasp the patterns and arrangements of its knowledge claims, its systems of constraints and legitimation, and to

locate one's own discourse within it [73]. The arrangement of texts becomes the basis for the possibility of new texts and, hence, new knowledge. The formulation of specific scientific hypotheses is always grounded in discussions of the same or similar problems, with respect to particular theories, with particular methods, in particular disciplines, with particular philosophies of the nature of the world.

Foucault's view of knowledge may have the potential for providing an alternative way of structuring the experience of the library. Following Eco, the library can be conceptualized as a labyrinth of texts that contains the possibilities for new arrangements. As Eco explains, the labyrinth is like a net where "every point can be connected with every other point, and, where the connections are not yet designed, they are, however, conceivable and designable. A net is an unlimited territory" [74, p. 81]. The individual text gains its value with respect to its place in the network, or in a multitude of networks, and not as the vessel containing some discrete knowledge put there by its author. Similarly, Foucault argues that "the frontiers of a book are never clear cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: *it is a node within a network*" [71, p. 23; emphasis added]. A library user engages with the library system, searching stacks and indexes for connections and patterns, and, ultimately, the creation of new patterns. The library experience is much more than locating discrete pieces of information. The activity of conducting literature searches becomes the individual's attempt to locate his knowledge claims within an existing order of knowledge claims. Foucault argues that such knowledge "derives from words spoken in the past, exact recensions, the amassing of minute facts, monuments reduced to infinitesimal fragments, and the reproductions of reproductions" [75, pp. 90–91]. The production of commentaries, critiques, arguments, and debate becomes the act of validating or questioning those locations within the limits of the prevailing arrangement.

The library makes the creation of new knowledge possible at its most fundamental level. One stands awed in the labyrinth of the library because of the knowledge that can be discovered through its potential for new connections. One stands hushed in the presence of that which the library makes possible, as well as that which the library contains. Foucault makes this point through the image of the "fantasy" [75]. The unstructured nature of the fantasy is an image that is usually regarded as standing in opposition to the rigorous systems of organization imposed by the library. But within the limits of this arrangement, Foucault posits the presence of an infinite number of spaces "in the interval between books" [75, p. 90]. In such spaces resides the possibility of "impos-

sible worlds," worlds other than the objective world constituted in the discursive arrangements of science: "Fantasies are carefully deployed in the hushed library, with its columns of books, with its titles aligned on shelves to form a tight enclosure, but within confines that also liberate impossible worlds. . . . 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*" [75, pp. 90–91; emphasis added].

From the Foucauldian viewpoint, the fantasia of the library is the experience of the labyrinth, of seeking connections among texts as well as their contents. The practices of the library institutionalize particular arrangements of texts, but Foucault argues that one can work within this to create new labyrinths, new perspectives, and ultimately, new worlds. The library becomes an instrument of possibility rather than a place where possibility seems exhausted. The image of the library as an impersonal collection of silent and dusty texts containing the sum total of the knowledge of the world is challenged by a more dynamic image, in which users immerse themselves within the crevices and spaces between texts, forming connections and making discoveries far more profound than simply collecting specific facts.

Conclusion

To change the perceived reality of the library experience, the library community must address and explicitly question the prevailing positivist foundation of its field. The work of Michel Foucault offers a powerful framework that might be employed in some of the conceptual work in library and information science that is already taking place. Foucault can be seen as a perspective in an ongoing research agenda and thus stands alongside this work, rather than above it. The evolving library environment will not be served by a dominant preconception that characterizes the library as an institution for housing particular texts that contain specific facts and the librarian as an impersonal, source-oriented intermediary whose function is to locate them. Following Foucault, the library can be a place of fantasia as well as facts, of creation as well as acquisition. As the positivist version of scientific knowledge gradually loses its dominance as an account of what scientists do, so the positivist foundations of the library experience also must be seriously reconsidered. The recognition of the work of European philosophers such as Eco and Foucault may represent a new foundation for structuring the preconceptions of the library experience for the librarian and the user.

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