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Library Encounters

Textuality and the Institution

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Abstract

The library is an institution and a work: it has developed functions and processes which constitute aspects of textual experience. For readers, students, and researchers, objects and practices such as library patronage, library books, and library classification are often familiar. They are also unique: there is no other textual site or institution which produces them in the way the library does. Brought into being by the work of the library, these objects and practices are also wrought forms available to abstraction and interpretation. Prevalent and regularised, the forms are consequential for the activities of reading and writing, producing singular textual phenomena.

Library patronage facilitates, administers, and orchestrates the reading experience. The library is often associated with textual complexity and heterogeneity, and is regularly represented as having a tendency to overwhelm its users. Patronage's experience, however, need not be as passive as this. Richard Brautigan's *The Abortion: An Historical Romance* 1966 and Mark Swartz's *Instant Karma* are unusual representations of library patronage which show it to be involved in a textual phenomenology of its own right. These two novels indicate how patronage opens up a critical space of reflection for reading. Involved in a cycle of borrowing, patronage in fact gestures towards the interminable in textual experience, its weave in life.

The character of O in Pauline Réage's *Story of O* is a model of circulation: inducted into an institution which sees her shared between its members, she is tagged, processed, circulated, and always returned. I take O as an allegory in order to undertake a descriptive phenomenology of the circulating library book. The library book can be differentiated from others: books which are privately owned, for instance, or books which have been found, given, or borrowed from friends. I describe critical aspects of the ontology of library books, such as the transformative process they undergo at the behest of the institution. The most significant of these aspects, however, is the way that library books can be understood to be oriented towards strangers, and as a consequence incarnate significantly defamiliarised elements within the reading experience.

Classification is explored in relation to library holdings of fiction. Using Carlos María Domínguez's novella *The Paper House* and Jorge Luis Borges's short story "The Library of Babel," as well as work from anthropology and library science on classification, the tensions between these two kinds of practice are investigated. Not only are there substantial difficulties involved in successfully deploying fiction arrangement practices in libraries, there seems to be a cardinal difference between fiction and classification as regards their mode of emphasis. Classification often prefers and prioritises subject – and yet librarians consistently report it is the concept of "subject" which proves most recalcitrant for the organisation of fictional material.

Fiction seems to work within a model of exemplarity, and this distinction is significantly consequential. Classification's expression is a kind of language that operates in a way which is not congruent with fictional expression, and thus classification proves resistant to reading as it is theorised in literary studies.

Intervention is the theme which unites all of these encounters. Ian Hacking holds intervention to be akin to experimentation in scientific practice, and he proposes that one of intervention's functions is the creation of phenomena. The involvement of the library in producing particular kinds of textual phenomena is considerably under-researched. At each of these locations – patronage, library books, and classification – intervention is a tool with which the library's role in textual experience can be conceived and reconfigured. In Hacking's work, intervention is also related to experiment. In the final chapter I conceive of interpretative practice around fiction as a kind of experiment: an activity which requires a stable context, like a laboratory or a library, to proceed.

Keywords

Library; Public libraries; Literature; Literature -- History and criticism -- Theory, etc; Archival studies; Brautigan, Richard; Reage, Pauline; Classification; Fiction; Borges, Jorge Luis; Phenomenology.

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1. Introduction

I. Institutions, libraries, and fiction

An institution furnishes encounters. Looking to institutions, sociology sees an intermediary: “most sociologists agree that institutions occupy a place structurally between the individual and the society as a whole.”¹ Because of their involvement in structure, institutions have been endowed with a level of stability or, rather, some degree of dynamic persistence. Because they are often widespread in the experiential landscape, they can in no way be understood as niche, nor do they bring with them any particular cachet.² For these reasons, institutions may be thought to be not evocative. I disagree. Like organisations they are the “major sites at which individuals actually encounter the structures of the wider society,”³ and as such, institutions entail presence. The presence I speak of does not yet even require some sort of conduit to an abstract societal entity. It is found within the endurance of recourse to an institution’s forms, a collective recourse, giving rise to a shared currency of the institution’s experience. For a rendition which works from their

¹ Theodore Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism and Its Institutions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 11.

² Jeffrey J. Williams has observed that the role of institutions in scholarly practice tends to be neglected, suggesting they “are often taken as exogenous and hence ignored.” “Swimming in the same school of words as *bureaucracy*, *disciplines*, and *professionalization*,” an institution “signifies the structures of regulation and management of contemporary mass society and culture, running in the opposite direction of words like freedom, individuality, or independence.” Williams, “Introduction: Institutionally Speaking,” in *The Institution of Literature*, ed. Williams (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 4, 2; italics in the original.

³ Christine Pawley, “Beyond Market Models and Resistance: Organizations as a Middle Layer in the History of Reading,” *Library Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (2009): 81. Pawley cites sociologist Paul DiMaggio in relation to this observation.

integral intimacy with many individuals' experience and aims at defamiliarisation, institutions present compelling raw material.

A literary institution has been defined as "any formation or collection of agents performing specific tasks in the production, distribution or promotion of fiction."⁴ In the middle of the twentieth century, René Wellek and Austin Warren enumerated potential areas of research for work conducted under such a model: "We can study the role of such social institutions and associations as the salon, the café, the club, the academy, and the university. We can trace the history of reviews and magazines as well as of publishing houses."⁵ In 2002 Jeffrey J. Williams in effect expanded upon this list when he offered an overview of some of the topics covered in the edited volume *The Institution of Literature*, including

professional organizations like [the Modern Language Association] or regulative processes like tenure...the position of graduate students, the hiring process, and the extraliterary role of English departments in managing personnel in the postindustrial university.⁶

⁴ C. J. van Rees, "Advances in the Empirical Sociology of Literature and the Arts: The Institutional Approach," *Poetics* 12, nos. 4–5 (1983): 292. Ziolkowski identifies two main senses of "institution" in literary theory. Practitioners of the first sense, often American, "appropriate" institution as a concept in order to apply it to literature itself; they work within the literary field, and "look beyond literature to other social institutions only for purposes of analogy." Harry Levin, Alvin Kernan, and René Wellek and Austin Warren are examples of such theorists. The second sense of "institution" is evident in German scholarship and is known as "institution theory." In such analysis, "the work of art is of interest not as an absolute but as a 'commodity'" and literature is considered "from the outside," theorised as "simply another social institution of bourgeois society." Ziolkowski places Peter Bürger and Rees in this tradition. Although Rees's definition of a literary institution has proven to be of a welcome orientation and is employed above, I do not construe the institution of the library in a commensurate sense to "institution theory"; there is no significant attention paid to class or economic concerns. Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism and Its Institutions*, 8, 9.

⁵ René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harvest / Harcourt Brace, 1956), 88.

⁶ Williams, "Introduction: Institutionally Speaking," 3.

“One could,” Williams continued, “perform complementary examinations of the nonacademic and popular precincts of literature (for instance, magazines like the *New Yorker* or prizes like the Pulitzer), and the material institutions of publishing, book reviewing, and bookselling.”⁷ There is a great number of investigations which concern themselves with the kinds of examples that Wellek and Warren and Williams have proffered.⁸ There are also innumerable analyses of the library, the institution which is the subject of this thesis. There is an abundance of material on libraries which answer to the social and historical concerns inferred in Wellek and Warren’s remark, in library history especially, and there is material on the representation of libraries in literary studies, which will be considered in greater detail at a later point in this chapter.

In 1987, however, it was suggested that “only a handful of scholars have considered the library in a critical or semiotic manner.”⁹ A volume entitled *Unpacking the Library: Literatures and Their Archives* is soon due for publication, and its original call for papers rendered a persistent gap in research explicit, citable: “despite the continuing rise of memory studies in various disciplines, there is yet no consistent, comprehensive, or metacritical publication accounting for the library as a

⁷ *Ibid.*, 3–4.

⁸ Some book-length examples include Peter Bürger and Christa Bürger’s *The Institutions of Art*, Samuel Weber’s *Institution and Interpretation*, Gerald Graff’s *Professing Literature: An Institutional History*, Richard Ohmann’s *English in America: A Radical View of the Profession*, Evan Watkins’s *Work Time: English Departments and the Circulation of Cultural Value*, Claire Squires’s *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain*, and Nancy Glazener’s *Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1850–1910* (Glazener’s work takes the Atlantic group of magazines as its subject).

⁹ Daniel Peter Walsh, “‘On Fire or on Ice’: Prefatory Remarks on the Library in Literature,” in *Current Trends in Information: Research and Theory*, ed. Bill Katz and Robin Kinder (New York: Haworth, 1987), 212; capitalisation in this quotation has been altered.

specific archival form.”¹⁰ There has been important work in addressing this gap in literary theory, especially in writing concerned with archives proper. Michael O’Driscoll and Edward Bishop, for example, have offered significant direction and inspiration when they construe the archive as that which “can be seen to inhabit the entire process of cultural production and consumption,” and investigate the archive as a form which “deconstructs this all too conventional binary opposition.”¹¹ Debra A. Castillo’s *The Translated World: A Postmodern Tour of Libraries in Literature* is a key literary-critical work which takes the library in its specificity as an archival form, and I draw upon Castillo’s analysis extensively.¹² Beyond a few scattered examples, however, there does seem to be a dearth of analysis. Throughout the course of this research I have found only a limited amount of material which considers the library as a site of interaction with a textual or literary-critical sensibility.

I work within this space. I start with a conception of the institution which is primarily sociological (“just as psychology views as its proper object the individual, and anthropology surveys the entire society and culture, sociology is concerned first and foremost with institutions”¹³). With such a conception, I am able to undertake an investigation which is conducted in line with entreaties that urge analysts “to look

¹⁰ Sas Mays, “CFP: Unpacking the Library (10/30/06; Collection),” *Cfp.english.upenn.edu*, Department of English, University of Pennsylvania, accessed November 26, 2010, <http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/14116>. The volume, edited by Mays and retitled *Literatures, Libraries, and Archives*, is forthcoming from Routledge.

¹¹ Michael O’Driscoll and Edward Bishop, “Archiving ‘Archiving,’” in “The Event of the Archive,” ed. O’Driscoll and Bishop, special issue, *English Studies in Canada* 30, no. 1 (2004): 4.

¹² Debra A. Castillo, *The Translated World: A Postmodern Tour of Libraries in Literature* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press / University Presses of Florida, 1984).

¹³ Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism and Its Institutions*, 11.

more directly and concertededly at the institutional vectors of literary studies, seeing them not as distractions, momentary, or external, but as constitutive and deeply formative of what we do.”¹⁴ In the context of work on library facilities, a relationship has been formulated which focuses on the “interface of library design and user behavior.”¹⁵ *Library Encounters* addresses the interaction between users and the library forms of patronage, books, and classification from a literary perspective. A selection of writings on phenomena and phenomenology have helped me to articulate (or even translate) a relation between my representation of library forms and processes – which have been generated out of fictional works and are essentially interpretative – and library experiences which may be unmoved by fictional, literary, or textual practices and concern. I would like to think, however, that phenomenology has worked still more obliquely than this; that it exists in the way this thesis implicitly registers – to cite a non-phenomenological text – how “literature has usually arisen in close connection with particular social institutions...in primitive society we may even be unable to distinguish poetry from ritual, magic, work, or play.”¹⁶

This thesis’s most profound relationship is with fiction. The involvement is deep and complex: I use fiction for its properties of representation and analytic acuity; I will take a fictional account as an allegory for a familiar yet incommensurate

¹⁴ Williams, “Introduction: Institutionally Speaking,” 3.

¹⁵ David E. Campbell and Theodore M. Shlechter, “Library Design Influences on User Behavior and Satisfaction,” *Library Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (1979): 27.

¹⁶ Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 82.

library experience because I want to foreground this experience and make it visible; I enlist fiction as an investigative category for the classificatory practices of libraries. However, I would suggest that fiction is most strongly implicated in my endeavour to develop a new interpretative frame for the library. My aim is to produce a reading of the library, and I believe that the chapters emerge with an especially narrative inflection. Using the library as an institutional site that manifests interactions which are experientially shared, this thesis represents my attempt to newly bring these encounters into being.

II. The work of the library

The first objective is to render the library workable. I aim to stabilise the concept of the library for an analysis which is less socio-cultural, historical, or representative, rather interpretive most of all. I wish to realise the library as a work.

One difficulty for this objective is that the concept of the library has much to incorporate. The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*'s definition of *library* is a "place set apart to contain books for reading, study, or reference";¹⁷ the word *library* is traced from the Latin *librarium*, a "chest for books";¹⁸ and one of the *OED*'s first listed uses is *lybrarye* from Chaucer's translation of Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae* in

¹⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary* (online), 2nd ed., s.v. "library, n.1," accessed November 21, 2010.

¹⁸ Robert K. Barnhart, ed., *The Barnhart Concise Dictionary of Etymology* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), s.v. "library."

1374, “the walles of thi lybrarye aparayled and wrowht with yuory and with glas.”

The library as a site of books (and information) has many forms. There are corporate and professional libraries; libraries in schools and universities; bookmobiles and societies which incorporate libraries. There are home libraries (“in the latest annual National Association of Home Builders consumer survey, 63% of home buyers said they wanted a library or considered one essential, a percentage that has been edging up for the past few years”¹⁹). There are iconic libraries (the new Bibliotheca Alexandrina; the Library of Congress in Washington DC). There was the original library at Alexandria, “certainly the greatest of all Antiquity and the greatest before the invention of printing.”²⁰ There were circulating libraries which flourished in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: collections of books available for hire upon payment of a fee, charge, or rate, and often attached to other organisations from “suppliers of stationery” to sellers of “groceries, patent medicines, musical instruments or fancy goods.”²¹ Contemporarily new versions of library amalgamations have resolved: there are libraries in artist retreats (the spiral library at Fabrica, the Benetton Group’s artist studio in Treviso, Italy), and there are libraries which are variously folded into other public institutions (the library at the Women and Newborn Health Service in Perth, Australia, for example, or Discovery Centres

¹⁹ June Fletcher, “Why Libraries are Back in Style,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 12, 2008, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122117550854125707.html>.

²⁰ Edward Alexander Parsons, *The Alexandrian Library: Glory of the Hellenic World; Its Rise, Antiquities, and Destructions* (London: Cleaver-Hume, 1952), x; capitalisation in the original.

²¹ Simon Eliot, “Circulating Libraries in the Victorian Age and After,” in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland*, vol. 3, 1850–2000, ed. Alistair Black and Peter Hoare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 126.

in England, which have been designed to “combine libraries with museums, health facilities, leisure activities and e-government services”²²).

Even beyond the variety of sited book and information collections which are called libraries, the concept of the library has proven to be an apparatus of considerable instrumentalism, and its use and application is extensive. It has been observed that “major taxonomic endeavours [such] as the Human Genome Project refer to their outputs as libraries,” and that publishers “began to use the term ‘library’ to describe lists of books in the 19th century.”²³ Roger Chartier finds the French word *bibliothèque* applied to a large variety of books and works in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including periodicals, multiple-volume collections, catalogues, and inventories.²⁴ In the English language, the word is sometimes applied to series of classic works marketed for a wide audience, such as Everyman’s Library and the Library of America. In the introduction to *Institutions of Reading: The Social Life of Libraries in the United States*, Thomas Augst observes that in “a builder’s manual [which] was reprinted throughout the later eighteenth century, the term ‘library’ refers to a bookcase,” before going on to suggest it is even possible to consider a “Book-of-the-Month Club as a kind of library.”²⁵ There is the Human

²² DCMS (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, United Kingdom), *Framework for the Future: Libraries, Learning and Information in the Next Decade* (London: DCMS, 2003), 22.

²³ Sean Cubitt, “Library,” in “Problematizing Global Knowledge,” ed. Mike Featherstone et al., special issue, *Theory, Culture and Society* 23, nos. 2–3 (2006): 588.

²⁴ Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 65–71.

²⁵ Thomas Augst, introduction to *Institutions of Reading: The Social Life of Libraries in the United States*, ed. Augst and Kenneth Carpenter (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 4, 12. Augst’s reference to the Book-of-the-Month Club is inspired by Janice Radway’s contribution to this volume,

Library program in libraries worldwide, which “allows people to ‘borrow’ a person – or ‘living book’ – for a conversation (‘loan’) to explore their experience or interests and to understand other backgrounds and cultures.”²⁶ There is the “Library” which organises media files in Apple’s iTunes program and the World Digital Library developed by the Library of Congress and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The prospect of the library, in short, is impressive: the concept is expedient with a facility for diverse application, and its manifestations are notable in their disparity.

How can the library be realised as a work with such an ad hoc existence; when, conceptually, it encompasses so much? It is possible to characterise it by establishing a more functional and limited frame of reference than the array outlined above, as Augst has done: “‘library’ is an amorphous term, a concept that describes a range of phenomena in the social history of reading.”²⁷ Such a description facilitates my work in two ways. Firstly, it offers the practice of reading as a frame of reference for the library. Secondly, Augst’s attribution of the library’s instrumentalism to amorphousness makes a container of the concept; it registers the way the word *library* has been used as a class. I use “class” here citationally, invoking a technical schema of what Richard Wollheim calls generic entities; a system he has outlined in the course of defining overlaps between different kinds of works of art. Three

entitled “The Library as Place, Collection, or Service: Promoting Book Circulation in Durham, North Carolina, and at the Book-of-the-Month Club, 1925–1945.”

²⁶ Saba Salman, “Taken as Read,” *Guardian*, December 3, 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/dec/03/living-library-communities>. When this article was published, the Human Library program was called Living Library.

²⁷ Augst, introduction to *Institutions of Reading*, 15.

generic entities are identified: types, classes, and universals.²⁸ Types are Wollheim's focus, employed by him to investigate works of art which are not plastic, such as music and novels. Classes and universals are employed contrastingly, in order to distinguish types. A class, in Wollheim's formulation, is not a work. It is at one end of a continuum he draws of "intimacy or intrinsicity": "a class is merely made of, or constituted by, its members which are extensionally conjoined to form it" (65). The project of understanding the library as a work will have to work through the library-concept's status as a generic entity.

In *Art and Its Objects*, Wollheim identifies three corresponding elements for each generic entity: classes comprise of members, universals of instances, and types of tokens. He describes the examples of a class of red things (which are members of the class); the universal of redness (which has instances); and the type of the Red Flag (which, as a type, has tokens that are the red flag incarnations carrying the operative power and symbolic weight of the concept "Red Flag").²⁹ For the library, class has been arrived at as the befit generic entity. And indeed, class is the viable explanatory resource to represent libraries when they are evoked as they have been above, for what the preceding discussion has shown, in its sampling, is "members": elements which have been extensionally conjoined to form a non-intrinsic class of the word *library*, from genome projects to series of orchestrated conversations to bookshelves.

²⁸ Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects: An Introduction to Aesthetics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 64–68.

²⁹ Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*, 65.

As a resource a class does not furnish a cohesive object of research. There are manifestations within the constellation of the library-concept, however, which cohere more strongly than being “extensionally conjoined.” I propose that the public library satisfactorily resolves itself into an object of analysis. In the next section I will show how public libraries act more like tokens than members, and thus support the deployment of the concept of a library as an operative power and with a symbolic weight. I recognise that to make an analogy between the type/token construct and a kind of library is to make a claim which is experimental, a speculation – “the intellectual representation of something of interest” – but it comes with purpose, as all speculations do: “the intellectual representation of something of interest, a playing with and restructuring of ideas to give at least a qualitative understanding of some general feature of the world.”³⁰ In Wollheim’s scheme types and tokens are the entity and constituents of particular kinds of art works; they have greater interpretative value than classes and their members, and thus constitute a theoretical apparatus which will enable me to construe the library as I have set out to do. The work, Roland Barthes suggests, “is the imaginary tail of the Text...the Text cannot stop (for example on a library shelf)”; it is a “fragment of substance, occupying a part of the space of books (in a library for example).”³¹ Perhaps it is no accident that Barthes so naturally and off-handedly – “for example” – finds a sited kind of library

³⁰ Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening: Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Science* (1983; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 212–13.

³¹ Roland Barthes, “From Work to Text,” in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (Glasgow: Fontana / Collins, 1977), 157, 156–57; capitalisation in the original.

to connote the work in the course of expressing his (essentially disapproving) distinction between work and text. In this thesis I propose that the public library can be figured with reference to a type/token arrangement in order to render the concept of the library a coherent wrought form – a work – and to read it accordingly.

III. Public libraries

So this thesis is not concerned with the constellation of the library concept. It will not sustain discussion at the level of the library as a class; I have worked my way to an identification of the library-concept's facility for diverse application in order to make clear a space in which to speak coherently. Only a vocabulary, a body of literature, an institutional discourse, and a set of standard institutional operations will allow the library to hold together as a work, and enable the development of a reading of its institutional character. The public library offers such an assembly of practices.

A public library has been defined as

a library provided by the local authority (the town or county council)...entirely or mostly at its own expense, governed and administered by the authority or a committee wholly or largely appointed by itself, available free of any charge to all who live in its area (and often to others as well), and offering a wide selection of materials chosen to embrace as completely as possible the varied interests of the individual and the

community, free from bias or religious, political, or other motives.³²

This definition, whilst not necessarily accurate in every detail for every public library today, is accumulative and descriptive. It tells of a particular institution – “a unique institution,”³³ in very recent assessments – with a particular history and operational process.³⁴ It is the first step: it has drawn a picture, characteristic by characteristic, of the institution I will work from. I have examined the public library’s history and practice in order to establish certain principles which should be inferred when I invoke the institution of the library throughout the thesis. I submit four. The first three pertain methodologically; the fourth is topical.

The first principle has been implied in the preceding section of this chapter: the public library is elect because of the way it can be figured as a work more convincingly than any other kind of library. One writer has remarked on the strangeness of the fact that theory has been slow to care for library history; a

³² Lionel R. McColvin, *The Chance to Read: Public Libraries in the World Today* (London: Phoenix, 1956), 12.

³³ Margaret Hodge, “Introduction: ‘A Vision for Public Libraries,’” in *The Modernisation Review of Public Libraries: A Policy Statement*, by DCMS (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, United Kingdom) (London: Stationery Office, 2010), 2.

³⁴ The literature on the public library is substantial and diverse; I consulted works of public library history as an introduction to what is a vast field. I found Alastair Black’s *A New History of the English Public Library: Social and Intellectual Contexts, 1850–1914*, Lionel McColvin’s *The Chance to Read: Public Libraries in the World Today*, James Thompson’s *A History of the Principles of Librarianship*, and Nick Moore’s article “Public Library Trends” to be especially useful orientations, and cite each of them at various points in the thesis. I have concentrated on writings about English and Australian public libraries, with some reference to the American situation.

The longer history of libraries – Sumerian clay tablets, the ancient library at Alexandria, the libraries of the Roman Empire and European monasteries, and university libraries from the eighteenth century onwards – is likewise a story told in many works. My sources included Lionel Casson’s *Libraries in the Ancient World* and Fred Lerner’s *The Story of Libraries: From the Invention of Writing to the Computer Age*. Publication details for these two works appear in the bibliography.

strangeness he attributes to rate-supported libraries' "homogeneity."³⁵ It is this conjectural homogeneity of public libraries – a markedly distinct homogeneity within the constellation of the library-concept – which is key. Wollheim – who has derived the idea of type and token from Charles Sanders Peirce – explains that a "very important set of circumstances in which we postulate types...is where we can correlate a class of particulars with a piece of human invention."³⁶ Homogeneity describes objects which correspond in structure because of a common origin, and public libraries today correspond in structure because of their common origination – to make a complex genealogy iconic – in the human invention of legislation. Public libraries are born out of crafted documentation: canonically in the British context from the Public Libraries Act 1850.³⁷

³⁵ Paul Sturges, "Library History in Britain: Progress and Prospects," *Journal of Library History* 16, no. 2 (1981): 368. Sturges in fact remarks on the "supposed homogeneity" of rate-supported libraries, suggesting that "a coherent theme in their past is often hard to discern" (368). As will be seen, I take homogeneity genetically, and thus maintain that it is proper to speak of public library homogeneity when operating at the level of principle. Sturges's caveat of "supposed," however, must be acknowledged as regards the diversity of public libraries themselves. When employing a type/token arrangement, Nelson Goodman's approach is to "dismiss the type altogether and treat the so-called tokens of a type as *replicas* of one another." It is because of public libraries' plurality that I will not follow Goodman's lead, choosing instead to develop the type/token arrangement with an emphasis on the public library as a type, rather than public libraries as tokens. Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 131; italics in the original.

³⁶ Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*, 67–68. Wollheim's criteria of a piece of human invention clarifies why the broader concept of the library, described in the second section of this chapter, is not a universal in the terms of his schema. Universals such as "redness" are not invented. Libraries, from their most recognisable incarnations (school libraries, for example) to their most peripheral (the Human Library program), always are.

³⁷ Nick Moore writes that "the public library service can be said to have begun properly in 1850 with the passage of the Public Libraries Act. However, this legislation was, in many ways, giving legitimacy to provision that had already been made." Arnold K. Borden suggests that "the universal emergence of the library as a public institution" took place "between 1850 and 1890." Moore, "Public Library Trends," *Cultural Trends* 13, no. 1 (2004): 28; Borden, "The Sociological Beginnings of the Library Movement," in *Landmarks of Library Literature, 1876–1976*, ed. Dianne J. Ellsworth and Norman D. Stevens (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1976), 175.

The configuration of the public library as a type – an experiment, an “intellectual representation of something of interest...to give at least a qualitative understanding of some general feature of the world” – results in several important and structuring insights. Wollheim employs the type to describe works of art where “there is no physical object with which the work of art could be plausibly identified,”³⁸ a terminology to discuss the novel and the opera, his examples, in their difference from painting and sculpture. (So “*Ulysses* and *Der Rosenkavalier* are types; my copy of *Ulysses* and tonight’s performance of *Rosenkavalier* are tokens.”³⁹) Comparing the public library to a type converts it into a recognisable format for what is, after all, a literary studies thesis: its investigation can be akin to the analysis of a novel (or, more generally, a print publication), which sees its object as a thing with a great number of dispersed incarnations. Figuring the public library in a type/token arrangement allows me to speak at a level of generality by taking a set of features as given; it makes the public library, as a concept, more manageable methodologically.⁴⁰ I wish to interpret features which are largely common to public

³⁸ Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*, 64.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴⁰ The actual governance of public libraries in different national contexts is a complex matter. Anne Goulding explains that English public libraries are not only “a local government service having to respond to local political priorities,” they “also have a national position as a statutory service.” Alan Bundy identifies a “watershed” 1935 report by Ralph Munn and Ernest R. Pitt as instrumental in the provision of public libraries in Australia, observing that after this report each state passed a library act. A National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) report explains that in Australia public libraries “are delivered by a variety of administrative arrangements” which vary between states and territories, “ranging from services wholly delivered by the State / Territory through to services wholly delivered by Local Government.” Goulding, *Public Libraries in the 21st Century: Defining Services and Debating the Future* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 4; Bundy, “Case-study: Public Libraries – Books, Bytes, Buildings, Brains,” in *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia, 1946–2005*, ed. Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2006), 373; NSLA,

libraries worldwide, and so my arguments depend upon some sort of homogeneity between the subjects of its discourse.⁴¹

Most significant is an associated ontological point about public libraries. A public library is figured as a type, and a type connotes a particular kind of work of art: a comparison which brings the issue of manufacture sharply into focus. James Thompson proposes that the “development of the public library illustrates very clearly a particular principle of librarianship: namely, that libraries are created by society.” He continues:

The seeds...have to fall on receptive ground if they are to come to fruition. The rise of democracy meant that libraries could no longer be reserved for an elite, and the spread of education required the intellectual sustenance that libraries provide. The provision of public libraries was inevitable.⁴²

Australian Public Libraries: Statistical Report, 2007–2008, compiled by Public Library Services, State Library of Queensland, 2009, 22, <http://www.nsla.org.au/publications/statistics/>; capitalisation in the original.

⁴¹ It is another kind of argument for public libraries’ homogeneity when, in *The Chance to Read*, Lionel McColvin writes:

Manifestly the justification for a public library in one place is its justification in any other. No one could suggest that the people of one nation, of one town in a country, of the towns and not the rural areas, need public library services without at the same time implying that the people of other nations, of other towns, of the rural areas need them also and equally. The arguments in favour of a public library service in America are the arguments for one in Abyssinia, for one in Madras, for one in Mandalay, for one in Manchester, for one in Muddlecombe-in-the-Mud. (225)

⁴² James Thompson, *A History of the Principles of Librarianship* (London: Bingley, 1977), 36. Thompson is one of the most forceful and insistently contextual writers on the public library, finding a vigorous role in society for it. His writing is entirely underpinned by his belief in the public library and its vitalness. His *Principles* opens masterfully: “There have been libraries in the world for more than twenty-five centuries...” (9).

Thompson's words are not dissimilar from descriptions of the library which represent it as a "collective resource,"⁴³ as "a gift a society makes to itself,"⁴⁴ or when, in reference to libraries, Toni Morrison rhapsodises: "Of the monuments humans build for themselves, very few say: 'Touch me; use me; my hush is not indifference; my space is not barrier. If I inspire awe, it is because I am in awe of you and the possibilities that dwell in you.'"⁴⁵ What cannot be lost in these austere sentiments of consequence is what Thompson concisely captures with his observation that "libraries are created by society."⁴⁶ And, for Thompson, it is the public library amongst libraries which is the premiere instance of making. Public libraries are specially tied up in the demonstration that libraries are works and acts; the library itself is an act of humanity, made and remade. Not only is the public library an institution which the public encounters and makes use of *now*, it is also and has been a production; in Wollheim's terms an invention; a work. Public libraries have been and are *worked*, and so the public library is not only amenable to historical analysis

⁴³ Lisa M. Given and Gloria J. Leckie, "'Sweeping' the Library: Mapping the Social Activity Space of the Public Library," *Library and Information Science Research* 25, no. 4 (2003): 372.

⁴⁴ Cubitt, "Library," 584.

⁴⁵ Toni Morrison, quoted in SLV (State Library of Victoria), *Executive Summary: Libraries/Building/Communities* (Melbourne: SLV, 2005), 5. This report provided no further bibliographic information for Morrison's words.

⁴⁶ Thompson's position also relates to the library's status as an institution. Among the first statements of Lloyd Vernor Ballard's book *Social Institutions* is a definition which holds these institutions to be "*sets of organized human relationships purposively established by the common will.*" The story of public libraries is the story of an institution which grew and developed in close association with others, including but in no way limited to monasteries, lyceums, workers' associations, mechanics' institutes, museums, and galleries. In his chapter on the public library, Ballard draws out the particular case of the public library's involvement with schools, identifying the emergence of free public schools as one of the prime causes of their development. Schools "created a need for books and libraries which would supplement [their] work." In this respect, Ballard finds the library to be not only "an institution supplementary to the school," but a "*complementary agency.*" He goes on to figure the particular importance of libraries for adult education as well. Ballard, *Social Institutions* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1936), 3, 229, 233; italics in the original.

(it has been analysed extensively, as this thesis can only begin to show); it is also available to an interpretation of its practices and forms.

The second principle of the public library which recommended it for this thesis is its stipulated inclusivity. "It shall be open to all the world, without excluding a living soul," declared seventeenth century librarian Gabriel Naudé.⁴⁷ "From its door shall resound that cry... 'Come in, all you who desire to read, come in freely.'"⁴⁸ There are many contemporary articulations of this principle. Patrick Joyce argues that the public library was involved in the constitution of a new political subject: "*demos*, the library being opened to one and all."⁴⁹ The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), the professional organisation for libraries in Australia, has a "Statement on Public Library Services" which professes the following guarantee:

each member of the Australian community has an equal right to public library and information services regardless of age, race, gender, religion, nationality, language, disability, geographic location, social status, economic status and educational attainment.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Gabriel Naudé, *Jugement de tout ce qui a été imprimé contre le cardinal Mazarin depuis le 6 janvier jusqu'à la déclaration du 1^{er} avril 1649*, Paris, [1650?], cited in Léon de Laborde, *De l'Organisation des bibliothèques dans Paris* (Paris: Franck, 1845), 20, cited in Edward Edwards, *Memoirs of Libraries: Including a Handbook of Library-Economy* (Trübner: London, 1859), 2:771.

⁴⁸ Edwards, *Memoirs of Libraries*, 2:772. Naudé has been described as "one of the pioneers in the making of libraries public." Thompson, *History of the Principles of Librarianship*, 70.

⁴⁹ Patrick Joyce, "The Politics of the Liberal Archive," in "The Archive Part 2," ed. Sean Hand and Irving Velody, special issue, *History of the Human Sciences* 12, no. 2 (1999): 39.

⁵⁰ ALIA (Australian Library and Information Association), "Statement on Public Library Services," last modified March 1, 2009, <http://www.alia.org.au/policies/public.library.services.html>. A memorable fictional representation of the kind of public library access facilitated by contemporary democratic governance can be found in the children's book *Mystery of the Fat Cat*. A girl accompanies her apprehensive younger brother and his friends to the public library with the objective of looking up some information: "the boys wanted to walk up and down in front of it for a while, and kind of

UNESCO's "Public Library Manifesto" is similarly encompassing: "the services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status."⁵¹ In these cases, the stipulated enunciation of the inclusiveness of public libraries is very extensive and stipulated indeed. Verna Pungitore extends this characteristic of the public library even further, ascribing to it a form of institutional accountability. "Public libraries are unique in that they have no parent institution within which to function," she argues.

In the case of other types of libraries, there is a school, a college, a corporate entity, or a similar institutional parent with specific aims and objectives and a well-defined, homogeneous clientele. The library's mission is thus relatively easy to determine: it supports the goals of the institution... Public libraries, on the other hand, have much more diffuse objectives and serve a very diverse clientele. The clientele, in effect, act collectively as the library's 'parent institution.'⁵²

case things; but Angie breezed right in like a taxpayer." Frank Bonham, *Mystery of the Fat Cat* (New York: Dutton, 1968), 80.

⁵¹ UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), "UNESCO Public Library Manifesto," 1994, accessed November 30, 2010, <http://www.unesco.org/webworld/libraries/manifestos/libraman.html>. The concept of public access to libraries is not new, however. Thompson traces the origin of such access to Assyrian clay tablet libraries in the seventh century BC: "according to Jules Oppert, an Assyriologist of last century, Ashurbanipal had a large collection of clay tablets expressly prepared for the purpose of instruction and these were placed in the midst of his palace for public use." Of course the aspiration of inclusiveness is always subject to certain immovable and historically contingent circumscriptions. "In the first millennium," Thompson suggests, "the principle that libraries are for all was severely inhibited by social and educational limitations," particularly limitations deriving from social constraints and illiteracy. Thompson, *History of the Principles of Librarianship*, 62, 66.

⁵² Verna L. Pungitore, *Public Librarianship: An Issues-Oriented Approach* (New York: Greenwood, 1989), 27–28; capitalisation in this quotation has been altered. How successfully a public library's clientele can "act collectively as the library's 'parent institution'" is, however, a contested question. Geoff Mulgan offers four points which outline "the minimum required of a coherent account of any public interest argument": one of these is that "it has to explain how it is to be controlled by its users." Mulgan, *The "Public Service Ethos" and Public Libraries* (Nathan, QLD: Institute for Cultural Policy Studies, Griffith University, 1993), 6.

Other libraries offer other kinds of openness, but of all libraries, the public library furnishes the greatest licence to speak generally because it is incorporative in its design.⁵³

Operationally, there are many reasons why the principle of inclusiveness falls short of its ideal and why the public library's reach is not comprehensive. Peter Worsley argues

the library cannot, and does not, 'serve everybody', and never has done: the pretence that this is the aim of the library is, Ennis suggests, an 'irrelevant ideological statement'. If only because the library has limited resources 'it cannot serve all the people in the community and do any of them justice.'⁵⁴

Gaps in service provision deserve notice, and shortcomings of institutional practice need to be acknowledged and discussed.⁵⁵ However, what is here enlisted is the

⁵³ Circulating libraries, described earlier in the chapter, were close precursors of contemporary public libraries. K. A. Manley explains that while "circulating libraries were commercial ventures, ostensibly run for profit and usually by a bookseller," they were also born out of a principle of "mutual benefit." Circulating libraries, Manley contends, were "the public libraries of their day, even though at a price – but the price was often very modest." Manley points out that while public libraries are "intended for all, regardless of wealth," they were (and are) supported by taxation, and "in the middle of the nineteenth century there was enormous hostility to public libraries in many towns because of the tax burden." Circulating libraries, in contrast, were opt-in concerns. While the case of the circulating library reinforces the particularly plenary orientation of the public library, it also demonstrates how less inclusive library clienteles can have elements of beneficence in their design, and incorporate other socially conscious principles, such as agency, as well. Manley, "Booksellers, Peruke-Makers, and Rabbit-Merchants: The Growth of Circulating Libraries in the Eighteenth Century," in *Libraries and the Book Trade: The Formation of Collections from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Robin Myers, Michael Harris, and Giles Mandelbrote (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll, 2000), 30, 29, 30.

⁵⁴ Philip H. Ennis, "The Library Consumer," in *The Public Library and the City*, ed. Ralph W. Conant (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965), quoted in Peter Worsley, "Libraries and Mass Culture," in *Public Library Purpose: A Reader*, ed. Barry Totterdell (London: Bingley, 1978), 88.

⁵⁵ In recent times the principle of inclusivity has been critically appraised within a policy context of social exclusion: see, for example, the chapters "Regenerating Communities" and "Building Communities" in Anne Goulding's *Public Libraries in the 21st Century: Defining Services and Debating the Future*.

ambition of the principle, not the success or otherwise of its implementation. Joseph Chamberlain, a British state secretary at the end of the nineteenth century, argued

it is absolutely necessary that [the student] have access to books, many of which are costly, many of which are very difficult to obtain even to the richest of single individuals, *but which it is in the power of a community to provide for all its members alike.*⁵⁶

In its approach to inclusivity, Chamberlain's formulation – based around the capacity of libraries founded on a public model – is on the same angle as this thesis. I will not discuss public libraries' inclusivity as a right – which may encourage a kind of analysis which proceeds by identifying failures in the principle's implementation – I choose instead to think of this inclusivity as a *facility*, or *facilitating*. It facilitates the inference of readers or users generally.

The third methodological rationale the public library offers this thesis is what can best be described as its institutional tone. The public library is considerably principled historically. "The early public library was an institution with a mission... unmistakably, [it] had a social purpose," writes Alistair Black, author of *A New History of the English Public Library*.⁵⁷ It has been suggested that "an ethos of selfless service" is one of the elements "to be found at the heart of the dominant ideology of ...public libraries."⁵⁸ In key contemporary statement documents, such a commitment is nominally enshrined: it has already been noted that ALIA has a "Statement on

⁵⁶ Joseph Chamberlain, pamphlets for *Free Public Libraries*, John Johnson Collection, Bodleian Library, quoted in Margaret Willes, *Reading Matters: Five Centuries of Discovering Books* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 219; italics in Willes.

⁵⁷ Alistair Black, *A New History of the English Public Library: Social and Intellectual Contexts, 1850–1914* (London: Leicester University Press / Cassell, 1996), 2–3.

⁵⁸ Mulgan, *Public Service Ethos*, 5.

Public Library *Services*”; the modernisation review of public libraries which took place in England from 2008 to 2009 and reported in 2010 aimed to deliver “a high level vision for public library *services* in the 21st century.”⁵⁹ Lionel McColvin, described as writing in the “grand tradition”⁶⁰ and thus strongly representative of a doctrinal position, suggests that the first tenet of the philosophy of librarianship “is that the library service exists to serve – to give without question, favour or limitations. It is an instrument for the promotion of all or any of the activities of its readers.”⁶¹ Such statements demonstrate, I think, the remarkableness of the public library’s presentation in making itself available. At moments in the course of this work I will speculate quite ambitiously on textual processes and possibilities, and am only enfranchised to do so, arguably, because of the posture of accommodation provocatively assumed by the object of its analysis.⁶²

⁵⁹ DCMS (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, United Kingdom), “Modernisation,” accessed January 2, 2010, http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/libraries/5583.aspx#2; italics added. The first objective of the published report is “to drive the quality of all library services up to the level of the best.” DCMS, *The Modernisation Review of Public Libraries: A Policy Statement* (London: Stationery Office, 2010), 5.

⁶⁰ K. H. Jones, “Towards a Re-interpretation of Public Library Purpose,” in Totterdell, *Public Library Purpose*, 123.

⁶¹ Lionel R. McColvin, “The Purposes and Values of a Library Service,” in Totterdell, *Public Library Purpose*, 35.

⁶² Perhaps the most radical demonstration of the provocativeness of the library’s attitude of service is offered by David Carr. “Every cultural institution *exists to give*,” writes Carr in his book on the cultural institutions of the library and the museum, and his account is ardent:

In any cultural institution, in any community, however important the information given (the resources provided, the questions answered, the lectures delivered) it is never more important than the quality of generosity in the giving (the voices heard, the moments taken, the remembered question). The greatest value in our civic and democratic culture is not what its institutions keep, but what they give away, and how freely it is given.

Tone, furthermore, allows me to start to acknowledge the idealism upon which this thesis is built. Insisting on the facility of the library's inclusiveness; elevating its commitment to service when, in other quarters, it has been characterised as an agent of social control;⁶³ these are idealistic analyses. There are all kinds of reasons why the public library is not ideal. It has been criticised for lacking "direct democratic accountability between public servants [librarians] and their public";⁶⁴ it has been challenged for its "arcane practices, bureaucratic policies and poor service."⁶⁵ Commentators have argued that the public library has a "tendency to give credit to the aspiration" of equal opportunity "rather than to the actual achievement of the goal";⁶⁶ it has been perceived as "an apolitical local authority function";⁶⁷ and it has been accused of being "a basically purposeless agency with relatively weak resources, diversified commitments, and fundamental biases which severely circumscribe its effectiveness."⁶⁸ I acknowledge these criticisms, and yet it is

In this excerpt, Carr infers the not-uncommon image of a library functioning primarily as a depository or storehouse. Carr's position is productively and provocatively counterintuitive because he insists that the library's ethos of service means it should be understood not in terms of repository, but gratuity. Carr, *The Promise of Cultural Institutions* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira / Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 64–65; italics in the original.

⁶³ Alastair Black writes that "control was certainly a facet of the early public library's history." However, he also suggests that while control was "integral to the ethos of the early public library... it does not follow that social control engineered through the mechanism of the municipal library was conspiratorial or, more pertinently, successful." Black, *New History of the English Public Library*, 257.

⁶⁴ Mulgan, *Public Service Ethos*, 5.

⁶⁵ Ron E. Scrogam, "The American Public Library and Its Fragile Future," *New Library World* 107, nos. 1220–21 (2006): 8.

⁶⁶ Rosemary Ruhig Du Mont, *Reform and Reaction: The Big City Public Library in American Life* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1977), 139.

⁶⁷ Dave Muddiman and Alastair Black, *The Public Library: Policy and Purpose* (Nathan, QLD: Institute for Cultural Policy Studies, Griffith University, 1993), 1.

⁶⁸ Mary Lee Bundy, "Factors Influencing Public Library Use," *Wilson Library Bulletin* 42, no. 4 (1967): 382. It is not only public libraries which have been the subject of censure. Francis Bacon was a famous opponent of the libraries of his day. Jennifer Summit quotes Bacon from the *Novum Organum*:

not my intention to address them. Although this thesis was born in the public library and uses its practices and history, my aim is not to seek the amelioration of its processes.

Idealisation pertains in a second way. I have explained why the public library is the model of library practice I will work from. However it is not my intention that this work refer exclusively to the public library. McColvin, having offered the definition of the public library which launched my analysis, goes on to report a tension in this definition, noting that “it may be maintained that any library is ‘public’ which is available to the public or to a section thereof, even though it may be subject to considerable limitations.”⁶⁹ The spirit of this amendment is closer to the concept of the library I deploy in the course of my argument. Building on the public library’s history and example, I develop a different operational definition, inspired by the public library but not in its reference nor consequence of analysis limited to it.

If any one turns his attention from workshops to libraries, and is amazed at the huge variety of books which we see, he will surely be stupefied in quite a different way when he has examined and carefully looked into the manner and content of those same books. For then he will see that there is no end to their repetitions, and that men are forever working over and talking about the same things, and he will switch from amazement at their variety to wonderment at their poverty and at the scantiness of the matters which have taken over and tenanted the minds of men.

Summit, however, suggests that remarks such as these from Bacon are misrepresentative, and possibly disingenuous as well. Summit argues that “Bacon’s governing models of knowledge and the mind...draw from the post-Reformation English libraries,” and in spite of his protestations to the contrary he does not “[abandon] the modes of knowledge embodied in libraries.” Bacon, *The Instauration Magna: Part II; Novum Organum and Associated Texts*, ed. and trans. Graham Rees, with the assistance of Maria Wakely (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), 137, quoted in Summit, *Memory’s Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 204, 207, 233.

⁶⁹ McColvin, *The Chance to Read*, 12.

Rather than strictly denote the public library when I use the word *library*, I intend instead to infer the slightly wider definition of a collection of information resources, historically books, sanctioned for use by individuals who are part of a community, however assembled and however large. Analysis may well pertain to other kinds of library institutions, some of which historically precede public libraries: school and university libraries, state libraries, military libraries, national libraries, gaol libraries. The construction of this operational definition also works to avoid or at least curtail continuing fractionalisation and miniaturisation in my analysis (“the case of patronage is different for the school library...”). However, the instrumental role that the public library played in creating this definition will not be forgotten: the public library, established in a concentrated form by the work of this section, is the platform or basis for the concept of the library inferred throughout the thesis.

The first three rationales are offered to give an account of the public library, and to explain its selection with reference to methodology. The fourth rationale is topical. It is to do with the public library’s relationship to reading. This relationship is articulated in many policy documents of public library organisations, and by their governing bodies. When it appears, it takes a strong position: the position of purpose, or mission. In a Department for Culture, Media and Sport report for English public libraries, *Framework for the Future: Libraries, Learning and Information in the Next Decade*, the first of three listed criteria that “should be at the heart of

libraries' modern mission" is the "promotion of reading and informal learning."⁷⁰ In a consultation document published by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council in England, the number one proposition for the purpose of the public library is the "skills and joy of reading."⁷¹ These statements have a precedent in the work of McColvin, who is the author of a 1956 volume entitled, tellingly, *The Chance to Read: Public Libraries in the World Today*. In 1942 McColvin also wrote *The Public Library System of Great Britain: A Report on Its Present Condition with Proposals for Post-War Reorganisation* – recognised in the field as "a tour de force,"⁷² and "the report to end all reports"⁷³ – and in the introduction to this publication he takes books as his topic and conducts a sustained discussion as to the value of reading as such.⁷⁴

There is much contemporary work which examines the relationship between reading and the public library. *Reading Matters: What the Research Reveals about*

⁷⁰ DCMS, *Framework for the Future*, 7. The other two criteria are "access to digital skills and services including e-government" and "measures to tackle social exclusion, build community identity and develop citizenship" (7).

⁷¹ John Dolan, *A Blueprint for Excellence: Public Libraries, 2008–2011; "Connecting People to Knowledge and Inspiration"* (Birmingham: Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, United Kingdom, 2007), 6. In the Australian and American documents I examined, the principle of reading was less explicit than in the British literature. For the Australian Library and Information Association, it can be discerned in the core value statements of the entire organisation (which represents all kinds of libraries), rather than in its statement on public libraries specifically. The first ALIA core value is the "promotion of the free flow of information and ideas through open access to recorded knowledge, information and creative works." For the American Library Association (ALA), literacy is one of seven key action areas: "the ALA assists and promotes libraries in helping children and adults develop the skills they need – the ability to read and use computers – understanding that the ability to seek and effectively utilize information resources is essential in a global information society." ALIA, "ALIA Core Values Statement," last modified March 1, 2009, <http://www.alia.org.au/policies/core.values.html>; ALA, "Key Action Areas," 2011, accessed February 23, 2011, <http://www.ala.org/ala/membership/whataladoes/keyaction/index.cfm>.

⁷² Barry Totterdell, ed., *Public Library Purpose: A Reader* (London: Bingley, 1978), 33.

⁷³ John R. Allred, "The Purpose of the Public Library: The Historical View," in Totterdell, *Public Library Purpose*, 31.

⁷⁴ McColvin, "The Purposes and Values of a Library Service," 33–37. McColvin's chapter in *Public Library Purpose* is a reprint of his introduction to the 1942 report.

Reading, Libraries, and Community responds to the need for a document which “draws together the scattered findings that relate to reading and the library’s role in fostering reading,” and examines child, young adult, and adult readers in turn.⁷⁵ In “Reader on Top: Public Libraries, Pleasure Reading, and Models of Reading,” Catherine Sheldrick Ross suggests that libraries “need to embrace a model of the reader as an active meaning-maker who can be trusted to make choices.”⁷⁶ In *Checking the Books*, Jackie Toyne and Bob Usherwood sought the opinions of politicians, public library stock managers, arts and cultural workers, and library users and non-users in order “to evaluate the value and impact of public library book reading.”⁷⁷ Toyne and Usherwood report on “the unique role the public library plays in establishing and maintaining the reading experience and why it is often the preferred source of reading material.”⁷⁸ “Books and Reading,” a chapter in Anne Goulding’s *Public Libraries in the 21st Century*, describes these topics in relation to England’s National Literacy Strategy, a decline in public library lending issues, stock management, and reader development. Goulding uses interviews with policy

⁷⁵ Catherine Sheldrick Ross, Lynne (E. F.) McKechnie, and Paulette M. Rothbauer, *Reading Matters: What the Research Reveals about Reading, Libraries, and Community* (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited / Greenwood, 2006), ix.

⁷⁶ Catherine Sheldrick Ross, “Reader on Top: Public Libraries, Pleasure Reading, and Models of Reading,” in “Pleasurable Pursuits: Leisure and LIS Research,” ed. Crystal Fulton and Ruth Vondracek, special issue, *Library Trends* 57, no. 4 (2009): 654. Jessica E. Moyer also considers the relationship between reading and public libraries. She identifies educational outcomes for leisure reading in four categories – “people and relationships,” “countries, cultures, and history,” “life enrichment,” and “different perspectives” – and suggests that these categories can be used to inform libraries’ reader advisory services. Moyer, “Learning from Leisure Reading: A Study of Adult Public Library Patrons,” *Reference and User Services Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (2007): 66.

⁷⁷ Jackie Toyne and Bob Usherwood, *Checking the Books: The Value and Impact of Public Library Book Reading* (Sheffield: Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society, University of Sheffield, 2001), 4.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 2.

makers, senior public library practitioners, and researchers to argue that public libraries “have not been slow to capitalize upon and become involved with all the activity going on nationally and locally aimed at encouraging people to read more, read more widely, think about and discuss their reactions to books.”⁷⁹

Presented in this way, a strong relationship between reading and the public library may seem self-evident, but this is in fact only part of the picture. The public library’s purpose is essentially contested, and perhaps the greatest consensus is among those who envisage it as a multipurpose institution. Verna Pungitore writes:

The underlying philosophy or rationale for public libraries began with the identification of a single, educational purpose. Gradually, several additional purposes were added: culture, recreation, reference, and information. At various time periods, depending on the prevailing social and economic conditions, one or two of these purposes have been stressed more than others; but all have been accorded a permanent place within the purview of public libraries.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Goulding, *Public Libraries in the 21st Century*, 298. Australian case studies of reading in public libraries can be found in the *Libraries/Building/Communities* reports from the State Library of Victoria, and older perspectives on the relationship between libraries and reading include *Studies on Research in Reading and Libraries: Approaches and Results from Several Countries*, edited by Paul Kaegbein, Bryan Luckham, and Valeria Stelmach, as well as chapters in B. Landheer’s *Social Functions of Libraries* and A. W. McClellan’s *The Reader, the Library and the Book: Selected Papers, 1949–1970*. SLV, *Report Four: Showcasing the Best; Libraries/Building/Communities*, 2 vols. (Melbourne: SLV, 2005–8), 1:27–35, 2:42–47; Kaegbein, Luckham, and Stelmach, eds., *Studies on Research in Reading and Libraries: Approaches and Results from Several Countries* (Munich: Saur, 1991); Landheer, “The Library in Relation to the Function of Reading,” in *Social Functions of Libraries* (New York: Scarecrow, 1957), 91–111; McClellan, “The Reader-Centred Library,” in *The Reader, the Library and the Book: Selected Papers, 1949–1970* (London: Bingley, 1973), 34–43.

⁸⁰ Pungitore, *Public Librarianship*, 32. Similarly, Scrogam observes that in spite of “a long history of creative efforts to be universally appealing, the public library does not have universal use.” In *The American Public Library and the Problem of Purpose*, Patrick Williams writes that “for more than 130 years, the public library community has struggled with the problem of finding the right place for the library.” Williams argues that one of the key challenges is “developing an idea of purpose that identifies a distinctive and valuable contribution that the library can reasonably be expected to make with the resources that society can reasonably be expected to provide.” The public library’s multipurpose nature is sometimes registered critically, and Pungitore herself is ambivalent: “the

Often, the public library's involvement with the principle of reading may be implied, unarticulated, or one among others. So learning, digital access, social exclusion, and citizenship objectives figure equally with reading in *Framework for the Future*. Or in Barry Totterdell's edited collection *Public Library Purpose: A Reader* – from which I sourced the introduction to McColvin's famous 1942 report – few other contributions detail a relationship between reading and the public library with any particularity. They are concerned instead with topics as diverse as “the public library as an agency for personal fulfilment”; “positive discrimination”; and the role of the library “in ‘counteracting the divisive and sterilizing effects of an elaborate class-cultured society.’”⁸¹ Reading is not a historically constant purpose for the public library; or, more specifically, it is not a consistently *articulated* purpose. Many commentaries on public libraries and their place in the world today describe an institution in crisis.⁸²

tendency of public libraries to attempt to serve multiple purposes has spread their resources so thin that they have been criticized as serving no real purpose at all in today's world.” Scrogham, “The American Public Library,” 8; Williams, *The American Public Library and the Problem of Purpose* (New York: Greenwood, 1988), ix; Pungitore, *Public Librarianship*, 36.

⁸¹ Gerald W. Johnson, “The Role of the Public Library,” in Totterdell, *Public Library Purpose*, 65; Peter Jordan, “Librarians and Social Commitment,” in Totterdell, *Public Library Purpose*, 150; Worsley, “Libraries and Mass Culture,” in Totterdell, *Public Library Purpose*, 85. I have attributed these observations to the relevant chapters and their authors; the quotations, however, come from editorial abstracts which appear at the beginning of each of the essays in the volume.

⁸² And, for some public library services, real crises. In July 2010, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in the United Kingdom announced its intention to abolish the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and the Advisory Council on Libraries, “as part of the Government's drive to cut costs and increase transparency, accountability and efficiency.” Local authorities across England are conducting reviews looking into closing libraries or reducing library services after the global economic crisis spurred significant cuts to local government funding. In 2010, it was reported that “more than 300 individual libraries have so far been advised of possible closure and the total could reach 800–1,000 when all councils have announced their plans.” This is also a story of a particular conservative government responding to a particularly dire global economic situation, and significant public campaigns have been mobilised in response to the closures, with some success. However, the situation in Britain demonstrates how libraries face real challenges, as well as an entrenched crisis discourse. Several examples from public library crisis discourses are enlisted in the final chapter of

Perhaps reading is re-emerging within the public library's multipurpose framework as an independent goal in response to a digital revolution which demands strong directional statements, such as those from Britain outlined above, and such as Ron E. Scrogam's argument that "the future of the public library depends on its commitment to being a place for books and reading, as an alternative to a model of service based on the internet, the bookstore, and a paraprofessional staff."⁸³ In 2011 American library organisation the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) urged its members to capitalise on its association with books.⁸⁴ Australian libraries and library associations have initiated a program to make 2012 a National Year of Reading.⁸⁵ Moreover, the imminent publication of *Unpacking the Library: Literatures and Their Archives* suggests that there is an evolving interest in interrelating the library and literature in literary studies. While it is certainly the case that reading is inconstantly in the frame as a singular purpose in public library discourses, it is also clear that when it *is* in the frame it is powerfully present, and conceived of as an autonomous and distinguished object and objective. In this work I simultaneously discern and participate in an institutional reinvigoration which recognises the public

the thesis. DCMS, "DCMS Improves Efficiency and Cuts Costs with Review of Arm's Length Bodies," news release, July 26, 2010, http://www.culture.gov.uk/news/media_releases/7297.aspx; Benedicte Page, "Arts Council Takes over Libraries, with Budgets Slashed," *Guardian*, December 9, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/dec/09/arts-council-takes-over-libraries-budget-slashed>.

⁸³ Scrogam, "The American Public Library," 7; capitalisation in this quotation has been altered.

⁸⁴ OCLC (Online Computer Library Center), *Perceptions of Libraries, 2010: Context and Community; A Report to the OCLC Membership*, principal contributors Cathy De Rosa, Joanne Cantrell, Matthew Carlson, Peggy Gallagher, Janet Hawk, and Charlotte Sturtz; ed. Brad Gauder (Dublin, OH: OCLC, 2011), 97. This counsel from OCLC represents a volte-face for the organisation, which will be considered in greater detail in the next section.

⁸⁵ The Library Agency [Sue McKerracher and Donna McDowell], "National Year of Reading 2012," accessed December 3, 2010, <http://www.love2read.org.au/>.

library as an emergent site for exploration, speculation, and intellectual activity around reading and reading practices.

IV. Searching and not searching

The library has been figured as a work; the public library acts like a type; and the wider definition of the library – a collection of books and information resources freely available within a community and sanctioned for its use – is available to interpretation. Reading has been established as the field of this operation. How is this interpretation to be undertaken? What approach will it make? Which aspects of the library will it address? What material will it use?

In 2005, OCLC published its findings from a large-scale research project which investigated “library resource use, perceptions and impressions of libraries, and people’s preferences for using information discovery tools.”⁸⁶ The project surveyed over 3,300 people in Australia, Canada, India, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and the United States.⁸⁷ To the open-ended question “what is the first thing you think of when you think of a library?,” 69 percent of answers correlated to the concept of “books,” and 12 percent to “information.”⁸⁸ OCLC reports that “across

⁸⁶ OCLC (Online Computer Library Center), *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources: A Report to the OCLC Membership* (Dublin, OH: OCLC, 2005), xi.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-32. OCLC’s report restarts its pagination with every chapter, and so page references take the form of a chapter number followed by a page number.

all regions surveyed, respondents associate libraries first and foremost with 'books.' There is no runner-up."⁸⁹ In response to the question "what do you feel is the main purpose of the library?" (3-39), 53 percent of answers correlated to information and 31 percent to books.⁹⁰ These findings led to a crisis for OCLC, with the report's conclusion primarily addressing the question of how the current situation can be changed:

In a world where the sources of information and the tools of discovery continue to proliferate and increase in relevance to online information consumers, the brand differentiation of the library is still books. The library has not been successful in leveraging its brand to incorporate growing investments in electronic resources and library Web-based services...It is time to rejuvenate the 'Library' brand.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ibid., 3-1. OCLC's findings are validated by Lisa M. Given and Gloria J. Leckie's study of two libraries in large Canadian cities. This research employed an observational "seating sweeps" method to report that the most common items being used by individuals working in the library were books, and the most common activity was reading. In fact, the authors remark "it was notable that reading was the most prominent activity across all age groups and at all times of the day." They write that "the frequency of reading may be somewhat surprising given the weight that libraries currently place on new technologies, and what librarians and researchers *think* they know about library patrons' behaviors." Given and Leckie, "'Sweeping' the Library," 378, 381, 380-81; italics in the original.

⁹⁰ OCLC, *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources*, 3-38. OCLC's survey did not relate to the public library specifically: "respondents were asked to identify the library that they use primarily (e.g., public, college/university, community college, school, corporate, other) and were asked to answer all library related questions with that library in mind" (xii). However, the resulting study focussed on the public library at a key juncture: responses relating to public library use were selected as the very first results to report (1-2 – 1-3).

⁹¹ Ibid., 6-7 – 6-8, capitalisation in the original. In 2011, OCLC released an update to the 2005 publication, and the organisation's attitude towards the library brand was significantly recalibrated in this later report. "Libraries = books," OCLC states, "is even stronger than it was five years ago. As new consumer devices and online services have captured the information consumer's time and mindshare, his [*sic*] perception of libraries as books has solidified." In 2005, 69 percent of Americans reported that books were their first association for libraries; this increased to 75 percent in 2010. Counter to OCLC's 2005 position, the organisation now encourages libraries with a new mantra: "Embrace the brand. Extend the experience. Connect the dots." The report's authors suggest that "libraries have an opportunity to create invitations to experience what comes with free book services—free job search help, free tutoring, free computer skills training, free e-books, free digital storage...Existing brands get reinforced, not redefined, as new alternatives enter a market." OCLC, *Perceptions of Libraries, 2010*, 38, 97.

The authors of the report thus perceive a significant disparity between association and capacity. I would suggest that this crisis, or more specifically the books/information binary it addresses, is an uneasy reflection of and uneasily reflected by the public library's mission, as defined in *Framework for the Future* and elsewhere, of "reading and informal learning."⁹² Reading sometimes gets caught up in policy questions of informal learning, possibly (from the perspective of textual analysis or literary studies) to its detriment. Learning and information as purposes, however, point towards to an area of research which is of considerable service in defining what I hope to contribute to conceptualisations of the library through the work of this thesis. It is an enormous field and I cite it as an orientation. The area is information seeking (IS), under the broader discipline of information science, and it helps to define this thesis's area of operation by *contrast*, and not only for disciplinary reasons. The literature on information seeking – vital though it is – displays a posture which will not be assumed by this thesis.

Sean Cubitt writes that "the library is a machine for retrieving information,"⁹³ and although Cubitt's definition does not come from information-seeking literature, it perhaps encapsulates it. "In order to qualify as information-seekers in most IS research," writes Catherine Sheldrick Ross, "individuals must experience a 'problem situation' and then formally initiate the search process by querying one of [the

⁹² Informal learning, mentioned briefly above, is another important purpose of the public library, articulated not only in the DCMS's *Framework for the Future*, but in many other primary documents as well. The American Library Association, for example, "promotes continuous, lifelong learning for all people through library and information services of every type." ALA, "Key Action Areas."

⁹³ Cubitt, "Library," 581.

library's] systems."⁹⁴ Information-seeking literature produces works such as *How Readers Navigate to Scholarly Content*; "On User Studies and Information Needs"; and "What is Enough? Satisficing [sic] Information Needs."⁹⁵ It can be represented by publications such as *Information Searches That Solve Problems*; *Scholarly Information Practices in the Online Environment: Themes from the Literature and Implications for Library Service Development*; and the report *Information Behaviour of the Researcher of the Future*, commissioned by the British Library and JISC (formerly known as the Joint Information Systems Committee).⁹⁶

The space between information seeking and my analysis is vast, and this is somewhat surprising because, as will be seen, I have an abiding interest in library use and will refer repeatedly to the literature on it. But the difference between information seeking and this work is an essential difference. It has been suggested that "for both positivism and the library, the dominant metaphor is that of 'the

⁹⁴ Catherine Sheldrick Ross, "Finding without Seeking: The Information Encounter in the Context of Reading for Pleasure," *Information Processing and Management* 35, no. 6 (1999): 784.

⁹⁵ Simon Inger and Tracy Gardner, *How Readers Navigate to Scholarly Content: Comparing the [sic] Changing User Behaviour between 2005 and 2008 and Its Impact on Publisher Web Site Design and Function*, Simon Inger Consulting, September 9, 2008, <http://www.sic.ox14.com/howreadersnavigatetoscholarlycontent.pdf>; T. D. Wilson, "On User Studies and Information Needs," *Journal of Documentation* 37, no. 1 (1981): 3–15; Chandra Prabha et al., "What is Enough? Satisficing [sic] Information Needs," *Journal of Documentation* 63, no. 1 (2007): 74–89.

⁹⁶ Leigh Estabrook, Evans Witt, and Lee Rainie, *Information Searches That Solve Problems: How People Use the Internet, Libraries, and Government Agencies When They Need Help*, research by Pew Internet and American Life Project, and the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, December 30, 2007, http://www.pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2007/Pew_UI_LibrariesReport.pdf; Carole L. Palmer, Lauren C. Tefteau, and Carrie M. Pirmann, *Scholarly Information Practices in the Online Environment: Themes from the Literature and Implications for Library Service Development* (Dublin, OH: OCLC Online Computer Library Center, 2009); CIBER (Centre for Information Behavior and the Evaluation of Research, University College London), *Information Behaviour of the Researcher of the Future: A CIBER Briefing Paper*, commissioned by the British Library and JISC, January 11, 2008, <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/infostudies/research/ciber/downloads/ggexecutive.pdf>.

search.”⁹⁷ The library with a searcher in its centre is necessarily invested in discourses and principles of achievement, results, satisfaction, and efficacy. In contrast, my primary area of interest is not the impetus for or success of library use; “searching” (and finding) is not the object of research at all. My aim of developing an interpretative account of the library leads in an entirely different direction. With its noble goal of assisting the searcher in a state of uncertainty, information-seeking research is admirably paradoxical in the way it dilatorily and extensively aims to expedite, to contract. This is not to suggest that due search process and the search procedures which feature in information-seeking literature are not dilatory, comprehensive, extensive, or expansive; rather, that an essential motion or tendency of this kind of research is to facilitate contraction. Operating under a principle of efficiency, its wish and desire for the individual in the library is to compress their encounter.⁹⁸

At a metalevel of intent, the difference between information seeking and this thesis is the difference between aiming at a result and investigating an experience. (This is a weak juxtaposition – intentionally so – for these are in no way mutually exclusive). It is the difference between movements which could be crudely described

⁹⁷ Gary P. Radford, “Flaubert, Foucault, and the *Bibliothèque Fantastique*: Toward a Postmodern Epistemology for Library Science,” *Library Trends* 46, no. 4 (1998): 618.

⁹⁸ Although representative, these remarks are generalisations; other philosophies of approach are evident within information-seeking research. Catherine Sheldrick Ross, for example, investigates the value of “nongoal oriented transactions with texts” in pleasure reading, and she cites two PhD dissertations which “represent to date the most substantial contributions to the literature about information that is accidentally encountered.” Ross, “Finding without Seeking,” 783, 784.

as the overstep and the undertake.⁹⁹ Both are imperative and, more than this, ever-present, and yet to each its tendential sphere. The distinction is reflected too by the character of Binx Bolling in Walker Percy's novel *The Moviegoer*. Bolling has engaged in two types of searches in his life: he calls them the vertical and the horizontal. The "greatest success" of the former occurred "one night when I sat in a hotel room in Birmingham and read a book called *The Chemistry of Life*. When I finished it, it seemed to me that the main goals of my search were reached or were in principle reachable."¹⁰⁰ The vertical search, however, was ultimately troubling for it left Bolling with a problem, a portentous one. "Though the universe had been disposed of," he reflects, "I myself was left over. There I lay in my hotel room with my search over yet still obliged to draw one breath and then the next" (70). In consequence he develops the idea of a horizontal search, which proffers fewer results but a greater level of spiritual traction. His move from a vertical to a horizontal search results in an entire reorientation of perspective and experience for Binx:

As a consequence, what takes place in my room is less important. What is important is what I shall find when I leave my room and wander in the neighborhood. Before, I wandered as a diversion. Now I wander seriously and sit and read as a diversion. (70)

⁹⁹ The overstep may be related to the sense of incumbency which gathers around many different kinds of institutions. Jeffrey J. Williams suggests there is a sense in which an institution is "a structure that we pass through, to be disposed of once we have completed the bureaucratic business there—like the [Department of Motor Vehicles] or the payroll office, which one must traverse to get to the heart of the matter, whether driving a car or getting paid." In this sense, institutions "are momentary thresholds, considered external to if not distractions from the activity at hand." Williams, "Introduction: Institutionally Speaking," 2.

¹⁰⁰ Walker Percy, *The Moviegoer* (1967; repr., New York: Noonday / Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977), 70.

In refusing to make searching the object of research; in looking instead to an experience of “being in” that may underlie searching but is not equal to it, this thesis has been inspired by another body of literature which complements the powerful metaphorisation offered by Bolling’s ambling distinction. Recent work on the archives furnishes a theoretical cognate from which this investigation of the library is launched.

Nascent archive studies confronted an essential motion similar to the one described as underpinning information seeking. For Jacques Derrida, author of the prepotent *Archive Fever*, the archive is inextricable from the science of psychoanalysis:

Freud made possible the idea of an archive properly speaking, of a hypomnesic or technical archive, of the substrate or the subjectile (material or virtual) which, in what is already a psychic *spacing*, cannot be reduced to memory: neither to memory as conscious reserve, nor to memory as remembrance, as act of recalling.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (1996; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 91–92; italics in the original. It is useful to bear in mind Carolyn Steedman’s reading of *Archive Fever*, wherein she draws attention to its tangential nature:

Many English-speaking readers – this one, too – have assumed that ‘Archive Fever’ has something to do with archives (rather than with psycho-analysis, or memory, or finding things); and even when the reaction has been more philosophical, Derrida has been addressed through his *archon* and the *arkheion*. But commentators have found remarkably little to say about record offices, libraries and repositories, and have been brought face to face with the *ordinariness*, the unremarkable nature of archives... There is a surprise in some of these reactions, at encountering something far less portentous, difficult and meaningful than Derrida’s archive would seem to promise.

Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 9; italics in the original.

Derrida does not outline a program of encountering the substrate or subjectile of the archive which cannot be reduced to memory – a program which would be of great interest for this thesis – but he does attribute to Freud a desire to elide, override, or negate such an encounter:

It is the nearly ecstatic instant Freud dreams of, when the success of the dig must sign the effacement of the archivist: *the origin then speaks by itself*...The archaeologist has succeeded in making the archive no longer serve any function. It comes to *efface itself*, it becomes transparent or unessential so as to let the *origin* present itself in person. Live, without mediation and without delay.¹⁰²

A recovery is made as though through a rescue mission; in such an approach, it is effacing that is aimed at, and this effacement is coherent with the spirit of information seeking outlined above. Freud's "ecstatic instant" (as described by Derrida) is antithetical to this thesis, in dreams and life. I make an opposite movement: not to efface but recuperate and reconstitute the library – the material substrate or material subjectile – everywhere that will have it. In impetus the thesis conforms with what Michael O'Driscoll and Edward Bishop call "archival consciousness,"¹⁰³ and what Carolyn Steedman has described as "the recent 'turn to the archive' in the human sciences."¹⁰⁴

In determining to work the overfamiliar institution of the library in these terms, I subscribe to tenets that Derrida and O'Driscoll and Bishop affirm. In *Archive Fever*, Derrida writes that "the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also

¹⁰² Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 92–93; italics in the original.

¹⁰³ O'Driscoll and Bishop, "Archiving 'Archiving,'" 9.

¹⁰⁴ Steedman, *Dust*, viii.

determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future.”¹⁰⁵ He continues: “the said archival technology no longer determines, will never have determined, merely the moment of the conversational recording, but rather the very institution of the archivable event.”¹⁰⁶ I have already quoted from O’Driscoll and Bishop’s “Archiving ‘Archiving,’” but I would like to do so again here, at greater length. O’Driscoll and Bishop, declaring that “archiving operates as a form of mediation at every stage of cultural circulation,” offer the pithiest truism: they name the “*intervening archive*.”¹⁰⁷ Whilst archives “are typically understood to come into play in the *wake* of production and consumption—that is, as repositories of a now past authenticity and originality,” O’Driscoll and Bishop contend

that the archive more broadly understood constitutes the indivisible remainder, the middle or third term, of any cultural history. The archive, whether understood as a technology of inscription or as a rhetorical trope that can be seen to inhabit the entire process of cultural production and consumption, deconstructs this all too conventional binary opposition.¹⁰⁸

The key contention of this thesis is developed from this platform. I take O’Driscoll and Bishop’s observations and build on them in order to conjecture the *intervening library*. The investigation and characterisation of the intervening library is this work’s motivation and interpretation.

¹⁰⁵ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 17; italics in the original.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁰⁷ O’Driscoll and Bishop, “Archiving ‘Archiving,’” 4; italics in the original.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

V. Intervention

The library intervenes. This is the strongest and most stable statement of the underpinning philosophy of this work that I am able to offer. The library can be construed as a collection of textual forms, functions, and processes and of these I consider library patronage, library books, and library classification to be the most compelling areas for investigation. Each is separate from the others, but they are linked by a modality of intervention.

In one classic account, scientific experimentation constitutes intervention. For Ian Hacking in *Representing and Intervening*, “there is no right answer to the question: which comes first, experiment, theory, invention, technology...?”¹⁰⁹ Experiment, or intervention (intervention, or experiment) is, in such a formulation, *placeless*, equivalent to O’Driscoll and Bishop’s statement that the archive is present throughout production and consumption’s “entire process.” Hacking writes:

Science is said to have two aims: theory and experiment. Theories try to say how the world is. Experiment and subsequent technology change the world. We represent and we intervene. We represent in order to intervene, and we intervene in the light of representations. (31)

Thus while intervention and representation are indissoluble, one is also the counterpoint for the other. Hacking suggests that his work is “a drift away from representing, and towards intervening” (29), and the library of this thesis moves in the same direction. I have already tried to signal my reluctance to limit analysis to a

¹⁰⁹ Hacking, *Representing and Intervening*, xii; capitalisation in this quotation has been altered.

representational epistemology. Intervention facilitates a substantial space of distance from an unconditionally depictive approach. It bears upon textual practice more than textual representation; it gets into the marrow of process. Intervention is of the category of undertakings, and it can never overstep.

Ari Kelman has argued that the library is a place which values “practice over content.”¹¹⁰ This observation, Kelman explains, is made “not to downplay the significance of content, but to highlight the practice of reading; not everyone in the library is reading the same thing, even as they are participating in a collective culture and in the production of a specific place.”¹¹¹ A bolder declaration ensues: “at the library it does not matter quite what one reads, but how.”¹¹² Kelman has intuited something in the library which is to do with reading practice, profoundly. In addition to the spatial aspects which interest Kelman, patronage, library books, and classification are each individually involved in a specific configuration of reading practice. In their interventions, I find these forms, processes, and functions to be akin to a “role of experiments...so neglected that we lack a name for it.”¹¹³ For Hacking in *Representing and Intervening*, experiment (or intervention) is in fact “the creation of

¹¹⁰ Ari Kelman, “The Sound of the Civic: Reading Noise at the New York Public Library,” in “The Library as an Agency of Culture,” ed. Thomas Augst and Wayne A. Wiegand, special issue, *American Studies* 42, no. 3 (2001): 31. Kelman’s observations are made in the course of his argument that noise plays a constitutive role in civic space, “[keeping] urban subjects mildly aware of the public of which they are always a part” (27). The New York Public Library “attempts to foster private interactions between people and texts” and is thus “simultaneously concerned with the public at large *and* the individuals who have come to read.” This leads to a tension whereby “the success of the library relies on the silence of its patrons,” while “the success of the civic...relies on their noise” (28; italics in the original).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 39.

¹¹³ Hacking, *Representing and Intervening*, 220.

phenomena” (220). Hacking aims to describe the scientific consensus of phenomena when he writes: “A phenomenon is *noteworthy*. A phenomenon is *discernible*. A phenomenon is commonly an event or process of a certain type that occurs regularly under definite circumstances” (221). He goes on to demonstrate the different, almost antithetical, senses a phenomenon infers across and within science and philosophy: from “a unique event that we single out as particularly important” to “sense-data – private, personal, sensations” (221). Ultimately for Hacking, however, a phenomenon “is something public, regular, possibly law-like, but perhaps exceptional” (222). It seems to me that Hacking’s primary intention in describing the “creation of phenomena” is to foreground the intrinsicality of production within the results of scientific experimentation. He suggests that “most of the phenomena of modern physics are manufactured” (228). Countering any impression that “phenomena have always been there, waiting to be discovered” (226), he describes the Hall effect – an important 1879 discovery related to the conduction of electricity – in order to argue that this phenomenon “does not exist outside of certain kinds of apparatus. Its modern equivalent has become technology, reliable and routinely produced. The effect, at least in a pure state, can only be embodied by such devices” (226). Thus Hacking also draws attention to the contingency of phenomena in their creation. Both manufacture and contingency are of prime importance in the parallel I am drawing.¹¹⁴ Like a laboratory, public libraries are organising structures (with, I

¹¹⁴ Having here enlisted Hacking’s phenomena, it seems appropriate to foreground my use of a more philosophical phenomenology later in the thesis, when I draw upon the work of Martin Heidegger in

have argued, a degree of homogeneity) which have designed and developed their apparatuses over time. It is possible to ask what phenomena these forms, functions, and processes have created, through the weight of their collective practice. I argue that in their specificity and contingency, patronage, library books, and classification create phenomena which do align in a regularity, admittedly much looser than science's phenomena. The experiences that these forms, functions, and processes give rise to are nonetheless discernible and noteworthy even when they accumulate and thrive unremarked – and there is nowhere else in the textual world from whence they come. The chapters which follow will promote practices over content in order to argue that basic library forms are productive of potent kinds of textual phenomena.

VI. Chapters and texts

Patronage is the part of a reader's identity which belongs to the library. I use the provocation "belong" deliberately, as a way of making visible the unexamined resonances of library use for textual experience. In my configuration, patronage is the arch-site; the preeminent phenomenon; the first encounter. It is the condition for

particular. Shifting between different senses of phenomena seems difficult in an already contested field, but I will always attempt to signal such a transition clearly when it occurs. Hacking has helped me represent the library as an institution which generates experiences in a coordinated fashion; philosophical phenomenology helps me when I move to more closely consider questions which tend to be affective.

all ensuing library encounters: those articulated within this thesis, and other unexamined ones too. In the next chapter of this thesis I look to literary representations of library patronage in order to identify how patronage has been enacted and how it might be enacted. One of the key arguments I make is that patronage is inextricable from a broader conceptualisation of textual identity. This claim does not only relate to the sense in which the library is a literary institution encountered often enough in the course of realising, living, or being in a textual identity. It is also made as part of my argument that patronage uniquely incarnates a concept of textual return which is implicit in reading. In part because of this achievement, patronage strikes me as a deeply instrumental (and yet largely unmobilised) capacity. This chapter finds in patronage a critical space within which a reader may reflect on his or her own textual and reading process, and in this way advocates patronage as a self-activating mode of readerly intervention.

With the sometimes begrudging validation offered by research from various library authorities, I take books to be the principle objects of the public library, and thus make them the subject of the chapter which follows. Herein, I present a class of library books which share a set of features as constitutive of a singular mode of cultural exchange. The circulating library book proffers an encounter which is distinguishable from other kinds of book movements and distributions: books which are purchased, stolen, found, given, and so on. Because they circulate in a textual economy which is not related to possession, but equivalent rather to the legal concept of bailment (or loan), library books have quite acute capacities for

transmission. In their material being, library books accumulate evidences of use which are a priori public. This has quite evident ramifications in the way that library books furnish evidence of other reading practices through their marginalia, their condition, and so on. However, I think the more crucial consequences are general ones, related to the way a library book can unsettle dualistic configurations of the relationship between a book and its reader, and related to the category of alterity in reading. Compared to public forums which existed prior to the advent of printing – where “to hear an address delivered, people have to come together” – Elizabeth L. Eisenstein has observed that “[reading] a printed report encourages individuals to draw apart.”¹¹⁵ Although “the wide distribution of identical bits of information provided an impersonal link between people who were unknown to each other,”¹¹⁶ modern publication also facilitates the anonymous consumption of material and often enacts a segregation of audience, one reader from another. By the nature of their existence within a group of people, however, library books involve a material interaction with strangers, and I will argue that through this interaction they intervene directly in a hermetic understanding of the reading experience by implying the other worlds, past and future, of the book.

The encounter of the fourth chapter is not an encounter between the library and its users. Rather, it is the encounter the library stages between classification and fiction, and in this way the chapter gives rise to issues of a metacritical and

¹¹⁵ Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 1:132.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

metanarrative nature. The relationship between classification and fiction is ultimately a troubling one, evidenced by fictional representations of the dilemmas of putting all kinds of books in their place, and by the real challenges involved in organising libraries' fictional material in particular. I will argue that difficulties accrue because fiction's mode of treatment is not based on subject (a vital component of classification), but exemplarity. Anthropological accounts of classification attest to its collectiveness, and library science has defined the particular processes involved in producing and deploying classificatory languages, and these two kinds of work help to account for the conflict as well. Classification and fiction are non-congruent spectrums, and so classification operates productively as a foil to show a form of expression which cannot be wielded by one individual, and which is uninvolved in the kinds of representational practice conducted and proffered by fiction. In these ways classification constitutes a procedure and a library encounter which is unavailable to intervention.

I enlist several literary works in the course of investigating the phenomena of library patronage and books, and the encounter of fiction and classification. These include Jorge Luis Borges's "The Library of Babel," Richard Brautigan's *The Abortion: An Historical Romance* 1966, Italo Calvino's "A General in the Library," Carlos María Domínguez's *The Paper House*, Weldon Kees's "The Library: Four Sketches," Pauline Réage's *Story of O*, and Mark Swartz's *Instant Karma*, as well as a longer list of novels, stories, and poems employed more fleetingly in support of various aspects of

analysis.¹¹⁷ There is a prejudice towards contemporary representations of libraries in *Library Encounters* which is not only evidence of my interest in contemporary literature. It is also functional: more present representations of libraries are well-suited for the purpose of developing a defamiliarising account of an institution which readers may have encountered yesterday or will tomorrow. (It is thus also unsurprising that I have been drawn towards accounts and excerpts which report the diurnal, the processual, and the prosaic.) The library's practices and processes are historically formed, deeply so, but it does not serve my objective to extensively engage with literature which depicts chained books, scrolls, significantly restricted access, and so on; that is, literature that represents forms and processes which are no longer part of the primary institutional process, currency, or dialect of the library.

It is important to qualify that I do not enlist the novels and stories listed above with a view to producing readings of them *as* works. In the essays which follow I am interested in using texts to explore ideas: not because texts are on particular *subjects* (such as libraries), nor because books are socio-cultural objects. I want to produce readings which are hermeneutically respectful; that aim to have "understood

¹¹⁷ There are several works which were indispensable navigational tools in my identification of literary works that represent libraries. Edited anthologies include Michael Cart's *In the Stacks: Short Stories about Libraries and Librarians*, Susan Allen Toth and John Coughlan's *Reading Rooms*, Eric Graeber's *Magic and Madness in the Library*, and Alan Taylor's *Long Overdue: A Library Reader*. Klaus Döhmer's *Merkwürdige Leute: Bibliothek und Bibliothekar in der Schönen Literatur* has some English entries. Another work, important because it was one of the few volumes which furnished a local context for my research, is Isla Macphail's *Inter Alia: Library Images and Australian Writing*, a collection of previously unpublished poems, short stories, and essays on libraries. Publication details for these works appear in the bibliography.

everything that one has really grasped without encountering contradiction."¹¹⁸

However a complete hermeneutical treatment would involve having "understood what one has reconstructed in all its relationships and in its context,"¹¹⁹ and this is not my ambition in producing this work. In relation to the selected texts my chapters often do transgress hermeneutically; they take "a minor issue for the main issue, significant for insignificant, higher for lower."¹²⁰ So whilst I hold the hermeneutical posture to be the consummate approach of literary criticism, I must also acknowledge that the essays which follow are not hermeneutic accounts – but equally I do not present their distortions as exercises of interpretation for the works themselves. I have read these texts, and read into them, because I discovered in each a peculiarly distinct faculty for producing a newly interpretative reading of the library.

VII. Circumscriptions and inspirations

There are several operations which remain yet to be discharged in order to substantiate the frame of reference I have established for this work. These include an explanation for the omission of certain contemporary forms of the public library

¹¹⁸ Friedrich Schleiermacher, "General Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics and Criticism, and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 228.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 230.

(including online public access catalogues or OPACs, digital readers, metadata, FRBR or Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records, library blogs, print-on-demand books, mass digitalisation programs such as Project Gutenberg and the contested Google Books initiative, commercial databases, e-journals, e-prints, and e-books); an overview of the approach of literary-critical and other related writing on libraries; and a qualification as to this thesis's object of address.

As the library is an institution manifestly involved in many missions, purposes, and especially digital endeavours, this thesis draws a picture of library encounters which is explicitly incomplete. One of my first undertakings in this thesis was to figure the public library as a work: a production of human making. The fact of this manufacture comes with a concomitant condition. It is tied up in the necessary impossibility of guaranteeing the public library's future form, or even existence. In *The Modernisation Review of Public Libraries* the minister for culture observes that "the context in which libraries operate is changing starkly and at speed"¹²¹ – but this situation is not the primary focus of this thesis. Indeed, I restrict my engagement with issues of service delivery, and defer an overview of the discourse of ending which attaches to the public library until the final chapter, partly as a strategy to avoid being forced into adopting an overly defensive position toward it. Another strategy in the face of a rapidly changing context is a tight focus on specific elements of public libraries which precede the digital revolution.

¹²¹ Hodge, "Vision for Public Libraries," 3.

There are several justifications for such an approach. The first is that digital technology in the library changes rapidly and analysis of it itself runs the risk of swift obsolescence. Relatedly, there is a high level of divergence between libraries' digital offerings, and debate continues about the best way to integrate new technologies into library services (the e-book is perhaps the best example of this situation¹²²). As comparatively new library forms, e-books, databases, and online materials have not stabilised as much as the forms I investigate, which have been reified through much longer practice. Patronage, books, and classification are non-emergent and yet still extant, and I found they offered a greater analytic coherence for the phenomenological investigation I wished to conduct. I give closer attention to the question of public library futures in the final chapter, but it is appropriate to anticipate this discussion by observing that the reification of the library forms I consider does not guarantee their future stability. Although in designing this thesis I aimed to evoke textual, literary, and interpretative consequence for these library forms, it is also possible that this work may, in the end, manifest some originally unintended value as a historicised or increasingly historicised account of library encounters.

¹²² An Association of Research Libraries' survey reported "strong enthusiasm for e-books tempered by frustration with publisher policies, staff resistance to a changing model, and confusion over multiple interfaces and platform access." Even libraries which are most advanced in terms of integrating e-books into their collections "acknowledge that the situation is evolving, is subject to forces outside the institution, and will continue to necessitate internal change at the institution." Catherine Anson and Ruth R. Connell, *E-Book Collections* (Washington DC: Association of Research Libraries, 2009), 11.

I wish to acknowledge prominently other work in literary analysis which takes the library as its subject. Preeminent among this work is Debra Castillo's *The Translated World: A Postmodern Tour of Libraries in Literature*, already described above as a vital text I enlist consistently throughout this thesis. These citations, however, do not adequately reflect the motivating and profoundly inspiring effect this book had upon me. *The Translated World* teems with revelations. Castillo's conclusion revisits works which can counteract what she has called "the monumentalizing force"¹²³ of the library. In the Book of John, an adulterer is brought before Christ and he is asked to pass judgement on her. In response, Jesus stoops to the ground and writes in the sand:

Christ ignores the structures that are set up to entrap him and obliterates their pertinence to the individual case at hand by addressing the question obliquely, with silence and with a written message that cannot be formalized because its content is unrevealed. (325)

Of course lost works which are known to exist are not without record, nor effect. Such works may even one day be rediscovered, as Sappho's poetry was found in Egypt at the beginning of the twentieth century. Castillo, however, reads the act of Christ's scripting as his work; *the* work. She continues:

Christ remained silent, and he wrote in the sand. But Christ's writing is a formal act, a visible sign of his silence, a distinction that published writings cannot maintain. They are thrust...into the orders of the archive and the timeless presence of the books. (326)

¹²³ Castillo, *The Translated World*, 323.

I still yet recall my despair upon reading Castillo's work at the beginning of my research and thinking disconsolately, "she has done everything I wished to do!" I hope that even in some small measure *Library Encounters* answers my desire to investigate the potential of this textual institution in as intriguing a way as *The Translated World* does, stepping out and to the side of the space occupied by Castillo's considerable achievement.

There are other works which extensively engage with literary representations of libraries that are vital to acknowledge. Some of the longer works I cite are more concerned with forms closely related to the library, such as archives, private collections, and museums: a fact I take to be indicative of my earlier claims about the lack of sustained literary attention paid to libraries. Nevertheless I have included them because resemblances between libraries and these other institutions see their themes and terms of reference regularly intersect. There is, furthermore, a considerable range of analysis which deals exclusively with the representation of the library in one work (for example, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*), or one genre (for example, science fiction, mystery, and crime), which I will not go into any detail about here.¹²⁴ In the paragraphs which follow, I have focussed on analyses which investigate the library and related institutions with some claim to generality.

¹²⁴ The articles in a special issue of *L'Esprit Createur* entitled "Imaginary Libraries: The Book in the Text" furnish a useful collection to showcase work undertaken in the discrete representational mode. In this issue, contributors consider libraries in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À rebours*, and the work of Jules Verne and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, among others. John Anzalone, ed., "Imaginary Libraries: The Book in the Text," special issue, *L'Esprit Createur* 28, no. 1 (1988).

Such work includes Suzanne Keen's *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction*. Keen defines romances of the archive as fictional works which include "scenes taking place in libraries or in other structures housing collections of papers and books" and "represent fictional characters questing in the archive."¹²⁵ She investigates many examples of such work, including but in no way limited to A. S. Byatt's *Possession*, Lawrence Norfolk's *Lemprière's Dictionary*, Robert Harris's *Fatherland*, Margaret Drabble's *The Gates of Ivory*, and Alan Hollinghurst's *The Swimming-Pool Library*. Suggesting that "the recent British novel is saturated with representations of archival research," Keen finds that in spite of "the prevailing view that postmodernism has scuttled old-fashioned notions of Truth, by far the majority of romances of the archive seek and find solid facts, incontrovertible evidence, and well-preserved memories of times past."¹²⁶ Also taking the archive as its subject is Marco Codebò's *Narrating from the Archive: Novels, Records, and Bureaucrats in the Modern Age*. Codebò identifies the archival novel, "a fictional genre where the narrative stores records; bureaucratic writing informs language; and the archive functions as a semiotic frame that structures the text's content and meaning."¹²⁷ He

¹²⁵ Suzanne Keen, *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 10.

¹²⁶ Keen, *Romances of the Archive*, 28, 3; capitalisation in the original. An important theme in Keen's work is the relationship between British archival fiction and imperialism. She argues that "romances of the archive become increasingly popular after the Falklands War, and...their emphasis on English heritage and national history coincides with the last decades of the Empire's slow demise" (210-11). In her epilogue "Postcolonial Rejoinders," Keen finds that "the deployment of romances of the archive by postcolonial writers reveals a diversity of critical revisions of the research quest's encounter with the past" (208).

¹²⁷ Marco Codebò, *Narrating from the Archive: Novels, Records, and Bureaucrats in the Modern Age* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010), 13; punctuation in this quotation has been altered.

proposes that the archival novel has an element which “without question distinguishes [it] in a formal manner, independent of specific texts’ contents and historical situations: the storing of records in the text” (14). Analysing Daniel Defoe’s *A Journal of the Plague Year*, Honoré de Balzac’s *La comédie humaine*, Gustave Flaubert’s *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, and Don DeLillo’s *Libra* among others, Codebò argues that

by approaching the archival novel as a genre, we can reconsider the map of prose writing in modernity; suddenly new demarcations emerge that cross both the borders separating fictional from nonfictional texts and the internal boundaries of novelistic discourse that lead to divisions among, for example, historical, realist, modernist, and postmodern novels.¹²⁸

Karin Sabrina Roffman’s thesis “Museums, Libraries, and the Woman Writer: Edith Wharton, Marianne Moore, and Nella Larsen” analyses how libraries and museums were feminised institutions in modernism, associated with women’s writing on the grounds of being “un-innovative, utilitarian, genteel, and high-minded.”¹²⁹ Roffman investigates how Wharton, Moore, and Larsen intervened in these associations and in the practices of the institutions themselves, “at first by working and visiting [these] spaces and later through their writing” (9). Liisa

¹²⁸ Codebò, *Narrating from the Archive*, 15. Another book-length text I would like to mention deals with libraries much more directly. Anne-Marie Chaintreau and Renée Lemaître’s *Drôles de bibliothèques...: Le thème de la bibliothèque dans la littérature et le cinéma*, unfortunately, appears to be untranslated. Chaintreau and Lemaître have published an English language chapter entitled “Funny Libraries...” in *The Image of the Library*, edited by Valeria D. Stelmakh. This piece describes some of the stereotypes of librarians they outlined in *Drôles de bibliothèques*. They also write about the research for their book in the article “In Search of Those Typical Literary Librarians.” Publication details for these works appear in the bibliography, listed variously under each author’s name according to how they appear in the work itself.

¹²⁹ Karin Sabrina Roffman, “Museums, Libraries, and the Woman Writer: Edith Wharton, Marianne Moore, and Nella Larsen” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2004), 3.

Stephenson's thesis "Reading Matter: Modernism and the Book" looks at private libraries in works by Henry James, Edith Wharton, and E. M. Forster. Citing Derrida, Stephenson suggests that "archives and libraries are the scene of 'archive trouble' in modernist fiction."¹³⁰ She argues that the writers she considers display evidence of Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence" in their depictions of libraries. "Despite the anxiety they induce" for these writers, the classic works they encounter in libraries nevertheless "fuel the imagination and foment writing" (330). "Keenly conscious of their literary precursors as well as their relation to them" (8), the modernist writers have a "love-hate relationship with the library and the archive as the embodiment of cultural heritage" (329).

Shorter generalist treatments of the representation of libraries in literature include Ewen Jarvis's "Cartographers of Consciousness: Imagined Library Spaces in the Work of Haruki Murakami, Umberto Eco and Elias Canetti," wherein Jarvis examines the image of the library in the novels *Kafka on the Shore*, *The Name of the Rose*, and *Auto-da-Fé*.¹³¹ In "Libraries, Librarians, and the Discourse of Fear," Gary P. Radford and Marie L. Radford argue that "fear is the fundamental organizing principle, or code, through which representations of libraries and librarians are manifest in modern popular cultural forms such as novels, movies, and television

¹³⁰ Liisa Stephenson, "Reading Matter: Modernism and the Book" (PhD diss., McGill University, 2007), 332.

¹³¹ Ewen Jarvis, "Cartographers of Consciousness: Imagined Library Spaces in the Work of Haruki Murakami, Umberto Eco and Elias Canetti," in *Frameworks, Artworks, Place: The Space of Perception in the Modern World*, ed. Tim Mehigan (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), 159–71.

shows.”¹³² This fear “is not a fear of libraries but a fundamental fear of the power of discourse itself” (324), with the authors conceptualising discourse after Michel Foucault. Using novels including Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*, Isaac Asimov’s *Forward the Foundation*, William Styron’s *Sophie’s Choice*, and Stephen King’s *The Library Policeman*, the authors identify many themes of the library in the course of their investigation, including “the librarian as formidable gatekeeper between order and chaos, the other-worldliness of the library, the library as cathedral, the humiliation of the user, the power of surveillance, and the consequences of disrupting the sacred order of texts” (299). Daniel Peter Walsh’s “‘On Fire or on Ice’: Prefatory Remarks on the Library in Literature” has already been cited earlier in this chapter: Walsh was the writer who suggested that the library is an institution which has not been sufficiently investigated within a critical (especially literary-critical) framework. In this essay, Walsh also argues that many literary library works – including Brautigan’s *The Abortion*, Bette Howland’s short story “Public Facilities,” Timothy Steele’s poem “The Library,” Mervyn Peake’s *Titus Groan*, Flaubert’s *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, Borges’s “The Library of Babel,” and Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* – can be interpreted through a binary configuration using the metaphors of fire and ice. For Walsh, fire infers representations of the library which foreground intertextuality and

¹³² Gary P. Radford and Marie L. Radford, “Libraries, Librarians, and the Discourse of Fear,” *Library Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (2001): 300.

the destruction of libraries, and ice infers texts “which [for] one reason or another do not ‘blaze’; they are frozen, the intertextuality is suspended.”¹³³

In “Fantasia of the Library,” Foucault contemplates Flaubert’s *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, which for Foucault “seems to summon”¹³⁴ Flaubert’s *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, a work much more commonly evoked in reference to the library (as will be evident from the précis offered above). *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, a fantastical depiction of St. Anthony’s visions of figures of temptation in the desert, does not represent a library, but Foucault infers one. Flaubert’s novel, a “monument to meticulous erudition” (89), allows Foucault to conceive of the library as an institution giving rise to a new “visionary experience” which was “singularly modern and relatively unknown before [Flaubert’s] time” (90). Foucault writes:

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. (91)

Thus for Foucault, Flaubert’s novel “was the first literary work to comprehend the greenish institutions where books are accumulated and where the slow and incontrovertible vegetation of learning quietly proliferates” (92).

¹³³ Walsh, ““On Fire or on Ice,”” 213. Another short piece which deals with libraries in literature, written in German, is Günther Stocker, “Das Motiv der Bibliothek in der Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts: Zur Aktualität der Motivforschung” [The library as a literary motif in 20th century literature: Recent research], *Weimarer Beiträge* 44, no. 4 (1998): 554–74.

¹³⁴ Michel Foucault, “Fantasia of the Library,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), 105.

I would like to mention two further works which each separately gesture toward some considerable ancillary discourses that have helped trace the border of my own investigation. First is Jennifer Summit's *Memory's Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern England*. Summit also makes important connections between the library and reading, but from a historical rather than literary perspective. "By transmitting medieval books to early modern readers," Summit argues, libraries of the period "brought those later readers into contact with medieval modes of reading that they themselves actively disputed, contested, or selectively adapted: such as *lectio divina*, *allegoresis*, or *compilatio*."¹³⁵ Moreover,

in the course of transforming medieval manuscripts into archival sources, [post-Reformation] libraries and their early modern users prepare the ground for academic literacies of the present day—in particular, the 'skeptical, wary, demystifying, critical, and even adversarial' reading practices that have been described by Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt. (7)

Second is Alberto Manguel's meditative and tender *The Library at Night*. Ranging from Alexandria to Google, Manguel organises his work around evocative themes such as "The Library as Oblivion," "The Library as Home," "The Library as Myth," "The Library as Workshop," and "The Library as Shape."¹³⁶ *The Library at Night* is a bridge to work by other writers of prose-based library appreciation, including Nicholas A. Basbanes, Anne Fadiman, Nancy Kalikow Maxwell, and Michael

¹³⁵ Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 9, quoted in Summit, *Memory's Library*, 6.

¹³⁶ Alberto Manguel, *The Library at Night* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 252, 306, 6, 176, 128.

Gorman. Although not literary-critical in approach, Summit and Manguel carry out library research which shares important inflections with the work of this thesis, most notably a recognition of the consequence of the library for textual practice.

Leah Price has contended that “the basic distinction between a work’s reader and a text’s addressee is less commonly accepted than that between author and narrator.”¹³⁷ Who is the addressee of *Library Encounters*? I think the way I have constructed the addressee is not unproblematic. I refer to patrons, users, readers: do I imply the person reading this work when I deploy these descriptions as claims? Does the reader recognise themselves; recognise others; feel bemused; resist any implication; or reject the characterisation outright? It strikes me that this work will be validly open to certain criticisms directed toward other phenomenological approaches. For example, Susan R. Suleiman suggests that “the reading subject who emerges” from phenomenological literary analyses “is not a specific, historically situated individual but a transhistorical mind whose activities are, at least formally, everywhere the same.”¹³⁸ “Given that the phenomenological approach promises to take account of the experience of the individual reading subject,” she writes, “it is important to note that the individual subject it poses is often indistinguishable from an abstract and generalized ‘reader’” (26). Analogously, Patricia Galloway has

¹³⁷ Leah Price, “Reading: The State of the Discipline,” *Book History* 7 (2004): 305.

¹³⁸ Susan R. Suleiman, “Introduction: Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism,” in *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, ed. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 25.

demonstrated the dangers of taking library users as an undistinguished mass. In a review of David Carr's *The Promise of Cultural Institutions*, she identifies a group that has been neglected in the design of Carr's project:

users who are not interested in critical investigation or meditative quests, who simply do not partake of this cultural ideal or lack the cultural background even to start, are not provided for; the aims of visitors intent on gathering social capital are equally ignored.¹³⁹

Galloway argues that Carr presumes visitors to museums and libraries are already in possession of a "museum set' of skills"; they have an "understanding [of] the purpose of the institution and [are] capable of using language" (349). Are there similar difficult assumptions within my characterisation of the patron, the reader, the user, the individual?

My use of the concept of intervention is one step towards mitigating these concerns, and it functions on several fronts. I attribute intervention to both the institution and the patron as a strategy of distributing agency. I conceive of intervention as a facility, and not (always) a compulsion; as a modality intervention has an in-built degree of optionality, and this is useful for disambiguating what Suleiman described as "a transhistorical mind." Finally, I would argue that it is crucial to recognise intervention as an activity-identifier, and not a subject-identifier. This last point acts as something of a coup de grâce against intervention's other functionalities, and perhaps because of this it is the most important among them. In

¹³⁹ Patricia Galloway, review of *The Promise of Cultural Institutions*, by David Carr, *Libraries and the Cultural Record* 39, no. 3 (2004): 348.

spite of this tension, I would suggest that each operates to interpolate a significant ethical distance between the reader of *Library Encounters* and the library user I imagine.

More directly, I respond to the addressee problematic throughout by trying to embody the library user as a figure analogous to Michel de Certeau's concept of the reader. "Readers are travellers," Certeau famously writes, "they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves."¹⁴⁰ Certeau's reader overreaches Price's formulation by claiming the privilege to poach the identity of reader and addressee both, of combining and dividing them at will. Certeau describes readings which are "rare and partial, like bubbles rising from the depths of the water, the indices of a *common* poetics."¹⁴¹ Admiring Certeau and learning from him, I have been inspired to resist a strategy of accounting for diversity in this study by pluralising its analytic components (*subjects* instead of *the subject*; *readers* instead of *the reader*). Rather I here state plainly that I do not believe my use of *reader*, *patron*, and *user* constitute labels which have eternal denotative value; nor will they necessarily coincide with the actual reader of *Library Encounters*. I offer them instead – and *patron* most especially – as a gainful fiction of how the library's potentials can be activated: ways its texts may be read, its classifications understood, its spaces mapped, and its compulsions, opportunities, and limitations mobilised.

¹⁴⁰ Michel de Certeau, "Reading as Poaching," in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (1984; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 174.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 172; italics in the original.

VIII. The offing

In determining and speculating on the nature of the library's intervention, I have been motivated by a sense of the library's consequence. ("Most people never go to the library," writes the protagonist of Swartz's *Instant Karma*, "but then most people never go to the moon either, and the moon makes waves in the ocean."¹⁴²) The library processes, forms, and functions I investigate are not necessarily powerfully present in the spectrum of a library user's textual experience, but they are a structuring, and neglected, experience in textuality. For literary criticism they are yet on the horizon; discerned but indistinct. I use a literary epistemology to investigate library forms which are experientially recognisable to many readers, with the aim of ripening textual experiences in literary studies and beyond.

¹⁴² Mark Swartz, *Instant Karma* (San Francisco: City Lights 2002), November 9. Written as a diary, Swartz's novel is unpagged, and so I cite the date of entry as a substitute.

2. Patronage

I. Names and naming

A name is the verbal expression which we assign to something to which we wish to refer repeatedly.¹

Who is in the library, who is not a librarian? How does this individual subscribe to identity, and how is he or she subscribed to it? What is an appropriate name for these individuals, as a group? Going to the library may be construed in the terms of many processes – social, pedagogic, class, gender, and more – but it is also an experience which involves textual process. I ask these questions of naming and identity because in this chapter I wish to investigate a library encounter in terms from literature and literary theory, guided by a proposition that the processes of library use are significant within a user's textual life. What will come to be called library patronage has been put before the other encounters because it is a location of a reader's holistic library experience: patronage, unlike library books and classification, is the process nearest to textual subjectivity. I start with the premise that patronage can be enlisted to act as a subjective unifying site for phenomena of the library which are of a textual nature.

The first step, then, is to unify – and the first step of unification is to name.

"Patrons" is one answer to the question of a name for library goers – it is others'

¹ John Fisher, "Entitling," *Critical Inquiry* 11, no. 2 (1984): 287. This remark is made in relation to "works of art" (286) including paintings, plays, and musical compositions. Fisher writes: "It is important to note...that titles, whatever role they play, are always in words. They are never in patches of color or in nonverbal noises; and even if the words are words for numbers, they are yet words" (287).

answer and will be mine² – but on first glance it is not potent for in life *patronage* is only one contender among others, and is often weakly used, and irregularly. But all the contenders are weakly used: not only is there no consensus answering my questions of naming library goers in literary-critical and literary-theoretical contexts; incredibly, there appears to be little debate answering to them. Commentators assume positions instinctually and idiosyncratically. Debra A. Castillo, the literary theorist who has written most extensively on the library, avoids reifying those who enter the institution with a group identity, a consistent description, a common name. When writing about characters who visit public, private, and other kinds of libraries, Castillo does not often configure their identity in reference to the institution they attend. Roquentin, who in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea* undertakes research in the Bouville library, is for Castillo first of all a "historian," as is the protagonist who uses his local library in Juan Goytisolo's *Count Julian*.³ For others she is equally elusive: assortedly, they include a "novelist" (15), a "heroine" (22), a "scholar" (54), a "critic"

² "Patron" is found in texts relating to libraries across a wide spectrum of approaches and discursive registers, ranging from Alistair Black's *A New History of the English Public Library* to Steven M. Cohen's *Keeping Current: Advanced Internet Strategies to Meet Librarian and Patron Needs*. However its use, as will be considered presently, is sporadic. Although it is not the same rationale I employ in this chapter, an eloquent justification for the use of *patron* is offered by Ron E. Scrogam, who suggests "it is not inconsequential that libraries call their public 'patrons,' 'users' or whatever infelicitous term they may have long used." Scrogam recognises that "speaking is a way of acting when it is supported by power. Libraries should jealously guard against the incursion of the language of the market in a public institution because the values of the public sphere will always fall short when analyzed according to those of the private sphere." Black, *A New History of the English Public Library: Social and Intellectual Contexts, 1850–1914* (London: Leicester University Press / Cassell, 1996), 17; Cohen, *Keeping Current: Advanced Internet Strategies to Meet Librarian and Patron Needs* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2003); Scrogam, "The American Public Library and Its Fragile Future," *New Library World* 107, nos. 1220–21 (2006): 11–12.

³ Debra A. Castillo, *The Translated World: A Postmodern Tour of Libraries in Literature* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press / University Presses of Florida, 1984), 118, 120.

(71), a “commentator” (73). That is, even in a work subtitled *A Postmodern Tour of Libraries in Literature*, these loci of investigation are not afforded a denomination which reflects their status as library goers. When they are configured in relation to the library in any capacity, Castillo’s vocabulary metaphorises them as library professionals rather than library users: Roquentin is a “historian-librarian” (117); Julian, “a librarian in reverse” (120).

The elision or variance that Castillo demonstrates is characteristic of the wider literary scene of writing on libraries. This chapter examines three fictional works which contain substantial depictions of library use – a short story and two novels – and in each of them their library-going characters are rarely named and rarely name themselves in relation to the institution which is a primary subject in their narratives. Even when it is narratively significant, library going is rarely recruited as the characteristic which provides a nominal attribution for the character; there is no functional name for library going, and it is but rarely reified into anything resembling a role. This is problematic, deeply so, for a role is a position from which to act.

Without a coordinate and without *position*, there is a radical under-consideration in literary analysis of issues around the textuality of library going. Compare, for example, the representational difference between the figure of the librarian and the figure of the library user. The librarian is a trope, instantly connotative, effortlessly remindful, an easy conjuration. In comparison with library users, the figure of the librarian is representationally overexamined: as a profession,

it is an explorable incumbency, and it has generated contingent investigation.⁴

Against this dutied and figurable presence, the library user languishes. As a role, the librarian – and, for that matter, the reader as well – has currency; as roles they are identifiable and self-identifiable; they connote motivations, action, and consequence. The lack of a name is a critical lack: it stands in for a dearth of critical investigation, and consequently signals the absence of reflexive inhabitation and theoretical development.

So what are other names, in discursive forums outside literature and literary analysis, which have been offered to describe the activity of library going? Are there contenders which will function as a normative denomination; a name that will allow a library goer to be referred to repeatedly; cleanly, and with significance? Outside literature, the issue is live. In the September 2008 edition of *Current Cites*, an annotated mailing list surveying new information technology literature edited by a senior program officer at the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), “the recent discussion on library email lists and blogs about calling library users ‘members’

⁴ From a bibliographic and literary-critical perspective, even a brief sampling of analyses of the figure of the librarian unearths an impressive array of material. Substantial bibliographic overviews are represented by Grant Burns’s extensively annotated lists in *Librarians in Fiction: A Critical Bibliography* and John Frylinck and Janice Oliver’s *Looks in Books: Images of Librarians in Literature, 1945–1990; A Bibliography*. Gregg Sapp lists and briefly annotates forty-six short stories which include a librarian protagonist in his article “The Librarian as Main Character: A Professional Sampler.” Michael Cart’s edited collection *In the Stacks: Short Stories about Libraries and Librarians* has already been mentioned as an important resource for literary representations of libraries, and it is also clearly invested in representations of librarians as well. Susan Allen Toth and John Coughlan’s edited collection *Reading Rooms* has a dedicated chapter called “The Librarian.” “Librarian’s Belle [sic] Lettres,” the fourth chapter of the second edition of Vladimir F. Wertsman’s *The Librarian’s Companion*, has ninety-five entries listing librarians, publishers, and booksellers in novels and plays. Publication details for these works appear in the bibliography.

rather than ‘customers’” was referred to;⁵ OCLC’s *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources* pauses to explain that “throughout the report, the phrase ‘information consumer’ is used, as it was in *The 2003 OCLC Environmental Scan*, to refer to people who seek, ingest and sometimes purchase information.”⁶ “User” has been employed in this thesis already;⁷ Gary P. Radford and Marie L. Radford also engage the description in the course of literary analysis,⁸ and they do so with admirable constancy. But in spite of this constancy, and in spite of its innate agency, *user* does not convey any kind of categoricalness nor specificity, and so it is not a name which is particularly expedient for connoting institutional characteristics that can achieve a consequent institutional circumstantiality.

Patrick Joyce enlists *user* in relation to libraries as well, but elaborates upon it to formulate a more extensive identity, the “liberal subject.” Joyce writes that “the library involved the formation of a political subject in whose name liberal rule could

⁵ Warren Cheetham, review of *Best Practices for the Customer-Focused Library*, by Metropolitan Library System, *Current Cites* 19, no. 9 (September 2008), <http://lists.webjunction.org/currentcites/2008/cc08.19.9.html>.

⁶ OCLC (Online Computer Library Center), *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources: A Report to the OCLC Membership* (Dublin, OH: OCLC, 2005), xii.

⁷ “User” is in play outside of literary analyses as well, as the following titles from the professional literature make clear: *How Libraries and Librarians Help: A Guide to Identifying User-Centered Outcomes*; “Considering the User Perspective: Research into Usage and Communication of Digital Information”; and “Making Patron Data Work Harder: User Search Terms as Access Points?” Joan C. Durrance and Karen E. Fisher, with Marian Bouch Hinton, *How Libraries and Librarians Help: A Guide to Identifying User-Centered Outcomes* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2005); Snow et al., “Considering the User Perspective: Research into Usage and Communication of Digital Information,” *D-Lib Magazine* 14, nos. 5–6 (2008); Jason A. Clark, “Making Patron Data Work Harder: User Search Terms as Access Points?,” *Code4Lib Journal*, no. 3 (2008).

⁸ See, for example, Gary P. Radford and Marie L. Radford, “Libraries, Librarians, and the Discourse of Fear,” *Library Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (2001).

go forward, and an object of that rule, something to be known and operated upon.”⁹ But Joyce’s formulation is particularly political; his primary concern is with people and governance, rather than people and texts. (His is a subject “not attached to different bodies, or to the market... This subject was constituted by the institution of the archive itself, and called into being legally through the 1850 [Public Libraries] Act.”¹⁰) While lauding his thinking through of library use in terms of identity, I find Joyce’s “liberal subject” so adept in its political reference that it loses power for any substantive mobilisation in reference to textuality. The “liberal subject,” as compelling as it is for recognising library goers’ involvement in the development of a particular kind of public sphere, is at too far a remove from textuality to be quickly recovered as a main name for the library user’s textual experience, and is in any case already invested in a discourse separate to it.

It is for a related reason that “reader” will not do. Of course there are readers in the library, and my reference to the public library’s multipurpose nature in the introduction illustrates the distinctiveness of the label, because it suggests how there are others in the public library who are not necessarily readers or not readers first of all (users of digital resources, community members participating in activities, people

⁹ Patrick Joyce, “The Politics of the Liberal Archive,” in “The Archive Part 2,” ed. Sean Hand and Irving Velody, special issue, *History of the Human Sciences* 12, no. 2 (1999): 38. These ideas are further explored in Joyce, “The Light of the Library,” in *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London: Verso, 2003), 128–37.

¹⁰ Joyce, “Politics of the Liberal Archive,” 39. It is important to acknowledge that Joyce explores the library as an agent of control over citizens as well as a source of their enfranchisement, and this governability is an inherent component of the political “liberal subject.”

working in study groups, even those who come to be “alone in a crowd,”¹¹ and so on). Of course there are readers in the library, and being invested in questions of textual experience it is readers I am interested in rather than those others in the library for other reasons. To refer to them as readers in this context, however, offers no facility of distinction between their reading and readerly identities which are unrelated to the library, and the particular textual forms, processes, and functions the library gives rise to.

What else? “Researcher,” “student,” “scholar,” after Castillo? Not always. “Member,” “subscriber,” “client”? Too clannish; clubbish; much too commercial. There is a name already in circulation which, upon closer examination, is revealed to have a significant capacity for embodying some of the issues raised by literary representations and a textual investigation of library going. The concept of patronage has the most mobilisation of them all to describe the experience of library use in a textual framework. “Patronage” and “patrons” come with a lode in their etymological and historical make-up, a resource of definition which will be drawn upon at the conclusion of this chapter to illustrate themes identified in the course of its speculations about users’ experiences in the library.

¹¹ Robert Butler, “Reinventing the Library,” *More Intelligent Life*, Summer 2010, <http://moreintelligentlife.com/content/ideas/robert-butler/reinventing-library?page=full>.

I contend that the processes of library use mean something for the textual life of a library goer who is also a reader, and that patronage operates as a unifying site of the library's textual phenomena. My use of *textual* should be closely explained.

In 1980 Susan R. Suleiman saw in literary theory a

movement away from the formalist and New Critical emphasis on the autonomy of 'the text itself' toward a recognition (or a re-recognition) of the relevance of context, whether the latter be defined in terms of historical, cultural, ideological, or psychoanalytic categories.¹²

I wish to enlist the existence of this juxtaposition – and especially the knowledge that it generates about the possibilities of being both within and outside a work while still conducting a fundamentally literary investigation – to clarify my use of the word *textual*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defines *textual* in this way: “of, pertaining to, or contained in the (or a) text.”¹³ In this chapter, I focus on *textual* in the sense that it can be “pertaining to.” The word is used with the preponderance of emphasis on its creation of a sense of “relating to” or “bearing upon” text and texts. *Textual* in the sense of being “contained in” (or “within,” or “emanating out of”) text and texts is of course present in any usage too, necessarily so, but herein this connotation is always and in every sense lighter. In proposing that patronage is a unifying site for phenomena of a textual nature, the textual nature I speak of is not exactly *context*, and my gloss of Suleiman's distinction will have indicated that it is

¹² Susan R. Suleiman, “Introduction: Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism,” in *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, ed. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 5.

¹³ *Oxford English Dictionary* (online), 2nd ed., s.v. “textual, adj. (and n.),” accessed November 10, 2009.

certainly not “the text itself.” As far as such a thing is feasible, it is *textual* when the word is used more as a noun than as an adjective. It denotes frameworks, and also infers their ensuing framing processes. The experiences and responses of patrons to the library as it presents as a textual institution are taken as the object of analysis.

Phenomenology, “to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself,”¹⁴ or “the investigation of ‘phenomena’ (i.e. things as apprehended by the consciousness),”¹⁵ has a long literary tradition. It has been argued that in literature the “phenomenological approach...is necessarily centered on the question of reading.”¹⁶ Whilst literary phenomenology is not an empirical description of reading, it is concerned with how “the convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence.”¹⁷ As part of this project, phenomenology “seeks to describe and account for the mental processes that occur as a reader advances through a text and derives from it—or imposes on it—a pattern.”¹⁸ These remarks demonstrate very clearly that literary phenomenology is often a reading phenomenology. This is true throughout literary phenomenology’s progression. It can be seen when taking the Geneva School as a starting point,¹⁹ a movement which understood “the *moi profond* of the literary text to be that of the

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (1962; repr., Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 58.

¹⁵ Chris Baldick, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), s.v. “phenomenology.”

¹⁶ Suleiman, “Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism,” 22.

¹⁷ Wolfgang Iser, “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach,” *New Literary History* 3, no. 2 (1972): 279.

¹⁸ Suleiman, “Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism,” 22.

¹⁹ Chris Baldick suggests phenomenology’s “impact on literary studies is most evident in the work of the Geneva School.” Baldick, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, s.v. “phenomenology.”

author (or, to be more accurate, of that aspect of the author which ‘crosses over’ into poetic language)...the reader’s task is to ‘live’ the experience of this *moi profond* as it is inviscerated in the text.”²⁰ Geneva School critic Georges Poulet has illustrated the case patently, describing “the remarkable transformation wrought in me through the act of reading...I am thinking the thoughts of another.”²¹ It is also evident within the manifestations of phenomenology in those literary studies which “place more emphasis on the reader’s consciousness of literary works,” and which have, in turn, ensured that “phenomenology has prepared the ground for reception theory.”²² The relationship between literary phenomenology and reading thus deepens: Suleiman, for example, concentrates on eminent reception theorist Wolfgang Iser in her description of the phenomenological literary approach.²³

Because of these precedents, the hypothesis of library use giving rise to textual phenomena will be drawn out against the question of reading. How do library going and reading relate to one another within a phenomenological framework? I do not believe that literary phenomenology needs to be limited to a reading phenomenology. I argue that some elements of literary phenomenology can be construed to be properly patronage’s own, and their value consists in the way

²⁰ Robert R. Magliola, *Phenomenology and Literature: An Introduction* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1977), 9. Baldick describes the movement in this way: “drawing on the philosophical tradition of phenomenology,” the Geneva School “saw the critic’s task as one of identifying, and fully identifying *with*, the unique mode of consciousness pervading a given author’s works.” Baldick, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, s.v. “Geneva School.”

²¹ Georges Poulet, “Criticism and the Experience of Interiority,” in *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1972), 58–59.

²² Baldick, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, s.v. “phenomenology.”

²³ Suleiman, “Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism,” 22–26.

that they operate outside reading. I think especially of some of the more abstruse connotations of an observation Leah Price has made: “part of the problem is that literary critics tend to act as if reading were the only legitimate use of books.”²⁴ The overall objective of this chapter is to recognise patronage as a textual phenomenology: a phenomenology which conducts itself in a space which does not emanate from the text itself; a phenomenology that is instead related to institutional involvement and which singularly bears upon text and texts (and in this way is able to be investigated as a “textual” experience with precision). From this, I hope to offer some suggestions as to what patronage’s characteristics and facilities as a textual phenomenology may be.

I will not attempt to develop a typology of the library patron’s identity in order to offer it as standing up alongside librarianship or readership. I take seriously an observation made by Vivienne Waller, which sounds as a lesson from prior experiences of imagining library users – “historically the user as s/he exists in library policy discourse has tended to differ from the actual user”²⁵ – and also doubt the feasibility of making a comprehensive survey of library users in a single chapter of a piece of work. Instead, I have sought to determine what literature and literary discourses typically tell us about the textual phenomena of library patronage as a first step: to identify what I suggest is a common literary depiction of patrons and

²⁴ Leah Price, “Reading: The State of the Discipline,” *Book History* 7 (2004): 305.

²⁵ Vivienne Waller, “Legitimacy for Large Public Libraries in the Digital Age,” *Library Review* 57, no. 5 (2008): 379. At this observation, Waller cites Herbert J. Gans, “Supplier-Oriented and User-Oriented Planning for the Public Library,” in *Public Library Purpose: A Reader*, ed. Barry Totterdell (London: Bingley, 1978), 71–83.

their experiences in the textual scene of libraries. Italo Calvino's short story "A General in the Library" has been employed as part of this purpose. Following this, I examine two novels which contain what I consider to be productively atypical representations of library patronage: Richard Brautigan's *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966*, and Mark Swartz's *Instant Karma*.²⁶ In this selection I have been guided by the example of a facility within the phenomenological method itself. Martin Heidegger asks "what is it that phenomenology is to 'let us see'?"

"Manifestly," he continues,

²⁶ In determining which examples of library patronage to enlist for this chapter, I looked for fictional representations of library patronage where library use was not incidental, but a substantial part of characterisation in the narrative. There are many examples of extensive depictions of library use which have been considered by literary criticism canonically: Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and Elias Canetti's *Auto-da-Fé* are prime examples. However, the libraries in such canonical works were often private libraries, and thus not sufficiently commensurate with the public library, the library form I have chosen to work from. In other extensive representations of library use which might otherwise have served – Stephen King's *The Library Policeman*, Michael Griffith's novella *Bibliophilia*, and Allen Kurzweil's *The Grand Complication* were among those considered – some particular feature (fear or lust or quest, respectively) was so exaggerated as to prove intrusive upon issues of textuality.

The exclusion of *Don Quixote* does not mean that my analysis is bereft of the quixotic. The two novels I consider in this chapter are resolutely *not* canonical; they are decidedly marginal within the field of literary exercises of library representation. In this marginality, they have some resonance with Jacques Derrida's account of the frame:

The frame labors indeed. Place of labor, structurally bordered origin of surplus value, i.e., overflowed on these two borders by what it overflows, it gives indeed. Like wood. It creaks and cracks, breaks down and dislocates even as it cooperates in the production of the product, overflows it and is deduc(t)ed from it. It never lets itself be simply exposed.

I suggest that employing the category of the frame operates to highlight the significance of the marginal. Thus the analysis also has the attendant fragility that Derrida accords the frame ("a frame is essentially constructed and therefore fragile"). What I enlist especially, however, is the translators' rendering of "deduc(t)ed," finding in "deduced" not only an understanding of the marginal as an issue of the product, but a potential for the marginal to be a source of an attuned interpretative power for what it frames. Derrida, "Parergon," in *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 75, 73.

it is something that proximally and for the most part does *not* show itself at all: it is something that lies *hidden*, in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself; but at the same time it is something that belongs to what thus shows itself, and it belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and its ground.²⁷

Heidegger's work on phenomenology cannot be reconciled with the psychological accounts of reading phenomenology outlined earlier. But it is not inconsistent with their impetus of description, a description of what Heidegger recognises "for the most part does *not* show itself at all." For Heidegger, the description of phenomenology has "the sense of a prohibition—the avoidance of characterizing anything without...demonstration."²⁸ In their atypical and yet scrupulous and scrupulously inquiring representations of textual library phenomena, I have found in *The Abortion* and *Instant Karma* a greater power to tease out some of the hidden aspects of patronage; hidden, but constitutive of its meaning and ground.²⁹ "We can understand phenomenology," says Heidegger, "only by seizing upon it as a possibility."³⁰ Texts such as *The Abortion* and *Instant Karma* present significant opportunities to speculate on patronage's textual possibility.

²⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 59; italics in the original.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Heidegger's description of phenomenology is echoed in his conception of the unthought in *What Is Called Thinking?* Heidegger urges us to "hear" the language of thinkers. Such an activity involves "letting every thinker's thought come to us as something in each case unique, never to be repeated, inexhaustible—and being shaken to the depths by what is unthought in his thought...The more original the thinking, the richer will be what is unthought in it." Original thinkers both, I find Brautigan and Swartz to be eminent contenders for Heidegger's formulation of the unthought. Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 76.

³⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 63.

II. A force of intervention

One day, in the illustrious nation of Panduria, a suspicion crept into the minds of top officials: that books contained opinions hostile to military prestige...³¹

The army marches upon the library to censor, rubber stamps ready. It requisitions the building and exiles its heavy-coated scholars; a mule eats a valuable unguarded Ciceronian manuscript. The army's charge; its mission? To examine every book and deem what class of reader it is appropriate for. The posture of the charge it makes; its conduct in discharging the assignation with which it has been entrusted? Pure soldierly swagger, and gloriously absurd.

We watch the officers and soldiers become readers during their long mission. They are "prey to conflicting sentiments," the narrator explains:

on the one hand they were constantly discovering new interests to satisfy and were enjoying their reading and studies more than they would ever have imagined; on the other hand they couldn't wait to be back in the world again, to take up life again, a world and a life that seemed so much more complex now, as though renewed before their very eyes. (68)

The men have perforce discovered complexity, and struggle valiantly, incongruously, with its consequence: "the lieutenant would answer by quoting other authors and getting all muddled up in matters historical, philosophical and

³¹ Italo Calvino, "A General in the Library," in *Numbers in the Dark, and Other Stories*, trans. Tim Parks (London: Cape / Random, 1995), 64.

economic" (67). In the library, the soldiers and officers read poetry together into the night.

Italo Calvino, the author of "A General in the Library," felt himself to be "living between Buchenwald and the H bomb,"³² and his family was deeply committed to "anti-Fascist principles."³³ Other work from the time of the story's publication has been recognised as a testament to Calvino's "faltering trust in political solutions."³⁴ "One writes fables in periods of oppression," he himself suggested. "When a man cannot give clear form to his thinking, he expresses it in fables. These little stories correspond to a young man's political and social experiences during the death throes of Fascism."³⁵ This is a writer who has penned a tale which celebrates the triumph of scholarship, a liberal parable about how the library defuses bad battles and instigates good ones. At the story's conclusion, the army's investigation is completed and the General's inchoate and consequently incoherent humanistic report – "including, as can happen with those who have only recently embraced new ideas, declarations that were often simplistic and contradictory" (68) – is a martial disgrace. The commanding officers are decommissioned, "a result of 'a serious nervous breakdown suffered in the course of

³² Calvino, *Una pietra spora: Discorsi di letteratura e società* (Turin: Einaudi, 1980), 14, cited in Constance Markey, *Italo Calvino: A Journey toward Postmodernism* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 88.

³³ Markey, *Italo Calvino*, 6.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁵ Italo Calvino, unpublished juvenilia, 1943, cited in Esther Calvino, preface to *Numbers in the Dark, and Other Stories*, 2; capitalisation in the original.

duty'" (69), and are last seen hurrying eagerly up the library's steps, bundled in their heavy civilian coats.³⁶

Calvino's story is a transparent statement of a library encounter, selected to introduce this chapter's subject of the library patron in recognition of its lucidity, and its pure depiction of library effect.³⁷ I enlist a fable first of all because this seems

³⁶ A similar premise is found in a chapter of Robert Musil's *The Man without Qualities*. David E. Wellbery remarks on the novel's use of the figure of "the military man as epistemological naïf" who enters the library because he believes that therein "the pinnacle or organizing center of knowledge must yield itself to his grasp." In their fictions Musil and Calvino evoke a long history of real martial interference in (or destruction of) bibliographic spaces. Edward Alexander Parsons characterises the original library at Alexandria as "the perfect victim of military madness." Recent relevant book length accounts include *Books on Fire: The Destruction of Libraries throughout History* by Lucien X. Polastron and *Libricide: The Regime-Sponsored Destruction of Books and Libraries in the Twentieth Century* by Rebecca Knuth (both of which are listed in the bibliography).

In evoking this history, it is important to acknowledge that the condemnation of acts of libricide and bibliocide is not textually nor culturally uncontested. From a literary perspective, Castillo expands on the view that the "purgation of the books by fire is also...a lending of life and heat...to a cold past." She recognises a multiplicity of attitudes in William Carlos Williams's *Paterson* towards such acts of destruction, and argues that the destruction of the library is a "complex image" for Williams, simultaneously representing "the rape of knowledge by the tyrant, the purification of the self that symbolically ensues in the body politic from the exorcism of spirits, and the reendowment of human passions to the maddening cold of dead books." Stanley Chodorow takes the authors of two recent works on book burning to task for their "cultural myopia." These writers

regard book burning as entirely negative, but where the burners express cultural ideals in justifying their acts, they express, from their point of view, a positive, culture-building motivation. We need to understand book burning as one of the processes by which people have built and defended their cultures, not merely as an immoral act of destruction.

Wellbery, "The General Enters the Library: A Note on Disciplines and Complexity," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 4 (2009): 982; Parsons, *The Alexandrian Library: Glory of the Hellenic World; Its Rise, Antiquities, and Destructions* (London: Cleaver-Hume, 1952), ix; Castillo, *The Translated World*, 163, 161; Chodorow, "Burning Books: A Review Essay," review of *Burning Books*, by Haig Bosmajian, and *Burning Books and Leveling Libraries: Extremist Violence and Cultural Destruction*, by Rebecca Knuth, *Libraries and the Cultural Record* 42, no. 4 (2007): 449, 450.

³⁷ Writing with reference to the figure of the librarian, Gregg Sapp has suggested that "the short story seems an ideal medium for exploring professional stereotypes, since the requisite economy of language and directness of literary technique make it likely that, if the authors label their characters as librarians, they've done this to achieve some specific effect." It is for an analogous reason that the short story offers a concise evincible representation of the figure of the library patron. Sapp, "The Librarian as Main Character: A Professional Sampler." *Wilson Library Bulletin* 62, no. 5 (1987): 29.

an appropriate investigative response in the face of the sparse, under-formulated and uncollected analysis of library patrons that I remarked upon earlier. And the picture “A General in the Library” paints?

The short story stages a clearly delineated intersection of military and bibliographic spheres and – perhaps predictably in a tale about the library’s transformative and redemptive power in a brutal world – their incongruities are found to be diametric. The soldiers’ inhabitation of the library is farcical (“then came a squadron of soldiers who set up camp in the old courtyard, with mules, bales of hay, tents, cooking equipment, camp radio, and signalling flags”³⁸); their initial scholarly capacity reduced at best (even Panduria’s General Staff is not “particularly well-versed in matters bibliographical”³⁹). Military and bibliographic economies are shown as incompatible: the virile purpose of the army’s original assignment degenerates before the library’s prodigiousness. Productivity wanes (“the number of books examined got bigger and bigger, but they no longer provided figures relative to positive and negative verdicts...General Fedina’s rubber stamps lay idle”⁴⁰), and finally collapses (“not much is known about the progress of the...work: what happened in the library through the long winter weeks was not reported”⁴¹). The commission fails. The commanders have succumbed, and effectively desert wholesale. The military, with all its paranoia, through all its overkill, in all its great

³⁸ Calvino, “A General in the Library,” 65.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 66–67.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

broken hopes of institutional heteronomy, is prostrated before the library. *Vivez moins, lisez plus.*

I want to suggest that the crowning, crowing incongruities outlined above work dangerously to obscure a more muted and abiding affiliation the story betrays. "A General in the Library" is of course fanciful, whimsical, and absurd. It tells of strange days, delighted discovery, and ennobling transformation: the short intellectual bildungsroman of a cohort. The library sparks good battles, and is a force for discursive good. Michael Cart suggests the story "reminds us of the disarming and insidious power of books to humanize."⁴² And yet, as the quiet and quite ambivalent intrusion of "insidious" in Cart's analysis begins to register, I cannot but see how the story also shows the similar and disquieting power of the military and the library to subdue and assimilate their recruits. (Sun-Zi in the *Art of War*: "the captives should be treated kindly, and absorbed into your ranks."⁴³) The men's induction into the military is prior, and naturalised as the story's problematic; the men's induction into the library is made subject, and narrativised as naturally progressive. But both of these relationships are inductions: in the world of Calvino's story the men are represented as consistently pliable; they are there to be worked upon. The library may be a force for discursive good, but it achieves this through a

⁴² Michael Cart, ed., *In the Stacks: Short Stories about Libraries and Librarians* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook, 2003), 10.

⁴³ Sun-Zi, *Sun-Zi's "The Art of War,"* trans. Han Hiong Tan (Aspley, QLD: H. H. Tan Medical, 2001), 26.

process of assimilation. In Calvino's story, we witness the library in its force upon patrons' consciousnesses. "We shall count as real what we can use to intervene in the world to affect something else," Ian Hacking has formulated, "*or what the world can use to affect us.*"⁴⁴ "A General in the Library" shows the library as a force of intervention.

In "A General in the Library," there are only a few characters who are fleshed out fully, and of these more characterful figures, there is only one who could be considered a truly effective manipulator. He, crucially, is not of the military but a library native, and unendingly kindly too:

Lieutenant Abrogati...would jump to his feet and throw the book he was reading down on the table: 'But this is outrageous!' ...Moving silently in soft slippers, the old librarian came up to him. 'That's nothing,' he would say, 'read what it says here...you can put this in your report too, and this and this,' and he presented him with a pile of books...Moving silently in his slippers, almost invisible in his grey shirt, Signor Crispino would always join in at the right moment, offering some book which he felt contained interesting information on the subject under consideration, and which always had the effect of radically undermining General Fedina's convictions.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening: Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Science* (1983; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 146; italics added.

⁴⁵ Calvino, "A General in the Library," 66–67. The library that Calvino describes here infers a curatorial model: Crispino *directs*. In "Why Read the Classics?," Calvino invokes contemporary cultural "eclecticism" – "which would never be able to draw up a catalogue of classic works to suit our own times" – in order to extol Giacomo Leopardi's father's library, which has been lovingly and carefully acquired. In this depiction, Calvino demonstrates another aspect of the curatorial model of libraries, which involves not only the expertise of those who facilitate its use for others, but also a considerable intellectual investment in its original design. Calvino is pessimistic about the tenacity of the curatorial model in today's world. He writes: "Today a classical education like that enjoyed by young Leopardi is unthinkable...All that can be done is for each one of us to invent our own classics."

Michel Foucault makes a similar point in "Of Other Spaces," when he writes "in the seventeenth century, even at the end of the century, museums and libraries were the expression of an individual choice." In *Memory's Library*, Jennifer Summit foregrounds the curatorial impetus in

A *library native*, and this beguiling agency is best understood as an emanation of the institution he serves as his primary role in the narrative is to accelerate its processes. (And who indeed is this commanding “General” that the title of the story infers? Is it necessarily the figure of the military man?) An agent of the library, the old librarian Signor Crispino intervenes, convolutes, and enmeshes, and the library is the place where instead of “thinning out,” the “forest of books seemed to grow ever more tangled and insidious” (66). And so under the combined influence of library and librarian the soldiers, once textually unmotivated, are transformed into awkward scholars nevertheless; and so under this influence the men “couldn’t wait to be back in the world again...” &c. And there is nothing particularly untoward about these strange vocations and these worthy bookish sentiments, *except* that the soldiers are compelled by tenure; *except* that the outcome for the commanders is uniform and totalised. A process of socialisation or homogenisation has been undertaken and achieved. By the end of the tale, “Private Barabasso,” “Lieutenant Abrogati,” and

medieval and early modern libraries. These “do not simply store but rather select and arrange their contents to make them meaningful in a changing world.” The libraries of this period did not aim for “totality or universality”; rather, in the examples Summit considers, “the library makers...constructed libraries in the same way that authors construct books, through a purposeful selection of materials.” Such curatorial models and languages for libraries may be re-emerging in a digital age. Associate librarian of collection development for Harvard College, Dan Hazen, argues that “internet search engines like Google Books fundamentally challenge our understanding of where we add value to [the research] process.” Librarians work to assemble a collection which can “support and sustain some kind of meaningful inquiry”; an effort which can give rise to “a collection that [is] a consciously created, carefully crafted, deliberately maintained, constrained body of material.” Calvino, “Why Read the Classics?,” in *Why Read the Classics?*, trans. Martin McLaughlin (New York: Vintage / Random House, 2000), 8, 9; Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 26; Summit, *Memory’s Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 5; Jonathan Shaw, “Gutenberg 2.0: Harvard’s Libraries Deal with Disruptive Change,” *Harvard Magazine*, May/June 2010, <http://harvardmagazine.com/2010/05/gutenberg-2-0>.

“Lieutenant Lucchetti” no longer have experiences in the library, but “the commission” does. The “minds of Fedina and his men” coalesce and act in concert:

the fact that the day was fast approaching when they would have to leave the library filled them with apprehension, for they would have to give an account of their mission, and with all the ideas that were bubbling up in their heads they had no idea how to get out of what had become a very tight corner indeed.⁴⁶

In Calvino, the library orients its patrons on an irrevocable trajectory. Extrapolating from Michel Foucault, Gary Radford and Marie Radford observe that “like the prison, an institution that transforms subjects into prisoners, the library, as an institution, first and foremost transforms subjects into...users.”⁴⁷ “A General in the Library” manifests this transformation, and represents it as entire, unrelenting, and common. Entering the library, everyone – no matter how ill-equipped; no matter how initially resistant; no matter how much they are lodged perforce – will participate in (or configure themselves in relation to) a shared worldview wherein complexity and a dizzying experience of heterogeneity has been made orthodox for textual experience. They will be entranced and transfigured. “A General in the Library” is a literary representation which shows the library producing predictable change in the user; it shows the library as it works upon its patrons.

⁴⁶ Calvino, “A General in the Library,” 68. The soldiers not only lose their proper names in the course of their library transformation; these same names have already augured the propriety of this transformation. *Lucchetto*, in Italian, means padlock or catch; *Abrogati* is a conjugation of *abrogare*, to repeal; *Barabasso* combines *bara*, coffin, and *basso*, low or shallow. Applied to people, all have undeniably pejorative connotations, demarcating those to be unlocked, annulled, elevated, and disinterred. The soldiers’ names signal their status as redeemable individuals. My thanks to Mark Byron for his suggestion that I investigate the connotation of these Italian names.

⁴⁷ Radford and Radford, “Libraries, Librarians, and the Discourse of Fear,” 322.

III. Fraught dialectic

Italo Calvino's short story is offered as an epitome. It reveals nothing that will surprise anyone familiar with literary accounts of libraries. For how wearisome and axiomatic – how tautological to collective literary consciousness – to find the library represented as a special incarnation of dialectic, showing scholarship's characteristic complexity; showing the soldiers' rangy debate; showing Signor Crispino's careful navigation from *this* book to *that*; showing the killing inadequacy of General Fedina's disordered "compendium of human history from its origins down to the present day"⁴⁸ presented as the commission's final submission; showing a young lieutenant's elicited citation of "other authors" and his subsequent turbid epistemological upset. How fatiguing, and how appropriately fatiguing: it is because the library's bald incarnation of textual heterogeneity is overfamiliar that such a response (by patrons and librarians alike) is shortly evidenced as a phenomenon in literary library discourses. Calvino's "forest of books" which "seemed to grow ever more tangled and insidious" is everywhere echoed in and elaborated by other literary accounts of libraries. Adso's epiphany in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, which sees him develop an autotelic understanding of the world of books:

⁴⁸ Calvino, "A General in the Library," 68.

Until then I had thought each book spoke of the things, human or divine, that lie outside books. Now I realized that not infrequently books speak of other books: it is as if they spoke among themselves. In the light of this reflection, the library seemed all the more disturbing to me. It was then the place of a long, centuries-old murmuring, an imperceptible dialogue between one parchment and another, a living thing.⁴⁹

The librarian's aggravation with his books in Anatole France's "The Shirt":

Can't you hear? Can't you hear the uproar they make?
My ears are bursting from it. They all talk at the same time, and in every language. They argue about everything: God, Nature, Man, Time, Space and Numbers, the Knowable and the Unknowable, Good and Evil; they examine and object to everything, affirm and deny everything. They reason; they contradict.⁵⁰

Debra Castillo's abstraction of the catalogue in *The Translated World*:

The madness of the books is paralleled by a madness of the catalogue; the labyrinth of the library stacks has its analogue in the even more intricate labyrinth of the catalogue of these books, in which the simple relation of one entry/one text is perversely multiplied in an unending game of cross-references...the game becomes ever more problematic. The proliferating catalogue takes

⁴⁹ Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver (1983; repr., London: Minerva / Mandarin / Reed, 1992), 286.

⁵⁰ Anatole France, "The Shirt," in *The Seven Wives of Bluebeard, and Other Marvellous Tales*, ed. James Lewis May and Bernard Miall, trans. D. B. Stewart (London: John Lane / Bodley Head, 1920), 156; capitalisation in the original. The contesting books in this library seem to echo the sound of the supplicants before Lady Fame in Geoffrey Chaucer's *House of Fame*, who also clamour and jostle. As people approach the goddess so that she can arbitrarily pronounce on their renown, the poet writes:

I herd a noyse aprochen blyve
That ferde as been don in an hive
Ayen her type of oute fleyng;
Ryght suche a maner murmuryng,
For al the world, hyt semed me.

Chaucer, *The House of Fame*, ed. Nicholas R. Havely (New Elvet, UK: Durham Medieval Texts, Department of English, University of Durham, 1994), bk. 3, lines 1521–25.

off toward infinity, overwhelming the library it was intended to organize, developing a will and a purpose of its own that only make reading more obscure than it was before the advent of such an organizing mania.⁵¹

Suzanne Keen's identification of "romances of the archive": novels which see intertextuality manifested as a quest, in the process making "what Seymour Chatman calls 'kernel' plot events" out of the most mundane of library activities, "filling out call-slips, enduring the inquiries of suspicious librarians, waiting for one's request to arrive, wading through pages, files, boxes, and cartloads of irrelevant material."⁵² Jorge Luis Borges in "The Library of Babel":

Someone proposed a regressive method: To locate book A, consult first a book B which indicates A's position; to locate book B, consult first a book C, and so on to infinity ...In adventures such as these I have squandered and wasted my years.⁵³

Jacques Derrida in *Archive Fever*: "...because the structure of the archive is *spectral*. It is spectral *a priori*; neither present nor absent 'in the flesh,' neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met."⁵⁴ How wearisome, as exhausting and exhausted as those patrons who must show up to rearticulate this experiential library default after long enough; to be co-opted by an institution Castillo characterises as a "machine," to *front up* where there "is no end to

⁵¹ Castillo, *The Translated World*, 80.

⁵² Suzanne Keen, *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 29.

⁵³ Jorge Luis Borges, "The Library of Babel," in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories, and Other Writings*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby, trans. Irby (1962; augmented ed., New York: New Directions, 1964), 56.

⁵⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (1996; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 84; italics in the original.

...productivity: no end and no exit, only the inexorable knitting, the piling up of one book on top of another.”⁵⁵

Italo Calvino’s story shows patrons being subdued and assimilated. Similarly, these writers or the characters they depict are somehow silenced or defeated (Adso is disturbed; France’s librarian enamoured; Castillo’s reading is obscured; the years of Borges’s narrator “squandered and wasted”), or else they register the inevitability of defeat (as in the incontestably elusive nature of Derrida’s spectrality). Heidegger remarks that the “expression ‘descriptive phenomenology’ ...is at bottom tautological.”⁵⁶ These excerpts are descriptive phenomenologies – they show the library as it is experienced phenomenologically; as it acts upon the consciousness of the patrons when they read or move towards reading. And, notably, the library’s intervention in these writers and characters’ textual experiences is of the same orientation. All of the excerpts above are logical outcomes from within a battery of possible outcomes which in every instance show users in some way responding to the library’s tendency to overwhelm. One of these outcomes is so common within empirically observable experiences of library patronage that library science has a name for it: the concept of “library anxiety” is an object of investigation in information management literature, and is perhaps best encapsulated by one respondent in a piece of library anxiety research who remarked that the library

⁵⁵ Castillo, *The Translated World*, 323.

⁵⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 53.

“seems so vast and overpowering.”⁵⁷ The library is experienced as a threat to readerly confidence or surety or authority. In the accumulation of these examples, I read an attestation that the experience of readers being overwhelmed is a textual phenomenon of the library.

These accounts all have something in common in the way that they interrelate the library and reading. The writers quoted above look at library usage and see as its first objective a moving towards reading, a facilitating of it. This is a rational approach, and evidently reasonable. But it is also *more* like an overstep, in the sense that I identified a difference between an overstep and an undertaking in the introduction. Such expediency is part of an explanation as to why the library is so often experienced as overwhelming – at base, all of these responses experience any in-between moment reluctantly, as a barrier or hindrance, or as anxiety-inducing. The library is certainly a conduit towards the moment of reading, but I argue that it also has its own phenomena which relate to texts, without emanating from any one text specifically. I have already attempted to demonstrate, for example, that there are library phenomena which relate to experiences of complexity, heterogeneity, dialectic, and readerly confidence, surety, or authority. I would re-emphasise here that none of these elements are necessarily dominant within a reader’s textual life; they are nevertheless present, and in this presence they are structuring experiences in textuality. The sensibleness of approaching the library as a facilitator of reading,

⁵⁷ Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie, Qun G. Jiao, and Sharon Bostick, *Library Anxiety: Theory, Research, and Application* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow / Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 31. For these authors, the student’s remark is a “compelling example” of library anxiety (31).

moreover, does not treat patronage in its phenomenological potential. The next two works I examine in this chapter have materially different ways of interrelating library going and reading. I would argue that this is the source of their atypicality that I remarked upon in the first section. Their narrative speculations are conducted through library-based characters who reconfigure familiar orientations to reading, and their idiosyncrasies are revealing.

IV. The unity of the library

What follows is a scene from Richard Brautigan's *The Abortion: An Historical Romance* 1966. Brautigan has imagined a new kind of library, wherein the only traffic is comprised of people who deposit books they have written and produced themselves. "It doesn't make any difference where a book is placed," the young man who is the librarian and narrator explains, "because nobody ever checks them out and nobody ever comes here to read them. This is not that kind of library. This is another kind of library."⁵⁸ People bring their unpublished manuscripts to the library and place them on the shelves wherever they wish; there the books stay for an

⁵⁸ Richard Brautigan, *The Abortion: An Historical Romance* 1966 (London: Picador / Pan, 1974), 17. It is fair to say that this novel, like much of Brautigan's writing, is an irritant for certain literary sensibilities, garnering mixed reactions. When first published, a memorable review of *The Abortion* appeared in *Catholic Library World*: "a waste of time to read, a waste of money to pay for, and a waste of space on the library shelf." This assessment, without further bibliographic detail, was quoted in Alex Albright, "Reading, Writing, and Publishing: Brautigan in North Carolina," *North Carolina Literary Review* 1, no. 1 (1992): 161.

indeterminate period of time until they are transported for storage to “hermetically-sealed caves in Northern California.”⁵⁹ The account of this library is especially strange because it is simultaneously ideational and verisimilar: an imaginary kind of library operation explicitly and definitively located, as the narrator tells us with geographical exactitude, at “3150 Sacramento Street, San Francisco, California 94115” (19), the real site of the Presidio branch of the San Francisco Public Library.⁶⁰ As an institution, then, the library that Brautigan imagines in *The Abortion* has been denaturalised on many counts. Nobody comes to read this library’s books; their arrangement is determined in a haphazard way by their authors; and after a time the books are taken away to be stowed in remote caves in the woods; moreover, it is asserted that this outlandish institution is run out of an address which matches that of a real and operational public library. One of the most important ways that the library’s denaturalisation has been achieved, however, is that there are no patrons in this institution. The only people who use the library do so to add to its collection, not to avail themselves of its extant resources.

The scene promised above depicts one of the library’s particularly notable deposits:

⁵⁹ Brautigan, *The Abortion*, 29. Although he does not elaborate further, Daniel Peter Walsh indicates a rich area for future investigation when he finds the books’ storage in the wilderness “strongly evocative” of Plato’s allegory of the cave. Walsh, “‘On Fire or on Ice’: Prefatory Remarks on the Library in Literature,” in *Current Trends in Information: Research and Theory*, ed. Bill Katz and Robin Kinder (New York: Haworth, 1987), 215.

⁶⁰ San Francisco Public Library, “Presidio,” accessed March 22, 2011, <http://sfpl.org/index.php?pg=0100002801>. A photograph of the library at the time of *The Abortion*’s publication is available on a website which outlines the branch’s history and acknowledges it as Brautigan’s inspiration. San Francisco Public Library, “Presidio Library History,” accessed March 22, 2011, <http://sfpl.org/index.php?pg=2000075001>.

MOOSE by Richard Brautigan. The author was tall and blond and had a long yellow moustache that gave him an anachronistic appearance. He looked as if he would be more at home in another era.

This was the third or fourth book he had brought to the library. Every time he brought in a new book he looked a little older, a little more tired. He looked quite young when he brought in his first book. I can't remember the title of it, but it seems to me the book had something to do with America.

'What's this one about?' I asked, because he looked as if he wanted me to ask him something.

'Just another book,' he said.

I guess I was wrong about him wanting me to ask him something.⁶¹

The reader of *The Abortion* – the novel in their hands – is introduced to a character whose name appears beneath the book's title and on the book's spine. This reader holds a copy of *The Abortion* in their hands and encounters a physical description of a character which matches the photograph printed on the book's cover, a picture of Richard Brautigan standing in front of the real library branch at 3150 Sacramento Street.⁶² The first book that Richard Brautigan wrote (although not the first he published) was a wildly successful cult novel entitled *Trout Fishing in America*. It would seem that the author of *The Abortion* has appeared in the unique, almost

⁶¹ Brautigan, *The Abortion*, 23; capitalisation in the original. There is an echo of this description in A. G. Mojtabai's *Mundome*, set in the New York Public Library in the early 1970s. Protagonist and librarian Richard Henkin is presented with a contribution to the library's collection by a man who has wandered in off the street. Similar to the Brautigan-depositor, "everything about him looked second-hand, borrowed, thumbed over, soiled; he was soiled to the yellow of his eyes." Valparosi, the author, had brought a jar filled with ash and a single page, singed around the edges. These were the remnants of a book he had spent eight years of his life writing – his "life work" – that he explains was destroyed by hoodlums. Henkin puts the page with other misfit materials in his miscellaneous file. Mojtabai, *Mundome* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974), 61.

⁶² Suzanne Mitchell Sweatt, "Postmodernism in the Fiction of Richard Brautigan" (Doctor of Arts diss., Middle Tennessee State University, 1985), 80; John F. Barber, ed., "*The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966*," *Brautigan Bibliography and Archive*, last modified February 16, 2011, <http://www.brautigan.net/abortion.html>.

impossible, library that Brautigan has created.⁶³ How can such a singular textual event be understood in relation to issues of library going?

It will first be noticed how the figure of the author appearing as a character in the library of his own writerly invention seems to confirm the complete absence of the figure of the patron which I hypothesised earlier. Given this absence, it is significant that “MOOSE by Richard Brautigan” is the only occasion out of twenty-three book deposits – each depicted with a similar economy in a single chapter that is forthrightly entitled “The Twenty-Three” – in which the themes of mortality and entropy are especially evoked.⁶⁴ The author of *Moose* is anachronistic; he seems to

⁶³ “Almost impossible” because of metafictional flourishes such as the fantastical visitation of the man who wrote the book. But perhaps, in practice, not so impossible after all. William Marquess has written about his work at the Brautigan Library, an institution in Burlington, Vermont, which was modelled on the library in *The Abortion*. Marquess, who himself had recently “unpublished a novel” by depositing it in the Brautigan Library, describes an average weekend day there:

10 or 12 people walk into this long, narrow room on the backside of a low flat-roofed building at 91 College Street in downtown Burlington (pop. 40,000). Occasionally one of them is looking for the Vermont Institute of Massage Therapy, which occupies the front half of the building...Some visitors just happen in off the sidewalk, pausing in the five-block stroll from Church Street down to Lake Champlain, lured by a sign that proclaims ‘A Very Public Library’... Most come expressly to see the Brautigan, America’s only library of unpublished writing. (159)

On the day that Marquess describes, the library is furnished with a plate of cookies “provided by a writer so pleased to see his manuscript mentioned in the *Wall Street Journal* that he has sent us \$25 to treat our readers this weekend.” The library closed in 1996, but its founder Todd Lockwood has written about its operations. Marquess, “A Very Public Library,” *North Carolina Literary Review* 1, no. 1 (1992): 160, 159, 160; Lockwood, “The Brautigan Library: A Noble Experiment,” in *Richard Brautigan: Essays on the Writings and Life*, ed. John F. Barber (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007), 144–45; Lockwood, “The Brautigan Library Founder’s Message,” in Barber, *Richard Brautigan*, 146–53.

⁶⁴ Another of the evening’s deposits helps illustrate the tonal range employed by Brautigan in describing the library’s acquisitions:

PANCAKE PRETTY by Barbara Jones. The author was seven years old and wearing a pretty white dress.
‘This book is about a pancake,’ she said.

have emanated from what has long passed. He is visibly ageing; his weariness is gathering and cumulative. The librarian-narrator's observation "I guess I was wrong about him wanting me to ask him something" seems to show the morose depositor moving towards an ultimate silence. And his glorious creative production, his contributive endeavour of literary and aesthetic intent? "Just another book." "Just another book" is nothing if not a disillusioned rearticulation or echo of the machine Castillo describes at the heart of the library, an institution of "inexorable knitting, the piling up of one book on top of another" (323). The narrative moment when there are not only no patrons, there are no others at all (not even other author characters) – the narrative moment when the only figures present are Richard Brautigan as an author and Richard Brautigan as a character – is a claustrophobic narrative moment, shrouded as it is in descriptive decay. Without patrons and without others, it may seem that the library is indeed entropic, benumbing, obsolescent; Castillo's "mausoleum of dead books" (33). Cognately one critic has interpreted Brautigan's library as "the clinic in which authors come to abort the product of their minds."⁶⁵ In this claustrophobic narrative moment, Brautigan (times two – the author and the character) intuitively feels the library's tomblike nature; he sees it in its deathliness.

The encounters in the chapter "The Twenty-Three" range in length, but all are as self-contained, evocative, concise, and diverse as the examples of *Moose* and *Pancake Pretty* would suggest. Brautigan, *The Abortion*, 22; capitalisation in the original.

⁶⁵ Farhat Mohammed Iftakharuddin, "Richard Brautigan: A Critical Look at *Trout Fishing in America*, *In Watermelon Sugar* and *The Abortion*" (PhD diss., Oklahoma State University, 1989), 16.

This interpretation, while valuable, is obvious, amounting to little more than a lament for unread work,⁶⁶ or an advocatory literary-critical perspective on the enlivening influence of the act of reading. Moreover, this is not the only possible reading of patronage in *The Abortion*. Before investigating the alternative interpretation, however, I would like to evoke the library as it appears more generally in *The Abortion*, as a background to it.

For the library in *The Abortion* is anything but tomblike. Brautigan frames his reconceptualisation of the library experience with an evocation of the library as an atmospheric, indistinct, and calmative space. Auberon Waugh, for example, was utterly seduced by *The Abortion's* "pure, brilliant perception of the library idyll."⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Exemplified, for example, by Marc Chénétier's argument as regards the library's holdings: "already their real life – being written – is over; and the 'gentle attention' the librarian gives these authors is all the attention these half-literary works will ever receive." *Mundome's* librarian Richard Henkin is not a sympathetic character, but in her novel *Mojtabai* evokes the pathos of writing to a much greater extent than Brautigan's more surrealist approach allows, even in his passage about the resigned and weary author of *Moose*. After the scene described in footnote 61 above, the author Valparosi seeks out Henkin once more: he needs to confess that it was he himself who had burned his manuscript, plagued by "the dogs of doubt." When filing the single page that Valparosi presented, Henkin reflects how this piece of paper "was the last shard of something, some edifice raised with effort and pain; who knew how much effort or how much pain or whether it stood for even a ramshackle moment?" Valparosi explains his decision to write the book:

All my life I've been a salesman. I earned an honest living, and I'm not proud of it. Thirty years...you name it, I sold it: toys, haberdashery, shoes—on my knees, hardware, Sani-Flush, bathroom fixtures, kitchen gadgets, gimmicks—Valparosi at your service. Junk, trash, rubbish, all of it a waste, one brand no better than the other. And what had any of them to do with me? *Me*, understand! My one and only life.

Mundome offers a melancholy version of one of Brautigan's main themes: the library as a storehouse for refuse material. Chénétier, *Richard Brautigan* (London: Methuen, 1983), 53; *Mojtabai*, *Mundome*, 69, 66–67, 62–63; italics in the original.

⁶⁷ Auberon Waugh, "Unwanted Books—In Fiction and Fact," review of *The Abortion: An Historical Romance*, by Richard Brautigan, *Prophecy and the Parasites*, by John Symonds, and *Car*, by Harry Crews, *Spectator*, January 27, 1973, 109. Neil Schmitz extends upon on this theme, explicitly associating the

Brautigan understands the library as a reserve, but refuses to consolidate this reserve into real, pragmatic, or symbolic terms, as historians, sociologists, anthropologists – people who encounter the library or the archive in the course of their professional lives – are wont to do. James Raven’s observation that the library “can act as a symbol for the preservation of national language and literature, as a centre of religious observance and memory, and as a real repository of patriotic or sectarian memory”⁶⁸ is one example of this. Another is offered by Harriet Bradley, who glosses Scott Lash and John Urry’s *Economies of Signs and Space* in pragmatic terms, suggesting that these authors depict archives as “repositories of inert meanings.”⁶⁹ The library in *The Abortion* is not a reserve in the manner of Martin Heidegger’s standing reserve, where resources are “set upon to yield”: “everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering.”⁷⁰ It is not presented in terms of latent functionality. Instead, Brautigan’s description is purely aesthetic, and held at the level of the abstract.⁷¹ “This is a beautiful library, timed perfectly, lush and American. The hour is midnight and the library is deep and carried like a dreaming

library in *The Abortion* with the pastoral idyll. Schmitz suggests that “stasis, the rapt and timeless state of pure being presumably attained at the center of the pastoral idyll,” is “critically rendered” by the novel. Schmitz, “Richard Brautigan and the Modern Pastoral,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 19, no. 1 (1973): 112.

⁶⁸ James Raven, “Introduction: The Resonances of Loss,” in *Lost Libraries: The Destruction of Great Book Collections since Antiquity*, ed. Raven (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 28.

⁶⁹ Harriet Bradley, “The Seductions of the Archive: Voices Lost and Found,” in “The Archive Part 2,” ed. Sean Hand and Irving Velody, special issue, *History of the Human Sciences* 12, no. 2 (1999): 113.

⁷⁰ Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper Torchbooks / Harper & Row, 1977), 15, 17.

⁷¹ In *The Abortion*, Charles Hackenberry sees “a parallel between the library and the subconscious.” Hackenberry, “Romance and Parody in Brautigan’s *The Abortion*,” *Critique* 23, no. 2 (1981): 27.

child into the darkness of these pages" (11). The quasi-possibility of Brautigan's library slides into its hermeneutics, its semantics, almost into its grammar (how is a library "timed perfectly"? How is a library "carried like a dreaming child into the darkness of these pages"? How can a library be "deep"?). Throughout *The Abortion*, similar images meander, loosely thread, re-emerge, fail to resolve, tantalise, and perpetuate. "I have been sitting at this desk for hours, staring into the darkened shelves of books. I love their presence, the way they honour the wood they rest upon" (11); "It has just started to rain now outside the library. I can hear it splash against the windows and echo among the books. They seem to know it's raining here in the beautiful darkness of lives as I wait for Vida" (26).

The motifs fail to resolve into a clearly delineated impression, but this failure has its own resolution of sorts in the way that Brautigan obsessively evokes and revisits granular imagery; imagery of constellations of coarse indistinct parts which combine to form a somewhat more distinct whole.⁷² So the idiosyncratic entries of the catalogue of book deposits combine to create "The Twenty-Three"; so the librarian compulsively discusses, drinks, and serves instant coffee; so the books of the library combine to form unpenetrated and shadowy corpuses, stowed in caves or

⁷² There are other literary representations of libraries in terms of granularity. In Haruki Murakami's *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, the novel's protagonist, upon first catching sight of a library, remarks it "might be a grain warehouse." Jennifer Summit observes how Francis Bacon denigrated the library in *Novum Organum* when he described it as "a granary and storehouse of things, not comfortable accommodation for staying or living in, but a place we go down to when we need to fetch out something useful." Murakami, *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, trans. Alfred Birnbaum (New York: Vintage / Random House, 1993), 38; Bacon, *The Instauration Magna: Part II; Novum Organum and Associated Texts*, ed. and trans. Graham Rees, with the assistance of Maria Wakely (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), 459, quoted in Summit, *Memory's Library*, 212.

in the library building itself. The parts are *effaced* by the wholes, and *The Abortion* itself is full of these parts, and full of the wholes. The result, for the library, is one of the closest representations imaginable of Sean Cubitt's innovative and elevating description of the library and its province. Arguing that a "book is incomplete because it presupposes the existence of a dictionary, and because it references other books by quotation, footnotes, indices and generic codes," Cubitt suggests that the "library can be understood as the unit of media."⁷³ This is a realisation of the institution of the library which has an analogue in Michel Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge*: "if there really is a unity, it does not lie in the visible, horizontal coherence of the elements formed; it resides, well anterior to their formation, in the system that makes possible and governs that formation."⁷⁴ Brautigan targets the library at a consummate unitary level, and he evokes it abstractly, aesthetically, indistinctly, and indefinitely. This representation is part of a wider philosophy in the work of parts effaced in wholes – a philosophy developed through repeated sensuous evocations in which things combine indissolubly, seamlessly, and unproblematically, with a strange absence of hierarchical structure.

Another reading of *The Abortion's* representation of library patronage was promised above, and this alternative interpretation is arrived at quite simply. I take up the cue suggested by Brautigan's example of seamlessly combining parts in an

⁷³ Sean Cubitt, "Library," in "Problematizing Global Knowledge," ed. Mike Featherstone et al., special issue, *Theory, Culture and Society* 23, nos. 2–3 (2006): 581.

⁷⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge / Taylor & Francis, 2003), 80.

exercise of creating wholes. With this example acting as a guide, it becomes clear that the dearth of patrons in *The Abortion's* library does not negate the category of patronage, nor even signal its referential absence. In this second reading I do not forget that with whatever adaptation of their role, Brautigan has chosen a collection of many figures of library goers to serve a function in this novel. Take Brautigan's use of the figure of the library goer literally – as someone who goes to the library with whatever purpose – and all of a sudden, rather than being bereft of patrons, the library in *The Abortion* is revealed to be teeming with them.

With this shift, the chapter “The Twenty-Three” is instantly transformed from a tale of twenty-three sad, failed authors.⁷⁵ It reveals itself instead as an account of

⁷⁵ This is a predominant interpretation in analysis of *The Abortion*. Sweatt, Iftekharuddin, and Michael L. Schroeder all expand upon the librarian's girlfriend's observation that the library is a “place where losers bring their books” to suggest that the library's patrons constitute an alienated and disaffected population. Terence Malley offers the most developed version of such an argument when he reads *The Abortion* as an extended metaphor for American colonisation and experience:

All we learn about The American Forever, Etc. [the organisation funding *The Abortion's* library], is that it keeps scrupulous records of all the unread books brought to the library (including perhaps some from seventeenth-century New Amsterdam); that it pays its employees irregularly and in irregular amounts—when it pays them at all; that it has moved its library steadily westward, more or less paralleling the settling of America, from New York to St. Louis to San Francisco; that it now houses its books in a sturdy brick building right across from a garage with the big word ‘GULF’ in front of it. The library, that is to say, seems to be a kind of metaphor for the loneliness of American experience and for the need to communicate somehow—last stop, right across the street from the Gulf, from the void that separates losers from winners.

Ostracism indeed connects these individuals. One of the characters who brings his book in on the night of “The Twenty-Three” remarks explicitly on the rejection of his book by publishers, for example. While it is possible to argue that these characters are “inferior” writers who have effectively been forced to become self-publishers, I think their marginalisation in no way mitigates their role as authors. They are marginal in a vital, Derridean sense. Their achievements, as textual productions, are manifest, reified, and treated respectfully – even lovingly – by the librarian and by Brautigan. Sweatt,

twenty-three library encounters wherein various textual functions have been imaginatively recombined in a way that reconfigures the textual functions themselves. Because these characters have written books, and visit the library, the most evident of these functions are authorship and patronage. However, Brautigan puts reading squarely in the frame for these characters as well. The author of *Hombre*, a “Chinese gentleman” who “spent thirty years cooking in a restaurant in Phoenix,” jocularly remarks that reading Westerns – the kind of staple pulp fiction which thrives in public libraries – “is my hobby, so I decided to write one myself” (24). So the author of *A History of Nebraska* says “I read everything I could find” on the state.⁷⁶ And so children, those populous and indomitable library book readers in life (Seth Lerer engagingly refers to them as “denizens of libraries”⁷⁷), make up nearly a quarter of the library’s depositors on the night “The Twenty-Three” depicts. The patron is not absent in *The Abortion* but integrated, and a force of vitalness. The library Brautigan has invented structurally and compulsively collapses the figure of the reader, the author, and the patron to suggest that patronage is endemic for textual identity. That the novel envisions a library in which the author of *The Abortion* is so modestly and earnestly represented as a patron with the rest takes on a new cast in this new reading. With a masterly rendering of the absolute, the author of *The Abortion* makes the patron inextricable from other functions of textuality, and

“Postmodernism in Richard Brautigan,” 79–82; Iftekharuddin, “Richard Brautigan,” 15–16, 157–59; Schroeder, “Rhetoric in the New Fiction” (PhD diss., Kent State University, 1986), 90; capitalisation in the original; Brautigan, *The Abortion*, 39; Malley, *Richard Brautigan* (New York: Warner, 1972), 67; capitalisation in the original.

⁷⁶ Brautigan, *The Abortion*, 23.

⁷⁷ Seth Lerer, “Epilogue: Falling Asleep over the History of the Book,” *PMLA* 121, no. 1 (2006): 230.

prominent within these functions, expanding the textual subject quite naturally and not failing to include very successful writers within its compass.⁷⁸ In the famous mode of Brautiganian innocence, *The Abortion* enacts a recuperation of patronage as a textual function, seemingly ignorant of the fact that recuperation may need to be made. The parts of textual experience have effaced themselves in the whole. For the operation of the liberal archive of the library, *The Abortion* finds the functions of writing, reading, and patronage to be indistinguishable or, to put it another way, equally constitutive.

The Abortion is a narrative scene of symbiosis for the patron. The twenty-three library encounters evoke the entire textual economy (and thus position the library as an institution akin to O'Driscoll and Bishop's archive, which "can be seen to inhabit the entire process of cultural production and consumption," and which

⁷⁸ In *The Abortion*, it is not only the depositor-character Richard Brautigan who imputes Richard Brautigan; the nameless young man who is the librarian and narrator is an example of a much-remarked Brautiganian device, the Brautigan author-narrator. The Brautigan author-narrator is a staple of his oeuvre, a narrator who closely resembles Brautigan himself due to the manifold characteristics they share. The librarian is shy and reclusive like Brautigan. As noted above, a photograph of Brautigan appears on the novel's cover and – pictured alongside a beautiful young woman who presumably represents the protagonist's beautiful girlfriend – this image of Brautigan must surely infer the character of the librarian, rather than the character named Richard Brautigan who deposits *Moose*. The librarian is 31; Sweatt observes this was "the age of Brautigan in 1966." Sweatt also writes that the librarian "does not drive, another similarity shared with the author." The librarian says he becomes "a hero in Berkeley" after leaving the library, a transformation which may allude to what Chénétier has described as "Brautigan's own status as cult hero." Furthermore Jerry Giddens has suggested that the abortion which takes place in Tijuana and comprises the second half of the novel's narrative is based on a real incident in Brautigan's life. The mischievously metafictional realisation of Brautigan as author-character, patron-character, and librarian-character is a tripled and thus more powerful demonstration of *The Abortion's* representation of elements of textual experience which ultimately coexist. Sweatt, "Postmodernism in Richard Brautigan," 84; Brautigan, *The Abortion*, 171; Chénétier, *Richard Brautigan*, 54; Giddens, "Brautigan, Richard: A Literary and Cultural Biography" (PhD diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2007), 144.

“deconstructs this all too conventional binary opposition”⁷⁹). The novel evokes the entire textual economy, and places library patrons and their patronage within it – seamlessly, and without any suggestion of hierarchy between functions. In Brautigan, patronage is not merely a conduit to reading. In the face of the common patronly responses of angst or overwhelmedness outlined earlier, this is remarkable. *The Abortion’s* atypicality in positioning patronage in relation to reading is that it does so evenly, and that patronage, like reading, stands up as an indurate constitutive element of a wider textuality.

V. The instrument of the library

I must stop treating the library like a whorehouse and every book in it like a fortune cookie...⁸⁰

This self-denouncement is an extraordinary, untoward, and idiosyncratic proclamation of a patronly identity. What can be learned from one who has issued such a declaration? At least two things can be discerned from the statement itself. Firstly, it is immediately apparent that this is an *averring* patron, and that library presence is intimately involved in this individual’s self-identity. The claim is easily

⁷⁹ Michael O’Driscoll and Edward Bishop, “Archiving ‘Archiving,’” in “The Event of the Archive,” ed. O’Driscoll and Bishop, special issue, *English Studies in Canada* 30, no. 1 (2004): 4.

⁸⁰ Mark Swartz, *Instant Karma* (San Francisco: City Lights 2002), January 22. *Instant Karma* is unpagged, but Felsenstein’s short diary entries are always dated, and so I have used these dates when quoting from the text. The format that Swartz uses for these dates varies throughout the novel, but I have standardised them throughout this work. No year is recorded with the dates in *Instant Karma*.

corroborated by the novel from which the adjuration issues. Mark Swartz's *Instant Karma* depicts David E. Felsenstein in a relationship with the library which is all-consuming. His days are spent in the Harold Washington Library in Chicago. "Too bad I don't live in the library," he remarks at one point; at another, a security guard gently teases him with the words "I'm in the library all day. Kind of like you, except they pay me for it"; later he is to evoke the library, plaintively, as "the place where I go."⁸¹ His days are spent there and, for love and art, he has plans to detonate a bomb within it, destroying the library and taking his own life as well. As an adjective to describe Felsenstein's relationship with the library, "all-consuming" is not exaggerated, for death nor life. Secondly, and quite apart from his destructive urges, the statement above shows Felsenstein to be an *agitated* patron; disquieted, he remains unconvinced by the compulsions which have led him to embrace his patronage to the lengths that he has. On balance, it is the former all-consuming quality which recommends this figure for special investigation, discomfiture in the library being – as we have seen in the testimony of the student experiencing library anxiety and the soldiers in Calvino's short story – unextraordinary; both prevalent and parochial. However, any reference to the all-consuming nature of the library for Felsenstein should be qualified: library patronage forms a substantial, substantive part of his identity *before* and *apart from* death. It is the quality of Felsenstein's presence which is the main subject of this chapter's election, and not the extreme mortal action he resolves upon. His flagrant and enduring library attendance is

⁸¹ Swartz, *Instant Karma*, December 11, December 10, December 31.

already unconventional enough, quite independent of his kamikaze drive, to warrant notice. What is the character of this rare assumption of library identity that Felsenstein displays?

Instant Karma is written in the form of Felsenstein's diary, and this document is an abundant harvest of library encounters involving textual phenomena which act independently of reading. *Instant Karma* can thus be used as a source to substantially reconfigure the possibilities of library patronage as a textual identity. A roll of Felsenstein's innovations and accomplishments shows his use of the library for many extraordinary actions. These include his use of the library to augur: "does anything have anything to do with the early memory of seeing my initials, DEF, for David Edgar Felsenstein, on a shelf of books in the fiction section of the library?"⁸² He formulates commentary on the ramifications of bibliographic arrangements and distribution:

By trucking in millions of titles that ostensibly are for sale but that might as well be printed in Aramaic, [bookstores] accelerate...decay by turning bookbuying into a practice of unfathomable complexity, inducing in men and women a momentary amnesia as they walk into the stores and gape at all the perfect spines, thinking 'Now what was I looking for again?'...I have learned

⁸² Ibid., February 10. It is surely not inconsequential that such an ambivalent figure as Daniel Defoe seems to be implied in the characterisation of David Felsenstein, confused idealist. Defoe, writing under multiple pseudonyms and often anonymously, likewise lived a "shadowy existence." Like Felsenstein, his motivations were never clear and often contradictory. "Judgements have varied widely on Defoe's character and ideas," writes Maximillian E. Novak. "He has been viewed by some as an amusing scoundrel and by others as a crusading spokesperson...He has been listed in a dictionary of radical writers and accused of resembling the worst propagandists working for Nazi Germany." Novak, *Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions; His Life and Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 8, 2.

from libraries that where you put a book matters.
(January 9)

He borrows books to venerate and enfranchise them: “a biblio-abolitionist, I respect books enough to refuse [their] ownership” (February 1). He uses the library’s processes to simulate the experience of mortality: “Collecting books permits the leisure necessary for thorough contemplation. Borrowing books causes the waking nightmare of time running out” (January 23). He senses an ideal notion of community within the library, and uses this sensation to experience an expanded kind of textual interaction:

I studied the card from the inside pocket, looking at the signatures of all the people who had handled the book before me, and I experienced a great sense of communion with them, a smart and well-behaved alliance of people who knew how to treat a book.
(January 16)

He theorises and experiences the textual encounter of borrowing as a potential analogue of postmodern experience: “Collecting books organizes the mind and keeps the memory straight. Borrowing them invites mental chaos and leaves sentence fragments detached and swirling” (January 23). Looking for books in the library, he invents his double:

I can’t fathom how remote the chances are of another individual coincidentally reading all the books I want, but isn’t that more likely than five separate individuals converging on the library, each there to retrieve one item from my list?...Somebody out there came up with a plan identical to mine, consulting the identical texts and coming to the identical conclusions, which goes to show the obviousness of its logic. (February 8)

He wants to make art with the library as a canvas: "I intend to create an art form from explosives, a pyrotechnic art that will take the fire out of the Independence Day sky and into the consciousness of America" (December 1). And, sanctioned by the example of the library, he takes on the role and responsibilities of a communal custodian: "Mrs. Bryars keeps shoes in the freezer, but so what? I keep library books in there. Nothing lasts, so you do what you can to retard spoilage" (January 26). People he encounters, too, participate in reconfiguring patronly possibility. Nathaniel the bombmaker uses the library to take its pledge of common ownership literally and benevolently. Felsenstein relates how Nathaniel "fished out of his suitcase a library copy of Stéphane Mallarmé's *Selected Prose Poems, Essays, and Letters*, which contains 'The Book: A Spiritual Instrument,' and offered to lend it to me indefinitely" (February 17).

The array and manifest personal potency for Felsenstein of all of these moments is remarkable, and their diversity and virtuosity reveal the potential richness of textual encounters in the library. How, then, does Felsenstein interrelate the vividness of his experiences as a patron with his experiences as a reader?

Reading has its own story and trajectory in *Instant Karma*. Felsenstein's identity as a reader is in decline. His diary opens with a fanfaronade celebrating his readerly skills: he is, he writes, a "true Man of Letters," a "reader with a taste for the neglected classics of the past as well as the more obscure works of the great writers. Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* instead of her *Jane Eyre*. Kafka's diaries instead of his

novels. Not *Hamlet*, *Titus Andronicus*.”⁸³ Felsenstein expresses the supreme self-assurance of a reader who refuses any curriculum in favour of self-direction, a reader who “didn’t have any more confidence that Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche would suit me two months in the future than a bagel, lox, and cream cheese would hit the spot the following Sunday morning” (November 20). Towards the end of his diary, however, something shifts. His readerly engagement slackens and becomes debilitated, restless, self-reproving:

I can no longer read with patience or with any critical faculty; in fact, I can no longer read a book from cover to cover...I continue checking books out because I like the titles, and I continue racing home with them, fanning through the pages and waiting for wisdom to poke me in the eye. (January 21)

Felsenstein’s reading is a shooting star. His reading suffers a doubled fall: a loss of capacity to read thoroughly, continuously, holistically, *longly*, and – more direly – the crisis of confidence this causes him to undergo; a violent tremor devastating the core of his readerly identity. Felsenstein is a character who offers some of the most developed and intriguing demonstrations of library patronage that I have encountered, but over the course of these demonstrations qualms as to his readerly responsibility and entitlement ruinously intervene.

Felsenstein’s uncertainty is consummated, apparently, in his final diary entry, composed in the top stories of the Harold Washington Library building. The ransom

⁸³ Swartz, *Instant Karma*, November 10; capitalisation in the original.

note to prevent the bombing he has planned has been delivered; explosives are by his side.

It feels like a long time has passed, but I'm not certain, since I've been reading. Finally, it makes no difference what book I reach for, because any page I open to contains a sentence that exactly summarizes my feelings, and therefore I must not be feeling anything specific at all. According to Yves Bonnefoy, Arthur Rimbaud 'spiritualized his emotional disintegration'...Edith Wharton writes, 'I was getting to know him too well to express either wonder or gratitude at his keeping his appointment.' (March 5)

In this moment, reading reveals to him his total vacancy. For Felsenstein, Borges's famous library dictum is reoriented in and by this moment: not "to speak" but *to read* "is to fall into tautology."⁸⁴ The encounter is experienced as resignedly and greyly ecumenical ("therefore I must not be feeling anything specific at all"). His readerly engagement has devolved, and with it David senses his own selfhood diminish: "It feels like a long time has passed, but I'm not certain, since I've been reading. Finally it makes no difference what book I reach for..." The novel ends not long after this moment. Before the blast – if indeed a blast takes place – a prolonged and strange readerly nihilism descends and an eschatological lassitude engulfs Felsenstein, presaging the explosion exactly as he had conceived it: "a single beat echoing, then a long silence" (December 31).

This is one version of the character of Felsenstein, as he is a reader. However, an adjustment of the most minor kind – a mere tweak – is all that is required to

⁸⁴ Borges, "Library of Babel," 57.

understand this final event in terms of transcendence and not negation, rewriting the entire scene. Felsenstein's account of being ready to detonate the bomb immediately follows his admission that "I acknowledge blame as a reader for never having found any literature that really satisfied me" (March 5). These are black words indeed, but they also – inevitably, irrevocably – gesture back towards the optimism of his earlier understanding of his potential as a reader. His naïve, earnest "if I read enough books I will come across justification for everything that occurs to me" (November 22), for example; or "if I sit in front of a book for 45 minutes, you can bet your gold fillings something will happen" (November 30), in all its cavalier but unspecified surety of inspiration's arrival. Crucially, his account of waiting and reading with the bomb not only evokes these earlier attestations, it perversely confirms them. For in spite of nihilism and lassitude, it would seem that something *is* indeed about to happen. And if "any page I open to contains a sentence that exactly summarizes my feelings" as he claims, his experience is *not only* tautological, but in point of fact the experience of a moment of ubiquity. (Guy Rosolato has also contemplated the possibility of reading constituting "an exercise in ubiquity."⁸⁵) In a moment of despair about precedence, Felsenstein's description of this scene of reading is also a way of saying he *feels everything*. With the bomb, and the books, in the upper reaches of the Harold Washington Library, Felsenstein testifies to the achievement of a metaphysical presence through reading.

⁸⁵ Guy Rosolato, *Essais sur le symbolique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 288, cited in Michel de Certeau, "Reading as Poaching," in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (1984; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 173.

The case of reading in the novel works to suggest that Felsenstein is an unreliable narrator, certainly in relation to the assessment of his own achievements. His self-identity in reference to textual matters has been disturbed and is highly vulnerable. With this new insight into Felsenstein's character, I would like to reexamine his exclamation "I must stop treating the library like a whorehouse and every book in it like a fortune cookie." Felsenstein has experienced a crisis of reading, and it is from an experience of crisis that his self-denouncement has emanated. However, what I hope to suggest with the reinterpretation of Felsenstein's experience as a reader is that this is, in a sense, a false crisis – a crisis of confidence first of all. With his assertion about the whorehouse and the fortune cookie, Felsenstein is *flailing*: he is being made or making himself subject to reading and patronage as competing claims. Patronage is equally constitutive for Swartz's protagonist as it is for Brautigan's characters, but in an entirely different way. Whereas Brautigan integrates reading and patronage as blended parts in a wider whole of textual identity, Swartz holds patronage and reading apart in order to explore them in their singularities. This separation is enacted quite literally within the novel, too: Felsenstein himself has a stated position on the subject, a "policy of not reading in the library" (November 28). In the end, however, Felsenstein is unable to support their separate experience; he cannot shoulder the demands of this (admittedly esoteric) holding apart. And in his consequent anguished flailing, I suggest, he misjudges himself.

It is not that Felsenstein is a poor reader, nor is it Felsenstein's instinct to treat "the library like a whorehouse" and "every book in it like a fortune cookie" which is the source of his manifest trauma. Rather, his trauma has issued forth out of the coerced "must" which precedes the similes. The dark compulsion of feeling inadequate as a reader has undone what is in fact Felsenstein's most unique work – his accumulation of novel and textually rich moments treating the library like a whorehouse and the books in it like fortune cookies – before this work has been fully done. His frenzied descent into possible suicide and grand destruction means that there are to be no more excogitate, surprising, winsome additions to the roll of library encounters. "I must stop treating the library like a whorehouse and every book in it like a fortune cookie" is untoward, although not in the manner that Felsenstein conceives it. He fails to realise the full potential of what commentators on the novel see clearly: "the library is Felsenstein's instrument, his medium."⁸⁶ With his untoward remark he intuits it, but he cannot develop it further. He has failed to *let continue*:

I made lists of books and searched them out, somehow hoping to find in one of them a chapter or passage that would bring an end to searching. If you don't find what you're looking for, how do you know when to stop looking? (March 5)

⁸⁶ T. J. Gerlach, review of *Instant Karma*, by Mark Swartz, *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 23, no. 2 (2003): 154. At one point in his diary, Felsenstein reminisces about a fortune he once received in a fortune cookie: "he who waits to do a great deal of good at once will never do anything." It seems to me that this too can be read quite clearly as imputing Felsenstein's mis-recognition of his work as a library patron. Swartz, *Instant Karma*, January 22.

VI. [Unnamed]

How is one to give a name to what he is still searching for?

– Martin Heidegger, “A Dialogue on Language”⁸⁷

If an individual, like Felsenstein, fails to find what he is looking for, how does he know when to stop looking? How is one to give a name to what he or she is still searching for? Who is in the library, who is not a librarian, and what is this individual to be called? How do library going and reading relate to one another within a literary-phenomenological framework, and what are the potentials of the textual phenomena of the library for the person who attends? This chapter has been bound up in questions. In this final section, I would like to suggest that the entanglement of these issues of searching and naming and experience and library patronage is not accidental. I will start with the last of these questions, and work backwards, sporadically and incompletely, but with a view to the key terms and essential flavour of the questions always.

It is *Instant Karma* which, with the greatest clarity, depicts a feature that I would like to suggest is one of patronage’s key potentials as a textual phenomenon. In one sense it does not matter to what effect Felsenstein experiences reading and library going as separate demands. What has greater textual consequence and

⁸⁷ Martin Heidegger, “A Dialogue on Language,” in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco / HarperCollins, 1982), 20.

mobilisation is the fact that he experiences them as separate demands at all. Of course patronage facilitates, administers, and orchestrates the reading experience. What is unique about Swartz's novel is that it shows what the first can do by detaching it from the second. Phenomenology, Heidegger says, is where entities "show themselves with the kind of access which genuinely belongs to them,"⁸⁸ and in *Instant Karma* patronage has revealed itself as a critical space. It is a space in which readers can take up a position on reading; a reflexive space for textual experience. In the library, patronage facilitates the constitution of a textual self against and within its vast resources. Felsenstein inhabits this space forcefully, explicitly: therein, he speculates and draws recondite conclusions about the arrangement and care of books; their enfranchisement; and other readers, to name but a few. Retrospectively it can be seen that Brautigan's novel has also taken patronage up on its offer of this space, although it may not be as apparent as in *Instant Karma*, because *The Abortion's* critical posture is so different. In using patronage as a reflexive space, *The Abortion* discovers something to do with the indissolubility of the elements of textual experience. Both novels, however, share a common realisation. In the moments when an individual is being a library patron, he or she is not reading, and yet this individual is nevertheless involved in an indisputable and intimate relationship with text. Such a situation involves significant opportunities.

In more typical literary accounts of library patronage, such as that offered by Calvino's short story, the library is experienced as a phenomenological force of

⁸⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 61.

intervention. When patronage is experienced as a critical space of reflection, it has the potential to become a phenomenological *mode* of intervention. Library patronage offers a reader the chance to intervene in his or her own textual practice. In this account, patronage is the thin shadow of reading. It skirts and complements reading, but is in its own space not replicable.

When a library user is called a patron in the many cases where this occurs, it is evidently in reference to the *OED* definition in which a patron is an individual who “supports or frequents a business or other institution.”⁸⁹ This definition will be returned to. Patronage is a complex concept, and historically the word *patron* has referred to an individual with considerably more power than this later definition connotes: for Roman historical usage, the *OED* describes “a man of status or distinction who gives protection and aid to another person in return for deference and certain services.” In this sense, the institution of patronage involves “a social relationship which is essentially (i) reciprocal, involving exchanges of services over time between two parties, (ii) personal as opposed to e.g. commercial, and (iii) asymmetrical, i.e. between parties of different status.”⁹⁰ Each of these elements has been present within this chapter’s discussion of library patronage. The asymmetry of the relationship between a library and its user is shown in Calvino’s “A General in

⁸⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary* (online), 3rd ed., s.v. “patron, n,” accessed February 26, 2011.

⁹⁰ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, introduction to *Patronage in Ancient Society*, ed. Wallace-Hadrill (London: Routledge, 1989), 3. Here Wallace-Hadrill’s account of patronage is from Richard Saller’s contribution to *Patronage in Ancient Society*, which Saller has based on the work of Jeremy Boissevain. Wallace-Hadrill surveys the essays in the volume and concludes that most of its contributors would subscribe to the tripartite definition that Saller has outlined. He further suggests that many would also accept a fourth component of voluntarism, or patronage not being legally enforceable, as argued by Peter Garnsey and Greg Woolf in the same volume.

the Library,” as well as in the other literary examples discussed in earlier sections: an asymmetry of ontological status which results in library users repeatedly experiencing the feeling of being overwhelmed or *overcome*. The two novels I have investigated depict personal (rather than commercial) relationships between libraries and users, most pronouncedly in *Instant Karma*, where the personal relationship between protagonist and library is very intimate indeed. And finally Brautigan’s representation of patronage shows most clearly how patronage is tied up in reciprocity and interdependency with the rest of the textual economy.

Historical patronage has been enlisted for this chapter connotatively – it connotes evident and less evident experiences of library patronage. “Patron” is a useful name because it captures the connotation of personal relations, reciprocity, and asymmetry in a way that the designations “client,” “member,” “student,” and “reader” do not. Patronage as a historical concept elucidates library patronage, but it does not exactly fit, and I will not attempt to make it conform precisely. The quotation which opened this chapter – “a name is the verbal expression which we assign to something to which we wish to refer repeatedly” – was enlisted because it focuses less on explicating how names are resolved upon, and more upon the fact of desire in naming. The epigraph acknowledges that behind an act of naming is a willing into existence. What has been named is put into the future. It is made available for subsequent reference and deployment.

I would like to conclude by outlining the feature of patronage which I think has the most potential to be mobilised as a textual phenomenon – the feature of

patronage which can figure most significantly in a user's textual life. This feature is captured by the more recent *OED* definition of *patron*, and its manifestation is narrativised poignantly in *Instant Karma*. A patron is a textual *frequenter*; he or she frequents. The patron goes away and comes back. "If you don't find what you're looking for, how do you know when to stop looking?" Felsenstein asked, elegiacally. A patron has a special relationship with the concept of *return*. The patron goes back: to the library, to be sure, but to a library which is also a primary textual institution and as such can emblematised text. Return is also a motion in the cycle of borrowing and a patron perforce *gives books back*; but this is often only by way of their own return, so that they may take books away once more. Patronage can be used to attest to and experience the interminability of text and textual experience, its weave in life. A patron, as a frequenter, is a reader who, *definitionally*, does not stop searching and does not stop returning: a patron is someone who lets continue. To be a patron means to embrace the *interminability* of the textual subject.

A final remark. I have come full circle and see the danger of absolutism on this point. The bestowal of a name for patronage cannot be absolute; it should itself be always in motion. Perhaps the irresolvability of the question of a name for a library goer – outlined in the first section of this chapter – signals more than it knows, most especially now that it can be informed by the example of Felsenstein throttled by his experiences in the library. If patronage is to be employed as a space where textual interminability can be represented and experienced, it must be done

so without dogmatism, or as an intermediate step; “patron” should act as a placeholder name, erected and experienced flimsily, as a journey or an experiment.

For the epigraph of Heidegger’s remark, in full, should read as follows: “How is one to give a name to what he is still searching for? To assign the naming word is, after all, what constitutes finding.”

3. Book

I. An allegory

The character of O in Pauline Réage's erotic classic *Story of O* is beaten, bled, punctured, scarred, bound, and scored. Her lover René delivers her to a château and delegates authority for her to this institution. The château is the estate of a society which takes possession of O and will henceforth offer use of her to its members. René "intended that from now on she be held in common by him and by others of his choosing and by still others whom he didn't know who were affiliated with the society...she'd be subject to general use."¹ O is to be lashed and taken as desired, by whomsoever of the community desires her; identifying marks will be impressed upon her body. She is told: "your only significant one duty...is to avail yourself to be used" (25). Her instruction continues, a series of highly elaborated stipulations: "your hands are not your own, neither are your breasts, nor, above all, is any one of the orifices of your body, which we are at liberty to explore and into which we may, whenever we so please, introduce ourselves" (25). What are O's features, as an entity? She is processed; she is tagged; she is held in common; she is co-opted for general circulation and she is always returned. Her availability is extravagant. The mode of O's being is tied up in her experience as an entity shared between members of a community; her existence particularises *borrowing*. *Story of O* is like the story of a book circulated in a public library system. O is loaned rather than given; in no direct sense does she need to be repaid by those who use her; and she is ultimately

¹ Pauline Réage, *Story of O* (1972; repr., London: Corgi / Transworld, 1998), 47.

possessed and orchestrated by the institution of the Roissy château. Similarly a public library book is loaned rather than given; it is not directly repaid by those who use it (the public library being usefully defined as an institution which is “free at the point of delivery”²); and it has a public library service as its ultimate owner and bailor. In her institutionalisation and circulation, O is bound, inscribed, foxed, and scuffed. In choosing O from Pauline Réage’s *Story of O*, I choose allegory to illustrate the experience of a circulating library book.

The book is the very object of public library interaction. When users are asked about the library, books are consistently the first named association and borrowing books the first activity. In 2010, a report for Britain’s Museums, Libraries and Archives Council found that “book borrowing is the most common activity amongst library users in our survey, with 76% using libraries to borrow books for pleasure and 44% for study.”³ As such, the book is a significant site of scrutiny for the investigation of library forms in their uniqueness. Yet even though it may hold position as the library’s custom object, the library book has not been extensively analysed as a specific typal structure. I contend that there is a class of library books

² Anne Goulding, *Public Libraries in the 21st Century: Defining Services and Debating the Future* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 206.

³ MLA (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, United Kingdom), *What Do the Public Want from Libraries? User and Non-User Research – Full Research Report*, prepared by Shared Intelligence and Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute (Birmingham: MLA, 2010), 17. Evidence that the book is the library’s first associated object, perceptually and empirically, is overwhelming. In 2005 the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC)’s *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources* found that “borrowing print books is the top library activity for information consumers.” Similarly, the State Library of Victoria (SLV)’s *Library User Census and Survey Project 2006* reported that “borrowing books was the main purpose people used libraries – 93% indicated they used the library for this reason.” OCLC, *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources: A Report to the OCLC Membership* (Dublin, OH: OCLC, 2005), 2-1; SLV, *Library User Census and Survey Project 2006: Report One; Statewide Analysis and Comparisons; Libraries/Building/Communities* (Melbourne: SLV, 2006), 20.

that shares a structure and features, principal among which is the circulation of these books and the material evidences of use this circulation gathers to them; the fact that the books are not possessed by those who use them, but rather exist with individuals in a relationship of bailment or loan; and the way that library books can be understood to manifest an orientation towards strangers, thus incarnating significantly defamiliarised elements within reading experiences. O is used as a device to explore library books because of the purity of her representation of the first of these features: because her story expresses the essences of an ontology of circulation in strong, incontrovertible language, with force. I use O somewhat ironically, too, forestalling the important configurations and investigations of psychology, gender, sexuality, and class raised by her story to take O – this figure who “wants to reach the perfection of becoming an object”⁴ – through analogy. (There is an ethical dimension involved in co-opting *Story of O* in this way, and yet the peculiar details of this narrative’s circumstance of production seem to vindicate many kinds of usage.⁵) In the course of this exercise O’s subjectivity – or rather, the

⁴ Susan Sontag, “The Pornographic Imagination,” in *Styles of Radical Will* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1969), 55.

⁵ It may be argued that reading O as an allegory of a library book is such a distortion of the work that it constitutes a misreading. However, because of the way that *Story of O* was composed, as well as various declarations made by its author, I maintain that authorial right over this literary property has been relinquished to a truly remarkable degree.

Pauline Réage has also been known as Dominique Aury, but over the course of the fifty-five years since the original publication of *Story of O* both names have been revealed as pseudonyms. In an essay accompanying *Return to the Château: Story of O; Part II* entitled “A Girl in Love,” “Réage” describes the composition of *Story of O* in the third person, as though she herself were disassociated from it: “this girl for whom I am speaking, and rightly so, since if I have nothing of hers she has everything of mine, the voice to begin with.” In the process of its writing, this novel was actively surrendered by its author to the man it was written for; piecemeal, but inexorably: “Ten pages at a time, or five, full chapters or fragments of chapters, she slipped her pages...into envelopes and

representation of her subjectivity – is entirely abstracted. Towards O, I assume a position similar to Michel de Certeau’s reader, who “takes neither the position of the author nor an author’s position”; a reader who “invents in texts something different from what they ‘intended.’”⁶ I treat O as a state rather than a subjectivity in order to enlist her as an incarnation of circulation.

O is employed as an allegory of a library book in order to begin to differentiate it from other books: new books bought from a large bookstore or online; books purchased second-hand; books which have been found; books which are stolen; books which have been given; books which are lent among friends.⁷ I

addressed them to the same General Delivery address. No carbon copy, no first draft: she kept nothing.” The “other life” that *Story of O* describes – the author “henceforth would share it with any and all, as perfectly prostituted in the anonymity of a book as, in the book, that faceless, ageless, nameless (even first-nameless) girl.” Shelley Newman’s *Purloined O* touches on many aspects of the textual ethics raised by O’s story, but Newman similarly articulates O’s conceptual availability when she suggests that O “is the signified without a word, without a signifier to represent her, for whom her lovers and the reader create signification. O is lack: an open, empty space to be filled by the phallus, to be made meaningful by the reader.” Réage, *Return to the Château: Story of O; Part II*, trans. Sabine d’Estrée (1985; repr., London: Corgi / Transworld, 1997), 9, 13, 17; Newman, “Purloined O: Occupation, Collaboration and Resistance in Dominique Aury’s (Pauline Réage [sic]) *Story of O*, as Read with Jacques Lacan” (Master’s thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1998), 25.

For a fuller account of the composition and publication of *Story of O*, and for further information about its author, see Régine Deforges’s *Confessions of O: Conversations with Pauline Réage*, John de St. Jorre’s “The Unmasking of O” and *The Good Ship Venus: The Erotic Voyages of the Olympia Press*, Geraldine Bedell’s article on the book’s author entitled “I Wrote the *Story of O*,” and the documentary film *Writer of O*, directed by Pola Rapaport. Publication and production details for these works appear in the bibliography.

⁶ Michel de Certeau, “Reading as Poaching,” in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (1984; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 169.

⁷ The Books Alive campaign, funded by the Australian government, commissioned a national telephone survey of 1,503 adults in 2001. Participants who had read for pleasure in the previous week were asked where their book had come from. Twenty-nine percent of books had been purchased new, 20 percent were borrowed from a library, 19 percent had come from household bookshelves, 13 percent had been borrowed from a friend, 10 percent had been a gift, and 5 percent had been bought second-hand. Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (Australia), *A National Survey of Reading, Buying and Borrowing Books for Pleasure*, conducted for the Books Alive campaign, prepared by ACNielsen, 2001, accessed March 18, 2011, http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/34105/natiional_survey_reading.pdf.

deliberately conceptualise these and the library book as kinds (which as a description has a leaning towards pattern and is perhaps a little crude in terms of the rigour of its delimitation), rather than categories, which are more rigid and imply stronger boundaries.⁸ The library is but one mode of cultural exchange for the book among others. O, in her flagrant circulation, could conceivably have something to represent about other kinds of book circulation as well.⁹ She may not be a perfect allegory, but because of her institutional connection and the allusions to common ownership which surround her, I have chosen to align her with the library. The mode I am attempting to distinguish throughout is library book circulation, and O offers the opportunity to undertake a descriptive phenomenology of this mode that may forestall tautology – Martin Heidegger’s characterisation of descriptive phenomenology – because of the separate nature of the illustration offered by an allegory’s extended conceit.¹⁰

There are many features of a library book which could be investigated.

Similarly, there are many kinds of books and library books which fall outside the terms of reference of this analysis. In the final section of this chapter I will undertake

⁸ Distinctions between different types of books are not always or even often intact. A book purchased second-hand may be an ex-library book; a book purchased to give as a gift may be read before being given; a book borrowed from a friend may never be returned and become uneasily one’s own.

⁹ It is apparent that O – who I have taken as an allegory for the library book – moves within a fairly restricted society and so has some correspondence with books which are lent between friends. Moreover, while the object of this chapter is the library book, I will enlist analyses of objects in gift economies to provide some key theoretical concepts in the course of my investigation. I work through some of the intersections between library books and other types of books in this chapter, and hopefully this process will result in a picture of library book circulation which is of greater integrity for this procedure of distillation. However, it is not possible for all correspondences and intersections with other modes of book circulation to be considered comprehensively.

¹⁰ I also referred to Heidegger’s remark on the tautologous nature of the phrase “descriptive phenomenology” at footnote 56 of the previous chapter.

a brief canvass of some of these other features and some other kinds of books and library books to demonstrate their arrays. I have deliberately deferred these important methodological provisions with a view to establishing a difficult and previously under-theorised class of books so that it is conceptually present, before its caveats and exceptions are presented. However, I do think that O offers a workable pattern for a large number of library books. The features which differentiate library books from other types of books that I find to be crucial have already been touched upon in the first paragraph of this chapter. O is available; she has been marked; she is held collectively; and she is circulated: these are the features to be investigated and elaborated. In this chapter I aim to describe critical aspects of the ontology of library books in a way which is meaningful and purposeful for those who use them, and to present or re-present the library book as a viably distinct object for interpretive sciences such as literary criticism, textual analysis, book history, book art, and bibliography.¹¹

¹¹ The case for the value of such analysis for literature is especially strong. Even the introduction to a volume entitled *Literature in English: A Guide for Librarians in the Digital Age* concedes that “literature remains essentially a print field.” Book art or book sculpture – called bookwork by Garrett Stewart – also seems particularly available to inform and be informed by a typical construction of the library book. For Stewart, the genre of bookwork “studies the book by generalizing it.” Stewart argues that in this genre “book forms...operate as art only,” and “tropes disembody the bookwork object into [an] idea so as to objectify those immaterial and often temporal features that the experience of a book as [a] mere physical object tends to defer.” Betty H. Day and William A. Wortman, “Introduction: Collaborative Partnerships,” in *Literature in English: A Guide for Librarians in the Digital Age*, ed. Day and Wortman (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, American Library Association, 2000), 13; Stewart, “Bookwork as Demediation,” *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 3 (2010): 456.

II. Foundation

A book has a material unity. “There is the material individualization of the book, which occupies a determined space, which has an economic value, and which itself indicates, by a number of signs, the limits of its beginning and its end.”¹² This is Michel Foucault’s account, offered in the course of roundly declaring his conviction that a book’s material unity is “weak, accessory,”¹³ and should be suspended in any analysis (a declaration to which I will return). Thomas Augst has developed a similar description for this unity, remarking on the “inviolable integrity of the printed volume as a whole” in his introduction to a collection of essays on libraries.¹⁴ In spite of Foucault’s disapprobation, the material unity of the book is the platform from which this study proceeds.¹⁵ In the way it will represent the book as an emanating

¹² Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge / Taylor & Francis, 2003), 25.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Thomas Augst, introduction to *Institutions of Reading: The Social Life of Libraries in the United States*, ed. Augst and Kenneth Carpenter (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 1. Print matter has many forms which trouble Augst’s approving representation. The scrolls in the original library at Alexandria and the codices of medieval libraries do not necessarily conform to Augst’s formulation of integrality in the same way as a typeset, machine-pressed book; nor do other kinds of textual material such as ephemera and limited editions, which are discussed in the final section of this chapter. The “inviolable integrity of the printed volume as a whole” is quite obviously a strategic and rhetorical conceit, and I enlist it with recognition of this limitation. However, the enlistment serves a demarcating and denotative function which will also be considered in the final section: it clarifies that the library books I am inferring are those which somehow present with an “inviolable integrity”: single volumes, often bound apart, circulating as individual units within a library economy. For more on the physical properties of scrolls and codices, see Henry Petroski, “From Scrolls to Codices,” in *The Book on the Bookshelf* (New York: Vintage / Random House, 2000), 24–39.

¹⁵ As will be evident from the previous footnote, my focus on the material unity of the book has been obliquely informed by the discipline of book history. So as to contextualise book history’s object in the complexity in which it is situated, I would add that the field itself is a famously complicated and interdisciplinary undertaking. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery observe that “the terminology used to define what one now does in ‘book history’ is contentious. As we have seen, it has been called

textual object, this chapter in fact provides a counterpart to textuality as it appeared in the patronage chapter: here I take the subject to be “textual” not in the sense that “textual” can pertain to or upon texts, but in a sense by which it emanates out of textual materials directly. The institution of the library intervenes at the level of the material unity of the book, and this intervention sets off a process which is found to be consequential for textual experience or, to put it another way, for the use of the library book.

Involvement in a library system does not generally alter a book’s unity in terms of its individualisation,¹⁶ but this involvement does proceed from the level of a book’s individualisation, making changes which are inarguably material. So while the material unity of the book may not be altered in terms of its individualisation, its

variously ‘print culture’, ‘the sociology of the text’, ‘publishing history’, ‘textual bibliography’, and so on.” Robert Darnton suggests that the “history of books has become so crowded with ancillary disciplines that one can no longer see its general contours. How can the book historian neglect the history of libraries, of publishing, of paper, type and reading?” Darnton goes on to argue for the remarkable scale that this scholarly activity deserves: “Neither history nor literature nor economics nor sociology nor bibliography can do justice to all the aspects of the life of a book. By its very nature, therefore, the history of books must be international in scale and interdisciplinary in method.” To sustain focus in building my case around critical aspects of the ontology of a library book, I refer to the material unity of the book in a fairly non-problematized way, but this approach is certainly not representative of the object’s treatment in book history. Finkelstein and McCleery, *An Introduction to Book History* (New York: Norton, 2005), 15–16; Darnton, “What is the History of Books?,” in *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (New York: Norton, 1990), 110, 135.

¹⁶ There are, however, instances when a library may bind individual volumes together, or occasions when it might separate pieces which belong to the same work. Dorothy Anderson describes the British Museum’s process of extracting and rebinding plays in the Garrick Collection, as titles were identified as duplicates (in some cases “not true duplicates”), removed for sale, and replacement copies inserted. Jennifer Summit describes the practices of Robert Cotton (whose collection is now housed in the British Library), who “unbound his own manuscripts in order to reorganize and rebind them into volumes of his own making.” Reconfigurations of this type are not necessarily common or even practiced today; Summit says they are “bibliographically incorrect by modern standards.” Anderson, “Reflections on Librarianship: Observations Arising from Examination of the Garrick Collection of Old Plays in the British Library,” *British Library Journal* 6, no. 1 (1980): 3; Summit, *Memory’s Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 146, 147.

material integrity (not quite “inviolable”) is affected, and thus too the nature of its material unity. Whilst highly abstract, I employ “material unity” because “unity” is also fundamental, and I believe that involvement in a library system does involve fundamental (or ontological) changes for a book object – just as “the way we treat a thing can sometimes change its nature” (to quote an author whose work I will soon refer to in greater detail).¹⁷ Contrasted to the books used in book art displayed in galleries and museums for example – which convey the “alienated and negating ratification of their once expected service”; which exist in “suspended animation, a literate instrumentality called to a halt in a single static jolt” – library books are “latent with enunciation.”¹⁸ They are singularly resolved objects which act as “points of departure for a temporal performance and sometimes an imaginary spatial transit.”¹⁹ In this chapter I ask the following question: how does involvement in a library system manifest locally, when it is gathered in the locus of a book? The changes which are effected by this involvement in a library system are used as indexical: they indicate and thus confirm my initial speculations about the key conditions and features of the ontology of the library book. As I believe that these books’ new ontological condition is consequential, I have been moved to figure the library book in its encounter with the patron, which is found to be affective first of

¹⁷ Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (London: Vintage / Random, 1999), xiii.

¹⁸ Stewart, “Bookwork as Demediation,” 454.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

all, but also potentially productive. In this way, the ultimate aim of this chapter is to occasion a phenomenology of the library book.

III. Bodies and books

O, our example and allegory, is considerably altered by her involvement in the château, in a clearly material sense. There is the iron and gold ring she wears on her finger that she is unable to remove, “the sign she was a slave, but a common one, one held in common.”²⁰ Her name and the name of one of the two men who control her within the economy of the château are inscribed on disks which are hung from her pierced body. The initials of this man are also branded with a hot iron on her buttocks. This is described as a “definitive mark,” a mark “which would not dispense her from common slavery, but which would designate her, among other things, as a particular individual’s slave” (163). O is put in a bodice, petticoat, and gown, the costume “not so much like an article of clothing, a protective device, but like a provocative one, a mechanism for display” (50). A red cosmetic, applied on her lips, nipples, and labia majora, “was more some kind of dye than makeup: it did not come off when it was rubbed.”²¹ Her body is covered with scar tissue, a remnant of the progression of her many whippings: “there still remained, in those places where

²⁰ Réage, *Story of O*, 163. All page numbers refer to *Story of O* and not *Return to the Château*, unless otherwise indicated.

²¹ Réage, *Return to the Château*, 72.

the skin had split, thin, rather whitish scars, like scars dating back to very long ago” (147).

There is a critical precedent for understanding O as inhering in the textual: in discussing *Story of O* Kaja Silverman holds the female body to be “quite literally written,” and O’s body itself to be “immediately readable by any of the male members of Roissy”; Silverman speaks of “the discourse by means of which [O] is first inscribed, and then read.”²² The examples above indicate just how far book similes can be extended in relation to this character. O’s ring is like the stamp of a library in a book which is possessed by it; the brand and disks which place her within the scene of the château are akin to the stickered, written, or impressed classification notations the library uses to designate its volumes. Her corset corresponds to library binding, the particular method libraries use to re-cover and re-present books.²³ The last two kinds of mark register the exercise to which O has

²² Kaja Silverman, “*Histoire d’O: The Construction of a Female Subject*,” in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance (Boston: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1984), 327, 320, 332. Developing the textual parallel further, Silverman observes that in the course of whipping O, a valet at the château takes care “to leave intervals (syntagmatic distances) between each lash so that all the abrasions will be visible.” Silverman notes that after being beaten, “O is always required to wear her skirt rolled up so that the marks can be ‘read’” (337).

²³ There are many different ways to bind books, in libraries and elsewhere, and one of these methods is known as library binding. Esther Potter explains that this method “was devised early in the twentieth century and reached a peak about the middle of the century.” She describes it as follows:

the folds of the leaves were strengthened with strips of paper with a wavy edge; the spine was of thick leather with a minimum of essential lettering; the sides were covered with a strong cloth of a colour that would not show the dirt; the corners of the boards were slightly rounded and, instead of a triangle of cloth being cut away to make a neat mitre, the triangle was turned in to give corners that defied the borrower to damage them.

Such binding, Potter suggests, was particularly applied to books “likely to be in popular demand.”

been put. The ruddling makeup that will not come off is like rubrication: reader-applied red pen underlining, highlighting, asterixes. The chronologically scattered whip scars, faded and fresh, are akin to foxing (or paper stains) and turned down page corner folds. These marks are the smudges, the wear, the creases in books, and all manner of gloss, marginalia, and scholium. And the very ancient “whitish scars” which are reminders and remnants of the way she has been treated by the château’s members? In the allegorical configuration, they are most likely remnant of rubbed-out pencil.²⁴

This reading of O’s body suggests that alterations to an object involved in a system like the library or the château may be of two kinds. Broadly, it could be observed that one group of effects comprise of changes made by the institution, and

Library binding continues to be practiced today. At the time of writing, the most recent American National Standard for library binding had been released by the National Information Standards Organization (NISO) in 2000. The transformation wrought by library binding, unexamined in detail within this chapter, has its own range of consequence. Ted Striphas’s *The Late Age of Print*, which investigates “everyday book culture” through topics including e-books, corporate booksellers, Oprah’s Book Club, and rights management of the *Harry Potter* novels, contains a section on ISBNs and barcodes. In this section, Striphas urges the reader to “examine the back cover of this book.” The copy of *The Late Age of Print* which I used had gold impressed ISBN digits – and no barcode – discreetly recorded on the back of a broad, brown, library-bound cover. Potter, “Bookbinding for Libraries,” in *Libraries and the Book Trade: The Formation of Collections from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Robin Myers, Michael Harris, and Giles Mandelbrote (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll, 2000), 181; NISO, *Library Binding* (Bethesda, MD: NISO, 2000); Striphas, *The Late Age of Print: Everyday Book Culture from Consumerism to Control* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 14, 99.

²⁴ This reading, which sees the alterations to O’s body as translatable into the situation of the material existence of a library book, is above all *neat*. This neatness, I would suggest, has been facilitated by a particular feature of the pornographic mode. “The universe proposed by the pornographic imagination,” Susan Sontag argues, “is a total universe. It has the power to ingest and metamorphose and translate all concerns that are fed into it, reducing everything into the one negotiable currency of the erotic imperative.” In this chapter I co-opt the “total universe” offered by *Story of O* for a total universe of the library book. The pornographic universe, Sontag writes, is “incomparably economical. The strictest possible criterion of relevance applies: everything must bear upon the erotic situation. Using Sontag’s insights, I would suggest that reading *Story of O* as pornography serves to also facilitate the novel’s use for allegory, which likewise creates the totality of its universe through a precisely tuned narrative focus. I will consider allegory in greater detail at the end of this chapter. Sontag, “Pornographic Imagination,” 66.

the other comprise of changes made by users, and broadly this observation would be representative. There is a danger here, however, of defining change only by attributing the agent of change. It should also be understood that an object's involvement in these systems sees apparatuses become attached to the object, and it sees the object accumulate evidences of use.

These observations give rise to several important temporal implications. First of all, the introduction of an object to such an institution is a liminal moment. The object enters a new system as through a threshold; it is transformed by its introduction. Before O is presented to members of the château, she undergoes a process of extended physical preparation. She is washed, made up, put in a collar and a costume, and her hands are tied behind her back. Before a library book is placed on the shelf it, too, will be readied for use. I suggested earlier that the library intervenes at the site of the material unity of the book. The major form this intervention takes is the attachment of apparatuses, such as library stamps and classification notations and pressmarks and barcodes. "Attach," which is to "connect or join on *functionally*,"²⁵ has been chosen to describe this moment quite deliberately, for it implies the extent to which these kinds of material changes are fundamentally preparative for what is to follow. All of this institutional activity is significant in many respects, but it is especially imperative for the terminology of this thesis. Firstly, the defining action of this introduction – when the library attaches apparatuses – is in fact the moment of the appearance of intervention for this library

²⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary* (online), 2nd ed., s.v. "attach, v," accessed February 27, 2010; italics added.

form. Secondly, the library undertaking a program of action to prepare a book for circulation is necessary for enabling later effects which will be discernible, noteworthy, and regular – that is, for phenomena in the terms that Ian Hacking has conceived them. The library’s intervention creates the conditions for the phenomena of the library book.

The introduction into their new economies is the key transformative moment for both O and the library book, because it is inaugural. The process of change, however, continues beyond the modifications made by the library, and this ongoing activity will prove to be of great impact. O’s body too is involved in attachment: it “repeatedly becomes attached to other objects – clothes, chains, rings, dildos, the male sex organ...O’s body has meaning imprinted upon it by the object with which it is connected, and is in the process re-constituted.”²⁶ O exists in a very precise state of configured transformation. It is, it has been argued, “no exaggeration to say that her body is constituted through the regimen to which it is subjected.”²⁷ “Step by step,” another commentator contends, “she becomes more what she is.”²⁸ The kinds of changes wrought by institutions attaching apparatuses, I suggested, are vital because they are preparative. In a single moment, what they prepare for is persisting change: changes which will consolidate the remaking of the object within its new and distinct category, apart from other objects which were once like them. The distinct and inferior status of ex-library books in the commercial second-hand book

²⁶ Silverman, “Construction of a Female Subject,” 327.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 332.

²⁸ Sontag, “Pornographic Imagination,” 55.

trade is perhaps the most succinct expression of the difference in kind between the library book and other volumes.²⁹ In real and ritualistic terms, the library's apparatuses ready these commonly held objects to receive an accumulation of evidences of use. I believe that these evidences of use constitute the primary feature of a library book's ontology. The first of the five laws of library science developed by S. R. Ranganathan ("the unquestioned giant of 20th-century library science"³⁰) is that "books are for use,"³¹ and my conceptualisation of the library book adheres to this formulation closely. The accumulation of evidences of use is deeply implicated in what I will find to be the principal facility of the library book encounter, and the preponderance of this chapter's analysis is oriented towards examining and elucidating this attribute.

²⁹ Ex-library books will be considered in greater detail at a later point in this chapter.

³⁰ Michael Gorman, "Let Us Now Praise...: A Reflective Look at Six Persons Who Greatly Influenced the Art of Cataloging," *American Libraries* 11, no. 4 (1980): 203.

³¹ S. R. Ranganathan, *The Five Laws of Library Science*, 2nd ed. (1957; repr. with minor amendments, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963), 9. The other laws are "every reader his [sic] book," "every book its reader," "save the time of the reader," and "[the] library is a growing organism" (9; capitalisation in these quotations has been altered). While a serious formulation of the principles of library practice, Ranganathan's work is also a curiosity, filled with many intriguing elements. He personifies his second law and stages it in dialogue with characters such as "The Patient," "The Jailor," "The Illiterate," "The Blindman," and "The Mother of the Dumb"; a dialogue which concludes with the group singing in a chorus (119–27). Ranganathan discusses the importance of books for lighthouse keepers (129–30); he includes carpentry specifications for a teak periodicals table in an appendix (421–22); and he involves himself in the minutiae of the delivery of services to such an extent that he advises even floors for libraries, "devoid of raised thresholds...so as to admit of the wheeling of the book-trolley to any part of the floor" (346–47).

IV. Circulation

Circulation is the key factor in accumulating evidences of use. It is perhaps the key ontological feature of the library book's situation, and is predicated on availability. And so it is that availability is a veritable refrain in *Story of O*, a shapeshifting iteration, visible in "whenever we so please" (25), in "at our entire disposal" (26), in "whenever they wish" (31), in "if he were to choose to enter" (36), in "alien hands and mouths to which nothing was to be denied."³² In so hyperbolically manifesting availability, the character of O estranges it, proffering to analysis a guarantee of passage which is shared by public library users and which is extraordinary. When Sean Cubitt suggests that "as a concept, the library is distinguished from the archive...by its role in making its contents accessible," and that the "librarian's task is to make available,"³³ he also implicitly identifies availability as an ontological condition of the library book.³⁴ In practice, availability and circulation are indissolubly tied up with one another, but they are analytically

³² Réage, *Story of O*, 56–57. These descriptions have their echo in Catherine Millet's autobiographical work *The Sexual Life of Catherine M.* Millet writes: "I was completely available: at all times and in all places, without hesitation or regret, by every one of my bodily orifices and with a totally clear conscience." The group that is constituted through her availability is a veritable multitude, akin to the group O is involved in: "the very first men I knew immediately made me an emissary of a network in which I couldn't hope to know all the members, the unwitting link in a family joined as in the Bible." Millet, *The Sexual Life of Catherine M.*, trans. Adriana Hunter (London: Serpent's Tail, 2002), 32; capitalisation in this quotation has been altered.

³³ Sean Cubitt, "Library," in "Problematizing Global Knowledge," ed. Mike Featherstone et al., special issue, *Theory, Culture and Society* 23, nos. 2–3 (2006): 581.

³⁴ There is an important pragmatic limitation to accessibility. Michael Warner expresses this limitation in the course of investigating public discourse, which "puts a premium on accessibility": it is that "there is no infinitely accessible language." Warner's analysis, too, will be used in greater detail later in this chapter. Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone, 2002), 108.

separable, and I will consider circulation in greater depth in order to examine the situation or circumstance through which objects accumulate evidences of use, rather than availability, which is the condition that makes circulation possible.

To illuminate its circumstance, I employ two theoretical frames which position circulation strongly within the fields of their concern. The first is anthropologist Marcel Mauss's account of gifts and different gift societies in *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, accompanied by Lewis Hyde's further development of the theory of gift exchange in *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*. I have found various elements of different societies' gifts and gift exchanges, as described by Mauss, to be helpful in illustrating certain aspects of O and the library book, because all of these are objects which circulate (O and the library book with sufficient frequency, and the gift, as will be seen, by definition). Although the library book is not a gift object, it does share many of its features, and for a library context Hyde's clear formulation of gift exchange using a language of creative production is fortuitous for the theorisation of the circulation of books, which after all are often enough creative undertakings. The second resource is Michael Warner's investigation of the concept of publics. Warner's work is deployed in support of a short story which works to explore the presence of strangers in the library book encounter. Warner suggests that circulation can perform integrally in the work of creating a public: "the notion of a public enables a reflexivity in the circulation of texts among strangers who become, by virtue of their reflexively

circulating discourse, a social entity.”³⁵ In short, because the gift and the library book share circulation as a mode of motion,³⁶ and because publics and libraries are configurations where circulation is implicit in the makeup of the entity, these resources have been enlisted to resituate library books as consequential entities in the textual scene.

In *The Gift* circulation is key to Marcel Mauss’s account of gift exchange in what he calls “archaic” societies.³⁷ Mauss observes “a certain power” in the gift objects exchanged in the North-West American potlatch, for example, a power “which forces them to circulate, to be given away and repaid.”³⁸ He discovers a similar power when investigating the *hau* of Maori gifts. *Hau* is a “spirit of things,”

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 11–12.

³⁶ The idea of giving has other intersections with the library. In the first chapter of this thesis at footnote 62, David Carr was cited to demonstrate how radical the service ideal in the library could be. His words also linked the idea of the gift with the cultural institutions of libraries and museums directly: “Every cultural institution *exists to give*...The greatest value in our civic and democratic culture is not what its institutions keep, but what they give away, and how freely it is given.” Carr, *The Promise of Cultural Institutions* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira / Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 64–65; italics in the original.

³⁷ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: Norton, 1967), 1. A useful chronological account of the history of the gift as a concept is offered by Natalie Zemon Davis. Starting from Aristotle and Seneca and Christian writing on gifts, Davis remarks on the limited consideration shown to gifts in economic and political economic writings, mentioning Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, and Karl Marx. She speaks of Mauss and his involvement with the work of Richard Meyer, Bronislaw Malinowski, and Franz Boas, and comments on those who have written about the gift after Mauss, including Marshall Sahlins, Annette Weiner, Georges Bataille, and Jacques Derrida. Davis, “The Gift,” in *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. Maryanne Cline Horowitz (Detroit: Scribner’s / Thomson Gale, 2005), 3:935–38.

³⁸ Mauss, *The Gift*, 41. Mauss describes the gift as a “total social phenomena” in which “all kinds of institutions find simultaneous expression: religious, legal, moral, and economic” (1; italics in the original); he is “concerned with ‘wholes’, with systems in their entirety” (77). As suggested above, I am interested in certain aspects of Mauss’s writing, most specifically with productive intersections between the economies of gift exchange and the library in relation to circulating objects. I do not propose to employ gift exchange at the level of “total social phenomena,” nor do I directly equate the library book with the gift.

particularly a spirit of the forest from which a gift object emanates, and also a “spirit of the thing given” (8). Mauss paraphrases *hau* as it was explained to ethnographer Elsdon Best by Tamati Ranaipiri:

you give me *taonga* [a present], I give it to another, the latter gives me *taonga* back, since he is forced to do so by the *hau* of my gift; and I am obliged to give this one to you since I must return to you what is in fact the product of the *hau* of your *taonga*. (9)

In these two instances, circulation is associated with a sense of compulsion, a literal force. One of Mauss’s key anthropological insights is that he construes objects which are involved in systems of circulation as being bound up with obligation.

Mauss saw that a gift enjoins three obligations simultaneously: the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to repay.³⁹ O and the library book are circulated objects, but as I suggested in the first section of this chapter, neither O nor the library book are in any direct sense “repaid.” And so it is the obligation to give and the obligation to receive which will work to particularly illuminate the situation of O and of the library book. These are obligations which, of course, primarily attend the users of the object. Because the analysis I am conducting is a phenomenological investigation which looks to users more than the institution of the library itself or any of its officers, this is a very important orientation in Mauss. Mauss’s work is further serviceable in the way it facilitates conceiving the material evidences of use which attend the library book in terms of obligation.

³⁹ Expanded upon in Mauss, *The Gift*, 10–12, 37–41.

When O is covered in whip scars, those who meet with her through the mediation of the château encounter her markings necessarily. To use her is to use her as she is, and to be obliged to receive and offer more evidences of use. Similarly without and sometimes with intention patrons will mark their library books in various ways, and without alternative they will receive their library books as manifesting evidence of other patrons' use.⁴⁰ In these senses, it can be seen that objects in a system of circulation have certain powers of transmission. Marks are given voluntarily or involuntarily, but they are always given, and they are always at least involuntarily received. To read a circulated library book is to come across evidences of use, and to return a library book is to release whatever evidences of use you have transmitted back into the library's textual economy. Because of obligation the circulated object has a power of transmission, and this power is a dual power: it is for patrons to transmit to it and it is for patrons to be transmitted to through it. Evidences of use in a library book are to a large extent *unmanageable*. The unambiguous and large manifestation of involuntary activity in all of the preceding discussion ensures that this is so. A library book's obligations are unmanageable, and they are what engender the phenomena of its encounter.

Evidences of use are unmanageable in another important sense. The extent of O's alteration, as it was described above, will be recalled: she was marked on the

⁴⁰ I will consider presently how the library book is akin to bailed property in legal terms. One of the conditions of bailment is that it "requires re-delivery of the bailed chattel at the end of the bailment in its original state," an injunction which would seem to be necessarily looser in its application to library books. *Encyclopaedic Australian Legal Dictionary*, s.v. "bailment."

front, from behind, all over. Her transformation was visible from all angles because her markings and material alterations were superabundant: the ring on her hand; the disks hanging in the front and her brand behind; the costume – in fact the château’s uniform – which acts to enshroud her entirely. The first group of material changes described above, the apparatuses which are attached by the institution, perform an important function here. It is apparatuses attached by an institution and not evidences of use by users which are often implicated in the total level of visible cover achieved. Library stamps, stickers, barcodes, call numbers, due date slips, and library binding are all involved in ensuring that the transformed state of the book object is nearly always obvious.⁴¹ That a library book is a book destined for circulation is rarely understated; it is almost always overarticulated.⁴² This level of

⁴¹ The library book is undergoing something of a historical transformation in this regard. As early as 1982, Jonathan Held suggested that “rubber stamps may be among the first casualties of the information revolution.” Held indicates the range of functions library stamps have been put to when reporting on an exhibition for which 5,000 stamps were gathered: “Mutilation Noted,” “For Mature Adults Only,” “Did You Like This Book?,” “Potpourri,” “There Are Currently No Fines on Children’s Materials. Please Return Them Immediately,” and, with a picture of a trolley filled with library materials, “Your Public Library...America’s Supermarket for the Mind.” With the decline of stamps and card-pockets, and the implementation of bar-coding systems and RFID technology, libraries now use very different methods to mark their books. RFID is Radio Frequency Identification, “a combination of radio-frequency-based technology and microchip technology.” It represents an improvement over bar-coding systems because patrons “charge several items at the same time.” This results in a change of appearance for library apparatuses on books. The visibility of these apparatuses may be different, but this does not necessarily mean that the provenance of library books is less apparent. Barcodes are usually attached to an inside or outside cover, and are always discernible. RFID technology’s tags “are typically affixed to the inside back cover and are exposed.” For RFID, moreover, libraries are advised to “consider placing the tags inside the front cover under a bookplate or with a logo printed on the tag. [This] may make the function of the tag less obvious and, therefore, improve security.” Held, “Their Indelible Mark: Rubber Stamps and Libraries,” *American Libraries* 13, no. 11 (1982): 680, 680–82; capitalisation in these quotations has been altered; Richard W. Boss, “RFID Technology for Libraries,” Public Library Association, American Library Association, June 30, 2009, <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/pla/plapublications/platechnotes/rfidtechnology.cfm>.

⁴² Liisa Stephenson has described a sentiment associated with the most camouflaging of these apparatuses: “‘To bind anew: this is an act of love’...Binding is a pact with a book, a promise to read it again—not just to shelve it beautifully like a museum piece. To bind a book is to acknowledge its

articulation of purpose may be achieved through evidences of use as well, but achievement is contingent on the manifestation of wear by any one volume. Often marks attached by an institution are wilfully external and so cannot be easily disguised or disguised at all, and in this sense, too, the obligations or impending obligations of the book are unmanageable.

Circulated objects are tied up in the obligation to give and the obligation to receive, and overall these obligations can be best encapsulated with the formulation that circulated objects have unmanageable powers of transmission. I have chosen to concentrate on the question of how these powers of transmission are received, rather than how they are given (or, more exactly, generated).⁴³ O, with her powers, is received in a very specific way which may be quite uncommon – the fact of her circulation is described in a markedly positive manner. Before enlisting Mauss and Hyde and Warner to investigate the concept of circulation further, I would like to pause a moment to consider this question: what are some other kinds of responses to these objects? Such a question need only be asked for it to be made instantly apparent that affect is deeply implicated by circulated objects. Put more strongly, I

lasting value.” Stephenson, “Reading Matter: Modernism and the Book” (PhD diss., McGill University, 2007), 331. Stephenson quotes “to bind anew: this is an act of love” from Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (1996; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 21.

⁴³ I believe the manner in which evidences of use are deposited in books by readers is the more abstruse and esoteric encounter. Beyond marginalia – which has been the subject of several studies – this area of interaction strikes me as so subtle that a comprehensive account could only be delivered by an investigation which was significantly empirical. I look at a single instance of the production of evidence of use later in this chapter: a fictional depiction of the deliberate application of marginalia.

would contend that it is always involved in their phenomenology. With the library book, the library has produced a space of conditions which are capable of generating strong affect (and the château has produced O in exactly the same way). It is logical, moreover, that if a circulated object has powers of transmission which are unmanageable and obligatorily received, testimonies of negative receptions will exist. As such descriptions are not at all prominent within the world of *Story of O*, I must defer the O allegory for a moment and examine negative encounters with circulating book objects directly.

V. Depletion

“We must seriously consider,” Carolyn Steedman suggests, “the archive as a harbourer of the anthrax infection.”⁴⁴ Steedman apes Jacques Derrida to diagnose “Archive Fever (Proper)” and convincingly identifies for earlier centuries a “striking and potent image of the book as a locus of a whole range of industrial diseases” (24).

She explains:

the book and its components (leather binding, various glues and adhesives, paper and its edging, and decreasingly, parchments and vellums of various types) concentrated in one object many of the industrial hazards and diseases that were mapped out in the course of the [nineteenth] century. (22)

⁴⁴ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 28.

In this account, book material is contagious: it incontinently seeps. Steedman is concerned with archival material, which will often be older than a typical circulating library book, and which is usually more restricted in terms of access as well.

Nevertheless, Steedman's depiction of the book is cited as an extreme example to demonstrate that book material which has been made available to a group of people may be understood to manifest malignantly. In such an incarnation, the book is porous, unsealed, noxious, and in its working it wreaks its virulence.

In library versions of negative responses, it is not that the library book is commonly experienced as a literal site of potential infection.⁴⁵ A more measured imagining of an affectively negative encounter would use Steedman's example to recognise how the physiological may persist psychologically, and to remark on the material repercussions of circulation upon objects, made more susceptible to atrophy and distress. And so writers on public libraries consider their stock replacement ratio, "a measure of the freshness of the stock," a ratio of ten meaning that "on average, each book stays in the library for 10 years before being replaced, by which time its appeal has diminished considerably."⁴⁶ Conversely, S. R. Ranganathan

⁴⁵ Although even popularly such a perception can persist. In a tongue-in-cheek article celebrating the virtues and quirks of libraries, David Stafford remembers library volumes with "notices pasted in the front saying: 'Books from houses where there has been any infectious illness should be wrapped in brown paper and marked with the name of the disease.'" Simon Eliot quotes an injunction similar in sentiment from a catalogue for a 1933 children's circulating library. Stafford, "Binding Love," *Guardian*, September 1–2, 1990, S9; Eliot, "Circulating Libraries in the Victorian Age and After," in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland*, vol. 3, 1850–2000, ed. Alistair Black and Peter Hoare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 131.

⁴⁶ Nick Moore, "Public Library Trends," *Cultural Trends* 13, no. 1 (2004): 53. Moore goes on to observe that "an overall stock replacement ratio of less than eight is generally thought to be desirable" (53). Moore suggests that this ratio has real consequence for public library services:

writes: “psychologists tell us that ‘recency’ is an important factor in securing attention...the soundness of [this dictum] is usually well demonstrated by the rapidity with which the Recent Additions Shelf gets emptied.”⁴⁷ In Bette Howland’s short story “Public Facilities,” a Chicago librarian describes how her colleagues perceive some of the more taxed goods they trade in: “books on the shelves were marked-down merchandise—spoiled, soiled, grubby, touched by too many hands.”⁴⁸

The librarian paints this picture of returned stock:

Books came back with bindings loose, pages ripped out, pictures defaced—mustaches, pubic hair, scratched in ball-point pen. Some seemed to have been on a bender: dropped in hot bathtubs, propping windows. Greasy thumbprints, shopping reminders, telephone numbers...⁴⁹

Put simply, public libraries in England are not buying enough books to keep the service going. The current rate of additions is not sufficient to maintain both the current overall size of [the] bookstock and its quality. Either the size will reduce or the currency and physical quality of the stock will decrease. The end result will be the same: the bookstock will be less appealing and people will no longer borrow books at their previous rate. (49)

In a similar vein, Anne Goulding notes that when library non-users are surveyed, they “invariably highlight stock quality and stock choice as reasons that people do not use public libraries.” She goes on to qualify, however, that “lack of interest and need are generally the principal reasons for non-use.” Recently released research in the United Kingdom for the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council seems to validate the position that the bookstock is, nevertheless, of critical importance: “Current users, and some lapsed users, would like the book offer to be better. While users are very satisfied with library staff, they are less satisfied with the range and condition of books.” Goulding, *Public Libraries in the 21st Century*, 303; MLA, *What Do the Public Want from Libraries?*, 67.

⁴⁷ Ranganathan, *Five Laws of Library Science*, 263; capitalisation in the original.

⁴⁸ Bette Howland, “Public Facilities,” in *Blue in Chicago* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 82.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 81. This story also touches on the issue (and imaginary) of books and contagion:

The most popular volume in the branch library was the medical dictionary...[it] came back to the desk without comment. Miss Rose, the reference librarian, would seize the germly contaminated thing and lock it up again. Lock it up and then—she couldn’t help it, kindly as she was, with her loud rude voice and knocking heels—she’d trot straight to the john and scrub her hands. (68)

Similarly *The Independent* reported, po-faced, that “a survey of unusual bookmarks discovered by librarians included a used condom, a kipper, bacon rashers, and an old jam sandwich.”⁵⁰ Perhaps it is because of such impromptu interleavings and reactions like those described in Howland’s short story that in “the legitimate second-hand trade, ex-library books are deemed all but worthless.”⁵¹

Enough examples have now been assembled to demonstrate that books involved with library systems may be construed in terms of low value because their circulation has depleted them. This susceptibility is not surprising when a library book’s likeness to a gift object is remembered: Lewis Hyde remarks that “another way to describe the motion of the gift is to say that a gift must always be used up... *The gift is property that perishes.*”⁵² Combine library books’ powers of transmission with a high level of circulation, and of course these objects can be understood to wilt, stagnate, or repel. The library book may also be a sullied object, unlovely and defiled, and aversion is within the complement of possible responses to it.

O, it has been suggested, is a counter case. The experience of her use is described in absolute terms, as a space for sacred encounters: “all the sexes that had

⁵⁰ Quoted in Alan Taylor, ed., *Long Overdue: A Library Reader* (London: Library Association, 1993), 211. Beyond a publication date of May 1993, no further bibliographic detail is provided for this citation.

⁵¹ Cubitt, “Library,” 588. An online second-hand bookstore makes its case unambiguously: “ex-library books are generally undesirable, due to the fact that they have usually have been stamped, taped, glued, and subjected to other indignities, such as the application of a card pocket.” There is also the risk that these volumes “may have been damaged by careless library patrons.” Empty Mirror Books [Denise Enck], “Book Collecting Terms: Illustrated Glossary,” accessed January 12, 2010, <http://www.emptymirrorbooks.com/collecting/bookselling.html>.

⁵² Hyde, *The Gift*, 8; italics in the original.

been sunk into her and which had so abundantly demonstrated her prostitution, had simultaneously demonstrated that she was worthy of prostitution and had in some sort hallowed her" (146–47). O, of choice circulation, is as "an ordinary object that has served some divine purpose and thereby become infused with sanctity" (48). Lovingly tied up in her very being are her powers of transmission. She receives all and shares too, and in her receiving what she shares is grace. I suggested earlier that O is an object of configured transformation, and so she is, and it is her involvements which enrich her:

those parts of her body which were the most continually offended, having become more sensitive, seemed to her to have become, at the same time, more lovely, and as though ennobled...between her wideflung thighs, the twin ways leading into her belly, avenues trod by a whole wide world to pleasure. (64)

So importantly, more sacredness gathers to her as her circulation continues. In some accounts, the circulated library book can accumulate an analogous power. Author Bel Kaufman, for example, exclaims that the library book is "merchandise to be handled...If the pages were worn and dog-eared, if the card tucked into its paper pocket inside the cover was stamped with lots of dates, I knew I had a winner."⁵³ In these kinds of incarnations, the body or the book which has been shared is fetching, quickened and enlivened by proofs of antecedent gratifications, authenticated – still more, consecrated – by its testament to readability or usability.

⁵³ Bel Kaufman, "The Liberry," *New York Times*, July 23, 1976, 15.

VI. Group connections

The positivity of these kinds of testimony willingly places the circulated object in a field of social relationality. These are responses which respond well to the library book in its true and incontrovertible situation within an economy of circulation (and it is because of this I think that it is ontologically productive for negative responses to be acknowledged and yet overridden within any analytical approach which works to conceive the library book as a kind, as positive testimony involves responding well to an ontological fact). Marcel Mauss proposes that the only obscurity of the *hau* situation, described by Tamati Ranaipiri above, is one of social relationality: it is “the intervention of a third person,”⁵⁴ an idiosyncrasy of super-brace relation. It may seem counterintuitive to speak of a “third person” in relation to gifts, for gifts are often thought of in terms of one-to-one exchanges. Anthropological theories of gift exchange, however, have found a different kind of situation. In fact, Mauss elsewhere clarifies the “obscurity” he identified in the course his analysis: he comments in summative remarks in his introduction that “it is groups, and not individuals, which carry on exchange, make contracts, and are bound by obligations” (3). Lewis Hyde has concisely developed Mauss’s insight about the number of parties involved in gift exchange: “The gift moves in a circle, and two people do not make much of a circle. Two points establish a line, but a circle

⁵⁴ Mauss, *The Gift*, 9.

lies in a plane and needs at least three points.”⁵⁵ Thus the gift, as a kindred circulating object, describes the library book not only in its obligation, but in terms of its configuration of social relationality as well. S. R. Ranganathan gives voice to both the obligatory and pragmatic elements of this aspect of a library book’s situation when he writes that “every reader can get his [*sic*] books only if each reader remembers that he is not the only person using the library. He should not forget that the Second Law pleads not only for his rights and privileges but also for those of others.”⁵⁶ The object of gift exchange describes both O and a library book because it is situated and takes place within a group, not between a pair.⁵⁷

“When gifts circulate within a group,” Hyde explains, “their commerce leaves a series of interconnected relationships in its wake, and a kind of decentralized

⁵⁵ Hyde, *The Gift*, 16.

⁵⁶ Ranganathan, *Five Laws of Library Science*, 251–52; capitalisation in the original. Ranganathan’s second law, also cited above at footnote 31, is “every reader his [*sic*] book” (9; capitalisation in this quotation has been altered).

⁵⁷ Whilst Hyde argues that “gift exchange is an economy of small groups,” he also notes a relevant exception. This is for

those communities which, like the community of science, are organized around quite specific concerns. The group that does not pretend to support the wider social life of its members—feeding them, healing them, getting them married, and so forth—can be connected through gift exchange and still be quite large.

I have outlined how the public library is conceived to be a multipurpose institution: Verna Pungitore lists education, culture, recreation, reference, and information as some of the objectives the public library has committed itself to over time (see footnote 80 in the introduction). However, even though some of these purposes are extremely encompassing (culture and recreation, for instance), the library has never presented itself as the only institution which responds to these needs. Furthermore, the public library is patently not an institution which “[pretends] to support the wider social life of its members—feeding them, healing them, getting them married.” When considering its continuing association with books and book materials, the library falls under the definition of a community “organized around quite specific concerns,” and therefore the use of gift analysis in this context is appropriate. Hyde, *The Gift*, 89.

cohesiveness emerges."⁵⁸ In this way the circulating object, like a gift, creates a relation. (A "gift makes a connection," Hyde writes at another point.⁵⁹) In a different context, Natalie Zemon Davis has recognised that a book can be "a carrier of relationships," and likewise I contend that a library book – materially, and as a kind – creates and carries relations between members of a group, in its own very particular manner.⁶⁰ Library books have unmanageable powers of transmission, and with the introduction of the concept of a social relationality, the situation can be articulated still more precisely. The relations that library books create are best understood as unmanageable *connections* between patrons.

The allegory of O bears this out. O offers "a reflected view of her body as perfectly open as if an invisible lover had withdrawn from her and left her belly agape" (153). O's body operates as a connection. As a circulated object, she consistently betrays occult predecessors, all those strangers come before. Often when O is beheld it is not her own self but these unknown others who are seen. Something similar happens when *Instant Karma's* David Felsenstein examines a library book's borrowing card: "looking at the signatures of all the people who had handled the book before me," he says, "I experienced a great sense of communion with them, a

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 56.

⁶⁰ Natalie Zemon Davis, "Printing and the People," in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (1965; repr., Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975), 192. In contrast to my analysis, Davis's research is explicitly social. Her essay considers the effects of printing on different social groups such as peasants, artisans, and tradesmen, investigating "the context for using printed books in defined popular milieus in sixteenth-century France" as well as "the new relations that printing helped to establish among people and among hitherto isolated cultural traditions" (192).

smart and well-behaved alliance of people who knew how to treat a book.”⁶¹ The protagonist of Haruki Murakami’s novel *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* has a comparable relational experience: “Libraries have certainly come a long way. The days of card pockets inside the backsleeves of books seemed like a faded dream. As a kid, I used to love all those withdrawal date stamps.”⁶² From *O* to *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, with greater and less articulation, each of these texts attest to the circulated object as a site which can establish a disembodied and not easily quantifiable association between users.⁶³ In a book object, the evidences of use may be very amenable to interpretation, such as in the case of marginalia. Even if its evidences are more recalcitrant than this, a book may still offer up a surprising connection (“Lesser marks,” H. J. Jackson suggests, are “also susceptible of interpretation. A scholar tracing Wordsworth’s reputation among the Victorians can interpret [a] quick mark against ‘Surprised by Joy’ as ‘poignant.’”⁶⁴).

⁶¹ Mark Swartz, *Instant Karma* (San Francisco: City Lights 2002), January 16. This passage was also quoted in the previous chapter.

⁶² Haruki Murakami, *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, trans. Alfred Birnbaum (New York: Vintage / Random House, 1993), 74.

⁶³ This association is mirrored to an extent by BookCrossing.com, an internet-based project that encourages readers to share their books by “reading and releasing.” One way that a book can be “released,” for example, is by leaving it in a public place for another reader to find. BookCrossing thus shares important characteristics of circulation and gratuity with the library economy. However, with the extensive online journaling procedures the project encourages (as well as facilities for members to exchange books directly, called “controlled releases”), BookCrossing offers a kind of circulation which is much more articulated and directed than the library’s more serendipitous and ineffable model. BookCrossing.com, “About Us,” accessed December 19, 2010, <http://www.bookcrossing.com/about>; BookCrossing.com, “How to BookCross,” accessed December 19, 2010, <http://www.bookcrossing.com/howto>.

⁶⁴ H. J. Jackson, *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 14. This work is based on an “examination of more than two thousand annotated books in great public or academic libraries” (6). Jackson’s monograph enthusiastically promotes the study of anonymous marginalia for “potential use by the sociologist and cultural historian” (4), and throughout extrapolates from many examples of anonymous marginalia.

However literal a connection is, for any one individual patron in a moment of encounter it will most often manifest as anonymous and thus spectral and untold prior usage.⁶⁵

A common relational configuration invoked for the book is the pair, made up of the book and its reader. O and the library book are objects in scenes which are typically (or “mythically,” perhaps, or even “popularly understood to be”) conducted with a base unit of two: sexual relations on one hand, and a private reading encounter on the other. In contrast, I have argued that users of the library book (and of O) are part of a group configuration – and a group always involves a quantity of constituents which is greater than two. The disparity that is emerging is quite arresting. The circulated objects, through the connections of spectral prior usage that they carry, show or imply a multiplicity manifested at the site of an encounter which is often configured in binary terms. At this moment the library book becomes supercritical, significantly apposite, and highly meaningful for the category of books generally. In the extremely localised space of a book (or a body, in O’s case), evidence of unknown and multiple encounters can be shown. In the very

⁶⁵ Digital textual objects may too have the capacity to manifest prior usage. Elizabeth J. Vincelette observes that “each interaction with a digital text may change the text if comments are added, even as each monitor displays a different version of the text.” It is not likely that a digital mark up of text will be as anonymous as a paper mark up, but I will not consider the capacities of the circulation of digital text in any further detail. Vincelette’s project is interesting from another perspective: she performs a similar process for the digital archive that this thesis aims to perform for the library. Vincelette understands digital archives to be “interpretive models,” and her work is intended to “define shared characteristics of literary digital archives.” Vincelette, “Genre, Database, and the Anatomy of the Digital Archive” (PhD diss., Old Dominion University, 2010), 164, 34, ii.

being of a library book, right there in its material unity, any attestation the book makes is not often or even not usually an attestation of the current reader and their experience. What is manifested instead is an acknowledgement (through abandoned receipts, for example) and an incarnation (through notes in the margins, perhaps?) of the unknown others who have had access to that book, in other and unknowable lives. This is an object which is or can become profoundly anti-solipsistic. The formulation of a library book ontology has been slow to resolve, but finally it is here. To bear evidences of use which act as unmanageable connections between patrons – and which disrupt any habitual consideration of the reading relationship as being one which is only conducted between the book and the current reading consciousness – is the primary and special facility of library books as a textual kind.

VII. Owning and borrowing

Unmanageable connections, however, are not exclusive to library books. They are also a property of second-hand books, for example, which will often show evidence of prior usage, anonymous or otherwise. But the fact of a second-hand book's possession constitutes a distinction between these two kinds of books which will prove to be decisive. It is possession itself which operates contrastively, and its distinction acts absolutely, encompassing personally owned books whether they are

new or second-hand. Walter Benjamin writes about the books in his personal collection:

Habent sua fata libelli: these words may have been intended as a general statement about books. So books like *The Divine Comedy*, Spinoza's *Ethics*, and *The Origin of Species* have their fates. A collector, however, interprets this Latin saying differently. For him [*sic*], not only books but also copies of books have their fates.⁶⁶

"In this sense," he continues, "the most important fate of a copy is its encounter with him, with his own collection. I am not exaggerating when I say that to a true collector the acquisition of an old book is its rebirth" (61). The collector as imagined by Benjamin is a redoubtable figure,

for inside him there are spirits, or at least little genii, which have seen to it that for a collector – and I mean a real collector, a collector as he ought to be – ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them. (67)

Like the example of contaminated books outlined above – and in fact like the entire O allegory – Benjamin's essay amounts to a hyperbolic case, and I enlist it demonstratively. Book collectors are not necessarily readers, and it is with reading and readers that this chapter (and the entire work) is implicitly concerned. However, as a hyperbolic discourse of possession, the perspective of a collector does have substantial power to present an incisive statement.

⁶⁶ Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (1968; repr., New York: Schocken, 1969), 61. *Habent sua fata libelli* is translated as "books have their destinies." James Morwood, *A Dictionary of Latin Words and Phrases* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 74.

When a book is Benjamin's property, he understands his relationship with it to be holistic, and he experiences the encounter as fated. But in becoming holistic and fated, the relationship also becomes hermetic, determinately of *two*: "its encounter with him, with his own collection." The encounter of book ownership is very different to a library encounter. Possession narrows the field of encounter to two in a remarkably definitive (and economical) way, radically undermining multiplicity as an ontological possibility. There is some analogy to the difference between contract and tort law here, wherein duties in contract – like the duties of a personally owned book – "are towards a specific person or persons" and, akin to the responsibilities that attend a library book, duties in tort "are commonly owed to persons generally."⁶⁷ Thinking about second-hand books as property, moreover, it becomes clear that there is no immediate compulsion to continue the circulation of a purchased book, and so its opportunity to carry on accruing unmanageable connections, and to disseminate traces left by the current owner, has been compromised. In contrast, the library book can be understood with reference to the legal concept of bailment, which involves "delivery of personal chattels by the owner of the chattels (the 'bailor') into the possession of another person (the 'bailee') upon an express or implied promise that they will be redelivered to the bailor."⁶⁸ A purchased book has no such expressed or implied promise. It has been taken out of an economy of circulation and this removal, while it may be only temporary, is

⁶⁷ LawofContract.co.uk, "Contract Law – Difference between Contract and Tort," accessed December 5, 2010, <http://www.lawofcontract.co.uk/contractmisc/differences-contract-tort.php>.

⁶⁸ *Encyclopaedic Australian Legal Dictionary*, s.v. "bailment."

definitive in its own moment. Lewis Hyde has suggested that “*the gift must always move*. There are other forms of property that stand still, that mark a boundary or resist momentum, but the gift keeps going.”⁶⁹ Personally owned books are more like these other forms of property. Second-hand books which manifest unmanageable connections can thus be precluded from analysis in advance. Even if they are one day sold on, they do not share library books’ consistent kind of circulation as an ontological property, and so the ontological situations of the two kinds of books are incommensurable.

This becomes clearer if the relationship between possession and gift objects is more closely considered. Of *vaygu’a*, for example – armshells and necklaces which were exchanged in the Trobriand Islands – Mauss makes the following observation:

The gift received is in fact owned, but the ownership is of a particular kind. One might say that it includes many legal principles which we moderns have isolated from one another. It is at the same time property and a possession, a pledge and a loan, an object sold and an object bought, a deposit, a mandate, a trust; for it is given only on condition that it will be used on behalf of, or transmitted to, a third person, the remote partner.⁷⁰

The object which is like a gift object is not only possessed, and this is suffice to say that any framework of possession will be inadequate to account for it. Because it is a bailed object, akin to the gift object that Mauss describes above, a library book is tied up in pledge, loan, deposit, mandate, and trust, in a way that a personally owned

⁶⁹ Hyde, *The Gift*, 4; italics in the original.

⁷⁰ Mauss, *The Gift*, 22. Mauss describes *vaygu’a* as “a kind of currency” (21) and argues that in spite of ongoing anthropological debate, “these valuables have the same function as money in our society and consequently deserve to be put at least in the same genus” (94).

book never could be. However, the most crucial element of Mauss's description is his recognition that a gift object will always exist with a third person, and its movements will be conducted in relation to this figure. There are other ways to express and represent this. At one point, Hyde suggests that because "the gift moves in a circle its motion is beyond the control of the personal ego" (16); at another, he argues that "a gift that cannot be given away ceases to be a gift" (xiv). Unlike books which are personally owned and have no necessary relationship with any notional third person, library books will never exist for an individual encounter only. Library books exist in and for groups. They incorporate unknown and unknowable and future readings; in their material unity they constantly remind their reader that it is *not* only "he who lives in them."

Benjamin involved individual copies of books with the concept of fate, and the grandiose terminology of his gesture is felicitous because a library book has a destiny which, paradoxically, refuses "destiny" (quotation marks intact). A library book confuses any idealistic notion of individual readerly fatefulness. The destiny of a library book is not "fateful," because it tends to intervene in the experience of a cosy relationship between a book and its reader. A library book, like O, shoulders all ingress gladly: it is never *straight* for us. The way that a library book keeps other readers in its material unity and promises to continue with this project for an indeterminate future heralds its past and continuing existence outside our own experience of it. Library books affirm the irrevocable beingness of books in a world which is not our personal world.

VIII. A world for the library book

The room was lighted by a forty-watt bulb in a lamp with a frayed rose-colored shade, from which strings of broken yellow beads dangled. The girl sat in a rocking chair below the lamp, the dim light pouring on her coarse hair. In the kitchen there were sounds of dishes rattling.

Staring through thick glasses at the book in her lap, the girl looked away for a moment to the wall, where a large calendar hung. There was a photograph of the Dionne Quintuplets in pink rompers; below the picture were the printed words: MOTHER MAYO'S FEMALE REMEDY 'THOUSANDS THANK GOD FOR IT.'⁷¹

What is this world, that library books affirm? There is no end of answers to this question, and yet the description above, from Weldon Kees's short story "The Library: Four Sketches," is the start of a particularly good one. Its first virtues are modest and fundamental. This is a narrative account of a borrowed library book in an environs. As a narrative, it automatically evinces another world for the borrowed library book for whoever reads this short story; and moreover – another fundamental virtue – it shows this world to be inhabited. It is merely propitious that it is a warm space which is depicted: illuminated; accented with rose and yellow; and replete with evidence of ministration (the sounds of food preparation; an advertisement for a "remedy" draught). I have asked about the world a library book moves in with a view to exploring an orientation of the library book that may not be

⁷¹ Weldon Kees, "The Library: Four Sketches," in *The Ceremony, and Other Stories*, ed. Dana Gioia (Port Townsend, WA: Graywolf, 1984), 67–68.

sufficiently emphasised in the worlds of the gift and of O. With such an objective in view, the welcoming atmosphere of the scene described above operates as a pathetic fallacy, proffering an invitation and perhaps even establishing a desire to know more.

[The] girl put one of her fingers inside her thick lips and bit off a piece of fingernail and spit it out. She looked at the book again. Picking up a stub of pencil on the table beside her, she wrote on page 203 of the book: *If my name you wish to know, look on page 239*. She stared at what she had written, carefully dotting the *i* in *wish*.

Then she put another finger in her mouth and chewed on it, removing a sliver of fingernail and holding it between her thumb and index finger to examine it carefully. She wiped it against her skirt. She looked again at the calendar on the wall.⁷²

A mere four short paragraphs, and it has already become clear that we will learn more of this world only when the story chooses for us to know. There is nothing which is not precise (and precisely decided) about this narration. The apparently inconsequential (the girl looks at the calendar on the wall) accompanies the potentially singular (her careful annotation of the book). The story relates proceedings as well as actions; a series of gestures and events which does not fail to include what may be automatic and performed without consciousness or intent – the close examination of a chewed-off fingernail, for example – but in any case certainly seems to have no ramification beyond describing a person inhabiting their body as they will. And yet this very exactness seems to be what veils the episode with a

⁷² Ibid., 68; italics in the original.

sense of pervading obscurity. Its mundane unfurling postpones the revelation of what it is the girl is doing which is perhaps notable, and its even incorporation of the habitual acts to strip the entire scene of any sense of event.

This much, however, is evident: beyond its (in fact rare) articulation of a library book in motion in a world, a more bespoke virtue of this passage for the purposes of this chapter is that it tells of the annotation of such a book. Moreover, the deliberative pace of narration reflects the demeanour of the one writing the marginalia. This character is above all considered. Even when her gestures appear automatic, it seems to me that their subconscious performance should be incorporated into the more insistent representation of her posture of contemplation. The girl's deliberation in fact extends to and is echoed in the sculpted form of her composition, with its poetical syntactic inversion – “if *my name* you wish to know”⁷³ – and the close manuscript attention she gives it, “carefully dotting the *i* in *wish*.” And yet throughout all the senses of attention which suffuse these paragraphs there is still some ultimate inscrutability. The character's prankish riddle and its singsong tone are childish. Her writing compares strangely with the considered attitude which marks every other aspect of the description: the composure of the narrator and the girl both. This girl *looks at* and *stares at* the book too often for it to seem likely that she has been overly moved by it; she seems to *look through* the volume in her lap. She is unhurried and aloof.

⁷³ Italics in this quotation have been altered.

In the kitchen a woman sang in a cracked voice:

*Jesus is waiting to save you
Open your heart to him now*

and then the song died away into a mumble.

The girl turned to page 239 and wrote: *If my name you wish to know look on page 285*. Then she turned to that page and wrote: *If my name you wish to know, look on page 304*.⁷⁴

Not only a riddle then, but a tease. The girl's work will take the future reader of her marginalia through the volume, as on a sightseeing tour, but it is a tour which is conducted entirely independently of its locale, so invisible is the book which hosts the journey. By this point the tone and the joke are established as childish, certainly, but perhaps not quite playful. And a voice sounds out in song: the other world, the world that the library book affirms the being of, is still there.

And at the top of page 304 she printed carefully in large letters: HA! HA! FOOLED YOU!!

She smiled, and a giggling sound came from her throat. She looked at what she had written, her smile widening, and then she closed the book quickly and held it out from her. On the back was stamped *Leaves of Grass Walt Whitman*.⁷⁵

"Leaves of Grass Walt Whitman" – and yet nothing. The girl has worked above some of the most impassioned poetry in the English language, and has met it with the cool undisturbed dispassion of her marking up. The quickness (with which she closes the

⁷⁴ Kees, "The Library," 68; italics in the original.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*; italics in the original.

book) is figuratively literal: it is one of the first signs of *life* to be seen. She holds the book out away from herself: her response is made embodied.

Someone moved in the kitchen: there were sounds of leather against wood, the squeal of a faucet being turned, and then the faint noise of a stream of water running and gurgling in the drain.

The girl opened the book again and turned to the title page and wrote: *This is a dirty filthy book. I hate it.* Then she raised one hand close to her eyes and stared at her fingernails, her face expressionless.⁷⁶

Until this very selfsame moment, there has been no indication that the girl had read the book she has been writing through. Certainly there has been no signal that her response was so pronounced, or let us even say *abundant*. The moment performs as a narrative shock, and perhaps with the girl's new forthrightness, all the ambivalence of the preceding passages is undone. There is no expression given to the nature of her aversion, however, nor will the story disclose anything further about her reading of Whitman. Even the story's provision of page numbers for the girl's book seems to act as a red herring. With so many and various editions of *Leaves of Grass* issued by its author and different publishers, it is not easy to imagine many other works for

⁷⁶ Ibid., 68–69; italics in the original. The girl in Kees's story is a canonical annotator, and by this I mean that she uses the space of a book for her marginalia in a way which has been empirically substantiated. H. J. Jackson suggests that it is "personal...expressions of opinion" and "general assessment" which are often recorded by readers in the first pages of books. She suggests several reasons for this practice: such inscriptions might "serve as an aid to memory for future reference," "make introductions," or – the situation which potentially concerns us here – "act as a mediator between the text and later readers." Jackson's remarks are part of her more general argument that annotators "can be seen to make distinctly different, though standard, use of [a book's] various spaces." For example, ownership marks and anathemas tend to appear in the front matter of books, and personally composed indexes are generally found in the back. Jackson suggests that it is "custom and perhaps physical necessity" which "dictate appropriate kinds of use for separate areas in the book." Jackson, *Marginalia*, 26, 27, 26, 18.

which (in the absence of any further identifying bibliographic information) the specification of page numbers could be more particularly, pointedly meaningless. In spite of the petit denouement of the revelation that the book is *Leaves of Grass* (the scene continues with the girl conversing with her mother and eventually departing for the library with the volume “clutched tight against her lumpy body”⁷⁷), I think it remains the case that the overwhelming flavour of these passages is obscurity.

The “sketch” that these passages come from in “The Library: Four Sketches” is called “Homage.” What is the significance of this title? Yes: there is a broad level of correspondence between the character’s prosaic expression of distaste and Whitman’s use of the vernacular, and a more significant correspondence between the definitiveness of her response and Whitman’s own earnestness. On one level the sketch operates as a purely intentional homage, utterly apt for a representation of the passions. Or, on another count, there is this piece of new writing: “*Leaves of Grass Walt Whitman,*” and perhaps the forced ungrammatical juxtaposition of the separate pieces of bibliographic information can be understood to operate as a poetic parody.⁷⁸ Are we asked to compare the effervescence of the poems in *Leaves of Grass* unfavourably with the fleshy, embodied presence of the girl? This too seems a potential source of the homage’s reference.

⁷⁷ Kees, “The Library,” 70.

⁷⁸ Kees himself was a respected poet. He also worked as a librarian, and as a painter, journalist, composer, and filmmaker, achieving “creditable and recognized work in all these areas.” William T. Ross, *Weldon Kees* (Boston: Twayne / Hall, 1985), 2.

For a reading which considers the girl's volume not just as a book but a library book, however, the identification of *Leaves of Grass Walt Whitman* has consequences well beyond any question of homage (subversive or otherwise). *Leaves of Grass Walt Whitman* is a volume which, after all, may give voice to the following expression:

Who is now reading this?⁷⁹

The girl who marks this volume is in the end never named, neither for the reader of Kees's short story nor for any future reader of the book that she has annotated.

Unknowability has been inscribed into her library book's material unity in a literal and powerful way. Throughout this section I have attempted to describe how "Homage" shows the world the library book moves in to be an enigmatic world. It will now be apparent that in this story the remote partner or third party of Mauss's gift exchange is represented as a self-elected stranger, one who uses marginalia to represent her decision to remain estranged. The especial virtue of this sketch's representation is that its positioning of a person who refuses to give her name at the very centre of its narrative makes this enigma operate as a metonymy.⁸⁰ I believe that

⁷⁹ Walt Whitman, "[Who Is Now Reading This?]," in *Leaves of Grass: A Textual Variorum of the Printed Poems*, ed. Sculley Bradley, Harold W. Blodgett, Arthur Golden, and William White, vol. 2, *Poems, 1860–1867* (New York: New York University Press, 1980), 386.

⁸⁰ The book that the girl brought may have also given voice to the following expression:

Shut not your doors to me proud libraries,
For that which was lacking on all your well-fill'd shelves, yet needed most, I bring,
Forth from the war emerging, a book I have made,
The words of my book nothing, the drift of it every thing,
A book separate, not link'd with the rest nor felt by the intellect,
But you ye untold latencies will thrill to every page.

a productive theorisation of the remote partner in the economy of a library book's circulation is precisely of this nature: an activity of conceptualisation which works to understand such an individual as a stranger. The next section will explore my argument that a library book is always at least partially oriented towards strangers, and that it is a kind of book which must be understood to emanate from strangers as well.

IX. Strangers and strangeness

I have spoken of the world that a library book moves in, and yet neither the analogy nor the theoretical framework I have employed before this point adequately captures this world. The examples of gift exchange from Mauss are associated with clans and tribes and kin groups. Likewise O moves within a limited and exclusive society. Neither of these configurations correspond with the group that a library serves: in a public library, books circulate amongst a public.

Michael Warner asks the question "what is a public?" (contending that "few things have been more important in the development of modernity"), so that he may "speculate about the history of the form and the role it plays in constructing our

A book where the words have been made nothing ("*a dirty filthy book*"), where its reader's own drift – in this case literally inscribed throughout the pages – is all. A thing that she has made: it is as though the girl follows Whitman's invocation, and brings the book of which he speaks. Whitman, "Shut not Your Doors," in *Leaves of Grass: A Textual Variorum*, vol. 2, 456. (I have used the full version of "Shut not Your Doors" from the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. The *Variorum* describes how the poem was substantially extended in the second and sixth editions of Whitman's work.)

social world.”⁸¹ In *Publics and Counterpublics*, texts are central to his analysis:

“without the idea of texts that can be picked up at different times and in different places by otherwise unrelated people, we would not imagine a public as an entity that embraces all the users of that text, whoever they might be.”⁸² In an analogous vein, Elizabeth L. Eisenstein has observed that “by its very nature, a reading public was not only more dispersed; it was also more atomistic and individualistic than a hearing one.”⁸³ Given Warner’s similar theorisation of publics in terms of an essential kind of diffusion, it will not be surprising to learn that one of the main features of publics in Warner’s conceptualisation of them is their “orientation to strangers” (74). In fact, Warner contends, “reaching strangers is public discourse’s primary orientation” (106). Yes: libraries serve communities, and there is a wealth of empirical literature attesting to this fact,⁸⁴ and this thesis is based on a definition of

⁸¹ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 65, 67.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 68. Warner distinguishes several senses of the “public.” The public can be “a kind of social totality,” as in – his examples – the nation, the city, the state, or humanity (65). The public can also be “a concrete audience, a crowd witnessing itself in visible space, as with a theatrical public” (66). His area of investigation, however, specifically concerns a third sense: “the kind of public that comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation” (66). He further stipulates that he intends for “texts” to infer “speech as well as writing” (66), suggesting that “publics are increasingly organised around visual or audio texts” (67–68) such as “visual advertising” and “the chattering of a DJ” (68). While texts (and specifically written texts) are central to Warner’s analysis, it is clear that these are not the only entities involved in the creation of publics. Language, for example, plays a critical role in their creation. Warner recognises this at several moments in his argument, such as when he suggests that “speaking, writing, and thinking involve us – actively and immediately – in a public” (69). It is the specific configuration of a relationship between public, texts, and strangers which drew me to Warner’s analysis, rather than his particular concept of “public,” and instead of other important theorists who have conceptualised the public extensively, such as Jürgen Habermas.

⁸³ Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 1:132.

⁸⁴ The relationship between libraries and communities is explored in a great many works. A recent example is the State Library of Victoria (SLV)’s *Libraries/Building/Communities* project: several reports from this initiative have been referred to throughout this thesis, and appear in the bibliography. Janet Newman offers a counter-position which acts to check overly approbative commentaries on libraries

the public library as an institution which provides resources for use by individuals who are part of a community, however assembled and however large. But I would argue that a community is also a public, and nowhere in the community literature have I found such an explicit treatment of the involvement of the conceptual category of strangers as that which is to be found in Warner, conducted in direct and unflinching language, with an extended consideration of the category's implications. Because of Warner's analysis it is possible to assume a position that is oppositional to the tone of the preponderance of writing on libraries, with an intent which is theoretical.

From any one individual reader's point of view, the library has an orientation to their own self because they use its services. Warner's work has enabled the significant counter-formulation that regardless of how a library might position itself in relation to its social capital, its *other* primary orientation is to strangers. In a public library, the third party – this notional third person who is involved in the reading encounter because the library book is also like a gift object – is more often than not a stranger. This is not an exclusive kind of classification, of course. The person who shares the library book is also in some senses a familiar: a member of one's university, community, school, or language world. And yet often "stranger" is a better characterisation for these individuals, for very simple reasons relating to the

and communities. In the context of United Kingdom public library services, Newman suggests, "the response to the fractionalization of the 'general public' produced an essentialist and homogenizing equivalence between identity and community." Newman, "Re-mapping the Public: Public Libraries and the Public Sphere," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 6 (2007): 904.

size of the population a library serves and the kind of undirected and arbitrary circulation a library book experiences.⁸⁵ The unknown past and future addressees who are implied by Whitman's question "Who is now reading this?" makes the figure of the stranger (and indeed the wider category of enigma) one of special resonance for the library book.

Warner suggests that publics "cannot be understood apart from the way they make stranger relationality normative, reshaping the most intimate dimensions of subjectivity around co-membership with indefinite persons in a context of routine action" (76). At another point, Warner writes that strangers "are no longer merely people who one does not yet know; rather, an environment of strangerhood is the necessary premise of some of our most prized ways of being" (75). I would suggest that there are two primary consequences which can be garnered from Warner's analysis for the library book. The first is related to the way that "an environment of strangerhood" can have significant subjective consequence. Warner suggests that although "we continue to think of strangerhood and intimacy as opposites," there is a "dependence on the co-presence of strangers in our innermost activity" (76). *Leaves of Grass's* "who is now reading this?" is not addressed to a hypothetical past or future reading: it is to the individual with the book in hand. "As if I were not

⁸⁵ The way that I conceptualise the group that the library serves is not easily defined with reference to Ferdinand Tönnies's ideal types of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*. It comprises associative elements of the former, but also estranging elements of the latter. Although I have elected to elaborate the library with reference to Warner's conceptualisation of the public, it is clear that the communal ethos that the library is committed to tempers a public which is conceived in terms of a strong *gesellschaft*. A limitation of Warner's conceptualisation of the public is perhaps suggested by the evident *gesellschaft* strain in his work, perhaps symbolised by Warner's tendency to conceive of a primarily urban public.

puzzled at myself!" Whitman exclaims in response to his own question.⁸⁶ I think that the category of strangers manifested in a library book begins to suggest reading's estranging capacities; that is, the strangeness and possible estrangedness of one's own self in reading. Secondly and more pressing is the opportunity to properly constitute the remote party in the reading encounter with reference to the unknown. Because the material evidence of strangers' reading practices becomes unavoidably instilled in an individual's own reading experience, the library book offers a function which is analogous to Warner's "reshaping [of] the most intimate dimensions of subjectivity around co-membership with indefinite persons in a context of routine action" for the activity of reading. Looking again to O, we see that it is possible even to imagine readings which directly seek such an intersubjective exchange; connoisseurs who know the presence of alterity and reach for it. O comes to René directly from another lover, and he seeks "over her person for the mark of a god"; at another moment, O realises that what each of her two main lovers "was going to seek in her would be the mark of the other, the trace of the other's passage."⁸⁷ I have considered the affective features of a library book's phenomenology, but I believe that this potentially productive feature is the library book's outstanding characteristic. It is not an automatic or necessary characteristic, but rather a facility and an opportunity for a reader to wilfully and with desire involve the unknown in his or her reading encounter.

⁸⁶ Walt Whitman, "[Who Is Now Reading This?]," 386.

⁸⁷ Réage, *Story of O*, 147, 112. These examples are clear instantiations of Mauss's argument in *The Gift* that the "bond created by things is in fact a bond between persons" (10).

Charles Lamb described people who borrowed books as “creators of odd volumes.” He was describing those who take books from his own library, and his intent was remonstrative (“I mean your *borrowers of books*—those mutilators of collections, spoilers of the symmetry of shelves, and creators of odd volumes”⁸⁸), but by enlisting “odd” for books that are borrowed and lent he has hit upon “strange” and thus betrays more than he knows. Library books are indeed odd volumes – they are the material incarnation of strangeness, or alterity. The material unity of a book is affected so fundamentally by its introduction into a library system that it is able to manifest alterity as a feature and a facility. At the beginning of this chapter I noted that Foucault had described a book’s material unity as “a weak, accessory unity in relation to the discursive unity of which it is the support” (25). Perhaps, as Foucault maintains, material unity is not a strong unity; but I hope I have indicated in this chapter that it is not inconsequential either. The library book is a demotic site of and for other readers. Through its unmanageably amended material unity, the library book brings stranger relationality in reading with it. True to its initially attested availability, the library book is the infrastructure of this kind of reading; it is where this reading is made ours.

⁸⁸ Charles Lamb, “The Two Races of Men,” in *Essays of Elia: First Series*, ed. N. L. Hallward and S. C. Hill (1895; repr., London: Macmillan, 1945), 38; italics in the original.

X. The duration of the allegory

One final note in this account of the critical aspects of the ontology of library books; one last characteristic that the model can offer to experience. Much of this chapter has proceeded from the conceit of *Story of O* as an allegory for a library book. It is useful, finally, to note that there is an abstract and yet intimate relationship between the form of allegory and the facility of the library book as I have conceived it. Paul de Man sees allegory as a resolutely temporal event, hinging on succession: "It remains necessary, if there is to be allegory, that the allegorical sign refer to another sign that precedes it...it is of the essence of this previous sign to be pure anteriority."⁸⁹ De Man opposes allegory to symbol, which – acknowledging Hans-Georg Gadamer and S. T. Coleridge respectively – he describes as "founded on an intimate unity between the image that rises up before the senses and the supersensory totality that the image suggests" (174) or, more succinctly, as an "organic coherence of synecdoche" (177). Thus for de Man, "the prevalence of allegory always corresponds to the unveiling of an authentically temporal destiny" (190), whilst the symbol is an attempt by the self to hide from time. De Man identifies one of allegory's fundamental structures as "the tendency of...language

⁸⁹ Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Interpretation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Charles S. Singleton (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), 190. De Man is investigating "the change that takes place in the latter half of the eighteenth century, when the word 'symbol' tends to supplant other denominations for figural language, including that of 'allegory'" (173). He finds that "the asserted superiority of the symbol over allegory, so frequent during the nineteenth century, is one of the forms taken by [Romanticism's] tenacious self-mystification," and that the symbol "will never be able to gain an entirely good poetic conscience" (191).

toward narrative, the spreading out along the axis of an imaginary time in order to give duration to what is, in fact, simultaneous within the subject" (206). So whereas a symbol expresses "simultaneity" (190), connoting all manner of extravagant integration, de Man's allegory facilitates the practice of a habituating, artificial, and interpretative concurrency.

Allegory promotes concurrency, and this fact is here noted because encountering the library book as an odd volume is a skill of co-incidence and not the impulse of a moment. Allegory *formally* represents spreading out the kind of presence required for such a connection along the duration of the library book encounter. Perhaps even more significantly, allegory is also formally apt because one of its impulses is to connect attracted and alike things (such as different readers; such as a reader and their book), all the while insisting on their alterity via a situation of "pure anteriority." Allegory presents the opportunity to refuse the kind of didactic or solipsistic readings which are based on "the love of a master who is capable of pitilessly appropriating unto himself that which he loves."⁹⁰ Allegory coincides with the library book more than a symbol because it demonstrates the way a library book can be functionalised: an effort, in real time, to move towards the enigma of other readings ardently, all the while recognising them in their insurmountable difference.

⁹⁰ Réage, *Story of O*, 240.

XI. Caveats and exceptions

In this chapter I have theorised the library book as a type by engaging in a sustained description of some of its critical ontological characteristics. Based on these characteristics, I have tried to imagine a new phenomenology for the library book which responds to its incarnation of connection with others; a phenomenology which may have some interpretive value for projects like literary criticism and book history. In this final section, I will do no more than tie up a few loose methodological ends. I would like to acknowledge the particular focus of my analysis and so remark on the applicability of my account. This is to say that I would like to take a moment to recognise the necessarily figural nature of my conception of a library book as a model, and to note some of its boundaries and limitations as well.

The allegory of O I have offered in this chapter, and the investigation of the library book I have subsequently undertaken, was launched by focussing on availability as a property and circulation as a feature. This means that analysis has operated to highlight certain aspects of a library book and entirely neglect others. What elements of a phenomenological encounter with a library book have been left undeveloped? David Felsenstein's observation that "borrowing books causes the waking nightmare of time running out"⁹¹ identifies urgency in reading as a feature which should figure in any comprehensive ontology of a library book. At another point, Felsenstein remarks:

⁹¹ Swartz, *Instant Karma*, January 23.

I have learned from libraries that where you put a book matters. Shelve Thurber beside Machiavelli and watch how both become their opposites. Edgar Allan Poe next to Emily Dickinson remains decoration, but next to Betty Crocker it transmutes into something ghoulish.⁹²

A library's particular co-location of books can influence the psychology of reading and direct the reception of a particular work, Felsenstein suggests, and this too warrants further investigation. In Anthony Boucher's short story "QL 696. C9," the narrator describes a visit by detective Donald MacDonald to a suspect's home: "The teacher's single apartment was comfortably undistinguished. His own books, MacDonald noticed, were chosen with unerring taste; the library volumes on a table seemed incongruous."⁹³ A library book customarily entails a different kind of personal commitment than other types of books. It has been bailed over and thus must be returned, and one potential consequence of this is that a kind of dispensability can attach to it. In the Boucher case, dispensability relates to identity – a library book is transient in a life and is not involved in articulating identity in the same durational manner that a personally owned or given book is – but the kinds of dispensability associated with a library book do not need to be limited to this. Library books may be dispensable in that they can have a more integral relationship to expediency, serviceability, substitutability, or replacability than other kinds of books. Consider, for example, this text from a student support website: "it's easy to convince yourself that your essay cannot be done: there's not enough time left, there

⁹² Ibid., January 9. This passage was quoted in the previous chapter.

⁹³ Anthony Boucher, "QL 696. C9," in *In the Stacks: Short Stories about Libraries and Librarians*, ed. Michael Cart (Woodstock, NY: Overlook, 2003), 165.

are no books left in the library.”⁹⁴ Sometimes a library’s greatest virtue not that it holds a specific book, but that it holds books of certain kinds generally. The book utilised under this circumstance will of course give rise to a different kind of phenomenological encounter than the experience of a book which has been particularly desired and attained.

I have mentioned urgency, arrangement, dispensability, and expediency in relation to the library book. All are highly suggestive, and fruitful for further analysis. Maybe some or none of these are properties or features in the way that circulation and availability have been theorised. Perhaps they could more properly be described as effects: somewhat weaker than properties or features, but of a certain influence nevertheless. It may be that with sufficient analysis and critical determination effects resolve into features. In any event, none of these characteristics which attach to books is inconsequential for the reading encounter. Suffice to say that if I had accorded any of them the attention that circulation has received in this chapter, a slightly different picture of a library book may have emerged.

Regardless, a picture of the circulating library book is indeed what has been articulated, and in the course of developing this model I have often alluded to “the library book” in inclusive terms. The formulation of the library book which has been outlined in this chapter, however, will not be applicable to all library books for many reasons. A library book which circulates, which prompts an affective response,

⁹⁴ University of Bristol History Society, “Don’t Panic!,” accessed February 27, 2010, <http://www.uob.historysoc.co.uk/dontpanic.php>.

which reveals and collects unmanageable connections and which is available to a reading encounter which elicits alterity, is the general or prominent case. But there are exceptions – indeed, entire other ways of being – for library books. Now that a general outline has been established, it is proper to acknowledge these exceptions, and by doing so define a kind of exclusion zone for my analysis.

There are books which are entirely outside the terms of this analysis because they are never (or rarely) procured by public libraries. There are many reasons why certain works cannot circulate (they may be banned in particular countries or by particular library authorities or they may be extraordinarily unwieldy); and there are many examples of such works (in its original publication run, *Helmut Newton's Sumo* was coffee-table sized and came with its own stand⁹⁵). Other works are lost to history. Still yet other books may not be practicable to circulate, or may circulate under stricter supervision: very small books, for instance, or ephemera, artists' books, limited editions, and other rarities.

I have dedicated this chapter to the investigation of an ontology of circulation, and yet it is plainly the case that there are multitudes of library books which may not conform to such an ontology. Although the ontological *condition* of availability would seem to be essentially common among library books which haven't been excepted as special cases in the paragraphs above, their *rate* of circulation is

⁹⁵ Taschen, "Helmet Newton's *Sumo*," accessed December 6, 2010, http://www.taschen.com/pages/en/catalogue/photography/all/02601/facts.helmut_newtons_sumo.htm.

markedly more variable.⁹⁶ There are library books which are specially impeded as regards their circulation, such as books stored offsite from a library's main building that must be specially requested, or reference books which cannot be borrowed in the way that other books can. Brand new library books will not have circulated yet. Moreover other library books simply will not circulate, even though they may be fully sanctioned to do so. A library book may be beneath the notice of readers, and at any one moment experience radically declining circulation, or no circulation at all. The blog *Awful Library Books* is filled with examples of books that could be described in these terms.⁹⁷ All of these cases work to show that while the feature of circulation may be generally applicable to many library books, it is applicable on a highly relative and very mobile scale.

⁹⁶ Some books experience tremendous circulation, and there several sources from which information about these books' identity might be gleaned. Britain's Public Lending Right (PLR) keeps records on the most borrowed titles and the most borrowed authors in British libraries. At the beginning of 2011, the PLR reported its annual data for the previous year, which found that the thriller *Swimsuit* by James Patterson and Maxine Paetro was the most borrowed book in the United Kingdom. Nielsen Book offers LibScan, a commercial service which compiles borrowing figures for the UK and makes this data freely available to participating libraries. *Bookseller* reported that LibScan statistics identified Dan Brown's *The Lost Symbol* as the most loaned book in the UK in 2010. The Public Lending Right annual report in Australia lists the Australian books most commonly held in Australian libraries; the most recent issue of this report covered the period 2009–10. The Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) previously maintained a "Top 1000" list which captured the works most widely held throughout its substantial worldwide member network. The last update of this data, however, was made in 2005. At this time, the three most commonly held works were the Bible, the census of the United States of America, and *Mother Goose*. Public Lending Right, "UK Children's Writers Dominate PLR's Most Borrowed Authors List," news release, February 18, 2011, [http://www.plr.uk.com/mediaCentre/mediaReleases/feb2011\(1\).pdf](http://www.plr.uk.com/mediaCentre/mediaReleases/feb2011(1).pdf); Nielsen BookScan, "Nielsen LibScan Panel," Nielsen Book, accessed March 22, 2011, http://www.nielsenbookscan.co.uk/uploads/LibScanPanel_Q&A_Mar11.pdf; Philip Jones, "Top 1,000 Titles Loaned 40m Times in 2010," *Bookseller*, January 21, 2011, <http://www.thebookseller.com/news/top-1000-titles-loaned-40m-times-2010.html>; Public Lending Right Committee, *Annual Report, 2009–10* (Canberra: Office for the Arts, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2010), 17–25; OCLC, "The 2005 Top 1000," accessed December 7, 2010, <http://www.oclc.org/research/top1000/>.

⁹⁷ Mary Kelly and Holly Hibner, *Awful Library Books* (blog), accessed March 26, 2011, <http://awfullibrarybooks.net>.

Michel Foucault described his *Archaeology of Knowledge* as a project which attempted “to define a particular site by the exteriority of its vicinity,”⁹⁸ and the final section of this chapter has been modelled after his exercise. The exteriority of the vicinity of the library book has proven to be vast indeed. I hope, however, that the extent of this exterior, and more particularly its heterogeneity, will operate as an implicit sanction of the investigation itself. A substantial and diverse space has been suspended in order to discover a pattern which is coherent for the circulating library book as a kind. Although general, there is a phenomenological consistency to the circulating library book, and in this consistency its model can be used to enrich and inform interpretative endeavour.

⁹⁸ Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 18.

4. Classification

I. Tensions and definitions

Book classification as an activity can be refractory, and literature presents the most acute challenge of all. Literary writing has proven elusive for library practices of classification, most especially those practices which involve subject classification. Because of the nature of literature's challenge, I have used fiction as a stage for the encounter of classification in this chapter. Material on fiction classification in the library is remarkable for the conflicts and difficulties it betrays. Looking to the professional literature in order to figure an encounter between the patron and fiction classification in the library catalogue and on its shelves, these problematics are incredibly compelling. I came to realise that the analytical eye should not ignore or resist the pull of the struggles which manifest in fiction classification's activity; they are such a constituent part of its story that it would be analytically remiss to do so. Therefore in this chapter I describe a different species of encounter from the previous two, which were directed towards library users. The practices of classification in the library are largely outside the province of the patron, and so the encounter of this chapter has a different amplification or level of conduction. It concerns the encounter of fiction and classification.

Thus this chapter does not have the scope of application which characterised those that preceded it. The design of the encounter for patronage and the book was inclusive, and aimed to incorporate researchers, students, and readers generally in the terms of its reference: anyone, in essence, who visits the library and uses its

books. Classification has eluded an encounter constructed around explicit library presence. My analysis grew inexorably in a specialist direction, and the classification encounter resolved itself metacritically instead. This chapter could have been an essay about the phenomenologies of fiction classification as a precursor, companion, or alterant to the phenomenologies of reading fiction. However its involvement with reading is less extensive than that of the previous chapters, and it only incidentally treats the creation of phenomena. The classification encounter has been found to present a set of observations and conceptual tools which relate to the category of fiction itself.¹

This chapter construes the relationship between fiction and classification in several manners: it examines a fictional representation of classification; explores the classificatory practices of fiction; and speculates on the expressive differences between classification and fiction. In the next section I enlist Carlos María

Domínguez's novella *The Paper House* to explore some general issues around book

¹ The caveat that a metacritical focus on fiction limits the scope of classification's application itself comes with a caveat. It is widely recognised that literature is a library material with one of the broadest ranges of appeal. James K. Bracken writes that literature is "both with and without a specific identity" and "with and without a specific constituency." The library

is the place where august scholars and ambitious readers still vie for the opportunity to obtain the circulating copies of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, and...Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*...The potential uses of any one [literary] work are many. This cannot be said of the literature of pharmacy, engineering, or chemistry, or even of the literature of sociology or economics; the central literatures of these fields are really only intended to be intelligible to their practitioners.

Evidently Bracken's remarks are contestable from a perspective of scholastic interdisciplinarity, but they are substantially apposite outside an academic context. Bracken, "Literature," in *The Humanities and the Library*, ed. Nena Couch and Nancy Allen, 2nd ed. (Chicago: American Library Association, 1993), 88.

classifications and arrangements. This work particularly clarifies the conflicts which are involved in their practice, and suggests how classification in the library has been narrowed down to the very precise purpose of access and retrieval. The following two sections aim to demonstrate how this purpose is especially acute in the case of fiction. Examining professional literature from librarians and theorists involved in organising adult fiction in libraries (as distinct from juvenile or young adult fiction), I consider the intractable nature of this material for classification. The difficulties gather particularly around the identification and definition of the subject(s) of fictional works. The final three sections use this tension to launch a more theoretical consideration of the relationship between fiction and classification. Using anthropological work on classification – including the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss – as well as Jorge Luis Borges’s short story “The Library of Babel,” the difference between classification’s subject approach and the exemplary practice of fiction is explored. The expressive properties of classification are substantially divergent from those of fictional expression, and this difference indicates that classificatory language may act as a productive counterinstance to fiction. The collective language of classification is not to be operationalised by writers and readers in a way that is familiar to literary studies and in this way works to manifest a space of non-intervention.

It will be apparent that there is a flavour of discord to all of these analyses. Discord is not antipathy, but I have found that encounters between fiction and classification regularly (and ultimately) resolve in terms of dissonance. Fiction and

classification seem to trouble each other, and the tension between them is the motif of this chapter.

Before proceeding I would like to make a few introductory remarks as to the rationale for fiction's selection, and classification's inference. It needs to be acknowledged that the concept of classification is significantly multifaceted and multiply committed. Classification is a form, process, and function all at once, and it takes place in language and in spaces and through an array of material and digital incarnations. There are, moreover, a great many other library practices which are closely related to or involved in classification. In this chapter, classification is foremost invoked as a classification scheme or categorisation arrangement. However, classification also relates to descriptive cataloguing, metadata, the production of catalogues, cataloguing rules, indexing practices, subject headings, and so on.² I particularly attend to subject classification, but as Ernest Cushing

² A sense of the compositeness of library practices around cataloguing and classification can be derived from a remark by Francis Miksa, when he identifies

the principal tools for library cataloging: the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, 2nd ed. (AACR2), with revisions through 2002; the International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD); the Library of Congress Subject Heading system (LCSH); the Dewey Decimal Classification, twenty-second edition (DDC22); the Library of Congress Classification (LCC); and the MARC21 encoding formats for bibliographic and authority records.

These classification tools are themselves not insubstantial: at the time of writing, "the complete Library of Congress Classification system is available in 41 individually printed classification schedules." Miksa's enumeration is a concise demonstration of his observation that the period from 1950 onwards has seen library cataloging and classification transform "into a strikingly complex matter based on extraordinary amounts of technical detail." Miksa, "A Review Article: Chan, Taylor, and the Future of Cataloging Texts," review of *Cataloging and Classification: An Introduction*, by Lois

Richardson makes clear, “there may be as many kinds of classification as there are kinds of likeness.”³ In addition to subject classification, Richardson identifies logical, chronological, alphabetical, and mathematical classifications, among others.⁴ “Classification” is something of a naïve way of referring to an area of substantially varied professional and intellectual practices and commitments. One of the findings of library work on fiction is that patrons seem to prefer to access their fiction directly from the shelf,⁵ and guided by this I use “classification” to primarily invoke the activity of putting actual book objects into an arrangement. Furthermore, it is the inextricability of subject which has commanded the attention of fiction librarians, and this is why it is subject classification that compels my notice.

The selection of fiction as the object of analysis above other literary forms also requires an explanation and a justification. René Wellek and Austin Warren describe how tragedy and epic were conceived of as the major literary kinds by Aristotle and Horace, with Aristotle recognising a further distinction between drama, epic, and lyric. They suggest that modern literary theory tends to “divide imaginative literature (*Dichtung*) into fiction (novel, short story, epic), drama (whether in prose or verse), and poetry (centering on what corresponds to the ancient ‘lyric poetry’).”⁶

Mai Chan, with the assistance of Theodora L. Hodges, and *Introduction to Cataloging and Classification*, by Arlene G. Taylor, with the assistance of David P. Miller, *Library Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (2009): 132–33; Library of Congress, “Classification: Cataloging Distribution Services,” accessed February 20, 2011, <http://www.loc.gov/cds/products/lcClass.php>; Miksa, “A Review Article,” 138.

³ Ernest Cushing Richardson, *Classification: Theoretical and Practical* (New York: Scribner’s, 1901), 8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 8–11.

⁵ I consider this finding in greater detail in the fourth section of this chapter.

⁶ René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harvest / Harcourt Brace, 1956), 217.

Wellek and Warren here provide a concise overview of the contemporary literary context in which this chapter is necessarily situated, serving to define the domains of imaginative literature which are to be left untouched by it.

These other literary kinds are excluded because the institutional practice of libraries to treat literature as first of all fiction. One of the key library manuals for literature, the second and most recent edition of the American Library Association (ALA)'s *Guidelines on Subject Access to Individual Works of Fiction, Drama, Etc.*, betrays this concentration when it acknowledges that it has "focused on individual works of fiction."⁷ (Indeed, the authors of this handbook go on to insist that "much more work remains to be done"; in particular, "consideration needs to be extended to other literary genres and other works of the imagination."⁸) In one of the major works of fiction classification, Clare Beghtol explains that she has focussed on fictional works "because they may reasonably be treated as central to scholarly research in literature."⁹ Beghtol observes that fiction, written in prose, is the form that is "closest to documents for which subject analytic techniques have already been most fully developed and tested," and fiction "is thus a convenient place to start investigating

⁷ ALA (American Library Association), *Guidelines on Subject Access to Individual Works of Fiction, Drama, Etc.*, prepared by the Subcommittee on the Revision of the Guidelines on Subject Access to Individual Works of Fiction [Hiroko Aikawa, Jan DeSirey, Linda Gabel, Susan Hayes, Kathy Nystrom, Mary Dabney Wilson, and Pat Thomas], 2nd ed. (Chicago: ALA, 2000), 2. The ALA's identification of "individual" fictional works is important. As the area of my investigation is book objects and their shelf arrangement, I primarily infer the novel in this chapter. Collections of short stories are perforce classified for the library shelf – the DDC in particular has elaborate arrangements for "Works by or about More than One Author" in a table which is used with its literature class – but individual short stories are not. Melvil Dewey, *Dewey Decimal Classification and Relative Index*, ed. Joan S. Mitchell et al., 22nd ed., 4 vols. (Dublin, OH: OCLC, 2003), 2:623; capitalisation in the original.

⁸ ALA, *Guidelines on Subject Access to Individual Works of Fiction*, 3.

⁹ Clare Beghtol, *The Classification of Fiction: The Development of a System Based on Theoretical Principles* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1994), 16.

the possibility of classifying the content of literary works.”¹⁰ The prejudice for fiction can also be discerned in the qualification fiction classification scholar Rune Eriksson makes when he writes that the “indexing of fiction and (sometimes) poetry and plays is now included in more than a few bibliographic databases.”¹¹ More generally, it has been observed that “in English critical language, *fiction* as the designation for an invented narrative—novel, novella, short story—has been current for more than a century and is, of course, a standard term for publishers, book reviewers, and librarians.”¹² The selection of fiction over other forms of literary expression as the subject of this chapter is sanctioned by institutional concentration.¹³

Fiction has been historically significant within public library collections, and there is much evidence to suggest that the predominance of fiction has been a consistent feature of their circulation records. Nick Moore argues that “while mass education was the driving force behind the establishment of the early public libraries, they were mainly used for fiction reading.”¹⁴ Describing the period

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹ Rune Eriksson, “The Classification and Indexing of Imaginative Literature” (paper, American Society for Information Science and Technology’s 16th Workshop for the Special Interest Group on Classification Research, Charlotte, NC, October 29, 2005), 2, <http://www.db.dk/binaries/The%20Classification%20and%20Indexing%20of%20Imaginative%20Literature.doc>.

¹² Dorrit Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 1; italics in the original.

¹³ The confluence of literature and fiction means that it is imperative to keep in view Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen’s formulation of the detrimental structuralist and post-structuralist tendency to “facilitate the identification” of the two. Such a tendency acts to “tacitly [assume] that the paradigmatic kinds of literature are the novel and short story.” The authors contend that “literature, unlike fiction, is an evaluative concept and a work is recognized as a literary work partially through the recognition of the intention to present something to the reader that is humanly interesting. This is not a necessary implication of the fictive stance.” Lamarque and Olsen, “Literature and Fiction,” in *Theory’s Empire: An Anthology of Dissent*, ed. Daphne Patai and Will H. Corral (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 637, 639.

¹⁴ Nick Moore, “Public Library Trends,” *Cultural Trends* 13, no. 1 (2004): 30.

between 1850 and 1900, Moore observes that “in most libraries over 50 per cent of loans were fiction, rising to over 80 per cent in some cases.”¹⁵ In the 1920s “fiction still dominated lending: in the mid-1920s it represented 37 per cent of lending stock but generated 78 per cent of the issues.”¹⁶ In 1958 R. S. Walker commented that “in the majority of public lending libraries fiction occupies half the shelf space, and 60 per cent of the issue”;¹⁷ in 1986 Gregg Sapp identified some of the “numerous surveys [which] indicate that fiction ranks consistently as the most popular type of library material.”¹⁸ Figures reported in Britain for 2005–6 show that 48 percent of all loans were adult fiction (24 percent were adult non-fiction, 23 percent children’s fiction, and 5 percent children’s non-fiction).¹⁹ In the public institution of the public library, fiction persistently constitutes the area of greatest user activity.

This significance must be contextualised with the recognition that, originally, the popularity of fiction was a source of great perturbation for the public library service. The debate that this institutional apprehension provoked in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has become known as the “fiction question” or “fiction problem.” Esther Jane Carrier observes that “from the earliest days of the public library movement and of the American Library Association, the questions of how

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 34.

¹⁷ R. S. Walker, “Problem Child: Some Observations on Fiction, with a Sketch of a New System of Classification,” *Librarian and Book World* 47, no. 2 (1958): 21; capitalisation and punctuation in this quotation have been altered.

¹⁸ Gregg Sapp, “The Levels of Access: Subject Approaches to Fiction,” *Reference Quarterly [RQ]* 25, no. 4 (1986): 489.

¹⁹ These percentages were calculated from data recorded by CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, United Kingdom), *Public Library Statistics: 2006–07 Estimates and 2005–06 Actuals* (London: CIPFA, 2006), 17. This edition is the most recent version of CIPFA’s public library statistics report which is freely available to non-subscribers.

much and what kind of fiction should be included in book collections [were] unresolved." In "the first half of the twentieth century," Carrier writes, "the fiction controversy continued to maintain a place of prominence in library literature."²⁰ Professional debate may have continued, but Carrier suggests that by the beginning of the twentieth century "the prejudice against fiction...that had existed earlier in the minds of many had almost disappeared,"²¹ and in any case the appetite of public library users for fiction has remained formidable since the public library's inception. Another contextualising factor is much more significant, and strikingly more urgent. The prominence and popularity of fiction in library collections is discrepant with the ministration it is accorded. "Nearly all American libraries own literature; few, however, handle it in special ways," writes the contributing author on literature to the volume *The Humanities and the Library*.²² In spite of the importance of literature within library collections, its treatment has not been particularly customised nor

²⁰ Esther Jane Carrier, *Fiction in Public Libraries, 1900–1950* (Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1985), ix. The aim of Carrier's work is to "present a historical survey of the attitudes of librarians and of the policies of public libraries in the United States toward fiction during the years 1900–1950 as reflected in the major library periodical literature of the period." Dee Garrison surveys the "fiction problem" in American libraries for the period preceding Carrier's analysis, and Robert Snape offers an account of the issue in the British library context. Carrier, *Fiction in Public Libraries*, ix; Garrison, "Moral Passage: The Fiction Problem," in *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876–1920* (New York: Free Press / Macmillan, 1979), 65–101; Snape, "The Great Fiction Question," in *Leisure and the Rise of the Public Library* (London: Library Association, 1995), 45–65.

²¹ Carrier, *Fiction in Public Libraries*, 15. Katherine M. Wisser traces a similar trajectory when investigating the classification schemes of social libraries in the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century. Analysing the place of fiction, religion, and science in these systems as they furnish a "comparative realm for understanding the intellectual climate of early nineteenth-century America," she finds that "fiction is less prominent in the early library catalogs but gains a solid presence in later catalogs, paralleling its presence in the American cultural market. In addition the class names *Fiction* and *Novels and tales* become commonplace in classification systems." Wisser, "The Organization of Knowledge and Bibliographic Classification in Nineteenth-Century America" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009), 226, 227; italics in the original.

²² Bracken, "Literature," 86.

generally devised and developed. This lack of a formulated practice is evident even at the level of institutional identification:

Few libraries will claim that they are literature libraries... On the other hand, identify on any American campus the library facility named 'general library,' 'humanities library,' or 'main library,' or the public library in any city or town, and you will locate a library in which a significant portion of the collection likely consists of literature.²³

The details of this neglect will be considered in greater detail in the middle sections of this chapter. It suffices now to note that in spite of its pervasive presence, literature within libraries has been rendered almost invisible in practical and critical ways.

Practices around fiction classification are, in a sense, the "text" of this chapter, and this is why the encounter that emerges bears less upon library moments, and more upon fictional reflexivities. These practices are the vehicle for some of my final speculations about a new kind of mobilisation which classification offers those interested in textual expression.

²³ Ibid., 88. James H. Sweetland makes an observation which acts as to qualify Bracken's contention by identifying libraries which do in fact handle literature in special ways, or can be understood to be some version of a "literature library." He lists collections which act to preserve fiction "of any quality, so long as it is in a particular genre, or on a particular subject." These include the Russell B. Nye Popular Culture Collection at Michigan State University and Bowling Green State University's collection of popular culture, as well as others which specialise in science fiction, mystery, horror, romance, and more. Sweetland also refers the reader to Lee Ash and William G. Miller's *Subject Collections* for further examples. I use Sweetland's list as a specialist resource which acts to qualify Bracken's observation, but maintain that Bracken's point about the general counterintuitiveness of the concept "literature libraries" survives these exceptions. Sweetland, "Managing Adult Fiction Collections in Public Libraries," in *Managing Fiction in Libraries*, ed. Margaret Kinnell (London: Library Association, 1991), 93.

II. Classification's purposes and purpose

Carlos María Domínguez's novella *The Paper House* offers two iconic expressions of the arrangement of books. Carlos Brauer, a Uruguayan bibliophile – a reader of “cannibal pride” and “ever-increasing voracity,” he “devoured every book he could lay his hands on”²⁴ – amassed a renowned private library at his home in Montevideo. He organised his twenty thousand volumes using a personally developed classification scheme, implemented via a card index. He told his friend “he was working on a system of decimal numbers that would be sufficiently flexible to allow him to change the position of books according to certain dynamic considerations” (50). His system was at least partially based on affinities between authors (“how hard it was to avoid putting two authors who had quarrelled on the same shelf...it was unthinkable to put a book by Borges next to one by García Lorca, whom the Argentine author once described as a ‘professional Andalusian’”²⁵), and the immense undertaking troubled his equilibrium. His friend reports despondently that he had “ignored the signs that [Brauer] was losing touch with reality” (50); he learnt from mutual friends that Brauer “was still working on his index, was spending a lot of time studying higher mathematics, and...was showing signs not only of exhaustion but of madness” (52). When Carlos Brauer's index was destroyed

²⁴ Carlos María Domínguez, *The Paper House*, trans. Nick Caistor (London: Harvill Secker / Random House, 2005), 43, 39.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 50. The image of the quarrelling books brings to mind Jonathan Swift's satire, *The Battle of the Books*.

by a fire, he “lost all possibility of finding most of his books, of even knowing on which shelf they might be if he could not remember exactly where he had put them.”²⁶ The blaze “ended all his hopes of classifying his library” (66). “It was,” his friend relates, “a tragedy for him” (60).

Carlos Brauer retreated further from society. He journeyed to an isolated part of the Atlantic coastline of Uruguay, and enlisted the services of a local builder. He had a house built on this strange shoreline, “between lagoon and ocean” (79), telling the builder to “turn his books into bricks” (70). And so:

In a week the labourer raised, page by page, volume by volume, edition by edition, the walls of this hut on the sands of Rocha; Carlos Brauer’s life’s work disappeared under the cement. One work destroyed inside another. Not just sealed up. Demolished in cement. (73)

²⁶ Ibid., 60. It is intriguing to speculate on the consequence of the destruction of a library like Brauer’s for an individual trained in memory techniques. Mary Carruthers has undertaken a comprehensive study of medieval *memoria* or “trained memory,” which is “educated and disciplined according to a well-developed pedagogy that was a part of the elementary memory arts.” Carruthers explains that the principle of *memoria*

is to ‘divide’ the material to be remembered into pieces short enough to be recalled in single units and to key these into some sort of rigid, easily reconstructable order. This provides one with a ‘random-access’ memory system, by means of which one can immediately and securely find a particular bit of information, rather than having to start from the beginning each time in order laboriously to reconstruct the whole system.

Carruthers illustrates the practice most evocatively when she describes Augustine dictating to three or four secretaries on various subjects simultaneously, with a “clarity as though reading from a book before his eyes.” While Carruthers recognises that Augustine consulted his books at other moments in the composition process, *memoria* concisely elucidates how print functions as external memory. Bereft of this apparatus, individuals like Brauer who have not developed memory techniques are at a distinct disadvantage when their proxy is destroyed. In this way, Brauer implicitly (and tragically) demonstrates the scriptist orientation of contemporary experience. Scriptism is a theme that will be returned to in my analysis of Borges’s “The Library of Babel.” Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 8, 7.

The books the builder used and the order he put them in was immaterial. Brauer lived in this house, a hermit's existence, until a letter arrived from a former lover who knew nothing of his new situation. She requested that a book she had given him be returned to her for her work, and Brauer tore holes in his house in search of it. Once he located the volume and consigned it to the mail, he was unable to fix the walls that had fallen. The house is destroyed, and Brauer abandons it, setting to wander again. It is the last the narrator of the story is able to discover of him.

The Paper House is the very tale of trouble for the arrangement of books. As the first site of investigation for this chapter it supplies a clear instance of the difficulties of book organisations and classifications registered on the representational level. Within its fictional enterprise it serially depicts an experiment with and failure of each scheme it imagines, and is near on remorseless in its vision.²⁷ Carlos Brauer is

²⁷ Although I will not consider the theme of madness in any detail here, it is clearly implicated through the failure of Brauer's arrangements. Developing this theme, reviewer Janelle Martin wrote that "*The Paper House* draws readers in and will cause many to re-evaluate their relationship to their books. If cataloguing methods are stages within the disease, then most readers are far from the illness inflicted on Brauer." Madness is a motif which is regularly invoked in relation to the library: Eric Graeber's anthology investigating "the variety and range of reactions to libraries filtered through the imagination of the fiction writer over the centuries" is entitled *Magic and Madness in the Library*. Debra Castillo explicitly invokes madness as a theme in relation to many of the fictional depictions of libraries she investigates, including Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*. Castillo suggests that a

multiplication of meaning...becomes a weight bearing down on the librarian, catapulting him from knowledge into dream and madness. The presence of books acts as a catalyst in this transformation. The librarian, who has lived so long in the midst of books, finds that the project of saying is foreclosed before he can start. The pressure of forms ensures his silence and initiates his descent into madness.

Martin, review of *The Paper House*, by Carlos María Domínguez, *Ready Steady Book*, July 6, 2006, <http://www.readysteadybook.com/BookReview.aspx?isbn=1843432080>; Graeber, *Magic and Madness in the Library: Protagonists among the Stacks*, ed. Graeber (Delhi, NY: Birch Brook, 1999), 9; Castillo, *The*

an utterly thwarted arranger of books. The purview of his difficulties is indeed inclusive when the iconicity of his two book arrangements and the complementarity of this iconicity is observed. As structures, both are unquestionably forms of book organisation, but they exist inversely to each other: as much manipulation of the books' order went in one as disregard into the other. The carefully wrought classification system and the house that is constructed of books as though they were bricks constitute a model of intentional order and a model of intentional disorder, and such a continuum endows an ambition of comprehensiveness to *The Paper House's* representation of book arrangements. This novella is resonant not only because of the paradigmatic stance of its two book arrangements, however. Through Brauer's frustrated endeavours, told in the fabular mode, I am reminded of another, persisting narrative.

The Paper House is also iconic because its doubly reinforced representation of the establishment and destruction of a book collection is remarkably congruous with a prototypical figure of the library, developed by Debra A. Castillo out of her wide-ranging and magisterial study of the library in literature:

Gradually, as the ever-larger masses of documents threaten to expand beyond human control, the librarian counters with ever more rigid structuring systems. Yet, eventually the place that was to serve as a repository of all knowledge, by the very fact of its existence comes to proclaim the inevitable failure of attempts to gather and organize the scattered documents of human production

Translated World: A Postmodern Tour of Libraries in Literature (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press / University Presses of Florida, 1984), 45.

...As the library becomes less accessible, it also becomes more fear-provoking, and that which was an essential part of the sociopolitical structure becomes a threat to structure. Once kind of consumption suggests another; the library is burned.²⁸

In spite of overwhelming, heroic, and tragic efforts of organisation, Castillo's formulation suggests that libraries will always and inevitably collapse, or be collapsed. In this way, *The Paper House* is symbolic of a more general experience of the putting of books in their place. By representing the consecutive destruction of two book arrangements, Domínguez captures something of the cyclical and enduring nature of the "inevitable failure" of this process. With *The Paper House* as an incarnation of Castillo's comprehensive conceptual work, the precedential involvement of fiction in representing the intractability of all kinds of book arrangements, including classification, is substantiated. *The Paper House's* narration of the greater refractoriness of "ever more rigid structuring systems" is narratively archetypal, and it carries significant representational strength for this theme.

Brauer's first structuring system was his index, destroyed in a fire. Brauer's second structuring system, his paper house, did not have any kind of arranging apparatus in its design. Taken together, it can be seen that an important thread of the novella's representation of book ordering is achieved through its absence: lost in the first instance, and wilfully abandoned in the next. *The Paper House*, that is, thematises

²⁸ Castillo, *The Translated World*, vii. Similarly Jon Thiem speculates that "the universality of the Alexandrian Library...led people to regard it as a symbol or as a mythical object; this in turn may have instigated its destruction." Thiem, "Myths of the Universal Library: From Alexandria to the Postmodern Age," in *Cyberspace Textuality: Computer Technology and Literary Theory*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 257; capitalisation in the original.

book organisation in a predominantly negative way. That the novella makes absence a subject forcefully implicates the functionality of what it is that is wanting.

The fact that the two iconic expressions of book arrangement are related inversely suggests the ordering device of the first (which is explicitly a classificatory apparatus) cannot in fact escape from the second. The destruction of the index, it will be recalled, was when Brauer “lost all possibility of finding most of his books, of even knowing on which shelf they might be if he could not remember exactly where he had put them.” The narrator of *The Paper House*, a stranger to Brauer who knows of him only through the stories of others, visits the fallen house that Brauer built. When he realises, to his dismay, that the books – “buried in stone, torn, shrouded in a black coating of dirt I could not scrape off” (83) – were “impossible to get at... without some kind of implement” (83), a reconfiguration of the original apparatus is revealed through its common capacity to facilitate access and retrieval. Transformed through the imagining of and desire to “get at,” and coloured by the remembrance of the experience of “finding,” the ordering device of the first has been decomposed by way of a coveting of its bare function. And in this image of significant literary representational strength, this classificatory apparatus translates as an *implement*.

The Paper House's two iconic expressions of book arrangement thus combine to suggest that the dominant function of the classificatory apparatus is as a tool of access and retrieval. This is congruent with the stance of much classificatory work on fiction in libraries (when it is suggested that “systems of classification...serve

primarily as ways for readers to access literature,"²⁹ for example, or when the imperative of "how to achieve content access to fiction"³⁰ is stressed), and indeed all kinds of content managed in different ways by libraries and other information agencies ("documents are indexed for the purpose of retrieval, and one can arrive at a theoretically well-founded procedure for indexing by being true to that purpose"³¹). This clarifies what amounts to an epistemological consequence for classification in the way that it is mobilised in the course of knowledge practices. Access and retrieval belong to classification as it is hegemonically instrumentalised. And so of course classification can be construed with reference to its intervention in the patron's encounter: prevailingly it is realised to constitute itself and be constituted in the space between a work and a reader.

Classification, however, has other imaginable facilities and mobilisations: pedagogic and compositional impetuses, for example, or motivations of theoretical challenge and representational practice. Classification can be an exercise, a tool of understanding, a promise of context. In their work *Primitive Classification*, Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss identify classification's "speculative purpose."³² For these anthropologists, the object of classification is "not to facilitate action, but to advance understanding, to make intelligible the relations which exist between

²⁹ Fiona M. McWilliam, "Classifying the South: Library of Congress Subject Headings and Their Impact upon United States Southern Literature" (Master's thesis, Florida Atlantic University, 2008), 16.

³⁰ Beghtol, *Classification of Fiction*, 12.

³¹ Abraham Bookstein and Don R. Swanson, "A Decision Theoretic Foundation for Indexing," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 26, no. 1 (1975): 49.

³² Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, *Primitive Classification*, trans. Rodney Needham (1963; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 81.

things.”³³ Specialist classification systems also demonstrate some quite imaginative realisations of different kinds of classificatory purpose. In the introduction to *Fantasy Classification System*, Alastair Cameron suggests that his work

should be of interest to the average fantasy fan as a reasonably complete compilation of the topics in his [sic] field of interest. Authors may find new plotting ideas in it; in particular, there is a wealth of new fantasy stories waiting to be suggested by combinations of various classification numbers.³⁴

Artist Nina Katchadourian’s *Sorted Books* project is another demonstration of a different kind of mobilisation: in this instance, an aesthetically representational one. *Sorted Books* sees Katchadourian apply a standard procedure to the libraries and collections she works with: “culling through a collection of books, pulling particular titles, and eventually grouping the books into clusters so that the titles can be read in sequence, from top to bottom.”³⁵ These clusters “aim to examine [a] particular library’s focus, idiosyncrasies, and inconsistencies — a cross-section of that library’s

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Alastair Cameron, *Fantasy Classification System* (St. Vital, MB: Canadian Science Fiction Association, 1952), 3. Experimental representations of classification in literature and literary writing are also involved in the demonstration of classification’s potential for theoretical reconfiguration. In Italo Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller*, for example, the protagonist walks into a bookstore and is presented with the narrator’s impromptu devising of some twenty book classes, including “Books You Haven’t Read,” “Books Made For Purposes Other Than Reading,” “Books Read Even Before You Open Them Since They Belong To The Category Of Books Read Before Being Written,” and “Books You’ve Always Pretended To Have Read And Now It’s Time To Sit Down And Really Read Them.” In “Brief Notes on the Art and Manner of Arranging One’s Books,” Georges Perec undertakes a gentle and haphazard kind of classification when he creates lists and notes under various headings including “rooms where books may be put,” “books just about impossible to arrange,” and “things which aren’t books but are often met with in libraries” (“postcards, dolls’ eyes, tins, packets of salt, pepper and mustard from Lufthansa, letter-scales, picture hooks...”). Calvino, *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller*, trans. William Weaver (London: Vintage / Random House, 1998), 5–6; capitalisation in the original; Perec, “Brief Notes on the Art and Manner of Arranging One’s Books,” in *Species of Spaces, and Other Pieces*, ed. and trans. John Sturrock, rev. ed. (1997; London: Penguin, 1999), 151, 154, 152.

³⁵ Nina Katchadourian, “*Sorted Books* Project,” accessed December 23, 2010, <http://www.nina.katchadourian.com/language/translation/sortedbooks.php>.

holdings"; her composition for Ohio's Akron Art Museum resulted in a cluster which read "*Primitive Art / Just Imagine / Picasso / Raised by Wolves.*"³⁶

Classification has these speculative, analytic, congregative, compositional, and interrogative capacities among others, but in the library these are typically (even procedurally) rendered inconsequential against the primary and more prosaic functions of access and retrieval. In the context of fiction, the only exception I discovered was an intriguing brief proposal by Anat Vernitski which "outlines the work"³⁷ required to develop an intertextual fiction classification for humanities researchers. The classification would relate different fictional texts on the basis of the categories quotation, allusion, variation, sequel, and prequel. Vernitski's work is theoretical, but it is designed specifically for specialists and is far from being ready for implementation in a collection. On both of these counts it acts as the arresting exception which proves the rule: as we shall soon see, the overwhelming bulk of analysis for fiction classification focuses on facilitating readers' access to fiction in public libraries as unproblematically as possible.

³⁶ Ibid. There are two other creative applications of classification schemes I would like briefly to note. The first is the Library Hotel in New York, which has arranged its floors based on the ten major classes of the DDC; each room is "individually stocked with a collection of art and books relevant to one distinctive topic within the category of the floor on which it is situated." The second is Tori Amos's retrospective compilation album *Tales of a Librarian*, which uses the DDC to class each of its songs in the liner notes. The song "Sweet Dreams," for example, is attributed to "970 History of North America / 973.928 Politics of Illusion," a double classification which strongly insinuates that the song is an indictment of the then-incumbent Bush administration ("'Lie, lie, lies everywhere' said the Father to the son"). HKHotels, "Concept of the Library Hotel," accessed December 29, 2010, <http://libraryhotel.com/dewey-decimal-system/index.cfm>; Amos, *Tales of a Librarian*, Atlantic / Warner, 7567836582, 2003, compact disc; capitalisation in original.

³⁷ Anat Vernitski, "Developing an Intertextuality-Oriented Fiction Classification," *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* 39, no. 1 (2007): 49.

An explicit statement of the preference for access and retrieval above other classificatory motivations in the case of fiction can be found in a remark by librarians Lyn Sear and Barbara Jennings: “we would suggest that fiction classification should not be seen as merely a pleasing intellectual exercise or an attempt to justify fiction’s significance, and solely for librarians, but as a response to a genuine need on the part of the readers.”³⁸ The single-mindedness with which a single motivation for classification has been instrumentalised is one of the primary reasons I find it imperative that classification’s realisation as a library encounter is not limited to the patron’s experience. The space that is presented to a patron for an encounter with classification has been generated in a very specific way: the facilitation of access and retrieval represents the concentration of a design objective into a single and limited purview. It is surely metonymically resonant that it is possible to find in *The Paper House* an image which has the classificatory apparatus as a gouging tool. Effectuation is strongly situated within the classification encounter. An implement is what is serviceable: what works and what will be worked. Its function is instrumental and momentary.

In representation and practice, then, the classificatory apparatus appears very much as a processual overstep, as was outlined in the introduction to this thesis. Acquittal appears implicit in the library’s design of classification. Like patronage, such a vision of classification has an attendant conceptualisation of a library which

³⁸ Lyn Sear and Barbara Jennings, “Organizing Fiction for Use,” in Kinnell, *Managing Fiction in Libraries*, 115.

functions to offer a moving towards or a facilitating of reading. This does not necessarily inhibit the theorisation of classification in terms of its intervention in a patron's library experience, nor its drawing out with reference to phenomena – patronage was developed as an undertaking in spite of a similar entanglement in the rapid discharge of textual services. But patronage was at least located in a more cohesive site (the patron's body or consciousness) than the multiple manifestations of classification in space, in language, and across different systems and practices, and I am not going to fight against this in the same way that I did for patronage.

I acknowledge it is certainly possible that classification could be drawn out to formulate an encounter which urges readers to interact reflexively with the rhetorical effects of the language of classification, or the constellations and compositions of the groups of works which result from classificatory exercises (for example). Library science furnishes research which would be serviceable in developing such programs; both generally,³⁹ and for fiction in particular.⁴⁰ However,

³⁹ Some general works I consulted which would facilitate such an investigation include Hope A. Olson's *The Power to Name: Locating the Limits of Subject Representation in Libraries*, Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star's *Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences* and – to give an example of a case study from a completely different discipline – Anne M. Fields and Tschera Harkness Connell's "Classification and the Definition of a Discipline: The Dewey Decimal Classification and Home Economics." Publication details for these works appear in the bibliography.

⁴⁰ One example of such a work is Phillip Pacey's critique of the DDC's practice of using language to classify literature. Pacey contends that

using languages as the basis for classifying literature creates 'English,' 'French,' 'Spanish' and other language collections on library shelves, collections which are inevitably dominated by, and are very easily identified with, the literature of the 'mother country,' while literature from other countries is liable to suffer the ignominies [of] fragmentation and subordination.

as the library aims to facilitate access and retrieval, it also works hard to subdue the noise of the struggle involved in this process. Sear and Jennings remark that “most readers’ experience of fiction *classification* is limited to fiction *categorization* on the shelves; the provision of bookmarks or lists of authors within particular genres; or... the indicating of genre categories within an author/title fiction catalogue.”⁴¹ With the qualifier “limited,” this remark serves to clarify how the tensions, difficulties, and decisions which have gone into the design of classification will almost certainly be invisible to the patron in the moment of their encounter. Lévi-Strauss offers a compelling illustration of an analogous way of encountering a system:

“inexperienced players in a game of dominoes...consider only the value of the adjacent halves in joining the pieces but manage to continue the game none the less for their lack of previous knowledge of its composition.”⁴² It seems to me that a strict focus on the way a patron experiences classification will offer only an impoverished imagining of classification as a library encounter. It may even be the case that the library’s focus on designing seamless classificatory apparatuses means that classification is a library form, process, and function which somehow resists an elaborated encounter with the patron – and if an elaborated encounter were to be

Fiona M. McWilliam investigates the Library of Congress Subject Headings applied to literature from the American South, finding a “lack of interconnection” between several relevant works, which results in a regrettable “lack of representation.” “Within the Library of Congress Subject Headings,” McWilliam writes, “there is no representation of a unified corpus of southern literature.” Pacey, “The Classification of Literature in the Dewey Decimal Classification: The Primacy of Language and the Taint of Colonialism,” *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (1989): 102; McWilliam, “Classifying the South,” 31.

⁴¹ Sear and Jennings, “Organizing Fiction for Use,” 113; italics in the original; punctuation in this quotation has been altered.

⁴² Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 161.

imagined, this resistance may be the fertile starting point from which to develop analysis. In any case, it seems to be more certainly productive to conceive the classification encounter not in terms of the library patron's experience, but in terms of the practices and activities of classification by classifiers, and a longer conceptual history of classification itself.

III. Fiction classification practices

David Perkins has suggested that "literature has no taxonomic system, but only a confused aggregate of overlapping classifications from different points of view."⁴³ This is the case too for the classification of fiction in libraries. There is no method which has achieved a level of satisfaction so as to resolve into a more general or theoretical approach. The arrangement of fiction in libraries presents as a complex of diversified and decentralised procedures, approaches, and systems. Librarian Gregg Sapp has written that "fiction may be the most misunderstood of all library materials."⁴⁴ Sapp offers what I find to be the most encompassing overview of the situation of arranging fiction in libraries when he remarks that the

⁴³ David Perkins, "Literary Classifications: How Have They Been Made?," in *Theoretical Issues in Literary History*, ed. Perkins (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 253–54.

⁴⁴ Sapp, "Levels of Access," 488. At this observation, Sapp cites A. W. McClellan, *The Logistics of a Public Library Bookstock* (London: Association of Assistant Librarians, Library Association, 1978).

apparent impossibility of conceptually classifying fiction has led librarians to establish more objective criteria for providing for its retrieval, such as the author's name, nationality, or period of activity. By doing this, librarians do not so much *classify* fiction as *organize* it.⁴⁵

His last sentence is a small claim, but I find it highly representative for the argument I wish to make in this section. I have speculated that the concepts and practices of fiction and classification are conflictual, and a signal manifestation of this is the difficulties that are experienced in attempts to classify works of fiction. The insight Sapp offers in arguing that libraries organise rather than classify fictional material is a concise statement of discord between the two on a pragmatic level.

To remark on the lack of a standard method is not a condemnation of the library as an institution: rather, the problem of fiction classification presents as unexcogitable. For almost as long as there have been public libraries, their fiction classification practices have existed in a state of ambivalence. In a 1898 article, E. A. Baker contended that "our artificial arrangements of books, skilfully constructed catalogs, open-access systems, and other methods of alluring and improving the reader...stop short at fiction."⁴⁶ In 1958 R. S. Walker suggests "there is no doubt that much of the disinterest in, if not active opposition to, the classification of fiction, is due to the absence of any accredited and efficient scheme."⁴⁷ "Experiments with an alternative classification of fiction have been carried out at various times," it was observed by Annelise Mark Pejtersen in 1978, "but with no permanent success, it

⁴⁵ Ibid.; italics in the original.

⁴⁶ E. A. Baker, "The Classification of Fiction," *Library World* 1, no. 10 (1899): 198.

⁴⁷ Walker, "Problem Child," 22; capitalisation in this quotation has been altered.

seems."⁴⁸ In 1985 Gail Harrell described "a clear indication of a lack of consensus on a best, or even a very good, means to categorize fiction," and remarked that "in recent years, discussion concerning fiction classification has been limited."⁴⁹

"Because no one classification scheme has been adopted as standard or universal," Harrell observed, "each library or library system decides individually on a method or methods for classifying its adult fiction. Methods vary from librarian to librarian and even from branch to branch within a system."⁵⁰ Judith A. Ranta noted in 1991 that while "many information professionals have recognized a need for increased subject access to individual works of imagination, there has been no clear consensus on how to do this."⁵¹ In 1992 Susan Hayes argued that "access to works of imaginative literature in academic and, especially, public libraries is clearly inadequate in comparison to the detailed access provided for works of non-fiction."⁵² In 1994 Clare Beghtol suggested that "fiction analysis for bibliographical retrieval is

⁴⁸ Annelise Mark Pejtersen, "Fiction and Library Classification," *Scandinavian Public Library Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (1978): 5.

⁴⁹ Gail Harrell, "The Classification and Organization of Adult Fiction in Large American Public Libraries," *Public Libraries* 24, no. 1 (1985): 14, 13.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵¹ Judith A. Ranta, "The New Literary Scholarship and a Basis for Increased Subject Catalog Access to Imaginative Literature," *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (1991): 4.

⁵² Susan Hayes, "Enhanced Catalog Access to Fiction: A Preliminary Study," *Library Resources and Technical Services* 36, no. 4 (1992): 441. Sear and Jennings also remark on the disparity between fiction and other kinds of classification: "certainly, the neglect and lack of attention to fiction organization can be compared with the effort that goes into the organization of non-fiction, such as 20 editions of a classification scheme, subject indexes, and professional cataloguers devoting their working lives to it." Similarly Beghtol observes that "classification theorists have not concentrated on the problems of creating bibliographic classification systems for the fine arts and humanities...science and technology have virtually monopolized the attention of classificationists both in theory and practice." Beghtol identifies Derek Langridge's 1976 monograph *Classification and Indexing in the Humanities* as "the only full-scale work on humanities classification." Sear and Jennings, "Organizing Fiction for Use," 102; Beghtol, *Classification of Fiction*, 14, 15.

at an early stage of development.”⁵³ “The potential value of basic research” into content access for fiction, she writes, “lies in its attempt to bring modern classificatory thought and techniques to bear on a segment of the world of documents that has not received detailed attention in classification theory and practice.”⁵⁴ In 1995 Yu and O’Brien remarked that “the arrangement of the fiction collection has remained a perplexing issue for decades.”⁵⁵ Jessica E. Moyer’s literature review, published in 2005 and covering a period from 1995 to mid-2003, noted that in spite of “encouraging projects...research on [the] classification of fiction has been limited since 1995.”⁵⁶ In 2005 Rune Eriksson suggested that the efforts of various fiction classifiers and classification writers have “turned out to have little effect in the real world” and “the classification of imaginative literature has not changed very much since the days of Dewey.”⁵⁷

The above paragraph has been protracted with rhetorical purpose. I am attempting to demonstrate how the writers who have concerned themselves with libraries’ organisation of fiction comprise a veritable chorus of dissatisfaction, and how there appears to be a substantial consensus which acts to construe fiction classification as a sticky issue or even a wicked problem.

⁵³ Beghtol, *Classification of Fiction*, 12.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 12–13.

⁵⁵ Liangzhi Yu and Ann O’Brien, “Domain of Adult Fiction Librarianship,” in *Advances in Librarianship*, vol. 20, ed. Irene P. Godden (San Diego: Academic Press, 1996), 179.

⁵⁶ Jessica E. Moyer, “Adult Fiction Reading: A Literature Review of Readers’ Advisory Services, Adult Fiction Librarianship, and Fiction Readers,” *Reference and User Services Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (2005): 221.

⁵⁷ Eriksson, “Classification and Indexing of Imaginative Literature,” 1.

It is equally important to acknowledge that there has been greater optimism about fiction classification in more recent history. In the English language abstract for his PhD thesis submitted in 2010, Eriksson identifies a “practical and theoretical breakthrough in relation to the bibliographical description of fiction” that took place around 1990 in conjunction with the publication of the first edition of the ALA’s *Guidelines on Subject Access to Individual Works of Fiction, Drama, Etc.*, “when many more scholars are suddenly concerned with the issue.”⁵⁸ Indeed, in 1992 Hayes suggested that “there are indications that the era of enhanced catalog access to imaginative literature is upon us.”⁵⁹ In 2005 Eriksson observed that over the last quarter century “the classification issue has probably been the most important question in the domain and Pejtersen, Beghtol, Hayes, Nielsen, Saarti and many others have all published significant articles or books in the field.”⁶⁰ Whilst still identifying a continuing need for improved access to fiction, Jarmo Saarti has also suggested that

fiction retrieval has become one of the interesting special issues within information science during the past few years. This is a consequence of several facts. The most important of them is the need for fiction retrieval and secondly, the possibilities for creating retrieval systems for fiction have increased, due to the development of computerised environments for information retrieval.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Rune Eriksson, “Klassifikation og indeksering af skønlitteratur – et teoretisk og historisk perspektiv” [The classification and indexing of fiction – a theoretical and historical perspective] (PhD diss., Danmarks Biblioteksskole, 2010), vii.

⁵⁹ Hayes, “Enhanced Catalog Access to Fiction,” 445.

⁶⁰ Eriksson, “Classification and Indexing of Imaginative Literature,” 2.

⁶¹ Jarmo Saarti, “Aspects and Methods of Fictional Literature Knowledge Organization” (paper, Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Istituto per le Previsioni e le Ricerche Internazionali, Rome, 2002), http://www.uku.fi/~saarti/Fiktio/Fiction_Aspects_Saarti.pdf. Saarti’s paper is unpagged.

Nevertheless the optimism of these researchers is not – or at least not yet – the achievement and implementation of a consistent, designed, nor customised approach for the arrangement of the public library’s most popular material. In spite of this recent flurry of scholarly interest and output, Yu and O’Brien’s observation regarding the “perplexing issue” of fiction arrangement is an adequate description not just for “decades,” but in fact for over a century. Fictional material has been persistently recalcitrant to the imperatives of classification. From 1898 to the twenty-first century, the exhortations which have in some way lamented the deficiency of the organisation and classification of fiction form a series which is very longstanding indeed. “Not only has our present notion of classification a history,” Durkheim and Mauss have observed, “but this history itself implies a considerable prehistory.”⁶² This 125-year long discourse around an institution’s experience organising fiction has a weight and a traction of its own: it makes a history of the disoperation of library practices for the classification of fiction.

So what are the practices which have been implemented simultaneous to (or in spite of) the chorus of dissatisfaction; practices which must surely be understood

⁶² Durkheim and Mauss, *Primitive Classification*, 5. A very few of the sources which contribute to the immense project of investigating the conceptual history of classification and which inform my research include Terence Hawkes’s *Structuralism and Semiotics*, Roy Boyne’s “Classification,” and Peter Burke’s *A Social History of Knowledge*. More implicit, oblique, and abiding contributions – also crucial for this chapter – are offered by Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, and Thomas S. Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Publication details for these works appear in the bibliography.

by the writers who have voiced such frustration as somehow provisional?⁶³ It is extremely difficult to make conclusive observations about common approaches to placing fiction books on library shelves, because there is a dearth of empirical and statistical research on the topic. Citing the two-page 1985 article “The Classification and Organization of Adult Fiction in Large American Public Libraries” in 1987, Sharon L. Baker and Gay W. Shepherd identify the writer of this piece, Gail Harrell, as “the only author to describe practices followed in a large number of libraries.”⁶⁴ Harrell conducted a survey which elicited responses from forty-nine American library systems that served a population of one hundred thousand or more. She found that 94 percent of these library systems “use genre categorization to arrange and organize a part of their fiction collections;”⁶⁵ however, her results also showed that there was little correspondence between the different types of genre categories used. Nor do her results specify the proportion of the fiction collection which is separated out into genre for this 94 percent; nor how fiction which is not differentiated by genre is treated. There was also evidence of a significant level of use of what Harrell called special categories, most notably large print and new

⁶³ Fiction classification goes on in spite of these apprehensions, which is almost to say that *it goes on in spite of itself*. In this respect its pragmatic perseverance is not unlike Jacques Derrida’s identification of one of Lévi-Strauss’s working contingencies. Derrida writes at length about Lévi-Strauss’s use of a binary of culture and nature, suggesting that Lévi-Strauss “simultaneously has experienced the necessity of utilizing this opposition and the impossibility of accepting it.” Perhaps without the extreme virtue of the anthropologist, fiction classification automatically implements what Lévi-Strauss will perform more reflexively: “Lévi-Strauss will always remain faithful to this double intention: to preserve as an instrument something whose truth value he criticizes.” Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge / Taylor & Francis, 2001), 357, 359.

⁶⁴ Sharon L. Baker and Gay W. Shepherd, “Fiction Classification Schemes: The Principles behind Them and Their Success,” *Reference Quarterly* [RQ] 27, no. 2 (1987): 249.

⁶⁵ Harrell, “Organization and Classification of Adult Fiction,” 13.

books.⁶⁶ Harrell updated her findings with a 1993 questionnaire, which similarly found that the use of genre categorisation for adult fiction was predominant among a large number of libraries; that of these libraries a majority used more than one category; and that format and special category influences continue to play a role in the arrangement of fiction.⁶⁷

Since Harrell's survey, substantial relevant literature reviews have been conducted, including Yu and O'Brien's work on adult fiction librarianship in 1996, and Jessica Moyer's work on adult fiction, reader advisory services, and libraries in 2005. Neither of these described research into actual library fiction arrangement practices comparable to Harrell's research. Nor does the bibliography of Rune Eriksson's 2010 thesis "The Classification and Indexing of Fiction – A Theoretical and Historical Perspective" offer any English language titles which appear promising. Andrej Pogorelec and Alenka Šaupperl write that "Slovenian public libraries have traditionally used [the Universal Decimal Classification] as the only subject information on belles-lettres."⁶⁸ Mirja Iivonen explains that the language of a work is the only device enlisted to subdivide fiction in the Finnish context, and so "the practice adhered to in most public libraries in Finland [is] to treat fiction

⁶⁶ Ibid., 14.

⁶⁷ Gail Harrell, "Use of Fiction Categories in Major American Public Libraries," in *Guiding the Reader to the Next Book*, ed. Kenneth D. Shearer (New York: Neal-Schuman, 1996), 149–57.

⁶⁸ Andrej Pogorelec and Alenka Šaupperl, "The Alternative Model of Classification of Belles-Lettres in Libraries," *Knowledge Organization* 33, no. 4 (2006): 204. Pogorelec and Šaupperl infer some of the other countries which employ the Universal Decimal Classification when they write that the alternative fiction classification system they devised "could be used in Slovenian libraries and libraries with a similar tradition, e.g., the states of the former socialist Yugoslavia or the Austrian Empire" (205).

collections as a block mainly organized in alphabetic order.”⁶⁹ Neither of these articles offer statistical information to substantiate their assertions about the common practices of their country. Amy J. Richard reports on a study that found 94.1 percent of surveyed public libraries in North Carolina “used some sort of genre fiction classification”;⁷⁰ however the study that she refers to is unpublished. Outside Harrell’s work on large US libraries, there appears to be no recent, comprehensive, large-scale investigation which authoritatively represents the overall composition of public library practice in relation to fictional works.

It is thus necessary to turn to schematic overviews to ascertain the standard practice among libraries for organising fiction. A remark by Sear and Jennings I cited in the previous section alluded to common approaches, and I would like to draw these out more extensively. Yu and O’Brien suggest that outside major classification systems such as the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) and the Library of Congress Classification (LCC), fiction is generally handled in one of two ways. The first involves “distinguishing types of fiction with spine labels or separate shelves, which is usually referred to as categorization.”⁷¹ This encompasses the predominant practices recorded by Harrell; most especially, I would venture, the predominance of genre as an organising device. Another important facet which can be incorporated

⁶⁹ Mirja Iivonen, “On the Library Classification of Fiction,” *Scandinavian Public Library Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1988): 12.

⁷⁰ David W. Singleton, “Genre Fiction Classification in North Carolina Public Libraries” (Master’s paper, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1992), 20; quoted in Amy J. Richard, “Genre Fiction Classification: A Study of the Durham County Library” (Master’s paper, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1999), n.p.

⁷¹ Yu and O’Brien, “Domain of Adult Fiction Librarianship,” 180.

under this definition is a division of the type serious/recreational fiction.⁷² The second practice described by Yu and O'Brien involves "applying [an] A-Z order according to authors' names."⁷³ Yu and O'Brien suggest that this approach "used to be seen as almost the only method...and it is still applied in most libraries to the so-called general fiction, which [has not been subject] to the first strategy."⁷⁴ The DDC has a different approach again: in the DDC's treatment of the wider category of literature, "the subject or topical aspect is secondary to language, literary form, and

⁷² Once such a division has been made, it is possible for a further genre subcategorisation to take place, or not. Reporting on a shelf classification experiment for fiction in the town of Kajaani, Finland, Saarti suggests that "traditional genres – e.g., detective novels, thrillers – were also those that were easiest to classify. Serious fiction was most difficult to classify." Saarti identifies two factors involved in the particular challenge of placing "serious" fiction into shelf classification groups: "it is in the nature of serious fiction not to open easily for classification," and "serious fiction readers tend to avoid the situation where serious fiction is classified according to genres – or according to any other basis." Saarti, "Feeding with the Spoon, or the Effects of Shelf Classification of Fiction on the Loaning of Fiction," *Information Services and Use* 17, nos. 2–3 (1997): 168.

⁷³ Yu and O'Brien, "Domain of Adult Fiction Librarianship," 180. Beghtol suggests that the A-Z arrangement is not merely an expedient approach to deal with recalcitrant library material, but that it can in fact be interpreted as a "classification-by-creator." She writes that while "the practice of classification-by-creator is widespread, little theoretical attention has been given to it." Beghtol's idea is stimulating, and has significant facility to reconfigure what otherwise presents as a very dry organisational practice. I think, however, that an A-Z "classification-by-creator" is a poorer imagining of classification than classification by subject, as it is less available to some of the other purposes of classification considered above, such as theoretical reconfiguration. Beghtol, *Classification of Fiction*, 21, 22.

⁷⁴ Yu and O'Brien, "Domain of Adult Fiction Librarianship," 180. At their observation that an A-Z order "used to be seen as almost the only method," Yu and O'Brien cite John Dixon, ed., *Fiction in Libraries* (London: Library Association, 1986). The observation is further substantiated by Carrier's *Fiction in Public Libraries, 1900–1950*: "A survey reported by [the American Library Association] in 1927 showed that most public libraries arranged English and American fiction...alphabetically in one section without assignment of a class number. Principle exceptions were made for reference collections of fiction that sometimes were classified by nationality." Similarly, Sear and Jennings note that in the professional literature of British librarianship in the 1930s, debates took place around "the advantages and disadvantages of alphabetical arrangements which keep books by one author together, versus segregation into groups such as crime stories, romances or historical. Fifty years on these seem to have remained the main options open to libraries for organizing fiction." Carrier, *Fiction in Public Libraries*, 195; Sear and Jennings, "Organizing Fiction for Use," 107.

period, which are the main facets of literature.”⁷⁵ Similarly for the LCC, Lois Mai Chan explains that the “classification of literature differs from classification in other subjects in that languages and forms take precedence over topic.”⁷⁶ In addition to fiction as it is treated in these major classification systems (as well as others including the Universal Decimal Classification, Colon Classification, Bliss Bibliographic Classification, and Cutter Expansive Classification), dedicated fiction classification schemes have been developed. As noted above, Eriksson has suggested that earlier instances of these classifications did not have a great deal of impact:

“usually these more or less skilfully developed systems were put into practise at the same library that employed the creator but apparently they were very seldom used

⁷⁵ Lois Mai Chan, *Cataloging and Classification: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 296. In the Dewey Decimal Classification, “Literature” is one of ten main classes, occupying the 800–899 range. “Fiction” does not have a freestanding position within the literature main class: Lois Mai Chan and Joan S. Mitchell demonstrate how it constitutes a facet of the class number equivalent to other literary forms such as “Drama,” “Poetry,” “Speeches,” “Letters,” and so on, after the initial classification by language has been determined. Different kinds of narrative writing are sometimes located in different main classes. Two of the first instructions in the schedules at 800 include injunctions to “class folk literature in 398.2” (the 300s are the DDC’s range for the social sciences), and “class librettos, poems, words written to be sung or recited with music in 780.268” (700 is the main class for arts and recreation). The print version of the DDC is currently in its twenty-second edition, and the Online Library Computer Centre (OCLC), copyright holder for the DDC, has recently announced that the twenty-third edition is scheduled for release in May 2011. Chan and Mitchell, *Dewey Decimal Classification: Principles and Applications*, 3rd ed. (OCLC: Dublin, OH, 2003), 115; Dewey, *Dewey Decimal Classification and Relative Index*, 2:x, 3:759; OCLC, “DDC 23 Is Coming Soon!,” accessed March 18, 2011, <http://www.oclc.org/info/ddc23/default.htm>.

⁷⁶ Lois Mai Chan, *A Guide to the Library of Congress Classification*, 5th ed. (Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1999), 353. The Library of Congress’s website lists the twenty-one main classes that comprise the LCC. Literature is joined with language to form the main class “Language and Literature,” designated by the letter *P*. It includes nineteen subclasses, among them “PN Literature (General),” “PR English literature,” “PS American literature,” and “PZ Fiction and juvenile belles lettres.” The name of the PZ subclass, however, is somewhat misleading. Chan notes that until 1980, “the Library of Congress classed all works of fiction in English, including translations into English, in subclass PZ”; a 1980 change in policy means that “since then, American fiction has been classed in PS, English fiction in PR, and translations into English with the original national literatures” (362). Library of Congress, “Library of Congress Classification Outline: Class P - Language and Literature,” accessed March 18, 2011, http://www.loc.gov/aba/cataloging/classification/lcco/lcco_p.pdf; Chan, *Guide to the Library of Congress Classification*, 362.

anywhere else.”⁷⁷ Two more recent comprehensive fiction classification designs include Annelise Mark Pejtersen’s Analysis and Mediation of Publications (AMP), and Clare Beghtol’s Experimental Fiction Analysis System (EFAS),⁷⁸ but there is little evidence to suggest that these have been extensively deployed. In her literature review, Jessica Moyer uses Harrell’s research to suggest that “classification schemes like Pejtersen’s have been adopted in only a very few libraries and most are still in the theoretical stage.”⁷⁹ Moreover, both AMP and EFAS are indexing systems, and thus do not address the placing of books on shelves in any extensive way.⁸⁰

The picture that I am attempting to draw is of a field which, first of all, bears out Sapp’s observation that fiction is more often organised than classified. The ascendant practices are based around genre, author’s name, languages, or literary forms: as Sapp observes, these are relatively objective criteria, and they do not

⁷⁷ Eriksson, “Classification and Indexing of Imaginative Literature,” 1.

⁷⁸ Pejtersen has written about her fiction classification system in many publications. For an introduction to AMP, see her two-part article with Jutta Austin, “Fiction Retrieval: Experimental Design and Evaluation of a Search System Based on Users’ Value Criteria.” Beghtol’s EFAS is described in her book *The Classification of Fiction: The Development of a System Based on Theoretical Principles*, which I have cited repeatedly. There are also other specialist genre fiction classifications in addition to Alastair Cameron’s scheme for fantasy which was mentioned above. Antony Croghan has developed a classification for science fiction which, unlike Cameron’s, is specifically developed to provide “indexing for information retrieval.” Pejtersen and Austin, “Fiction Retrieval: Experimental Design and Evaluation of a Search System Based on Users’ Value Criteria,” pts. 1 and 2, *Journal of Documentation* 39, no. 4 (1983): 230–46; 40, no. 1 (1984): 25–35. Croghan, *Science Fiction and the Universe of Knowledge: The Structure of an Aesthetic Form* (London: Coburgh, 1981), 7.

⁷⁹ Moyer, “Adult Fiction Reading,” 221. Gail Harrell also observes that “although [the AMP] scheme has been implemented in Denmark, there is no evidence in the literature that suggests this system is being employed anywhere in the United States.” Harrell, “Organization and Classification of Adult Fiction,” 13.

⁸⁰ The AMP’s “classification cannot be used for shelf order. Instead, libraries could use a classification of this kind in their catalogues and indexes while still shelving their novels alphabetically by author.” EFAS is “intended for computerization and is not suitable for conventional shelving in a library collection.” Pejtersen and Austin, “Fiction Retrieval,” pt. 1, 235; Beghtol, *Classification of Fiction*, 11.

involve the characteristic of hierarchy which is associated with classification, nor the topicality which is associated with subject classification. Secondly, in spite of the examples of several substantial, highly developed, and admirable endeavours by individual scholars and classifiers, the field of fiction classification is, as a whole, under-researched. And finally: from the empirical, statistical, and anecdotal information which is available it would seem that while this field's evidently diversified practice could probably not with justification be described as "heterogeneous," it is certainly inconsistent. Fiction classification presents as persistently, almost wilfully, half-formed; it seems to remain essentially unresolved. What is the impediment to the development of an efficient and prevalent kind of operation? It is telling that when fiction classification practitioners and researchers explain the difficulties they have encountered and described, their responses cluster around a single theme.

Fiction has proven specially and consistently resistant to the operation or incursion of the concept of subject. "Classifying a work of fiction according to any subject criteria is extremely difficult," writes Sapp. "The very nature of fiction makes the task so."⁸¹ Fictional works "do not seem to be 'about' a 'subject' in the commonly

⁸¹ Sapp, "Levels of Access," 495. In this article, Sapp also suggests that "the subject of any novel is much more likely to be expressed collectively, rather than singularly." Similarly Saarti writes that fiction "consists of several meaningful facets, and indexing or classification schemes become thus multifaceted." These observations encapsulate the reason why approaches based on indexing and/or subject headings are very popular amongst fiction classifiers and classification writers, and enjoy the greatest level of success within this context. When describing the recently renewed interest in fiction classification, for example, Eriksson notes that "the main object has not been class numbers and shelving but indexing." However, I have made the decision to concentrate on fiction arrangement which is oriented towards books on shelves, before subject headings or indexing practices. This

recognized sense," suggests Beghtol.⁸² At another point, she extends her observation: "there seems to be no satisfactory way of determining 'representativeness' for fiction."⁸³ Indeed, it is the case that neither the LCC nor the DDC, "the two major universal classification schemes," facilitate "primary subject access to fictional works."⁸⁴ Eriksson contends that "class marks as well as subject headings are not very suitable devices for reflecting some of the most important features of fiction."⁸⁵

He explains:

normally fiction does not deal with a particular subject matter, but stages a world with a lot of topics...an essential part of fiction is the narrative; and...in general subjects are not treated as isolated units, but as something fictitious characters relate to and respond to, intellectually and emotionally.⁸⁶

The concept of subject has been interpreted in quite multifaceted and complex ways in the course of various fiction systems' design. Pejtersen's AMP classification scheme – modelled "on the basis of an empirical analysis" which involved the investigation of "three hundred user–librarian conversations in real-life situations" – is divided into four "dimensions" which demonstrate significant innovation for how the idea of fictional subjects might be conceived. These dimensions are "subject

orientation is also adopted with a view towards the most popular method of accessing fiction amongst patrons, which is browsing. It is also almost certainly linked in to the previous chapter's material approach to the library book. Sapp, "Levels of Access," 495; Saarti, "Aspects and Methods," n.p.; Eriksson, "Classification and Indexing of Imaginative Literature," 2.

⁸² Beghtol, *Classification of Fiction*, 22.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁸⁴ Sapp, "Levels of Access," 489. More specific remarks regarding the organisation of literature in the DDC and LCC schemes, and the place of fiction within these systems, were offered above at footnotes 75 and 76.

⁸⁵ Eriksson, "Klassifikation og indeksering af skønlitteratur," viii.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

matter," "frame" (which refers to setting in time and place), "author's intention" ("the author's attitude towards the subject"), and "accessibility" (complexity of language, typography, etc).⁸⁷ Similarly the *Guidelines on Subject Access to Individual Works of Fiction, Drama, Etc.* identifies four kinds of "subject access for fiction: form/genre access, access for characters or groups of characters, access for setting, and topical access."⁸⁸ The Hennepin County Library has published a subject heading list of over 1,500 entries relating to specific fictional characters and locations.⁸⁹ As all of these examples are indexing systems, however, the difficulty of subject for book arrangement is once again highlighted, and the now familiar refrain that none of these systems have achieved a generally sanctioned implementation could be repeated.

The predominance of genre and categorisation treatment for fiction represents the endeavour of libraries to achieve a subject classification for fiction; an endeavour which will not consolidate. The specialised fiction systems represent an acknowledgement as regards the non-topical orientation of common practice, and an attempt to ameliorate this practice; but these are systems which will not take up. It seems that fiction does not make itself readily available to the imperatives of access and retrieval when subject is the mode of classification. To use language which has

⁸⁷ Pejtersen and Austin, "Fiction Retrieval," pt. 1, 233, 234.

⁸⁸ ALA, *Guidelines on Subject Access to Individual Works of Fiction*, 2.

⁸⁹ Hennepin County Library (Minnesota), *Unreal! Hennepin County Library Subject Headings for Fictional Characters and Places*, 2nd ed. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992).

been supplied by *The Paper House*: no implement has been found which is adequate to the task of extraction. It may be that such an implement does not exist.

In any event the encounter of fiction and classification finds subject awkwardly protruding at their juncture. In the next two sections, the concept of subject is taken as a lens through which to stage the encounter of fiction and classification more minutely. Because of their resistance to one another, the encounter has acted to reveal and illuminate some salient and in fact singular points about fiction. Launching from the trouble of subject for fiction but not locked into it, the first section constitutes a collection of resources for students of literature which expresses fundamental characteristics of fiction and fiction in the library; characteristics which have been identified through an instrumental comparison of fiction and other kinds of material that libraries acquire and administer. This section is relatively self-contained and thus somewhat extravagant, perhaps even indulgent – I do not use these resources to develop a further argument within the trajectory of this chapter. The second section, which is a more theoretical consideration of subject, serves this function. It has been observed, however, that “librarians are among the foremost mediators of fiction within the literary world,”⁹⁰ and I would argue that this experience is generally under-recognised. The following section offers the chance to apply librarians’ substantial experience with fiction and fictionality anew.

⁹⁰ Liz Greenhalgh and Ken Worpole, with Charles Landry, *Libraries in a World of Cultural Change* (1995; repr., Abingdon, UK: Routledge / Taylor & Francis, 2004), 132.

IV. Instrumental characteristics of fiction in libraries

Fiction has proven again and again to present the library with an unrepeatable challenge to its classificatory capability. We are familiar with the generally intractable nature of book classification from *The Paper House*, but it is becoming clearer that fiction is a very special case because of the nature of its challenge to the concept of subject. The observations by librarians about subject and fiction cited towards the end of the last section may appear to add very little to a literature student's understanding of his or her field. This would be to dismiss their value too quickly, however, for what they reveal is library science expressing its discovery that fiction is a kind of book work which is singular amongst all others.⁹¹

⁹¹ I have discovered one interesting exception to this statement. Richard Davies advocates that works of philosophy should be "treated as fiction"; that is, arranged in a single alphabetic sequence by author. "The positive good that such an arrangement seeks is philosophical neutrality," Davies writes, "given the highly controversial and fissiparous nature of the activities that are embraced under the rubric 'philosophy.'" Davies argues that philosophy presents similar difficulties to classification as fiction does:

In philosophy, the hard cases are so hard, so many and so prominent, that they would require any conscientious cataloguer to be continuously making choices...Even supposing the choices made were wholly coherent one with another, they would nevertheless be unpredictable by anyone who did not share all and only the cataloguer's philosophical presuppositions.

Davies's is not an isolated position. Literary theory, too, has recognised philosophy as presenting a special case to taxonomy. In determining that a distinctive criterion for identifying literature is "fictionality," Wellek and Warren write:

Admittedly, there will be 'boundary' cases, works like Plato's *Republic* to which it would be difficult to deny, at least in the great myths, passages of 'invention' and 'fictionality,' while they are at the same time primarily works of philosophy...No wrong is done to a great and influential work by relegating it to rhetoric, to philosophy, to political pamphleteering, all of which may pose problems of

With some reference to the concept of subject but also beyond it, what follows is an exploration of a few of the instrumental characteristics and consequences of this singularity. Collected from librarians and library writers, these practices, definitions, and characteristics each struck me when I encountered them in the course of researching this chapter. It was their plain speech, skilfully articulating fictional conventions and conventions around fiction, which I found compelling. I felt they acted to productively *refamiliarise* certain features of fiction which are perhaps overly naturalised for those who look to fiction more than other textual and informational resources in the course of their study, research, and lives.

The unique case of fiction in libraries has led some writers in the library science field to develop quite elegant and arresting prosaic descriptions of fiction itself. Clare Beghtol, for example, doesn't endorse but does recognise the validity of treating fictional works as "entities"; that is, "classes with one and only one possible member."⁹² While the librarian may deal with substitutes of works from artistic mediums such as visual art, music, and theatre in the form of prints, scores, and recordings, D. W. Langridge has observed that literature is unique in that "the

aesthetic analysis, of stylistics and composition, similar or identical to those presented by literature, but where the central quality of fictionality will be absent.

Davies, "Should Philosophy Books Be Treated as Fiction?," *Knowledge Organization* 36, nos. 2–3 (2009): 121, 123; Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 14–15.

⁹² Beghtol, *Classification of Fiction*, 33. This position is echoed in literary-critical work on classifications. Perkins suggests that, for Benedetto Croce, "a work of art embodies an individual intuition, and hence every work of art differs from all others." Perkins goes on to elaborate this position by maintaining that "the literary field—any assemblage of texts that we wish to divide into groups—is always perfectly heterogeneous. When we classify texts, we put the continuously differing objects into a few pigeonholes." Perkins, "Literary Classifications," 251.

librarian is expected to handle the actual products of the artist."⁹³ The singularity of fiction in the library is realised in several tangible and intriguing ways. Librarians have identified formal and procedural differences between fiction and non-fiction, and commented on the ramifications of these for readers and for their own practice. So, for instance, fiction has been found to be distinguished by its lack of certain bibliographic features which are often characteristic of non-fictional work, and which in fact facilitate classificatory and organisational process. Gregg Sapp has quantified some of these differences: "fiction does not have abstracts; fiction does not follow scientific methodologies; fiction does not employ highlighting devices to emphasize major concepts."⁹⁴ Jarmo Saarti has recognised that one manifestation of fiction's unique relationship with subject is that "free text search cannot be used efficiently when searching fictional material. This becomes apparent if we compare it ...with the search and retrieval of natural sciences literature, where the text is usually very topical and unambiguous."⁹⁵ I find, however, that the most intriguing pressure fiction's singular status puts on library processes is the kind of reading practice that some librarians suggest fiction requires. It consists of the curious claim that the nature of fiction as a work object could or should compel a classifier to read a piece of work in its entirety.

An extended engagement with the whole of a text seems to be a defensible position in library and information science writing. Following on from his list of the

⁹³ D. W. Langridge, *Classification and Indexing in the Humanities* (London: Butterworths, 1976), 83.

⁹⁴ Sapp, "Levels of Access," 495.

⁹⁵ Saarti, "Aspects and Methods," n.p.

formal bibliographic features which distinguish fiction from non-fiction, Sapp writes that “for these and many other reasons, it [almost seems] the indexer would have to read an entire novel in order to represent its content.”⁹⁶ Sapp’s tone suggests that any proposition or injunction to read an entire work has the potential to induce incredulity among his colleagues. And indeed, there are counterpositions to those which would explicitly or implicitly urge for a comprehensive reading. Christine DeZelar-Tiedman, for example, conducted an investigation to determine whether “dust jacket copy, or back-of-book copy on paperbacks, provides enough information to apply subject headings to fictional works,” and concluded that these “usually provided sufficient information.”⁹⁷ Beghtol, however, is on the side of a thorough reading, and adopts a similarly justificatory stance to Sapp. In explaining that her study does not focus “on whether implementation of [a fiction] system would be an economically sound choice for a particular information agency,” she

⁹⁶ Sapp, “Levels of Access,” 495.

⁹⁷ Christine DeZelar-Tiedman, “Subject Access to Fiction: An Application of the *Guidelines*,” *Library Resources and Technical Services* 40, no. 3 (1996): 205, 208. DeZelar-Tiedman’s conclusion as to the approach’s sufficiency was formed from the finding that out of the fifty works catalogued in her study, three “did not give sufficient information to apply any subject headings” (207). However, she does add that “it would seem appropriate for catalogers to supplement the jacket copy with other easily scanned information, such as lists of characters in plays or preliminary pages in paperback novels. When reviews are readily available, they may also be helpful provided they are brief” (208). Moreover, DeZelar-Tiedman’s study does not include a component that evaluates the headings provided by a reading of the dust-jacket to those generated by a more extensive reading. Ultimately, however, her investigation is a pragmatic one: the subject heading format that she is utilising recommends “a superficial review of the publication at hand” (203), and she is testing this recommendation. She writes: “few libraries have the resources to pay catalogers to read and interpret fiction; perhaps they will find book jacket copy an effective summarizing tool for providing a reasonable level of access to these valuable library materials” (210).

asserts that “it seems clear from the study of previous fiction analysis systems that analysis of a work of fiction would require a classifier to read the work.”⁹⁸

“Reading complete works of fiction is not an intellectual impediment to detailed fiction analysis, although it might prove an economic barrier to an information agency,” Beghtol continues. “So little is known about fiction as a document type that shortcuts are, at present, inadvisable” (11). The value of Beghtol’s prudence is convincingly supported by David Lonergan’s account of the classification of Michael Crichton’s 1976 novel *Eaters of the Dead*. This work, a retelling of *Beowulf*, was misclassified as non-fiction by the Library of Congress and assigned the LCC number DL31.I2613, for Viking History. Lonergan’s contention is that “the misclassification of *Eaters of the Dead*...might have been prevented,”⁹⁹ and he makes four recommendations for reducing the chance of such an error in the future. One of these is that cataloguers should “read...books thoroughly in cases of ambiguity or confusion.”¹⁰⁰ I am not suggesting that avoidance of error is the only rationale for a complete reading of a fictional work by a cataloguer or classifier; however, I will leave the consideration of librarians’ various persuasions and positions at this point. My intention in relating the issue is not to weigh in on the debate, which evidently involves quite serious economic and technical concerns, as well as textual consequence. Rather, I wish to draw attention to the library material

⁹⁸ Beghtol, *Classification of Fiction*, 11. In “Enhanced Catalog Access to Fiction,” Susan Hayes has considered another facet of the question of implementation, conducting an empirical investigation which measured the time it takes cataloguers to provide increased subject access to fiction.

⁹⁹ David Lonergan, “Fooling LC: Michael Crichton and *Eaters of the Dead*,” *Behavioral and Social Sciences Librarian* 16, no. 2 (1998): 70.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

which has forced librarians to construct their debates in these terms. *Fiction* is what has challenged library processes in such a way that the recommendation of this new procedure is at least legitimate, and perhaps even appropriate. Fiction is again differentiated from other kinds of library materials, in this instance by giving rise to the professional suggestion, figuration, and imagining of an engaged and extensive reading.

A related facet of a library debate is the recommendation that the classification of fictional works should involve a description, in sentences, of what the work is about. Rune Eriksson is a major proponent of this tactic. In the English language abstract for his 2010 doctorate, his position is stated succinctly: “a proper description in prose is often the best choice and thus it is a major problem that a lot of bibliographic systems do not include [this] particular feature.”¹⁰¹ In his 2005 English language paper, he lauds the Danish approach: “in Denmark a representation of imaginative literature beyond class numbers was introduced in 1981 when records of novels included a note offering a short description of the narrative.”¹⁰² Eriksson cites as an example the brief note (some thirty-five words when translated into English) which accompanies the subject headings assigned to F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. He particularly commends that “the indexer clearly has tried to interpret the book in order to state its most significant theme,” captured by this anonymous indexer’s words “the power and powerlessness of

¹⁰¹ Eriksson, “Klassifikation og indeksering af skønlitteratur,” viii.

¹⁰² Eriksson, “Classification and Indexing of Imaginative Literature,” 9.

wealth.”¹⁰³ Eriksson acknowledges that not everyone will agree with this description, but represents its inclusion in the classificatory record as a “truly spectacular feature,” which indicates that “indexers have gradually been more inclined to accept that the reading of imaginative literature [is after all] very much about interpretation.”¹⁰⁴ An idea developed by E. Wyndham Hulme in 1911 has some application here. Literary warrant, a classificatory concept which has developed “the status of a principle,”¹⁰⁵ is “justification for the development of a class...based on the existence of a body of literature on the topic.”¹⁰⁶ A more abstract definition of literary warrant represents it as an impetus which “enjoins that the vocabulary of a subject language be empirically derived from the literature it is intended to describe.”¹⁰⁷ Beghtol has suggested that “fiction documents use prose language as a vehicle of expression,”¹⁰⁸ and with this in view I think a charming poetic resonance between literary warrant and Eriksson’s recommendation becomes apparent. Literary warrant presents as a precise (metaphorical) acknowledgement of how fiction, finding usual subject languages insufficient, has perhaps of its own ontological manifestation enjoined a descriptive and interpretative subject language for its representation. Through literary warrant fiction has prompted classification to replicate its own form in prose.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Elaine Svenonius, *The Intellectual Foundation of Information Organization* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 135.

¹⁰⁶ OCLC (Online Computer Library Center), “Dewey Decimal Classification Glossary,” s.v. “literary warrant,” accessed December 28, 2010, <http://www.oclc.org/support/documentation/glossary/dewey/>.

¹⁰⁷ Svenonius, *Intellectual Foundation of Information Organization*, 135.

¹⁰⁸ Beghtol, *Classification of Fiction*, 19.

The final instrumental consideration I would like to explore is the tendency for fiction to be accessed by library patrons in particular ways. Readers often “choose fiction straight from the shelves.”¹⁰⁹ Library patrons looking for fiction “like to find their books...by browsing the shelves,” rather than using “card catalogues and/or computer databases.”¹¹⁰ The fiction patron “can and will make his [*sic*] final decision whether to loan a book or not only when one has that specific book in his own hands.”¹¹¹ In the context of fiction research there has been an important discovery made and a criterion defined which relates to the realisation of patrons’ browsing preference. Readers appear to prefer “to choose from a smaller, more manageable range than the large unbroken alphabetic sequence”;¹¹² “they commonly gravitate toward any smaller chunk of the collection they can find.”¹¹³

The preference for smaller and more contained groups of books is manifested at several distinct sites in the library. Sear and Jennings describe “a heavy use of the returned section.”¹¹⁴ Kerri L. Huff writes that “most public librarians can attest to the fact that the new fiction section...has a higher circulation rate than the books in the stacks.”¹¹⁵ And finally, there are the small subcollections which result from the

¹⁰⁹ Library and Information Science Abstracts, abstract 88/1045; quoted in Sear and Jennings, “Organizing Fiction for Use,” 115.

¹¹⁰ Saarti, “Feeding with the Spoon,” 160.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Sear and Jennings, “Organizing Fiction for Use,” 107.

¹¹³ Barry Trott and Vicki Novak, “A House Divided? Two Views on Genre Separation,” *Reference and User Services Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2006): 36. This article comprises two sections, authored individually by Trott and Novak. I quote exclusively from Novak’s contribution to the piece.

¹¹⁴ Sear and Jennings, “Organizing Fiction for Use,” 107.

¹¹⁵ Kerri L. Huff, “Genre Fiction Classification: A Continuation Study of Its Reception by Patrons in the Durham County (NC) Public Library” (Master’s paper, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006), 4.

categorisation processes described by Yu and O'Brien above. Here my source for these sites is the results of library-based experiments which consider the smaller book ranges created by fiction categorisations. Jennings and Sear describe a test for which they set up a fiction browsing area, "Novel Ideas," in Sevenoaks Library, Kent. "Novel Ideas" consisted of four bays of fiction, "in a well-lit area, near comfortable seating," where the books were arranged into themes including "Animals," "Bestsellers – past and present," "Fireside reading," and "Victorians."¹¹⁶ The authors report that the section "was heavily used in proportion to its size."¹¹⁷ Over the six months of the experiment, "most books had 1 to 3 issues...only 24 of the 381 books involved did not go out at all."¹¹⁸ They also observed that "some titles, becoming desirable by being displayed, went out from Novel Ideas after a long period without issues," and contended that "books untouched for months or years could be made attractive to readers."¹¹⁹

I would like to here conclude my discussion of the popularity of small groups of books among library patrons, and more closely consider the kind of categorisation that the example of "Novel Ideas" in Kent provides. Gail Harrell's researches, which

¹¹⁶ Barbara Jennings and Lyn Sear, "Novel Ideas: A Browsing Area for Fiction," *Public Library Journal* 4, no. 3 (1989): 41; capitalisation in the original.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* Two articles by Sharon L. Baker report the results of a similar research experiment, and similarly find an increase in circulation for categorised titles, demarcated by spine labelling or physical separation. Baker, "Fiction Classification Schemes: An Experiment to Increase Use," *Public Libraries* 26, no. 3 (1988): 75–77; Baker, "Will Fiction Classification Schemes Increase Use?," *Reference Quarterly [RQ]* 27, no. 3 (1988): 366–76.

¹¹⁹ Jennings and Sear, "Novel Ideas," 42; capitalisation in the original. Similarly, Novak suggests that "librarians weeding books [which] haven't been checked out in years may even find that the act of just putting them on a cart makes them more desirable." She calls this "the book cart effect." Trott and Novak, "A House Divided?," 36.

were discussed above, in the main described genres: "Science fiction and/or fantasy," "Westerns," "Detective and/or mystery and/or suspense," "Love and/or romance," "Espionage and/or spy," "Gothics," "Horror and/or ghost stories," "Adventure," "Humour and/or satire," and so on.¹²⁰ "Novel Ideas" has undertaken a different kind of classification. The list of groups in its entirety is represented in a table in Jennings and Sear's article, and comprises: "Africa," "Animals," "Australia," "Bestsellers – past and present," "Books made into films," "Modern classics," "Fireside reading," "First novels," "Humour," "Modern women writers," "Prizewinners," "Victorians," and "War."¹²¹ With the exception of "Humour," none of the "Novel Ideas" groupings can accurately be described as genres. Jennings and Sear call them "themes," and elsewhere they are described as "reader interest categories."¹²²

I'm interested in the instrumental distinction between themes and genres in the context of fiction organisation in the library.¹²³ Of course there is some crossover between these two descriptions, and the distinction is not absolute nor will it be

¹²⁰ Harrell, "Organization and Classification of Adult Fiction," 14; capitalisation in the original.

¹²¹ Jennings and Sear, "Novel Ideas," 41; capitalisation in the original. The most popular of these themes were "Modern Women Writers" and "Humorous Novels." These were followed by "Books Made Into Films" and "Prizewinners." In a separate report, the authors provide sample stock lists for each theme in an appendix. Jennings and Sear, "Novel Ideas," 43; capitalisation in the original; Sear and Jennings, *Novel Ideas: A Browsing Area for Fiction* (Maidstone: Kent County Library, Kent County Council, 1989), appendix 3.

¹²² Mary K. Chelton, "Read Any Good Books Lately? Helping Patrons Find What They Want," *Library Journal*, 118, no. 8 (1993): 35. In this piece, Chelton advises "arranging and displaying all your circulating materials in broad popular topical categories, regardless of their actual classification. You'll attract more attention...with such topics as computers, home improvement, parenting and childcare, personal finance, job-hunting, and so forth" (35). Although Chelton's suggestions here appear to be reader-interest categorisations for non-fictional works, this focus of her article was reader advisory services for fiction.

¹²³ I should note that Harrell's research also included groupings which were themes rather than genres: "Country and/or rural backgrounds," "Family chronicles," "Librarian's choice," "Prizewinners," and "Psychological." I read the overall tone of Harrell's categorisation, however, as generic. Harrell, "Organization and Classification of Adult Fiction," 14; capitalisation in the original.

uncontested, but the examples canvassed in the previous paragraph seem to me to be fairly clear-cut. Jennings and Sear write that they “saw the use of themes as a means of stimulating the process of choosing for the readers.”¹²⁴ I think that Jennings and Sear have rightly identified a greater stimulation involved with themes over and above genres, and this is indicative of a useful means by which the two can be differentiated. It relates to the kind of intervention that a theme or a reader interest category involves. To a much greater extent than any genre division, a theme or a reader interest category suggests a figure on the ground: an individual or individuals within an environs and a local context instrumentally involved in the theme’s creation. These individuals can be readers or librarians: in “Novel Ideas,” patrons were invited to contribute suggestions for future themes. Jennings and Sear note that participants’ responses included “medical or legal settings, the ‘homefront,’ mountaineering adventures, the development of the novel, ‘runners-up’ (to follow Prizewinners?) plus personal selections by members of staff.”¹²⁵

The involvement or intervention of these individuals is relative. I can discern at least three levels on which it takes place. The first is the baseline case, where librarians or readers are clearly involved in the process of identification, demarcation, and collection that goes into defining and offering a theme (“Bestsellers – past and present,” “First novels,” “Books made into films,” “Modern women writers”). The most literal instances of the first level are evidenced in themes

¹²⁴ Jennings and Sear, “Novel Ideas,” 41.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

of the type “librarian’s choice” and “reader’s choice.” The second level extends the first, but is not so different from it. Topical reader interest categories such as “Africa,” “medical settings,” and “Victorians” do not only involve demarcation, identification, and collection – it seems to me that perhaps a greater on-the-ground vision or desire is required for their instantiation. This work is often lauded when it is understood to indicate a sort of attuned local or contemporary consciousness. And indeed such a virtue may be involved, but the vision and desire for all kinds of topical reader interest categories is not necessarily limited to those generated through some kind of synchronicity or sympathy with a milieu. The less local and the less contemporary may also on occasion be the more compelling.

“Fireside reading” and “the ‘homefront’” each strike me as examples which take the potential of theme origination to another level of intensity again. Unlike the previous two levels, there is no immediately obvious set of external criteria which can be consulted to populate these themes. Nor are they in any straightforward manner topical or related to a subject. “Fireside reading” is not related to a subject at all, and “the ‘homefront’” presents as being particularly available to a significantly metaphorical realisation in the way that the books within its collection are identified and assembled. Individually they each suggest the potential for the production or composition of entirely new and quite innovative themes. Both of them are creative invocations, and “fireside reading” a compositional undertaking in its own right. Not only does it invite lateral thinking and curatorial extension in its assembly, but it has authored its own reading context.

This section of the chapter was designed to be self-contained, but arriving at its conclusion, I can discern one thread which I would like to extract and amplify from its analysis. The singular instrumental differences between fiction and non-fiction in the library show that fiction classification acts to complicate several relations. It is an encounter which perceptibly confounds relationships between the roles of reader and classifier; between classification and interpretation; and between categorisation and composition. Fiction makes readers out of librarians; it makes expressive speakers out of practitioners of taxonomy; in some contexts it has been enabled so that readers and librarians can write categories and groups of their own desire. None of this is intended facilely or ingratiatingly, even though I am quite certain that elements of the last sentence read this way. I speak of and look to roles and functions, not people and their activities. Certain instrumental characteristics of fiction classification are intelligible occasions upon which the library, like the archive, troubles the division between production and consumption; where it “deconstructs this all too conventional binary opposition” and “[inhabits] the entire process of cultural production and consumption.”¹²⁶

For fiction classification in this regard, I am reminded fleetingly of Michel Foucault’s description of heterotopias: sites “that have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or

¹²⁶ Michael O’Driscoll and Edward Bishop, “Archiving ‘Archiving,’” in “The Event of the Archive,” ed. O’Driscoll and Bishop, special issue, *English Studies in Canada* 30, no. 1 (2004): 4.

invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect.”¹²⁷ Could fiction classification be a discursive heterotopia? The remark is merely speculative. However when I read that heterotopias have one of either two roles – “to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled,” or “to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory”¹²⁸ – it doesn’t seem impossible that classification has a stake in the first kind of heterotopia, and fiction classification a stake in the second; that fiction classification operates as the heterotopia of the heterotopia of classification. I do not want to develop this point extensively because I do not feel invested enough in Foucault’s formulations to do so, but I would suggest that *heterotopic* can be enlisted as an appropriately allusive adjective for the classification of fiction.

V. Subject and exemplarity

Earlier I offered a collection of observations from librarians about the special difficulties that the concept of subject presents to fiction. I believe that this tension can be developed with reference to Claude Lévi-Strauss’s work on the structure and

¹²⁷ Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 24. Of course Foucault famously identifies the library itself as a heterotopia “of indefinitely accumulating time...in which time never stops building up and topping its own summit” (26).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

history of classification. In *The Savage Mind*, Lévi-Strauss investigates the experiences and worldviews of members of what he prefers to call “prior” rather than “primitive” societies.¹²⁹ He conceptualises these experiences and worldviews as a “science of the concrete,” involving “discoveries of a certain type: those which nature authorised from the starting point of a speculative organization and exploitation of the sensible world in sensible terms” (16). “This science of the concrete,” Lévi-Strauss continues,

was necessarily restricted by its essence to results other than those destined to be achieved by the exact natural sciences but it was no less scientific and its results no less genuine. They were secured ten thousand years earlier and still remain at the basis of our own civilization. (16)

In an earlier essay, Durkheim and Mauss concur: what they call “primitive” classifications “may be said without inexactitude to be scientific, and to constitute a first philosophy of nature.”¹³⁰ Lévi-Strauss’s investigation of the “science of the concrete” in *The Savage Mind* involves various systems of classifications such as rites and myths. For Lévi-Strauss, classifications are that which “allow the natural and social universe to be grasped as an organized whole”; they involve “totalizing

¹²⁹ Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 16.

¹³⁰ Durkheim and Mauss, *Primitive Classification*, 81. Lévi-Strauss’s claim to be “scientific” – here demonstrated by Durkheim and Mauss as well – is critiqued by Jacques Derrida. Derrida writes “empiricism is the matrix of all faults menacing a discourse which continues, as with Lévi-Strauss in particular, to consider itself scientific.” To Derrida’s position, I would merely like to add another: D. F. McKenzie suggests that it is possible for “scientific” to refer to simply “an honesty of method.” Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 364; D. F. McKenzie, “Printers of the Mind: Some Notes on Bibliographic Theories and Printing-House Practices,” in *Printers of the Mind, and Other Essays*, ed. Peter D. McDonald and Michael F. Suarez (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 14.

thoughts, which exhaust reality by means of a finite number of given classes.”¹³¹ The systems of classification he considers are not unconnected to those which are more familiar in contemporary contexts: “Native classifications are not only methodological and based on carefully built up theoretical knowledge. They are also at times comparable from a formal point of view, to those still in use in zoology and biology” (43). For Lévi-Strauss, classificatory systems are “means of thinking” more than “means of communication” (67): they constitute “systems of meaning” (223).

Lévi-Strauss has identified “a sort of fundamental antipathy between history and systems of classification”¹³² which is based on a distinction between history’s seriality and classification’s atemporality. In view of this chapter’s motif of certain tensions between fiction and classification, it seems appropriate to recognise that the contrast Lévi-Strauss demarcates between history and classification can also be used to encode a similar contrast between fiction and classification. Lévi-Strauss has explained history in terms of

a single series in which each term is derivative in relation to the one preceding it and original in relation to the one coming after it. Instead of a once-for-all homology between two series each finite and discontinuous in its own right, a continuous evolution is postulated within a single series that accepts an unlimited number of terms.¹³³

¹³¹ Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 135, 172.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 232.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 233. Derrida infers Lévi-Strauss’s orientation within this binary when he writes of the latter’s “respect for structurality, for the internal originality of the structure,” which “compels a neutralization of time and history.” Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 368.

As most narratives occur consecutively and progressively perforce (even those which implicitly challenge the idea of narrative sequence or progression), fiction similarly shares history's stake in seriality. I think that Lévi-Strauss's distinction between history and classification is a theoretical touchstone from which other structural tensions between fiction and classification can be investigated. I will develop the opposition along a different trajectory to Lévi-Strauss's interest in temporality – I am moving towards an enumeration of the different ways that fiction and classification manifest emphasis.

I do not wish to characterise the contrast between classification and fiction (alongside history) in terms as stringent as "antipathy." Francis Bacon's 1605 classification of knowledge in *Of the Proficiency and Advancement of Learning, Divine and Human* proposed that knowledge could be comprehensively accounted for with a tripartite division of history, poesy, and philosophy.¹³⁴ And so firstly, it seems clear that history and fiction (which I contend can be aligned with Bacon's poesy, and its associated faculty of imagination) have their own individuated realisation which cannot be lightly broached. (The connections between the two, nevertheless, are strong: Bacon described poesy as an "imitation of history at pleasure."¹³⁵) Moreover, Donald Davidson's work to redress conceptual relativism – in which he investigates

¹³⁴ My source of information on *The Advancement of Learning* is Sachiko Kusukawa, "Bacon's Classification of Knowledge," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bacon*, ed. Markku Peltonen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 51.

¹³⁵ Francis Bacon, *The Philosophical Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, vol. 4 (London: Longman, 1861), 315, quoted in Kusukawa, "Bacon's Classification of Knowledge," 54. Kusukawa notes that Bacon emphasised his classification "was not intended merely to establish separate and independent branches of knowledge, but it should rather be considered as 'veins and lines' running across a sphere" (47).

the plausibility of fundamental contrast between conceptual schemes and concludes that “we cannot intelligibly say that schemes are different” nor “can we intelligibly say that they are one”¹³⁶ – makes any project of absolute distinction extremely arduous. Fiction and classification palpably share an important characteristic of interior organisation, for example. Lévi-Strauss comments on classification systems’ “internal coherence,”¹³⁷ while Frank Kermode has observed contemporary literature “assumes that it has to create an order, unique and self-dependent.”¹³⁸ Finally, classification and fiction can coexist functionally and combine productively to create work. Primo Levi’s *The Periodic Table* is a collection of twenty-one diverse pieces based on elements from the periodic table which mix fiction, memoir, and science writing; Michael Swanwick’s *The Periodic Table of Science Fiction* consists of 188 “short” short stories inspired by the entire table; and Charity Blackstock’s *Dewey Death* is a murder mystery set in an interlibrary loans department which orients each chapter with a Dewey Decimal Classification number (and uses chapter titles which evoke Melvil Dewey’s distinct and economical method of spelling as well). More broadly, there are those texts which play with classification and which also have an undeniably literary resonance, such as Roland Barthes’s *A Lover’s Discourse* and *The Pleasure of the Text*, or Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. I am not attempting to demarcate a space of mutual exclusivity between classification and

¹³⁶ Donald Davidson, “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 47 (1973–74): 20.

¹³⁷ Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 217.

¹³⁸ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (1967; repr., London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 167.

fiction, but rather give voice to and explore the tensions which are evidently between them.

Using Lévi-Strauss's analysis, it becomes clear that there is a significant disparity between classification and fiction as regards their respective predispositions for emphasis. Earlier Lévi-Strauss's argument that "the forms of thought with which we have been concerned [are] totalizing thoughts, which exhaust reality by means of a finite number of given classes" was cited, and Lévi-Strauss supplements this with the remark that these forms of thought also "have the fundamental property of being *transformable* into each other."¹³⁹ Even more specifically, he maintains that

all the levels of classification in fact have a common characteristic: whichever, in the society under consideration, is put first it must authorize – or even imply – possible recourse to other levels, formally analogous to the favoured one and differing from it only in their relative position within a whole system of reference which operates by means of a pair of contrasts: between general and particular on one hand, and nature and culture on the other. (135)

Classification is a system which demands that a referent or emphasis be able to function on any level; to an extent, the level upon which the reference or emphasis takes place is a matter of insignificance or indifference. As Lévi-Strauss says elsewhere in *The Savage Mind*: in such conceptual systems, the "terms never have any intrinsic significance. Their meaning is one of 'position'" (55); he also describes classification as "an adjustable thread which gives the group adopting it the means

¹³⁹ Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 172.

of ‘focusing’ on all planes, from the most abstract to the most concrete, the most cultural to the most natural, without changing its intellectual instrument” (136). This special kind of functional mobility is such a distinctive feature of classification that Lévi-Strauss strongly criticises earlier anthropological accounts which acted to invent systems of totemism, on account of their “mistake” in acting

arbitrarily to isolate one level of classification, namely that constituted by reference to natural species, and to give it the status of an institution, when like all levels of classification it is in fact only one among others and there is no reason to regard it as more important than, say, the level operating by means of abstract categories or that using nominal classes. (135–36)

Fiction seems to be constitutionally unable to function in the transposable way Lévi-Strauss attributes to classification. The relevant and distinguishing key feature of fiction (in its context within the broader category of literature) is its distinctness of focus. For René Wellek and Austin Warren, literature “is in any case a selection, of a specifically purposive sort, from life.”¹⁴⁰ “One thing that is crucial is a special structure of exemplarity at work in literature,” says Jonathan Culler. “A literary work – *Hamlet*, for instance – is characteristically the story of a fictional character: it presents itself as in some way exemplary (why else would you read it?).”¹⁴¹ There is something in fiction’s uncomfortable relation to the concept of subject which illuminates its relationship to classification in this context. Arguing for fiction’s exemplarity so soon after maintaining its irreconcilability with subject may seem

¹⁴⁰ Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 202.

¹⁴¹ Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (1997; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 36.

counterintuitive: if fiction is an exemplary structure, a selection from life, and has the key feature of a distinctness of focus, surely this should mean that it *lends* itself to a subject approach? Actually not: for as Culler explains a contingent feature of literature is that while it “presents itself as in some way exemplary,” it “simultaneously declines to define the range or scope of that exemplarity.”¹⁴² (We have seen how this refusal is substantively manifested through negative textual gestures: “fiction does not have abstracts...fiction does not employ highlighting devices to emphasize major concepts.”) What is at play in fiction in the context of my argument is the *specific nature* of its distinctness of focus.

Fiction in fact serves to clarify the distinction between subject and exemplarity. Lévi-Strauss’s analysis of classification suggests that a subject can be related to its work in a relation of “possible recourse”; it operates to focus on a different plane of the text, to which it is “analogous.” To be exemplary is an entirely different proposition. To be exemplary is to remove the possibility of recourse by means of its nature as a selection. An exemplary entity does not only differ by means of a position; its material has been arbitrated. In the way it works to prefer, fiction may in fact have a stronger correspondence with the anthropological imaginary of totemism than it does with classification proper. In any event, it was never going to be at ease within a system which in effect operates to equally and impartially distribute content through all levels.

¹⁴² Ibid.

Except, perhaps, in an exemplary moment: the uncanny fictional moment of the narration of a book arrangement where distribution of content has been perfectly operationalised and is perfectly equal, and perfectly impartial.

VI. The gap of Babel

I know of an uncouth region whose librarians repudiate the vain and superstitious custom of finding a meaning in books and equate it with that of finding a meaning in dreams or in the chaotic lines of one's palm...They admit that the inventors of this writing imitated the twenty-five natural symbols, but maintain that this application is accidental and that the books signify nothing in themselves.¹⁴³

Men live out their lives in the famous library of Babel. They troop through its shelved landscape, which is "*unlimited and cyclical*";¹⁴⁴ they will be born and die without beholding a horizon.¹⁴⁵ Its geography is cosmological, canonical: "the universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries, with vast air shafts between, surrounded by very low railings."¹⁴⁶ Each gallery has "five shelves for each of the hexagon's walls;

¹⁴³ Jorge Luis Borges, "The Library of Babel," in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories, and Other Writings*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby, trans. Irby (1962; augmented ed., New York: New Directions, 1964), 53.

¹⁴⁴ Borges, "Library of Babel," 58; italics in the original.

¹⁴⁵ Umberto Eco has characterised the library of Babel as "a library *from where one cannot exit*." Eco, "Between La Mancha and Babel," *Variaciones Borges* 4 (1997): 51; italics in the original.

¹⁴⁶ Borges, "Library of Babel," 51; capitalisation in the original.

each shelf contains thirty-five books of uniform format; each book is of four hundred and ten pages; each page, of forty lines, each line, of some eighty letters which are black in color" (52). The librarian who is the protagonist and narrator of this short story relates the discovery that in the world of the library there are no two identical books. Rather, the library is "total," and "its shelves register all the possible combinations of the twenty-odd orthographical symbols (a number which, though extremely vast, is not infinite)" (54). This computational compositional situation of permutation means that, as well as unimaginable nonsense, the library contains

all that it is given to express, in all languages.
Everything: the minutely detailed history of the future,
the archangels' autobiographies, the faithful catalogue of
the Library, thousands and thousands of false
catalogues, the demonstration of the fallacy of those
catalogues, the demonstration of the fallacy of the true
catalogue, the Gnostic gospel of Basilides, the
commentary on that gospel, the commentary on the
commentary on that gospel, the true story of your death,
the translation of every book in all languages, the
interpolations of every book in all books. (54)

Jorge Luis Borges's "The Library of Babel" is a redoubtable representation of the library; renowned for the power of its vision, it is "one of the defining parables of modern civilization,"¹⁴⁷ and it "has given rise to a small critical library of its own."¹⁴⁸ I am going to read this work with reference to the preceding investigation into subject and exemplarity's distinction. I would like to suggest that a source of this

¹⁴⁷ Stephen Wagner, "Bibliotopia: The Dream/Nightmare of a Universal Library," *Bibliion: The Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 9, nos. 1–2 (2000–2001): 5.

¹⁴⁸ Alberto Manguel, "A Universe of Books: Borges's 'Library of Babel,'" review of *The Unimaginable Mathematics of Borges' "Library of Babel,"* by William Goldbloom Bloch, *New York Sun*, September 24, 2008, <http://www.nysun.com/arts/a-universe-of-books-borgess-library-of-babel/86435/>.

short story's "extraordinary importance"¹⁴⁹ and ongoing intrigue is the way that, as a piece of fiction, it involves itself with the expression of classification. Before commencing such an argument, however, I will first characterise and contextualise the story through my understanding of its implicit tone. "The Library of Babel" incarnates *resistance*: as a literary event, it has been designed to be resistant on every level.

I find "The Library of Babel" resistant in the following ways. For all the library's overwhelming inclusivity, there are many things that it does not have and cannot incorporate (Castillo has remarked on the story's "intriguing aura of empty grandeur"¹⁵⁰ with astuteness). Every book that could possibly exist according to its standard bibliographic format is held within it and there are no two identical works: and yet this also means that, as a collection, there is no place for even a single one more volume to be admitted.¹⁵¹ The library denies any kind of noble experience to the vast majority of its inhabitants as they eke out an existence within: librarians are recorded throwing themselves and books and others over the railings; they join sects; become inquisitors. "Epidemics, heretical conflicts, peregrinations which inevitably degenerate into banditry," writes the narrator, "have decimated the

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. Manguel here refers to Borges's collection *The Garden of Forking Paths* generally, but singles out "The Library of Babel" for special concentration in his article.

¹⁵⁰ Castillo, *The Translated World*, 107.

¹⁵¹ The possibilities and complexities generated by Borges's library structure also compels the attention of researchers from the disciplines of mathematics and the philosophy of mathematics. For a recent example of this kind of work, see William Goldbloom Bloch, *The Unimaginable Mathematics of Borges' "Library of Babel"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

population.”¹⁵² This is a place which precludes most meaningful modes of life and obstructs experiences of integrity. “The Library of Babel” is also a puzzle and as such operates to perplex and confound.¹⁵³ A puzzle in its nature has some inbuilt intractability and a puzzle as a short story cannot help but direct some of its resistance towards a reader. In all these ways “The Library of Babel” is, and I mean this precisely not pejoratively, an adverse, contrary short story. It operates as a machination of refusal through its content and in its ontology as a piece of fiction.

There is one particularly important site of resistance in “The Library of Babel” which I wish to draw out. “This much is already known,” Babel’s librarian writes, “for every sensible line of straightforward statement, there are leagues of senseless cacophonies, verbal jumbles and incoherences” (53). Content is distributed impartially between all the library’s volumes, and such a configuration of production has resulted in “the formless or chaotic nature of almost all the books” (53). Certainly in such a collection there may be the autobiographies of archangels and the true story of your death, as the librarian suggests. But I am at one with the librarians in the “uncouth region.” Ultimately I think readers of “The Library of

¹⁵² Borges, “Library of Babel,” 58. Christopher Scott Carter explicitly construes the short story in terms of “the *intersubjective violence* implicit in linguistic structures.” Carter suggests that “if satisfaction lies only in monolithic truth, the decentered nature of the Library seemingly makes disappointment inescapable. The librarians destroy their books and even murder each other in the name of a limitless, hopeless hope.” Carter, “The Rhetorical Bricolage of Jorge Luis Borges” (Master’s thesis, University of Louisville, 1996), 19, 20; italics in the original.

¹⁵³ In a review of Domínguez’s *The Paper House*, Miranda France asserts “the problem with Borges is that his admirers often regard him as a philosopher, rather than a master puzzle-maker.” Although this is a repudiating and not particularly generous position, I think that it is a wholly logical response to a piece of fiction which itself is implicitly involved in and generative of resistance. France, “Argentina, Step by Step,” review of *The Tango Singer*, by Tomás Eloy Martínez, and *The Paper House*, by Carlos María Domínguez, *Telegraph* (London), January 22, 2006, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/3649543/Argentina-step-by-step.html>.

Babel” are asked to understand that any meaning in such a context is “accidental,” and that “the books signify nothing in themselves.” Such books are like the terms in the classification systems described by Lévi-Strauss which “never have any intrinsic significance,” whose “meaning is one of ‘position.’” This discussion of the semantics of the library’s books is undertaken in order that I might propose the following formulation. Babel’s library comprises a collection which is conspicuously resistant to a profuse variety of modes of engagement which characterise the encounter of textual and fictional forms – resistant to interpretation, to comprehension, to *plaisir*, to *jouissance*, to hermeneutics.

Prompted by one of the two concepts whose intersection has given rise to this chapter, I tried very hard to construe the books of the library of Babel in an explicit and significant relationship with fiction. The exercise proved incredibly arduous, and ultimately devolved into the experience of a kind of *mise en abyme*. In a situation where books “never have any intrinsic significance,” the question of classification (and most especially subject classification) is a non sequitur. Like fiction, then, there are significant difficulties in trying to relate the books of the library to the concept of subject. Thus they may be akin to fiction in the way that they resist subject, but this is not decisive because they resist its exemplarity too. We have seen how fiction’s exemplarity is based on an operation of selection. As the books in the library of Babel are generated rather than written, it seems clear that their content has no involvement with any process of selection and thus the books themselves have no characteristic of exemplarity. Furthermore: the books are arranged, naturally, but my

use of “naturalness” must be understood in its intentionally double sense. The library’s books are arranged in that they exist perforce in an arrangement, *and* they are naturally arranged in that their array is as stars in the night sky. These volumes have not been ordered by any human consciousness. They exist in “an order: the Order,”¹⁵⁴ but this may as well have been imposed by a god, or by some other version of an originary force or being. The question is not relevant for this discussion: what is imperative to recognise is that in Babel’s library there is no ordering system which is conceptual and human-designed. Its books are thus like fiction in that fiction is often presented in an ultimately arbitrary manner as pertains to subject; they are also unlike it in that within their world there is no available device to facilitate access at all: there is no genre device, and there is certainly no author device.

I have explored the similarities and differences between fiction and the books of this library in terms of subject, and exemplarity, and their realisation within an order. With reference to all of these criteria, the books in Babel’s library cannot be completely allied with fiction, nor can they be understood to be completely distinct from it. Fiction has no decisive explanatory power for Babel’s works as a metonym or a metaphor. The status of fiction within this library is very ambivalent, as is the status of all the textual work therein. There is, I have come to realise, only one way that fiction is especially distinguished by this collection. Once identified, it becomes

¹⁵⁴ Borges, “Library of Babel,” 54.

immediately apparent that the distinction is one which is not only fundamental, but wholly ineluctable as well.

The only work that this “universe” has produced which is available to any reader in the world in which we must live is “The Library of Babel” itself. Thus in a very real sense the single only text of this library is a fictional one. The work of the library of Babel is the work “The Library of Babel.” When I say “work” here, I mean to attribute “work” both as it was invoked in the introduction (as a wrought form of human production), as well as using it to connote that which actualises interpretation, comprehension, *plaisir*, *jouissance*, and hermeneutics as possibilities. And yet the relation of fiction to this collection can be further refined still, in a closely related way. The only apparatus available which serves to grant any kind of access to this collection – its only *implement* – is of a fictional materiality because, in the world that we must live in, it is only the short story which performs this function. Of course “The Library of Babel” does not resemble a classification scheme or a schedule or a list of categorisations in any way, but I think this is precisely the point. Borges has enlisted *narrative* to give us passage to “the faithful catalogue of the Library, thousands and thousands of false catalogues, the demonstration of the fallacy of those catalogues, the demonstration of the fallacy of the true catalogue.” (And it is only narrative and not classification which could furnish such an absurd list, in which there is no recourse between the items and where they are not transformable into each other, instead forming “a continuous evolution...postulated within a single series that accepts an unlimited number of terms.” Narrative; or a

Borgesian anti-classification as translated by Michel Foucault.¹⁵⁵) I suggested earlier that the way “The Library of Babel” involves itself with the expression of classification is a source of its ongoing intrigue. The short story is the only point of access to a scene which has shown itself to be substantially resistant to signification. In relation to classification, “The Library of Babel” functions like radical movements in the history of Western metaphysics as described by Jacques Derrida: those discourses which do not try and identify a centre or point of origin, but offer instead “the sign which replaces the center...taking the center’s place in its absence,” a sign which “occurs as a surplus, as a *supplement*.”¹⁵⁶ “The Library of Babel” is to be

¹⁵⁵ I refer here of course to Foucault’s famous exegesis of Borges’s fantastical classification in “The Analytical Language of John Wilkins.” Borges writes:

animals are divided into (a) those that belong to the Emperor, (b) embalmed ones, (c) those that are trained, (d) suckling pigs, (e) mermaids, (f) fabulous ones, (g) stray dogs, (h) those that are included in this classification, (i) those that tremble as if they were mad, (j) innumerable ones, (k) those drawn with a very fine camel’s hair brush, (l) others, (m) those that have just broken a flower vase, (n) those that resemble flies from a distance.

Foucault finds that “what is impossible is not the propinquity of the things listed, but the very site on which their propinquity would be possible.” Borges, “The Analytical Language of John Wilkins,” in *Other Inquisitions, 1937–1950*, trans. Ruth L. C. Simms (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), 103; Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge / Taylor & Francis, 2002), xvi.

¹⁵⁶ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 365; italics in the original. Carter also construes Borges with reference to Derrida’s writings, opening his thesis with a gloss of “Structure, Sign and Play” which represents Borges exploring a similar “linguistic indeterminacy” some twenty years before Derrida, in which “language becomes a form of wildly variable play.” Carter posits that the “imaginary core” of Babel’s library – “a totally incandescent room” – is “analogous to Derrida’s ‘transcendental signifier.’ The librarian’s powerlessness to discover that core despite his long-suffering dedication may represent the condition of Western metaphysics.” Carter suggests that Borges’s strategies in this short story “inform a sober critique of the social injustices generated by logocentrism.” In a similar manner Philip Seargeant uses Roy Harris’s concept of “scriptism” to suggest that “The Library of Babel” “explores the flawed nature of a scriptist ideology which would privilege the written word and, in so doing, sideline the role of essential human involvement in any act of communication.” Carter, “Rhetorical Bricolage of Jorge Luis Borges,” 1, 19; Seargeant, “Philosophies of Language in the Fictions of Jorge Luis Borges,” *Philosophy and Literature* 33, no. 2 (2009): 400.

understood as an experiment in which fictional expression stands in directly for classificatory expression; wherein it supplements the other.

On one hand this may be read as a Borgesian motion of no confidence directed towards classificatory expression in general. This chapter's preceding analyses of the difficulties of book arrangements and the organisation of fiction acts as a rationale for such a position, and I think that in many respects it is a valid understanding of the short story's overall interrogative attitude towards libraries. Derrida, furthermore, offers an implicit endorsement of such a stance when he reminds us that the addition of the sign "comes to perform a vicarious function, to supplement a lack on the part of the signified."¹⁵⁷ However, an important component of Derrida's argument is that no signifier has the capacity to redeem the signified's absence, and so I believe this position can only take us so far. I think that the supplement of fictional expression operates more powerfully in a different kind of way. In its fictional moment, "The Library of Babel" pours the power of its exemplarity into the space of classification's expression.¹⁵⁸ Doing so, it implicitly asks us to look closely at this space. Upon the occasion of looking I have seen the selection or supplement of narrative itself: in my reading the exemplarity of "The Library of Babel" is a metanarrative exemplarity. And having looked, I wish to argue

¹⁵⁷ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play," 365–66.

¹⁵⁸ H. E. Lewald recognises this gesture throughout Borges's entire oeuvre, lauding it as one of his great achievements: "he used almost exclusively the short story as a vehicle for his themes and showed himself capable of developing ideas or situations adequately within the brief span of ten to fifteen pages." Lewald, "The Labyrinth of Time and Place in Two Stories by Borges," *Hispania* 45, no. 4 (1962): 630.

that “The Library of Babel” operates to point the way towards an understanding of classificatory expression as an adverse language for the domain of fictional practices.

The world and the collection of “The Library of Babel” has no authors and no need of authors. Its works have been generated by rote: the library utterly resists the authorial function and has no space to accommodate creative textual production. Even the librarian concedes that his “wordy and useless epistle already exists in one of the thirty volumes of the five shelves of one of the innumerable hexagons – and its refutation as well.”¹⁵⁹ Part of the reason the library’s books “signify nothing in themselves” and have no “intrinsic significance” is because not one of them constitutes what we have seen D. W. Langridge call a “product...of the artist.” If there are no authors in Borges’s library, who or what is it that speaks? When Durkheim and Mauss clarify the social origin of classification, they offer some relevant analysis which can be adduced at this point. Durkheim and Mauss argue that the “nature” of classification’s conditions “is social.”¹⁶⁰ This means that classification and – by extension – classification’s languages are not the product of “individual activity”; they have a “collective origin.”¹⁶¹

Libraries speak: this is what Borges asks us to understand. “It is verisimilar that these grave mysteries could be explained in words: if the language of the

¹⁵⁹ Borges, “Library of Babel,” 57.

¹⁶⁰ Durkheim and Mauss, *Primitive Classification*, 82. The authors explain: “it was because men were grouped, and thought of themselves in the form of groups, that in their ideas they grouped other things” (82).

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 4, 88.

philosophers is not sufficient, the multiform Library will have produced the unprecedented language required, with its vocabularies and grammars" (55). In a universe which is not a library, however, libraries speak in their classificatory languages. What is known about these kinds of expression, as specific forms of writing? In *The Intellectual Foundation of Information Organization*, Elaine Svenonius describes a bibliographic language as "a special-purpose language that is designed and applied in accordance with a special set of rules."¹⁶² Citing the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Svenonius describes subject languages as artificial languages in contrast to natural ones, outlining how these "differ in certain essential respects" (128). The "chief difference," Svenonius writes, "lies in the *vocabulary* each uses. The vocabulary of the [subject language] is controlled—that is, normalized."¹⁶³ This is achieved through a process which "involves semantically treating terms to restrict their meanings and to make explicit the relationships they bear to other terms" (128). Terminology "is obtained by explicating natural-language words and phrases. An explication is a technical definition, whose purpose is to standardize an expression and to hone it to make it more precise" (132–33). Svenonius's account of a subject language helps define its differential bearing from the natural language of fiction by

¹⁶² Svenonius, *Intellectual Foundation of Information Organization*, 53. Svenonius theorises the existence of two types of bibliographic languages. Document languages cover "attributes that are specific to particular manifestations of works" (53) such as publication, physical manifestation, and location. Work languages describe "intellectual attributes independent of space-time manifestation of the information" (53). Subject language is a sublanguage of the latter type, along with author, title, and edition languages, but it is specially distinguished among them. "Since the beginning of the twentieth century," Svenonius writes, "subjects of works have been treated separately from other work attributes, like author and title, and a large literature has developed around subject analysis and description" (54).

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 128; italics in the original.

describing how a subject language is differently generated. Bibliographic subject languages are obtained by putting natural language through a treatment process which is delivered according to a “set of rules.” Its processes and its set of rules indicate that a bibliographic subject language, being institutionally designed, maintained, and culpable, is inescapably collaborative.

Considering the analyses of Svenonius and Durkheim and Mauss together, it can be seen that classification connotes a deeply collective instance of textual practice. “Practice” is crucial here; so crucial that I feel compelled to offer “exercise” as a supplement and a surplus to it, to indicate how sincerely I wish to imply the very practice of practice. The spaces of practice of classificatory language and fictional expression are non-congruent spectrums. Because of the processes that bibliographic subject languages undergo, and because of their stake in collectivity, classification as it incarnates textually is a peculiar mode of expression which is unavailable for deployment by any one individual. Carlos Brauer tried to produce his own classification system, and his world collapsed in upon itself: like a long line of predecessors before him, the undertaking pushed him in the direction of madness, and fate took his efforts from him. And in light of these findings about classificatory expression, “The Library of Babel” becomes particularly powerful metaphorically. It represents the unavailability of classificatory expression to individual exercise as though it were a natural law, or a phenomenon in the rigorous scientific sense. In a universe which is defined as the place where the library speaks, *of course* there are no authors: when the library speaks in its bibliographic language, voice – a human

being's faculty – is conditionally precluded. As a mode of expression, classification's overstep is of an ontological nature. The metaphor of the overstep incarnates a real gap: a gap where individual practice cannot be conducted.

And yet: the activity of classification seems to happen everywhere, all the time, and it is the activity of people which makes it happen. David Perkins observes that the

importance of literary taxonomy to the profession cannot be overstated. Classifications are organizing principles of courses ('The Lyric')...societies (the divisions of the Modern Language Association), journals (*Studies in Romanticism*), anthologies, collections of essays, conferences, and tenure searches.¹⁶⁴

There is a classificatory facet in literary criticism, necessarily; there are innumerable acts of classification throughout this chapter and throughout the work as a whole. It seems axiomatic that classifying is an operation which can be conducted by an individual person, both within classification systems and independent of them. But I hope the preceding discussion has operated to demonstrate that this general sense of "classification" is *exemplificative* of a strong technical sense and, being exemplificative, there is in fact no recourse between the two. The strong sense of classification has an entirely different set of characteristics and imperatives. In its context, *to classify* is not to name nor to divide nor to place, nor is it even to write one's own classification system. It is an act which must be committed technically and socially. It serves a very rarefied kind of function that comes with a functionality

¹⁶⁴ Perkins, "Literary Classifications," 249.

which is not to be operationalised by the writer, the instrument of human voice. As a resource, bibliographic subject languages can only be referred to, they cannot be spoken. As a mode of expression, classification serves the adverse function of delimiting a textual space which is unavailable to the *intervention* of an individual.

Classification thus has its own exemplarity to show fiction, and those interested in fiction. On one hand, this exemplarity can be used to reinvigorate any encounter between a patron or analyst and classificatory language. Bibliographic subject languages have particular features which can be used to inform and develop these encounters; arguably, these are features which, once identified, necessarily provide a framework for their reading. As Svenonius has clarified, bibliographic languages are written to be precise, and designed to manifest their relationship with other terms. Perhaps more compellingly, classificatory languages are structures which have “cultural warrant.”¹⁶⁵ Alvin B. Kernan describes a related way that the library affects textual expression when considering the accumulation of printed literary material in the eighteenth century. “Not only did the size of actual libraries begin to increase enormously at this time,” Kernan writes, “but the necessity of classifying these large numbers of books probably led to further refinement of the

¹⁶⁵ Joel M. Lee, “E. Wyndham Hulme: A Reconsideration,” in *The Variety of Librarianship: Essays in Honour of John Wallace Metcalfe*, ed. W. Boyd Rayward (Sandy Bay, TAS: Library Association of Australia, 1976), 111. Lee writes: “the belief that the culture in which we live is the source of our values implies that the literature produced by our society will, along with classification of concepts, reflect the values, needs and accumulated knowledge of our culture” (111). Beghtol cites Lee’s work when considering the different configurations of classification’s warrant or authority which have been formulated by various classification theorists. Beghtol, *Classification of Fiction*, 31–32.

categories of writing."¹⁶⁶ The vocabulary of these languages lend themselves to analysis as resources of social authority and a significant semantic heft.

On the other, classificatory language serves as a foil to demarcate a particular province of the writer. Borges's story is often read with an emphasis on the librarian's lament that "the certitude that everything has been written negates us or turns us into phantoms."¹⁶⁷ Certainly this would be a source for Castillo's reading of the story, in which she suggests that the library works to lead "the librarian...(and us) to consider the impossibility of writing new thoughts under such circumstances."¹⁶⁸ But the foreclosure of "The Library of Babel" also gestures towards a different order of silence, with a compulsion that does not need to be at all negatively intoned. There is space for a new kind of writerly innocence in Borges's library. Libraries do speak to mute all kinds of writers, but this operation is highly emblematic. The expression of classificatory languages represents a space wherein writers are compelled to reintegrate (and be silent) within the social.

¹⁶⁶ Alvin B. Kernan, *The Imaginary Library: An Essay on Literature and Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 21.

¹⁶⁷ Borges, "Library of Babel," 58.

¹⁶⁸ Castillo, *The Translated World*, 86. Perhaps the limit case of this kind of sentiment is offered by the author and librarian John Braine, who said in an interview that "being a writer in a library is rather like being a eunuch in a harem." Robert Gutwillig, "A Talk in London with John Braine," *New York Times*, October 7, 1962, BR3.

VII. Inspiration and afterwards

I think that the classificatory encounter as I have conceived it can be more completely demonstrated if I conclude with a few remarks which relate to inspiration.

When I started work on library classification, classification schedules – especially fiction classification systems – appeared to me in a particular glory, each as its own wrought thing. Expressive arrangements of book objects, I imagined them as texts which were also pictures: pictures that would depict, illustrate, potentially gloss, and powerfully place all that I loved. They might be the source of a thing which Michel de Certeau disparages but which has always endlessly appealed to me: “the ‘treasury’ hidden in the work, a sort of strong-box full of meaning.”¹⁶⁹ Fiction classifications appeared as full of delectation, and presented the chance to revitalise a wonderful resource; an opportunity for a significant retelling of or engagement with a marvellous map.

What creative and analytical opportunities are presented by the LCC, for example, which gathers such extraordinary subdivisions as “171.A6 Anonymity,” “171.G74 Greeting Cards,” and “171.H67 Housewives as authors” in its classification for special topics relating to authorship; or “56.A5 Allegory,” “56.B27 Balloons,” “56.H37 Health resorts, watering-places, etc.” and “PN56.M5363 Miniature dolls”

¹⁶⁹ Michel de Certeau, “Reading as Poaching,” in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (1984; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 171.

under special topics for what it calls “Theory. Philosophy. Esthetics.”¹⁷⁰ Or the DDC, which places the intriguing description and binary “Literature (Belles-lettres) and rhetoric” right at the top of its literature schedules?¹⁷¹ What corners of fiction and fictional practice might be discovered if readers worked from classification schemes and apparatuses? Where are particular fictional works located in different schemes and schedules, and what promise of context do these schemes provokingly, dazzlingly, offer these works?¹⁷²

Classification inspired me with zeal, but I was inspired heedlessly and without responsibility: I *behaved* heedlessly and without responsibility. I worked directly from fiction classification schedules themselves. Attempting to evoke and manifest my intuition of classification’s interpretative, phenomenal, or representative potential, so many previous versions of this chapter saw me chasing rabbits down holes. I entered a series of repeating situations of diminishing returns. Habitually I became attached to old and partial pieces of analysis which I could not break free of. Classificatory expression inspired and incited me, and yet each attempt would wind down, amounting to not much more than a few scattered analytic and

¹⁷⁰ Library of Congress, *Library of Congress Classification: PN; Literature (General)*, prepared by the Cataloging Policy and Support Office, Library Services (Washington, DC: Cataloging Distribution Service, Library of Congress, 2004), 23, 24, 3, 4, 6, 9, 3. A new edition of this LCC classification volume was released in November 2010. The schedule I consulted noted that all changes between its print editions are registered on *Classification Web*, an online version of the LCC which is available through subscription.

¹⁷¹ Dewey, *Dewey Decimal Classification and Relative Index*, 3:759.

¹⁷² Mark Swartz’s *Instant Karma*, investigated in my chapter on patronage, has been given the Library of Congress Subject Heading “Mentally ill—Fiction,” a designation which was not explicitly articulated by the novel in my reading of it. The story is also endowed with the less contentious subject headings “Public libraries—Fiction” and “Chicago (Ill.)—Fiction.” Swartz, *Instant Karma* (San Francisco: City Lights 2002), copyright page.

rhetorical impressions. It has been a long and painful process to peel off these plural pieces of partial analysis, and yet I cannot forget my initial zeal – I am sure there are moments when it can still be heard throughout this chapter – and I do mourn it. I see now that my enthusiasm was born out of my imagining that classification would proffer delectable kinds of representation for fiction. The finding of this chapter, however, is that any delectation of classificatory expression can only be invented by the analyst. Retrospectively the inspiration has been killed; has been shown to be misguided from its very inception; was in fact as walking dead as it is possible for inspiration to be.

This does not mean that delectation is impossible: the literary analyst can invent it. The key point of distinction is that it does not convey them to a place that they are familiar with; a place of hermeneutical or interpretative yield. It is exactly as Lévi-Strauss has said: classification's "terms never have any intrinsic significance. Their meaning is one of 'position.'" I have argued that classification serves a functionality which is not to be operationalised by the writer; I think it is possible that this is a functionality which is not to be operationalised by the reader either; a reader as all kinds of literary and textual criticism would have them be. I do not doubt that classificatory languages are available for analysis, and this analysis can be culturally, socially, and linguistically substantive, as suggested above. Looking for delectation, however, the greater truth to be learned is that classification's representation comes from a very different place than fictional representation. There is nobody behind it and there is nothing to figure. To extrapolate from it is as to

extrapolate from a void. For people interested in fiction and literature, the expression of classification operates as an extremely strange and perhaps repelling space. And so it is that the facility which classification offers is not a resource of representation at all, but a language which functions adversely to fictional expression. Classification acts to alert us that there are places, languages, and expressions where representation does not function as we might expect it to (and, apart from classification, what might these other intriguing adverse languages be?). It signals a crucial cleft in representation, and helps us to recognise (or be reminded) that representation can somehow, sometimes, operate emptily. In all of these ways the expression of classification draws a productive limit: a limit not only for the interventionary possibilities of library encounters, but for literary practice itself.

5. Ending

I. The library to come

“Librarianship has become preoccupied, perhaps to a point of obsession, with its own future.”¹ Any understanding of the contemporary scene of public libraries is immeasurably serviced when it includes a recognition of the institution’s orientation towards the future. In *A Brief History of the Future of Libraries*, Gregg Sapp suggests that “various contrasting points of view toward information technology and its effect on libraries have been expressed voluminously by hundreds of writers.”² Such preoccupations can be traced back at least as far as 1894, when it was feared that “the printing of books was about to be replaced by the new technology of the wax cylinder, and libraries would shortly become ‘phonographoteks.’”³ Similarly Vivienne Waller has observed that “in the late 1940s, radio, movies and TV were seen as grave threats to reading and the use of libraries.”⁴ The digital revolution and – in the shorter term – the global economic downturn have been the most recent catalysts for a proliferation of future thinking and for change.

In my investigation of patronage, the library book, and classification, I have not considered the socio-cultural scene of public libraries in any dedicated way. In

¹ Ross Atkinson, “Contingency and Contradiction: The Place(s) of the Library at the Dawn of the New Millennium,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 52, no. 1 (2001): 3.

² Gregg Sapp, *A Brief History of the Future of Libraries: An Annotated Bibliography* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow / Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), vi. Following this observation, Sapp is led to acknowledge that “there has been a tremendous abundance and frequent redundancy in the literature of librarianship in recent years” (vi).

³ Octave Uzanne, “The End of Books,” *Scribner’s Magazine* 16, no. 2 (1894): 225, cited in David Bawden, “An Obsession with Its Own Future? The Library, the Web and the Phonographotek,” *Journal of Documentation* 65, no. 4 (2009): 537.

⁴ Vivienne Waller, “Legitimacy for Large Public Libraries in the Digital Age,” *Library Review* 57, no. 5 (2008): 375.

the introduction I pledged to not forget the public library – the institution which has been at the heart of *Library Encounters* – and so it is crucial to acknowledge the conditions and pressures it operates under. There is a profusion of literature which sceptically represents extant library forms, processes, and models, and indeed explicitly questions the future existence of the institution itself. In “What If Libraries Are Artifact-Bound Institutions?,” David W. Lewis argues that libraries “will be replaced as the dominant technology for information communication moves from tangible objects to electronic bits on a network.”⁵ The prospect of public libraries’ extinction is aired with some regularity in populist press articles:

Should these institutions – that date back to 1900 B.C. – be on the way out?...a full 2.5 percent of our yearly property taxes go to fund them. That’s money that could go elsewhere – like [to] schools, the [Chicago Transit Authority], police or pensions.⁶

In the context of academic libraries, the Taiga Forum of associate university librarians, associate deans, and associate library directors has issued several controversial series of “Provocative Statements” since 2006. The latest of these, released in 2010, includes predictions such as “within five years, provosts will see that the bookless libraries out there are the most successful and will ask, are these libraries?”⁷ Clearly public libraries operate in a social and political environment

⁵ David W. Lewis, “What If Libraries Are Artifact-Bound Institutions?,” *Information Technology and Libraries* 17, no. 4 (1998): 191.

⁶ Anna Davlantes, “Are Libraries Necessary, or a Waste of Tax Money?,” *MyFOXchicago.com*, Fox Television Stations, July 2, 2010, http://www.myfoxchicago.com/dpp/news/special_report/library-taxes-closed-20100628; punctuation in this quotation has been altered.

⁷ Taiga Forum, “Taiga 2010–2011 Draft Provocative Statements,” December 22, 2010, accessed March 3, 2011, <http://taiga-forum.blogspot.com/>.

which includes a vocal cohort impatient to pronounce their obsolescence, and surely the future has been identified as a preoccupation of librarianship because one of the key implied elements of public library discourse is *ending*.

The examples of “phonographoteks,” radio, cinema, and television are not intended to dismiss challenges to the future of libraries out of hand by invoking clearly superseded scenarios of threat. Elements of library service – such as card catalogues and microfilm – have been wound back or become manifestly outmoded, and while the progression of library technologies does not, of course, necessarily support a scenario of the pending demise of the public library, the question of which elements of the library service will survive is a valid one.⁸ Moreover, acknowledging the superannuation of certain aspects of public library services is a realistic stance; in fact a position of increased strength from which to postulate what will endure. There are all kinds of abstruse but certain ways that book and library *forms* will subsist in virtual and material information environments: bibliographic remediation; taxonomic praxis and inherited theorisations and techniques of cataloguing and classification; electronic accounts where readers’ memberships, borrowed e-books, searches, and more are managed in new configurations of patronage; “metonymic

⁸ My own view in relation to the question of the ultimate termination of public libraries is implicitly aligned with a comment attributed to an unnamed Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) library director, who stated in one of the organisation’s membership reports that: “This too shall pass. The constant questioning of a library’s reason for existing is a very good thing. Libraries have continued to evolve to find their appropriate function—their core service. They will continue to get funded and continue to exist.” OCLC, *The 2003 OCLC Environmental Scan: Pattern Recognition; A Report to the OCLC Membership*, principal contributors Cathy De Rosa, Lorcan Dempsey, and Alane Wilson; ed. Wilson (Dublin, OH: OCLC, 2004), ix.

slippages” for the very terms “book” and “library”;⁹ or, to be more ironic still, even the perennial discourse of library obsolescence itself (Jennifer Summit identifies “a strikingly widespread tendency to misrepresent the library’s past, as if the very promise of the new must be purchased at the cost of understanding the old, which is repeatedly archaized and disowned”¹⁰). The development of library forms – including the forms of the encounters this thesis has been designed around – is a valid and important method of addressing the question of the library of the future.

⁹ Jacques Derrida, who identified these “slippages,” writes in full:

if we still say library or *bibliothèque* to designate this kind of place to come, is it only through one of those metonymic slippages like the one that led to the Greek noun *biblion* being kept, or the Latin noun *liber*, to designate first of all writing, what is written down, and then ‘the book’ – even though at the beginning it meant only the papyrus bark or even part of the living bark of a tree?

Derrida, “The Book to Come,” in *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 8; italics in the original.

¹⁰ Jennifer Summit, *Memory’s Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 234. Summit traces a very long history for statements of library obsolescence:

In a gesture that is continually replayed, the new library is set against, and made to vanquish, the old, a gesture that borrows from the paradigmatic break with the past that divides ‘medieval’ from ‘Renaissance.’ Just as the medieval/Renaissance divide rests on a language of darkness versus light, this imaginary division in library history pivots on a set of similar oppositions: closing versus opening, imprisoning versus liberating, hoarding versus sharing. (234)

Using an article from the first edition of *Wired* magazine in 1993, “Libraries without Walls for Books without Pages,” Summit identifies how similar metaphors “have framed the digital library from its earliest imaginings,” echoing writing from the same “polemic that drove Reformation era library history” (234–35). Summit writes that “even in the act of rejecting the past, we depend on it to establish the foundation and basic outline for the stories we still tell ourselves about who we are” (237). At her observation about the medieval/Renaissance divide, Summit cites Margreta de Grazia, “The Modern Divide: From Either Side,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37, no. 3 (2007): 453–68.

In this chapter I wish to contribute to the dialogues and commentaries around library futures in a different way. In addition to library forms there is much that could be discussed under the heading of public library futures, both socially (the service mission of public libraries;¹¹ their involvement in internet provision;¹² their generation of social capital;¹³ their function in liberal governance; their role in literacy and reading promotion), and operationally (the level of penetration of library services; shifting supply chains; the public library's new manifestation as a digital platform; and changes in the visibility and symbolic function of library buildings¹⁴). What follows, however, will be in no way comprehensive, nor addressed to the cultural, economic, and technological contexts which typically

¹¹ There are circumstances in which the justification for the ongoing provision of public library services is particularly pronounced. At the time of composing the final sections of this thesis, I observed a plethora of reports in news sources describing a significant increase in public library use prompted by the global economic crisis. Christine Rooney-Browne, having conducted a literature review of publications ranging in date from 1880 to 2009, writes that "there is an impressive, growing body of statistical and anecdotal evidence which supports the theory that there is indeed a link between public library usage and economic crises." Rooney-Browne refers to a study by Washington State Public Libraries (WSPL) which found that every area of library use in its network grew between 2007 and 2008, including patron visits, circulation, use of library websites, reference queries, and time spent on the internet on library computers. Rooney-Browne, "Rising to the Challenge: A Look at the Role of Public Libraries in Times of Recession," *Library Review* 58, no. 5 (2009): 342; WSPL, "Use of State's Public Libraries Rising During Recession," news release, February 4, 2009, http://www.secstate.wa.gov/office/osos_news.aspx?i=7mGFpzDxwXmjyN4wEGiiVw%3d%3d, cited in Rooney-Browne, "Rising to the Challenge," 343.

¹² See, for example, John Carlo Bertot, Paul T. Jaeger, and Charles R. McClure, eds., *Public Libraries and the Internet: Roles, Perspectives, and Implications* (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited / ABC-CLIO, 2011).

¹³ See, for example, Andreas Vårheim, Sven Steinmo, and Eisaku Ide, "Do Libraries Matter? Public Libraries and the Creation of Social Capital," *Journal of Documentation* 64, no. 6 (2008): 877–92.

¹⁴ The Seattle Public Library, for instance, gained worldwide attention in 2004 when it reopened its main branch in a building designed by architect and architecture theorist Rem Koolhaas, not least for its "Book Spiral" (which ordered books in "a continuous ribbon" following the sequence of the Dewey Decimal Classification system, making "the subjects form a coexistence that approaches the organic: each evolves relative to the others, occupying more or less space on the ribbon, but never forcing a rupture"). Michael Kubo and Ramon Prat, eds., *Seattle Public Library: OMA / LMN* (Barcelona: Actar, 2005), 34.

frame debate; my approach is more oblique than this, and tends towards the philosophical. In a backwards gesture, I take ending as a theme from the future of public libraries in order to incorporate this quality of the contemporary socio-cultural scene within my analysis. Ending, enlisted from an old discourse of library futures, will operate as an organising theme with which to figure their future.

Discussing what he calls “the book to come,” Jacques Derrida urged the necessity of surrendering “any kind of eschatological teleology, in other words any kind of evaluation, whether pessimistic or optimistic, reactionary or progressive.”¹⁵ According to Derrida we must refuse to mount a staunch, enamoured defence as resolutely as we must “give up any lamentation” (“‘What’s befalling us is the death of the book—catastrophe’”¹⁶); as resolutely as we must “be wary of a progressivist—and sometimes ‘romantic’—optimism, ready to endow the new distance technologies of communication with the myth...of universalist transparency” (17). Derrida’s repudiation of “any kind of eschatological teleology” for the book to come – his aversion to “evaluation” – is a rejection of prognosis, and I believe it has value for the situation of the library to come as well. Instead of prognosis Derrida advocates an analysis of “the retention of the model of the book” – the bibliographic remediation I noted above – which would investigate

the unit and the distribution of discourse, even its pagination on the screen, even the body, the hands and eyes that it continues to orient, the rhythm it prescribes,

¹⁵ Derrida, “The Book to Come,” 16.

¹⁶ Ibid.

its relationship to the title, its modes of legitimation, even where the material support has disappeared. (16)

Derrida enjoins a kind of analysis which investigates changing durability and acknowledges “coexistence” (16); rather than prediction or forecast, he recommends an identification of *the present in the future*. This method of critically advancing towards the book’s time to come proffers a model of a usefully conservative approach with which to consider the future of the public library, a field permeated by conjecture, augury, vision, assailment, and defensiveness. It is perhaps inevitable that certain elements of such practices will invade any discussion about library futures, but Derrida’s method presents a way to ensure that analysis will exceed the snare of these practices. This is because the example of his analysis demonstrates the necessity of integrating and deploying critical practice, in a strong sense, throughout any figuration or articulation of the future.

Accordingly the library of the future in this conclusion is not at all futuristic; when I say the library of the future I infer the *resilience* of the library of today and – as shall be seen – when I say the resilience of the *library today* I do not yet even mean an *institution* but rather a certain interpretative configuration, significant for the study of fiction, which can be formulated out of the work of this thesis. *Library Encounters* has been a theorisation of the public library of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Doubtlessly this institution was the last to manifest certain attributes which shall never again be endowed to any library, and it is difficult to say how applicable the main analysis of *Library Encounters* will be in another one

hundred years' time. Some broad areas of investigation for the present in the future of libraries have already been identified by merely noting the pliancy of bibliographic forms; the necessary endurance of classification practices and theories; the complaisance of libraries' figuration of patronage; the tolerance of "book" and "library"'s signification. Rather than focus on any one of these areas, however, I attempt to assume a more generalist perspective. In the case of the library, the critical practice endorsed by Derrida's model of the "book to come" is to be developed through a synthesis of certain epistemological tendencies evident throughout *Library Encounters*, and I characterise these tendencies with figures which Derrida developed in his essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." My argument shall be that the public library is an institution which uniquely configures endlessness and ends, and my conclusion relates to the nature of the support this configuration offers interpretative practices for fiction.

II. Ends and endlessness

The library is an institution for which it is not improper nor philosophically naïve to speak of essences; more exactly, it is not improper to speak of the ambition of essence. From an institutional mode of being in the seventeenth century, when libraries "were the expression of individual choice," Michel Foucault describes a new conception of the library which issued from the nineteenth century:

the idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity.¹⁷

This will which Foucault describes; Gabriel Naudé's cry ("Come in, all you who desire to read, come in freely"¹⁸); UNESCO's "Public Library Manifesto" ("the services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all"¹⁹): today's public library holds all of these intentions within itself as part of its history. Derrida has said that "the idea of *gathering together*...seems as essential to the idea of the book as to that of the library,"²⁰ and the orthodox library texts of Foucault, Naudé, and UNESCO show that the centripetal momentum Derrida has identified is not only the library's modus operandi but also its objective: its desire to create itself *as* an essence. Of course all of this is but to reiterate certain themes introduced in the first chapter about the posture of accommodation adopted by the library; its institutional tone. The public library's different modes of inclusiveness may play out as ultimately illusory functions and yet they cannot but inhere in some way in its

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 26.

¹⁸ Gabriel Naudé, *Jugement de tout ce qui a été imprimé contre le cardinal Mazarin depuis le 6 janvier jusqu'à la déclaration du 1^{er} avril 1649*, Paris, [1650?], cited in Léon de Laborde, *De l'Organisation des bibliothèques dans Paris* (Paris: Franck, 1845), 20, cited in Edward Edwards, *Memoirs of Libraries: Including a Handbook of Library-Economy* (Trübner: London, 1859), 2:772. Naudé's words were also quoted at footnote 48 of the introduction.

¹⁹ UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), "UNESCO Public Library Manifesto," 1994, accessed November 30, 2010, <http://www.unesco.org/webworld/libraries/manifestos/libraman.html>. This excerpt from UNESCO's statement was also quoted at footnote 51 of the introduction.

²⁰ Derrida, "The Book to Come," 7.

institutional function. However failingly the public library might live all of this purpose which has been dreamed for it the purpose is inextricably of its identity.

Its ambition for essence, precisely because it is ambition, means that as a discursive site of critical practice the library accommodates the articulation of other essences and supports other kinds of essential imaginings; metanarratives; positivist inclinations.²¹ The library's ambition for essence is perhaps registered most literally within the domain of creative and critical creative writing, where its involvement in the absolute can be reflected and instantiated, for example, by the different singular unities of the collection of Borges's dystopia and the atmosphere of Brautigan's utopia; by creative critical imaginings of universal libraries which generate various formations of "comprehensiveness."²² All of these expressed unities operate cumulatively, constituting what I think of as a kind of weight for the library. The purpose that has been dreamed for the library in its optimistic history is involved in the sustainment of a certain kind of unalloyed epistemological impulse evident

²¹ John M. Budd has outlined – and contested – the positivism which inheres in library and information science in "An Epistemological Foundation for Library and Information Science," *Library Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (1995): 295–318.

²² Jon Thiem, "Myths of the Universal Library: From Alexandria to the Postmodern Age," in *Cyberspace Textuality: Computer Technology and Literary Theory*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 257. Purportedly composed in 2056, this proleptic and verisimilar essay investigates the mythological significance of the by-then extant (and ubiquitous) "UL" or "Universal Library" (256). A "universal electronic database for libraries," the UL "unified and transcended all regional and specialized databases"; with his vision Thiem anticipated contemporary projects of mass digitisation because the UL was in part assembled when "the books of all academic and national libraries" were "scanned and converted to e-books" (257). Through "sophisticated word-subject-title search tools, Universal Abstracts, and electronic reading programs," the Universal Library "gives you everything there is, but it also gives you the means to find exactly what you need" (259; capitalisation in the original). It has become "the impossible object of mythological devotion and execration" (260). Thiem's piece concludes with a "Postscript" (264) from a world thrown into chaos: the UL has been attacked by hackers and destroyed; unexpectedly, however, this event produces a "widespread euphoria" across the globe, which the author surmises may be the result of "a temporary respite from the oppressive burden of learning, of human cultural memory" (265).

throughout *Library Encounters*. This impulse is revealed by my clear desire at moments in this thesis to treat certain elements of the library as integral: my allegiance to the material unity of the book, for instance; or my plenary treatment of classification languages; or the largely uncritical way I recruit the positivistic, broadly constellated area of library and information sciences as a verified, evidential base in order to build nuance in the textual realm, in an approach which is more multidisciplinary than truly interdisciplinary;²³ or my unproblematised conceptualisation of “institution,” untouched by the work of Derrida or Samuel Weber to interrogate and develop this concept.²⁴ Furthermore the library’s ambition

²³ A certain evanescence suggested by this thesis’s construct of “encounter” holds for the nature of its disciplinary interface as well. In multidisciplinary “disciplines remain separate, disciplinary elements retain their original identity, and the existing structure of knowledge is not questioned” while, for interdisciplinarity, “integration is the most common benchmark.” Where multidisciplinary is “juxtaposing” and “sequencing,” interdisciplinarity is “interacting” and “blending” – and while I think that the work of this thesis does integrate insights from library and information science into literary practice, it lacks the mutual interaction and bi-directionality which would be the signature of a fully interdisciplinary exercise. Julie Thompson Klein, “A Taxonomy of Interdisciplinarity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, ed. Robert Frodeman, with the assistance of Klein, Carl Mitcham, and J. Britt Holbrook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 17, 16.

²⁴ Here I have in mind Derrida’s interview in “This Strange Institution Called Literature,” and Samuel Weber’s collection of essays *Institution and Interpretation*. Weber stands in opposition to formulations that would reduce the concept of institution to “the maintenance of the status quo,” instead specifying that “the notion of institution at work in [*Institution and Interpretation*] is one in which *instituted* organization and *instituting* process are joined in the ambivalent relation of every determinate structure to that which it excludes, and yet which, qua excluded, allows that structure to *set itself apart*.” Derrida investigates literature itself as an institution, one which

allows one to *say everything, in every way*. The space of literature is not only that of an instituted *fiction* but also a *fictive institution* which in principle allows one to say everything...the law of literature tends, in principle, to defy or lift the law. It therefore allows one to think the essence of the law in the experience of this ‘everything to say.’ It is an institution which tends to overflow the institution.

This is not to say that literature for Derrida is unreservedly iconoclastic, as elsewhere he also figures literature as “conservative”; as having “an innocence or irresponsibility, or even an impotence.” However, Derrida reorients the notion of the institution through his work of conceiving literature as

of essence and the integrating and puristic elements of my critical practice both are undoubtedly answerable under Derrida's critique of the element of "Western science and Western philosophy" which yearns for "a point of presence."²⁵ Derrida characterises his critique with the figure of the centre, "by definition unique," which in this style of science and philosophy "constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality."²⁶ Thus the centre is something which is "paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside it*," and as such is "contradictorily coherent": exposing the ethos that an ambition for essence must also comprehend, Derrida recognises that "as always, coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire."²⁷

And yet also this: in *Library Encounters*, the desire for a centre is entirely matched by the exercise of its displacement. The work is cut through with representations and devices of succession, characterised by continuance and flow or endorsing these movements by showing the destruction wreaked in their absence: the suicidal library patron and reader David E. Felsenstein, protagonist of Mark Swartz's *Instant Karma*, critically debilitated in all his textual activities and undertakings because he is unable to let continue, and my attendant critical

"a place at once institutional and wild, an institutional place in which it is in principle permissible to put in question, at any rate to suspend, the whole institution." Weber, *Institution and Interpretation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), xv; italics in the original; Derrida, "'This Strange Institution Called Literature': An Interview with Jacques Derrida," by Derek Attridge, in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Attridge, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (1992; repr., New York: Routledge / Taylor & Francis, 2009), 36, 58, 39, 58; italics in the original.

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge / Taylor & Francis, 2001), 351, 352.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 352.

²⁷ *Ibid.*; italics in the original.

figuration of the library patron as a frequenter with a special relationship to the concept of return; the circulating library book, and the related anthropological category of the gift which must be kept in motion; the aggregation of methods (or wilful irresolution of method) for the classification of fictional material. The impetus of these representations and devices of succession and accumulation is also accounted for by the “formal schema”²⁸ of Western philosophy Derrida has designed, in a chronological manner. After centring Derrida identifies what he calls a “rupture” within “the history of the concept of structure,”²⁹ when it became

necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play.³⁰

This rupture he finds in the writings of Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, and most especially Lévi-Strauss, from whose work he is able to articulate a further process of renunciation: “the stated abandonment of all reference to a *center*, to a *subject*, to a privileged *reference*, to an origin.”³¹ Generally the displacement of the centre in *Library Encounters* is of a slightly different quality to both the sign-substitution of the first movement and the purgation of the second – and its precise nature shall be explored presently – but it is undoubtedly aligned with them and certainly can be encompassed by decentring as a technical criterion.

²⁸ Ibid., 356.

²⁹ Ibid., 351; italicisation in this quotation has been altered.

³⁰ Ibid., 353–54.

³¹ Ibid., 361; italics in the original. I also draw on an aspect of Derrida’s formulation of renunciation in the sixth section of the chapter on classification, where I suggest that Jorge Luis Borges’s short story “The Library of Babel” offers its fictional expression as a supplement to classificatory expression.

The decentring figurations of *Library Encounters* which belie the need for an end (and indeed its unitary figurations too) are as yet uneven and utterly unalignable, stretching across many multifarious scales and sites in and of the work. However, in the end I think that certain manifestations of the irresolute impulse – the impulse which would dislocate and refuse “a point of presence” – consolidate in a pattern more strongly than the unitary figurations, repeatedly emerging as a culmination in a kind of epistemological reflex. In this thesis I have identified phenomena which are the occasion for the interminable in the textual identity of the patron; the unknowability of a library book’s other readers; a cleavage between language and representation in classification as a mode of expression delineating an aphonic space of non-practice, unavailable to individual readers and writers. Interminability; unknowability; cleft: and *every time* such a space or such a practice comes at or very near the end of the work of a chapter. For each library encounter explored within this thesis a phenomenon has been arrived at which has significant deconstructive capacity, where things cannot be determined or cannot be done. The encounters seem compulsively to cascade towards an eluding post-structuralist figure, which emerges every time like a gasp at the end of practice. Through iteration this pattern operates to reveal and clarify the link between the two countervailing epistemological impulses of the library, for it is in reference to the decentering impulse that Derrida recognises “the absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely.”³²

³² Ibid., 354.

What is most signal about the library's countervailing epistemological tendencies is how they both operate as types or varieties of endlessness. The expressed unities, the weight of the library, are traction: their endlessness is that they promise to or imagine they shall abide. The preponderance of the post-structuralist figures in the library are intrinsically involved in the institution's relationship with modality: interminability and unknowability always open up; they allow space for practice; by maintaining ending with practice they perversely *keep* ending; they are an escape from *ends*. If for greater precision I stipulate that the endlessness of the expressed unities is *imaginary*, I should characterise this latter set in terms of *theoretical* endlessness. The library's post-structuralist figures operate as mechanisms for renewal, as much a conduit as the unitary figurations are traction. (The way that classificatory expression occludes the participation of an individual seems to broach the two categories of endlessness: developed as a post-structuralist figure, the unavailability of classification in fact resolves in the manner of the expressed unities, in the way that it demarcates a space of ongoing non-practice).

In the sense that this thesis is a document that will be read by a reader who will visit libraries, read other things, and live their textual life, it can perhaps be said that the modality of the second variety of endlessness is of the most *personal* interest. In this thesis the rubric of intervention has presented the library as both a producer of textual experience and a catalyst for textual experience: it has found simultaneously a determining library and a capacitating library. This doubled functionality of the library has been represented with the figure of the encounter

(and it is perhaps only at the end of work – faced plainly with determination and capacitation, centring and decentring – that the full sense of encounter as a phenomenological and methodological construct can be savoured: *encounter*, a word which was also once “proposed as a name for the rhetorical figure *antithesis*”³³). I have described patronage as a critical space for textual reflection and the library book as a material object bearing evidences of use which can promote connections between patrons or strangers. These post-structuralist figures which relate to indeterminateness in reading are capacities for intensification and, as suggested in the introduction, activity-identifiers and not subject-identifiers. As activity-identifiers, however, they are performative of interest to subjects because they are undertakings – each needs to be activated by an individual – and indeed this thesis has been littered with instances of my compulsive tendency to culminate analysis with the indication of an opportunity for a furthered practice (the library book was “found to be affective first of all, but also potentially productive,” and accommodating alterity in a library book reading encounter is “a facility and an opportunity”; the descriptor “patron” is “a gainful fiction of how the library’s potentials can be activated” and patronage itself “a self-activating mode of readerly intervention”). The opportunity of these critical practices is, furthermore, reflected in the recognised empirical capacity of the public library “to encourage people to

³³ *Oxford English Dictionary* (online), 2nd ed., s.v. “encounter, n,” accessed February 22, 2012; italics added.

experiment and take risks with their reading.”³⁴ Something of the library, in and at the end, seems always to function in the manner of a prospect. The precise nature or manifestation of the decentring impulse in the library is not predicated on sign-substitution nor on any “abandonment of all reference to a center”;³⁵ rather, through the work of this thesis I have found it to be closer to the creation of a discretionary space.

This is an instrumental development or realisation of the library’s relationship with ending, or in this case endlessness. Altogether the library as it has been revealed through this thesis, and the public library as we know it today, is an institution which keeps ending in play, not only *through* play (the play of critical practice in a discretionary space), but acting conjointly with an institutional weight that undergirds play: the public library’s profuse and differential modes of inclusiveness, civic and bibliographic; its facility of reader autonomy; ultimately, its institutional self-definition or institutional self-belief.

Refutation is not the only involvement the library has with ending, however: it is also a place which holds ends proper. I started work on this thesis intrigued by the guarantee the library offers textual work – codices, not “information” – a

³⁴ Bob Usherwood, *Equity and Excellence in the Public Library: Why Ignorance is Not Our Heritage* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 22. Usherwood is here referring to findings from his publication *Checking the Books: The Value and Impact of Public Library Book Reading* (co-authored with Jackie Toyne), which I referred to in footnote 77 of the introduction. Usherwood quotes one respondent from *Checking the Books* who remarked that “it is economical to try out books in the library. [People] are not wasting their money. They are safe to try out new books or authors” (22). Usherwood also notes that “other respondents felt that through taking...risks they had progressed as readers” (22).

³⁵ Italicisation in this quotation has been altered.

guarantee implied by Debra Castillo when she describes Christ's act of writing in the sand in response to his questioners as "a visible sign of his silence" and "a written message that cannot be formalized because its content is unrevealed"; she recognises in this textual act "a distinction that published writings cannot maintain," because such writings "are thrust...into the orders of the archive and the timeless presence of the books."³⁶ If contemporary book publication makes writing irrevocable, the library shelf seems to be more irrevocable still. For writing in the form of paperbacks and hardbacks, the *public* library in particular is at once a pledge of availability and a sanction; a profound kind of sanction, releasing the book into a circulation that is not commercial nor personal but a circulation informed by the library's ambition of essence and underpinned by a discourse of right ("each member of the Australian community has an equal right to public library and information services..."³⁷). A book might be purchased by an individual and put on his or her shelf, but the public library book has been acquired with public funds and placed by an impartial or professional person or agent, and becomes a work of material unity among others. The sanction in this act of public (and embodied) co-location is powerful. It is a commonplace to think of authors giving their work to the world, and yet it seems to me that a library acquiring that material work might be the truer representation of such a gesture.

³⁶ Debra A. Castillo, *The Translated World: A Postmodern Tour of Libraries in Literature* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press / University Presses of Florida, 1984), 326, 325, 326. Castillo's words were also quoted in the seventh section of the introduction.

³⁷ ALIA (Australian Library and Information Association), "Statement on Public Library Services," last modified March 1, 2009, <http://www.alia.org.au/policies/public.library.services.html>. This statement was also quoted at footnote 50 of the introduction.

In this thesis I have been at pains to position the library as implicated throughout the cycle of textual production and consumption, and yet this does not preclude its capacity to accommodate terminability; its function of acting as a place of sanctuary for ends. In her investigation of various consequences of the “typographical fixity”³⁸ characteristic of print culture, and specifically in relation to printed materials’ preservative properties, Elizabeth L. Eisenstein infers the inherent role the production of printed volumes plays in a signifying textual economy: “until it became possible to distinguish between composing a poem and reciting one, or writing a book and copying one; until books could be classified by something other than incipits; how could modern games of books and authors be played?”³⁹ Typographical fixity is involved in ensuring that books are in any one realisation consummate, and the library is an institution which intervenes definitively in these “modern games.” As transmitters of knowledge and information codices are now accompanied in a way they have never yet been before, and yet the electronic forms which now complement, imperil, and newly distinguish them – commonly understood to be always open to amendment in the very place where they are incarnate⁴⁰ – do not have an equivalent capacity of consummation. Printed matter is

³⁸ Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 1:113, 1:121.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:121.

⁴⁰ Nicholas Carr offers a transparent illustration of this property of electronic text when he describes his recent experience creating an e-book: “I dug out a handful of old essays I’d written about innovation, combined them into a single document, and uploaded the file to Amazon’s Kindle Direct Publishing service.” It takes two days for Carr’s e-book to be available for sale online. “The whole process,” he breezily acknowledges, “couldn’t have been simpler.” Soon afterwards, however, he

revised, expanded, rewritten, reissued, even disavowed and disowned; of course. By continuing to acquire codices, however, the library functions to interpose in the cycle of production, and it gathers the harvest of this interruption (authoritatively; as a proxy for us all). Francis Bacon denigrated the library as a “storehouse,”⁴¹ but a storehouse has this virtue: it takes books in their moment. The library operates as one of the most powerful signifiers of attainment for textual practice. The stack – the demonstration and sweet promise of the end of practice – is yet and more than ever a seal of work.

makes several editorial emendations, and this decision causes him to feel somewhat differently about the electronic publishing process:

I got the urge to tweak a couple of sentences in one of the essays. I made the edits on my computer and sent the revised file back to Amazon. The company quickly swapped...the old version for the new one. I felt a little guilty about changing a book after it had been published, knowing that different readers would see different versions of what appeared to be the same edition.

The emendation leads him to contemplate some of the differences between printed and electronic books in terms of editorial interference:

Once digitized, a page of words loses its fixity. It can change every time it's refreshed on a screen. A book page turns into something like a Web page, able to be revised endlessly after its initial uploading. There's no technological constraint on perpetual editing, and the cost of altering digital text is basically zero.

Acknowledging Elizabeth Eisenstein's work on typographical fixity, Carr's experience leads him to conclude “movable text makes a lousy preservative,” and that “what will be lost, or at least diminished, is the sense of a book as a finished and complete object, a self-contained work of art.” Carr, “Books That Are Never Done Being Written,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 31, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203893404577098343417771160.html>; capitalisation in the original.

⁴¹ Bacon, *The Instauration Magna: Part II; Novum Organum and Associated Texts*, ed. and trans. Graham Rees, with the assistance of Maria Wakely (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), 459, quoted in Summit, *Memory's Library*, 212. I also related Jennifer Summit's quotation of Bacon's remarks on the resemblance of the library to a “granary and storehouse” in footnote 72 of the chapter on patronage.

In this facet of sense where it operates so constitutionally to *come after*, the library acts as a public executor of textual works. However, its activity in this role exceeds the management of legacy; *executor* should be pared down to *execution* in the most operative sense. Precisely because the public library participates in a textually signifying economy with its unique, irreplicable sanction, its role must also incorporate a critical and ongoing institutional operation: the public library is not only a symbol but a functionary of textual ends. Although by no means exclusively it is instrumentally involved in the book's status as a work. Distinctively among organisations implicated in textual reification and, in particular, those involved in the provision of books and e-books and in the facilitation of a connection between writing and readers (the retail bookstore; online booksellers and wholesalers; virtual and material archives; virtual and material databases; commercial or independent publishers; private collections), the library executes a work within its particular matrix of endlessness. For textual work the public library is the institution which operationalises, simultaneously, a promise of continuance and mechanisms for continuance; and this promise and these mechanisms are differentially but also at once bibliographic, personal, ideal, institutional, civic, and readerly. Thus for textual work the library's public executorship clearly exceeds the administrative, the technical, and even the functional: it has critical, *interpretative* consequence. In one sense *Library Encounters* has been entirely devoted to identifying, enlisting, deploying, and exploiting this interpretative consequence, and itself acts as this consequence's demonstration. It is difficult to imagine another organisation or

institution that could legitimately support the speculative kind of analysis undertaken in this thesis, which has extrapolated *readings* – in the strongly interpretative sense of the word – into a proffered account of experience in a real-world institution; which, in using texts to explore ideas, has been anything but empirical; which has been in fact contra-empirical, concerned not with *how* people use books and libraries but rather *how they might*. Nevertheless, *Library Encounters* is but a single minor realisation of the consequence which derives from the library's unique, irreplaceable, *plural* sanction, and the more general operation of this consequence should not be obscured.

III. Fiction, consequence, and interpretation

For interpretation there is something characteristic and positive about the library's configuration of ends deployed in the context of an endlessness which is both willed and accommodated; I would suggest that it is specifically characteristic and positive in relation to fictional (and not necessarily "literary") writing which has been gathered in books. In "Structure, Sign and Play" Derrida identifies two kinds of response to the non-centre of discourse, and he speaks explicitly in terms of interpretation:

Turned towards the lost or impossible presence of the absent origin, [the] structuralist thematic of broken immediacy is therefore the saddened, *negative*, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauistic side of the thinking of play whose other side would be the Nietzschean *affirmation*, that is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation. *This affirmation then determines the noncenter otherwise than as loss of the center.* And it plays without security. For there is a *sure* play: that which is limited to the *substitution* of *given* and *existing, present*, pieces. In absolute chance, affirmation also surrenders itself to *genetic* indetermination, to the *seminal* adventure of the trace.⁴²

Derrida goes on to describe how there are consequently “two interpretations of interpretation,” one which “seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile”; and another, “no longer turned toward the origin,” which “affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who...throughout his entire history...has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play.”⁴³

For Derrida play is avowedly the radical activity; the matchless approach. Previously I used “play” lightly, idiomatically – “the public library...is an institution which keeps ending in play” – but for Derrida “play” exceeds the casual register; it is epistemologically apostate. He writes:

⁴² Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 369; italics in the original.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 369–70.

Play is the disruption of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Play is always play of absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence.⁴⁴

For all kinds of discourse Derrida's account of the centring and decentring impetuses of Western philosophy and science seems to explain so much – and indeed does explain so much – but it is crucial to remember that Derrida is concerned with the “human sciences” specifically; moreover, the focus of “Structure, Sign and Play” on ethnology and empiricism means the thread of his concern is pulled more and more towards the social sciences. Derrida builds upon Gerard Genette's contention that bricolage describes criticism – and literary criticism “especially” – by arguing that “every discourse is *bricoleur*,”⁴⁵ but I think the overreaching nature of Derrida's declaration indicates that in his essay something profound has remained elided or unarticulated for the literary field. In short, I suspect that Derrida's description of play is insufficient to function in the extolling manner he desires for it in the case of fictional writing.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid., 369.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 360; italics in the original.

⁴⁶ Derrida has elsewhere confessed his lack of interest in fiction and fictional experience, and in the course of explaining his disinclination seems to slide from a mere absence of proclivity to something more disparaging and even hostile:

I was interested by the possibility of fiction, by fictionality, but I must confess that deep down I have probably never drawn great enjoyment from fiction, from reading novels, for example, beyond the pleasure taken in analyzing the play of writing, or else certain naive moments of identification...telling or inventing stories is something that deep down (or rather on the surface!) does not interest me particularly. I'm well aware that this involves an

Most conventional definitions will relate fiction to the category of invention – “invented stories”⁴⁷ – and as textual invention, fiction can only be understood as a form of writing which has already integrated “the disruption of presence” into itself. This is why Jonathan Culler, who identified the exemplarity of fiction which I enlisted in the chapter on classification, is able to differentiate fiction from non-fictional discourses by observing that “reference to the world is not so much a property of literary works as a function they are given by interpretation”; fiction is that which “leaves the work’s relation to the world open to interpretation.”⁴⁸ Derrida’s schema of the discourse of human sciences leads him to his conclusion where a problematisation of *interpretation* is the critical product, and yet fiction is the site where interpretation is immanently problematised because it acts as the differential operator of fiction itself; that which facilitates fiction’s “special relation to the world.”⁴⁹ To speak even more precisely, it is also why Frank Kermode,

immense forbidden desire, an irrepressible need – but one forbidden, inhibited, repressed – to tell stories, to hear stories told, to invent (language and in language), but one which would refuse to show itself so long as it has not cleared a space or organized a dwelling-place suited to the animal which is still curled up in its hole half asleep.

Derrida, “This Strange Institution Called Literature,” 39–40.

⁴⁷ Chris Baldick, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), s.v. “fiction.”

⁴⁸ Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (1997; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 31, 32.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 30. The fact of fiction’s “special relation to the world” might also be indirectly supported by Derrida’s remarks on the different intentionality of literature (which, for a moment I will read as “fiction”) and literary criticism, when he states that:

It is difficult to speak *in general* of ‘literary criticism.’ As such, in other words as an institution, installed at the same time as the modern European universities, from the beginning of the nineteenth

paraphrasing Hans Vaihinger, is able to singularise fiction by stating that “the fictional *as if* is distinguished...from hypothesis because it is not in question that at the end of the finding-out process it will be dropped.”⁵⁰ Because fiction carries this highly specific and, to my mind, extraordinarily valuable condition – “it is not in question that at the end of the finding-out process” fiction’s *hypothetical-like* “as if”⁵¹ shall be relinquished – fiction has already put itself “before the alternative of presence and absence.” The object of fictional criticism (more idiomatically or also known as literary criticism, but that is not appropriate here) is *non-committal*, already imbricated in play: invested in a certain disinvestment fiction is conditionally primed to drop, and always ready to be abandoned as a way of explaining or encountering the world.

Fiction therefore inverts the order of priority evident in Derrida’s schema. We have seen Derrida identify what he calls “*sure play*,” a depreciated activity, and he elaborates upon this idea when he suggests that “the concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on

century, thereabouts, I think it must have tended, precisely because it wanted to be theoretical, to be more philosophical than literature itself. From this point of view, it is perhaps more metaphysical than the literary texts it speaks about. But it would be necessary to look at this for each case. In general literary criticism is very philosophical in its form, even if the professionals in the matter haven’t been trained as philosophers, or if they declare their suspicion of philosophy. Literary criticism is perhaps structurally philosophical. What I am saying here is not necessarily a compliment.

Derrida, ““This Strange Institution Called Literature,”” 53; italics in the original.

⁵⁰ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (1967; repr., London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 39; italics in the original.

⁵¹ Italicisation in this quotation has been altered.

the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play.”⁵² A preference for play over sure play is not so self-evident for interpretative practice in the fictional realm, and perhaps not so propulsive or progressive. Reference to the world is not a “property” of fictional works but a “function they are given by interpretation,” and as such this reference is relatively variable and unsecured: sure play’s “ground,” “certitude,” and “immobility” are more clearly stimulating and compelling in such a context. In relation to interpretative and critical practices around fiction, what is rarer, more urgent, more provocative, and more intriguing than play – I have deliberately chosen a *mélange* of descriptors which do not sit comfortably together because of the way they inelegantly track across registers of preference, value, and obligation – is a different mode of conduction, a mode closer to sure play. For fiction, play simply does not come with the premium Derrida invests in it. I would contend that *experiment* is the activity which should be imbued with an equivalent capital in fiction studies; not with the inflection that might be derived from the adjective “experimental,” but experiment when it is taken in a rigorously procedural sense, as Ian Hacking has described it. In the case of fiction what is needed is not abandonment to genetic indetermination and seminal adventure; for fiction there is a much greater imperative around experiment’s legitimating context.

⁵² Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 352.

In Hacking's *Representing and Intervening* experimentation is completely tied up in doing; in a profuse variety of means by which things can be done.⁵³ Out of a work which has figured the library as a site of interaction with a literary-critical sensibility – and which has recognised the intimate connection between fiction and the public library in particular⁵⁴ – “experiment” emerges as a provocative, productive, and even aspirational metonym to describe the activities of interpretative and critical practices around fiction. (And after all, is it such a surprise – in the end – to find experimentation so potent in an account of the library which has always insisted on the institution's interventionary tendencies, when the closeness of the relationship between experiment and intervention is remembered?⁵⁵) I suggest the metonym because of the way Hacking describes the receptive observation involved in experiment (he writes enthusiastically of a scientist in experimental optics who “was not testing or comparing theories,” but “trying to find out how light behaves”; he states that a pair of physics experimenters who won the Nobel Prize were awarded the honour not “for refuting anything, but for exploring the universe”⁵⁶). Perhaps most especially I suggest the metonym because of the operation of manipulation in experiment (Hacking suggests the contribution of an experimenter in quantum optics was not related to any theoretical advance, but

⁵³ Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening: Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Science* (1983; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 149–66.

⁵⁴ Some aspects of the coexistence of public libraries and fiction are considered in the first section of the chapter on classification.

⁵⁵ The relationship between experiment and intervention in the work of Ian Hacking is explored in the fifth section of the introduction.

⁵⁶ Hacking, *Representing and Intervening*, 157, 160.

rather “a keen ability to get nature to behave in new ways”; he explains how Francis Bacon demonstrated that we must not only “observe nature in the raw,” but “also ‘twist the lion’s tail’, that is, manipulate our world in order to learn its secrets”⁵⁷).

Experiment, however, comes with its own particular challenge:

There is no more familiar dictum than that experimental results must be repeatable...But as a paradoxical generalization one can say that most experiments don’t work most of the time...To experiment is to create, produce, refine and stabilize phenomena. If phenomena were plentiful in nature, summer blackberries there just for the picking, it would be remarkable if experiments didn’t work. But phenomena are hard to produce in any stable way. That is why I spoke of creating and not merely discovering phenomena. [It] is a long hard task.⁵⁸

Hacking insists that we recognise and appreciate how the phenomena of science are not only recorded but in fact *achieved* through experimental practice. And, more often than not, this achievement is dependent upon a highly specific context and set of circumstances. Reflecting upon the Hall effect, which I referred to passingly in the chapter on classification, Hacking writes: “If anywhere in nature there is such an arrangement, with no intervening causes, then the Hall effect occurs. *But nowhere outside the laboratory is there such a pure arrangement.*”⁵⁹ Experimentation, science’s own mode of conduction, is only made possible by the stable context of the laboratory. Through and through Hacking’s account is an all-pervading sense that

⁵⁷ Ibid., 158, 149.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 229–30.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 226; italics added.

the laboratory is much more than a site: it is the *platform* from which experiment – and consequently the very practice of science – can proceed.

James Bracken has observed that “while the primary laboratory of fine arts or music scholars must necessarily be where the primary resources are located—the gallery and museum or the concert hall—the laboratory for the literary scholar is the library.”⁶⁰ Bracken’s terminology is almost incidental – I too casually employed a simile of the library as laboratory in the introduction – yet I think his a highly apposite observation, in fact stronger than a metaphor and – simultaneously – an inexact comparison. Clearly it is important to acknowledge that fictional phenomena are not dependent upon the library in the same way or to the same extent that scientific phenomena may be dependent upon the laboratory. The library does not generate all or even most textual phenomena: on the contrary, throughout this thesis I have tried to show that it creates and is involved in a suite of highly specific textual phenomena. Relatedly, in Hacking’s account experimentation is implicated in scientific realism – he hypothesises as to the “best kinds of evidence for the reality of a postulated or inferred entity”⁶¹ – and I do not intend to absurdly parlay the

⁶⁰ James K. Bracken, “Literature,” in *The Humanities and the Library*, ed. Nena Couch and Nancy Allen, 2nd ed. (Chicago: American Library Association, 1993), 95.

⁶¹ Hacking, *Representing and Intervening*, 274. It is appropriate to note that Hacking’s argument includes a significant distinction between scientific entities and scientific theories. Theories are not manipulable in the way that entities are, and thus do not have the translating power which is required to substantiate scientific realism:

Aiming a finely tuned laser at a particular atom in order to knock off a certain electron to produce an ion is aiming at present electrons. There is in contrast no present set of theories that one has to believe in. If realism about theories is a doctrine about the aims of science, it is a doctrine laden with certain kinds of values. If realism about

comparison between the library and the laboratory into an equivalent contention about some kind of literary or ficto-realism. Nor do I mean to suggest that scholars of fiction must enter or consult libraries to practice. In counterpoint to attendance, patronage, and presence, I intend to infer something akin to what has been described in policy circles as the library's "existence value," which recognises that while "repositories of public knowledge" may not be "relevant to all people, all of the time," they are "still relevant."⁶² "Existence value" is mobilised within policy discourse in relation to obligations around the preservation and maintenance of such repositories, but I think this is a conservative use of the concept, because it seems to me that existence value also involves a clear mandate to more precisely consider and articulate the impact of an institution "irrespective of [its] levels of use and patronage."⁶³ Through all of these caveats I hope that the strength of the comparison between the library and the laboratory can emerge. I am not aiming to develop a physical, spatial or interior analogy but an institutional one: an analogy about the field, context, background, and condition of literary-critical practice.

In its role as an executor of fictional works and through its plural sanction, the public library of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is actively and

entities is a matter of aiming electrons next week, or aiming at other electrons the week after, it is a doctrine much more neutral between values. The way in which experimenters are scientific realists about entities is entirely different from ways in which they might be realists about theories. (263)

⁶² Bob Usherwood, Kerry Wilson, and Jared Bryson, *Relevant Repositories of Public Knowledge?: Perceptions of Archives[,] Libraries and Museums in Modern Britain* ([Sheffield]: Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society, University of Sheffield, [2005]), 3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

instrumentally involved in working to *determine the non-committal hypothesis of fiction otherwise than as loss of commitment*. For an activity such as literary-critical practice – still concerned with those kinds of *ends* we know as fictional works and, as such, specifically hermeneutical – the library’s involvement in reification is key. But we have seen that the public library is not only involved in reification. The public library has achieved its key role in textual execution by developing itself as the institutional site which both executes and *respects* textual ends and endlessness.⁶⁴ The public library is where two aspects of the “fictional as if”⁶⁵ coincide: on the one hand, the library maintains the “fictional as if” as a work of fiction which is also an end and, on the other, it works to recuperate the “fictional as if” as the frame of human activity which is fiction’s specific kind of hypothesis. Exactly like a laboratory, the public library is the field which furnishes a context for the practice of the manipulations of the interpretation of fiction. If experiment is viably a productive and provocative metonym for ficto-critical activity, the public library is involved in operationalising this activity by converging a “point of presence” with the

⁶⁴ There is another institution involved in the provision of books and the facilitation of a connection between writing and readers that I deliberately excluded from the list of organisations which appeared earlier in the conclusion. This institution is the classroom, and I omitted it precisely because I suspect that, given sufficient analytical space, classrooms in schools and universities would be discovered to have an interpretative consequence which, like the library, is significantly unique. It would take an immense amount of investigation to achieve a formulation of the classroom’s consequence comparable to the present investigation of the library, but I think it is self-evident that pedagogy must also play a distinctive configuring role in the navigation of fictional ends and endlessness. Lloyd Verner Ballard’s observation that the school and the library are “*complementary*” agencies may be prescient and extremely penetrating in this regard. Ballard, *Social Institutions* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1936), 233; italics in the original. Ballard’s observation was also quoted in footnote 46 of the introduction.

⁶⁵ Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, 39. Italicisation in this quotation has been altered; as noted above, Kermode was here paraphrasing Hans Vaihinger.

opportunity of discretionary interpretative practice. In this manner, the public library's existence value is that it is irreducibly a condition of interpretative and critical practice around fiction as this practice is conducted today.

The public library's redetermination of fiction's hypothesis is a specific interpretative configuration, and I contend that it is a crucial component in what can be identified as the present in the future for the public library. This is a future beyond the institution, in the sense that it is a future which has been articulated unapologetically at an intersection of institution, materiality, and practice. Perhaps the configuration shall only exist as a future memory of a particular kind of interpretative practice for fiction, or through some future reference *backwards* to identify the practice in the course of a historical or evolutionary treatment of literary criticism's future remediation. The configuration is resilient even as a memory, however, and such a future is not imminent. The public library shall always be an institution which has been involved in capacitating an "interpretative as if" for fiction studies.

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