Searching for a Library Child

Jessica Schriver

ABSTRACT Through the building and maintenance of systems in libraries, a universal child is constructed. While many systems scaffold the Library, this paper focuses on the library catalog, as it systematizes and makes legible the Library Child. By reading the Library through theories of power, infrastructure, and childhood, the complexity of systems that work on both the Child and the Library. Ways to challenge that system are available when we know what the system looks like and how it works.

> *The library was a little old shabby place. Francie thought it was beautiful. The feeling she had about it was as good as the feeling she had about church. She pushed open the door and went in. She liked the combined smell of worn leather bindings, library paste and freshly-inked stamping pads better than she liked the smell of burning incense at high mass.*
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> *Francie thought that all the books in the world were in that library and she had a plan about reading all the books in the world. She was reading a book a day in alphabetical order and not skipping the dry ones. She remembered that the first author had been Abbott. She had been reading a book a day for a long time now and she was still in the B's. Already she had read about bees and buffaloes, Bermuda vacations and Byzantine architecture. For all of her enthusiasm, she had to admit that some of the B's had been hard going. But Francie was a reader. She read everything she could find: trash, classics, time tables and the grocer's price list. Some of the reading had been wonderful; the Louisa Alcott books for example. She planned to read all the books over again when she had finished with the Z's.* (Smith 17-18)

In the early pages of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn,* Betty Smith describes Francie Nolan as a child who loves to read and loves going to the library. Growing up in poverty-stricken Brooklyn at the turn of the century, Francie finds joy in checking out her weekly books and peace as she reads them on the fire escape.

It is striking how aware Francie is of the book organization. Shelved alphabetically, at a time in history before classification standards took hold in American libraries, and with no children's reading room just general stacks, the only limits to Francie in this library are what books are available during her visit. Francie's library is a world difficult to understand today, with Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) and the Library of Congress systems structuring America's library shelves. Reading about "bees and buffaloes, Bermuda vacations and Byzantine architecture" together is the antithesis to the library's classification system today, where the emphasis is on depth of a subject, rather than breadth of knowledge.

The systems that make up our every day life are easy to ignore. They typically make our lives easier, more efficient, less complicated. But as Shannon Mattern points out, "concern with infrastructures, particularly with the material networks that make our seemingly immaterial systems work, or work better, seems to be part of the zeigeist" (x). Exposing these systems through detailed, critical analysis is a chance to appreciate and challenge systems.

That librarians devote extensive time to develop their skills is unique to social

institutions. The emphasis on practicality, and in particular, library systems are always framed as service-oriented endeavors. However, as more and more systems are exposed, the implicit power of those systems is coming to light. Francie's visits to the local library may be seen as her empowerment over her education and understanding—which is an apt reading. We often coo over children "reading" books and libraries often offer reading hours for children of all ages, including babies and toddlers. But what is less savory for some people is a dissection of Francie's library reading as disempowering, through the systematic construction of literacy. Melissa Adler, writing with a queer theory lens on libraries, notes "these systems must be understood as tools that have contributed to the construction of a national history and identity of the United States…that the subjects were not only arranged in relation to one another but in relation to an imagined nation and its interests" (Adler xi).

While Adler's call is a big undertaking, much too big to explore in total here, I do take up her call through Mattern's analytical methods to think about how the library catalog enacts a Foucauldian power system. Through the skilled crafting of discipline, I argue that library systems are not neutral data, but rather carefully structured to produce a universal child. As frightening as this reveal is, there is also a method of breaking the system. Through Latour's translation/ purification practices, children work to pick apart the disciplinary hierarchy so pertinent to the catalog. And because Latour argues that these merged practices can "change the future," I close thinking about how posthumanism offers libraries a method of examination and praxis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public libraries have become central outlets of information in the American system of democracy. As institutions of knowledge and accessibility to knowledge, libraries hold a special place in the heart of American culture. But American culture also situates the book as a medium of knowledge acquisition. As Patricia Crain explains, "The book as a sacred or quasi-sacred object and the book as a container for something that one must go to the book to acquire in order to fill the heart—or, in a sense, to have a heart at all, to become, that is, a self" (155). Children are declared in need of knowledge and thus in need of books. "The book form is often represented as a container for aspects of the self that can only be acquired there" (Crain 168), and the library is, then, the container of these containers. There is little excuse, then, for any child to be without this knowledge since libraries lend books without charge.[1]

Libraries are mapped in highly localized ways. There are no two shelving plots alike in any library; yet, what ties all of these multifarious geographies together is the catalog. The catalog is built by library staff and accessed by library patrons. On the built end, library staff must enter particular information, into particular fields, for particular items—under a universal umbrella. In universalizing data, the catalog serves patrons, the idea that a particular item is searchable and locatable across libraries. Yet, the uniform demands of the catalog, with noble claims of accessibility, are unable to meet the needs of all its users. Children, in particular, are often underserved by the library catalog.

While scholars admire the complexity of children's search habits, they admit that children are understudied users of catalogs. Allison Druin notes that the demands of children as library

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[1] Unless the item is late, or damaged, or lost.

patrons are not out of line. “Children still want more copies of books in better condition and more books for entertainment,” she explains (22). However the foundation of cataloging—subject headings—fails to meet the needs of children. “If one looks at the Dewey Decimal Classification,” a major system of organization for public libraries, “the classes for fiction are quite limited,” which is a problem for children because “fiction” is what “children are most interested in,” as well as multicultural materials, according to Druin (22). Without a system that speaks to their needs, children as catalog users are limited. Yet, Druin notes that it is not simply the catalog that limits, but also the cognitive development of children. “Development psychologists have shown that children think quite differently from adults…the way that information is categorized for children might not be the same as for adults” (Druin 22). Thus children face limitations from both the catalog system organization and their own biological constraints as early learners. “Search terms such as ‘gross stuff,’…’scary stuff,’ ‘castles,’ and ‘jokes and cartoons’ (Druin 23) are not part of the standard DDC, yet this is what children—real children—key into catalogs.

There are two ways to manage this problem at present: (1) create an OPAC (open public access catalog) for children to use and (2) tailor the current catalog systems to meet the needs of child users. Both have their pitfalls and successes, and within a Foucauldian reading of the catalog, they are situated as complex negotiations of power.

In a study from the University of Maryland, Druin reports on building a digital library “for children with children.” The research team in the article not only set out to create an interface that met the particular needs of younger patrons, but also invited children into the research and development of the interface. Two themes became clear. Children advocated for “(1) customization and (2) visualization of tools and materials” (24). Graphics, in particular, is a topic that comes up often when child interfaces are developed (see Sandlian), but the customization request points to the perspectives children bring to problems. As Paul Solomon writes, “Children, as users, bring a dimension of diversity and change that seems particularly appropriate for a study of uncertainty, variety, and complexity as they influence the use of an information retrieval system” (unpaginated). Without this complexity, an adult-only team may have never considered customization a valuable factor in interface construction. Children, then, are not only important to the research as future users, but also as people with perspectives and opinions, to be taken seriously. In one case, a child on the research team noted that, “‘You have to be patient with them [adults], since they only know what adults know. But when you’re patient you can learn from adults and they will learn too’” (27). A touching example of how easily children should not be discounted due to cognitive development. A children’s interface may actually be a better design for all users, of all ages (see Sandlian).

“Children want and need different collections, different ways of cataloging materials, and different tools-technologies to access and use collections” (Druin 34). Pamela Sandlian outlines how the Kid’s Catalog was built in tandem with the building of a new library building in Denver, CO.[2] “Customizing the networked information,” explains Sandlian, “is a step towards helping children become sophisticated information users” (134). Unlike in Druin’s case, where children

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[2] It’s interesting to think about how both the building and the system that organizes the building are being built simultaneously. I wonder if either influenced outcomes of the other.

advocated for customization, adults were interested in customizing for children:

> The project started with input gained from children in a series of five focus groups during the summer of 1990 at the Denver Public Library. Children and their parents told us they had difficulty understanding how to use the library. Children rarely asked for assistance from staff; in fact, they asked if we could make the librarians shorter (i.e., they would feel more at ease asking a peer for help). They wanted an environment that was friendlier, more accessible, more comfortable. The children asked that fiction be organized by subject, instead of by author. They wanted information in other formats besides books. The online catalog system, CARL, was difficult for children to decipher. They had difficulty spelling, typing fast enough to avoid the built-in time allotment limitations to searches, and formulating the right words to initiate a search. The successful searches indiscriminately provided hundreds of titles, both juvenile and adult, relevant and irrelevant. Once this display of materials was available, children had difficulty deciding which books held the most promise for their query. After a great deal of thought about children's information needs, it became apparent that the online catalog had to better reflect the information use and skill levels of children. (138)

Here, children are critical of the catalog and how the catalog makes navigating the library difficult. As the atlas of the library space, the catalog is where children go to locate those containers of knowledge. Recognizing that children were interested in gathering their own materials, the Kid's Catalog team realized that to meet that demand, a more kid-friendly catalog was needed "to not only assist children in their information searches but also to entice them to explore information" (134). While "classification systems force materials into single subject areas" it is important to note that "information is dynamic" (Sandlian 137).

In 1966, the Library of Congress, recognizing the particular needs of children in libraries, and created the Annotated Card program (Intner, Fountain & Weihs). This program "adapted the Library's cataloging policies and practices to include annotations, modified subject heading use, and some special classification options" (2). Today, the continued development of this program yielded the Children's Subject Headings (CSH).[3]

As a matter of standardization—and perhaps efficiency—libraries began sharing their records. Instead of locally customized records and processes, the ALA "recommended…that LC's [Library of Congress] practices for cataloging children's materials be adopted as a national standard" (2), positioning the state as the influencer and controller of children's catalog records. As Intner et al. notes, the development of MARC records has made libraries more efficient in terms of critically under-valued library labor and "made it possible for many smaller libraries to automate their catalogs" thus making homogeneous records across library catalogs (3). Adler, citing Patrick Wilson, writes "'the organization of knowledge is in fact 'power over power.' It is true that each individual cataloger holds a degree of power, but more significant is the fact that the standard-bearing institution in bibliographic control and the organization of cultural memory

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[3] The Library of Congress CSH is available online: http://id.loc.gov/authorities/childrensSubjects.html

in our research and public libraries is, in fact, tied to the state" (Adler 9).

Today, library studies seem to be on trend. From film (Hermione in the Harry Potter series always finds her answers in the library), to television (USA series, *The Librarians*), being in the library has gotten cooler—although probably not cool—and it seems fitting to invest in this space as much theoretical work as schools and playgrounds receive. In the past few years, a spate of scholars have taken up this mantel, even creating a field of study called Critical Library Studies (CritLib), to bring theory into the practicality-emphasized field of Library Studies. Using "a reflexive lens to expose and challenge the ways that libraries and the profession 'consciously and unconsciously support systems of oppression,' thereby pursuing a socially just, theoretically informed praxis" (Nicholson & Seale 2). There is nothing wrong with practicality, per se, as it is the execution of regular tasks that makes machinery run. What CritLib is pushing for is rather an acknowledgment that the message of "practicality is inextricably entwined with our profession's claims to neutrality" (5). It is "the hegemony of practicality within librarianship [that] acts to reproduce patriarchy, neoliberal ideology, neutrality, and white supremacy" (5). Closely examining the systems that make up the practice of librarianship is one method that moves closer to improving library services.

THEORETICAL INTERVENTIONS

People, Foucault explains, are subjected to power because power sees them as "something that can be made": "out of formless clay, an inept body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit" (135). Of course, Foucault is specifically speaking of the ways bodies are made into soldiers. But as we think about the body modifications, the mind of a soldier is also being crafted through these bodily adjustments. Tying body and mind together, Foucault illustrates the innocuous methods of discipline. Small, micro adjustments repeated over and over, time and time again are what make discipline go unnoticed, even natural. These micro adjustments are deployed in library services: shushing loud voices, posting rules of conduct, and meticulously cataloging materials. While each of these elements deserves further examination, I want to focus on the standard: Cataloging. Because cataloging is a complex, data-centered task, there is a certain amount of prestige to it. To do cataloging well is a sign of knowledge and study. Yet, to be the best at cataloging is also to absorb a classification system of the state, the "apparatuses in the production of subjects" (Adler 12).

Cataloging is a manifold project. Rather than attempt to cover the entire scope—of pedagogy to patron—I examine the power system of subject headings and consider the outcomes for children in their library searches. In particular, I think about how children disrupt the classification systems of library simply by being children.

HV8666.F6813 | *Discipline & Punish*

"Discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, 'docile' bodies," Foucault argues, "It dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an 'aptitude,' a capacity, which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that

might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection" (138). Foucault is breaking the bad news: that skill—highly valued and desired—is the symptom of a docile body. To know how to do a thing well is to perform it according to the will of the task, not individual desire. Yearning to be highly skilled—to complete the task better, more efficiently—is an additional symptom of docility. Mastery, then, can be considered a useful technology of discipline: it feels good to be a master, but it also means you are docile.

Aptitude

The aptitude of learning how to use the library catalog is a success: cataloging skills mean more accurate searches, tailored results, and the right texts for need. It is the "strict subjection" that highlights how docile the catalog user has become: she knows the subject headings, she knows the best searches, she knows where the books are because she has internalized the classification system. At once she feels successful in the results, however, her success is merely the verification of her docile body.

One element making the catalog so successful at discipline is the investment in detail. "Discipline is a political anatomy of detail" (Foucault 139) and detail is the very foundation of classification. The catalog entry for *Discipline & Punish* shows how the Library of Congress sees this text:

Title Discipline and punish : the birth of the prison
Creator Foucault, Michel, 1926-1984.
Subject
Prisons
Prison Discipline
Punishment

The subjects, Prisons, Prison discipline, and Punishment are telling: (1) this is not a text of theory, (2) this is not a text of Power, and (3) and the term Discipline isn't even given its own subject heading, yet Punish is. If an apt searcher was looking for Theory works dealing with Oppression or Discipline, this text may never enter her results because the classification scheme —which she so dutifully deploys—would never allow such a hit. Aptitude in executing searches in the catalog means embodying discipline.

Like Foucault illustrating how what works on the body works on the mind, the seeming neutrality of library organization is just not neutral. And while the agenda of the library is beyond the scope of this analysis, the "structures underlying the classifications and naming systems in libraries were born out of and reiterate societal norms" (Adler 22). As Intner et al. explain to students of cataloging, their duties are not just knowing the code, but determining an item's "aboutness" (21) and thus determining the item's classification. As Adler argues, "A subject of a work was reduced to what that work was about, and aboutness came to be defined by subject headings" (xii). The reduction of an item to an individual's reading is a powerful exercise of discipline and picks away at claims of neutrality, one item at a time.

Call Numbers

Foucault discusses how management grew, thereby adding layers of complexity to

disciplinary practice. “By assigning individual places it made possible the supervision of each individual and the simultaneous work of all” (Foucault 147). No longer is a single Boss waking the aisles enough; now, different levels of observation are deployed to collect even more data and to further distance the disciplined from the disciplinarian. Instead, there are many disciplinarians, each reporting to another above, on the people below. “In organizing ‘cells,’ ‘places’ and ‘ranks,’ the disciplines create complex spaces that are at once architectural, functional and hierarchical. It is spaces that provide fixed positions and permit circulation; they carve out individual segments and establish operational links; they mark places and indicate values; they guarantee the obedience of individuals, but also a better economy of time and gesture” (Foucault 148). Call numbers not only designate place and rank on a shelf, they also organize users to move into specific spaces in the library, such as nonfiction or nonfiction. However, for children’s materials, there is a further organizational pressure to move the user to the children’s area, a space segmented from the general stacks. Unlike Francie Nolan’s library, where she was not excluded from any particular space, designating a children’s space (1) welcomes children into that space and (2) does not welcome to explore spaces outside of the children’s area.

In *Cataloging Correctly for Children,* Intner et al. Write: “Catalogers need to keep in mind the hierarchical nature of the DDC when choosing a [call] number” (138). There is a professional call for obligation and skill: not only should catalogers know the hierarchy of DDC, but also must adhere to the principles of it. Intner et al. go on, “The notational hierarchy of the DDC is obvious because it is visible, with longer numbers more specific than and subordinate to shorter numbers in the same class” (138). While the number may be visible to patrons—it appears on the spine of the book—its power is invisible. The hierarchy of call numbers are based on numerical building: As the numbers grow, the subject field is narrowed. That base number is what ties them all together.

For Foucault, hierarchy and rank are disciplinary techniques: “Discipline is an art of rank, a technique for the transformation of arrangements. It individualizes bodies by a location that does not give them a fixed position, but distributes them and circulates them in a network of relations” (146). Intner et al. (138) uses a search for the subject heading “General customs” as an example of the hierarchy of the DDC:

394 General customs
394.2 Special occasions
394.26 Holidays
394.262 Holidays of March, April, May
394.2627 May Day

Shelving of these items reflects the hierarchy, turned horizontal, so that 394 would appear at the left and more complex numbers moving to the right. These numbers then send the user to a specific shelf in the library for retrieval in the nonfiction area. However, if any of these numbers had a J in front of it (J 394), the patron would be directly to the nonfiction shelves of the children’s area. In this way, the addition of a small detail, the letter J, moves the user to a part of the library separate from the general, or adult, stacks.

These call numbers become that network of relation. They are always beholden to their general number. “‘Whatever is true of the whole is true of the parts’” explains Intner et al. (139).

However, by the time a user gets to “May Day” they may no longer be considering “General Customs” as the source topic so far away from that whole number.

Records

Of course, call numbers and subject headings are present in all catalog records—whether for adults or children. As Druin notes in her literature review, researchers have been interested in these subject headings as they pertain to child users in efforts to make searching the catalog more successful: children “developed their own metadata categories”; “children made a clear distinction between people and animals, but not between fiction and nonfiction”; children recommended search terms, including dinosaurs, dragons, princesses, gross stuff, family life, sports, scary stuff, castles, and jokes and cartoons (23). The recommendations from children here are telling: they seem unaware of the numerical hierarchy catalogers are so invested in. In these descriptions, no child is suggesting adding numerical builds onto general topics; instead, children are asking for subject headings that are relevant to their interests regardless of subject hierarchy. Druin goes on to claim that “the idea that metadata could be defined by the way that a child felt about the book suggested a more user-centered approach to cataloging” (34-5).

The false neutrality of the catalog—as the search aid for everyone—falls apart when children are engaged in the work of cataloging, rather than simply cataloging for children. When feelings and emotions are brought into the record, the hierarchy struggles to keep up. What does scary stuff mean? Does this include bugs or atomic warfare or the dark? I don’t mean to mock children; I actually find their rebuttals to the catalog invigorating. When they ask for a subject heading for “gross stuff,” there is no single answer—there is nothing pure in gross stuff, except for the embodied emotional response to some thing that is gross. Children, in this way, are embracing Latour’s proposal of never being modern, acting as “that a delicate shuttle should have woven together the heavens, industry, texts, souls and moral law—this remains uncanny, unthinkable, unseemly” (5). Latour makes clear the problems of catalogs for children: “If the creatures we are pursuing cross all three spaces, we are no longer understood” (5).

Q175.5.L3513 | *We Have Never Been Modern*

To diagnose modern thought, Latour outlines two practices: translation, which he argues mixes two “types of beings, hybrids of nature and culture” and purification, which divides the human from the nonhuman (10-11). If we are to believe in these separations, explains Latour, then we are being modern, doing what moderns do. But “as soon as we direct our attention simultaneously to the work of purification and the work of hybridization, we immediately stop being wholly modern, and our future begins to change…our past beings to change” (11). The key, it seems, is to do what children are doing already: reading across subject headings, to find and compile all the things that are gross.

Children have been an important part of library services since the early 20th century. As outlined in the literature review, the ALA in the 1960s took on the job of standardizing children’s catalog. Creating uniformity, it seemed, was a method of providing structure for early learners. That system has gone on to perpetuate the sort of systemic data control that makes cataloging what it is today and tomorrow.

The concerns raised by the ALA are interesting. They found that library staff, who had no control to change classifications, chose to modify bibliographic records to tailor the child's search experience. The ALA "found that the lack of a uniform standard meant that many libraries developed customized cataloging according to their own perceived needs or that they accepted nonstandard cataloging from other sources" (2). An early interface intervention, the library staff engaged in Latour's merged practices, of both enacting the duties of classification as per the ALA and Library of Congress, while simultaneously translating content for children to understand. Still within the framework of Foucault's disciplinary hierarchy, these library staff were probably trained and invested in the purification of classification; however, those edits, those translations, changed the future of searching, making monstrous records.

In their analysis of controlled vocabulary, Gross, Taylor and Jourdrey explain that subject heading searches, while touted by library professionals, are often not undertaken by library users. "Even though most users cannot negotiate subject-heading searches successfully, many authors are not ready to abandon controlled vocabularies… 'Controlled vocabulary offers the benefits of consistency, accuracy, and control…which are often lacking in the free-text approach'" (Gross et al. 9). The emphasis here on purification—that subject headings, regardless of how end users feel about them—speaks back to Foucault's hierarchy of discipline. It might be helpful to further consider that classification systems are a way to normalize searches: when a search yields unsatisfactory results, the user will retry searches until the system returns satisfactorily relevant results. Perhaps, though, what is really happening is the user is learning the technology of control and internalizing that to produce better search methods. "The power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another" (Foucault 184). Catalogs must insure purity and homogeneity if searches are to be successful, if users are to find success in the library.

No authors in the literature review here recommended keyword or Google-style searches for libraries (see Gross et al.). Yet, as noted in Gross et al., there appears to be a trend for purification by library professionals in "the period in which collaborative tagging has emerged" (15). Beholden to the classification system, libraries are slow to consider hybridization as a method of classification. Yet, overwhelmingly, children and adults working with/for children note that a hybrid program offers some of the best results. There are two sides to this: end-user controls and back-end controls. The former puts the power over the material in the hands of the child user with customizable interfaces. The latter gives library staff the ability to customize records and interfaces for child users.

CONCLUSION

Successful searching is such an important framework in catalog building. It would be foolish to dismiss all subject headings, all keywords, all call numbers as oppressive systemic agents. And consider the daunting task of recataloging all the books in all the world to retrofit a new, inclusive system. We're not there yet.

However, that doesn't mean we passively accept the powerful construction of library systems. CritLib is tailoring its work to not only bring theory to study, but to invite library staff to think with theory and alter practices on a local level to challenge power systems. In the larger

context, Posthumanism—Object-oriented ontology (OOO) offer ways to rethink and reconfigure our understanding of libraries, and specifically, how libraries serve children.

Object-oriented feminism, a rebuttal/offshoot of OOO, "gladly seizes on speculative realism's nonanthropocentric conception of the world as a pluralist population of objects, in which humans are no more privileged than any other" (5). Anthropocentric conceptions are ways to normalize power, continuously pushing on non-humans to develop human qualities. And while here, Behar is referring to the non-human, I want to reframe her analysis and not just human, but human-as-adult. Children are constantly poked and prodded into adults; this is also known as "raising a child." Libraries do this, too, by creating children's library spaces that keep children out of the general stacks and curate the reading materials for children. And while both of these practices are not all bad—having child-sized furniture and literacy level assistance—they are not all good either—children may be seen as suspicious if they are outside the children's area and who gets to decide what children read. Being able to hold these two ideas in mind is part of what makes OOF a satisfying response to either the current library studies paradigm: theory or practice. OOF says both/and, in a Latourian stance, to not only address power but to find ways to work with/in/against it.

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