

Into the Labyrinth of Knowledge and Power

**The library as a gendered space in
the western imaginary**

Sanne Koevoets

**PhD Dissertation
Utrecht University**



Sanne Koevoets, 2013. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons
Attribution-Non Commercial-Share Alike 3.0 Unported License

ISBN: 978-90-393-5988-4

Into the Labyrinth of Knowledge and Power
The library as a gendered space in the western
imaginary

In het Labyrint van Kennis en Macht
De bibliotheek als gegenderde ruimte in het westerse imaginaire

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Utrecht op gezag van
de rector magnificus, prof.dr. G.J. van der Zwaan, ingevolge het besluit van het
college voor promoties in het openbaar te verdedigen op vrijdag 14 juni 2013 des
middags te 14.30 uur

door

Susanna Koevoets

geboren op 12 september 1980
te Apeldoorn

Promotoren: Prof. Dr. R.L. Buikema
Prof. Dr. S. Slapšak

Financial support for this research was partially provided by the European Union,
Marie Curie Fellowship for Early Stage Training (EU Sixth Framework Programme)

Librarians wield unfathomable power.
With a flip of the wrist they can hide your dissertation
behind piles of old Field and Stream magazines. [...]

Librarians rule.

- The Librarian Avengers

Table of contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
INTRODUCTION	5
SETTING THE SCENE FOR LIBRARY RESEARCH: RESONANCES OF LIBRARY LOSS	5
SETTING THE SCENE FOR LIBRARY RESEARCH: THE “IMAGE PROBLEM” OF THE FEMALE LIBRARIAN	11
SETTING THE SCENE FOR LIBRARY RESEARCH: INTO THE LABYRINTH	18
1. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CULTURAL LIBRARY RESEARCH	22
ARCHIVE THEORY	22
ARCHIVAL EXCLUSION AND BIBLIOGRAPHIC ERASURE	30
EPISTEMOLOGIES OF THE LIBRARY	34
A FEMINIST HETEROTOPOLOGY OF THE LIBRARY	38
METHODOLOGY: TOWARDS A POETICS OF THE LIBRARY	43
2. THE LEGACY OF ALEXANDRIA: THE LIBRARY AS MYTH	49
ALEXANDRIA AS A RETROSPECTIVE UTOPIA	51
THE GREAT LIBRARY IN LITERATURE	66
RESONANCES OF LOSS	76
THE QUEST FOR THE SECRET	95
UTOPIAN AND DYSTOPIAN VISIONS OF THE LIBRARY OF THE FUTURE	103
ALEXANDRIA REBUILT?	118
3. LIBRARY TERROR: GOTHIC ENGINEERING IN THE UNCANNY LABYRINTH	120
READING THE UNCANNY LIBRARY: THE GOTHIC AS <i>MODE</i> AND AS <i>CODE</i>	124
THE EXCESSES AND TRANSGRESSIONS OF THE LIBRARY OF BABEL	129
THE LIBRARY OF BABEL: A <i>TOMB</i> AND A <i>WOMB</i>	136
<i>THE NAME OF THE ROSE</i> AND THE LIMITS OF MEANING	142
THE LIBRARIAN AS MONSTROUS REFLECTION	159
ROBOT LIBRARIANS ON THE UNCANNY NET	169
LOST IN THE LABYRINTH OF MEANING	180
4. BOOKS AND BODIES: DEATH, PLEASURE AND FIRE	182
DOCILE BODIES: LIBRARY DISCIPLINE	184
THE PATHOLOGY OF THE LIBRARY	196
GIRLS WHO LOVE BOOKS	207
ALEXANDRIA AND GOOGLE: A POETICS OF DESTRUCTION	219
THE POLITICS OF THE LIBRARY IN A VIRTUAL SPHERE:	229
NEW FIGURATIONS OF LIBRARIANSHIP	229
LIBRARY POLITICS	239
CONCLUSION	240
CONVENTIONS IN LIBRARY NARRATIVES: THREE PARADOXES	240
LIBRARIANSHIP AS FEMINIST KNOWLEDGE PRACTICE	246
WORKS CITED:	248

SUMMARY:	263
INTO THE LABYRINTH OF POWER AND KNOWLEDGE: THE LIBRARY AS A GENDERED SPACE IN THE WESTERN IMAGINARY	263
NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING	265
IN HET LABYRINTH VAN KENNIS EN MACHT: DE BLIOTHEEK ALS GEGENDERDE RIMTE IN HET WESTERSE IMAGINAIRE	265
BIOGRAPHY	267

Acknowledgements

I entered into the labyrinth of the library expecting that it would provide me with answers to the questions that had haunted me throughout my life. I believed that somewhere I would find a book that, once located, would tell me how to be a woman, a feminist, and a scholar. I want to express my deepest gratitude to those who helped me when I inevitably got lost.

First of all my gratitude goes out to the many different organizations and institutions that made this project possible: the EU Marie Curie fifth framework program for funding the first two years of my research in Ljubljana; the Research Institute for History and Culture (OGC) at Utrecht University for funding years 2-5 and providing me with such a supportive research environment, where I was surrounded by experts; the Nederlandse Onderzoeksschool Genderstudies (NOG) for providing an exciting and lively gender research environment in The Netherlands, and ATGender for doing the same in Europe and for making it possible to edit and write a book on this topic which is so dear to me and so sorely lacking in European studies of gender.

Rosemarie Buikema, my greatest gratitude goes out to you, without whom I would have never made it out of this labyrinth at all. Thank you for tossing me a ball of yarn when I was stuck in some corner, and for helping me to draw maps of where I had been. And most of all: thank you for your patience. I also want to thank Svetlana Slapšak, without whom I would never have been able to conceive of this topic. Thank you for inviting me and encouraging me to enter this labyrinth, and for sharing with me your own labyrinth of knowledge.

My trip through the labyrinth would have been very dark and lonely if I had not had a group of travel companions by my side. Thank you, dear colleagues and fellow PhD students at the department of Media and Cultural Studies at Utrecht University, for your insights, guidance, critical perspective, and encouragement throughout the years. You have been great guides. I particularly want to thank Marianne van den Boomen. Our inspiring conversations have meant a lot, and I am sure you will find some of what we have discussed on these pages. Also Koen Leurs, Chiara Bonfiglioli and Domitila Olivieri for thinking along with me about libraries, digital culture and representation. And special thanks go out to Trude Oorschot, who navigated me through the maze of formalities - you are the one with the map and the key!

Anyone who has watched an adventure flick or two knows that the best part of any adventure is coming home. Erika & Jane, Pum, Rebecca, Consuelo, Sebastian, Petj & Agnes, Martine, Buïnus, Reinhard and Jeroen: you are the best housemates, neighbors and randomly appearing and disappearing riff-raff! Thank you for making our castle a real home. Fabian, Jeremy, Maartje, Maaïke, Mazal, Mijke - thank you for your enduring support and for your endless patience for hearing me ramble on about libraries and feminism. And especially Delilah: thank you for meticulously going through my work and correcting my mistakes.

To my mother and father: Thank you for all of your warm encouragements, for stimulating my curiosity and for supporting my not always practical decisions. And thank you for your patience when at times I was too busy or too obsessed to appreciate everything that you have done for me.

Dear Daan, thank you so much for standing by me, for telling me over and over that everything would be fine; for not judging me when I didn't move from the desk for five days straight; for being there with me throughout the process, and for being you. Now that the monster at the heart of the labyrinth has been slain we can go on adventures together.

Introduction

Setting the scene for library research:

Resonances of Library Loss

Research on the library as a cultural institution has been developed out of three distinct fields or disciplines: historical research that focuses on great libraries of the past and the historical development of libraries¹; studies focusing on the cultural role of libraries² (for instance from the fields of American studies and cultural studies); and investigations of the qualitative transformation libraries have undergone and are undergoing under the influence of changing social and technological demands.³

In the past decade, historical researchers have taken a particular interest in lost libraries, and have reflected on the effects of the destruction of great book collections through malevolence, natural disaster or neglect. The images of the burning Library of Alexandria, the flooding of the libraries of Florence, the bombing of the Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992, and the looting of the National Library and Archives in Baghdad in 2003 have inspired historical and political narratives of culpability, victimization, and irreparable cultural loss.

The trope of library loss is echoed time and time again in literary fiction and in popular cinema: in Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1984) the fictional Aedificium is burned to the ground, together with its priceless collection of rare volumes. In Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) books are banned, and private collections ruthlessly incinerated. In Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) the

¹ See for instance Michael H. Harris' *History of Libraries in the Western World*, the fourth edition of which was printed in 1999 (Scarecrow Press). The volume offers a descriptive account of the development of books and libraries in western history, and the latest edition also takes into account the "information revolution" of the post-WWII era and European post-socialism. Also of note are Luciano Canfora's *The Vanished Library* (1990) and the collection of historical accounts of library destruction from ancient to contemporary societies in James Raven's *Lost Libraries* (2004).

² See for instance Thomas Augst and Wayne Wiegand (ed.): *Libraries as Agencies of Culture* (2001). This special issue of the journal *American Studies* which investigates libraries as "institutional locales of culture [in the United States] where communities broker the tensions between the individual and community, the public and the private, the material and the symbolic" (Augst, 2001 5).

³ See for instance Lorcan Dempsey, "Scientific, Industrial and Cultural Heritage: A Shared Approach" (2000), Thomas Kirchoff et al., "Archives, libraries, museums and the spell of ubiquitous knowledge" (2008), and Hellen Niegaard, "Library Space and Digital Challenges" (2011).

historical and cultural record is purged through the burning of archival materials in a furnace. All three novels were adapted to film, to different acclaim, but all successfully. Artistic narratives of library loss are ingrained into the western cultural imaginary – these literary and cinematic scenes have produced some of the most powerful images of the destruction of scientific progress and cultural memory.

A distinction should be made, of course, between different kinds of book destructions. Great book collections have been lost through state-sanctioned, often violent destructions of the historical record as a form of political domination (Knuth 2003, 2004; Sutter 2004; Ramsay 2004); through lack of space or funding, meaning not by violent, enemy forces, but by internal changes of interest or situation (Harris 1995; Bagnall 2002; Buchmayr 2004); and through natural disaster. Interestingly, studies of the destruction of great book collections tend to focus on the first two causes, and rarely on the latter. It seems as if historical writing on library loss follows the narrative tradition of writing about libraries by engaging primarily with the tragedy of humanity's failure at preserving its own history.

Historical and cultural narratives pertaining to violent and dramatic acts of intentional destruction speak to the imagination in a forceful way, while the incredible labor involved in maintaining book collections even at the best of times remains curiously understated. Books are fragile, and the maintenance of book collections involves great investments in terms of time, space and physical labor. The question thus arises whether accounts of violent book destruction are ideologically complicit with obscuring the fact that the destruction of the cultural record is more often an effect of neglect than it is of explicit violence.

In the case of the Library of Alexandria, classical historian Roger Bagnall argues that it would not have been in existence even had it never burned down or been looted. According to Bagnall, the Dark Ages were not an effect of the loss of the texts stored in the library, but rather the other way around: “[the Dark Ages] show their darkness by the fact that the authorities both east and west lacked the will and means to maintain a great library” and “[an] unburned building full of decaying books would not have made a particle's worth of difference” (Bagnall 2002, 359). Rather than focusing on mythical stories of loss and destruction Bagnall urges to instead: “turn our attention away from the

dramatic single event and toward the forces and personalities that create and sustain cultural institutions” (Bagnall 2002, 360).

The urgency of Bagnall’s call should resonate particularly with feminist scholars. Historically, feminist humanities research has attempted to rediscover knowledge about the work and lives of women that had never made it into archives, museums, and libraries. Attempts to correct the gaps in the canon are an integral part of feminist cultural, intellectual and political projects, as is a critique of how the canon is constructed through and sustains systems of domination and marginalization. It has become commonsense that women have hardly been less creative than men, but that the products of their creativity have been marginalized by hegemonic patriarchal notions of what counts as art, philosophy or knowledge. On the other hand there is the issue of the effects of patriarchal culture on women’s creativity. In their seminal work on feminist literary history, Gilbert and Gubar (1979) have argued that 19th century women suffered from an anxiety of authorship, and experienced a fear of writing because writing was connoted as a masculine, even godlike activity. The pen as a metaphorical phallus has not been equally accessible to women and men as a tool for expression.

Any investigation of the role of the library in the Western imaginary thus needs to take into account the dual and paradoxical dynamics between the library as a memory institution on the one hand, and the marginalizing practices of selection (of what is created, published and preserved) and book destruction (after the fact of creation, publication and selection for preservation) on the other.

The above suggests that gender dynamics are present at all levels of the practices of selection, preservation and organization that memory institutions such as libraries are expected to do (Dempsey 2000; Kirchhoff et al. 2008)⁴. Gender dynamics are a relevant factor at all these levels. Firstly, the criteria by which selections are made reflect and reproduce the prevalent attitudes of the cultural discourse on gender and creativity. As feminist literary critic Elaine Showalter argued, women’s literary production was met with resistance from Victorian male critics, who simultaneously tended to trivialize literature

⁴ Libraries have this in common with archives and museums. The common understanding is that archives preserve unfiltered records, such as photographs, letters, notes of meetings, contracts, etc. Museums preserve visual arts, such as paintings and sculptures, and libraries preserve the written record – literature, philosophy, and scientific tractates and articles. The prevalence of new media has complicated these distinctions.

produced by women, and considered female authors a threat – this “double critical standard” with regards to the female novel succeeded in marginalizing the work of Victorian female authors (Showalter 1972). The disregard of women’s literature may in fact have led to the quiet destruction of this work, since we can only imagine what novels may have existed but were not preserved at the time. Indeed, as Dutch feminist cultural studies scholar Maaïke Meijer has argued, such works have systematically been forgotten, dismissed, underestimated, and marginalized under such labels as ‘sentimental novels’ and ‘ladies’ novels’ (Meijer 2007, 135).

To understand the importance of libraries in the construction of gendered cultural identity, I want to make an argument parallel to that of Meijer’s: just like the masculine critical discourse on literature produced the gender of its objects and subjects (Meijer 2007, 135), the discourse on libraries (and their destruction) produces the gender of *its* subjects and objects. Whereas images of libraries in flames speak to the imagination in a forceful way that almost immediately evokes feelings of great injustice, the traces of marginalization through selection are more subtle, and had to be meticulously reconstructed and made visible by feminist and postcolonial literary critics who aimed to set the record straight. My cultural analysis of the role of the library in the Western imaginary should thus be read in this context: it is intended as an intervention in the discourse surrounding library loss, at a time when many scholars, artists and librarians fear that the public library as a social space may be disappearing, and the book is under threat of losing its battle with digital information.

Of course, the fear that libraries are becoming obsolete may not be unmerited, and it certainly did not appear out of a vacuum. As Abigail van Slyck – whose work on gender and public libraries in the United States began a discussion that was both timely and has remained relevant over the years – pointed out during her 2000 address to the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Texas, “that in some circles the very term ‘library’ seems to have become a synonym for the phrase ‘moribund storehouse of outmoded information’” (Van Slyck 2001, 519). Whereas some – most notably in the field of library and information studies – welcome the convergence of libraries, archives and museums into digital memory institutions (Kraemer 2001; Besser et al. 2004; Kirchhoff et al. 2008), others fear

that the social function of the library as a safe social space will disappear, and that young students will be left to navigate the internet without the careful guidance of trained librarians (De los Reyes 2001).

Others suggest that new technologies have already resulted in the large-scale destruction of the paper record. In *Double Fold*, celebrated American author and essayist Nicholson Baker expresses both concern and outrage at the treatment of paper sources in the wake of the microfilm hype.⁵ As Baker argues, it is not only the information in the books that is at stake, but rather the very existence of books as material artifacts (Baker 2001). The violence against library collections, Baker warns, does not only come from forces outside of the library but is perpetrated within them in the name of modernization or under pressure of budget cuts.

Indeed, the public discourse on libraries seems to be dominated by the fear that libraries will disappear altogether, as users lose interest in books in favor of surfing the web from their own homes. An investigation of this discourse reveals what exactly is feared to be under threat of being lost forever: that being the illusion of the library as a space of order and the belief in the enduring and universal value of what at some moment in history was recognized as art or knowledge. Such an investigation requires a perspective, or a lens, attuned to reading for implicit assumptions pertaining to power, knowledge and gender, since – as I will argue – this discourse itself produces the gender of its subjects and objects in particular ways.

Simultaneously, and perhaps paradoxically, it also seems as if libraries have never enjoyed as much interest and have never been so passionately defended. An illustration of the heightened interest in libraries can be found in the recently published collection of short stories by notable British authors entitled, quite descriptively, *The Library Book* (Bennett 2012). In it, acclaimed British author Zadie Smith recounts how her working class parents educated the Smith family by frequenting the public library (Smith 2012). During a radio interview, Smith stated that she “owe[s her] whole life to books and libraries.”⁶ In the same volume, author, comedian and television personality Stephen Fry

⁵ The title of Baker’s Book, *The Double Fold*, refers to the practice of folding books back and forth along the spine until they break. Initially a technique for testing the resilience of paper, the technique is also used to take books apart for easier copying or scanning.

⁶ The radio interview aired on BBC 5 Live on the 30th of October, 2012 and can be accessed online at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-19423778>

recounts how at the age of eleven, he became acquainted with the works of Oscar Wilde through the mobile library that visited the small, rural village of his childhood: “For a gay youth growing up in the early ‘70s, a library was a way of showing that I was not alone” (Fry 2012, 69).

The authors of *The Library Book* all in some way affirm the important social and emancipatory function of public libraries. De los Reyes makes a similar argument with regards to academic libraries, reminiscing how the librarian at the Harvard university library made her less alienated, and as belonging to the academic community as a young Latino student at the white institution (De los Reyes 2001). For these authors, the loss of libraries involves the loss of an emancipatory social space, not the loss of some abstract notion of history or the dominant idea of the cultural record. These narratives are as much part of the discursive formation of the library as the procedures and cultural assumptions that produce library collections.

Throughout my research I have set out to investigate the narrative and discursive construction of the library in the western imaginary. I aim to show that the library is a complex configuration of power and knowledge, shaped in and through social, sexual, political, scientific, historical and educational discourses. By (additionally) reading library narratives through a feminist lens, I argue that gender is present at all levels of this configuration: from the way in which library collections are always and inescapably situated and limited, to the way in which the ideal library is imagined, and from the way in which the library can instill a sense of fear and intimidation, to the way in which it may offer a space of resistance to the dynamics of discipline and control

Setting the scene for library research: The “image problem” of the female librarian

While the canon⁷ has traditionally been a male dominated space, the work of maintaining it in libraries has become a highly feminized profession. Before 1870 librarians were predominantly male, and were also often scholars or writers themselves. But after the rapid and seemingly sudden entrance of women into the field of professional librarianship, the profession has become feminized not only in numbers⁸ but also, and more tenaciously, in perception. And the perception of female librarians, as well as that of librarianship as feminine, is perceived as highly problematic by both information workers themselves as well as by feminist scholars. Over the course of the past century the female librarian has become a pervasive stereotype throughout western culture that not only diminishes the intellectual and professional contributions of librarians (male and female) but also reproduces sexist prejudices against women and women’s labor in general.

The stereotype of the female librarian should be familiar: an elderly lady, her hair usually in a bun, humorless face hidden behind wire-rimmed spectacles. Her gestures are the gestures of authority, discipline, and control: stamping cards, filing books, and shushing patrons who dare disrupt the silence in the library. The stereotype of the librarian as a stuffy old maid is so recognizable that she has inspired a question on the American game show “Family Feud”, where 100 people were surveyed on what they considered typical characteristics of librarians. The resulting top five answers included: quiet, mean or stern, single/unmarried, stuffy, and wearing glasses (Kirkendall 1986, 40-42). As recently as 2003 Archie McPhee, a company retailing in

⁷ In the previous section I have suggested that women’s literary and intellectual work has historically been excluded from the canon. This is, of course, a matter of canon formation. Feminist critiques of the canon have addressed the question of women’s work not meeting the “standard” of inclusion into the canon. There are two main strands of feminist canon critique: moderate revisionists suggest that women’s work should be added to the existing canon, while keeping the criteria for inclusion intact. This “add-women-and-stir” approach was critiqued by radical revisionists, who suggested that the very criteria for canon formation are historical and cultural constructions based on patriarchal values and misogynist ideologies. Radical (or fundamental) feminist critiques of the canon cut across philosophy, science and the arts. Notable are the contributions by Irigaray (1984), Lloyd (2000), and Shapiro (2004) in philosophy, Okin (1979) in political theory, Nochlin (1988) in the visual arts, the aforementioned Showalter (1972) and Gilbert and Gubar (1979) in literature, and Harding and Hintikka (1983) and Haraway (2004) in science.

⁸ In the U.S., librarianship became feminized in the span of 30 years, with 20% of librarians being female in 1870, compared to 80% in 1900 (cf. Passett 1990).

novelties such as pigeon masks and pencil-toppers shaped like hats, began selling a librarian action figure modeled after Nancy Pearl.⁹ Pearl is a real life, alive and active librarian, who has worked in libraries in Tulsa, New York and Seattle, is the author of the best seller *Book Lust* (2003) and describes herself as “an avid bicyclist and happy grandmother of three.”¹⁰ The librarian action figure should thus be seen as ironic: Nancy Pearl is by no means a quiet, stern, and stuffy old maid. She is married to a man named Joe, and while she does wear wire-rimmed glasses in the photo accompanying the action figure, her website shows her wearing some pretty hip frames. The action figure is meant as a tribute to - not as a mockery of - Ms. Pearl: her super hero description mentions the Dewey Decimal System as her ‘weapon of choice’, but also lists her accomplishments. A photograph of Pearl demonstrating the action figure’s “amazing push-button shushing action” is prominently positioned on the website selling the toy. However, the fact that the irony works relies on the pervasiveness of the librarian stereotype: those who are familiar with Ms. Pearl *and* with the stereotype recognize the obvious incongruity between the two. The respectfully, even admiring, tongue-in-cheek tribute to Ms. Pearl thus relies on a problematic stereotype - one that has been critiqued for being sexist, classist, and ageist by feminist librarians and researchers (McReynolds 1985; Brewerton 1993; Van Slyck 1995; Radford and Radford 1997, 2000).

It is difficult to point out a particular cultural realm where the stereotype of the female librarian as a dowdy old maid regularly appears. In Hollywood cinema female librarians are more often depicted as demure, quiet, yet friendly and attractive young women - indeed, the ‘hot librarian’ trope is so prevalent in audiovisual culture that one would think that librarianship would have become connoted with sexiness by now. Rachel Weisz’ character in *The Mummy* is a great example: not appearing very assertive at first, she holds her own in the adventure, uses her knowledge to solve riddles, and it doesn’t hurt (certainly not at the box office) that she is the embodiment of Hollywood-hotness. Nevertheless, she is prim and proper - a Hollywood rendition of the bureaucratic old maid. It also stands to argue that the hot librarian trope feeds

⁹ An image and description of the action figure can be found at Archie McPhee’s website:
<http://www.mcphee.com/laf>

¹⁰ Pearl’s website contains more information about her accomplishments - among which is the 2004 Women’s National Book Association’s Award for extraordinary contributions to the world of books:
<http://www.nancypearl.com>

off of the stereotype as a dowdy old maid in a similar way that the librarian action figure does: the hot librarian is appealing because the association with the unapproachable, dowdy, old bookworm lends her an air of inapproachability.

A similar trick of associations is performed in the 1969 Monthly Python sketch *Gorilla Librarian*. The sketch shows an interviewing committee in a nondescript conference space, ready to meet their applicants. The applicant in question is a gorilla - or rather: a man in a gorilla suit. The gorilla is asked whether he doesn't consider the fact that he is a gorilla to be problematic, given the responsibilities of the job of a librarian. But as the interview progresses, the interviewer becomes quite excited about the idea of having a wild beast for a librarian. When the interview is almost over, and the gorilla admits that he is actually just a regular man in a gorilla suit, he is angrily dismissed. While the dialogue is entirely played out by two men and a gorilla, there is also a stereotypical librarian present. The sole woman on the interviewing committee immediately evokes the librarian stereotype: she is (made to look) middle aged, wears sexless attire, her gray hair is cut into a practical cut that frames her prominent spectacles, and her demeanor is prim and proper. She is silent during the entire scene. In the *mise-en-scene* she functions as a marker of the library space, and reminds the viewer of the type of position that is being interviewed for. The absurdist humor works because she is there: the visual disconnection between the gorilla and the librarian, and symbolic disconnection with the male interviewer's excited envisioning of a vicious librarian beast is what drives the joke home.

Curiously, while the stereotype of the female librarian is rarely represented in her full-on dowdiness in popular culture, she is pervasively present within the cultural imaginary as a necessary precondition for getting the jokes that are being made about 'unconventional' librarians. And she is persistently female. That library work is connoted as women's work was already problematized by historian Jody Newmyer in 1976. She remarked that "the assumption that librarians, male as well as female, are 'feminine' has been accepted without question" despite the fact that there is "nothing inherently 'female' about librarians" (Newmyer 1976, 44). This raises the question of the origins of the stereotype, which to this day remain unclear. Many trace the stereotype of the female librarian back to the feminization of the library

profession in the U.S. in the late 19th century, when Melville Dewey opened his newly established library college to women (Sverdlin 2008). This was not a *feminist* development: although Dewey opened up a new professional domain for women, he did so based explicitly on the assumption that women were particularly suited for the boring, repetitive work of shelf-stocking and filing, and that women were naturally disinclined to rock the boat (Wayne 1996). Whether or not library work is boring or repetitive, it soon became a profession in which women dominated in numbers (but not in rank). By the 1960s, north-American sociologists classed librarianship as a feminized semi-profession, along with other 'typically' female professions such as teaching, social work, and nursing (Simpson and Simpson 1969).

Librarian Rosalee McReynolds has argued that the perceived feminization of librarianship resulted in negative stereotypes about librarians, which are rooted in sexism and ageism (McReynolds 1985, 30). Male librarian Antony Brewerton, on the other hand, suggests classism as a basis for the negative stereotypes surrounding librarianship, suggesting that low pay prevented librarians from maintaining a fashionable appearance (Brewerton 1993, 25). Art scholar Abigail van Slyck has suggested that the library profession was from the get-go marked by a highly gendered library hierarchy, where women take up low-prestige positions while men tend to hold positions higher up the ladder (Van Slyck, 1995). Such a division is common in feminized professions, which are characterized as "semi-professional field[s] which [are] female-dominated in numbers, but male-dominated in organizational control" (Ivy 1985, cited in Radford & Radford 1997, 262).

What these authors agree on is that ever since the feminization of the profession, the stereotype of the female librarian has been associated with characteristics traditionally considered female, such as "domesticity, emotionality, nurturance and the like" (Mumby 1993, cited in Radford & Radford 1997, 262). Carmichael's survey (1992) among male library staff at the University of Carolina revealed that "the sexual stereotyping of library work as female has a negative effect on the self-esteem of male librarians" and that "many male librarians feel bruised by feminism" (Carmichael 1992, 24). The relationship between feminism and librarianship is a complex one, perhaps partly because, as Carmichael concludes, "the gender dialogue in librarianship

has remained curiously static and impersonal” up until the time of his study on male librarians (Carmichael 1992, 25).

On the one hand, as feminist historian Suzanne Hildenbrand argues, library women’s history is deeply rooted in library feminist activism. She highlights the creation of the Feminist Task Force within the American Library Association in 1970 as one of the high points of library feminist activism, during an age when women librarians actively fought for more appreciation of their profession as a truly professional field, while at the same time strengthening feminist appeals to change the sexist representation of female librarians (Hildenbrand 2000). On the other hand, the appreciation of librarianship as a *feminist* profession has traditionally held negative, instead of positive connotations (Hannigan & Crew 1993). Indeed, library historian and Director of Serials and Special Collections at Loyola University Rosalee McReynolds had noticed that early attempts to change the negative perception of the profession involved librarians reminding one another to other to behave more “professionally”, while on the other hand suggesting that they behave in a more approachable or friendly manner – trying to hold onto two ends of a slippery pole, they expected themselves and their colleagues to behave both in contrast to and in accordance with firmly established assumptions with regards to femininity as being associated with servility, domesticity, and emotionality (McReynolds 1985). Still today librarians are trying to perfect this salto mortale. Aware of the negative effects of the way in which the librarian stereotype is rooted in an ideology of gender inequality and misogynist preconceptions of men’s and women’s work, librarians in the 20th century became “vigilant image-watchers” (Sapp 1987, cited in Radford & Radford 1997, 254).

Although librarians have been grappling with this problem since at least 1909, when the first complaint of a female librarian against the dual stereotype of the librarian as either dowdy and featureless, or as impossibly efficient and attractive went on record¹¹, their efforts have not lead to the demise of the stereotype. Indeed, librarians are still trying to intervene in the representation

¹¹ McReynolds gives the following account: “As early as 1909, a librarian used the word “stereotype” in objecting to the portrayal of her profession in fiction. She complained that librarians were depicted in extremes, either as “old fogey bookworms” or as unreasonably efficient and attractive young people. “Both types must go down,” she insisted, “before the downtrodden, average, ordinary, human librarian can have a fair chance” (McReynolds 1985, 25) In this passage McReynolds cites Helen Rex Keller’s article on the subject from *The Library Journal*, July 1909.

of their profession and of themselves as professionals.¹² The question this raises is the fundamental question with regards to stereotypes: who is speaking through the stereotype, and to what ends? (Radford & Radford 1997, 263).

As communication scientists Marie and Gary Radford – whose work on the stereotype of the female librarian takes a cultural studies angle – argue, the library in the Western imaginary works as a metaphor for rationality and control, which imposes order on the multiplicity of diverse texts that it preserves. Following Foucault, Radford and Radford theorize the library as a space of fear and power, as the place where discursive formations generate knowledge in terms of order. The negative stereotype of the female librarian as simultaneously utterly repressed and as an enforcer of oppressive order, they argue, is a way of dealing with the fear of unrestrained discourse – the figure of the female librarian reminds us not to upset the order of things, but also that it is in safe and capable hands (Radford and Radford 1997, 254-256). Their recognition of the underlying cultural work the stereotype does serves as an important starting point for a thorough investigation of the stereotype as a *gendered* stereotype.

My contribution to the discussion is in part a continuation of the Radfords' argument, insofar as I have aimed to situate the stereotype of the female librarian in relation to the figuration of the library space. However, I have felt it necessary to extend this analysis to include a critique of culture, particularly in terms of the western cultural discourse on power, knowledge, and the subject. In order to do so, I have found it necessary to critically investigate library narratives, particularly in the ways they function as cultural myths, perform Gothic horror, and negotiate the dynamics of Eros and Pathos.

When viewed from within the profound transformations that the library is presently undergoing, reformulations of librarianship in relation to Web 2.0 (Cohen 2006), in terms of the feminist figuration of the cyborg (Yoder, 2003), or as knowledge broker (De Jong & Wieringa 2013), the cultural study of the stereotype of the female librarian is of particular relevance, especially now. If the stereotype of the female librarian, as the Radfords (1997) claim, is a mediation of anxieties pertaining to the power/knowledge dynamics of

¹² See for instance the wealth of websites dealing with the image of the female librarian, such as the Super Librarian at <http://www.njlibraries.org>, the Warrior Librarian at <http://www.warriorlibrarian.org>, the Librarian Avengers at <http://librarianavengers.org/>, or the Lipstick Librarian at <http://www.lipsticklibrarian.com>

disciplinary societies, then the question of the role of librarians in control societies should serve as an interesting new point of entrance for a feminist analysis and critique of this stereotype. And such an investigation, in its turn, is an integral step towards exploring potential new figurations of librarianship that are more in tune with the contemporary social and cultural developments and practices, and as such might be able to act as a more effective counterforce to the sexist stereotype of the female librarian than the mere recognition that the stereotype is 'false'.

Setting the scene for library research: Into the labyrinth

In the previous passages I have mapped out the issues and discussions that form the context of my research on the library as a gendered space in the western imaginary. On the one hand, library destruction and loss (either historical, fictional, or future) resonate within public and popular discourses – when books are burned, neglected, or abandoned, it inspires a sense of great cultural loss. However, what is lost exactly remains unclear. On the other hand, library staff responsible for maintaining and disseminating the cultural record – librarians – suffer from an image problem that they have been at a loss to correct.

As will have become evident, many of these discussions took place (and are taking place) in the United States. My aim to investigate the figuration of the library and the stereotype of the female librarian in the *western* imaginary may seem spurious without some further elaboration. So before I explain how my investigation will continue, I will elaborate on the reasons why I consider the figuration of the library and the stereotype of the female librarian to be cultural configurations particular to, and pervasive within, the western imaginary (including the European imaginary).

First of all, I should explain why I persistently use the term ‘imaginary’ rather than the more common (and perhaps more appealing) term ‘imagination’. When referring to the ‘western imaginary’ I consciously refer to the notion of the imaginary as presented by Jacques Lacan as one of the three psychoanalytic orders¹³. The imaginary, in Lacan’s model of the human subject, refers to the fascination of the subject, who is fundamentally split from itself by language, with the fantasy of unity and wholeness. The imaginary in Lacan’s theory is thus fundamentally connected with identity.

¹³ Lacan formulates the imaginary as one of the three order, alongside the Real and the Symbolic. Rather than being separate sites of experience, the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic are different layers. The Imaginary is that level of direct experience at which the subjects experiences the self as coherent and unified. It through the mediation of the Symbolic becomes split from the Real (that which cannot be articulated through the symbolic) and becomes split subject. (cf. Lacan 1956). It is the experience of unity and coherence that the Imaginary presents that makes it a useful level at which to investigate the function of the imaginary library in culture, since, as I will argue, the library is figured consistently as an illusion of unity and order, which it cannot maintain.

The imaginary in a collective sense can be understood as the way in which “human beings create [...] their ways of representing their collective life” (Thompson 1984, 6). Thompson connects the concept of the imaginary to ideology: “The ‘imaginary me’ which is the ‘subject of discourse’ is constituted through the subject’s identification which dominates it, with the ‘Other’ in the terminology of Lacan (Thompson 1984, 236). It is this formulation of the collective imaginary, which is closely tied to discourse and ideology, to which I refer when I write about the collective imaginary. Feminist theorist of sexual difference Moira Gatens (1996) has argued convincingly that the imaginary is also the locale where masculine and feminine subjects are created and maintained. In her feminist analysis of ‘imaginary bodies’, Gatens argues that the way the body and sexual difference were imagined in the Enlightenment still inform in part the relations between embodied, sexed subjects. She warns against the deployment of a ‘reality’/‘imaginary’ distinction, as such a distinction “inevitably leads to a contrast between a less than satisfactory present and an idealized future. [...] To acknowledge the diversity in, and dynamism of, our social imaginaries allows one to focus on those aspects of present social imaginaries which are contradictory or paradoxical” (Gatens 1996, 21).

I posit the figuration of the library within the western collective imaginary in order to highlight how this figuration traditionally formulates the library as a fantasy of coherence and order, rather than as a space of multiplicity and cultural fragmentation. Library narratives, as I will show, are rife with anxieties that can be traced back to fundamental anxieties of modernism in the western cultural tradition. Library narratives are characterized by paradoxes and contradictions, particularly in the ways utopian and dystopian visions of libraries present the uses and dangers of knowledge, in the way libraries as knowledge spaces are simultaneously presented and experienced as liberating and oppressive, and how the relationship between bodies and books is envisioned.

I will explore these paradoxes through three points of entrance into the labyrinth of the library. Firstly, I will investigate the library as an ideological construction by reading the historical myth of the Great Library of Alexandria as a retrospective utopia. The myth of a universal library, as I will show, serves to naturalize a patriarchal ideology of rationality and objectivity, which is

echoed and problematized in utopian and dystopian library narratives, and which in turn can be seen to inform public discourse on the role of libraries in culture. Both utopian and dystopian library narratives engage with the ideological aspects of the collective imaginary by positing libraries as places that order and maintain social relations through identification with a (idealized) stable and coherent cultural record. Narratives of library loss can thus be interpreted as destabilizing patriarchal ideologies pertaining to rationality and objectivity, and as such are profoundly gendered, even when the stereotype of the female librarian does not appear in them.

Secondly, I will investigate narratives of libraries as fearful places. I read the narrative figuration of the library parallel to the Gothic tropes of the haunted castle, the labyrinth, and the mirror, in order to show how the collective imaginary of the knowing subject as a coherent entity is destabilized within the labyrinth of language. The mirror appears twofold: firstly, the library as a house of mirrors or as a mirror of society and culture offers distorted images of reality. Secondly, the stereotype of the female librarian appears as a monstrous mirror image of the knowing subject. Library narratives perform Gothic terror in particular ways that are, as I will argue, deeply gendered.

Thirdly, I will illustrate how library narratives grapple with the problematic relationship between knowledge and embodiment within the western rationalist discourses. In such narratives, a poetics of destruction is formulated that presents the destruction of books and bodies as a resistance to the power of discourse. Paradoxically, another form of resistance is formulated in the simultaneous centering of bodily attachments to books as material artifacts, of female pleasure, and of situated community work.

These three points of entrance allow me to make what I consider to be my original contribution to the cultural study of libraries. Firstly, they make it possible to look at library narratives as being expressed through a set of conventions that are simultaneously coherent (insofar as they appear time and time again, across different media and within different discourses) and paradoxical (insofar as they present a multiplicity of cultural dynamics that cannot be easily integrated within one ideological framework). Secondly, these three points of entrance make it possible to view the figuration of the library and the stereotype of the female librarian to be viewed as complex and interrelated configurations of culture, ideology, and social relations, which are

fundamentally related to the dynamics of power and knowledge. Thirdly, they make it possible to situate this discussion within a feminist critique of culture and language, and to investigate how the way libraries and librarians are imagined is related to feminist (and) knowledge practices. My aim is thus to present a politically informed panorama of the library as a gendered space in the western cultural imaginary that both adds to and reinvestigates previous claims concerning the gender politics of libraries.

1. Theoretical foundations of cultural library research

Archive Theory

While the library is a figuration with a far greater reach and recognition than the archive, the convergence of libraries and archives through new technologies has given rise to a popular strand of archival theory throughout the disciplines. Relatively untouched by narrative prefiguration, the archive has become instead an important theoretical metaphor.

Archive theory can be traced to Jacques Derrida's highly influential essay *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1995), which argues that archivization (fundamentally a technological process) produces, rather than records, the event (Derrida 1995, 17). Derrida's claim is that technologies of archivization define and limit what can be archived, and that this argument is profoundly political. According to Derrida, archivization structures history and memory, and as such structures the relationship between the present and the past. While Derrida's conception of the archive is often read as a metaphor, I would argue that it goes beyond mere metaphor. Derrida's analysis of the way in which technologies of archivization frame the ways we relate to and within the world, and as such describes material processes. Archive theorist and librarian at MIT Marlene Manoff aptly summarizes his argument as follows: "The methods for transmitting information shape the nature of the knowledge that can be produced. [...] If the archive cannot or does not accommodate a particular kind of information, then it is effectively excluded from the historical record. Electronic archives have very different implications for the historical record than do paper archives" (Manoff 2004, 12).

As such, Derrida argues that "there is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory" (Derrida 1995, 11 note 1), suggesting that the technologies of archivization mediate the power of information in a way that produces and sustains political power.

Derrida formulates his theory of the archive by considering how Freud's psychoanalysis and the resulting theories of the subject and identity (that have, as Michel Foucault has argued, *produced* rather than *described* subjectivity within

the *dispositif* of the disciplinary society)¹⁴ were shaped through the technologies of archivization that Freud had at his disposal. Throughout his work, Freud corresponded extensively with his contemporary colleagues, and this paper record allowed for a certain psychoanalytic practice to emerge. Indeed, Derrida ponders how different Freud's psychoanalysis would have looked had he and his colleagues recorded their communications differently. As Manoff suggests: "if Freud and his contemporaries had had access to telephones, tape recorders, fax machines, computers, printers and email, it would have completely transformed the history and development of psychoanalysis" (Manoff 2004, 12). Indeed, it would have transformed the modern subject itself, since the practice of psychoanalysis has played such a significant role in the production of the specific type of modern subjectivity through the "psychiatrization of perversion" that Michel Foucault described in *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault 1978).

Simultaneously, Derrida investigates the dynamics of the archive itself through a psychoanalytic lens. The archive, Derrida suggests, is an effect of two conflicting forces: the death drive and the pleasure principle. He surmises that the affirmative archive drive is premised on the pleasure principle, and shapes the desire to preserve the past. While this sounds like a noble undertaking, Derrida suggests that the desire to preserve is mostly the desire to preserve for oneself, for the edification of the self or the group of people whom the archive is meant to serve. But to disclose information is also unavoidably to disclose it to others, and as such to risk destroying it, or destroying its potential to grant power to oneself and only oneself. That is why Derrida argues that the death drive, the drive towards archive destroying, always and unavoidably characterizes the archival drive. The result is archive fever, induced by: "the trouble of secrets, of plots, of clandestineness, of half-private, half-public conjurations, always at the unstable limit between public and private, between the family, the society, and the State, between the family and an intimacy even more private than the family, between oneself and oneself" (Derrida 1995, 57). Indeed, the archive does not only promise to disclose secrets, it is itself a form

¹⁴ Foucault has linked psychoanalysis to the development of the disciplinary society and the construction of its subject throughout his writing. Notable is his discussion of the links between the Christian tradition of confession and the way this tradition was transformed by psychoanalysis in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: Introduction* (1978), although Foucault also mentions psychoanalysis' relationship to the *dispositif* of the disciplinary society elsewhere (cf. Foucault 1970; 1980).

of secrecy. It is not only a space of preservation, but fundamentally one of destruction. It is not a space of reason and *a priori* order, but a battleground of Eros and Thanatos (Derrida 1995, 10). As such, Derrida's theory of the archive moves beyond the dual formulation of archival power in terms of *potestas* and *potentia*, and instead hints at a fundamental paradoxicality of the archive. This is why, according to Derrida, "Nothing is less reliable, nothing is less clear today than the word 'archive'" (Derrida 1995, 57).

Manoff formulates three reasons why this theory of the archive has had such tremendous influence across the disciplines. Firstly, Derrida's analysis shifts focus from the archive as storehouse of knowledge to the archive as a generative site of knowledge production – as the laboratory functions for the natural sciences, so does the archive function for the humanities and social sciences (Manoff 2004, 13). As Bruno Latour has shown, the laboratory has served as a transformative space, where the boundaries between the inside and outside of the laboratory walls are transgressed as to produce material changes in the world – it is not a space where reality is reproduced under controlled circumstances, but rather a site where the world is produced in such a way as to generate certain effects that extend well beyond the walls of the laboratory, showing the boundaries of the laboratory to be permeable and unfixed (Latour 1983).

Taking Manoff's analogy as a starting point, Derrida can be understood to make a similar claim from the perspective of psychoanalysis as a product of archivization: the archive is not a site where historical facts are preserved, but rather a site where the real events of the now are produced. This suggests that the social sciences and humanities are as fundamentally engaged with reality-producing (related to what Haraway calls 'worlding')¹⁵ activities, as are the natural sciences. This of course begs the question of what materials deserve to become a part of the archive, since this is now a matter of great political gravity. Indeed, as Manoff argues: "[q]uestions about what belongs in the archive reflect disputes over the nature of the disciplines – what counts as sociology or history or psychology" (Manoff 2004, 14), and I would add to that questions of how the

¹⁵ Donna Haraway's concept of 'worlding' is closely related to the entanglements of practice, imagination, and materiality that I propose in this dissertation. Haraway connects 'worlding' to art, biology and ecology as "knowledge-making and world-making" fields. She pays particular attention to science fiction writing (which she does not consider clearly distinguished from scientific writing) as a form of 'worlding': telling stories about the world that materially intervene in world, even produce the world in certain ways (cf. Haraway 2011)

disciplines engage in what Derrida would call the production of events. This is fundamentally a feminist question, since feminist research investigates layered systems of power and oppression throughout and within different levels of society and culture, including the academic disciplines. As feminist philosopher of science Sandra Harding has argued, gender is a complex category that operates on the individual, structural, and symbolic level and is always asymmetrical (Harding 1986, 52). In order to be analyze the multiple dimensions of gender, Gender Studies has been an interdisciplinary field from the get-go, at a time when interdisciplinary research was still seen as at best risky, and at worst academically suspect (Friedman 2001; Wekker 2007, 71). Questions concerning the disciplinary embeddedness of Gender Studies research have therefore always been central to debates within the field, and questions concerning how to sustain feminist inter-, multi- and transdisciplinary research (both epistemologically and institutionally) continue to be relevant. In this vein, feminist critical science scholar Nina Lykke has argued alongside Karen Barad - whose work attempts to bridge the gap between the natural science and cultural disciplines - that while provisional 'cuts' between disciplinary platforms are necessary in scholarly work, an awareness of the entanglements between ontology and epistemology may allow Gender Studies to establish solid "discipline-like platforms" without "sustaining a process of universalization and congealing of certain scientific structures (disciplines, 'proper' objects, canons and so on)" (Lykke 2011, 147).

Back to the archive: social and cultural theorist Thomas Osborne has argued that archives are "centres of interpretation" much like "courts of law, psychotherapeutic encounters and departments of humanities," but archives are at the same time "obligatory passage point[s] for all the others; the archive is the place in the network through which all the other points must pass" (Osborne 1999, 52). Archives are thus very specific and centralized locations from which to produce knowledge, whether they be literal locations - Derrida traces the term 'archive' back to its Greek roots to reveal that it refers to the literal domicile of the 'Argon', the literal house of the ruler - or more generally as the "world of [...] the 'knowing subject'" (Osborne 1999, 52). As such, the question of which materials do or do not belong to the world of proper objects to be archived is a fundamental political concern to be raised by feminist researchers, and Derrida's theory of the archive provides an important starting

point for such an investigation due to his insistence on archivization as generative of knowledge and – as he insists – the world itself.

The second reason Manoff gives for the current interest in archives from within the different disciplines is related to the truth claims that can be based on archival material. Alongside historian Dominick LaCapra, Manoff warns against the fetishization of archives, which feeds the problematic belief “that the archive is a literal substitute for the ‘reality’ of the past which is ‘always already’ lost for the historian” (LaCapra 1985, cited in Manoff 2004, 14). As Manoff argues, the archive is always already a reconstruction: “Someone decided what was worth counting and how to count it” (Manoff 2004, 14). Archives are thus never neutral, are always complicit with historically and culturally particular – what feminists would call located (Rich 1986) or situated (Haraway 1988) and partial (Harding 1986) – perspectives.

While Derrida’s discussion of the archive as constitutive (rather than a preserver) of events does not explicitly reflect on the concrete effects of archival selection for the production and preservation of patriarchal power inequalities, second-wave feminist historians together with feminist archivists and librarians have labored intensively to write women back into the historical record (Manoff 2004; De Jong & Wieringa 2013). Drawing on Derrida’s insight that the archive produces the events it is meant to preserve, this project of concretely writing women into the archive is not merely an act of historical revisionism, but rather a political activity with real and concrete effects in the present, engaging a promise for the future. This political project is ongoing: archivists are still debating how to make sure that archival materials pertaining to women’s lives are actually being preserved, since the preconception that women’s life experiences are not of enough cultural or historical value to be preserved in archives prevails – most problematically among women, who are often responsible for taking care of the family archive (letters, documents, photographs) and tasked with taking care of estates of deceased family member (Bogadóttir 2013).¹⁶ Additionally, the historical exclusion of women from the

¹⁶ Bogadóttir’s research on the presence of (or absence from) women’s documents in Icelandic national and local archives, and surveys she has conducted, show that the traditional distinction between public and private spheres contributes to this problem. Women have tended to correspond with friends and family members on ‘private issues’, which they are reluctant to hand over to archives since they may involve discussions of social taboos such as illness, adultery, death, etc. Estates handed over to archives tend to include official documents, but few personal documents. Due to the historical exclusion of women from the public sphere, this means that relatively little remains of documentation of women’s lives (cf. Bogadóttir 2013).

public sphere may hamper the inclusion of the archival preservation of archival materials pertaining to women's lives, as documents pertaining to women's lives may appear more intimate and as such neither of interest nor 'proper' enough to be included in public records (Waaldijk & Petö 2006).¹⁷

Derrida's insight that archivization is at its core a technological process highlights the importance of projects such as FRAGEN, which aims to make the core texts of European feminism available online by including it in the digital record. Of particular interest is the fact that the FRAGEN project was conceived from the very start with an awareness of the fact that any selection is an interpretation, and as such has made its selection criteria public. It invites reflection upon the very nature of this digital archive itself and the way in which it produces a particular and partial representation of European feminism, and as such produces an awareness of the situatedness of archival truth claims as well as their effects in the real (De Jong, Meulmeester and Vriend 2013).

Epistemologies of the archive should thus not only focus on the question of how to interpret archival materials, but also on the historical, cultural and social practices and values that have led to the inclusion and exclusion of certain materials in or from the archive. Interpreting archival materials should involve and engage a reflection on archivization as a politically situated practice.

The third reason Manoff formulates for the current prevalence of archival theory across the disciplines pertains to the insight that archives have historically functioned as the administrative core of colonial empires. She argues alongside Foucault, Said, Mill, Comte, Leibnitz, Kant and Von Humboldt that control of the archive is a form of political power (Manoff 2004, 16). She ventures into the realm of cultural analysis when she describes the genre of the "archival romance" as a narrative formulation of a colonial project that constructs British national identity of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Suzanne Keen has argued that such "romances of the archive" center the experience of the imperial archivist, whereas postcolonial narratives make

¹⁷ As such, Waaldijk and Peto have suggested oral history as a methodology to correct the absence of women's experiences from the historical record. For an example of a research that combines archival research and oral history and reflects on the methodological challenges of such an approach, see Chiara Bonfiglioli's dissertation *Revolutionary Networks: Women's Political and Social Activism in Cold War Italy and Yugoslavia (1945-1957)* (Utrecht University, 2012)

visible the way in which the historical record has been distorted and manipulated to construct the colonial subject as other (Keen 2001).

Feminist postcolonial theory has produced a similar shift in focus, most notably in the work of Ann Laura Stoler. Stoler contends that scholars have taken up the task of re-imagining “what sorts of situated knowledge have produced both colonial sources and their own respective location in the historiographic operation” (Stoler 2002, 89). She suggests that an ‘archival turn’ has taken place, which involves an epistemological skepticism with regards to the way in which archives are entangled with colonial power, and which invites a “rethinking of the materiality and imaginary of collections and what kinds of truth-claims lie in documentation” (Stoler 2002, 94). This kind of critical ethnographic writing on archives can be understood as the academic equivalent of the postcolonial counter-narrative to the “romances of the archive” (Keen 2001).

Stoler also points out the problem of this archival turn in art and theory: “in cultural theory, ‘the archive’ has a capital ‘A,’ is figurative, and leads elsewhere. Rather, it may serve as a *metaphor* for any corpus of selective forgettings and collections – and, as importantly, for the seductions and longings that such quests for, and accumulations of, the primary, originary, and untouched entail” (Stoler 2002, 94). Such a metaphorical understanding of the archive along the Derridean frame presents a problem, and has been critiqued extensively. Historian Carolyn Steedman, in her article “Something She Called a Fever: Mechelet, Derrida and Dust”, has suggested that the title of Derrida’s essay “Archive Fever” should be taken more literally, in order to reflect how getting sick from books is an actual occupational hazard for people who work in archives: “The book and its components (leather binding, various glues and adhesives, paper and its edging, and, decreasingly, parchments and vellums of various types) in fact concentrated in one object many of the industrial hazards and diseases that were mapped out in the course of the century” (Steedman 2001, cited in Manoff 2004, 17).

Steedman’s account of actual archive disease warns against taking Derrida’s theory of the archive as too metaphorical. As a theory of the archive, Derrida’s essay has been highly productive and incredibly evocative, but the question of archival practice remains at the forefront of debates of embodied and situated research practices. However, as I will argue throughout this

dissertation, the kind of textual flurry instigated by encounters with libraries and archives do have a strong foothold on the cultural imaginary, and deserve critical investigation. While I agree with Steedman and Stoler that the actual embodied practices of archivization and the related material effects on culture and society should not be dismissed in favor of more interpretative accounts of the *meaning* of archives in culture, I find that the latter project has not yet been successfully completed, and as such sustained attempts should be made to grapple with the symbolic meaning of spaces of knowledge and memory.

Another notable formulation of the archive takes us further into the realm of the metaphor. In Foucault's "The Statement and the Archive", the archive is not "the library of libraries" or "the sum of all texts that a culture has kept upon its person as documents attesting to its own past" (Foucault 1972, 128-130). Instead, Foucault abstracts the archive in terms of "the law of what can be said [...] the system that establishes statements as events and things [...] that system of their enunciabilities." The archive, for Foucault, is the system of discursivity *itself* (Foucault 1972, 129). Archives, like academic disciplines, are discursive formations that define their own truth criteria (Manoff 2004, 18). This type of extreme abstraction is exactly what Steedman argues against, but other scholars find the archive a useful notion exactly *because* of its elasticity (Osborne 1999, 53). In his appeal to define a sort of middle ground between Foucault's abstract and Steedman's literal concepts of the archive, Osborne suggests a focus on "archival reason", defined as the practice of making discriminations to define the useful and relevant from within a mass of data (Osborne 1999; Manoff 2004, 19). This type of work is, along the Foucauldian vein, a work of truth production, and it is the work of archivists and librarians as much as it is the work of scholars and researchers.

Since library narratives tend to represent the interests of the patron or researcher in opposition to that of the librarian or archivist, a close analysis of these narratives may offer a way into considering how the relationship between library users, librarians and library spaces is performed in library narratives, and how these narratives in turn inform the collective imaginary.

Archival exclusion and bibliographic erasure

In the previous section I have already highlighted that archive theory as formulated by Jacques Derrida is intricately engaged with questions of archival inclusion and exclusion. These questions are of tremendous importance, and have been at the center of academic debate at least for the past 20 to 30 years. The question of archival in- and exclusion is fundamentally the question of who builds and controls the archive, and to what purpose? Or, to put it in Derrida's terms: who are the *archons*?¹⁸

David Greetham approaches this question from what he calls “the cultural poetics of archival exclusion” (Greetham 1999). Greetham does not limit his investigation to spatial, material archives, but instead focuses on the broad notion of the archive in its more metaphorical sense. He uses an example from performance history, for instance, to show how a song lyric by Cole Porter about cocaine later became a lyric about “perfume from Spain” in a Sinatra performance of the '50s, since cocaine had by this time stopped being an acceptable stimulant to partake in or even refer to (Greetham 1999, 4). Libraries similarly tend to preserve only what is considered *at the time* to be the best of human cultural or intellectual production in a certain field, what is considered to be an apt representation of human productivity, and what is expected to be relevant in the future. But what is considered valuable or worthy of preservation changes over time. In other words: the delineation between valuable bibliographic material and garbage is slippery. Caught in the paradox between the need to store information and to make it accessible – considering

¹⁸ Derrida's *Archive Fever*, which was originally delivered as a lecture in 1994 in London, begins with a historical tracing of the word 'archive' back to its Greek root: 'Arkhe', which according to Derrida “names at once *commencement* and *commandment* [...] *there* where things *commence* – physical, historical, or ontological principle – but also the principle according to the law, *there* where men and gods *command*, *there* where authority, social order are exercised [...] – nomological principle” (Derrida 1995, 2). The Latin word 'archivum' refers more explicitly to this latter meaning: “com[ing] from the greek *arkheion* [it initially meant] a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded” (idem, 2). It was at the archons' houses, on account of their authority, that official documents were filed, they were “first of all the documents' guardians [but were] also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. [...] It is thus in this *domiciliation*, in this house arrest, that archives take place. [...] At the intersection of the topological and nomological, of the place and the law, of the substrate and the authority, a scene of domiciliation becomes at once visible and invisible”. This ‘topo-nomological function’ of the archive, which Derrida calls the “archic, in truth patriarchic function” of archives (idem 3) works by the logic of privilege: “the documents [...] are only classified under the title of the archive by virtue of privileged *topology*” (idem 3). It is not surprising, then, that the question of “who are the archons?” has become a central political question in archive theory (Greetham 1999; Manoff 2004).

that the latter becomes more difficult the more information is stored – we “are always in danger of looking like conservational idiots” (Greetham 1999, 8). Greetham stresses that “while the prerogatives bestowed by culture may often have been taken seriously *by the standards of the time*, attempts to either predict the archival needs of the future or to find universalist systems of classification are inherently doomed by the force of local prejudice” (Greetham 1999, 19).

Greetham’s article epitomizes Derrida’s insight that archivization is fundamentally a process of bibliographical repression. He compares Nicholson Baker’s furious account of the destruction of library card catalogues to the fate of rusty cars in a landfill: items that were once active and productive, have now become embarrassing excretions (Greetham 1999, 27). The archive is always involved in the repression of such garbage, and yet the garbage is always present, always threatening to remind us of our own failure at cleansing the record of garbage, and selecting the proper materials for preservation. As such, he bears in mind Derrida’s argument that “the archive [...] will never be either memory or amnesia as spontaneous, alive and internal experience. On the contrary: the archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory” (Derrida 1995, 11 cited in Greetham 1999, 19). It is this fluctuation between memory and amnesia, or what psychoanalysts would call ‘forgetting to forget’, that allows the historical ‘garbage’ of cocaine use in the 1930s to float just below the apparent surface of a popular song from the 1950s. Greetham’s Derridean analysis of archival exclusion inspires a reading of library narratives in search of this ‘garbage’. As I will show throughout my analysis, library narratives unfailingly deal somehow with culture’s failure to repress inconvenient or unsavory memories, and the continuous reappearances – or even: the haunting presences – of such memories.

But bibliographic control also takes place at the surface level. Archives and libraries as knowledge spaces are engaged with the cultural work of interpretation at different levels. Firstly, at the level of selection, interpretations with regards to the value of texts and materials may lead to the empirical exclusion of whole genres oeuvres or topics from the archival space. Secondly, at the level of the organization or ordering of library collections there is also a tendency towards exclusion and marginalization. In *The Power to Name* Hope A. Olson takes the Dewey Decimal System to task, showing that this cataloguing

system is not a neutral organizational structure, but rather classifies knowledge in a way that reflects and reproduces a logic that goes at least as far back as Aristotle (Olson 2002, 509). As she shows, feminist critiques of logic suggest that it is a gendered classification,¹⁹ and library classification systems often sustain this logic. She states “[librarians’] theories, models and descriptions, applied in our role as intermediaries between people and information, are as presumptuous and controlling as scientists’ construction and containment of nature” (Olson 2002, 4). Bibliographic control through classification systems, Olson argues, allows for certain forms of knowledge to emerge *and not others*. This means that libraries and librarians are active participants in the collective processes of knowledge production, which are always partial and never neutral. Throughout my research, I will show how this role of libraries and librarians is expressed through narratives of submission and of resistance to these forms of control, which are fundamentally engaged with questions of gender. Olson’s analysis calls into question how and to what extent Osborne’s concept of “archival reason” is complicit with operations of power, and whether the notion of “reason” itself engages a hierarchical and exclusionist discourse.

These theoretical considerations on archival exclusion and bibliographic erasure have provided a lens through which to read the figuration of the library in the western cultural imaginary in terms of a foundational paradox: on the one hand, library narratives consistently reimagine and idealize the fantasy of a universal library that houses and orders the totality of human history and cultural production. On the other hand, libraries are imagined as being haunted by the presence of repressed memories and excluded knowledge. Both Greetham’s insistence on reading for the ‘garbage’ present in all archives and libraries, and Olson’s analysis of library classification systems as ordering and selecting knowledge based on a logic that is fundamentally an inescapably gendered, allow for a reading of library narratives as mediating the tension between what Derrida calls the Eros and Thanatos of the archive through a

¹⁹ Aristotelean classifications have been extensively critiqued by feminist philosophers and scientists as being profoundly misogynist. See for instance Lange (1983), Irigaray (1984), and Haraway (1988). Others have attempted to reread Aristotle in order to investigate how his ideas can be reformulated to be of use within a feminist agenda. However, such a project proved possible only after an “intense criticism” of Aristotelean classifications and the way in which these have co-informed and inscribed the values of liberal feminism (Freeland 1998, 1-15).

feminist lens, which lends a new dimension to the analysis of the stereotype of the female librarian as mediating this tension.

Epistemologies of the Library

The notion that the library is a space that generates knowledge and at the same time marks the failure of memory points to the complex entanglements of library spaces - real and imaginary - with fundamental epistemological questions. Indeed, libraries are not only “places of knowledge” (Ophir 1991) but are also valuable *objects* and *subjects* of knowledge (Koevoets & De Jong 2013). Parallel to Olson (2002), we may ask: why are library collections organized in a certain way, and not another? Or, in Greetham’s (1999) terms: what *local prejudices* can we recognize in the way libraries select, order and structure knowledge in terms of its objects, subjects, its disciplinary structures? Library narratives all in some way grapple with these fundamental questions, and as such are a rich site on which to explore the dynamics of (gendered) power and knowledge in the cultural imaginary. Indeed, many library narratives belie a certain sense of nostalgia or longing for a (fictional) time when libraries provided or will provide unlimited access to the unfettered truth. At the same time, library narratives can be characterized as always somehow attempting to grapple with the status of the library as an imperfect representation (or distorted mirror image) of reality, complicating the relationship between situated subjects and objects of knowledge. Fantasies of an ideal, universal library and stories about imperfect, incomplete or dilapidated libraries signify complex epistemological conundrums that philosophers and theorists have been debating for a long time.

Leibniz, best known for his work in philosophy, was also himself a librarian. In that position, he considered the problem of library organization and the kind of research library classification systems can or cannot sustain. As Leibniz contended, the materiality of books logically suggests a linear order along shelves. However, such an organization cannot represent the evolution of knowledge, which is not linear in nature, but rather cross-referential. Leibniz therefore dreamed of producing a workable scheme for an organic organization of knowledge (Hart, Baines & Jones 1997, 24). However, Leibniz’ scheme never materialized. Instead, one of the most widely used classification systems schemes is the Dewey Decimal System, which atomizes knowledge into clearly defined categories (Hart, Baines, Jones 1997, 25) and which also reveals and sustains a gendered hierarchy (Olson 2002). The Dewey Decimal System is one

of many attempts to confront the fundamental challenge librarians face: how to organize *material* books into a *conceptual* framework that facilitates easy retrieval and represents a logical order. The production of a truly interdisciplinary, cross-referential, and non-hierarchical library classification system is yet to become a reality.

Attempts to formulate a perfectly natural and objective organization of knowledge are sustained by the collective belief in the order of nature. The library, Garrett contends, is “one of the most visible and important temples that society has erected to this belief” (Garrett 1991, 382). As Hart et al. show, this monumental function of the library can be recognized in its architecture. They found that libraries across Britain and the United States are often designed to resemble temples and cathedrals – references to a divine order that sustains the belief in the library as a space of natural or divine order (Hart, Baines, Jones 1996, 26). Gary Radford argues that this association of the library with order, where “order becomes the end in itself,” forms the basis of the librarian stereotype (Radford 1998, 618-619). In the universe of the library-as-natural-order, “it is the librarian, and the librarian alone, who determines the truth of an individual text through his knowledge of where that text is located” (Radford 1998, 620). Garrett argues that Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* turns this sustained belief of a natural or divine order into a dystopian tale, in which the librarian is cast as the arch-villain, and the book as his murder weapon (Garrett 1991). Radford and Radford (1997) make a similar claim when they argue that the stereotype of the female librarian is a mediation of the fear produced by the sustained belief in the (discursively constructed and enforced through discipline) order of the library: the fact that she is a woman, and thus can only be an enforcer, but never the source or site of the power of the library, makes her less of an arch-villain than a repressed representative (Radford and Radford 1997).

This representation of libraries and librarianship, Radford argues, reveals a positivist worldview, where “the “truth” of an event in the world is “discovered” by understanding its relationship to other events according to the rules of an underlying structure that cannot be observed directly [but which asserts itself through the order of the library]” (Radford 1998, 620). The library user, in search of the “truth”, stands in tension to the order of the library, as “allowing texts to circulate inevitably produces disorder. [...] The user must

engage with the rationality of the library directly, and must submit to its version of the order of things before the user can find what he/she needs” (Radford 1998, 620). Classification systems, which presumably *facilitate* access, thus can be perceived as withholding access at a deeper level.

Radford suggests a postmodern epistemology of the library, by taking Foucault’s discussion of Flaubert’s *La Tentation* in as a starting point. In “La Bibliothèque Fantastique” (1977) Foucault argues that “fantasia”, rather than rational investigation, forms the basis of how knowledge may be produced in an unrestrained way. In fantasia, the author’s imagination roams free, “unrestricted by such codes and conventions [as posed by library order]” (Radford 1998, 627). Developing Foucault’s concept of fantasia, Radford argues that libraries are fantastical in essence, since “in the interface between the user and the library system, the fantasia of imagination and the linking of disparate elements in new ways, becomes an integral part of the experience” (Radford 1998, 631). Because Foucault considers the imaginary to be a phenomenon of the library (Foucault 1977, 91 cited in Radford 1998, 631), “dichotomies such as the true and the false, the important and the trivial, and the enduring and the ephemeral lose their previous importance” (Radford 1998, 631), making space instead for an epistemology of the imagination. Radford’s proposition for a Foucauldian postmodern epistemology of the library has been of great importance to my analysis for two reasons: firstly, because it has allowed me to reconsider my own encounters with texts and lead me to consider my presentation of these texts in new configurations as itself a kind of fantasia; and secondly, because it does so without inadvertently referring back to or re-establishing the cultural canon as if it were somehow universal, neutral, or ahistorical. Indeed, Foucault’s notion of the fantasia of the library is particularly suited to the kind of cultural analysis that I present in this dissertation, since it makes understandable and significant that my critical feminist analysis has produced trajectories that lead to Star Wars via Eco and Borges, or to Canetti via Monty Python and Dr. Who. Fantasia as an epistemological concept allows for a radical (and in this case feminist) unfaithfulness to a cultural order where canonical literature is set apart from and beyond the scope of the popular imaginary.

A second reformulation of an epistemology of the library beyond positivist logic was formulated by Hannigan and Crew (1993), who have

suggested that library philosophy needs to be reconsidered alongside feminist epistemologies. Taking Harding's work on feminist standpoint theory as a starting point, Hannigan and Crew state that "the library profession needs to devise a clearer and better concept of how we do research, how problems are defined, what generates hypotheses and how they are tested, how rival explanations should be handled, and how we measure progress from one study to the next" (Hannigan and Crew 1993, 28). They argue that libraries should facilitate pluralistic, self-reflexive and socially situated research. They also stress the poststructuralist problematization of the subject/object distinction and the insight that the subjects and objects of knowledge are co-constructed. This offers interesting challenges to the spatial and conceptual organization of libraries, which traditionally classify and categorize knowledge under hierarchically organized headings. Hannigan and Crew's argument for a feminist epistemology of the library offers an interesting point of entrance into reading library narratives as a form of critique of the culturally constructed knowing subject.

Taken together, these two reformulations of library epistemology strongly suggest that the collective imaginary of the library as a gendered space of power and knowledge should take into account that libraries function as spaces that generate knowledge through the partial and situated practices of selecting and ordering, but are themselves also situated within networks of discipline and control. My perspective, grounded in the feminist politics of location and situated epistemologies, allows for an investigation of the figuration of the library and the stereotype of the female librarian as part of the collective imaginary of the knowing subject, which simultaneously problematizes it as a construction.

A feminist heterotopology of the library

Archival theory and resulting considerations of archival exclusion and bibliographic erasure form the backdrop for the epistemological challenges posed by the library space. These three theoretical points of entrance coincide with the three scenes I have set for my research. Archival theory offers a conceptual framework for thinking about the curious configuration of the library as space where past, present and future converge in uncanny ways, haunted by the excluded other of the archive. The stereotype of the female librarian can be understood as a complex gendered figure that engages with the politics of archival exclusion and bibliographic erasure: at once subject and object of the marginalizing archival practices that mark the library, the position of the female or feminized librarian is profoundly paradoxical. Epistemologies of the library link the collective imaginary to feminist and poststructuralist critiques of reason, which immediately unhinges the fantasy of a universal library that can both contain and reveal the Truth. However, a fourth theoretical point of entry is necessary in order to conceptualize the library as a specific kind of social and cultural space.

Indeed, while the three previous theoretical foundations for a cultural critique of the figuration of the library all formulate power in terms of language and discourse, linking it explicitly to the library's complex spatiality can strengthen it. For this, Foucault's concept of 'other spaces' has proven useful, which he formulates as heterotopias, being:

real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted (Foucault 1986, 24).

Originally formulated during a lecture at a French architecture institute in 1967, and first published in English in 1986, Foucault's "Of Other Spaces" proposes that heterotopias are unusual, out-of-the-ordinary places that may provide a very acute perception of social order (McLeod 1996, 6). Whereas Derridean deconstructivist accounts of space tend to focus on otherness as the presence of absence (as in Derrida's concept of the archive), Foucault's notion of

“heterotopia” - literally meaning “other places” or “places of Otherness” (Hetherington 1997) - is more explicitly politicized, and considers those spaces of otherness that aren’t only within, but also outside or marginal to everyday life (McLeod 1996, 5). What sets Foucault’s conception of “other” in heterotopia apart from the Derridean and Lacanian models, is that it refers to “actual places and structural moments in time” (McLeod 1996, 9).

While Foucault’s own theory of heterotopia remains underdeveloped, it has been extended to feminist analyses of space formulated as “heterotopology” (Evans et. al. 2010, 214-15). Hook and Vrdoljak have made a notable contribution to the theoretical development of the concept in their analysis of South-African gated communities as heterotopia which holds “symptomatic indications of a social, moral political order” (Hook and Vrdoljak 2002, 218). Hook and Vrdoljak come to this analysis by considering heterotopia not only in terms of concrete social places, but as marked by the complex intersections of space and text: they view the gated community as a materialized form of discourse (Hook and Vrdoljak 2002, 207). As such, it is the link between power and discourse that stretches the relevance of Foucault’s concept beyond the study of particular spaces, and extends it to an understanding of how “space communicates power and makes sense within the broader sociopolitical context” (Evans et. al. 2010, 215).

So what does the term heterotopia refer to, and how is it relevant to my research on the narrative configuration of the library as a fundamentally unstable space of knowledge and reason? Firstly, the concept of heterotopia appears in *The Order of Things* (1970) as an unsettling textual device: “disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that [...]; heterotopias desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks [...]; they dissolve our myths [...]” (Foucault 1970, xix). Heterotopias in this sense, which Foucault recognizes particularly throughout the writings of Borges (whose work, as will become evident, has been of incredible importance to my research), mark a “loss of what is ‘common’ to place and name” (Foucault 1970, xx). This concept of heterotopia has been remarkably informative in my reading of library narratives, since stories detailing the problems of naming and ordering the subjects and objects of knowledge are a common theme within this corpus. This kind of heterotopia can be recognized in Borges’ *The Library of Babel*, when the protagonist aims to

enumerate everything the library holds, which is every version of everything that can be written. But it also appears in the comedy/drama film *Party Girl*, when Mary the young librarian races through the categorization system by which she has “destroyed” her friend’s record collection. Similarly, this kind of textual device appears when Rob has to associatively return to a painful breakup from his youth in order to locate the position of a Deep Purple album within his biographically organized record collection in the film *High Fidelity*. In all these cases, discursive and textual conventions (for instance of the literary narrative or of the conversation) are disrupted in order to gain access to the space of the collection as a space of order.

In “Of Other Spaces” Foucault formulates heterotopia from a different angle in order to analyze “specific social spaces whose social meaning is out of place and unsettling within a geographical relationship of sites” (Hetherington 1997, 8). Foucault suggests that a heterotopology would entail “a sort of mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live” that “would take as its object the study, analysis, description, and “reading” [...] of these different spaces, of these other places” (Foucault 1986, 24). As Hook and Vrdoljak argue, the analysis of heterotopia is not limited to space (in the geographical sense) alone: it is an analytics rather than a place: “a particular way to look at space, place and text” (Hook and Vrdoljak 2002, 207). As such, the concept of heterotopia has been of use in my analysis of library narratives exactly because it has allowed me to consider the way in which these spaces are constructed through narrative conventions that evoke a particular type of spatiality that is neither part of or within the social, nor disconnected from it, but rather defined by its being a space of Otherness.

Foucault formulates a set of principle of heterotopia, all which have, to some extent, relevance to my analysis. First of all, his formulation of heterotopia in contrast to utopia has allowed me to grasp the relationship between utopian, dystopian and ‘other’ library narratives. Utopia, as Foucault argues, are fictional sites, whereas heterotopia are a kind of effectively enacted utopia. Both together, Foucault argues, form a kind of joint experience, in the sense that they function as mirrors of society. However, heterotopia are particular in the sense that while they take on varied forms, every human group constitutes heterotopias in the literal and material sense, and that they can have different functions that can change over time (Foucault 1986, 24-25). Libraries can thus be

utopian, when we focus on stories of idealized libraries that give infinite access to the totality of all knowledge and are thus unlimited in their emancipatory potential. These kinds of libraries are necessarily unreal spaces that exist in fiction only (and even then, often problematically, as I will show). But libraries are also real spaces, materialized in different forms at different times across different cultures, mirroring in that case not so much a universal reality, but rather the particularities of their historical, geographical, and discursive situationality. As such, the concept of heterotopia has informed my reading of the Library of Alexandria as a retrospective utopia, as well as of the globalized technological heterotopia of the recently reconstructed Alexandrina.

Moreover, Foucault describes heterotopias as being “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible [...] a whole series of places that are foreign to one another” (Foucault 1986, 25). While this may seem like a very abstract concept, any experienced reader and avid library user will recognize the experience of travelling to different spaces and sites through literature. Libraries thus contain within their walls both the fanciful worlds of myths and fairytales as the rationalist deliberations of Descartes. When connected to Foucault’s notion of the episteme, libraries can be seen to juxtapose within their walls different worlds, since épistèmes construct reality in different and incompatible ways.

When linking heterotopia to “slices in time” (Foucault 1986, 26), Foucault mentions libraries explicitly, stating that they are a culmination of the idea of a “place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages [and] the project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place” (Foucault 1986, 26). That this is not necessarily a *utopian* ideal can be recognized in Borges’ *The Library of Babel*, in which the librarians are not only lost in the vast, placeless space of the library, but also caught in a kind of time warp, cut off from all sense of situationality that would allow them to make sense of the space or to ascribe meaning to what they find in it.

Foucault also defines heterotopia as being marked by a system of opening and closing, suggesting that entry into heterotopia is either compulsory (think of students who experience library anxiety, and are nevertheless forced to visit the library, if only during the obligatory library introduction at the beginning of the program) or else “the individual has to

submit to rites and purification” (Foucault 1986, 26). This latter insight is of particular interest when thinking about the role of the librarian, who is tasked with performing these rituals (through stamping books and authorizing entrance) and purifications (by enforcing silence, making sure no food is brought in, and by preventing sex between the stacks).

Most important is the last quality of heterotopia: “they have a function in relation to all the space that remains” either by “creat[ing] a space of illusion that exposes every real space [or by] creat[ing] a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled” (Foucault 1986, 27). Although these are two extreme opposites, library narratives can curiously be seen as constructing the library as either one or the other, or as both simultaneously. The meticulous library then appears as utopia, instead of heterotopia, while dystopian narratives insist on the messiness of the library’s entanglements with social reality, and its failure to remain perfectly external to and untouched by the social.

Foucault’s concept of heterotopia thus offers exciting analytical possibilities for the study of the narrative figuration of libraries and their relationship to the social. However, it also has a particular political relevance to view them as such. As Hook and Vrdoljak argue, heterotopia are “places capable of a certain kind of social commentary, [...] where social commentary may, in a sense, be *written into* the arrangements and relations of space” (Hook and Vrdoljak 1986, 209). The understanding of heterotopia as “socially constructed counter-sites embodying [...] form[s] of resistance” (Genocchi 1995, 36 cited in Hook and Vrdoljak 2002, 209) in particular offers a way of ‘reading’ the figuration of libraries as spaces that are not only oppressive and exclusionary, or as fictional and unachievable utopia, but also as spaces of resistance to discursively produced social structures. As such, it lends another lens, another dimension, to the reading of library narratives that is as political (but differently so) as Derridean archival theory.

Library narratives formulate heterotopia as “analytic node[s] through which one may deduce wider networks of power” (Hook and Vrdoljak 2002, 208), where the discourses that reproduce, challenge and extend historical discourses (Evans et. al. 2010, 215) on power, knowledge and gender can be explored, and from within which spaces of resistance may emerge.

Methodology: Towards a poetics of the library

Libraries, like archives, are both physical sites – “an institutional space enclosed by protective walls” – and imaginative sites – “a conceptual space whose boundaries are forever changing” (Voss & Werner, 1999, i). In their introduction to the special issue of *Studies in the Literary Imagination* devoted to the poetics of the archive, Voss and Werner highlight “the paradoxical logic by which it runs: it preserves and reserves, protects and patrols, regulates and suppresses” (Voss & Werner 1999, i). As I have already pointed out above, libraries, like archives, are political spaces, gendered spaces and memorial spaces, and library narratives, as I will show, problematize each of these aspects to great effect. Not only susceptible to *external* forces of wastage, the library is always a site of garbage: filled with traces of garbage of the past, and with what will inevitably become garbage in the future, libraries are marked by the simultaneous presence of different conceptual spaces and different slices of time. These paradoxical forces are made present in the way library narratives figure libraries as heterotopia, and allow for a consideration of the cultural imaginary surrounding preservation and destruction, art and waste, the beautiful and the abject, reason and madness. As such, my poetics of the library as heterotopia involves an investigation of these paradoxes, which frames my method.

It would certainly be of great interest to investigate how waste flows through real library spaces, especially now that libraries are becoming digitally entangled with the realms of the publicized marketplace (through ads and links to commercial spaces) and the exposition of the private (through social networks, blogs, and personal websites). However, for this project I have limited myself to narrative and discursive analyses of literary works and films on the one hand, and public and academic debates on the other. Since the postmodern, feminist epistemology of the library suggests that any organization of texts is always a provisional and imaginative site to be explored from a partial perspective, I have organized my discussions into a sort of fantasia of my own. In each section I explore a fundamental paradox of the library as it is expressed through different narratives, showing the interconnectedness of and curious similarities between the way libraries are represented in textual and visual culture, as well as in political debate and

public discussions. My poetics of the library thus negates the notion that there are “real” libraries that are either properly or improperly represented, and instead formulates how all libraries – real and imaginary – exist on the boundaries between myth and matter.

The library is both a sign and a semiotic space – that is: libraries produce meaning in a certain way, but become meaningful themselves through that same operation. This self-referentiality can be recognized when library narratives are viewed through a poststructuralist lens. I have adopted the feminist practice of “reading in between the lines” as a way to read for the garbage. In some narratives, this garbage consists of the provisionality of meaning itself, whereas in others it is figured as abject femininity or unrestrained desire. In any case, a poetics of the library involves a kind of maniacal hoarding of these instances of garbage, in order to produce out of them a new kind of collection.

A poetics of the library also involves a keen awareness of the library’s status as metaphor. Libraries are not metaphors in the sense that they are mere literary conjectures, or signs that refer to some other, proper object. Instead, metaphors are performative in a profound sense. Library narratives show how fundamental anxieties pertaining to reason and knowledge sustain the construction of real sites of suppression, oppression and resistance. A *feminist* poetics of the library is thus premised on the search for such sites of repression and resistance through a gendered lens. Library repression functions on all three levels outlined by Harding (1986): at the individual level, the experiences of cultural others may be un(der)represented in library collections, or they may even be denied access to the library altogether. Narratives about the difficulties in gaining access to the library strongly echo the historical exclusion of African Americans from public reading rooms (Hildenbrand 2000, 52) or, more recently, the expulsion of homeless people from public libraries where they look for shelter and computer access. At the institutional level, libraries are organized in a way that restricts women’s access to higher positions on the administrative ladder. However, my research investigates how libraries are involved in the production of difference at the symbolic level and the dynamics of power/knowledge at the discursive level. Throughout my analyses, I will point out how the dream of the universal library, as well as dystopian visions of

library destruction, are always involved in the fundamental process of giving or withholding access to knowledge to patrons by inscribing them with difference.

For my analysis I am indebted to the dual (and partially convergent) traditions of cultural studies and feminist critique. Readers familiar with these two traditions will recognize my insistence on the political function of culture as stemming from the tradition of critical cultural studies, which has historically insisted on the importance of the critical assessment of the way hegemonic power circulates within culture, both at the 'high' end (such as literature and the arts) and the 'low' end (the mass media). I have similarly been informed by semiotic, deconstructionist and critical traditions in my attempt to untangle the ideological and constructive work that libraries narratives do, and remain convinced that this is best illustrated by providing a panorama of such narratives as they appear throughout literature (Borges, Eco, Canetti), the mass media (Star Wars, High Fidelity, Threesome, etc.), and popular and public discourses (newspaper articles, blogs, magazines). My feminist perspective comes into play when I center my analyses on the way these library narratives perpetuate, challenge or extend hegemonic patriarchal notions of power, knowledge and gender. As both cultural studies and feminist critique are highly interdisciplinary fields, my analytical trajectory can be seen as such. Taking insights from literary studies, film studies, cultural critique and new media studies has allowed me point out the different cultural levels on which the figuration of the library operates: the textual, the visual, the discursive, the ideological, the levels of mediation and materiality.

I have selected the corpus that contributes to the figuration of the library in a way that can be related to Foucault's notion of the 'fantasia': starting from an immersion in public and academic debates, I discovered a small corpus of literary works that were mentioned in almost every single text on libraries, culture and power. My choice to begin my investigation with Jorge Luis Borges' *The Library of Babel* and Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* will not win me any credits for originality. These two library narratives have been seminal throughout the western cultural imaginary on the library, and excluding them would have presented a striking omission. Fortunately, the richness of these literary texts capacitated an analysis that I believe is indeed original and novel, particularly since I have approached them through a feminist lens and related them to contemporary debates on the digitization of the cultural record.

The combination of my immersion in these two literary texts and my feminist poststructuralist reading of them provided me with a frame of reference through which I began to notice interesting library narratives throughout different media. Some are obvious: *Party Girl* is a film about a young librarian who does not fit the stereotype, but the narrative stresses this difference as difference-from a stereotypical librarian. This librarian found company in the character Jocasta-Nu in an often-referenced scene from *Star Wars*. Then I remembered having encountered their grotesquely evil sister when I had read *The Library Policeman* in my youth, and decided to revisit her. These librarians all seemed to inhabit a kind of in-between (or neither/nor) space: neither public nor private, neither fully in the present, nor entirely disconnected from it, present in semi-social spaces, but not themselves fully part of social life. I recognized that they all exhibited a strange relationship to the library collection and its organization: not in control of it, but rather the executors of its control over the user, these librarians were disciplinarians, yet at the same time not fully submitting to the library's discipline. From there on I began seeing these tensions played out across different media and throughout different mediated narratives. As such, my panorama of the figuration of the library in the western imaginary came to include narratives that center around libraries, but also narratives where a single scene or passage poignantly performs the cultural paradoxes and gendered politics of the library. Some of these narratives are part of what is considered the cultural canon: Elias Canetti's *Auto-da-Fé* may not be as widely read or recognized or cited as often as Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, but can surely be said to belong squarely within the tight boundaries of the European literary canon. Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire* holds a similar position within the European film canon. Stephen King's horror stories may be considered belonging at the margins of high culture: not-quite literature, his novels and short stories are generally accepted as intelligently negotiating prevailing cultural anxieties in an approachable way. Other narratives, such as *Threesome*, *High Fidelity*, and the made-for-television films in the Librarian series belong to popular mass culture. Not generally considered 'quality films', they nevertheless allowed me to point out the ubiquity of the conventions of library narratives, as they each in their way engage with the paradoxes of the library at multiple levels. Other narratives can be considered obscure. Some of the 19th century utopias of the library will be

entirely unfamiliar to everyone except those who are exceptionally familiar with American literary history. I accidentally stumbled across Nikki Giovanni's poem *My First Memory (of Librarians)*, and had I not done so I may have never become familiar with her beautiful collection of poems *Acolytes*. Although she is well known in poetry circles (spoken word enthusiasts will undoubtedly be familiar with her work), she is rarely (if at all) referenced in cultural studies of the library.

I consciously decided to study works by both male and female authors and filmmakers. Rather than trying to formulate particular "male" and "female" imaginaries of the library, I have found it more informative to investigate the underlying gendered discourses by which library narratives signify the cultural and social practices of archivization and librarianship. Neither gender studies nor feminism are exclusively tied to women, and as my investigation shows, the cultural poetics of the library formulates political issues that apply and extend to all genders. By considering gender as a cultural register, rather than as a characteristic of individuals, my panorama of the library in the western imaginary allows for the very problematization of the discursively produced relations of power, knowledge and gender.

As Derrida argued, archivization is both political and technological. Now that libraries are transforming into digital repositories, any poetics of the library must engage with the question of the materiality of the text. As I will show, the material constraints of preserving the paper record have informed the imaginary for centuries. However, the possibilities and potential threats of digitalization give rise to as many utopian visions as it has produced dystopian horror stories. These anxieties, in some all way pertain to our capacity to relate to history in an embodied manner, and as such, the embodied, often erotic relationships between bodies and books forms an important starting point for the formulation of new figurations of (feminist) librarianship. And my work should be read in that vein: my final goal was never to "merely" investigate how libraries appear throughout the cultural imaginary, or to "only" highlight striking consistencies between the representation of libraries in art, politics, and academia. Instead, my goal was to locate potential spaces where new ways of relating to books, to knowledge and to power are emerging. Whether we should call this "Librarianship 2.0", "the Cyborg Librarian", a "knowledge broker" or "Librotraficante" is yet to be determined. My concern has been with

the question of how such new figurations propose new ways of relating that allow new forms of knowledge to be produced that are better capable of coming to terms with the technologized world in which we continue to search for stories that help us navigate our contemporary situationalities.

2. The Legacy of Alexandria:

The Library as myth

“The Tower of Babel stood (while it stood) as proof of our belief in the unity of the universe. [...] The library of Alexandria (on ground firmer perhaps than that of Babel) rose to prove the contrary, that the universe was of a bewildering variety and that this variety possessed a secret order.”

Alberto Manguel (*The Library at Night*, 2008)

Libraries are entangled with some of the most fundamental aspects of (collective) cultural identity. As such, the way libraries are constructed through historical, political, and cultural narratives offers an intriguing insight into the cultural imaginary. Situated at the borders between myth and memory, ideology and society, and the cultural and the material, library narratives perform situated cultural assumptions pertaining to knowledge, power and gender. The library as myth is often imagined as a utopia – an idealized fictional space where knowledge is universal and enduring, provides unfettered access to the Truth and offers unlimited emancipatory possibilities.

The Great Library of Alexandria is undoubtedly the most ubiquitous and enduring library myth. As I will show in the first section of this chapter, this enigmatic historical library forms the narrative prefiguration of two of the most prolific library narratives in literature: Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* and Jorge Luis Borges' *The library of Babel*. While the legacy of the Library of Alexandria mythologizes the dream of a universal library, in which all knowledge of mankind once was stored, organized and available, Eco and Borges unveil this myth as a dangerously seductive impossibility.

In this chapter I will argue that the figuration of the library can be read as a myth that naturalizes the illusion of universal reason, and hides its historical and cultural partiality. I will show that this myth has been foundational in the formulation of the library as an important capaciator of rational citizens in the public sphere, and that this catches it in the paradox between publicity and

concealment that is inherent in the concept of the public sphere. I will argue that both of these paradoxes are fundamentally intertwined with the cultural construction of gender, and as such are part of the gendered power/knowledge nexus.

Alexandria as a retrospective utopia

“The Tower of Babel in space, and the Library of Alexandria in time are the twin symbols of these ambitions. In their shadow, my small library is a reminder of both impossible yearnings – the desire to contain all the tongues of Babel and the longing to possess all the volumes of Alexandria.”

Alberto Manguel (*The Library at Night*, 2008)

Few would contest the claim that the library of Alexandria holds a singular and central place in the European imagination. It appears again and again as a nostalgic memory of what libraries can and should be: monumental spaces of intellectual, artistic, and political activity inspired by the enduring presence of ubiquitous knowledge. On the one hand, its formation played a central role in the political and academic arena of early Europe, and its legacy lives on in contemporary attempts to compile, (re)store, organize and make available the cultural and historical record for intellectual and civic purposes.²⁰

The Library of Alexandria exists on the border between the real and the imaginary, fact and myth. Its legacy has not only been approached academically and scientifically through the practices of historical, archaeological and philological investigation, but has also been extended into the cultural realm of literature and film. Both Borges' *The Library of Babel* and Eco's *The Name of the Rose* – two works of literature that are mentioned in almost every cultural investigation or analysis of the symbolic role of libraries – can be read as cultural pastiches which take the varied accounts of the rise and demise of the Library of Alexandria as their narrative point of departure. The legacy of Alexandria speaks to the imagination not only because the reality of its collection and its loss remain veiled in mystery, but also because the Library of Alexandria nevertheless appears to be awaiting our rediscovery (MacLeod 2004, 1). Indeed, Eco and Borges' library narratives echo the disparity between

²⁰ The most notable of these is certainly the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (New Library of Alexandria) in Egypt, the construction of which finished in 2002, and which was from its very conception meant to support its objectives as the world's window on Egypt, Egypt's window on the world, a leading institution of the digital age, and a center for learning, tolerance, dialogue and understanding through its architecture, collection, and events. See: <http://www.bibalex.org>

The legacy of Alexandria was also present throughout the early conceptualization and development of the internet as a decentred digital network of learning, which also evoked the values of tolerance, dialogue and understanding.

the immense symbolic importance of the Library of Alexandria on the one hand, and our near total ignorance about it on the other (Bagnall 2002, 348). The Library of Alexandria, in other words, serves as a prefiguration of the library in the western imaginary. Its threefold destruction serves as a reminder of the fragility of the cultural record. As such, the Library of Alexandria can be read as a sign or code that operates, in the Barthesian sense²¹, within a *mythology* of the library.

As Lakoff and Johnson have argued, myths are extended metaphors, which provide ways of comprehending experiences within specific cultural settings (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 185-186). The library, as I will illustrate further on, functions as a myth of rationality, parallel to the “myth of objectivism” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 186-188). As I will argue, library mythologies serve to naturalize the ideology of reason and rationality as masculine domains within patriarchal hegemonic culture. This section considers the Library of Alexandria and the resonances of its loss as highlighting the foundational narrative and discursive configurations of library mythology as being fundamentally intertwined with cultural and historical constructions of hegemonic conceptualizations of knowledge. It serves this purpose so well because of its enigmatic status: despite concerted efforts, the origins, contents, and destruction of the Library of Alexandria are shrouded in mystery.

Part of the reason why the Library of Alexandria remains such a historical enigma is the fact that the only available contemporary sources on its rise and demise have reached us through obscure authors who regularly contradict each other, or are second-, third- or fourth hand translations. Indeed, the *Letter to Philocrates*,²² attributed to a courier named Aristeeas (Philocrates’ brother), is generally cited as the earliest source mentioning the Library of Alexandria, but is currently widely accepted to be either misappropriated or even fraudulent (Bagnall 2002, 349). This pseudepigraphic text recounts how Ptolemy Philadelphus allegedly traded 100.000 Jewish captives for a copy of the

²¹ Roland Barthes’ semiotic analysis of myth (1957) does not consider myth in the common-sense understanding of myths as ‘false’ accounts or as fanciful stories about deities and fictional creatures. In Barthesian terms, “myth” refers to modes of writing, representations, images (“intentional speech”) that naturalize ideology, i.e.: which represent ideological constructs (for instance the nation, masculinity, scientific genius) as universal, ahistorical, self-evident or obvious truths (Barthes 1972, 109-126). Barthes’ concept of myth as a semiotic mode informs my reading of the library as a sign that is both sustained by and sustains the ideology of reason as a masculine domain (Lloyd 1993).

²² An authoritative translation (R.H. Charles 1913) of the letter can be found at: <http://www.ccel.org/c/charles/otpseudepig/aristeeas.htm>

Jewish Law, in order to add it to his great collection of books. Some of the most politically divisive interpretations of the letter of Aristeas consider it a piece of Jewish propaganda - the legacy of the Library of Alexandria has since its construction always been part history, part myth (MacLeod 2004, 2).

While the letter of Aristeas is no longer accepted as valid historical document, some of its contents remain accepted as historical facts. Most historians agree, for instance, that Ptolemy I commissioned Demetrius of Phaleron, founder of a school modeled after the Aristotelian Lyceum and Plato's Academy, to construct the Library (MacLeod 2008, 2). The Library was built sometime around 300 BC, and while it wasn't the first library of its kind - libraries were omnipresent in ancient Greece - it certainly was the *greatest* Greek library (Knuth 2003, 22). It consisted of the *Museion*, dedicated to the muses, and the *Biblion*, where the books were kept. The Library of Alexandria functioned as a museum, a depository of knowledge, a study space and a space for writing. But most importantly, insofar as the library still speaks so strongly to the imagination, it was a materialized attempt to collect all the knowledge of the Classical age in one geographical location.

The Library of Alexandria was always quite literally (and unironically) intended to be a *universal* library, before that idea became a metaphor. One of the most well known Alexandrian myths recounts how Ptolemy III wrote to the world's sovereigns, asking to borrow their books for copying. Instead of returning the originals to their rightful owners, they were stowed away in the Library of Alexandria, and the copies returned. Similarly, all passing ships would be required to forfeit all books on board for copying. Again, the originals were placed in the Library (MacLeod 2004, 4-5). These schemes were intended to ensure that the Library would one day *literally* contain all the knowledge of the world, right at the fingertips of the Ptolemies.

The Library of Alexandria was a lively center, where scholars came together to study, debate, and write. The library thus started out with impressive academic credentials, and its founders can be considered the first visionaries of the prototype of monumental modern libraries' aspirations to universality (Harris 1995, 47). However, the construction of the Great Library should not be mistaken for an emancipatory project. It is widely believed that from the outset, the Library of Alexandria was intended to serve the Ptolemies' imperial ambition, and designed to not only store scrolls, but to underwrite a

program of cultural expansion. As such, it already bore the characteristics of the expansive system of colonial archives that fuelled western imperialism²³. The Library of Alexandria (unlike its rivals) was from its conception part of a program of cultural imperialism. It was a symbol of prestige and a center for cultural intelligence: on the one hand a center of learning, it also served the practical purpose of administration and rule. Although the idea of the Library of Alexandria as a centralized storehouse of universal knowledge has evoked utopias of independent scholarship and research, in Alexandria “the cloister lay close to the palace” (MacLeod 2004, 5-8). As is the case with scholarship nowadays, Alexandrian scholarship did not take place in a political vacuum, nor was it free from paradigmatic waves. While certain phases in Alexandria’s social and cultural history provided the circumstances for intellectual exploration and scientific discovery, other phases emphasized hegemonic textual practices and discouraged the exploration of the ‘new’ (MacLeod 2004, 8). But more importantly, the phrase “knowledge is power”, often attributed to Bacon, expresses an insight that the Ptolemies had certainly already embraced 1800 years earlier (MacLeod 2004, 9)²⁴.

So far, the history of the library of Alexandria, or at least that part of its history, is currently accepted as fact. The question that arises now is why this library, more than all others, has retained its presence in the cultural imaginary for so long after its destruction. Of course what counts as ‘history’ or as ‘fact’ cannot be separated from the historical context from whence it emerged, nor can it be approached outside of the narrative conventions that produce it as such. But rather than to engage with the discussion on the narrative or ideological aspects of historiography, I want to engage with the Library of Alexandria as a cultural sign – an extended metaphor - that operates at the level

²³ Ann Laura Stoler’s practice of reading *along* the archival grain allowed her to show that Dutch colonial rule in the East Indies was not based on iron-clad hierarchies, but instead can be read and approached through a meticulous practice of looking for how emotions and affects are anchored in the social relations of power that are stored and organized (in particular and meaningful ways) in archival repositories of colonial history (Stoler 2009). Stoler’s work is based on the premise that archives do not simply give access to colonial history, because of their historical complicity with colonial rule. Obviously, the Library of Alexandria does not allow for such a reading of its holdings along the archival grain, since its collection has been mostly destroyed and/or dispersed. Nevertheless, the idea that the Library of Alexandria was part of a program of imperial and cultural expansion underscores the importance of considering it to be from its very conception a political tool aligned with hegemonic power, rather than an idealized space of unconstrained intellectual development.

²⁴ The phrase “scientia potentia est” in fact never appears in Bacon’s writing. It does appear in Hobbes’ *De Homine*. I admit that I refer here not to Hobbes’ idea that the sciences are one of the (minor) powers of man, but instead (following MacLeod) to the cliché meaning of the phrase that is closely linked to the maxim that one “must keep one’s friends close, but one’s enemies closer”.

of what Barthes calls myth – as a mediation of and naturalization of hegemonic notions of knowledge and power – and what Foucault calls discourse – as a discursive formation on the power/knowledge nexus. In order to do so, I will compare and contrast two attempts to ‘demystify’ the Library of Alexandria.

It is of course exactly because of the lack of facts about the Great Library that it fuels the imagination as much as it does. As Alejandro Parada writes:

there will always exist several histories of the Library of Alexandria. Its historiography emerges from the historian's imagination and capacity to revisit it under new lights. The narrative discourse has promoted the myth of what we know about this remarkable Library. So, when thinking about its hundreds of thousands of rolls, we just spread before our eyes the texture of those bibliographical references that gave it life (Parada 2004, n.p.).

It is interesting to note that Parada takes quite a different perspective concerning the mythological quality of Alexandria than does Roger Bagnall. The former is an Argentinean philosopher, who has written extensively about book culture, from the onset foregrounds the way in which the interpreter of history narratively mythologizes (or in other words: ideologically invests) the history s/he aims to describe. In Parada's analysis, the myth is not a veil that covers the facts, but rather the process by which history becomes meaningful in a *certain*, never neutral, way. As such, his analysis reveals a *metahistorical* awareness²⁵, reminding us that to investigate the multiple (and often contesting) histories of Alexandria should be considered a “plunge into a *metaphor* of human knowledge” (Parada 2004, n.p., emphasis mine) rather than an attempt to reconstruct historical facts.

Roger Bagnall 2002, professor of ancient history at NYU, on the other hand, describes the mythical configuration of the Library of Alexandria in terms of three types of dreams about the Library: dreams about its size, dreams about its destruction, and “dreams about the consequences of its loss” (Bagnall 2002, 348). These three dreams, Bagnall argues, stand in contrast to “its reality in antiquity” (348), “a sober look at the real thing” (354) and “the reality [of the

²⁵ Hayden White's concept of *metahistory* refers to the archetypal narratives that are imposed on the past to produce continuity, coherence and meaning out of a multitude of multi-interpretible sources. White argues that metahistories have four components: emplotment, formal argumentation, poetic structure, and ideological implication (White 1973).

inevitability of its disappearance]” (359). Bagnall does admit that: “Although it is too late to recover much of the reality of the Ptolemaic library, its dream is very much still with us” (362), his article “Alexandria: Library of Dreams” reads like a wake-up call (Bagnall 2002).

By presenting these two perspectives alongside one another, I want to show that the enduring obsession with the Library of Alexandria is neither simply an effect of a lack of facts surrounding it, nor of a naive overestimation of its importance or size at the time of its existence. Rather, the Library of Alexandria functions as the historical prefiguration of the current and still very much alive dreams about the library as a myth of order and rationality, that serves to naturalize the hegemonic ideal of reason as a masculine domain. I begin by discussing Bagnall’s unveiling of the “three dreams” in order to show how the enduring “Alexandrian dream” cannot be robbed of its power through appeals to reality and rationality, since such appeals only serve to further reinforce the ideology of reason.

It is commonly accepted that the Library of Alexandria was the largest library in its time. Scholars are still debating how many volumes it may have actually contained, but the figures run from 70.000 to 700.000 scrolls in the time of its existence, to between 200.000 and 490.000 in the third century BC (Reynolds & Wilson 1991, 7). Bagnall makes a strong case against any estimations that go beyond the middle six digits, which was the size of the largest modern European libraries at the time of the introduction of the index card system in the mid 19th century, and beyond which collections would become unmanageable without such a system (Bagnall 2002, 356). Bagnall further points out that if only one in forty words written in Greek at the time of the Library’s existence has survived, the Library’s collection would have contained, at most, 15.000 scrolls. This estimate is extremely low, compared to historical sources and contemporary estimates. If the claims concerning the size of the collection made in the *Letter of Aristeas* were to be believed, then either not a single word has been preserved of the vast majority of ancient writers, or the Library held dozens of copies of every work of every author known at the time (Bagnall 2002, 353). Estimations aside, the true size of the Library’s collection will remain a mystery. The fact that we will never know will certainly not diminish the mythical power of its imagined greatness.

While Bagnall seeks to demystify the Library by negating overinflated estimations, Parada reminds us that the Library is “a retrospective utopia, “a building kit going from our present to the labyrinths of the past” (Parada 2004, n.p.). The Library of Alexandria exists in the European imaginary as a positivist mythology based on the desire to capture all knowledge and organize it under one roof, and on the desire to believe not necessarily that *at one time this universal library really existed*, but rather that *such a project is possible*. This realization suggests, as Parada argues, a simple idea:

If the Library of Alexandria had not existed, we would have invented it. [...] It is as if the Library oscillated between two apparently opposite spheres, since the remarkable collection of books needed the imagined universe [...] in order to construct the scaffolding that came to be known as the Library of Alexandria. But it is precisely this *imagined universe* - filled with mythical aspects and narrative traditions - which invites us, more than the proven facts, to ascribe to the Library an unwithering allurement (Parada 2004, n.p.).

The myth of the Library’s size is entangled with the ideal of objectivity and the belief in universal knowledge. These ideals are not merely naïve misunderstandings that can be resolved by confronting believers with the undeniable limitations of reality - they are ideological constructions firmly engrained in the Western intellectual traditions that have served modern imperialism, much like the Library of Alexandria was complicit with the expansionary ambitions of the Ptolemies. Feminist critiques of liberal humanism have suggested that the ideals of objectivity and universal knowledge have informed the construction of the liberal humanist subject as male (Lloyd 1993; Harding 1997) on the one hand, while on the other hand these ideals motivated the construction of numerous academic and public libraries throughout Europe and United States built for the express purpose of producing a civilized citizenry (Kelman 2001). The fantasy of the Library of Alexandria as a real space that combined all of human knowledge under one roof, and unified all of human knowledge according to one universal, indivisible order, is thus a profoundly ideological construction. As Parada provocatively puts it: “Why trust in a global universality if the world still appears divided into isolated geographical regions and different cultures? [...]

The triumph of the Library of Alexandria resides less in its existence than in its mythical and universalist intention” (Parada 2004, n.p.).

Of course this retroactive utopia, as a retrospective ideology projected onto the Alexandrian library as a perfectly unified and unifying space of universal knowledge, can only continue to exist because its necessarily imperfect materialization has long since disappeared. And like the estimations of its size, there is no single, authoritative account of the destruction of the Library of Alexandria. Three narratives have circulated throughout historically variable accounts. These accounts can be interpreted as narratives of cultural victimization that have historically served as justifications for retribution onto different historical and cultural perpetrators. As such, these accounts arise from and sustain variable cultural ideologies. These narratives construct, in chronological order, three perpetrating groups: the Romans, the Christians and the Muslims. Bagnall (2002) attempts to demystify these accounts by confronting them with the reality of the fragility of scrolls, whereas I will argue that these myths support modern western ideologies of superiority by constructing historical villains as intellectually, morally or spiritually inferior.

The first to be accused of destroying the library was the Roman emperor Julius Caesar, who defeated the Egyptian fleet in 47-48 BC. During this battle at sea, Caesar purportedly had to defend his fleet with fire. The fire spread to the city of Alexandria and destroyed part of the Library. Sources of the time offer conflicting information, but the myth of Caesar’s destruction of the Library was persistent enough to get an authoritative mention in Plutarch’s *Life of Caesar* (written 100 years after the reported fact). The number of books that were burnt during the fire has been reported as anywhere between 40.000 up to 700.000 in Aulus Gellius’ account (Raven 2004, 13-14). The exact number of books destroyed is of less importance than the fact that over time the number has seemed to increase. The story of the accidental fire has come to be commonly referred to as ‘the greatest act of vandalism during antiquity.’²⁶ For all the

²⁶ This often cited phrase is oddly difficult to trace back to its original source. James Raven mentions it in his introduction to *Lost Libraries* (2004, 13), calling it “a phrase that often establishes the benchmark for the account of pillage [of libraries]”, but does not cite a source. Almost every account of the vanishing of the Great Library mentions the exact phrase, yet no original source is mentioned. Whatever the source may be, the phrase seems to have become a cultural cliché that serves to marginalize accounts of other great library destructions on the one hand (cf. Raven 2004, 12). It is also of note that the description of library destruction as ‘vandalism’ is a very common trope through which casual or neglectful library destruction is narrated, and where the perpetrator is constructed as a bumbling barbarian, rather than a malicious criminal (cf. Baker 2001; Knuth 2004; Manguel 2008).

“claims and counterclaims” and significant “evidential gaps and silences” (Raven 2004, 14-15), the image of Caesar as a bit of a bumbling fool who accidentally sets the greatest compendium of human knowledge on fire is burnt into the western cultural memory.

The second villain in the mythology of the destruction of the Library is the Christian Theodosius, who is said to have ordered all pagan temples to be destroyed in the year 391 AD. Historical writing of the time marks the moment when anti-Christian sympathies replace anti-Caesar indictments in the Alexandrian mythology (Raven 2004, 15). Historical research has placed many question marks over the exact date of, and motivation for, the second burning of the Great Library, but this does not deter from the vivid images it has left on the European cultural imagination. Whereas the first myth of fire in the Great Library serves to strengthen notions of the vandalism of the later Roman Empire, this second fire myth connects strongly to the painful legacy of burnings administered by the Christian church. The images here are not of an accidental fire in the buildings of the library, but rather of pyres of burning scrolls in the streets of Alexandria. The association with the witch burnings by the Spanish Inquisition a millennium later is completed by the image of Hypatia. The myth tells of this Alexandrian teacher, philosopher and mathematician being dragged from her chariot by monks, then flayed and finally burned together with the remaining scrolls from the library (Raven 2004, 16).²⁷

The third part of the mythology of the destruction of the Library of Alexandria casts the scrolls codices as the victim of yet another villain: the Arab general Amr, who conquered Egypt in 642. By far the most legendary, the historicity of this account is the most suspect: whilst many contemporary writers recorded the conquest, none mentioned the burning of the Library. Only 500 years later did writers begin to associate Amr with the destruction of the Great Library. Ibn Al-Qifti's *History of Wise Men* claims that Amr had 50,000 scrolls distributed as fuel for the bathhouses (Raven 2004, 16-17). If the accounts were to be correct, they reflect an immense callousness. Caliph Omar in

²⁷ The image of Hypatia on the pyre will return in my investigation of the library as a cultural myth. For here it suffices to say that that I explain the prevalence of the image of this particular female librarian - who was also a scholar, philosopher, and teacher, and in no way a dowdy old bookworm or a slave to a bureaucratic library system - to stem from its mythical function as a warning: a naturalization of the idea that learning is dangerous for women.

Damascus is cited by MacLeod as having ordered the destruction of the books by the following decree:

If the content of the books is in accordance with the book of Allah, we may do without them, for in that case, the book of Allah more than suffices. If, on the other hand, they contain matter not in accordance with the book of Allah there can be no need to preserve them. Proceed then, and destroy them (MacLeod 2004, 10).

Following the logic of this legendary statement, there was no need to actually read any of the scrolls before distributing them to the bathhouses – in that sense Caliph Omar’s classification can be considered the most efficient grounds for the weeding of library collections in the history of mankind. Ironically, it illustrates that is far easier to devise a classification system that allows for the destruction of knowledge, than it is to devise one for its effective preservation, organization and dissemination. Notably, the legend also recounts that after the bathhouses had been warmed with the Alexandrian scrolls for six months, only the work of Aristotle was preserved (MacLeod 2004, 10).

Although the sources of these legendary accounts are not necessarily trustworthy, they function as powerful myths that sustain and naturalize ideologies that attribute and sustain cultural relations. While the Library of Alexandria stood, it served as a symbol of cultural superiority and imperial ambition. But even after its destruction, its legacy serves to illustrate the cultural inferiority of the perpetrators as if it goes without saying.²⁸ That is why the real force of these narrative accounts of the destruction of the Library of Alexandria resides in how they operate as myths. Together they form “a totemic story about delays in human advancement, the scars in the history of civilization, and great caesuras in learning” (Raven 2004, 19). These totemic stories are thus not about the destruction of the greatest repository of knowledge mankind has ever known, but instead function to present advancement, accumulation, and progress as the *normal* state of affairs: as long as the foolishness, dogmatism and decadence of the cultural and historical other can be kept at bay, then knowledge can be allowed to grow infinitely, or so the

²⁸ Roland Barthes considered this the function of myth: to mask how ideology makes cultural differences (particularly class differences) *seem* natural (cf. Barthes 1957; 1973).

myth seems to suggest. The inherent paradoxes present in this view of knowledge production should be apparent to those familiar with feminist and postcolonial critiques of culture.

Bagnall (2002) also warns against the suggestive force of this mythology of loss, but from quite a different angle. He claims that even if none of these fires had ever happened, none of the Library's collection would likely have survived until today. The conditions inside and outside the Library were far from ideal for the preservation of the papyrus scrolls, as the humid Mediterranean climate of Alexandria would have been very detrimental to the scrolls in the absence of advanced techniques of climate control (Bagnall 2002, 358-359). In this account, it is nature that interferes with the accumulation and preservation of knowledge. Bagnall thus argues that even if the Library had not fallen victim to arson, the scrolls in its collection would have had to be constantly replaced by new copies - a labor and capital-intensive endeavor (Bagnall 2002, 359). The reputation and grandeur of the Library rose and fell with the fortune of the city itself. By the end of the existence of the Library of Alexandria the impetus for sustaining such a large body of texts had waned tremendously. As authorities in both East and West simply lacked the means and the ambition to maintain such a collection, in Alexandria or elsewhere, "[a]n unburned building full of decaying books would not have made a particle's worth of difference" (Bagnall 2002, 359). Bagnall's argument thus suggests that material (including economic) circumstances may interfere with the preservation of cultural artifacts more than singular events of destruction.

In the midst of the current global economic crisis, and at a time when, for the sake of efficiency, new technologies seem to be supplanting books with what is argued to be a far less stable medium (Manoff 2004), contemporary authors and book-lovers are warning that our libraries are under similar threat (Baker 2001; White 2005; Smith 2012). Such analyses seem to answer to Bagnall's call to "turn our attention away from the dramatic single event and toward the forces and personalities that create and sustain cultural institutions" (Bagnall 2002, 360). Rather than assigning blame for the destruction of the Great Library, or overestimating what was lost in a distant past, it may be more important to consider a social and political environment may be sustained in which books, libraries and learning are valued. But in doing so, Bagnall himself reconstructs and upholds a dichotomy that separates the products of the mind from the

social and cultural conditions that produce knowing subjects, and that separates the realm of knowledge (culture) from the realm of the material (nature). As I will argue in the third chapter, these distinctions are becoming increasingly difficult to uphold in the context of contemporary (notably feminist) critiques of knowledge and culture, and belies what can be considered a logocentric view of knowledge that is undeniably tied to hegemonic, patriarchal power. Let it suffice for now to suggest that Bagnall's demystification of the dreams of Alexandria performs itself the myth of universal knowledge, and hides the underlying ideology of objectivity.

This culminates in Bagnall's claim that the Library of Alexandria is nevertheless – despite the inflationary tales surrounding it – a library of “valid dreams” (Bagnall 2002, 361). By describing the Library of Alexandria as setting the standard of philological scholarship, allowing for great leaps in scholarship in many fields, and having “already within a century or so of its founding [...] become a symbol of universality of intellectual inquiry and of the collection of written texts,” and as such “bequeath[ing] the image of itself, the idea of a large, comprehensive library embracing all of knowledge” as a valid one (Bagnall 2002, 361), Bagnall's adherence to the “valid dream” of Alexandria reinforces the idea that intellectual progress is fundamentally a teleological development, and that the quest for pure, universal knowledge is both a valid and a valiant effort.

The ideal of a “library embracing all of knowledge” sounds nothing short of magnificent. However, the Library of Alexandria had always already been involved with other purposes: the political, the religious, and the utilitarian (Parada 2004). The Ptolemaic society undoubtedly benefited from having access to a vast repository of information about its enemies and conquered peoples, and as such it may have functioned more as a prototype of the imperial archive as described by Ann Laura Stoler (2002), who argues quite forcefully that European imperialism has always operated by a system of archival control. The utilitarian purpose of the Library of Alexandria consisted of both the practical inventions that the scholars in the Library made, as well as the Platonic functional-aesthetic notion that “the beautiful is useful” (Parada 2004), which has as its corollary the notion that that which is useful is beautiful. The feminist question to pose is of course: useful to whom, and useful to what ends – who benefits? New inventions often serve the purposes of waging war

and controlling conquered people more effectively.²⁹ To interpret the legacy of Alexandria as a “valid dream” that serves only the pursuit of universal knowledge hides its conflict-ridden history under a layer of modernist ideology. And is that not, in fact, the ideology of science, as a fundamentally patriarchal but also colonial ideology, at which feminists such as Evelyn Fox Keller (1984), Sandra Harding (1983; 1987) and Donna Haraway (1988) aimed their critiques?

Parada’s (2004) reminder that the Alexandrian scholars did not “discover” truths from within a political vacuum, but rather produced knowledge from within and under influence of a complex network of social, cultural and political forces, echoes (albeit not from an explicitly pronounced feminist point of view) such fundamental feminist critiques of knowledge. If the Library of Alexandria were still to exist, and its collection remained intact, whatever was to be found there would have to be approached and interpreted by contemporary scholars who necessarily would be tied to their own situated perspectives, and would have to be interpreted with an awareness of our limited understanding or appreciation of the historically, geographically, and politically situated perspectives from which they were produced. Bagnall’s “valid dream” of a library that embraces “all of knowledge” is thus itself based on the parable of scientific objectivity that Donna Haraway has coined the “god trick of seeing everything from nowhere” (Haraway 1988, 582). It is only because the Library of Alexandria exists *nowhere* that Bagnall can uphold this dream as “valid” – had the Library of Alexandria still been *somewhere* as an *actually existing* heterotopia rather than a retrospective utopia, any confrontation with the radical historical contingency of the knowledge it contained would quickly reveal the dream to be a myth.

The myth of the Library of Alexandria not only raises the question whether universal knowledge exists, but also the question, posed by Foucault in *The Order of Things* (1970) of how the way in which knowledge is organized constructs reality in a certain way. Attempts to collect all knowledge under one

²⁹ Donna Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto” (first published in 1985, and continually republished and rewritten ever since) offers an original and compelling perspective on the complicity of different technologies in different wars, claiming that the sociotechnological context of the Star Wars of the 1980s (both the Cold War project and the series of films) suggest a new form of political and cultural subjectivity that Haraway posits in opposition to the Marxist revolutionary subject. The cyborg, she claims is “not subject to Foucault’s biopolitics; the cyborg simulates politics, a much more potent field of operations” (Haraway 2004, 22).

roof perhaps reflect not so much a desire to honor the great achievements of humanity as a drive to organize all knowledge within the same intellectual framework, and - through indexing and editing - fitting it into and sustaining dominant discourse. In that regard, Parada provocatively suggests that:

What really concerns us with regard to the human discourse is not so much the magnificence of certain achievements but the discourse itself, the rhetorical imagination that purposes to possess the fragmentary variety of knowledge turning it into an indivisible unity, which, despite its physical attire, continues to be ideal. The triumph of the Library of Alexandria resides less in its existence than in its mythical and universalist intention (Parada,2004).

Whereas Bagnall's critique of the "unreal character of much that has been said about [the Library of Alexandria]" (2002, 348) fails to reveal the essential function of the myth of the Library, Parada is more aware of the simultaneous construction of the "real" Library and the values realized through the retelling of the myths surrounding its construction and demise. In order to understand the enduring ideological force of the legacy of the Library of Alexandria, it does not suffice to simply demystify the dreams pertaining to its size, its purpose and its ultimate destruction. The long-vanished Library of Alexandria remains an enigmatic presence in the collective imaginary, and as such still does this ideological work. To understand how it does so should thus involve a critical investigation of the enduring values that are naturalized through the mythical narratives surrounding its legacy, as well as the historical and cultural situationality of these values *per se*. To proclaim the Library of Alexandria a compendium of dreams to be debunked (Bagnall 2002, 348) on the one hand, while on the other hand considering the dream of a "large, comprehensive library embracing all of knowledge" a "valid dream" (Bagnall 2002, 360-361) does not allow for such a critical investigation.

But if, as I have argued, a confrontation of such dreams with the 'real' does not suffice, how can the myth of Alexandria and its enduring hold on the collective imaginary be productively and critically analyzed? While Parada's foucauldian analysis is elegant and convincing, his analysis cannot fulfill the cultural gap left by the work of the myth. Barthes' semiological investigation of the myth may provide the way into what could be considered a critical analysis

of the Library of Alexandria. Bagnall, as a “myth consumer[,] takes the signification [of the myth] for a system of facts” (Barthes 1957, 130). I, on the other hand, want to propose that the Library of Alexandria - a retrospective utopia that functions as a mythic signifier of universal knowledge - is part of a semiological system. This is where the literary imagination becomes a rich site from which to explore this semiological system.

The Great Library in Literature

“For this discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learner’s souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves. . . . You give your disciples not truth, but only the semblance of truth; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality.”
(Plato, *Phaedrus*)

Through art the dream of the Library of Alexandria can be entered from a vantage point that reveals it to be an illusion of universality and cohesion. Rather than following Bagnall’s realist attempt at debunking the dreams about its size, its destruction, and the consequences of its loss, I will approach its myth-like presence by investigating two of its most seminal reformulations in the work of postmodern authors Jorge Luis Borges and Umberto Eco. As I will show, both Borges’ *The Library of Babel* and Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* offer powerful deconstructions of what Bagnall considers the “valid dreams” of Alexandria, and capacitate both epistemological and political reflections on the status of the library in the Western imaginary.

As Rosemarie Buikema has argued, history is a narrative that is never fixed, and literature possesses the possibility to give expression to exactly that fact (Buikema 2006, 197). The works of both Borges³⁰ and Eco³¹ stand as examples of this potential, both authors having taken the foundational myth of the Library of Alexandria as a starting point for their library narratives that stretch the myth of universal knowledge to its imaginative boundaries. Moreover, their work allows for a politically informed, feminist critique of the figuration of the library in culture that runs counter to Bagnall’s realist approach that serves to uphold the mythical status of the library

³⁰ Jorge Luis Borges is commonly cited as an author who has influenced postmodern literature and inspired postmodern theory. Both Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault cite his work as having been inspirational to their postmodern critiques of writing (Derrida 1981) and knowledge regimes (Foucault 1970). Derrida has been critiqued for recycling Borges’ ideas in his theories of language (cf. Monegal 1990). Foucault, on the other hand, has used Borges’ fictional Chinese Encyclopedia as an illustration of a heterotopia in *The Order of Things* (1970, xvi). His later work on other spaces (heterotopias) no longer refers to Borges, but nevertheless takes the explosion of categories that Borges presents in his Chinese Encyclopedia as a starting point (Topinka 2010, 55-56).

³¹ Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* has been read as an exemplary performance of intertextuality, and as an exemplary postmodern text (Graham 2000).

While the Library of Alexandria functions, as I've demonstrated, as a retrospective utopia, Borges turns the utopia into a dystopia. *The Library of Babel* at first seems to be the literary and literal parallel of Alexandria, possessing literally every possible work imaginable:

The Library is total and [...] its shelves register every possible combination of the twenty-odd orthographical symbols (a number which, though vast, is not infinite): in other words, all that is given to express, in all languages (Borges 1962, 75).

While this may sound at first like the realization of Bagnall's dream of a library that possesses all knowledge, the logical corollary of the Library of Babel's extreme completeness is that "for every line of straightforward statement, there are leagues of senseless cacophonies, verbal jumbles, and incoherencies," including, for instance, a volume that contains "four hundred and ten pages of inalterable MCV's [...]" (Borges 1962, 77). Borges' library stands as a firm reminder that nonsense is as much part of the universe as are reasonable and meaningful statements, and that the same goes for any library that would be a perfect representation of the universe. Without a system to distinguish nonsense from meaning, Borges' librarians are hopelessly and infinitely lost in the Library-universe, and make attempt after failed attempt to either deduce or construct some kind of order. Notable are the Purifiers, who:

[...] believed that it was fundamental to eliminate useless works. They invaded the hexagons, showed credentials which were not always false, leafed through a volume with displeasure and condemned whole shelves: their hygienic, ascetic furor caused the senseless perdition of millions of books (Borges 1962, 80).

The image of the Purifiers frantically burning books evokes some of the most traumatic instances of book destruction in history and fiction, from the frenzied libricide committed by the Nazis, to 1984's Winston Smith, who's daily job was to commit to fire every piece of writing that contested the ever-changing political relations of the day. But in the Library of Babel such purification is as senseless as it is futile: for every copy there exist "several hundred thousand imperfect facsimiles" (Borges 1962, 80). Indeed, Borges' musings can be applied retroactively to fuel a critique of Nicholson Baker's

exaggerated depiction of the microfilming and destruction of newspapers and books by the Library of Congress (Raven 2004, 32).

In Borges' Library traditional methods of reason are equally doomed to failure:

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 (Borges 1962, 81).

The Library-universe of Borges ruthlessly dismantles Bagnall's library of valid dreams - the Library of Babel is less dream than it is nightmare: "The certitude that some shelf in some hexagon held precious books and that these precious books were inaccessible seemed almost intolerable" (Borges 1962, 80).

Firstly, it can be read as an ironic response to Bagnall's claim that the Library of Alexandria "sustained for the first time a philological enterprise, in which scholars tried to establish correct texts and to think about the art of doing so" (Bagnall 2002, 360). This claim reveals a positivist attitude - indeed, it suggests that the philological enterprise forms a *de facto* contribution to intellectual progress, and serves to bring humanity closer to discovering a truth that is assumed to be external. Borges' story reflects on this assumption and turns it upside down. In the Library of Babel:

[it] is useless to observe that the best volume of the many hexagons under my administration is entitled *The Combed Thunderclap* and another *The Plaster Cramp* and another *Axaxaxas mlo*. These phrases, at first glance incoherent, can no doubt be justified in a cryptographical or allegorical manner [...] (Borges 1962, 82).

Whereas Bagnall reaffirms the assumed universal usefulness of the philological project, Borges shows that such a project can only become useful in the context of that which the Library of Babel sorely lacks: as a heterotopia of indefinitely accumulating time (Foucault 1986, 26). Such heterotopias, as Foucault has argued, belong to modernity, and are inventions of the western culture of the 19th century. So while they may present themselves in the imaginary - as in Bagnall's "valid dream" - as mere accumulation, as an ever expanding collection of truth and knowledge that realizes progress in an

objective way, in fact they are products of historically and geographically located ways of thinking that *produce* space in a certain way. In other words, Borges' story confronts the illogical assumptions underlying the illusion of the library as a container-space. No matter what the library contains, its contents and collections can only become meaningful (in whatever partial way) when reflected upon from a situated point of view. What the librarians of Babel lack is exactly that of which Bagnall robs the librarians of Alexandria in positing its "valid dream" as disconnected from its historical and political specificity: a partial and situated perspective.

Indeed, Bagnall's second "valid dream" does something similar when he states that the Library of Alexandria capacitated "many attempts to compile systematic information about different subjects" (Bagnall 2002, 361). Bagnall proposes the Library of Alexandria as a separate space, a space that is a reflection of perfect order where "systematic information" can be "compiled" seemingly without the intervention of systems of inequality and difference. Borges' story pontificates on this utopian dream by showing how libraries are heterotopias of compensation, whose role is 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" (Foucault 1986, 27). Of course, the Library of Babel is a horrific counter-reflection of these heterotopias. In Borges' story "[t]he universe (which others call the Library)" is a perfect reflection of the universe insofar as it is a reflection of its disorder. Rather than suggesting that writing and scholarship serve to reveal or unveil the underlying order of the universe, the librarian of Babel suggests that: "[t]he methodical task of writing distracts me from the present state of men" (Borges 1962, 82). Rather than suggesting, as Bagnall does, that methodical, systematic intellectual activity serves to progress knowledge about the universe, Borges instead suggests that it is an activity that serves to distract the intellectual from having to confront the chaos of the universe.

Thirdly, Bagnall's insistence on the validity of the dream "of universality and intellectual inquiry and of the collection of written texts" (Bagnall 2002, 361) becomes increasingly untenable when confronted with Borges' philosophical parable. The Library of Babel is indeed universal. Since its collection includes "everything that is given to express, in all languages" (Borges 1962, 78), the Library of Babel does not distinguish between different

discourses or symbolic systems – it does not favor any tradition (past or possible) over any other. The Library of Babel’s collection of written texts is so complete that it holds “the faithful catalogue of the Library, thousands and thousands of false catalogues, [and] the demonstration of the fallacy of those catalogues, the demonstration of the fallacy of the true catalogue” (Borges 1962, 78-79). Borges’ story thus problematizes Bagnall’s third “valid dream” – *The Library of Babel* shows that the idea of a universal library, once realized, might be more of a nightmare than a dream...

Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*, on the other hand, illustrates the historical and ideological contingency of such necessary, but never “natural” order. The Aedificium – the medieval monastic library conjured up by Eco, modeled after the Libraries of Alexandria and Babel³², which is the primary driving force behind the plot of *The Name of the Rose* – is strictly organized, according partly to the groundbreaking work done by the Alexandrian scholars and intricately interwoven with the rhizome of religious worldviews it both produces and sustains. If *The Library of Babel* stages a confrontation with the chaos of the universe and its refusal to conform to any discursively produced ordering principles, Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* stages a confrontation with the semiotic interplay between the world and the text. The library, as a storehouse for the latter, is always simultaneously an imperfect representation of the former, as well as its prefiguration.

In the novel, that reads like a pastiche of the detective genre, William of Baskerville and the young novice-assistant Adso of Melk (often referred to as “My dear Adso”) have to unravel the mystery surrounding a series of deaths at a medieval convent in Italy that houses the greatest library of its time: the *Aedificium*. After William and Adso have deduced that the secret behind the murders is to be found inside the Aedificium, they set out to gain access to the seemingly hermetically closed labyrinth. The presumption is that the library is shielded from the world to protect its visitors – not to protect it from its visitors. When they consult the elderly monk Alinardo de Grottaferrata about the library, he warns them:

³² J..O. Ward has illustrated that Eco’s Aedificium is not in accordance with anything we know medieval libraries to have been like. He argues that it is not a library at all, but a metaphor for the world, and a symbol of “man’s wrongful endeavor to control and understand what he cannot he cannot control and understand” (Ward 2004, 171-172).

“Hunc Mundum tipice labyrinthus denotat ille,” the old man recited, absently. “Intranti largus, redeunti sed nimis artus. The library is a great labyrinth, sign of the labyrinth of the world. You enter and you do not know if you will come out” (Eco 1984, 158).

Indeed, William and Adso find it easy enough to enter the labyrinth – they reach a secret entryway through the kitchen and *ossarium*, by pressing a button concealed inside a skull – but have considerably more difficulty exiting it again. Much of the narrative centers on their search for an exit, during which William has to reason his way around multiple (all ultimately false) hypotheses as to the organizing principle behind the Aedificium’s layout.

The figure of the library as a representation of the world suggests that its order is natural, god-given. However, as the narrative progresses, this idea is reversed. When after many struggles, William and Adso finally (and by chance) stumble upon the solution to the labyrinth, they find that it is indeed organized like the world – but it is not the natural world that serves as the model for the library’s lay-out. Rather, the layout of the library reflects a specific worldview:

[...] the books are arranged according to the country of their origin, or the place where their authors were born, or, in this instance, the place where they should have been born. The librarians told themselves that Virgil the grammarian was born in Toulouse by mistake; he should have been born in the western islands. *They corrected the errors of nature* (Eco 1984, 314).

As such, the library and the librarians actually “contradict the nature of things” (Ward 2004, 173). The map of the library does not reflect the geographical organization of countries and continents, but a specific moral ideology: the works of the infidels, including volumes on mythical monsters and human sexuality, are placed in a far-away corner labeled *Finis Africae*. Here Adso is overcome by terrifying hallucinations as he pages through a richly illustrated volume. At first thinking that he had released the demons contained in the writings of the infidels, Adso is told by William that he had inhaled toxic fumes wafting from an incense burner placed inside the room. The library as a sign of the world thus does not reflect the world, but stands in a mutual

relationship to it, producing a complex moral and ideological map that is navigated through logic, but rather discovered by chance.

Indeed, William and Adso discover that the order of the Aedificium is not a reflection of any natural or rationally deducible order, but rather of a complex framework of historically contingent and intersecting value systems. Ward (2004) has suggested that the spiritual meaning of the Aedificium is “the contingency of all meaning, the uselessness of all systematic knowledge” (Ward 2004, 173). As such, the Aedificium effectively destroys the dream of a universal library, as libraries are rhizomatic in nature: the knowledge they contain can only become accessible through an ordering principle that necessarily points towards different and intertwined systems of meaning, but that are ultimately historically and ideologically contingent and fundamentally irrational. To access knowledge *in* the library, one must have knowledge *about* the library, and this knowledge is ultimately experiential and affective, rather than systematic and rational. Moreover, library order shown to be both a product of and at the same time constructing a certain historically and culturally contingent categorization. Libraries are thus literal power *structures*: no matter how arbitrary their organizing principles are: “If an eternal traveler were to cross it in any direction, after centuries he would see that the same volumes were repeated in the same disorder (which, thus repeated, would be an order: the Order)” (Borges 1962, 83).

Borges and Eco thus radically overturn the myth of the library. Whereas the Library of Babel is a perfect reflection of the chaos of the universe, the Aedificium produces an order that is entirely unnatural. The Aedificium stands as a stubborn denial of the chaos of the universe, and materializes in its stead a strictly enforced religious insistence on divine order as the natural order of things. Both confrontations with the limitations, arbitrariness, and uselessness of ordering principles produces profound uncanny effects, upon which I will reflect in the third chapter. For now, I want to point out how the myth of the library – which is so cunningly robbed of its signification³³ in Borges’ and Eco’s

³³ Roland Barthes described myth as “language-robbery” – instead of making the object of the image or the narrative into a symbol or example, it naturalize instead certain ideologies. He gives the example of a *Paris Match* cover on which a Black man is depicted saluting the French flag. This image functions as a myth by presenting the Empire as what Foucault might call a natural order of things for the colonized. Barthes suggests that this language-robbery can be resisted (or even undone) by robbing myth of something. To rob the myth, he suggests that the signification of the myth can be taken as the signifier in a third semiological chain (Barthes 1957, 133-134). Both Eco and Borges can be understood to do so: they take what Bagnall calls the “valid

library narratives – still endures in popular culture, markedly unchanged from the way it appears throughout Bagnall’s defense of the Alexandrian dream.

The library as mythology – as a compendium of myths – also appears in popular culture. In the 2004 made-for-television film *The Librarian: Quest for the Spear*, perpetual student, holder of 22 academic degrees, know-it-all and man-child Flynn Carsen is expelled from the university by his professor so that he can make himself useful in the world. After having successfully applied for a job at the Metropolitan Public Library, he is in for a surprise: rather than a calm and reserved life in between the stacks, he is tasked with protecting the Library’s special collection. In the library’s basement, Flynn finds artifacts from almost the entirety of western mythology, along with some fairy-tale animals and some of the most sacred items from the world’s religions: Pandora’s Box and the Arc of the Covenant are stored alongside the Goose That Laid the Golden Eggs. Excalibur is kept there, as well as the original Mona Lisa (proving the rumor that the version of the painting in the Louvre is only a copy).

The plot is driven by Flynn’s assignment to return one of the three parts of the Spear of Destiny – the spear that is said to have been the first one to pierce Jesus’ side before he was crucified – that was stolen from the library, and which is understood to contain great destructive powers. He receives help from the feisty Nicole Noone, a library employee whose talents include martial arts, sulking, and the humiliation of men. By no means a masterpiece of contemporary cinema, the plot of this made-for-TV adventure flick is as predictable as can be expected of the genre. In the end, through a series of fantastical Indiana Jones-like adventures, Flynn ends up in Shangri-La, where he rescues the spear and wins a kiss from Nicole. The film’s representation of the library as a container of myths allows for an interesting reflection on the way the library functions as a myth that naturalizes the order of things.

In *Librarian: Quest for the Spear* the relationship between the historical record and the narrative prefiguration that sustains it and gives it meaning (Ricoeur 1990, 53), is as straight-forward as it can only be in fiction: the myth of Pandora is contained within the library in its entirety, within the box itself. The Arthurian legend is present materially in the library, in the form of the mythical

dreams” of scientific progress, the natural order of things, and the universality of knowledge as themselves signifiers for the sterility of the lust for books and knowledge (Ward 2004, 1973), and as such point out the emptiness of the conceptual signified (Barthes 1957, 135). They thus produce new myths that *denaturalize* exactly what the myth of the Universal Library tends to *naturalize*. I will develop this argument further on.

sword Excalibur. Within the fictional library resides a whole labyrinth of cultural values and gendered ideologies sustained through these material records of male heroism and destructive female curiosity.

The film's plot concludes (unsurprisingly) with the return of the Spear of Destiny to its proper place in the library's vaults. As such, the story sustains the myth of the library as a space of natural order. In contrast to Borges' Library of Babel and Eco's *Aedificium*, this library space is not shown to present any fundamental problems pertaining to how knowledge *can* be ordered, and how such ordering *produces* a universe of knowledge that is neither natural nor universal. So while the film can be (and has been) interpreted as offering a reversal of the gendered stereotype of the female librarian, from a feminist perspective the way it presents the library undermines this reversal. By suggesting that knowledge as we know it is ordered in a way that reflects a natural order, the film sustains the myth of the library as being a space of universal reason. As such, it is a reflection of what Bagnall calls the "valid dream" of Alexandria, without engaging with what Parada calls its "mythical and universalist intention" (Parada 2004, n.p.). Indeed, the ending of *The Librarian: Quest for the Spear* solidifies the myth of the library, when Flynn tells his mother: "Being a librarian is actually a pretty cool job." What presumably is "cool" about the job is that it allows mama's boy Flynn to become the savior of the world. He, and he alone, ensures that things are put in their proper places, thereby assuring that the status quo is maintained. That the universe of *Librarian: Quest for the Spear* features a literally anonymous woman (Nicole Noone) as an objectified adventure chick who is destined to succumb to the charm of our hero renders this film no so much a rebellious inversion of the librarian stereotype, but rather a slightly differently angled but still normative reflection of the gendered politics of knowledge.

The Library of Alexandria has become a myth that on the one hand glorifies universal knowledge, while on the other hand obscuring the historicity of knowledge and its contingency on practices of bibliographic control. If the Library had survived, it would have been impossible to uphold the ideal of a universal collection. Paradoxically, the destruction of the Library of Alexandria has allowed myth of the Universal Library to flourish. Indeed, the echoes of Alexandria still resound throughout the western cultural imaginary. Literary narratives such as those of Eco and Borges seem to succeed (at least partially) in

robbing the myth of the library from much of its signifying power. However, the fantasy of the library as a space where a presumably natural order of things is not only reflected, but also maintained, remains present in popular culture.

In my investigation so far, the gender lens I promised has remained somewhat implicit. In the following section I will investigate how feminist critiques of reason may contribute to an understanding of the ideological work that libraries do, particularly when libraries are lost. As I will argue, these critiques begin to unveil to what extent the myth of the library can be understood as a fundamentally patriarchal illusion.

Resonances of Loss

“All over the city, sheets of burning paper, fragile pages of grey ashes, floated down like dirty black snow. Catching a page, you could feel its heat, and for a moment read a fragment of text in a strange kind of black and grey negative, until, as the heat dissipated, the page melted to dust in your hand.”

(Kemal Bakarsic, 2000)

The above citation, when read out of context, could appear to refer as much to the burning of the library of Alexandria as to the final pages of Eco's *The Name of the Rose*. Instead, they are the memories of Kemal Bakarsic, librarian of the Sarajevo National Museum, who watched the aftermath of the attack on the Vijećnica (the Library of Bosnia and Hercegovina) in Sarajevo by incendiaries between 25 and 27 August 1992. Together with the monumental, Moorish-style library building, over a million books and manuscripts were destroyed (Raven 2004, 2).



[cello player in the library, Sarajevo 1](#)

In a similarly impassioned outcry, leading British Islamic bibliographer Robert Fisk condemned the invasion of Iraq after the National Library and the library at the Ministry of Religious Endowment were laid to ruins within 48

hours of the first attacks in April of 2003. He wrote that the destruction of the National Archives and the Koranic library marked “Year Zero” for Iraq: “the cultural identity of Iraq is being erased. Why? Who set these fires? For what insane purpose is this heritage being destroyed?” (as cited in Raven 2004, 1-2).



Man collects books from ruins Iraq N. L. 1

Historian Rebecca Knuth has written extensively about what she has termed “Libricide” – the regime-sponsored destruction of books and libraries in the twentieth century. In her 2003 book on the topic, she argues that while books and libraries are essentially fragile, and as such easily fall victim to disaster, the twentieth century “plague of book destruction” is not only experienced as, but is *in fact* an attack on “the whole of human culture.” She considers libricide to be a pattern parallel to those of genocide and ethnocide – not merely a by-product of extremist violence, but a calculated and systematically executed strategy of extremist regimes (Knuth 2003). Knuth makes a convincing case, and her analysis offers an important contribution to the question of how and why the images and stories of the destruction of libraries evoke such a profound sense of loss. Linking libricide directly to regime-sponsored devastation of the cultural record, her argument stands alongside James Raven’s assertion that, in some cases, the destruction of libraries has also been exaggerated for propagandist value (Raven 2004, 5). The historical myth of Great Library of Alexandria can thus be read in different

ways simultaneously. Firstly, the library can be viewed as a victim of political conflict: political foes sought to destroy the cultural cohesion the library enabled, and the cultural values it symbolized. Secondly, the different accounts of its destruction that emerged throughout history can be read as historical narratives with clearly recognizable ideological prefigurations, that variably place blame on what was at the time of their writing considered humanity's greatest foe, be it barbarism, decadence or indifference. Bagnall's account can certainly be read as such a narrative, as it relativizes the importance of the Roman and Muslim attackers, and favors an interpretation that forecasts the inevitable ruination of the library throughout the Dark Ages.

While I do not want to dismiss the relevance of regime-sponsored book destruction throughout the 20th century, I find it doubtful that the resonances of the loss of libraries can be sufficiently understood in terms of intercultural, political or social conflict. The emotional and impassioned reactions elicited by images of libraries in Japan that were destroyed by the 2011 earthquakes and tsunami suggest that there is something else going on. When Japanese librarians and library users posted a collection of images on the site *togetter.com*, that showed deserted libraries and books in disarray, the images quickly spread along digital (social) networks and news portals. The images elicited emotional reactions from people across the globe.



Aftermath of earthquake in Japanese libr 1

For instance, *The Huffington Post* – an online newspaper with readers from all over the world, but aimed mostly at a North American audience – wrote: “Though the toll on human lives from the Japan earthquake is inconceivable, there is something *heartbreaking* about seeing the treasured books

that have likely been read by many of these individuals scattered and in complete disarray.”³⁴

Whereas in the cases of Nazi book burnings, the burning of the library in Sarajevo and the burning and raiding of the National Library in Iraq we can clearly speak of intentional destruction related to distinct (inter)national conflicts, the destruction of the libraries in Japan is a case of natural disaster – destruction without reason. But in all these cases, the images of destroyed libraries provoke profound feelings of loss and a public quest for explanations – to be found in human, structural or cultural failing – and liability. In all these cases, the Library of Alexandria looms over the imagination of library loss as a “standard parable” (Raven 2004, 12).

So what makes the images of the destroyed libraries in Japan equally touching as those of the burned library of Bosnia? How can it be that such politically, historically, and situationally different destructions appeal to a similar sense of immense cultural loss? While Knuth argues that the willful destruction of libraries plays a specific role in global conflicts in the twentieth century, I want to suggest that images and stories of library destruction have a particular function in the cultural imaginary that goes beyond the context of violent struggle and relates at a profound level to the more violent aspects of what Derrida calls “archival control” (Derrida 1995). In *Librarian: Quest for the Spear*, archival control appears as a benign form of putting things in their place, which is figured as a way to protect civilization from destructive, chaotic forces. But narratives of library destruction evoke the other side of the same coin: state violence and natural disaster can destroy our control of the archive, and as such destroy civilization as we know it. These stories thus evoke an awareness of the fragility of civilization. It is telling that in George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), protagonist Winston Smith is tasked with throwing documents down the “memory hole” – a furnace that reduces to ashes any material record that does not coincide with the current ideology. In this dystopian warning against the destruction of paper, flames devour truth and memory, but also produce memory in a certain way. Just as is the case with the mythology surrounding the destruction of the Alexandrian library, “in the imagination, a lost library might have contained a written, real truth and those who destroy book

³⁴ Via: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/14/japan-earthquake-libraries_n_835249.html. Accessed on 10-08-2012.

collections destroy the basis of civilization” (Raven 2004, 31). But as Orwell already showed, the “memory hole” of the library also figures forgetting – the destruction of memory – as formative of the ideological construction of civilization.

Stories of library destruction (both real and fictional) have such an affective power that they have become powerful rhetorical devices in public discourse. An example in case is the publication of novelist and bibliophile Nicholson Baker’s book *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper* (2001). In this minutely researched volume, Baker sets out to retrace what happened to the thousands of books and newspapers that were copied to microfilm and often destroyed during the 1980’s and 1990’s in American libraries. Baker likens the destruction of the paper record to ecological destruction: “It’s as if the National Park Service felled vast wild tracts of pointed firs and replaced them with plastic Christmas trees” (Baker 2001, 238). He warns that at the beginning of the 21st century, paper records potentially face an even more extensive wave of destruction under the influence of the drive to digitalize the cultural record. On the one hand digitalization makes it possible to make the cultural record available online, but on the other hand Baker feared that it would also lead to a widespread habit to destroy the material records. Baker’s book inspired a heated debate in the U.S., in which few were left untouched by his vivid descriptions of the practice of the “double fold”, by which books are folded over, their pages guillotined, then separated to be microfilmed (or scanned, as is currently the practice), and ultimately destroyed, turning the book (at once part of the material as well as intellectual record) into a simulacrum, a representation without an original³⁵ – like replacing a pine tree with a plastic Christmas tree.

Many have argued that Baker’s book exaggerates the rate of destruction of the paper record and unfairly assigns blame onto librarians, whom he describes as uncaring and callous bureaucrats, more concerned with preserving space than with protecting the paper record (Manoff 2001; Quint 2001; Raven 2004). Others declared it a “narrative of a heroic struggle” in which Baker

³⁵ I am referring here to Jean Baudrillard’s (1994) concept of the simulacrum as a copy without an original that bears no relation to the real, but instead appears as more real than the real. Gilles Deleuze has argued that simulacra can overturn privileged position, as simulacra posit difference instead of similarity or resemblance as their central operation (Deleuze 1968, 69). Baker is clearly aligned with Baudrillard’s more negative interpretation of the simulacrum as something that detracts from and supplants reality: a plastic christmas tree instead of a pine tree in a forest.

“hammers away at the Orwellian notion that we must destroy books and newspapers in order, supposedly, to save them” (Chad 2001, 19). Suggesting that Baker does not “distinguish between a book guillotine and the other kind,” some appreciated his concern for the paper record, but attempted to steer the discussion away from alarmist discourse into a more productive, but perhaps more complicated, discussion of how to address issues pertaining to the profound and unavoidable technological transformations in and economic context of the way the cultural record is being produced and preserved (Star 2001, n.p.).

Marlene Manoff, associate head of the gender library at the Michigan Institute of Technology and author of several articles contemplating the transformation of archives and libraries into digital records, suggests that Baker’s book resonated so strongly with the American public because of the fear that “contemporary conditions [in the age of digitalization] threaten both memory and history and thus also imperil our individual and collective identities” (Manoff 2001, 379). Arguing that it is the fear of the fragility and vulnerability of memory and history - so acutely visualized through the images and narratives of library destruction and libricide - that allowed Baker’s critique to resonate so strongly, Manoff urges that it is exactly the symbolic value of libraries as “bulwark[s] of history, culture and memory,” and thus of civilization, that needs to be taken into account. She suggests that “perhaps there is a need for an ongoing project to chart cultural sensibilities and to explore the way library debates and issues are shaped or framed by broader social and cultural matters” (Manoff 2001, 379-380).

It is exactly this issue of broader cultural matters, particularly the way the fantasy of the ideal library is shaped by a set of distinctly modern cultural values that I want to consider in the following sections. As I will argue, libraries in the western imaginary - retroactively projected onto the mythical Library of Alexandria - stand for the ideal of reason as a form of transcendental subjectivity that is assumed as a precondition for modern, idealized civilization. This notion of reason, as I will argue, is profoundly entangled with the patriarchal symbolic. Having been critiqued, deconstructed, and epistemologically and ontologically superseded by postmodern notions of fragmentation and multiplicity, this notion of an idealized, rational civilization

still informs the collective imaginary of the ideal library and feeds what could be called a “library nostalgia”, that is really a nostalgic longing for those values.

Libraries have long symbolized the ideal of the public in the Habermasian sense – a public that consists of educated and informed citizens, who have access to a free flow of reliable information, and who – through deliberation – can engage in meaningful debate about collective interests by overcoming (or bracketing) their personal interests in favor of the public interest (Habermas 1962). Indeed, while the Library of Alexandria as a center of learning as well as a storehouse for the cultural record was already deeply entangled with the contemporary imperial forces and ultimately limited by the technological and economic possibilities of its time, the dream of a universal library that somehow exists separate from these forces has persisted throughout utopian literature of the 19th century (Hayes 2010), and has materialized through modern architecture (Hart et. al. 1996). The feminist problematization of the notion of a rational public and the progression of civilization will set the scene for a critical engagement with the continuing idealization of the universal library, and will allow for a critical engagement with the way both library utopias and dystopias prefigure notions of rationality in the cultural imaginary.

The question “what is lost when libraries are destroyed?” needs to begin with a consideration of what libraries mean in culture. What is their function beyond the most obvious (but not self-evident) function of preserving and disseminating the cultural and intellectual record? The answer to this question is of course multifaceted, and, moreover, paradoxical. However, I will argue in this section that it begins with the understanding of the library as an institution that is both shaped by and serves to materialize the ideal of reason as it developed from the modern conceptualization of knowledge and subjectivity. As I will show, this ideal is profoundly gendered, and as such gives access to the question of the problematic status of the female librarian in (popular) narrative culture.

Marie and Gary Radford (1997) engage this question as a way to challenge the librarian stereotype, considering it to be not merely a “silly” (sexist) misrepresentation, but rather an element in a wider cultural text that expresses the inherent tensions in the relationship between knowledge and power. Departing from the point of view that the library “represents, in institutional form, the ultimate realization of a place where each item within it

has a fixed place and stands in a priori relationship to every other item," they argue that: "the *rationality* of the library in many ways represents the description of nature idealized by the institutions of positivist science" (Radford & Radford 1997, 254). Indeed, one could argue that this is exactly the point of view expressed by the elderly monk-librarian in Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, when he states "the library is a great labyrinth, sign of the labyrinth of the world" (Eco 1986, 158). Bagnall's (2002) insistence that the legacy of Alexandria harbors "valid dreams" pertaining to the possibility of intellectual and civilizing progress made possible through attempts to systematize universal knowledge similarly shows how the library in the cultural imaginary has historically functioned, and continues to do so, as a metaphor for the world viewed from a *specific episteme*. In other words, the library is a space where objects and subjects of knowledge are co-constructed according to the logic of dominant discourse, and as such libraries are spaces where power relations take form and are enacted along the logic of rationality. Through this line of reasoning, the resonances of library loss gain a profound pertinence, as the destruction of libraries thus simultaneously entails and comes to signify the destruction of rational subjectivity, which in turn can inspire a deconstruction of rational subjectivity through a critical reading of such narratives. If the notion of rational subjectivity is profoundly gendered – which is exactly what feminist critics of reason have been arguing³⁶ – then this provides an interesting route into rereading library narratives and librarian stereotypes as gendered at the symbolic level.

In her seminal work *The Man of Reason* (1993), feminist philosopher Genevieve Lloyd has traced the history of how reason has come to be associated with masculinity. She argues that while this association has been part of the

³⁶ Notable here is Luce Irigaray's (1977) critique of logic, which she claims to have been premised – at least in the West and since the Greeks – on *phallogocentrism*. Central to her argument is the Derridean notion of patriarchal *logos*, which positions women outside of discourse – as external, as object, as outside of reason. The claim that the image of the phallus strives for "the one form", for unity, where such unity is withheld from women, is central to Irigaray's critique of the phallogocentrism inherent in Western conceptions of logic and reason (Irigaray 1977). Irigaray's critique has its flaws. Most notably, Genevieve Lloyd (1993) has argued that Irigaray's insistence on conceptualizing the disparate, indeterminate, fluid, etc. as nonessentialist "feminine imaginary" does not offer an escape from old polarizing concepts of masculinity and femininity. Herta Nagl-Docekal (1999), on the other hand, has suggested that Irigaray's critique of rationality is limited to scientific rationality and thus misses earlier attempts that have been made throughout the history of philosophy to define reason more broadly. Moreover, Nagl-Docekal questions Irigaray's suggestion to change the phallogocentric syntax, since she herself is confined to using it in order to remain legible (Nagl-Docekal 1999, 58-59). Nevertheless, Irigaray's work remains inspirational in the sense that she has enabled ways of analyzing the concept of reason as being part of a phallogocentric imaginary, and has such has enabled feminist debates on the topic.

Western philosophical tradition since Aristotle, early modernism - particularly René Descartes' proposition of methodical reasoning as the idealized model for knowledge - gave rise to the particular *character ideal* of the 'Man of Reason.' Lloyd argued that since methodical reasoning required the type of intellectual training from which women were traditionally excluded, its practices empirically excluded women. But Lloyd warned that, rather than simply cataloguing the exclusion of women from the character ideal of the 'Man of Reason', the feminist project should instead focus on an evaluation of how the exclusion of emotion, intuition, and imagination impoverishes both men and women by examining the symbolic associations that constitute it as a metaphor. By engaging both the structural and symbolic levels of gender³⁷, Lloyd sets out to understand how gendered discourse and metaphors have affected the theory of rationality by connoting rationality with masculinity, and how this has constituted the rational subject as male (Lloyd 1992).

From Lloyd's understanding of reason as an ideal that is symbolically linked to maleness emerges an interesting route of interpretation of narratives of library loss. If the library, as Radford and Radford (1997) claim, can be understood as institutions of and metaphors for rationality, then they can also be understood as intricately linked to maleness. It is important to note that the popular perception of libraries has its origins in the early eighteenth century (Hart et. al. 1996, 24), at a time when the character ideal of the "Man of Reason" had been fully incorporated in European culture (Lloyd 1993). The maleness of the ideal library can be recognized both on the level of the structure of libraries, particularly in the way libraries impose classifications and categorizations on the universe of knowledge *materially*, as well as on the level of the symbolic meaning of libraries as storehouses for the greatest achievements of *man*-kind. Both levels are intertwined with the Western imaginary of the library.

Luce Irigaray's (1977) derridean formulation of the non-essentialized feminine exists as an internal tension or fundamental paradox in the library as a space of reason. Following Irigaray's understanding of masculinity and femininity as intricately interlinked, women and the feminine are always present in the library as the Other - as the undetermined and fluid outside of

³⁷ Sandra Harding has argued that: "Gender difference is a pivotal way in which humans identify themselves as persons [as individuals with a gender identity], organize social relations [relations of authority, by designating specific gender roles in private, public, and professional spaces] and symbolize meaningful natural and social events and processes [through gendered symbolism and metaphors]" (Harding 1987, 18).

discourse that functions as the point of reference for patriarchal logocentrism. Women's presence as other/Other inescapably produces a tension – the library, seemingly a firm bastion of order and rationality, continuously teeters on the brink of tipping over into madness. The excessiveness of the library, so viscerally experiential through the images of chaotic piles of damaged, illegible books, is not simply a visualization of the aftermath of a disaster, but rather a reminder of the chaos that is always lurking between the stacks – connoted as feminine. By viewing the library as a myth of rationality, materialized and upheld by library order, the image of the female librarian as the protector of that order becomes not merely a stereotype rooted in historical gender and class inequalities, but a complex configuration of discourse and ideology.

An interesting example of this chaos-within-order, and the narrow dividing line between reason and madness, comes from the comedy film *Party Girl* (1995). The film presents the story of party girl Mary, an orphan, who (reluctantly and out of financial duress) becomes a librarian. The plot begins with Mary getting arrested for throwing an illegal party, and calling upon her librarian aunt and godmother Judy Linderdorffer to bail her out. After the incident Mary is left penniless, and decides to visit Judy at the library to ask her for money. Judy refuses, and chastises Mary for living a meaningless, decadent lifestyle. Their confrontation is disrupted by a disgruntled patron, who appears very distraught by the fact that a book appears to be misplaced:

Patron (angry): “Do you have a problem with modern European political thought in general, or is it a particular vendetta against Hanna Arendt?”

Judy Linderdorffer (puzzled): “Excuse me...”

Patron: HANNA ARENDT! [irritatedly taps on the cover of a book he is holding] Every single Hanna Arendt book on the shelf was out of sequence!

Judy Linderdorffer [apologetic]: I am so sorry. You must understand, we are reeling from budget cuts...

Patron [dismissive]: hmph...fine... [leaves desk]

Mary: What a DICK!

Judy Linderdorffer [offended]: He is NOT a dick, he is a patron!

This short sequence is interesting because it shows that small displacements within the thoroughly ordered system of the library turn the reasonable library user into a madman. As head librarian Judy Linderdorffer assures hem, external factors (such as budget cuts) are to blame. Nevertheless, the patron blames the librarian for allowing the library to fall into disarray, and even accuses her of *mal intent* and of having a personal vendetta against Hanna Arendt. That Hanna Arendt is known for her work on the banality of evil (1963) is a particularly clever subtext in this humorous exchange – it is, indeed, the librarian who is accused of being evil’s executioner for allowing the library to fall into disarray.

The confrontation illustrates the untenability of rigid order within an unstable and ever-changing world. The (male) patron’s almost neurotic insistence on the preservation of the library’s order is contrasted with the (female) head librarian’s awareness of the library’s intersections with global economic and political events. Nevertheless, the head librarian is deeply committed to protecting the order of the library, despite these unfavorable conditions. Judy Lindendorffer’s serviceable and apologetic response to the insulting and aggressive manner in which she is addressed shows her role as one of responsibility towards protecting the *semblance* of the library as a pristine and isolated space of reason. As such, Judy Lindendorffer can be seen as a kind of housekeeper, tasked with protecting the fantasy of transcendental reason by ordering the environment according to the dominant epistème.

But the confrontation also illustrates the intricate interconnection and thoroughly permeable boundaries between reason and madness. The library patron appears quite insane – reason does not produce order, but rather the other way around: order produces reason and presents it as if it was always already there. The sequence thus hilariously illustrates what Foucault argues in *The Subject and Power*: that the practices of naming, ordering and internalizing produce rational subjectivity as an effect (Foucault 1982). The distraught patron’s semblance of sanity dissolves when the fragility and artificiality of library order is revealed. He relies on the female librarian to reestablish the order of the library on which his rational subjectivity relies. In Foucault’s terms, the patron can be understood as demanding that the real library reflects the utopia of the library as a space of pure rationality and order, while the female librarian, Judy Linderndorffer, serves as a reminder that the library is a

heterotopia that is on one hand positioned outside of social space, but on the other hand reflects the gender and class dynamics and epistemic practices of all other social spaces. This tension between the utopia of the library on the one hand, and the heterotopic characteristics of libraries on the other, reappears throughout library narratives in popular culture and the Western literary tradition.

Walter Benjamin has described the condition of book collectors and their relationship to their private libraries as a dialectic tension between order and disorder. In "Unpacking My Library", Benjamin describes his books, still packed in boxes after a move, as "not yet touched by the boredom of order" (Benjamin 1969, 59). Benjamin's thoughts on his private library are dramatized in Canetti's novel *Auto-da-Fé*, in which book collector Kien becomes so obsessed with protecting the order and integrity of his private book collection that he devolves into total insanity. Canetti's novel should be read as a critique of modernism, or even as a harbinger of its end, and its dual and conflicting desires to on the one hand produce new meaning emanating from the creativity of the autonomous, unique subject, and on the other to discover a more or less objective order (Collins Donahue 2001, 14).

In the novel, Sinologist Peter Kien is far more preoccupied with his personal library than he is with interpersonal relations and the society outside of his library. His library, rather than operating as a representation of the world, has come to substitute the world – Kien's life takes place in the library, and even when he is physically expelled from it, he carries each and every book with him in his mind, mentally unpacking and ordering his books each night as he goes to bed in his hotel room. It is not surprising that Kien proves himself to be completely incapable of relating to anyone or anything outside of his library. Whilst at home he figures himself the master of the minutely organized microcosm of knowledge in his library, but outside of it he is an easy target for anyone who wants to take advantage of him. Because the world of knowledge that is contained within his library in no way offers him any knowledge of the world outside of it – the world of affects, politics, and interpersonal relations – the novel is at times a hysterically funny, at others a deeply unsettling study of book-obsession.

When Kien marries his housekeeper Therese, his tribute to their wedding night is both endearing and pathetic: he erects a wall of books amidst

which to consummate their marriage. Therese, in a fit of passion, topples over the books, leading Kien to throw a raging fit that begins his devolution from a fairly eccentric yet seemingly rational book-lover, into a paranoid and delusional madman. Kien cannot bring himself to sleep with Therese after the incident, so impotent is he rendered by the destruction of the order of his carefully curated collection.

Canetti's novel drives home Benjamin's assertion that:

every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories. [...] For what else is this collection but a disorder to which habit has accommodated itself to such an extent that it can appear as order? [...] If there is a counterpart to the confusion of the library, it is in the order of its catalogue (Benjamin 1969, 60).

For Kien, this catalogue has become his only point of reference. When he is no longer able to uphold the perfect order of the catalogue within the space of his library, he burns it to the ground - himself along with it.

There are pop-cultural parallels to Canetti's study of the complex relationship between collectors and their collections. In the 2000 film *High Fidelity*, based on the 1995 novel by Nick Hornby, there is a particularly intimate and touching moment in a personal library. This library is not filled with books, but with records. The narrative figures the disgruntled and slightly disappointed record shop owner Rob, who is in the process of a self-obsessed reexamination of his relationship failures, right after his most recent girlfriend has broken up with him. An important moment in Rob's premature midlife crisis is when he decides to reorganize his personal record collection. This is not a task to be taken lightly, as Rob's musical elitism easily matches Kien's philological fervor. Rob's record collection is as much his refuge from the world as Kien's library is for him. But rather than wanting the world to match the order of his library, he instead tries to organize his library to reflect his world. After his break-up his world has changed, thus so must his library transform to match it.

When his best friend Dick - one of the two employees at his record store, whom he refers to as the "musical moron twins" - finds him in the middle of the grand reorganization, the following exchange takes place:

Dick: "I guess it looks like you're reorganizing your records... What is this, chronological?"

Rob: "no"

Dick (looking at the piles of records that fill the dimly lit room): "It's not alphabetical..."

Rob (shaking his head): "no"

Dick (puzzled): "huh..."

Rob: "Autobiographical."

Dick: "No fucking way!"

Rob: "Yeah. I can tell you how I got from Deep Purple to Howling Woolf in just 25 moves."

Dick (admiring): "whoa..."

Rob: "And! If I want to play the song Landslide by Fleetwood Mac I have to remember [points at his head] that I bought it for someone in the fall of 1983... but...didn't give it to them for personal reasons."

Dick: "Wow. That sounds..."

Rob: "Comforting."

Dick: "Yes."

This exchange in Rob's dimly lit, magical, profoundly personal music library illustrates Benjamin's claim that "for a true collector the whole background of an item adds up to a magic encyclopedia whose quintessence is the fate of his object" (Benjamin 1969, 60). Rob's encyclopedia is thoroughly personal, affective, and informed by interpersonal relationships and intimate encounters between people and music. His memories form the catalogue that provides access to his collection. The corollary of this is that his collection would appear as pure chaos to anyone but him. That is why Dick is initially unable to identify how the records are categorized. But to Rob and Dick, the idea of an autobiographically organized record library is "comforting", perhaps because this is the only type of organization that reflects not some external, repressive order, but rather the internal and personal relationship between the contents of the archive and the collector's personal memories. The tragicomical effect of the exchange comes from the insight that now that Rob's life centers on rejection and romantic failure, so does his collection. One can assume that after he gets back together with his ex, he may have to reorganize it again.

There are some obvious differences between personal libraries on the one hand, and public or academic libraries on the other. Whereas the former may be organized according to seemingly arbitrary, deeply personal criteria that only the collector will find meaningful, the latter can only fulfill their purpose when organized according to general, seemingly objective principles that appear universal, but always and necessarily reflect a type of logic that is alienating and impersonal. In order for the library user to be able to access public or academic collections, he or she must first internalize, or at least be familiar with, the logic by which categories are defined and ordered. It is exactly because the public or academic library serves a collective purpose that the patron in *Party Girl* is so upset when he cannot find what he is looking for: to be able to navigate the public library is a proof of belonging to the collective society that orders knowledge in a specific way that is constructed as “rational”. The upset patron in *Party Girl* is shaken to his core when he cannot locate the specific volume that he knows *should* be in a specific position, standing in a specific relation to the other books. When he cannot find it, not only the book appears to be lost, *he himself* feels lost. What he has lost is not the book, but his own sense of place within the order of things presented by the library.

There is a striking internal paradox present in the imaginary library as a space of reason. For as the examples above show, the myth of the library is not only founded on a historically and symbolically specific notion of reason as a masculine domain; it also serves to uphold and reproduce reason as such. The constant threat of the devolution of library order into chaos thus does not serve as a reminder that library order is a construction, or that maintaining its order requires constant vigilance and care, but also that the same holds true for reason itself. Being or becoming a rational subject takes the kind of work that, when it is undertaken in a single-minded way, actually appears as quite obsessive. The upset library patron in *Party Girl* cannot be understood to possess the particular passion of the collector, but he nevertheless exhibits a decidedly obsessive dependence on and preoccupation with the preservation of the order of the library.

A foucauldian analysis suggests that this preoccupation is part of the historical condition of modern subjectivity as produced through ordering principles that are at their core arbitrary and historically contingent, and always hierarchical. Library order, whilst being imagined as being objective and

universal, in fact produces a particular kind of subjectivity through the internalization of its categorizations as the order of things. Although experienced as stable and unified, rational subjectivity is constructed by means of the library's order, and therefore continually under threat of chaotic interventions, both by internal and external factors (Radford & Radford 1997). The mere chaotic presence of library patrons threatens the library order from the inside, whereas social, historical, political and economic developments may threaten it from the outside. From this perspective, the librarian in *Party Girl* can be reread not only as a simultaneous warning *against* and disarming *of* the dependence of the subject on library order, but also as a figure who – as a woman – is herself essentially outside of reason. As the outsider within, the figure of the female librarian serves as a reminder of the contingency of reason upon order, and the contingency of order upon situated ordering practices that are in fact arbitrary, historical, and always intertwined with the chaos of the social.

Unsurprisingly, given the above, the question of how to order the library space so that it forms a perfect reflection of the universe of knowledge has historically been considered a great challenge. Many Western philosophers, including Bacon, Kant, and most notably Leibniz, were concerned with the aim to unify knowledge under a universal scheme (Hart et. al. 1996, 25). One of the most widely used classification system for libraries, the Dewey Decimal System (DDS), is a case in point.³⁸ The classification scheme operates as a deductive grid that atomizes knowledge into ten major categories that each have numerous subcategories – it presents knowledge as fragmented by organizing books as separate items in a linear scheme. Melville Dewey devised this scheme in the nineteenth century, and the system still reflects the modernist episteme from which it emerged: religion and philosophy take precedence, while

³⁸ The Dewey Decimal System and the Library of Congress Classification are the two most widely used classification systems in the English speaking world. In the Netherlands, most academic libraries have been using the Nederlandse Basisclassificatie (Dutch Basic Classification) since the 1990's. From a Gender Studies perspective, all these classification system scan be understood to present some serious challenges as they all tend to fragment knowledge produced within the Gender Studies context under other disciplines and topics. As such, the DDS, LCC and NBC all fail to present feminist knowledge as a coherent corpus. Moreover, the DDS has been critiqued for presenting knowledge from a recognizably patriarchal perspective (cf. Olson 2002; Koevoets and De Jong 2013). The LCC has similarly been critiqued for categorizing topics in such a way as to associate women with domesticity, and categorizing gender issues and feminism under the topic "Women," as if such topics are not relevant to men (thus reproducing the idea that only women have a gender). In this way, the LCC (even after many revisions) still presents the universal as masculine, while associating the feminine with the particular, and women's issues as fringe issues (cf. Baider and Zobnina 2013).

information technology, arguably the most important and influential development of the past century, is found under the Generalia subdivision (Hart et. al. 1996, 25). The DSS also favors a Eurocentric, colonial worldview.³⁹ Originally devised to deal with the massive explosion of intellectual productivity of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the DSS does not lend itself well to adaptation or the accommodation of new themes, concepts, and developments. It is a telling anecdote that Dewey considered the dictionary the “most essential book” - a book in which terms are linked to definitions and organized in a practical, alphabetical manner. But such a practical, linear organization has very serious implications when it is used to organize all of culture and knowledge. To students of Gender Studies this undoubtedly sounds all too familiar. When operating from an understanding that issues pertaining to gender and power are best addressed through an interdisciplinary framework, a gender researcher will be sent through the maze of stacks stretching from one corner of the library to the other, picking up books from a linear arrangement of atomized knowledge - the DSS does not accommodate retrieval across disciplines well. As such, the ordering system devised by Dewey in fact and quite materially marginalizes not only certain topics and locations (such as the politics of the private sphere or other domains historically and symbolically connoted as female domains), but also marginalizes certain knowledge production practices - particularly those forms proposed by feminist epistemologists such as Harding, Fox Keller and Haraway, who take relationality, the personal sphere, and affective connections as seriously as they do vigorous objective inquiry and rational deduction.

As Gary Radford notes, it is a curious paradox indeed that while “it is claimed by its creators that such systems of classification are designed with the goal of facilitating access to texts [...] such systems can also be perceived as barriers that serve to deny that same access” (Radford 1998, 620). The library in the cultural imaginary performs the simultaneous forces of reason and madness and order and chaos, since to read it as a metaphor⁴⁰ for order and rationality

³⁹ See for instance Philip Pacey’s insightful article “The Classification of Literature: The Primacy of Language and the Taint of Colonialism” (1989). In it, Pacey argues that the categorization of literatures according to language of origin (with the exception of American literature in English) subordinates literatures of previous colonized communities to the country of the mother tongue, and as such leads to what Pacey terms literary colonialism.

⁴⁰ Although Gary Radford tends to read the library as a metaphor, I consider it instead to be a figuration. The library, as I argue throughout my work, is not a sign that stands for something else, but instead is both a sign and

“makes sense only against the presence of madness, the domain of “the other” that is not ordered” and which is “an ambiguous domain which is not under direct control of the library” (Radford 1998, 621). At least, this is the logical corollary of the positivist notion of universal knowledge that is able to categorize, make understandable, and ultimately control – an epistemological stance that excludes the imagination and any confrontations with the fantastic from the realm of knowledge. However, in *Fantasia of the Library* (1977), Michel Foucault – in character with most of his work – illustrates that these domains are not separate, but rather intricately interlinked. His rereading of Flaubert’s *The Temptation* posits this work as a phenomenon of the library, not ordered by means of discipline and categorization, but instead chaotic and fantastical, imaginative and productive. Foucault suggests that in this text:

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* (Foucault 1977, 91 - italics mine).

The imaginary as a phenomenon of the library, rather than merely the mechanism by which the library is imagined, gives new depth to the understanding of the madness and chaos of the library – not only as a risk or a danger to be disarmed by the meticulous wielding of discipline and order, but as productive forces that offer the possibility for resistance.

Foucault’s text thus suggests a radically different relationship between the library, the librarian, and the user than does the positivist stance suggested (and shown to be ultimately and tragically flawed) in Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*. In the Aedificium, the library is a fortress presumed to be the domain of order; the users (William and Adso) represent the domain of ambiguity and chaotic interventions. The librarians are tasked to protect the library from the chaos introduced by the users, but their obsession with the order of the library (and what it is assumed to represent) ultimately is shown to be insanely destructive. Judy Linderdorffer, the head librarian in *Party Girl* may also be understood as obsessed with order for order’s sake: while seemingly serviceable to the

a material fact. Moreover, the library does not simply *represent* the tension between reason and madness or order and chaos in the cultural imaginary, but instead *performs* it. This is a fundamental starting point for my analysis.

patrons, her primary engagement is with the preservation of the order of the library. Her constant battle against the chaotic interventions of the social realm renders her entirely incapable of entering into a meaningful relationship with her niece. Her success as a librarian thus comes at the cost of failure as a guardian and aunt. Radford, inspired by Foucault's fantasia, imagines a different role for librarians in a postmodern context. Rather than the protector of order and the executioner of discipline, Radford suggests that the "librarian's role becomes that of a guide, not only to the pre-existing order of the library that comprises its catalogs and indexes but to the creation of new orders [...]" (Radford 1998, 230). The library, then, is no longer seen as a domain of reason, but as a space for the imagination and creation of new and better worlds. And this, of course, is where a powerful potential for feminist projects resides.

Lloyd (1992) suggest that to take Irigaray's insistence on the constitutive outside of reason - unreason, lack of boundaries, indeterminacy, fluidity, multiplicity (concepts that are generally coded as feminine) - into account, means to occupy a territory where notions such as determinate and indeterminate, discrete and continuous, are inextricably mixed (Lloyd 1992). Reading the library as a myth of universal reason that is fundamentally a patriarchal myth thus serves to strengthen the understanding of the rational subject as an unstable and fragile construction that can be situated historically and culturally as a product of modernist positivism. As I have shown, even popular film narratives manage to highlight the complex intermixing of reason and madness, order and chaos in the imaginary library. A poststructuralist feminist analysis of the correlation between libraries and the reason (order)/madness (chaos) dichotomy does not on its own constitute a deconstruction of reason, but may nevertheless give new impetus to this important feminist project.

In the following section I will address this issue from the perspective of ideology critique, by showing how the myth of the library as space of reason (however untenable and contrary to reality this ideal may be) sustains political utopias where access to knowledge produces rational subjects as citizens. Again, I will show that these utopias are ideologically partial to centering the masculine as the universal, and as such serve to symbolically marginalize the feminine and to empirically marginalize women and women's knowledge.

The quest for the secret

"If an item does not appear in our records, it does not exist."

(Jocasta Nu, in *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones*)

"They know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it."

(Sloterdijk, *The Critique of Cynical Reason*, 1983)

As I have shown in the previous sections, the library should be understood as a complex configuration of power and knowledge, and is thoroughly gendered. As a (material and symbolic) figuration of tension between reason and order on the one hand, and madness and chaos on the other, the library is a space marked by tension. This tension is further complicated by the (public or institutional) library's function as not only a storehouse, but also a disseminator of knowledge to the public. Indeed, utopias of the library often insist on the library's capacity to strengthen the production of rational subjects who can engage as citizens with the public sphere. In this section I want to discuss this aspect of the library in the cultural imaginary by discussing how the very concept of the public sphere is problematically founded on the notion of *publicity*. In library narratives this is formulated in terms of two library plots: utopian plots that present libraries as giving unfettered access to knowledge on the one hand, and plots centered around heroic (and often fruitless) quests in search of the secret of the library on the other.

Point of departure in this section is insight that the ideal library as a space of pure reason is a fantasy, and that the notion that libraries (even public libraries) are public spaces is also a fantasy. The library in the cultural imaginary is marked by the tension between revelation and foreclosure as much as it is marked by the tension between order and chaos. How these tensions are negotiated may differ depending on the type of library discussed or envisioned. The personal library in Elias Canetti's *Auto da Fé* is kept strictly private by the neurotic Kien. So afraid is Kien of the inevitable chaos introduced by visitors that he shuts his library off from the world completely. Driven mad by his self-induced isolation, Kien eventually decides to go up in flames together with his books, rather than letting them fall prey to the barbaric forces

of the outside world. Similarly, the librarians in Eco's *The Name of the Rose* obsessively protect their library from intrusions – they, and they alone decide who may access which books, and visitors are strictly forbidden to enter the library themselves. Both examples already suggest that the dual aspirations of ordering knowledge and making it accessible stand in tension with one another.

Indeed, Radford and Radford (1997) consider the tension between order and accessibility to be the foundation of the problematic stereotype of the female librarian, who must at once guard the library's order, as well as providing access to it. "The *ideal library* is one that is never used or disrupted" (Radford & Radford 1997, 256). However, Knuth (2003) points out that: "there is a mandate for individual libraries to participate in web-like systems of information production, storage and dissemination" (Knuth 2003, 26). Since the library is expected to support different social and cultural functions, linked to identity, citizenship, and scholarship, they are complex configurations of clashing aspirations. How can the library support a literate population, service students and faculty in teaching and learning, and support scholarly activities (Knuth 2003, 28), whilst at the same time maintaining the integrity and orderliness of its collection?

In public discourse, the library's potential to inform and produce a literate citizenry of rational political subjects is presented as both an ideal and a challenge. The importance of a literate, informed public for the development of democratic societies has been argued by Jurgen Habermas (1996 [1962]) in his seminal work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Habermas' ideal of the public sphere is premised on the existence of an informed public. The accessibility of information about the state and its operations is a clear precondition for the existence of such a public. Librarian and scholar John Buschman (2005) has argued that in democratic societies, libraries collectively embody and enact Habermas' ideal of the public sphere. Libraries further rational discourse by offering unfettered access to information; they capacitate critique and rational argumentation on topics of general interest by offering balanced collections that reflect historical and intellectual diversity; they refute authority by allowing anyone to verify and check claims made in public debates, and as such strengthen democracy; and they help to produce an informed public by making access to information and education available to all (Buschman 2005, n.p.). Buschman goes on to

warn that libraries as public sphere are being threatened by what he calls New Public philosophy, which favors a business model for public services, and as such forces libraries to market themselves and take a quantitative, rather than a qualitative approach to their “output” – meaning that instead of shaping and preserving balanced collections, libraries are being forced to favor a business model over a consideration of the democratic good of library collections (Buschman 2005, n.p.). In this scenario, the ideal of the habermassian public sphere has devolved into what Habermas has called “publicity”: a mass-market economy in which the cacophony of mass media has substituted rational communication, and diverts attention away from, rather than enabling, critical public debate (Habermas 1996).

While Buschman’s analysis of the present day challenges that libraries face under the contemporary post-capitalist, neoliberal ideology is provocative, his insistence on the value of libraries as public sphere demands some feminist scrutiny. As Nancy Fraser (1990) has argued, the public sphere has never been as equalitarian and open as is often suggested by those who bemoan the demise of this habermassian ideal. The public sphere that Habermas refers to, being the coffeehouses in 17th century imperial cosmopolitan areas, was traditionally not open to women, nor were the issues of “general interest” debated there as generally relevant to women’s daily lives (Fraser 1990). Indeed, Habermas’ insistence that contributions to debates in the public sphere should bracket out interests of a personal nature to a large extent excluded the issues pertinent to women’s daily lives, which tended to play out in the domain traditionally understood as the personal or private sphere. Moreover, Lloyd’s (1993) critique of the notion of universal reason also suggests that what has counted as rational debate favored a kind of systematic reasoning that is deeply masculinized, and as such far from neutral or universal. Whereas the feminist credo that “ the personal is political” has given rise to many insights on the marginalization of women within patriarchal societies, the habermassian public never really accommodated enquiry into, and discussion of, what happens in spaces deemed “private”. It should be noted here that many of the most vehement contemporary defenders of libraries, unlike Buschman, do not celebrate the library’s function as or in the public sphere, but instead focus on their function as “safe spaces” that exist on the boundaries between the private and the public. I will return to this point later on in this chapter – for now it should be

added to my critique of the tendency to limit the democratic value of the library to its function as public sphere.

So far I have questioned the assumed democratic potential of the library as public sphere in two ways: firstly, by critiquing the ideal of the public sphere as being rooted in patriarchal notions of universality that excludes traditional feminine domains, and secondly by suggesting that the library is not a public space (and as such cannot sustain the ideal of unlimited accessibility). Both considerations relate strongly to the problem of reason and order that I have presented in the previous sections.

An important further reflection on the ideal of the library as sustaining the public sphere or producing informed, rational citizens is found in Jodi Dean's reflection on *publicity*. In "Publicity's Secret" (2001), Dean questions whether total access to information can even productively or meaningfully exist. Rather than defaulting to the notion of information overload or the digital divide, Dean's poststructuralist argument hinges on the understanding that the notion of *publicity* is inextricably intertwined with and dependent on the assumption of the/a secret. Dean's argument pertains explicitly to global technoculture, but two of her arguments are relevant to the discussion of the imaginary ideal library. Firstly, Dean argues (alongside Bentham, but through a Derridean lens) that "publicity requires the secret as its constitutive limit, as that point of exclusion through which [that which is] public becomes intelligible [as *public*]" (Dean 2001, 626). Dean engages Zizek's Marxist, psychoanalytically informed concept of ideology to argue that the public *requires* the secret in order to conceive of itself as a collective, as a coherent entity part of the same society and culture (Dean 2001, 626-627). I have argued that the library functions in the cultural imaginary as a myth of reason that naturalizes the idea of the universality of knowledge and hides the contingency, situatedness, instability, and partiality of knowledge. Here I want to argue that the myth of the library is also a myth of publicity. Like reason, publicity is not a universal or neutral concept. Publicity, as Dean argues, is an ideological construct sustained by the fantasy of a secret.

Zizek suggests that ideology should not be understood as a layer of false consciousness that lays over the some "real" truth that is simply waiting to be unmasked, but instead operates at the level of fantasy as *sustained belief* that structures social reality (Zizek 1989, 29). Belief, according to Zizek, is not simply

some emotional or mental state, but rather “radically exterior, embodied in the practical, effective procedure of people” (Zizek in Dean 2001, 628). This is what happens in the 2002 sci-fi film *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones*. At some point in the plot, the young Obi-Wan Kenobi visits the Jedi Archives in order to find information on the location of the planet Kamino. When unable to find any records of the planet, he asks Chief Librarian (and Jedi) Jocasta Nu for help.

Setting: the futuristic library of the Jedi Archives, among glowing “stacks”

Jocasta Nu [friendly]: “Did you call for assistance?”

Obi-Wan: “Yes. Yes, I did.”

Jocasta Nu: “Are you having a problem, Master Kenobi?”

Obi-Wan [walking over to a table with computer terminals]: “Yes. Uhm, I’m looking for a planetary system called Kamino. It doesn’t show up in the Archive charts.”

Jocasta Nu: “Kamino... It’s not a system I’m familiar with. Are you sure you have the right coordinates?”

Obi-Wan: “According to my information it should be in this quadrant here. [pointing to screen] Just south of [Orizhi Mays]

Jocasta Nu [fiddles with the controls]

Jocasta Nu [apologetic]: “I hate to say it, but it looks like the system you’re searching for doesn’t exist.”

Obi-Wan: “Impossible. Perhaps the archives are incomplete.”

Jocasta Nu [decisive]: “If an item does not appear in our records, it does not exist.” [walks away]

Camera pans out to show Obi-Wan behind a small computer terminal inside of a massive library space filled with virtual stacks produced by vertical lights that are horizontally aligned like books on shelves.

Disappointed, Obi-Wan visits his teacher Yoda, who is instructing a group of young students in the library in the ways of the Jedi. One of the children gives Obi-Wan intuitive clues as to how the elusive planet of Kamino might be located. Not having found the information he was looking for within the library’s records, he finds it through the common sense of a child. The irony, of course, is that the library does in the end reveal the secret to the location of Kamino – not through its records, which reflect a false image of the universe controlled by an oppressive government, but by connecting Obi-Wan with a

sharp-minded child who has not yet learned to accept the library records as truth.

The sequence is a telling example of how Žižek understands fantasy as a sustained belief that enables ideology to produce the social. The fantasy of the library as a place where the secret truths about the world can be discovered is sustained through Obi-Wan's persistent search for Kamino's location in the archives. Jocasta Nu is more persistent in her belief: "If an item does not appear in our records, it does not exist." Indeed, as Gary Radford suggests, the dominant metaphor for both positivism and the library is that of the search for the truth – the search for the natural order of the universe (Radford 1998, 218). Had Obi-Wan's belief in the correctness of the library's records been sustained, he would not have been able to ultimately discover, reveal and halt the evil plot. What Obi-Wan discovers, in other words, is that "if an item does not appear [in the library's] records," it may very well exist, and the very fact of its not appearing in the records may be more revealing than everything that *does* appear.

The library sequence in *Attack of the Clones* thus serves as an appeal to the practice of what feminists have called reading for the silences in discourse. It has been argued that power-knowledge relations work through silences, by excluding the Other of culture (or the Other of critical feminist theory itself) from the discourses that present and construct the social, cultural and political subject (Singh 1997, 27). The search for the secret within the discursive and ideological formation of the library can thus be read as sustaining the belief in the correctness – the universal validity – of these records. The library in *Star Wars* not only – or primarily – hides the location or existence of the clone army on Kamino. In that case it may have mentioned the planet and its location as "classified." Instead, the library hides *the fact that it is hiding something*: "If it does not appear in our records *it does not exist*." The secret of the library, ironically, is that the library does not harbor answers, but produces secrets – the very secrets that sustain the ideal of the library as a space of revelation.

As the library in the Western imaginary can do no more than produce secrets in order to sustain its image as a space of revelation, it is not surprising that the search is the main plot of many library narratives. Such is certainly the case in Eco's *The Name of the Rose*: William and Adso wander through the Aedificium in search of the truth behind the accumulating dead bodies in the

monastery. What they find, of course, is something else entirely: they discover that the library, rather than preserving and making available the knowledge in the books it contains, instead serves to hide the fact that it hides Aristotle's treatise on comedy - a long lost book, thought to have been destroyed sometime around the destruction of the Library of Alexandria. The librarians in Borges' *The Library of Babel* search in vain for order, for some positivist, irreducible truth that can render the endless rows of books accessible and meaningful. In both narratives the search for some irretrievable secret drives the plot. Unlike Obi-Wan, Eco's heroes do not discover what they were looking for. They do eventually discover, by chance, the cause of the deaths of the monks, but their real discovery is of an entirely different order: they find that the library, rather than being a bulwark of rationality is instead a construction that aims primarily to hide its own constructedness. "It represents a universe of knowledge, truth, and moral order unto itself" (Radford 1998, 619) by hiding the fact of its construction. As such it operates as a myth of publicity: it performs the ideology of reason and publicity, and presents it as a natural, rather than an ideological, discursively constructed order. The secret of the library is its emptiness - that vacuous space where the "god-trick" of positivist science is performed (Haraway 1988). The secret of the library, Eco's narrative suggests, is that there is no secret, only emptiness, at the center of the library. As such his novel can be read as a wink to Borges. *The Name of the Rose* confirms what the librarian of Babel fears: no matter how long he keeps looking, he will never discover the divine order of the library, because the library is circular and eternal.

The myth of the library can thus not be found within the library itself, but can be approached by viewing the library as an enactment of fantasy and sustained belief by both librarians and library users. The library is therefore not a mere whimsy of the imagination, but the materialization of the sustained belief in the revelatory potential of reason. Hart, Bains and Jones similarly suggest that the "myth of material knowledge" can be recognized in library architecture in England and the United States (Hart et. al. 1996). They suggest that library architecture is predicated on the myth that the library reveals a universal, a priori, or "*ab aeterno*" (Borges 1962, 78) order of things. While Leibniz already recognized that knowledge is not linear, nor do concepts naturally align themselves into categories - that it is the materiality of the book

that demands such organization (Hart et. al. 1996, 24-25) - the sustained belief in (that is: sustained by the myth of) universal reason and the revelatory function of the library becomes materialized in the way libraries are designed and placed within the city. Formulated along the fundamental paradoxes that I have argued to shape the cultural imaginary of the library, such architecture serves to hide the paradox of order and chaos and the paradox of publicity and secrecy.

Hart, Bains and Jones recognize four main archetypes (which they call “categories”) of library architecture: temples; cathedrals; office blocks; and glasshouses. They suggest that libraries modeled after the Athenian temple are intended to inspire awe and reverence, to divide the divine from the profane, and to impose an image of permanence (Hart et. al. 1996, 26). By presenting library order as ahistorical and divine, this type of library building mediates the tension between order and chaos. The glasshouse, on the other hand, is described as a reverse-panopticon that invites a consumerist gaze, promises total access and evokes the power of technology (Hart et. al. 1996, 28). Drawing on Habermas’ notion of publicity, and Dean’s insistence that the ideal of publicity produces the secret as its constitutive limit, the glasshouse can be understood to mediate the tension between publicity and secrecy.

Although Hart, Bains and Jones’ analysis appears quite preliminary, and their quick categorization of library buildings into four categories seems rushed, they illustrate an interesting point: the symbolic and ideological function of libraries is materialized through architecture in ways that appear to sustain the dual and conflicting fantasies of order and access. Library architecture seems to deflect those tensions that library narratives (particularly literary narratives) tend to bring to the foreground. Both architecture and narrative thus engage with the fantasy of the library and its complex figuration as a semi-public space marked by both order and chaos. Library narratives and library architecture thus exemplify Sloterdijk’s claim that: “They know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it” (1983).

Utopian and dystopian visions of the library of the future

“A library is a haven.”

(Alan Bennet, *Baffled at a Bookcase*, 2012)

In this section I will explore how the library myth has inspired and continues to inspire utopian and dystopian visions that are part of the cultural imaginary and tend to reappear throughout narrative culture as well as public and academic discourses on knowledge. My exploration of the library in utopia and dystopia will bring together the major strands developed in this chapter so far. First of all, I will show via the excellent work of Kevin J. Hayes that North American 19th century library utopias already elaborated the problem of the tensions between the ideals of order and access. I will then move on to show how the conversion of libraries with new technologies has given rise to a number of contemporary dystopian visions of the library in a postcapitalist and neoliberal context. I will then illustrate that some pose the solution to these tensions as residing with librarians on the one hand, and with a reconsideration of the role and meaning of the library as institution on the other.

So far I have established that the myth of the library as being both a space of reason and order as well as giving unbridled access to information is inherently paradoxical. Not only do the values of order and access stand in tension with one another, reason and publicity are in themselves problematic concepts – especially from a feminist point of view. While the ideal library is imagined to stand as a monument to, and a realization of, the universalist, positivist worldview, these paradoxes of the library already point towards the inherent untenability of such a worldview.

As Kevin J. Hayes argues, North American utopian authors, writing at the turn of the 20th century – a time when public libraries were becoming a staple of every city and community in the United States – imagined futures where these tensions would be resolved, and the library could fulfill its duty of both ordering and disseminating knowledge to all citizens. Authors like Edward Bellamy, Mary Lane, and Thomas Kirwan imagined libraries of the future to be monumental displays of literature and culture, used often and intensively by the public (Hayes 2012, 334-337). However, Edgar Chambless

imagined the future of the library differently: instead of library buildings, there would be an underground railroad system that delivered books to whoever requested to borrow them at all hours of the day (Hayes 2012, 338). These utopian novels were written at a time when two major issues were being discussed pertaining to the future of public libraries in the 20th century. Firstly, there was the problem of access. Up to the 19th century, most libraries had kept their stacks closed, and according to Bellamy (1888) in his utopian science fiction novel *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* books had been “obtainable only at an expenditure of time and red tape calculated to discourage any ordinary taste for literature” (Bellamy 1887, cited in: Hayes 2010, 334). Shortly after, open shelf access became the standard for public libraries. However, opponents argued that open shelf access would threaten the integrity of library collections: patrons would misplace books, alcoves would become crowded, and books would be stolen. Some suggested a panoptic design, by which the librarian would serve as the prison guard whose disciplinarian gaze ensured that library patrons behaved in accordance with library order (Hayes 2010, 339).

A second challenge addressed by American utopists concerned the management of the proliferation of print during this time in history (Hayes 2010, 342). To be fair, this concern had been expressed many times since the invention of the printing press. Loys LeRoy, for instance, had already suggested in 1575 that the burning of Alexandria may have been a blessing in disguise. Had all those ancient texts survived, he worried that:

we should be constrained to go, sit and lie upon books . And yet there remain so many, and more are made every day, that the age of man could not suffice to read, not only the writings in many disciplines; but one in particular [...] (Loys LeRoy 1575, cited in Thiem 1979, 513).

LeRoy foresaw in the boundless proliferation and preservation of books a horror of Borgesian dimensions: a world taken over entirely by books, where the scholar will be fated to spend his life going through subpar volumes without ever getting to the “good” stuff. The proliferation of print would turn books into objects without any intrinsic value, no better than subpar furniture, cluttering not only the world, but also the mind. The turn of the century utopists were well aware of this dilemma, and suggested different ways of keeping library collections manageable, including *weeding* (eliminating books

no longer deemed of value to contemporary needs); a combination of personal ownership and central depositories; and stricter criteria for book preservation. Thus imagined Victor Rousseau Emmanuel in his short story *The Messiah of the Cylinder* (1916):

The scientific books were saved from the twelve million tons of printed paper, chiefly from the British Museum shelves, that burned for twelve days upon Blackheath; and from the contents of the Bibliotheque Nationale that heated Paris during an entire month (Emmanuel 1916, cited in Hayes 2010, 346).

The passage evokes the legacy of Alexandria's burning, and expresses sentiments much like the nostalgia for the Great Library present throughout Eco's *The name of the Rose*.

The 19th century utopians, Hayes contends, did not offer a singular practical solution to the challenges faced by libraries at their time of writing. Rather, they imagined technological and economic developments to solve these problems in the future. Charles Caryl, for instance, imagined in his 1897 novel *New Era* that in the future (our present) there would exist a harmony between culture and technology, where all institutions, including libraries, would be connected by glass arcades that made them easily accessible to all, and that placed them close to each other (Hayes 2010, 335). Bellamy (1888) imagined there to be a balance between public and private spaces, which would interconnected (Hayes 2010, 333). Macnie imagined in *The Diothas* (1883) that the question of how to manage so many texts would be solved by a combination of private and public ownership, further developing Bellamy's ideal into a harmony between culture and commerce (Hayes 2010, 343). As I will show in the following, these utopian visions have not become reality. To the contrary, contemporary authors, some of them librarians themselves, have become worried that an increasing disbalance between culture and technology and culture and commerce forms the greatest threat to libraries nowadays.

But first I want to point out the curious absence of librarians in the utopian visions described by Hayes. As he notes, the librarian's presence was seldom mentioned. Rather than being shown as mediators or facilitators in the process of organizing, preserving and disseminating knowledge, librarians in utopian narratives were either absent, or did little beyond reshelving (Hayes

2010, 341). It appears that librarians were imagined to have little useful to contribute to knowledge production, nor were they seen as particularly helpful to patrons in search of library materials.

It is worth noting that at this time in the United States librarianship was already fast becoming a feminized profession. Melville Dewey, inventor of the Dewey Decimal System, had opened up a new professional field for women by starting a library school at Columbia College (now University) in 1887 that allowed women to enter. While this proved a unique opportunity for women to enter a new professional field (most of which were closed off to women entirely), Dewey was quite outspoken about why he considered women to be ideal library workers: he considered women to be suited by nature to the repetitiveness of library work, and to be calm and obedient. It should be considered a curious paradox that the man who was one of the first to offer women opportunities in a professional field also put serious restrictions on their opportunities to advance in the field by considering men more suitable for administrative positions, and also had a serious inability to control himself around women (Wiegand 1996). While Dewey, due to his quirky personality and legendary inventiveness, was and remains a fascinating figure in library history, he cannot be held solely responsible for the dismissive attitude towards female librarians both then and now. It is more likely that his ideas about women were shared by many of his contemporaries, and that the role of the librarian as service-oriented nurturers fit conveniently into prevailing societal norms (Sverdlin 2008, n.p.). The omission of librarians from utopian visions from the turn of the 20th century may well be read as an expression of contemporary prejudices against women and women's work. Although Dewey himself expected that librarians who could adapt to these new developments would be fulfilling important roles as mediators between the library and the patron (Hayes 2010, 341), the utopists clearly put more trust in technology and the economy to solve the challenges posed by the preservation and dissemination of knowledge.

While libraries served an important function in American utopian literature at the turn of the 20th century, remarkably few library utopias have been written in the past few decades.⁴¹ It seems as if the library as a physical

⁴¹ A notable exception is to be found in the work of Ursula K. Le Guin, whose young-adult science fiction novels often feature libraries as safe spaces in dystopian world. In *The Telling* for instance, the natives of the planet of

space that houses books is imagined as becoming entirely obsolete in the future, its role as storehouse of knowledge being taken over by networked digital databases. Indeed, it is the internet that has inspired some of the contemporary utopian library narratives.

In “Myths of the Universal Library” (1999) Jon Thiem formulates a new library utopia for the turn of the 21st century. Thiem plays on Borges’ fantasies of the Aleph and the Library of Babel by opening his article with two citations. The first citation comes from Borges’ short story *The Aleph* (1945): “... an Aleph is one of the points in space that contains all other points ... the microcosm of the alchemists and Kabbalists ... the *multum in parvo*.” (Borges 1945, cited in Thiem 1999, n.p.). The second consists of an excerpt from the fictional *A Chrestomathy for Universal Librarians*, to have been written in 2036 by one James Pitcher, who states that: “The Universal Electronic Library is a sphere whose center is everywhere, whose circumference is nowhere” (Thiem 1999, n.p.). This citation, of course, is a reference to that *other* story by Borges, the one that I have referenced throughout this chapter to highlight the inherent paradox of universal reason: *The Library of Babel*.

In “Myths of the Universal Library,” Thiem writes from the perspective of a historiographer living in 2056, who looks back on how the Universal Electronic Library, established in 2036, has become mythicized parallel to the myth of Alexandria. It is a thoroughly postmodern play on Thiem’s own intellectual work, in which he has offered multiple historical analyses of the Alexandria myth. In this pastiche of his own work, Thiem posits that the Universal Library has finally been realized as a virtual/digital resurrection of the Library of Alexandria. The Universal Library is imagined through the alephic principle, posited by Borges:

a condition wherein a maximum of inclusiveness coincides with a maximum of intelligibility or accessibility. As is well known, every project of all-inclusiveness, of universal enumeration, harbors within it the virus of chaos, of irretrievability. Thus comprehensiveness can lead

Aka maintain a forbidden library within an arctic mountain, where they store books that have been forbidden by the corporatist government. Although only few are allowed to visit the library, the natives of Aka practice the art of Telling – a practice of storytelling with strong religious and antiscientific characteristics (Le Guin 2000). However, Le Guin’s vision of the library as a space where religious practices are preserved and maintained stands in stark contrast to the utopian narratives that feature libraries as spaces of reason and publicity. It should therefore be considered as part of the counter-discourse of libraries, on which I will elaborate further in this and other chapters.

to incomprehension. It is the pathological dimension of inclusiveness that the alephic principle reverses (Thiem 1999, 258).

From within this imagined future, Thiem recalls how the extraordinary accumulations of knowledge in the modern era led to chaos within and an inaccessibility of the historical and cultural record, which produced anxiety in intellectuals. This is why, the imaginary future-Thiem argues, the Library of Alexandria became a symbol of the proliferation of useless knowledge, and intellectuals began to approve of its destruction. He mentions Borges' *The Library of Babel* as a pessimistic fable – this vast, labyrinthine universe was “as complex as the world it meant to explain” (Thiem 1999, 258). But in Thiem's digital utopia the modern crisis of knowledge has been resolved by sophisticated search tools, “Universal Abstracts”, and electronic reading programs that render all the knowledge in the Universal Library immediately accessible and intelligible. As such, the alephic character of the Universal Library renders the *Library of Babel* a fable.

Thiem's utopian fantasy of an alephic - rather than a Babylonian - universal library may be read as a reaction to the techno-skeptical sentiments expressed in David Langford's eBook (“displayed using 100% recycled electrons”) *The Net of Babel by Jorge L**s B*rg*s*. In this 1995 pastiche of Borges' *The Library of Babel* the vast library-universe, that in Borges' story consisted of hexagonal rooms filled with books, has been “disbanded as being an irrational construct, and new devices were supplied in its stead” (Langford 1995, 3). These devices once promised solace, but soon the Net of Babel, much like its predecessor, proved to be not so much exhaustive as exhausting:

Observe: in place of the old days' interminable weary lattice of hexagonal chambers, I and my colleagues inhabit a single, vast, crimson-walled hexagon. Instead of the long bookshelves there are desks arrayed against each wall, and on each desk that many-keyed device which places all the Library's volumes under my hand (Langford 1995, 5).

Indeed, the Net of Babel, unlike the Library, makes its exhaustive records easily searchable with the click of a button. But despite its seemingly convenient searchability, “chaos reigns throughout the whole vast informational sea; the tiny islands of meaning we have found are scattered like

primes in the ocean of numbers, according to no visible plan" (Langford 1995, 5). Since the Net contains (or rather: generates) every possible combination of the orthographical signs, every search, however bizarre, will yield results:

The golden or leaden key that unlocks the Library is the inbuilt search facility. One prepares a text of any length, sets the searching into motion, and the Library's own devices will swiftly trawl that sea of data. [...] Like so many I have commanded a search for a volume of one million, three hundred and twelve thousand successive repetitions of the letter *a*, and likewise all of the other letters. Each of these monotonous works occurs once in the Library. [...] every child is tempted to scan for some such phrase as "This sentence is not contained in the Library", and to giggle when the glowing letters seem to assert it. The Library, however, does not assert; nor does it deny. It simply is (Langford 1995, 5-6).

Langford's digital Library thus offers no respite from the chaos of the Library of Babel – without a context of production and interpretation, how can found records ever yield meaning? That is why the wanderers on Langford's Net are as lost as Borges' librarians. Their "withered fingers hesitate over the input keys, searching, searching." Although the past librarians spent their entire lives "traversing the hexagonal cells of their conjectural, physical Library, without ever encountering a book that held a single intelligible sentence," and "every volume lies instantly within our grasp," Langford's Net-dweller realizes that "we now possess a far greater understanding of our own impotence," and longs for the old days when there was still hope that maybe the index, the book of books – which Borges call "God" – could one day be encountered (Langford 1995, 8).

Thiem's techno-utopian and Langford's techno-dystopian pastiches of Borges' library fantasies represent two distinct narrative reformulations of the utopian dream of the digital library. The internet as a universal yet also accessible library is a popular myth that has been critiqued and deconstructed throughout multiple critical studies of technology. Thiem and Langford both suggest equal access to and equal involvement in new library technologies by users, and do not reflect on the effects of the remediation of libraries as digital archives. The internet simply presents them with unlimited space – not easy to

navigate, but accessible to anyone who may wish to enter. Their cyberspace libraries exist outside of culture and politics, and present knowledge as disembodied information. But feminist and postcolonial critiques of technology contend that digital space isn't any more abstract or dislocated than social space. It is thus curious to note that both utopists and dystopists appear to forget that space is inherently political, and that digital space is characterized by material, embodied and imagined power relations as much as what is generally thought of as the physical space of material objects (Foucault 1980; Nunes 2006; Verhoeff 2012).

Donna Haraway, ever wary of overly utopian visions of technology, contends that socio-technological space is a space of socio-technical, material-embodied and imagined-discursive relations that are entangled with the economic, technical, political, organic, historical, mythic and textual (Haraway 1997, 68). Whereas Thiem's and Langford's digital universal libraries seem to exist separate from social relations and historical situationality, digital technologies, in reality, have become a part of everyday life, where online and offline spaces infuse each other with meaning (Leurs 2012, 48). It is curious that while the utopists at the turn of the century located brick-and-mortar libraries as being at the center of the future urban environment, and highlighted their connection and importance to the construction of a political collective, Thiem and Langford envision the digital library as being entirely disconnected from the real spaces of everyday life.

Librarians themselves have for a long time been worried about the threat that new technologies pose to the future of the library. English scholar and educator Fred D. White, for instance, worries about the effects that the digitalization of libraries may have on learning. He argues that new technologies meant to allow libraries to operate more efficiently are interfering with serendipitous learning and chance encounters:

Serendipity often occurs when you are surrounded by books in a library's stacks. A particular sentence in one volume gives you a flash of insight, creating a connection where you didn't expect one. You start to test that insight by reaching for other books near the original volume, and suddenly a chain reaction of insights is taking place – like nuclear fission. Hitherto unsuspected associations suddenly provide you with a whole new view of your topic (White 2005, n.p.).

I have argued in the previous sections that the systems of categorization by which libraries are ordered produce discursive formations in certain ways, and thus already limit the ways in which encounters with knowledge can take place in the library. I am therefore unconvinced by White's assertion that brick-and-mortar libraries allow for more serendipity in terms of finding content than, for instance, internet browsing. In fact, I would say from my own (anecdotal) experience that I have serendipitously stumbled upon more unforeseen connections by either following or resisting hypertextual links online, than I have by browsing the more strictly ordered stacks of the university library. However, I do agree that closed stacks and automated retrieval systems even further inhibit what Foucault called the *fantasia* of the library - that is, that flurry of imagination and dreamlike state that the confrontation with a library can bring about.

When it comes to the imagined harmony between culture and technology that has been envisioned to produce the utopian library of the future, many scholars and librarians seem to think that that harmony has been disrupted in favor of a technophilia that threatens the very existence and coherence of libraries. "Virtual reference" having been a buzzword in library administrations since the increasing influence of digital technologies since the 1990's, is understood by some to have upset the precarious balance between completeness and accessibility so carefully tended by librarians throughout the ages by having been too rapidly and too carelessly unleashed (Maxwell 2004). It seems that the digitalization of knowledge poses particular and formerly unforeseen challenges to libraries. The increasingly complex array of electronic objects demands different forms of organization.

While Thiem and Langford fantasize about digital libraries that have become free from the physical and economic constraints of social and material reality (either for good or for bad), Marlene Manoff (2000) has argued that the actual effect of digitalization has been that the boundaries between libraries and the rest of the world - that is: between the spaces of knowledge, culture, politics, and commerce - have eroded. She points out that electronic library connections don't easily solve the dilemmas that utopians so hopefully turned to technology and the economy for. First of all, she argues that the sheer volume of electronic information poses challenges to the organization and accessibility

of texts. The internet is not selective, and whereas one of the primary functions of libraries has been to select and organize texts in a meaningful way, the digital network does not allow for the same level or type of organization or categorization that has kept libraries manageable (if only seemingly) over time. Equally challenging is the fact that libraries cannot guarantee access to electronic documents, since electronic documents are even less stable than books. A book may mold or crumble in time, or can be destroyed by fire or water. But a text that is online one day may have disappeared the next without anyone noticing, and librarians can barely be expected to keep records up to date with the quick proliferation, deletion and mobility of electronic documents on the internet. A third important point that Manoff makes has to do with the blurring of the boundaries between the library and “the larger Web of corporate, business, government, and entertainment culture” (Manoff 2000, 858). She argues that: [w]hat most of us find on the net is not the fulfillment of a utopian fantasy of free information but rather a vast array of consumer choices in a sea of poorly organized information (Manoff 2000, 859). Indeed, as access to electronic documents becomes increasingly controlled by code and protocols, librarians can no longer be expected to keep the records in order.

But what is under threat is not only the coherence and order of the library collection or the convenience of the user, but also the library’s status as a symbol of culture. As budget cuts continue the pressure towards efficiency, the drive to adopt new technologies should not only be viewed as unbridled technophilia on the part of librarians and library administrators, but as a necessary move towards ensuring the continuation of libraries’ existence (albeit in a different form). However, Manoff notes “an increasing anxiety about whether libraries are living up to their obligations as cultural conservators” (Manoff 2001, 371). She notes “a certain irony” in the fact that libraries are being chastised for failing to preserve the paper record at a time when they are facing the challenge of maintaining the digital record (Manoff 2001, 377).

Of course, libraries should not be considered mere storehouses for culture. As I have argued extensively throughout this chapter, the library is a cultural figuration of the myth of universal reason and unbridled access to the truth, prefigured utopian and dystopian narratives – as such, the library both figures and materializes the western humanist tradition and its rationalist ideology. Especially now that digital technologies are transforming the cultural

record from solid, material artifacts into hybrid, fluid and mutable electronic data, the meaning of the library and that which it signifies may be transforming as well. A hopeful reading of the call-out against book destruction and digitalization of the library would hold that people are gaining a new interest in the role of the library in culture. However, the question remains if this interest will result in a critical investigation of the ideological function of the library in the cultural imaginary. My work in this chapter should be read as a step in that direction.

Some of the renewed interest in the role of the library formulates it as a “safe space”. Eileen de los Reyes, for instance, considers libraries to be “pockets of hope” in a time when education is being “dehumanized” (De los Reyes 2001, n.p.). She argues that in the technologized classroom, students are being trained to become standardized, global workers, and young people are facing increasing pressures that their parents feel unable to adequately address. Libraries as “pockets of hope” are places where “time moves slower than the accelerated and dehumanizing speed characteristic of our institutions and of society” (De los Reyes 2001, n.p.). They are spaces of silence and of conversation, where speaking and listening are both valued equally. The library as “pocket of hope” can only realize this function if it remains situated within as well as partly shielded from social spaces. De los Reyes considers this of particular importance for students trying to safely find their place in the world, “particularly those [students] who are seldom welcomed in other spaces in their lives” (de los Reyes 2001, n.p.). These “pockets of hope,” she argues, should be lively spaces “where the soul can dance” (de los Reyes 2001, n.p.).

De los Reyes’ notion of the library as a “pocket of hope” is not a utopia, but a heterotopia: a space that is simultaneously set apart from social space and where all aspects of social space are reflected; a heterochronic space where students are confronted with slices of time that have all in some way served to define the social spaces where they are expected to find their place; it is a space where different and incompatible sites are juxtaposed (such as the public and the private, the virtual and the material, the sites of reason and of affect, the sites of work and of care and of leisure); they presuppose a system of opening and closing and are entered through rites of passage and changes in behavior and demeanor. These are all aspects of heterotopias as formulated by Foucault (1986).

If the library as myth is oddly dislocated, stagnant and suffocating, the library as pocket of hope is a firm location for situated yet authentic reflection through relating. De los Reyes' image is certainly *also* utopian, but unlike the utopias of the turn of the century, hers awards a central role to librarians. She writes:

I place my trust in women and those who embrace those attributes that we associate with being a woman. [...] I place my hope in librarians, creators of pockets of hope, and in libraries, the protective, loving and caring places where students learn to live in their world and dream about a more humane future (de los Reyes 2001, n.p.).

De los Reyes' trust in female librarians to provide safety and nurturing reads simultaneously as affirmative and normative, and I suspect that many of the high-tech librarians who are currently involved in the highly intellectual, philosophical and technological work of maintaining the electronic record would take issue with this characterization of the librarian as primarily a nurturer. Nevertheless, De los Reyes presents librarians not as stern disciplinarians, nor as mousy clerks mindlessly shelving books and stamping cards. Indeed, she imagines librarians not as the wielders of library discipline and accomplices of the library's oppressive order, but as strong allies in the resistance to the complex operations of technologized control in the digital era.⁴² This disengagement from the stereotype of the female librarian appears in a text that is also surprisingly disengaged from the myths of universal reason and publicity. De los Reyes imagines librarians as reasonable and accessible exactly because she does not imagine them to be single-mindedly involved in maintaining order and delimiting access. Rather than being hopeless wanderers in an infinite library (like Borges' librarians) or sadistic madmen set on protecting their strictly limited universe from outside intervention (like Eco's monks), nor as socially inept delusionals who cannot think beyond their libraries (like Cannetti's collector). De los Reyes imagines librarians as located, situated human beings who care as much for the library as they do for its

⁴² I am referring here to Gilles Deleuze's claim that the west has moved from the era of the disciplinary society to an era of the control society. Building on Foucault's understanding that modern societies are characterized by the dynamics of panopticism and discipline through visibility, Deleuze suggests that the current era will be characterized by invisible control mechanisms, enacted by advanced technologies (Deleuze 1992). I will return to the operations of discipline and control in the library (and in particular how these are figured in library narratives) in the next two chapters as well.

patrons, and who consider both as part of the social and cultural environment with which they themselves are also engaged. In this light, her representation of librarians as being primarily engaged with the labor of care is perhaps less normative than it appears at first glance.

De los Reyes is neither the first nor the only one to consider the utopian potential of libraries to reside in the capacity of librarians to turn the potentially oppressive library space into a safe space where people (particularly marginalized youth) can attempt to navigate the universe of knowledge and their place within it safely. This fantasy of the library has also been a theme in the work of African-American poet and author Nikki Giovanni. In 1970 Nikki Giovanni wrote a short story simply called *The Library*, in which a young girl searches for her African-American heritage in a small-town library, to no avail. A friendly neighborhood librarian shows her a secret corridor in the library that leads to the underground Black Museum. There, the girl discovers the *Great Black Book* – the hidden legacy of her African heritage is located in a space set apart from the library, and reveals the not only the past but also the future of her people. When she opens it, she reads: “wherever you are in the real world is where you will stay” (Giovanni 1970). This places her in a limbo of sorts, for the secret place underneath the library is both part of and placed outside of the “real world”. Giovanni’s story reflects on the curious heterotopic aspects of the library: it is neither here nor not here, but connected to both. It is a place outside of social space, but reflects at the same time all aspects of social space: the simultaneous presence within, and exclusion of the American cultural landscape of African-Americans within the library; the complex and often unsuccessful search of marginalized people for traces of their heritage; the not-here or elsewhere on which the assumed here and now of everyday reality asserts itself. The story is macabre, frightening even. The librarian appears as a friendly guide, who is nevertheless unable to safeguard the young girl from being trapped in the library. It is knowledge, history itself, that traps the girl in her underground location.

The same Nikki Giovanni also wrote the following poem, which presents librarians as the figures that “open up” the library to a young African-American girl:

My First Memory (of Librarians)

This is my first memory:

A big room with heavy wooden tables that sat on a creaky
wood floor

A line of green shades – bankers' lights – down the center
Heavy oak chairs that were too low or maybe I was simply
too short

For me to sit in and read
So my first book was always big

In the foyer up four steps a semi-circle desk presided
To the left side the card catalogue
On the right newspapers draped over what looked like
a quilt rack
Magazines face out from the wall

The welcoming smile of my librarian
The anticipation in my heart
All those books – another world – just waiting
At my fingertips.

Giovanni's poem expresses trust in the librarian to make the passage from the real world into the world of the library safely. The library described is not designed for little girls - she is aware of the material discomforts and distractions of the creaky floor, the too-low chair, and the strange new functions seemingly familiar objects take on in this twilight zone. Yet the girl is reassured by the smile of librarian, who encourages her to take up the "big books," to sit and read, to enter "another world" safely. Again, the library is figured as a heterotopia: a space set apart from social space, and as such can give access to other, heterogeneous and incompatible spaces - by entering the library the little girl can enter the different worlds presented in books. It is telling that the little girl aspires only to enter this world. She is not on a quest for the secret, and there are no librarians maliciously withholding the secret from her. The library is not a space of disembodied reason, but a space of heavy wood tables, too low

chairs, creaky floors, items and objects that refer to the public sphere (newspapers) as much as they do to the private sphere (quilt racks).

De los Reyes and Giovanni present library heterotopias instead of library utopias or dystopias. Their contributions to the cultural imaginary of the library offer a way of reflecting on and relating with the library in different ways, made possible by the fact that they disengage the library from the myth of universal knowledge and the ideal of publicity. Such heterotopic imaginary libraries also appear, as I will show in my final chapter, in contemporary refigurations of librarians in the digital age. For now I want to point out that the library fantasies presented by De los Reyes and Giovanni fundamentally divert from the dominant library myth as a space of reason and publicity.

Alexandria Rebuilt?

So far I have argued that the library operates as myth in the Western imaginary. The dream of a universal library that contains, orders and makes accessible all knowledge naturalizes the modern positivist notions of reason and publicity. However, both reason and publicity are specific, situated, partial, and fundamentally gendered ideals. I have therefore analyzed the myth of the library not through an insistence on the practical impossibility of realizing a universal library, but through a dual critique of reason and publicity.

Both aspirations are intrinsically paradoxical and inherently patriarchal. The former because reason is predicated on categorizations of knowledge that are historically contingent and arbitrary, and that symbolically constructs femininity as its repressed other. The latter because the ideal of a rational public that has access to information in order to have informed debates is premised on a notion of publicity that has historically excluded women. From this perspective, the stereotype of the female librarian becomes not merely a sexist or classist misrepresentation, but a fundamental node in the web of meanings attached to the myth of the library. In addition, these two ambitions stand in tension with one another: giving access to library collections inevitably invites in the chaotic presence of the user. Since these dual aspirations cannot be realized simultaneously, elaborate mythologies of loss have allowed narratives of lost libraries to emerge as retrospective utopias. Librarians are imagined as stern disciplinarians who deny access to the library in order to protect its integrity. Utopian visions of future libraries imagine technological developments to resolve these tensions, whereas dystopian visions of future libraries suggest that new technologies may exacerbate them. The library is thus a complex configuration in the western imaginary - never capable of fully enacting the cultural aspirations of universality and publicity projected onto it - and the stereotype of the female librarian mediates this frustration.

Library narratives that figure the library as a heterotopia seem to be more successful at presenting librarianship as a way of engaging readers, texts, and spaces, whereas library utopias and dystopias instead either erase the librarian completely, or figure librarians as sadistic disciplinarians or lost souls.

Given these tensions and paradoxes, it is not surprising that the library is often narratively figured as a horrific space. In the next chapter I will investigate how library narratives perform the horror of the library, and show how images of monstrous librarians mediate these fears.

3. Library Terror:

Gothic engineering in the uncanny labyrinth

“DR MOON

Listen to me. The Library is in your mind.

THE GIRL

I know it's in my mind - but something's got inside!”

(Dr. Who – *Silence in the Library*)

In the previous chapter I have shown that the library in the Western imaginary is a myth that naturalizes the ideal of reason, for which the different accounts of the lost Library of Alexandria serve as a historical and narrative prefiguration. As I have illustrated, libraries exist in a peculiar tension between order and chaos, and concealment and disclosure: the library as a space where knowledge is ordered within a rational scheme that places objects (books) and subjects (librarians and users) in an a-priori relationship with one-another that is constantly under threat by the presence of users, who introduce chaos among the stacks. In addition to this tension, both the ordering of knowledge and the provision of access are paradoxical in themselves. Ordering principles are always historically contingent, yet rigid and unadaptive. Ordering schemes such as the Dewey decimal system have proven unable to adapt to new developments, and do not satisfactorily allow for serendipity and intuition – that is, they do not reflect or enable the processes of knowledge production nor the complex and multiple interrelations between different kinds of knowledge. The ideal of full access, on the other hand, produces the secret as its constitutive limit. The figuration of the library performs this tension in literary and film narratives, often in complex ways. I have illustrated how the figuration of the library is in fact part of a complex configuration of gendered discourse and ideology. Rather than simply presenting the stereotype of the female librarian

as a sexist misrepresentation, I have argued that she should also be viewed as part of this constellation.

In this chapter, I want to turn attention from the ideological and discursive construction of the figuration of the library, towards the curious affect it produces. As I will show, the library often appears as a horrific and terrifying space. Indeed, many library narratives can be in some way considered tales of the macabre, of the supernatural, and of the dissolution of the subject. I will make use of the framework of Gothic studies in order to show how the library performs certain deep-seated cultural anxieties pertaining to power, knowledge and the subject. I will show that even in narratives that do not otherwise follow the conventions of the Gothic, the library often still performs certain uncanny effects.

The fear of the library is not mere literary conjecture: it has been measured as a specific psychological effect of the library that was first described by Constance Mellon as “library anxiety” (Mellon 1986). Through the thematic analysis of the personal writings of 6000 undergraduate students, Mellon found that they experienced a range of feelings of anxiety when using or even contemplating to use the academic library. These feelings ranged from a sense of being overwhelmed or lost, to helplessness and dread, and students were likely to describe their own library skills as inadequate, and as worse than the skills of others (including other students). Interestingly, Mellon found that there was no correlation between the students’ actual library skills and the extent to which they experienced library anxiety. Later psychological studies suggest that library anxiety is a unique phenomenon, tied exclusively to the library space – it is not correlated with other disorders on the anxiety spectrum (Jiao et. al. 1999; Mech & Brooks 1997).

Ever since Mellon’s initial research and call for a grounded theory, the phenomenon of library anxiety has been studied from within a number of fields, predominantly the social and psychological sciences. While my aim is not to contribute to or intervene in empirical studies of library anxiety, two characteristics of this phenomenon are of interest here. Firstly, that the literature on library anxiety describes it in consistent terms as feelings of confusion, embarrassment, frustration, being overwhelmed, threat, and loss; as fear, phobia, worry, and nervousness; as being characterized by negative and self-defeating thoughts; as a sense of unease and discomfort; and as feeling

helpless, inadequate, incompetent, intimidated, and unsure (Carlisle 2007, 131). And secondly, that both race and gender appear to be predictors of library anxiety levels, with either males or females⁴³ reporting higher levels of library anxiety in different studies, and African-American students reporting relatively lower anxiety levels (Jiao et. al. 2006). As I have argued in the last chapter, the foundational myth of the library associates it with the ideology of reason as it is rooted in the western modernist tradition, which produces certain internal tensions. While psychological studies on library anxiety do not tend to speculate on the origins of the different rates of occurrence among different subjects, it would be interesting to see whether this may be traced back to the extent to which students identify with or aspire to rationality.

While there remains much to be said about library anxiety as a psychological phenomenon, I will not do so here. Instead, I want to point out a curious correlation with library narratives. It has been suggested that library anxiety may stem from a sense of intimidation caused by the overwhelming size of the library, or the puzzling complexity of the library's layout and the way materials are organized (Carlisle 2007, 133). As I will show in this chapter, the figuration of the library performs exactly these anxieties, and as such can be understood to produce library terror as a cultural mode. Some researchers suggest that stereotypes, myths and negative perceptions of female librarians and of the library as a feminine space are what cause library anxiety (Onwuegbuzie et. al. 2004, 34-35). As I will show, the figuration of the library is constructed in library narratives as a feminine space that is intimidating, puzzling, and confusing; in which protagonists are continually getting lost and losing themselves; characterized by a lack of boundaries; and that exists in the no-man's land of the Other. Library terror is thus, as I will show, as profoundly gendered as library mythology.

Perhaps librarians should be more approachable, unintimidating and professional in order to alleviate library anxiety in students. However, if library anxiety is correlated with a rich cultural prefiguration of libraries as terrifying and intimidating spaces, one is left to wonder whether a behavioral change in

⁴³ The authors cited investigate these gender and ethnic differences as empirical categories, and as such do not problematize the dualism reflected in the male/female terminology. As will have become obvious, my study focuses on the symbolic aspects of gender, and as such I tend to operate a different terminology. When I refer to feminine or masculine aspects of the dual figurations of libraries and librarians I do not consider these to be congruent with empirical categories inherent in individuals.

librarians alone can alleviate the anxieties libraries appear to evoke. If these anxieties are deep-seated in culture, then art may be a far better mediator of these anxieties than our friendly neighborhood librarians can ever aspire to be.

My aim in this chapter is to show that the figuration of the library as a haunted labyrinth, as a monstrous-feminine space or as a space that houses feminine monsters is a cultural trope. This critique forms a further expansion of the paradoxes of the library that I have developed in the previous chapter. My stake in this chapter is to enrich the understanding of library anxiety as a cultural, rather than merely a psychological, phenomenon. I will argue that library terror and horror mobilize fundamental anxieties resulting from patriarchal logocentrism, and that the monstrous librarian is the most viscerally appealing figuration of the librarian stereotype. The dual lenses of Gothic theory and feminist theory allow for a cultural critique of the library as a fearful place by showing the figuration of the library as an uncanny labyrinth that destabilizes normative taxonomies, and questions the stability of the subject.

The library as a confusing and confounding labyrinth of language is the foundational metaphor through which the library is imagined, and it is through this rhizome that it emerges as the complex configuration of power and knowledge, discourse and desire, pleasure and violence that continues to spark the Western imaginary.

Reading the uncanny library: The Gothic as *mode* and as *code*

In terms of Gothic engineering, we may understand the library within the context of the revolt against rationalism (of which the library is an ever failing materialization, as I have shown), excesses of memory and desire, and of the transgression of boundaries, categories, and limits. As I will show, an analysis of library narratives allows for an understanding of the terrors and horrors of the library as presenting “the dissolution of all order, meaning and identity in a play of signs, images and texts,” which Fred Botting has argued to be one of the key elements of Gothic fiction (Botting 1996, 9). As Botting argues: “one of the principal horrors lurking throughout Gothic fiction is the sense that there is no exit from the darkly illuminating labyrinth of language” (Botting 1996, 9) – and if there were ever a narrative space that encapsulated this horror, it would be the library.

While the Gothic is widely accepted as the genre that “[e]nunciat[es] aspects of the sublime effects of terror,” which is “the primary function of Gothic rhetoric,” then “it is also the primary task of postmodernist art and literature as it is perceived as a route to the unknown, unrepresentable aspects of self and reality” (Beville 2009, 15). As such, the Gothic should no longer be understood only as an expression of anxieties fundamentally tied to the problem of modernist rationalism, but can also be understood as a mode of writing that engages the postmodernist dissolution of this ideal. As such, the Gothic has in recent scholarship come to be understood not only as a specific genre of modernist literature, but also as a mode of postmodern cultural criticism that “interrogates and often personifies the uncannily present subcurrents which may render a person or a culture irrational, unpredictable, possibly dangerous” (van Elferen 2009, 122).

An analysis of library narratives through a Gothic lens thus allows for a reading of library narratives as formulating a form of cultural criticism that problematizes the ideals of order, coherence, and continuity that the library is often assumed to project, and that reveals them as illusions. But first I want to assert that this analysis does not rely on the notion of the Gothic as a genre.

While it is true that some library narratives aesthetically and poetically follow the conventions of the Gothic, few follow a straightforwardly Gothic plot.

Anne Williams, for instance, distinguishes male and female Gothic plots in 18th and 19th century Gothic literature, suggesting that these narrative plots address different attitudes towards structures that govern social life, desire, and subjectivity (Williams 1995). While this may appear as a productive framework in which to couch my analysis of the figuration of the library as a Gothic trope, it has proven far too rigid to account for the diverse ways in which the library appears across different genres and media. Rather than focusing on plot, my analysis is predicated on the widely accepted but as of yet under-researched phenomenon that the library, as a repository of dead discourse (Tancheva 2005), is understood through metaphors of control, tombs, labyrinths, morgues, dust, ghosts, silence, and humiliation (Radford & Radford 2003, 58). In other words: the library is not itself a Gothic trope per se, but is consistently figured through Gothic tropes.

The following Gothic tropes listed by Kosofsky-Sedgwick in her study of *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (first published in 1986) all appear throughout the narratives I will discuss in this chapter: tyrannical older men; priests and monastic institutions; found manuscripts; sleeplike and deathlike states; subterranean spaces and live burial; doubles; unnatural echos and silences; unintelligible writings and the unspeakable; apparitions from the past; the madhouse; and fires (Kosofsky-Sedgwick 1986, 9-10). Although Kosofsky-Sedgwick lists more tropes - which do not appear in any of the library narratives that I have encountered - it is at the very least surprising that, given this very noticeable overlap in tropes between Gothic narratives and library narratives, no analysis of the latter has made use of the insights of Gothic studies in order to better understand how the library is figured as an uncanny space, and the ways in which library narratives produce Gothic terror and horror.

Although I do not suggest that library narratives are always Gothic, nor that the library itself is a prevalent trope in Gothic fiction, I will operate a framework of concepts derived from the study of the Gothic to analyze the uncanny effects often produced by libraries in fiction. When I use terminology from Gothic studies, I do so from an understanding of the Gothic as a *mode* and as a *code* rather than as a genre. In any case, it would have been ironic to adhere

to strict definition of genres in this dissertation, which deals primarily with the structural, conceptual, and material untenability of such rigid categorization in the libraries that I investigate.

As Terry Eagleton has argued, new literary modes can be understood as resulting from a “collective psychological demand” – for instance social or ideological shifts that give birth to new collective dilemmas and anxieties (Eagleton 1976, 20-27). The Gothic first emerged as a literary genre in modernity, where it was mobilized to powerfully evoke the regressive underside of modernist emancipatory projects, and served as a signifier of cultural crises. Through the staging of confrontations with the uncanny, the Gothic negotiates anxieties that pervade dominant modes of thinking. The Gothic exposes how that which commonly appears as a natural order, is in fact a construction that always includes and hides (or fails to hide completely) its opposite.

As such, the Gothic is a critical stance that “highlights the fragmentation, distortion and hidden dimensions of selfhood and reality [and] works as a rearview mirror, unveiling the absent presence of the past, of the Other, of the imaginary, of fear within the here and now” (van Elferen 2009, 122). The hauntings common to Gothic narratives expose the spectral Other as central, rather than marginal, to the collective (post)modern unconscious – it shifts the focus from the constituted order of things to its constitutive outside, and makes it possible to contemplate the subconscious processes that underlie systems of inclusion of exclusion. The Gothic thus functions as a kind of a mirror that shows the uncanny presence of the Other inside our culture, our institutions, our homes, and ourselves.

The Gothic’s potential to expose the “cracks and fissures” in the Phallic Order (Williams 1995) remains relevant in the context of the social and epistemological shifts brought about in postmodernity. As Kristeva (1982) has argued, ghosts and monsters (grotesques) are the narrative embodiments of the split subject that became one of the central focal points of postmodernism. In horror stories, grotesques evoke the untenability of coherent identity, showing subjectivity as fundamentally unstable and ambiguous. By mobilizing the ghosts of otherness, Gothic horror produces a deconstructive counter-narrative to the discourses of rationality and the autonomous subject. Thus, the Gothic in postmodernism is not only or primarily an expression of the collective

unconsciousness but is also part of (Western) social *consciousness* (Beville 2009, 39-42). Re-emerging cyclically at times when new social and epistemological transformations and crises produce the need for literary forms to deal with new questions pertaining to power and subjectivity, “the popularity of [the Gothic] speaks for its efficacy in interpreting and refiguring unmanageable realities for its audience” (Hurley 1996, 5).

What makes the Gothic so powerful, and lends it a privileged potential for expressing the dark underside of subjectivity, is the way in which it narratively operationalizes the labyrinthine quality of language: in order for a concept or a word to be meaningful, it must always engage the presence of its opposite, the other, other words and meanings. This is why Jodey Castricano considers the writing of Jacques Derrida to be a Gothic type of “ghost writing”; Derrida evokes the spectral presence of text beyond the text in a mode that can be understood as a kind of Gothic engineering. Not limited to the specific *genre* of the Gothic, this engineering can be fruitfully understood as any linguistic operationalization of the “ghosts of language”: the return of the repressed Other of culture that haunts the text (Castricano 2001). Reading texts written in the Gothic mode thus always involves a kind of decoding: a search for traces of the beyond or the repressed that expresses itself in a codified way within the text.

While Derrida has claimed that any text is always haunted by the repressed or excluded (Derrida 1994)⁴⁴, the conventions and devices of the Gothic genre serve the particular purpose of generating horror and terror by mobilizing these ghosts so as to make the instability of the subject palpable and experiential (Beville 2009, 42). As I will show, such gothic engineerings are also powerfully mobilized in library narratives which, despite not falling strictly within the Gothic genre, nevertheless make use of this Gothic code in order to expose the very logic on which the library is founded as fundamentally, terrifyingly (and sometimes literally) unstable and fragmented.

In order to understand how library narratives produce these effects, I will look at the excesses and transgressions performed through the figuration of the library. The figuration of the library, as I will illustrate, has been produced

⁴⁴ The idea of all text – any text – being haunted by the ghostly presence of meanings that have been repressed or excluded is a common theme throughout Derrida’s work. Derrida’s statement that “This text is a ghost story”, which appears both in *Specters of Marx* (1994) and in “Force of Law” (1989), characterizes Derrida’s stance on the impossibility to “fix” meaning.

through narratives that play with the excesses of reason, the imagination, and emotion. Figured as an excessive space, the figuration of the library emerges not as an imaginary bulwark of science and culture, but as a site of ambivalence and ambiguity. Moreover, library narratives figure the library not as an enclosed site that marks the boundaries between the past and the present, the imaginary and the real, the self and the Other, reason and desire, and that which is considered “proper” to culture and that which is excluded from it. Instead, the library is figured as a liminal space of transgression. Such excesses and transgressions have been formulated throughout the tradition of Gothic writing (Botting 1996, 1-8). Gothic theory thus offers me not only a way to recognize the narrative devices that produce these excesses and transgressions, but also a key to decoding the cultural critique on knowledge, power and gender contained within them.

The excesses and transgressions of the Library of Babel

“Up the marble staircase, down the tiled floor, between the grey columns, the library seemed a parallel universe, both fearful and comforting, in which my own story had other adventures and other endings.”

(Alberto Manguel, *The Library at Night*, 2006)

Borges' *The Library of Babel* contains an infinite collection of texts that defies all ordering mechanisms: a horrifying *chaosmos*. When viewed through a Gothic lens, Borges' figuration of the library can be decoded as an excessive space that transgresses the boundaries of meaning, and as such destabilizes the normative taxonomies of the self. Firstly, there is an excess of imaginative space and of meaning, secondly, the boundaries between inside and outside are transgressed, and thirdly, the limits of order and chaos are destabilized. The effect of this is, as I will show, a confrontation with what Beville calls the “unrepresentable aspects of reality and subjectivity” (Beville 2009, 15).

Borges' library is figured as both a labyrinth and as what Lacan has called the ‘abyss’: the “end of meaning’s infinite regression, the empty (w)hole around which whirl the signifiers, the unsignifiable double of a lost transcendental signified” (De Lauretis 1985, 23). I will start with the former by offering a reading of Borges' story that figures the library as a labyrinthine, liminal, and numinal space.

The Library of Babel begins with a detailed description of the library that immediately identifies it as a labyrinth:

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. From any of the hexagons one can see, interminably, the upper and lower floors. The distribution of the galleries is invariable. Twenty shelves, five long shelves per side, cover all the sides except two; their height, which is the distance from floor to ceiling, scarcely exceeds that of a normal bookcase. One of the free sides leads to a narrow hallway which opens onto another gallery, identical to the first and to all the rest. To the left and right of the hallway there are two very small closets. In the first, one

may sleep standing up; in the other, satisfy one's fecal necessities. Also through here passes a spiral stairway, which sinks abysmally and soars upwards to remote distances. In the hallway there is a mirror which faithfully duplicates all appearances. Men usually infer from this mirror that the Library is not infinite (if it were, why this illusory duplication?); I prefer to dream that its polished surfaces represent and promise the infinite ... Light is provided by some spherical fruit which bear the name of lamps. There are two, transversally placed, in each hexagon. The light they emit is insufficient, incessant (Borges 1962, 75).

In this story, and in line with his other writings, Borges presents the reader with a sophisticated game of *what if?* What if the library were *in fact* exhaustive, and were *in fact* to contain not only all known truths, but also all possible truths? What would this marvelous library look like? What would it be like to be inside of this library? Borges' story confronts the reader with the dizzying, almost nauseating corollary of this fantasy.

The Library of Babel opens a paradoxical space of simultaneous enclosure and limitlessness. On the one hand, the library is as vast as the universe, even a universe in itself. On the other hand, the library elicits a sense of claustrophobia, of being trapped in an enclosed space. Rather than appearing as a vast, open space, and in stark contrast with those glorious images of a boundless universe flecked with the clearly distinguishable bodies of stars and planets that popular culture has come to associate with "the universe", this universe consists of narrow and suffocating rooms and hallways that continue eternally – there is no way out. Windowless, a view from these rooms can only offer a glance back inside, by way of a mirror. As "a sphere whose exact center is any one of its hexagons and whose circumference is inaccessible" (Borges 1962, 76) and "unlimited and cyclical" (Borges 1962, 83) the Library is the largest Gothic castle imaginable: trapped within its structure without the possibility to discover anything or write anything about or from within the library that isn't already within it, the librarians are doomed to become phantoms (Borges 1962, 82).

What exactly makes this *The Library of Babel* so horrifying? What is it that makes this game of *what if* so sinister? I suggest that the vastly excessive and at the same time suffocating space of the Library embodies a particular type of

haunting. As Jody Castricano claims: "Haunting is to concept as haunting is to house. That is, the notion of haunting involves the "construction" or creation of an *inside*. [...] Haunting implies interiority: the necessary construction of an "inside" whether of a house, a text, [...] or a "subject" "(Castricano 2001, 22-23). The notion of an inside is thus always predicated upon the existence an outside (that which haunts, the spectre), and when viewed as such Library appears as the opposite of the traditional Gothic castle, which is generally understood as a metaphor for the conventional limits of social rules and the Symbolic Order (Botting 1994; Williams 1995).

While the Gothic traditionally plays with the transgression of boundaries, by showing how the outside is always creeping into or haunting the inside, Borges' library has cannibalized all space – the library is not merely a metaphor for the universe; it *is* the universe. Rather than being haunted by the beyond, the library of Babel has usurped any sense of the beyond. It is an excessive inside that, by denying its own constitutive limits, becomes inside and outside all at once. It is utterly chaotic because it has usurped its own limits.

Whereas the Gothic is generally understood to be a reaction to the oppressively enforced limits of discursivity and signification, Borges' Library enacts the terrifying counter-reality of limitlessness:

[The Library's] shelves register all the possible combinations of the twenty-odd orthographical symbols (a number which, though extremely vast, is not infinite): Everything: the minutely detailed history of the future, the archangels' autobiographies, the faithful catalogues 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 (Borges 1962, 78-79).

Just like the Library of Babel's excess of space turns it into a non-space, its excess of potential signification becomes an absence of meaning. As such, Borges' story should be read as a critique of the Alexandrian dream of a universal library containing all knowledge of the past, present and future. What

appeared in my previous chapter as an unattainable dream appears in *The Library of Babel* as a nightmare.

Because the Library of Babel contains every possible statement, systems of signification collapse entirely:

An *n* number of possible languages use the same vocabulary; in some of them, the symbol *library* allows the correct definition *a ubiquitous and lasting system of hexagonal galleries*, but *library* is *bread* or *pyramid* or anything else, and these seven words which define it have another value. You who read me, are You sure of understanding my language? (Borges 1962, 82).

In the Library of Babel, the lack of a discursive order thus makes it impossible to even provisionally fix meaning. “The true story of your death” falls apart into a limitless number of potential stories, all of which are equally true or untrue, and all of which are equally meaningful or meaningless when notions of truth versus falsity (paradoxically enacted and refused in the phrase “true story”), self versus other, and life versus death lack the necessary discursive limitations. The excess of imaginative space and the lack of limits in the Library of Babel may seem at first sight a liberation from the constrictive notion of reason on which the myth of Alexandria is premised, but on closer scrutiny it presents a far more inescapable labyrinth.

Fred Botting (1994) has argued that in late Gothic fiction, the city with its labyrinthine streets replaced the traditional Gothic castle and forest in giving spatial expression to the hauntings of modernity (Botting 1994, 2). Borges’ Library-universe seems more closely related to this type of *chaosmos* (Hurley 1996, 160) than to the traditional Gothic castle. It should be noted, however, that in Gothic fiction both the castle and the city are sites of violence and menace, much like Borges’ Library of Babel is a destructive site where meaning, identity and the subject are at risk of collapsing under the chaos that “cannot be brought to order through narrative and other conventional strategies of organization” (Hurley 1996, 160).

Borges’ labyrinthine library-universe may be best decoded by viewing it as mobilizing the ambiguity of the *limen*. The concept of the *limen*, or threshold, has been coined in anthropology to understand the state of being characteristic to rites of passage. Cultural theorists such as Homi Bhabha (1994) understand it

as a space of passage between fixed identifications. Gothic theorist Manuel Aguirre has theorized the *limen* in Gothic literature as the threshold between the “domain of rationality [...] and the world of the Other, the Numinous” (Aguirre 2007, 15). The *limen* is “a place that is not a place, both this and that, or neither this nor that” (Aguirre 2008, 5). Rather than being a passageway to the Other, “the threshold is a part of the Other. [...] It is already that which it delimits and isolates, and becomes what it defines; or, to put it in different words: the Other takes over and ‘colonizes’ its own frontiers” (Aguirre 2008, 5).

In “Geometries of Terror” Aguirre argues that the labyrinth experience, both physical and metaphorical, is a profoundly Gothic experience of the confrontation with the primitive chaos that lurks behind the rational plan, and where the exit and entrance are contiguous (Aguirre 2008, 5-9). *The Library of Babel* performs the labyrinth it describes: to read it is to become as lost as its librarians in the excesses of its imaginative universe. The Borgesian librarians, who realize that: “some shelf in some hexagon held precious books and that those precious books were inaccessible” (Borges 1962, 80), reflect on the horror of Western culture when it bemoans the loss of Alexandria and at the same time is forced to admit that this Alexandria never existed.

In *Art of Darkness*, Anne Williams suggests that the Gothic expresses anxieties about meaning (Williams 1995, 67). As Fred Botting argues, the trope of the labyrinth does so in a particular way:

The horror of the labyrinth and its confusion of fears and desires lies in its utter separation from all social rules and complete transgression of all conventional limits.” As “places of radical politics and confusion,” labyrinths “are identified as dangerous, subversive sites destroying established boundaries and conventions” (Botting 1996, 52-53).

The Library of Babel indeed figures the imaginary universal library-labyrinth as such a site of horror. The librarians of Babel are stuck in the labyrinth of language, and unlike the librarians we know and love, they have no external point of reference from where they can assess and make accessible this labyrinth.

Borges’ story can be understood in terms of what Castricano calls *cryptomimesis*: a ghost writing, exemplified in the work of Derrida, that poses language as a “seductive, discouraging, fascinating, and fatiguing labyrinth”

(Castricano 2001, 110). Borges' labyrinthine Library is a figuration of language itself: without conventions (however arbitrary) there can be no intelligibility. And this labyrinth is inescapable, as Borges' librarians discover:

If an eternal traveler were to cross it in any direction, after centuries he would see that the same volumes were repeated in the same disorder (which, thus repeated, would be an order: the Order) (Borges 1962, 83).

The librarians are thus literally "drawn into the infinite generation of texts" by "go[ing] through everything once more" (Castricano 2001, 110). Order in the Library of Babel is thus nothing but endless and senseless repetition: there is no basis in reason, and it offers no basis for reason.

Faced with this realization, Borges' librarians turn their hope onto the mythical and elusive "Man of the Library":

On some shelf in some hexagon (men reasoned) there must exist a book which is the formula and perfect compendium of all the rest: some librarian has gone through it and he is analogous to a god (Borges 1962, 81).

God (in the library) is thus he who has witnessed the abyss of the library: the universe both consists of and includes the Library, which is itself included within the compendium it contains, which, if we take this to its logical conclusion, is included within the index it contains, which is included in the word "Index" it contains. This chain can continue *ad infinitum*, from the largest unit (which due to its limitlessness is no longer a unit) to the smallest unit (which is not so much the opposite of the largest, as it is analogous to and inclusive of it, and thus, paradoxically, also limitless). The library "is the universe," and at the same time the library is the word, or even the Word. This infinite chain of mutual inclusions, the circularity of the Library, produces a sense of vertigo, a sense of tumbling into the abyss of language. Its secret may perhaps be described, a strategy suggested for navigating this endless labyrinth, but no such endeavor will ever lead to an original source or to a final solution: "To locate book A, consult first book B which indicates A's position; to locate book B, consult first a book C, and so on to infinity..." (Borges 1962, 81)

The thought that the library hides - and thus suggests the possibility of discovering - the secret of language is a seductive one. However, due to the

circularity and self-referentiality of the library, the confounding conclusion seems to be that it is impossible to discover the secret of language from within language itself. Indeed, in Borges' story lies the culmination of the notion developed in the previous chapter, that library narratives are centered on the search for a secret that will never disclose itself (that does not exist except as the constitutive outside of "the public"), that can neither be found nor resolved.

Borges' story figures the library-labyrinth as a threshold: whilst we, as librarians, ponder whether to enter, we are already trapped inside of it, and as much as we are reluctant to pass the threshold into the realm of the Other, the threshold is already part of the Other. The library is neither inside nor outside (it is the Universe), neither here nor there (it is a non-place), and in its crossing of the boundaries between past and future, it skips over the present.

If Gothic literature can be read as a critique of the processes of inclusion and exclusion (operations of the symbolic order) on which subjectivity is founded, then *The Library of Babel* can be understood as a play on this critique. While subjectivity indeed has a dark underside, figured through the Gothic engineerings of ghosts and hauntings, the removal of all order erases the *very possibility* of subjectivity. *The Library of Babel* thus confronts the reader with a confounding axiom: any order by which the library can be organized will inevitably be partial and unstable, and yet we are dependent on such ordering principles to make the world and our place within it intelligible. Paradoxically, library order thus on the one hand disrupts the imaginary unity and authenticity of the subject, by forcefully interjecting boundaries and limits that are by principle artificial. But on the other hand, if such boundaries and limits were to fall away, the resulting chaos makes identification and subjectivity impossible - this is why "Man, the imperfect librarian" is doomed to wander aimlessly and namelessly through the endless corridors of the Library of Babel. This crisis of order is the uncanny aspect present, in some way or other, in all the library narratives that I discuss in this chapter.

The Library of Babel: a *tomb* and a *womb*

While it is obvious that Borges' *The Library of Babel* is not a ghost story in the traditional sense, nor squarely located within the genre of Gothic literature, it undeniably mobilizes that curious combination of fascination and fear, of pleasure and abjection, that is central to gothic engineerings (Farnell 2009). Confronted with the limitlessness of the Library, we see the dark underside of modernist rationality that is idealized in the Alexandrian dream of the universal library. The dream of an extensive yet orderly library that is both (and impossibly) limitlessly accessible and rationally ordered hides and represses these excesses and transgressions - but never fully succeeds in doing so. *The Library of Babel* stages a confrontation with the unrepresentable aspects of the real by mobilizing as well as deconstructing "moral binaries of good and evil, aesthetic binaries of beautiful and monstrous, and other oppositions that, in general, define societal values and the place of the 'other' in relation to those values" (Beville 2009, 199-200). These transgressive aspects of the Library of Babel lend it particular tomblike and womblike qualities that align it with what Irigaray (1977; 1984) has called the feminine, and more particularly with what has been theorized as the abject (Kristeva 1982) and as the *monstrous* feminine (Creed 1993).

Even though Borges' narrative cunningly avoids all explicit references to gender (bar perhaps the occasional reference to 'he' where, if language permitted, a general pronoun could easily be substituted), it does open up to political considerations concerning power and sexual difference. The key to this code lies again in the relationship between haunting and houses as metaphors of (the oppressive power as well as the transgression of) limits and boundaries. To turn the key we must turn to Derrida's notion of the house as the very principle of violence. As Mark Wigley points out, power does not only operate through exclusion, but also through inclusion: "to dominate is always to house [...] Domination is domestication" (Wigley 1993, 137). Drawing from the derridean notion of the feminine as that which lacks boundaries and produces insecurities, Wigley reflects on architecture's masculine, phallogentric urge to "house" it - that is, to force rigid (spatial) limitations upon space in order to produce the semblance of rigid gender divisions that appear as if they were a priori, but in fact *produce* the male and the female as spatially separate entities.

Woman becomes domesticated and enclosed, and Man becomes the bodily archetype of the structure (the tower reaching into the sky, or the temple modeled after man's body). Wigley argues that this is in itself a form of violence, as it serves to suppress the feminine through enclosure. As such, "masculinity is not only erection but also enclosure, the logic of the house is as phallic as that of the tower" (Wigley 1993, 138).

It is clear that Borges' Library fails to provide such boundaries and limits - it fails to domesticate or to enclose - and as such it performs the monstrous-feminine, which "poses a threat to a certain order, not because it is synonymous with "woman" - Derrida cautions against mistaking the feminine for "a woman's femininity, for female sexuality" - but because it is unrepresentable" (Castricano 2001, 86). From this Derridean formulation of gothic transgression follows an understanding of the Library of Babel as a space radically limitless and unstructured, and as such radically feminine and monstrous, tinged with the abjection that clings to the feminine (Creed 1993).

The abject is present in Borges' story in a more subtle way. As Julia Kristeva argues in *Powers of Horror*, a work that has and still does inspire a rich and diverse body of feminist theory as well as gothic theory: "It is [...] not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order; what does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 1982, 4). The abject should thus be seen as that which crosses or threatens the border between self and other: abjection occurs when these borders are destabilized or transgressed.

Interestingly, Kristeva describes abjection as tinged by the "weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me" (Kristeva 1982, 2). Barbara Creed has posited that "the function of the monstrous [is] to bring about an encounter with the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability" (Creed 1993, 11). The following passage from *The Library of Babel* articulates this "weight of meaninglessness" established through the collapse of the symbolic order in a peculiar and paradoxical way, by mirroring it to an excess of meaning, or possible meaning, without order and without any way to establish any *particular* meaning:

The Library includes all verbal structures, all variations permitted by the twenty-five orthographical symbols, but not a single example of absolute nonsense. It is useless to observe that the best volume of the many

hexagons under my administration is entitled The Combed Thunderclap and another The Plaster Cramp and another Axaxaxas mlö. These phrases, at first glance incoherent, can no doubt be justified in a cryptographical or allegorical manner; such a justification is verbal and, *ex hypothesi*, already figures in the Library. I cannot combine some characters

dhcmrlchtdj

which the divine Library has not foreseen and which in one of its secret tongues do not contain a terrible meaning (Borges 1962, 82).

At first glance, nothing particularly “abject” seems to be happening here. There is no blood, no gore, no walking dead or decomposing corpses. Nevertheless, this passage can be seen to perform the “weight of meaninglessness” that Kristeva mentions, about which, indeed, “nothing is insignificant” (Kristeva 1982, 2). As such, the *Library of Babel* is a *chaosmos*: it does not so much give space to abjection, but is itself an abjected space.

What Borges’ story shows us is that the significance of the word is not necessarily that it is meaningful in any strict sense of the word. What makes the library of Babel so terrifying is the excess of language combined with the absence of meaning. However, as the narrator observes: “No one can articulate a syllable which is not filled with tenderness and fear, which is not, in one of these languages, the powerful name of a god. To speak is to fall into tautology” (Borges 1962, 82). Language is thus not only (or even primarily in this labyrinth without a center) a conveyor of meaning, but rather a conductor of affects. When the governing structure of a linguistic system is taken away, what remains is the boundless potential of language to refer to everything at once, by means of infinite, not always recognizable, but always present and multiple connections. What makes the Library of Babel abject is not so much that it crosses boundaries but that it is fundamentally *boundless*.

This boundlessness of the Library of Babel is so complete that it negates the ultimate boundary: that between life and death. As the narrator of *The Library of Babel* tells us: “The certitude that everything that has been written negates us or turns us into phantoms” (Borges 1962, 82). When the librarians

die - we are told of "suicides, more and more frequent with the years" (Borges 19262, 83) - the narrator predicts that: "my grave will be the fathomless air; my body will sink endlessly and decay and dissolve in the wind generated by the fall, which is infinite" (Birges 1962, 76). But even then, "the Library will endure: illuminated, solitary, infinite, perfectly motionless, equipped with precious volumes, useless, incorruptible, secret" (Borges 1962, 83). The library can thus be read as a tomb, in which bodies (both alive and dead) are always in the process toward decomposition. To be in the library is to be on the threshold, constantly, between life and death - to be *living dead*. Since the librarians cannot fulfill their task of selecting, ordering, or otherwise rendering intelligible and accessible the library's collection, and they are also unable to escape the infinite, spherical library, they are destined to haunt it - since the library necessarily holds the true story of their death, their deaths are already part of reality, even when they are still alive.

The boundlessness of the Library of Babel also provides it with a specific and monstrous sexual dimension. It can be read as both (and at the same time) a *tomb* and a *womb*. In the next chapter I will discuss the interplay between bodies and books in order to understand the paradox of the library as a space that excludes the bodies it simultaneously disciplines. Here, however, I want to point out one specific bodily metaphor that helps to understand the abjection produced by *The Library of Babel*. As I have argued above, the Library of Babel should be read as a monstrous and feminine at the same time on account of its lack of boundaries. But to read the library as a *womb* requires a reading of the space as figuratively aligned with the monstrous- maternal.

As I have shown, Borges' short story deals with a library that is infinite and eternal, haunted by the living dead: the abyss at the limits of meaning. Significant is the mystery surrounding the origins of these bodies and books. The description of the hexagonal rooms that comprise the Library, and which are the eternal dwellings of the living-dead librarians, presents the enigma of its origins. Resembling a large beehive, the library of Babel is composed of hexagonal galleries, which are connected by narrow hallways. "To the left and right of the hallway there are two very small closets. In the first, one may sleep standing up; in the other, satisfy one's fecal necessities" (Borges 1962, 75). This seemingly insignificant detail begs scrutiny: while the librarians throughout the story appear as disembodied phantom dwellers, the Library has obviously

provided them with the necessary spaces for the bodily functions of defecation and sleep. Absent, however, are spaces for the bodily practices of human productivity: writing and procreation. While both copulation and writing can be (and often are) performed outside of the bedroom or the study, it is telling that the Library only provides two types of designated bodyspaces. One space allows “one to sleep,” and “standing up,” no less. The other space is tied up intimately with what Kristeva recognizes as the rituals of defilement that are reinforced by the mother, the primary figure to impose sphincter training on the child – the preOedipal mother (Creed 2000, 122). Through the latrine, we can begin to understand the Library of Babel as a maternal authority, who teaches her ‘children’ about the body and its proper and improper functions.

However, the library as womb is best understood when we return to the question of origins. The Library of Babel, vast and inexhaustible, is occupied by generations of librarians and by uncountable books. But where do these librarians come from when there are no lovers, no parents, no grandparents? And who writes these books when there are no authors, no desks, no pens? This is how the library reveals itself as a monstrous *womb*. The library-womb is monstrous in two ways. First of all, this womb seems to be producing chaotically and randomly – bodies and books appear out of and disappear into the (w)hole (the abyss) of the library without purpose and without end. The Library of Babel is thus a sublimation of the archaic mother: she gives birth all by herself, without any interference of men or of patriarchal rites and rituals.

As Kristeva points out: “Fear of the archaic mother turns out to be essentially fear of her generative power. It is this power, a dreaded one, that patrilineal filiation has the burden of subduing” (Kristeva 1982, 77). The Library of Babel possesses a generative power that is unbounded by any order, let alone a patriarchal one. This is the second way in which the library is monstrous. While the librarians seem to attempt to interject a male authority in order to understand, and in doing so tie down, this generative power, their attempts are futile. Their “*inquisitors*” have endured epic adventures in search of the mystery of the Library, but “of course, no one expects to find anything” (Borges 1962, 80). The “Man of the Book,” who is “analogous to a god” may or may not reside in some “venerated or secret hexagon” (Borges 1962, 81), but all attempts to devise a system by which to locate him are fruitless. The library as a monstrous-

mother thus renders the librarians entirely impotent through her unconstrained generative power.

Thus, the Library of Babel can be posited as feminine in two ways: firstly, the library is feminine in so far as it lacks boundaries or threatens the stability of boundaries. This aspect of the library's femininity should not be conflated with female sexuality – this nonessential feminine does not refer to female sexuality and its symbolic figuration as abject or monstrous, but only with the limits of meaning and the way meaning is always contingent on processes of inclusion and exclusion. Secondly, the Library of Babel, when read as an abject, archaic mother, is also fundamentally figured in terms of sexual difference and the female body. In Borges' story, the interconnected tropes of the tomb and the womb negotiate the problem of borders in terms of uncanny femininity. This is the gendered symbolic of what has been referred to as "the monstrosity of Borges' discourse, [which stages a confrontation with] the destruction of the logos and of its consequences, [and] the terror when facing the unintelligibility of writing, when facing the unthinkable" (de Toro 1999, 131).

The Name of the Rose and the Limits of Meaning

“Hunc mundum tipice labyrinthus denotat ille [...] Intransi largus, redeunti sed nimis
artus”

(Alinardo of Grottaferrata, in Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, 1984)

In this section I will turn to Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* to show how Borges' monstrous Library of Babel is mirrored in this refiguration of the labyrinthine library as a liminal space, and how both narratives stage a confrontation with the same paradoxes and anxieties that the library performs in the Western imaginary. Firstly, I will show how Gothic engineerings are put to work to articulate anxieties related to the violence of repressive order, and to the haunting presence of chaos. I will show how *The Name of the Rose*, similar to *The Library of Babel*, deals with the paradox of subjectivity, which on the one hand is threatened by the oppressive and alienating operations of ordering principles (such as language), and on the other, relies on it for its very construction. Secondly, I want to turn attention to the crucial role sexual difference plays in these narratives, tying these anxieties and paradoxes implicitly and explicitly to the question of female sexuality. While *The Library of Babel* is presented at first glance as a genderless universe, on closer scrutiny it reveals itself to be a (terrifyingly and horrifically) feminine space. As a cunning and reversal of Borges' story, *The Name of the Rose* presents us with a space that at first glance seems strictly patriarchal, but on closer scrutiny reveals itself as (terrifyingly and horrifically) reliant on the violent interventions necessary to maintain this order.

If *The Library of Babel* erases borders completely, and leaves its librarians with nothing on which to found any semblance of subjectivity, the Aedificium is protected by boundaries so strict that they completely immobilize the subject, and effectively self-destructs in its attempt to maintain them. I speak here of the Aedificium not as a passive space (as the scene of the crime), but rather as an active participant in the plot, since *The Name of the Rose* explicitly posits it as such. The Aedificium cannot be understood sufficiently by simply analyzing it as a passive story-space in which narrative action takes place, but needs to be

understood as an irrational agent that actively propels the narrative towards its terrifying and violent culmination.

My second line of argumentation in this section involves showing that Eco's *Aedificium* figures the library as a profoundly and explicitly gendered space, that seems at the surface to be structured by normative, patriarchal notions of rational subjectivity, but is fundamentally shaped by the problematics of sexual difference and the challenges the feminine poses to the very notion of the rational subject. *The Library of Babel* and *The Name of the Rose* thus stand as two examples of how the library space is coded as feminine, and as such rob the myth of the library as a space of universal reason of its signification.⁴⁵

Reading Eco's *The Name of the Rose* through a Gothic lens involves returning to the functional understanding (which I have developed at the beginning of this chapter) of the Gothic as a code that mobilizes fear in order to give expression to the fundamental questions and anxieties that resulted from modern and postmodern social and epistemological transformations. I have suggested in the introduction to this chapter that these questions are fundamentally linked to the problem of limits posed by the simultaneous and contradictory forces of order and chaos and disclosure and concealment, which pose in themselves multiple problems of limits as at once forceful and even violent, and on the other hand fundamentally unstable. As I have shown, Borges' Library robs the myth of the universal library by evoking the uncanniness of a universe without limits. Eco's *Aedificium*, as I will argue in this section, does the same by mobilizing the opposite (and equally terrifying) reality of a library enclosed within thick walls and guarded by complicated rites of passage.

While these two narrative figurations of the library might seem to be mutually exclusive, they are in fact opposite sides of the same coin – or perhaps two mirrors that reflect one another and project one another's reflections into an infinite space of otherness – each performing the destructive tension between order and chaos that forms the unstable foundation of the library. In *The Name of the Rose* the library is figured again through the metaphor of the labyrinth (which I have already suggested is the foundational metaphor of the library in the Western imaginary) – this time presented again as a liminal space. The

⁴⁵ I refer here to Barthes' understanding of the myth that I have developed in the previous chapter.

winding, haunted corridors of the Aedificium undermine the stability of the subject and destroy normative taxonomies, and as such form a more literal reformulation of the haunted castle of the Gothic literary tradition. Eco's novel, more explicitly than Borges' story, employs Gothic liminization techniques that produce the library not as a strictly defined and limited *inside* space, but rather as a liminal space, or a threshold, right on the boundaries between order and chaos, nature and culture, ratio and desire. This liminal quality of the library space can be understood in parallel to Eco's own theory of semiosis.

Indeed, Eco's novel is commonly read simultaneously as a literary product *of* and a story *about* semiosis, mobilizing intertexts at multiple levels of the narrative. As DeLauretis has noted:

[*The Name of the Rose*] is a novel made up almost entirely of other texts, of tales already told, of names either well known or sounding as if they should be known to us from literary and cultural history; a medley of famous passages and obscure quotations, specialized lexicons and subcodes (narrative, iconographic, literary, architectural, bibliographical, pharmaceutical, et cetera), and characters cut out in strips from a generic World Encyclopedia (De Lauretis 1985, 15-16).

To read Eco's novel is to enter a labyrinth of semiosis and intertextuality, which Eco himself posits as a universe of *unlimited semiosis* haunted by Borges' absent presence as the Man of the Book.

In his theoretical work on semiosis, Eco has argued that: "The universe of semiosis, that is, the universe of human culture, must be conceived of as a labyrinth" (Eco 1994, 83).⁴⁶ The Aedificium is thus a figuration of semiosis itself, turning semiosis into the object of the plot. Eco's conceptualization of the process of semiosis suggests an interpretation of the Aedificium as a figuration of cultural anxieties pertaining to meaning and subjectivity, by showing the significance of the labyrinth as twofold. Firstly, the notion of semiosis as a labyrinth suggests that the Aedificium does not present an authentic order of the universe, nor any universal presemiotic structure, nor does it exist at all

⁴⁶ Eco's formulation of meaning as a labyrinth – or a rhizome, in Eco's own terms – is fundamentally a political statement. Eco goes on to argue that to consider local knowledges (i.e. any knowledge that exists anywhere in the labyrinth of human culture) as "unique or 'global' – ignoring their partiality – produces an ideological bias" (Eco 1976, 83-84). A reading of *The Name of the Rose* as an attempt to destroy the myth of universal knowledge is thus very much in line with Eco's philosophical critique of universalism.

before or beyond signification. Eco's labyrinthine library is neither a metaphor for nor a representation of the universe of semiosis. Rather, it is both a product of and involved in the process of *unlimited semiosis*, which Eco understands to be the process by which: "in order to establish what the interpretant of a sign is, it is necessary to name it by means of another sign which in turn has another interpretant to be named by another sign and so on" (Eco 1976, 68). Eco considers unlimited semiosis thus very much in terms of the conundrum facing the librarians of Babel, who "in order to locate book A {must} first consult a book B which indicates book A's position; [and in order] to locate book B [must] consult first a book C, and so on until infinity" (Borges 1962, 81). The library thus does not simply signify "something", but both contains and opens up to other signs (such as books, stacks, compendiums) and other frames of meaning.

Secondly, Eco's Aedificium should be understood in relation to the "universe of human culture" (Eco 1976, 83). This universe is the universe of intertextuality, where signs do not only contain other signs, but where texts always reference and evoke other texts. Eco's Aedificium as a labyrinth of intertextuality thus presents the first conundrum to those who enter it: its center and its exit are contiguous, as is the case in Borges' *The Library of Babel*.

The description of Adso of Melk's first view of the Aedificium illustrates this point:

This was an octagonal construction that from a distance seemed a tetragon (a perfect form, which expresses the sturdiness and impregnability of the City of God), whose southern sides stood on the plateau of the abbey, while the northern ones seemed to grow from the steep side of the mountain, a sheer drop, to which they were bound. I might say that from below, at certain points, the cliff seemed to extend, reaching up toward the heavens, with the rock's same colors and material, which at a certain point became keep and tower (work of giants who had great familiarity with earth and sky). Three rows of windows proclaimed the triune rhythm of its elevation, so that what was physically squared on the earth was spiritually triangular in the sky. As we came closer, we realized that the quadrangular form included, at each of its corners, a heptagonal tower, five sides of which were visible on the outside—four of the eight sides, then, of the greater octagon producing four minor heptagons, which from the outside

appeared as pentagons. And thus anyone can see the admirable concord of so many holy numbers, each revealing a subtle spiritual significance. Eight, the number of perfection for every tetragon; four, the number of the Gospels; five, the number of the zones of the world; seven, the number of the gifts of the Holy Ghost (Eco 1984, 21-22).

Adso of Melk thus focalizes the outside appearance of the Aedificium *from within* the labyrinth of semiosis that the library performs. On the one hand, Adso describes the Aedificium in terms of geometric forms in order to give an objective account of it. On the other hand, Adso's account shows how these geometric forms are already flooded with meaning. The tetragon is understood as "a perfect form," a high rock as "reaching upwards to the heavens," and a few rows of windows as "proclaim[ing] the triune rhythm of its elevation." So already on the very first page of the novel, the reader realizes that she was already and inescapably inside of it the labyrinth as soon as she started - together with Adso - to make sense of it.

This labyrinth of meaning, or semiosis, is a dangerous place - so much so that entrance into it is rigidly guarded by the abbot of the monastery. Only two people are allowed to enter the library: the librarian and the assistant librarian. Only they know the secret of the library, "which has remained obscure to all over the centuries" (Eco 1984, 37). While William and Adso were summoned to the monastery to solve the mysteries surrounding the mysterious death of one of the monks (more of which will follow during their stay at the monastery), the plot as well as its solution is hinged upon the secret of the library itself. The reason for its secrecy is predicated upon the belief that, as the abbot states: "not all truths are for all ears, not all falsehoods can be recognized as such by the pious [...]" (Eco 1984, 37). The monks are thus only allowed to work in the Scriptorium, where they may only consult books deemed suitable by the librarian - ostensibly to keep them from "pursu[ing] every curiosity that seizes them, whether through weakness of intellect or through pride or through diabolical prompting" (Eco 1984, 37). As in Borges, the Man of the Library who has access to the index is "analogous to a God" (Borges 1962, 81) - he, and he alone, owns and controls the index of the library, which is the map of the universe.

A striking parallel between Borges' Library of Babel and Eco's Aedificium is that they are not so much storehouses of the past or windows to the truth (despite the sustained belief on part of both the librarians and the "intruders" that the secret truth must be concealed somewhere within their winding pathways), but rather mysterious and obscure labyrinths in which a dizzying array of utterances stand row after row, in an order so complex that it devolves into (real or seeming) chaos. These libraries are trickster spaces – to enter them is to stray from the truth, to wander on the border between truth and falsehood, unable to distinguish them from one another. Entering the library means inevitably to get lost. The abbot's strict regulation of access to the library and its contents can be understood as an attempt to protect the reader from the fate of the Borgesian librarians, who are doomed to exist as stray souls in the midst of the endless and inconceivable configurations of truth and falsehood. Except for the librarian and his assistant, no one can enter this library, which is obviously and explicitly modelled after *The Library of Babel*:

No one should. No one can. The library defends itself, immeasurable as the truth it houses, deceitful as the falsehood it preserves. A spiritual labyrinth, it is also a terrestrial labyrinth. You might enter and you might not emerge (Eco 1964, 38).

Eco's reappropriation of Borgesian ideas (and, as I will later show, of the public image of Borges himself) is not merely a reflection or a postmodern appreciation (Parker 1990), but rather an elaboration on the labyrinth as foundational metaphor that informs the figuration of the uncanny library in the cultural imaginary. In order to make this point, it is necessary to expand upon Eco's notion of the labyrinth as not only a metaphor for semiosis, but as its very structure. This notion relies on three formulations of the labyrinth that Eco delineates in *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (1986) that are crucial to interpretations of the role of the labyrinth in *The Name of the Rose* (DeLauretis 1985; Sibley 2004). These formulations of the labyrinth do not only explain what makes the labyrinth in *The Name of the Rose* so particularly terrifying, but also that this terror is an effect of the destabilization or even transgression of boundaries within and beyond the library.

The first type of labyrinth that Eco distinguishes is what he calls the "classical" labyrinth, consisting of a winding, unicursal path towards the center.

The “solution” to such a labyrinth is simple and impossible to miss. One must only follow its path to arrive at its centre. For this reason, DeLauretis and Sibley do not consider this notion of the labyrinth to be applicable to the Aedificium. The second type of labyrinth, which Eco calls the “mannerist maze,” describes the Aedificium much better: comprised of intersecting pathways and dead-ends, this type of labyrinth demands decision-making at every corner – this way or that, left or right – without being able to see where each decision will lead. While this type of labyrinth is literally embodied by the abbey library, Rochelle Sibley rightly notes that that “the physical structure of the library is only one aspect of its labyrinthine nature.” She explains that:

The first mention of the library emphasises the intellectual knowledge that the librarians are required to learn in order to navigate it successfully, suggesting that the physical labyrinth is a concrete manifestation of the immaterial labyrinth of knowledge contained within the books that the library houses (Sibley 2004, 34).

This presents the third type of labyrinth, which Eco calls the “rhizome” or network, and to which he explicitly refers when he formulates his concept of the labyrinth of semiosis. The rhizome, rather than a two-dimensional map of intersecting paths which ultimately lead to a solution (the revelation of the secret), it is a network of multiple and intersecting connections between multiple points, in which every point is connected to every other point.⁴⁷ This network is “an unlimited territory [which] has neither a center nor an outside” (Eco 1986, 81). The figuration of the rhizome not only, as Sibley points out, drives home the fact that the library is not so much a storehouse for knowledge as the materialization of the complex interweaving of signs that produce it, it also connects it explicitly to Manuel Aguirre’s argument that the labyrinth functions in the Gothic “to destabilize assumptions as to the physical, ontological, or moral order of the cosmos” (Aguirre 2008, 6).

⁴⁷ Deleuze and Guattari (1987) develop the concept of the rhizome in *A Thousand Plateaus* as a map (and not a tracing) not amenable to any structural or generative model, in which any point in the rhizome can and must be connected to any other point. It is a figure of thought that opposes Bacon’s conceptualization of knowledge as branching out like a tree (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 3-28). However, Eco already developed an earlier critique of the arboreal model of knowledge, by suggesting that knowledge is instead a web-like structure, which he also calls a “rhizome”. Eco suggests that: “in a rhizome blindness is the only way of seeing, and thinking means to grope one’s way” (Eco 1989, 82).

The plot of Eco's novel hinges on the distinction between the mannerist maze and the rhizome of knowledge on the one hand, and the (ultimately false) belief that the library maze gives access to knowledge about the ontological order of the world on the other. In the very beginning of the narrative, William and Adso approach the abbey and encounter a group of monks. After they are greeted graciously, William thanks them for interrupting their search for the abbot's horse Brunellus, "the abbot's favorite horse, fifteen hands, the fastest in your stables, with a dark coat, a full tail, small round hoofs, but a very steady gait; small head, sharp ears, big eyes" (Eco 1984). William tells them that Brunellus is waiting for them by the dungheap. Both the monks and Adso are in awe, for neither have the monks told William the name of the horse, nor that they were looking for it. William and Adso haven't even seen the animal, so Adso enquires as to how William gained all this information:

My good Adso," my master said, "during our whole journey I have been teaching you to recognize the evidence through which the world speaks to us like a great book. Alanus de Insulis said that

'omnis mundi creatura

quasi liber et pictura

nobis est in speculum'

and he was thinking of the endless array of symbols with which God, through His creatures, speaks to us of the eternal life. But the universe is even more talkative than Alanus thought, and it speaks not only of the ultimate things (which it does always in an obscure fashion) but also of closer things, and then it speaks quite clearly. I am almost embarrassed to repeat to you what you should know. At the crossroads, on the still-fresh snow, a horse's hoofprints stood out very neatly, heading for the path to our left. Neatly spaced, those marks said that the hoof was small and round, and the gallop quite regular – and so I deduced the nature of the horse, and the fact that it was not running wildly like a crazed animal. At the point where the pines formed a natural roof, some twigs had been freshly broken off at a height of five feet. One of the blackberry bushes where the animal must have turned to take the path to his right, proudly switching his handsome tail, still held some long black horsehairs in its brambles. ... You will not say, finally, that you do not know that path leads to the dungheap, because as we passed the lower

curve we saw the spill of waste down the sheer cliff below the great east tower, staining the snow; and from the situation of the crossroads, the path could only lead in that direction."

"Yes," I said, "but what about the small head, the sharp ears, the big eyes ...?" "I am not sure he has those features, but no doubt the monks firmly believe he does. As Isidore of Seville said, the beauty of a horse requires 'that the head be small, siccum prope pelle ossibus adhaerente, short and pointed ears, big eyes, flaring nostrils, erect neck, thick mane and tail, round and solid hoofs.' If the horse whose passing I inferred had not really been the finest of the stables, stableboys would have been out chasing him, but instead, the cellarer in person had undertaken the search. And a monk who considers a horse excellent, whatever his natural forms, can only see him as the auctoritates have described him, especially if" – and here he smiled slyly in my direction – "the describer is a learned Benedictine."

"All right," I said, "but why Brunellus?"

"May the Holy Ghost sharpen your mind, son!" my master exclaimed. "What other name could he possibly have? Why, even the great Buridan, who is about to become rector in Paris, when he wants to use a horse in one of his logical examples, always calls it Brunellus" (Eco 1984, 23-24)

This exchange illustrates William's belief in the tree-like, vertical structure of logic at the onset of the plot - William is a firm believer in deductive reasoning. In this worldview, the library is indeed a perfect compendium of the world, and the world is ordered by a logic that can be navigated through deductive reasoning. There is no puzzle that is ultimately unsolvable, and the maze of knowledge can be navigated by taking a proper and logical trajectory, that will lead to the revelation of its secret. However, the ultimate solution to the murders at the abbey is not discovered through logical reasoning, but through a serendipitous stumbling along false pathways - a groping in the dark - that happens to accidentally lead the monk and his apprentice to the solution. Indeed, like the rhizome, the library does not offer any access to a "real" or ultimate truth, but offers multiple trajectories leading to different and often incompatible local knowledges. While the library cannot be simultaneously

ordered according to the plot of revelation, *and* as a representation of geographical locations, both maps lead William and Adso to new insights. Their blindness in the library is their way of seeing. The library thus ultimately destroys William's belief in deductive reasoning, and he loses his sense of self as a rational subject of knowledge.

Adso, in loving awe of his master, is desperate to sustain his belief in the brilliance of his master and the infallibility of his deductive skills. Having come of age, Adso is not willing to give up his belief in rational subjectivity before having been granted it himself. William, however, has conceded:

I have never doubted the truth of signs, Adso; they are the only things man has with which to orient himself in the world. What I did not understand was the relation among signs. I arrived at Jorge through an apocalyptic pattern that seemed to underlie all the crimes, and yet it was accidental. I arrived at Jorge seeking one criminal for all the crimes and we discovered that each crime was committed by a different person, or by no one. I arrived at Jorge pursuing the plan of a perverse and rational mind, and there was no plan, or, rather, Jorge himself was overcome by his own initial design and there began a sequence of causes, and concauses, and of causes contradicting one another, which proceeded on their own, creating relations that did not stem from any plan. Where is all my wisdom, then? I behaved, stubbornly, pursuing a semblance of order, when I should have known well that there is no order in the universe (Eco 1984, 492)

When Adso insists that they did, indeed, solve the mystery, William explains:

What you say is very fine, Adso, and I thank you. The order that our mind imagines is like a net, or like a ladder, built to attain something. But afterward you must throw the ladder away, because you discover that, even if it was useful, it was meaningless (Eco 1984, 492)

Ultimately, William is left to conclude that "the only truths that are useful are instruments to be thrown away" (Eco 1984, 492). As such, *The Name of the Rose* is about epistemology and ontology, as much as it is about semiotics. The library, which takes the material form of a maze, suggests an ontological

order of the universe that can be discovered through deductive reasoning. This was William's conception of the universe before he entered the Aedificium: a confusing and complex, but ultimately ordered and navigable maze, in which puzzles are challenging but ultimately lead to a singular solution – a universal truth. But throughout the plot, the library, as a trickster space, makes William see things differently. The universe in all its complexity is more like the Borgesian nightmare-library: you may serendipitously stumble upon something, and your tools of reasoning may even take you in the right direction. But in the end it is merely accidental, without origins, merely a web of interconnected yet often incompatible local and partial truths. The Aedificium thus destroys the Man of Reason of which William first appeared to be the perfect image.

As such, Sibley's interpretation of the labyrinth in *The Name of the Rose* as being about the problem of interpretation is convincing, but it does not allow for an understanding of why this labyrinth is so terrifying. In order to do this, Gothic theory offers a more sustainable framework. Manuel Aguirre argues, the Gothic space "exhibits different properties in different directions" (Aguirre 2008, 6). Rather than clearly delimiting what is inside and what is outside, by means of more or less traceable patterns of inclusion and exclusion, its space is "literally or metaphorically *larger inside than outside*" (Aguirre 2008, 6). This is certainly the case for Eco's Aedificium.

First of all, the library indeed appears to be larger inside than outside, as the old monk Alinardo reminds Adso: "The library is a great labyrinth, sign of the labyrinth of the world. You enter and you do not know if you will come out" (Eco 1984, 158). The library is thus not only in the world, its labyrinth also contains and maintains all of the dizzying connections that make up the meaningful world. In order to know it, you must enter it. But there is no question that you will get lost, and it remains to be seen if you will find an exit. Both a "spiritual" (i.e. supernatural) and a "terrestrial" (i.e. material) labyrinth, the library complicates the question of what came first: was there first a knowable world, the knowledge about which is collected in the library? Or is knowledge of the world dependent on the specific organization of interconnected signs within the labyrinth of semiosis? As Sibley suggests: "what the abbot's description really reveals is that the library is a multiple labyrinth existing in more than one dimension" (Sibley 2004, 34). Despite its

thick, impenetrable walls, its securely locked doors, and the complicated rituals that limit access to the library, it is as much a universe and a cosmos as Borges' Library of Babel.

Aguirre's framework for conceptualizing Gothic spaces proves useful in understanding how the Aedificium not only figures, but also performs the dissolution of boundaries. He considers the use of space in Gothic fiction to be a particular technique to elicit the Numinous (or supernatural):

it suspends the causal order; it defers the attainment of human purposes and renders action purposeless; it places individuals in the no-man's-land of an indefinitely suspended threshold, a phantom territory which intrudes between action and result, between cause and effect, thus keeping the fugitives in a permanent betwixt-and-between condition. [...] This environment is presented as terrifying because it does violence to the expected order of things, makes action seem futile and escape impossible, and seems associated with a vast inhuman power for obstruction and control (Aguirre 2008, 10).

The Aedificium is very much a liminal space in this sense: it is a space that is on the border between distinct spheres and discourses, such as the spheres of science and rationality, and that of religion and spirituality, the discourse of law, and that of art. These distinct spheres and discourses that attempt to order and make sense of the world are all materialized in the Aedificium, but none grants the final solution to its secret. Its secret, in the end, is nothing other than the realization that to enter the library is to enter the maddening interconnectedness of different strands of meaning. The secret is that there is nothing to reveal.⁴⁸

Eco's novel stages the labyrinth in which we become trapped whenever we try to make sense of the world or try to discover its order. At each stage of their investigations, William and Adso become more aware that the deaths of the monks are somehow connected to the library. But rather than being able to deduce the one connection that explains the events, they become stuck in a network of multiple connections that reaches far beyond the walls of the

⁴⁸ Here Eco's novel can be read as an elaboration on the critique of ideology of publicity that I have formulated in the previous chapter. Indeed, as Dean argues, without a secret there can be no disclosure (Dean 2001). The library is thus robbed of both its status as enclosure and as disclosure in Eco's novel. As such, Eco reveals the emptiness at the heart of the myth of the library as a space of reason and as a space of revelation.

library, and beyond the limits of reason. As Adso's initial description of the library in terms of divine shapes and numbers shows, it is easy to enter into the labyrinth of semiosis, by establishing an interpretive framework that consists of and includes a multiplicity of texts. However, to trace one's way back to empirical fact is much harder. Once entered, the labyrinth is inescapable. This is exemplified in the way William eventually solves the murders: while his initial interpretation of the clues and the connections between them was essentially flawed, it is this interpretation that spurred him to undertake the actions that eventually lead to the revelation of the real course of events. Indeed, the library is a "phantom territory which intrudes between action and result, between cause and effect" and violates "the expected order of things" (Aguirre 2008, 10).

As the Aedificium "exhibits different properties in different directions" (Aguirre 2008, 6), it gains a supernatural quality. From the outside, the library looks like a stable, even indestructible, and quite clearly delineated space: "an octagonal construction that from a distance seemed a tetragon" (Eco 1984, 21). Later on in the novel, the abbot describes it as: "An admirable fortress [...] whose proportions sum up the golden rule that governed the construction of the ark" (Eco 1984, 444). The supernatural is literally inscribed in these descriptions, insofar as they explicitly refer to the number three (in terms of the tetragonal shape of the library tower, and the three stories of the Aedificium) as the number of the Trinity, to which the abbot adds that: "the square shape also [...] is rich in spiritual lessons" (Eco 1984, 444). When the abbot enumerates the ways in which the square shape of the structure reflects the divine order, William plays along, by adding that three and four together represent even more godly virtues and divine truths:

"Oh, to be sure," William said, "and three plus four is seven, a superlatively mystical number, whereas three multiplied by four makes twelve, like the apostles, and twelve by twelve makes one hundred forty-four, which is the number of the elect."

And to this last display of mystical knowledge of the ideal world of numbers, the abbot had nothing further to add (Eco 1984, 444).

While this exchange is likely to elicit laughter rather than fear in the reader, it poignantly illustrates that the library may exhibit different properties in different directions. I have already shown that the library labyrinth appears

larger from the inside than it does from the outside, but the above citation also shows that it seems to draw into itself entire universes of knowledge and meaning, from mathematics to exegesis. However, the monks in the monastery are engaged in the daily business of producing this knowledge from the books that the library contains and orders for them. This is on the one hand a circular operation, insofar as the library seems to consistently reproduce the basic premises upon which it is founded – namely an order presented as the Order. But on the other hand, there is a certain opposite movement. The library, in its structure, materializes and solidifies metaphysical assumptions as to the foundations of truth and beauty. But simultaneously, the library-as-rhizome opens up to infinite tendrils of meaning, contained within infinite and minute networks of signification, which are in fact both immaterial and untraceable, and not in any way solid or stable.

As Sibley suggests, the passages that connect mathematical descriptions of the library to the biblical significance of numbers (and thereby transposes this significance onto the library) show “how simple it is to build a code of interpretation” (Sibley 2004, 32) that works, insofar that it seems to render the world intelligible. Such a reading reveals the internal paradox of the Aedificium: while on the one hand undermining the claim to the supernatural origins of the library’s logic (it is *merely* an interpretative code), it equally and simultaneously reinforces the notion that such codes are universal (nothing exists outside of these codes – they are a metaphysical precondition). As such, the library is not delineated but *liminal*: is a threshold, an in-between space where both of these incompatible realities are present equally and simultaneously, and from which they may operate in different directions in different ways and with different effects.

This latter quality of the Aedificium can be understood in terms of the Mandelbrot set; as a spatial metaphor for liminality (Aguirre 2008). The Mandelbrot set is a mathematical pattern that illustrates how the ragged edges of complex natural shapes (such as water, plants or fire), when scrutinized from extreme proximities, are labyrinthine in themselves. These thresholds, rather than being discrete lines or limits, actually show how the boundaries of such natural shapes contain wiggles and eddies that coil back in on themselves. They do not clearly delineate where the inside ends and the outside begins. Rather, they show that natural boundaries consist of ever more complex interlinkings

between inside and outside. This is not to say that inside and outside coincide, as in Borges' infernal library-universe. Rather, "[w]e can truly say that the Mandelbrot set is finite, and yet, from within we cannot reach its end; it is a labyrinth that delves 'down' instead of pushing outwards (Aguirre 2008, 13). The Aedificium is such a threshold – rather than a solid, delineated, or clearly demarcated structure, it is the raggedy edge between order and chaos, nature and culture, logic and desire. As such, Eco's figuration of the library performs the dissolution of the boundaries between these concepts.

But how does this explain why Eco's library-labyrinth manages to instill so much fear in its visitors, and such a palpable sense of the uncanny in the reader? The answer to this lies partially in the way that Eco manages to operationalize these complex of boundaries, this sense of getting lost in the rhizome, by engaging the Aedificium in a narrative technique whereby "physical or figurative space is endlessly fragmented and so seems both to repeat itself and to stall resolution" (Aguirre 2008, 13). If we look at the boundaries of the library, we see that they are fundamentally entangled with and within the rhizomes of meaning, such as the rhizome of faith, "which is shown to have indefinable connections to heresy" (Sibley 2004, 29), and the rhizome of knowledge, which is shown to be a product of chance connections and unconscious drives and desires more than of the systematic deployment of deductive reasoning. Each of these rhizomes shows how in this labyrinth (of which we are already a part, even when we stand outside of it) opposites do not exclude one another, but are rather intertwined with one another. The intricate connections at the thresholds of meaning are labyrinthine in themselves – getting lost is therefore inevitable. It is through this sense of getting lost *without knowing what you are looking for* that the Aedificium destabilizes identity and destroys the rational subject.

Borges' labyrinth of meaningless reproduction forecloses the construction of proper objects. Its librarians are doomed to haunt the Library of Babel indefinitely, without hope of ever discovering its center or its secret. Were they to stumble upon it, they wouldn't be able to recognize it without any references to an original or originary truth. Eco's medieval sleuth William does end up finding the object of his search, although it turns out to be something completely different than what he thought he had been looking for. Instead of a bloody murder weapon, William finds Aristotle's treatise on comedy – an

elusive tome that had long been considered lost (and is, in our reality, still lost). The book is simultaneously the object of desire of the monks who have died, and the weapon that killed them. Blind librarian Jorge of Burgos – clearly modelled after Borges, who himself was both blind and a librarian – understands like no other that this book and the pleasures it may awaken is potentially more disruptive than any of the grotesqueries or erotic manuals kept in the rest of the library. As Jorge explains during his final confrontation with William:

if one day someone can say (and be heard) ‘I laugh at the Incarnation,’ then we would have no weapons to combat that blasphemy, because it would summon the dark powers of corporal matter, those that are affirmed in the fart and the belch, and the fart and the belch would claim the right that is only of the spirit, to breathe where they list! (Eco 1984, 477).

The threat that pleasure poses is precisely that it defies order and rationality. The dark powers of corporal matter should therefore be understood in the broader sense of the term *jouissance*: the alternating rhythms of sublimation and abjection. Feminists, most notably Luce Irigaray (1977), have taken heed to the old monk’s warning and considered it a challenge to take pleasure to its most disruptive potential in order to counter the phallic order of patriarchy. In the next chapter I will elaborate further on how women’s pleasure is presented as a form of resistance against library discipline, but for here it suffices to explain why Eco’s monks constructed an entire library just to hide this one dangerous book.

Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* presents a puzzling and confounding refiguration of Borges’ *The Library of Babel*. If Borges’ *The Library of Babel* can be understood to stage a confrontation with the terrifying corollary of the fantasy of the total and universal library, Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* can be understood to instead stage a confrontation with the fantasy of a library that is a literal and perfect representation of the universe of knowledge. Full of intertextual references, Eco’s novel performs the labyrinthine qualities of the library it describes: as a border space that destabilizes, transgresses and ultimately destroys all normative taxonomies, the Aedificium ultimately destroys the

rational subject both as character ideal and as the imaginary locus of universal knowledge.

The librarian as monstrous reflection

"I'll try to terrify you first, and if that doesn't work, I'll horrify you, and if I can't make it there, I'll try to gross you out."
(Stephen King, *The Essential Stephen King*, 86)

Both Borges' and Eco's fictional libraries, as I have argued, point towards the inherent epistemological and ontological paradoxes posed by the fantasy of the universal library. In this section I will illustrate that the librarian can function within this paradoxical library-microcosm as a monstrous other - that is, as is the case with monsters: a distorted mirror image of the self. This kind of double is a staple of Gothic fiction: Jane Eyre encounters Bertha Mason, the protagonist in *Bluebeard* her dead predecessors, and William the maniacal Jorge. Through these encounters with the double, the incoherence and instability of identity is revealed. Mirrors and monstrous doubles in library narratives can thus be understood as further devices that foreground the uncanny way in which libraries destabilize identity and undermine rational subjectivity.

The librarian as monstrous other is perhaps most terrifyingly and grotesque figured in Eco's *The Name of the Rose*. The Aedificium is, in fact, full of monsters that at closer scrutiny turn out to be merely distorted reflections. The first time William and Adso enter (and get lost inside) the labyrinthine library, the young apprentice notices "a giant of threatening dimensions, a swaying and fluttering form" approaching him, which he assumes to be a devil. William soon comforts Adso, who is so terrified that he flings himself into William's arms - what Adso saw was his own reflection in a distorting mirror. William of Baskerville, the great lover of puzzles and trickery, is so amused at Adso's distress at a mere mirror image that he bursts out laughing: "Really ingenious. A mirror! [...] Yes, my bold warrior. A mirror that reflects your image, large and distorted" (Eco 1984: 172).

Apart from mirrors, the Aedificium has more tricks up its sleeve. When Adso, ashamed of the poor figure he cut in front of his revered master, offers to explore a few chambers on his own in order to find a way out of the labyrinth in which they have been walking in circles for some time, he stumbles upon a room with a small lamp and brightly colored book lying open: an illustrated

Mozarabic apocalypse. Lured in by the colors of the book, Adso suddenly finds himself surrounded by the beasts from the pages, while the library, like a Syren, seems to be luring him into herself, seducing him:

Suddenly I saw the dragon [from the page] multiply, and the scales of his hide become a kind of forest of glittering shards [...] I flung my head back and I saw the ceiling of the room bend and press down toward me, then I heard something like the hiss of a thousand serpents, but not frightening, almost seductive, and a woman appeared, bathed in light, and put her face to mine, breathing on me. I thrust her away with outstretched hands, and my hands seemed to touch the books in the case opposite, or to grow out of all proportion. I no longer realized where I was, where the earth was, and where was the sky. In the center of the room I saw [the monk] Berengar staring at me with a hateful smile, oozing lust. I covered my face with my hands and my hands seemed the claws of a toad, slimy and webbed (Eco 1984, 174-175).

Again, William is quick to offer a rational explanation for the terrifying experience. After having carried his apprentice out of the room where he quickly realized hallucinogenic herbs were being burnt, William makes fun of Adso's plight, ensuring him that what he had seen was partly what he had glimpsed in the book, and partly a chemically induced hallucination of his own fears and desires. William ensures Adso that the herbs and mirrors that scared him so much are only "cunning devices [...] knowledge used to conceal, rather than to enlighten" that guards the "forbidden knowledge" in the library (Eco 1984, 176).

At this point the medieval Sherlock still believes in the power of rational explanation to reveal the smoke-and-mirrors of the library – he considers them quirky devices employed by rational and purposeful minds in order to conceal the secret of the library that, once discovered, will prove that all such mysterious occurrences have a perfectly reasonable explanation. Eco has thus indeed mirrored William not on a medieval monk as much as on the 19th century hero of reason: Sherlock Holmes. It was the 19th century that marked the replacement of supernaturalism by rational understanding, when mechanical explanations replace supernaturalism in the explanation of strange delusions (Botting 2005, 8). Rather than being, as Adso feared, the work of

demons, William confidently shows the strange apparitions to be caused by (crude) technical illusions: a mirror here, a lens there, and a strategically placed candle together produce what appear as ghosts. Adso, however, is not comforted by the reasonable explanations of his master, and continues to fear finding himself in front of another mirror, “because the magic of mirrors is such that even when you know they are mirrors they still upset you” (Eco 1984, 239).

Indeed, Adso is far more aware than William of the uncanny capacity of mirrors to present “this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there” (Foucault 1986, 24). It is for this reason that Foucault considers the mirror to function as a heterotopia – and it would be useful once again to remember that Eco’s novel does not present the library as a utopia, but rather as a heterotopia. Indeed, Borges’ *The Library of Babel* also posits the library as a heterotopia: “a substitution of a substitution, a permutation of a permutation [that] may be characterized as carnivalesque, as *folle* (Derrida), as *monstreux* (Foucault)” (de Toro 1999, 148).

William will face his own experience of the monstrosity of the mirror when he encounters his own mirror image. Only then will he realize that the library is an uncanny, *unheimlich* place, and that those who enter it are irrevocably changed by it. In the case of William, he is not startled by his reflection in an actual mirror. Instead, he finds his mirror image in the blind librarian Jorge of Burgos. The confrontation coincides with their accidental stumbling upon the solution of the murder mystery: William and Adso have discovered that what the monks who died had in common was a book – Aristotle’s treatise on comedy – and they have discovered that Jorge, in order to keep the book and the knowledge in it hidden, did not only hide the book away in a far corner of the Aedificium, but also poisoned its pages so that whomever would read it would die. They find the old man with the book, first caressing its pages, then slowly eating them. When William tries to take the book from him, the monk escapes. As they chase Jorge, William implores Adso to hurry: “Otherwise the old man will eat up all of Aristotle!” Adso cries: “And die!” But William is more concerned with the fate of Aristotle than with that of the old monk: “I want the book!” (Eco 1984, 482).

After a chase they find Jorge and what is left of the book in a darkened room:

His face, in the reddish glow of the lamp, now seemed horrible to us: the features were distorted, a malignant sweat streaked his brow and cheeks, his eyes, usually deathly white, were bloodshot, from his mouth came scraps of parchment, and he looked like a ravening beast who had stuffed himself and could no longer swallow his food. Disfigured by anxiety, by the menace of poison flowing abundantly through his veins, by his desperate and diabolical determination, the venerable figure of the old man now seemed disgusting and grotesque. At other moments he might have inspired laughter, but we, too, were reduced to the condition of animals, of dogs stalking their quarry (Eco 1984, 483).

In this confrontation the librarian is revealed to be a monstrous mirror image of William. Even before they are confronted with the monstrous figure of Jorge, William has revealed himself to be a monster, more interested in saving a book than with saving an old, blind man. And the old blind man has become the monstrous reflection of this preoccupation with books. William's love of books is no longer a quaint, but ultimately affirmative passion - it is a monstrous and dehumanizing pathology. A few moments earlier, William had stared at his double with fascination as Jorge sat in the library consuming the book - it is in this moment as if he looks in a mirror to see his own deepest desire: to make the book part of him, to make it part of his flesh. It is at this interplay between fascination and abjection that Eco most cunningly mobilizes the Gothic as a space of *jouissance* that arises from the encounter with signs of the 'beyond' or 'outside' of signified meaning (Farnell 2009, 116).

As one of the undisputed masters of postmodern Gothic literature Angela Carter has suggested, in the Gothic: "characters and events are exaggerated beyond reality, to become symbols, ideas, passions" (Carter 1974, 122). The cunning sleuth with a passion for finding the truth is figured parallel to the monstrous librarian, obsessed with owning and embodying the truth. In fact, the Truth is the hollow void, the Real, the Thing desired by both William and Jorge that lies beyond signification and blurs normative taxonomies. Clearly present throughout Eco's text is a typical gesture of the Gothic: the simultaneously nostalgic and transgressive rewriting of past situations and

attitudes (van Elferen 2009, 123). William is a nostalgic figuration of the lure of positivism and the belief in an ultimately benign truth that may be discovered through systematic reasoning and intellectual honesty. But this figure is haunted by Jorge, the ghost of Borges, whose insanity exposes the primordial absence at the root of the desire to know: that the object of this desire is void, and that the Real cannot be accessed through knowledge practices, however elegantly executed or violently enforced. The library, as a liminal space or a threshold, stages the dueling doubles as mirror images, exposes them as two sides of the same medallion. The monstrosity is not the old, blind, drooling Jorge with his bloodshot eyes, but the fact that Jorge and William are one and the same: caught up in a frenzied desire to penetrate the real and claim the truth as their own, they form a two-headed beast. They are two fully intertwined images of masculinity: the Man of Reason reveals its abject counterpart, whose investment in maintaining the order of power and knowledge is a violent, destructive and masochistic perversion. This confrontation with Jorge stages a moment of horrifying introspection – William is forced to look at the monster that he is: a librarian.

Another monstrous librarian of note is to be found in Stephen King's 1990 novella *The Library Policeman*, which was first published as the third installment of a collection of four short stories entitled *Four Past Midnight*. King is of course known as one of the masters of 20th century horror, and this story is no exception. In a short introduction to the story, King explains that the story was born from his childhood fascination with libraries. While on the one hand having loved the library, which offered him access to books that his working class background did not permit him to purchase, King also remembers experiencing what social scientists call library anxiety:

I feared becoming lost in the stacks, I feared being forgotten in a dark corner of the reading room and ending up locked in for the night, I feared the old librarian with the blue hair and the cat's eye glasses and the almost lipless mouth who would pinch the back of your hands with her long, pale fingers and hiss 'Shhhhh!' if you forgot where you were and started to talk too loud" (King 1990, n.p.).

In the story about the Library Policeman, King develops his memories into a veritable monster of a librarian. But the story starts out benign enough,

with Sam, a self-employed insurance salesman who borrows some books from the Junction City public library to help him liven up his speech for Speaker's Night at the Rotarian's Hall. The utterly pedestrian, thoroughly bourgeois setting provides the perfect backdrop for a Gothic horror. The uncanny feeling that not all is right in Junction City begins when Sam first sets eyes on the library: "he hated the place on sight. [...] He didn't like it; it made him uneasy; he didn't know why" (King 1990, n.p.).

Sam's initial experience of the library is quintessentially *uncanny* or the *unheimlich*. Freud (1919) suggested that the *Heimlich*, or homely, is an ambiguous notion that refers simultaneously to that which is familiar, agreeable, safe and tame; and that which is concealed, hidden from sight, that which should not be seen (Freud 1919, 23). Through this double gesture, what is familiar becomes frightening. For Freud, the uncanny was fundamentally an effect of repression: within the familiar subject are concealed repressed, unconscious drives. And it is exactly this model against which King's story figures the uncanny library and the monstrous librarian.

The library is an oppressive space. As soon as Sam enters, he encounters numerous signs demanding "SILENCE!" and "RETURN ALL MAGAZINES TO THEIR PROPER PLACES!" At first glance, the elderly librarian Mrs. Ardelia Lortz, with her "pleasant unlined face in neat beauty-shop curls" does not appear much of an enforcer of the library's tyranny. But soon Sam realizes that underneath the librarian's unthreatening old-lady façade hides something uncanny: when she smiles "Sam didn't think her *eyes* were smiling; her eyes seemed to be watching him carefully, almost coldly" (King 1990, n.p.). Another suggestion of Mrs. Lortz' less-than-pleasant constitution Sam finds in the fact that the children's section, which he wandered into before he was found by the librarian, is decorated with decidedly grim and terrifying posters. But Sam is particularly struck, shocked even, by a poster on which a dark, looming figure of a policeman is depicted:

It showed a dismayed boy and girl, surely no older than eight, cringing back from a man in a trench coat and gray hat. The man looked at least eleven feet tall; his shadow fell on the upturned faces of the children. The brim of his 1940's-style fedora threw its own shadow, and the eyes of the man in the trench coat gleamed relentlessly from its black depths.

They looked like chips of ice as they studied the children, marking them with the grim gaze of Authority (King 1990:n.p.).

The poster, intended to remind children to return books on time, was captioned: "AVOID THE LIBRARY POLICE!" Mrs. Lortz and the library policeman are immediately identifiable as parallel figures of library authority. Both express superiority and power over the library user through their authoritative gazes, in what Radford and Radford have called the humiliation of the user (Radford and Radford 1999). Their Foucauldian analysis of the library as a domineering space, structured by the visibility and submission of the user against the invisible and dislocated power dynamics of the library space can go a ways into explaining the discomfort of Sam as he encounters these two figures of authority. When he expresses concern over children who might be traumatized by the posters, Ardelia Lortz informs him that children like frightening things, that the children have picked out the posters themselves. But whilst insisting that the posters are harmless, she does not fail to warn Sam to return his books on time, lest the library policeman come to look for him. As such, the poster, like the signs, function as disciplinary devices – after all, Foucault has argued that discipline works through embodied processes of internalizing spatialized power relations that translate discourse into behavior. The posters and signs remind the library user that he or she is being watched, even when the librarian is not at her desk. There is a reason why the stereotype of the female librarian presents her as quiet and soft-soled: she may be around any corner, ready to catch you when you smuggle a forbidden snack in between the stacks, or a forbidden kiss...

But the Junction City library hides a deeper secret, one that is far more uncanny and, indeed, horrific. Sam, of course, does not return his library books on time, and soon he is visited by the library policeman. When Sam returns to the library to refund the books he has lost, he finds an entirely different space: it is a lively space, bathed in light, with lowered ceilings. The Junction City library, it appears, has transformed over the course of a week into a modern library, with a friendly male librarian and a young, attractive assistant who has no records of the books Sam borrowed and who has never heard of Ardelia Lortz. Of course this library is equally uncanny as the old, looming, crypt-like library, as Sam knows that it must be hiding something. In a classical library-

quest, Sam searches for the elderly librarian he met to rid himself of the recurring visions and nightmares he has of the library policeman, only to discover the terrible truth through the story of the local village idiot and with the help of a reserved damsel who has previously spurned his advances.

The solution to the mystery is, in true King-style, as hysterical as it is horrific. Ardelia Lortz is a kind of succubus, imbued with a proboscis-like snout with which she feeds off of the energy of people. Although she has a ravenous sexual appetite, she does not feed off of the sexual energy of men, but instead off of fear. As the head librarian of Junction City in the 1950's, she terrorized children during story-time with her own horrific renditions of fairy tales and with her terrifying posters. When one of the children is sufficiently terrified, she gives them a "special hug" to drink their "special tears" - a process that is described as being an utterly abject sucking of a pinkish, meaty fluid from the children's eyes. Being able to shift shapes, Ardelia Lortz may appear as either an attractive young vixen or as an elderly bun-lady, but she may also take on the shape of the victim's worst fear or repressed trauma. As the town idiot tells Sam, everyone has their own library policeman, and in order to rid himself of his own library policeman, he must find out who he is.

Ardelia Lortz and the library policeman both signify the return of the repressed within the Junction City library. On the one hand there is the subdued woman, who below the surface teems with sexual desire and revels in the fear of others - her energy is chaotic and excessive, and the exact opposite of the seemingly strictly regulated and ordered library space. The library policeman, on the other hand, takes on the image of the victim's own repressed fears or traumas. Sam's library policeman has taken on the form of the man who raped him when he was a small boy, on his way to return a book to the Junction City library. Sam's library policeman is the man who lured him into the bushes by telling him he was a policeman, and that little Sam had to pay him a fine as a punishment for returning his book late. The reason why Sam's library policeman has no eyes is because his rapist had worn glasses on that day - Sam had never seen his eyes, and thus his library policeman has none. The library policeman is as much a reflection of the ghost from his past that haunts him, as Ardelia Lordz as a bespectacled librarian is a reflection of his own expectations with regards to female authority and the desexualization of female figures of authority. As such, the Library Policeman and Ardelia Lordz are

reflections of Sam's own sexism and agism on the one hand, and the repressed memory of his own emasculation on the other. They are indeed two sides to the patriarchal medallion on which Sam's unstable identity and subjectivity are inscribed.

The sequence of events in the plot is thus fully circular, whereby Sam must resolve a mystery in the present by revisiting a trauma from the past, the events of which are mostly identical to those that got him in trouble this time around: the returning late of a library book. The library space appears as a space where past and present coincide, and where Sam is forced to relive the horrors of his past. Indeed, when he encounters the librarian again, they are inside the library, and she is transforming into a monstrous and abject creature:

The creature was a fat, naked thing with arms and legs that appeared to end in joined claws. A sac of flesh hung below its neck like a deflated goiter. [...] It did not have face, exactly, but below the bulging eyes, a horn shape began to extrude itself, becoming first Chinese, and then insectile (King 1990, n.p.).

The image of the shape-shifting succubus-librarian is horrific, yet fascinating to Sam. As the creature's proboscis (a tube-like protrusion where its nose and mouth would have been) develops, Sam is mesmerized by the vitality of the thing, all of which is "invested in the horn of flesh, the conduit through which it would suck Sam's vitality and essence into itself" (King, 1990, n.p.). The most puzzling passage occurs when Sam drops to his knees to give the creature access to his face in order to suck out his tears, which feels like a brief and pleasant sting. Here, Sam's childhood experience becomes reflected and distorted, flipped around even. When as a child he was raped, the sensation was neither brief nor pleasant, and his rapist accused him afterwards of having liked it, of being a "very dirty boy." His encounter with the monstrous librarian is thus a kind of catharsis: in this instance, he enjoys the sensation, but nevertheless he yanks himself free and reclaims his childhood by killing his assailant with a ball of red licorice - a treat he used to enjoy before he was assaulted in the shadow of the library.

The monstrous librarians in both Eco and King serve as examples of the image of the librarian as being tied to the dangerous, yet cathartic, potential of the library. On the one hand, libraries are haunted by the past. They are

reminders that the repressed is always with us and within us. On the other hand, libraries offer possibilities to relive and rechannel those histories into something more productive. William of Baskerville ultimately comes to realize that the universe does not follow an order – the library burns down, so William can be free from its seductive yet dangerous lure. Sam, on the other hand, has to relive his repressed trauma, but through it, becomes liberated from it. After he has stuffed the succubus' snout with a ball of red licorice and has killed her in the process, all fines have been paid – not only the one he owed the library, but also the one he was owed. The image of the monstrous librarian is thus a complex image, one that is oversignified by and entrenched in the richness of the sign of the library as a haunted, labyrinthine space full of smoke and mirrors. The monstrous librarian in is in both instances similar to Adso's distorted mirror image and drug-induced visions, which externalize and sublimate repressed fears as well as desires.

But the endings of both narratives suggest very different approaches to the Gothic uncanny. Sam manages, in the end, to rid himself of the monster. He walks away with a woman on his arm and a promise of new, better beginnings. With his memories purged, Sam's monster is dead – no longer will he be haunted by the specters of the past. William of Baskerville, on the other hand, loses the library in a fire. We do not hear from him again, except through Adso's nostalgic memories, of which the narrative of *The Name of the Rose* is a representation. Adso's fond memories of a man who loved books will forever be haunted by the monster hidden behind the illusion of reason.

Robot librarians on the uncanny net

“You know what? This is the biggest library in the universe. So where is everyone?”
(Dr. Who, *Silence in the Library*)

In the previous sections I have outlined how the library appears in the collective imaginary as an uncanny labyrinth full of mirrors and monsters. The library space is uncanny in two ways: firstly, as a space of unbridled reproduction the library is figured as the monstrous feminine. Secondly, the labyrinthine library (or rhizome) is a liminal space of endless connections that resists and undermines taxonomies and as such destabilizes identity and destroys rational subjectivity. Considering these aspects of the library, it is not surprising that it is haunted. In library narratives, the library stages the return of the repressed. As I have shown, the repressed other sometimes figures as a monstrous double disguised as a librarian.

So far I have focused on three narratives that can productively be read through the lens of the Gothic. Eco and King operationalize the Gothic trope of the haunted castle in order to represent the horrors of the library. Borges' library is arguably still true to this trope in some sense, given that his library expresses what Aguirre calls the numinous quality of the Gothic space to appear larger on the inside than from the outside. Indeed, Borges' library in reality would be larger than the universe it represents - there is no outside. Given that the library is commonly imagined to be an uncanny space, marked more by the disruption and even destruction, rather than by the maintenance of order, this analysis of the library in the collective imaginary adds another layer to the understanding of “library anxiety.”

It is of course no accident that I have entitled this chapter “Gothic Engineerings”. The Gothic has historically been understood as a type of narrative machinery. Having originated in the age of Enlightenment, the Gothic operates through the interplay between the mechanical repetition of genre-specific formulas, and the excitement introduced by the explained supernatural (Botting 2005). Borges, Eco and King all cunningly operate narrative devices originating from the Gothic tradition. The uncanny library, both familiar and full of secrets, reflection and deflection, is a narrative trope that allows for the negotiation of collective fears and anxieties pertaining to the relationship

between past and present, order and chaos, and reason and desire. But as I have shown in the previous chapter, current technological developments - most notably that of the internet and the prevalence of digital technologies in daily life - are giving rise to new anxieties about the library. When it comes to libraries, this anxiety is marked by the simultaneous fascination with and belief in the new possibilities these technologies offer for the realization of the universal library on the one hand, and the fear that they may threaten the traditional institutions of knowledge on the other. In this section I want to illustrate how these new anxieties, in particular as they pertain to libraries, are articulated in popular culture. As I will show, the digital network as a type of virtual library appears within these narratives much like the traditional library does in the stories I have discussed above: as an uncanny labyrinth marked by the transgression of traditional taxonomies that threaten to substitute - rather than represent or preserve - lived reality. The uncanny digital library is haunted by technological monsters that warn against the threat to identity and subjectivity posed by these virtual library spaces.

The first example can be found in the Irwin Winkler's 1995 thriller *The Net*, starring Sandra Bullock as computer expert Angela Bennett, who becomes entangled in an international web of cybercrime when she accidentally discovers a computer virus capable of deregulating every information system imaginable, from the stock market to flight regulation programs. When the cyber-criminals who programmed the virus discover that Bennett has it in her possession, they do everything in their power to get it back. Considering that they can access any computer network with their virus, they first make sure that Bennett's copy of the virus is destroyed during her vacation in Mexico (apparently - the film suggests - in 1995, computer experts did not know better than to carry around important information on a floppy disk without first copying its contents onto multiple back-up devices). Then they erase Bennett herself. When she tries to get back home, she discovers that her picture and social security number are now digitally attached to a person by the name of Ruth Marx, who, as she later discovers, is also wanted for prostitution and drug related charges. Conveniently (for the criminals), Bennett is a computer geek who rarely leaves her house and only communicates online, through the net, to order food and chat with friends. Her only living link to the outside world who

could have identified her is her mother, but she has Alzheimer's disease and has not been able to recognize her own daughter for some years.

The story is contrived, yet it illustrates an interesting phase in the narrative imagination of the dangers of the internet. The internet is figured as an unreliable library that erases Bennet's social identity. Bennett's biggest problem is not that her name and identity have been erased, but that a new and dangerous one has been attached to her. This virtual identity, as she learns, is more powerful and authoritative than her knowledge of herself. When she tries to explain to an embassy worker that *these* are indeed her picture and her social security number, but *that* is not her name, the embassy worker, instead of looking at Bennett and confirming that the flesh-and-blood woman in front of her indeed exists and looks capable of confirming her own identity, looks at her computer print-out and tells her that *according to the computer she is Ruth Marx*. Although the film's effect is predicated on suspense rather than Gothic terror or horror, *The Net* figures the internet as an unreliable library alludes Borges' library of Babel: rather than being an accurate or corrigible representation of reality: the 'net does not give access to or reflect, but rather has supplanted reality. The film's uncanny corollary is succinctly articulated in the short scene from *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones*, which I have discussed before: "If it is not in our records, it does not exist." This archive-induced schizophrenia is exactly what Bennet has to fight throughout *The Net*: while she knows very well that she is Angela Bennett and that she does indeed very much exist, the records contradict her everywhere she goes. The digital record is shown to complicate and even challenge the notion of the real, and to hold a stronger claim to the truth than Bennett's physical presence within the "real" world.

The uncanny quality of *The Net* becomes slightly obscured by the action-driven plot, but reveals itself at the moment when Bennett discovers that the 'net, over which she thought she held the power of the almighty programmer, has turned against her and is erasing her existence. *The Net* is thus an early articulation of the anxiety attached to the mutability of the electronic record (Manoff 2000). Under the influence of postmodern insights the book, of course, can no longer be understood to verily *contain* the text, but it at least *appears* as a discrete, artifactual object and bears the traces of its own materiality and

historicity.⁴⁹ Electronic text, however, is highly mutable. Anyone who does online research will have experienced the frustrating and sudden disappearance of a reference. Indeed, *The Net* subtly evokes Orwell's *1984*, in which history is changed by tossing the old paper record in the flame and rewriting history anew, in convergence with the political climate of the moment. *The Net* thus shows the digital record as a highly efficient *forgetting machine*. But *The Net* points to another problem, namely the dependency of actual, social identity upon the electronic record. The mutability of the electronic record, Bennett discovers, renders the self an unstable entity within a virtualized world. Of course, Borges' and Eco's intricate, labyrinthine figurations of the library perform the destruction of the rational subject far more subtly. However, *The Net*, whilst being narratively far less complex and relatively unphilosophical as compared to *The Library of Babel* and *The name of the Rose*, highlights how new technologies, most notably the internet, gave new impetus to these anxieties towards the end of the 20th century.

A kind of nostalgic sentiment with regards to the library as a refuge from technoculture can be found in *Party Girl*, the romantic comedy/drama that I have discussed before. In fact, the film expresses a rather ambivalent stance with regards to the library as a space of both discipline and resistance. Head librarian Judy Lindendorffer yields her stamp with a heavy hand, and regularly mocks and humiliates users and trainee librarians who are not as apt at negotiating the complex and alienating labyrinth of the Dewey decimal system. When Mary (the party girl) takes a job as a library assistant out of financial necessity, Judy has no qualms with mocking her repeatedly. After Judy has discovered that Mary has miscoded Freud's *Dora*, she publically berates her:

I know it is not your life's work, but for your information: Freud's *Dora* is not a biography! It is the cornerstone of his psychoanalysis! That's PSYCHOLOGY, dear. The Psychology section is, for your information, in the 100s, along with Philosophy and Logic. It amazes me how you can come here every day and absorb no knowledge of the system. A trained monkey learned this system on PBS in a matter of hours! RECODE IT!

⁴⁹ I am referring here to Barthes' demarcation of the work vs. the text, which suggests that the physical embodiment of a work is not the work itself. On the other hand, I want to insist on N. Katherine Hayles' assertion that digital information is not without a body of its own – that both books and digital information are both material as well as discursive (Hayles 1999, 2002). *The Net* illustrates Hayles' critique of the material/discursive divide in an interesting way: her material being alone does not suffice to give her agency, for this she also needs to be part of the discursive formation of society, as a digitally documented citizen.

As Judy slams the book down, an audio loop replays Judy's mockery: "A TRAINED MONKEY! A TRAINED MONKEY!", accompanied by monkey sounds. The frame then shows the different retorts Mary mentally considers. We see only her face against a blackened background, signaling that these responses play out in Mary's imagination:

[robotic voice] "I may have made a mistake, but that is no reason to patronize me. It is dismaying that your expectations are based on the performance of a lesser primate, and also relevant to your managerial style, which is severely lacking."

[Mary's voice and face become more animated] "Is it any wonder then, that I have chosen not to learn the intricacies of an antiquated and idiotic system? [screaming] I THINK NOT!"

Mary's other mental retorts range from enraged and obscene to pathetic victimization. It is telling that Mary is so dismayed by the accusation of not having absorbed any knowledge of *the system*, which according to Judy places her below the level of a monkey. The altercation signals the problem of the Dewey Decimal System being a kind of labyrinth of knowledge that, in Mary's experience, bears no relevance on contemporary life in the 1990's. For Judy, knowing how to navigate the system is a kind of rite of passage into civilized personhood - Mary is not expected to know what is *in Freud's Dora*, but she is expected to know what it signifies, as well as the system by which his work is ordered and incorporated into the universe of knowledge. Within this universe of knowledge, Freud holds a foundational position as the father of psychoanalysis. But the fatherless Mary resists Freud's authority. The library where Mary works appears as a repressive space, marked by humiliation and dehumanization, and is structured by a system that bears no relevance on the global technoculture with which Mary is familiar. It is a storehouse of dead discourse to which she refuses to yield, and that she actively resists by introducing visual and auditive chaos into the library by having loud conversations with her friends and by dressing flamboyantly and seductively.

But as Mary's time working at the library progresses, she begins to enjoy the structure the library offers. She is a party girl, whose everyday life plays out in the underground club scene queered by techno music and dress-up games.

In contrast, the library is a quiet space where the world appears neatly ordered and every book can be expected to be in its proper place. In the library, Mary also for the first time gains some authority – she eventually appears to enjoy hushing patrons and deriding them for misplacing books. Even though she only learns the system to prove to her aunt that she is not a monkey, she eventually is very much trained. The question that haunts the film is whether Mary is enslaved by her chaotic, pleasure-driven lifestyle, from which the library offers solace; or whether she is a free spirit who slowly becomes enslaved by the library system. Throughout the film, which can be read as a coming of age story not entirely dissimilar to that of Adso who must first make it into and through the library before he can become a man, Mary begins to genuinely appreciate the complex but reliable order the Dewey Decimal System offers. She even goes so far as to reorganize her DJ-friend Leo’s record collection according to what she has come to think of as “The System.” When he fails to intuitively grasp the system she has forced upon his collection, she condescendingly explains the superiority of the Dewey Decimal System over his own organization. Leo, however, insists that she has ruined his life – echoing Rob’s desire for a more personal and biographical organization of his musical library. Radford and Radford (2003) argue that this moment marks Mary’s transformation into a stereotypically, order-obsessed librarian. They suggest that the stereotype is not operationalized in an evaluative or judgmental way, but is based in an old stereotype that has become culturally fixed and which naturalizes the idea of librarians as mean, obsessive, condescending, and uncommunicative hags (Radford & Radford 2003, 65). This stereotype is so prevalent that the library anxiety scale, a tool to measure library anxiety in students, considers the perception of librarians as intimidating as one of the dimensions – or sources - of library anxiety (Bostick 1992).

However, *Party Girl* paints a more complex image of the librarian than the one suggested by Radford and Radford. It indeed seems to simultaneously subvert the stereotype of the female librarian by representing it as a positive and empowering field for women to work in, while simultaneously engaging with the negative stereotype of the librarian as authoritative, dismissive and uncommunicative. But the film also, subtly, poses the library as a safe space that protects Mary from the undermining presence of technological cacophony. This subtext becomes visible when two dance sequences in the film are

juxtaposed. In the first dance sequence, which takes place in the beginning of the narrative, right after Mary has visited the library and has agreed to become a library assistant, she and DJ Leo visit a club. The environment is queer and the party breathes the type of ironic retro-atmosphere of the 1920's through a 1990's lens. At the party, Mary performs a very peculiar dance to a riotous house-beat: she pretends to be a robot emulating the human emotion of boredom. While her dance partner pretends to attempt to wake the robot from its slumber so that it may awaken as a 'real girl' by dancing seductively around her, Mary's body jerks and jolts to the beat into different simulations of boredom: the robot yawns, looks at its watch, raises one eyebrow. The party crowd is amused by the performance, but in the viewer it nevertheless evokes an eerie premonition that Mary – who is now only pretending to be a robot – may soon become a library drone. Rather than being a true automaton, a machine that mimics the subject and hollows it out by making its inner workings visible (Botting 2005, 18), Mary is a human mimicking the machine that she is about to become.

This dynamic is inverted in a later dance sequence, where Mary dances through the library as she files away books according to the Dewey Decimal System. In this dance sequence, Mary appears as a contemporary librarian rendition of Disney's Snow White as she sings and dances while performing the housekeeping tasks of the librarian. Rather than performing a robot that mimics boredom, she now performs an elated housewife – the boredom having seemed out of place in a place of fun, the overperformance of joy in what are essentially dull and drab domestic tasks seems similarly out of place and insincere. Mary's joyful library dance, when viewed from this perspective, appears as an uncannily robotic performance of domestic bliss. These two uncanny doubles together beg the question of which space is supposed to be the liberating one, and of what Mary is supposed to become liberated. If the library provides solace from the cacophonous chaos of the mediated consumer society, then it does so only if one pays the price of submission to the system, and submission to the system requires an ongoing and almost automated performance of belief in the system (Zizek 1994). There is no real stable, autonomous subjectivity to be found in either Mary: neither the bored dance-bot, nor the singing housekeeper is a fully realized being with believable or authentic affects.

If *Party Girl* is to be read as a narrative that aims to reappraise librarianship as a liberation from the cacophony of the contemporary mediated and fully technologized consumer society, then at least some attention should be paid to the uncanny presences of ambiguous doubles and grotesque exaggerations that complicate this opposition. While the film cannot in any way be considered a product of intentional Gothic engineering, the presence of uncanny doubling still haunts this supposedly subversive story of joyful librarians.

The third, and undeniably more complex and puzzling example of the uncanny virtual library that I want to discuss involves stretching the idea of librarianship to include those skills and capacities to discern order within a flow of digital information, and to locate bits of floating and mutable information within vast information networks. This example is to be found in one of the most haunting and haunted films about virtual reality: the Wachowski brothers' 1999 cyberpunk science-fiction film *The Matrix*. The story revolves around hacker Neo, who is offered a reality pill by a mysterious man who calls himself Morpheus. Curiously, yet apprehensively, he decides to take the reality pill, and finds himself waking up in "the desert of the real": what is left of Chicago after a global war. Machines have taken over the world and human beings serve as organic batteries, used to generate power for the machines now that the sky has been darkened by postapocalyptic clouds. Neo comes to learn that what he has always known as the "real", as material reality, is in fact a virtual reality generated by a megacomputer. The machines have learned that humans need (if only virtually) to live in a world of affects in order to generate the power the machines need, and thus they have created *The Matrix* as a solution. Now fully aware that the matrix (that is: material reality as we know it) is an illusion, Neo is able to manipulate the virtual environment and finally to beat the virtual entity that guards it.

There are two points of entrance relevant to my discussion of *The Matrix* in terms of uncanny virtual library labyrinths. Firstly, there is the matter of monstrosity, articulated in the film as the continuous crossing of the taxonomical division between human and machine. Throughout the film, Neo discovers that what seems real and alive (i.e. the world as we know it) is in fact only a virtual reality; a computer-generated illusion. When he awakens in the "real" world, he finds himself hooked up to a massive power plant through

numerous wires, one of which is connected to his brain and makes him experience the virtual reality of the matrix as real. Throughout the film Neo and his companions re-enter the matrix, by hooking themselves up to the technology that connects them. These images are unfalteringly abject, as they mark the transgression of the boundaries between nature and technology. Such transgressions serve to unleash anxieties that are usually hidden underneath the apparent safety of categorized truths (Van Elferen 2009, 124).

Secondly, the film is marked by the uncanny side of technology itself. *The Matrix* articulates and sets in motion what Fred Botting calls “Gothic Machinery”, which he understands as the Gothic’s capacity to reflect upon the uncanny side effects of technology (such as virtual reality) – particularly its capacity to encode, through its presentational apparatuses, emotional responses. Spectres, monsters and undead figures are the technical and subjective effects of new media, and the Gothic provides a way to reflect upon these effects (Botting 2005, 25). *The Matrix* is of course a phenomenal example of this – a virtual reality that appears more real than the desolate, postapocalyptic planet where Neo’s material body has been resting, suspended in an anti-aging fluid. And in fact, what happens in *The Matrix* is real, as it gives space and effectuates real feelings and emotions and produces sensations that allow the subject to develop and engage with the (virtual) world. As such, *The Matrix* transgresses the boundaries between the real and the virtual in a way that reflects the untenability of this division per se.

Drawing on Derrida’s notion of the archive as being both a “commandment” and a “house” – that is, both a law and a place (Derrida 1995) *The Matrix* can be read as an allegory of the archive. Often misunderstood as mere metaphor, Derrida quite literally insists that the archive comes before the memory. And indeed, in the Matrix this is not only metaphorically true, but also technologically mediated reality. It must be noted that Derrida never intended his notion of the archive to be a metaphor – for Derrida, the archive is what structures memory, and thus the present, and not the other way around. Neo’s Matrix is generated by the massive computer memory that generates reality, and as such this massive digital archive produces reality as it is lived within the Matrix.

What was true for Eco’s hero William of Baskerville is also true for Neo: the library (or Matrix) not only *represents* the labyrinth of the world, it *supplants*

it. You may enter and you may never come out. This is why Neo and his gang of outlaws engage in risky business when they re-enter the matrix in order to beat the system: if you die within the Matrix, your material body also dies outside of the Matrix. This is why they have an expert on board, specialized in locating remotely the points of access into and exit out of the Matrix. The figure of Tank, a friendly, quiet, African-American computer wizard is the film's rendition of a postapocalyptic librarian. Surrounded by sixteen screens, Tank watches lines and lines of code pass in front of his eyes, and is capable of deducing where Neo and any possible foes may be hiding within the virtual network. Tank has less in common with *Party Girl's* Judy Lindendorffer than with the located and caring librarians in De los Reyes pockets of hope: when he sees on the screen that Neo is wounded in virtual battle, he kneels besides his body in order to give him some water. Part reference librarian, part caregiver, Tank negotiates the uncanny, virtual reality of the Matrix and its devastating disembodied effects on subjectivity with a sustained and relatable humanity.

The digital library as a horrific substitution of reality that replaces human beings with automatons has an interesting prefiguration in an episode of the BBC serial *Dr. Who*. In the episode entitled "Silence in the Library", Dr. Who and his assistant Donna are transported to the biggest library in the universe, from whence all patrons mysteriously disappeared some years ago. They are tasked with solving this mystery. The library, as Dr. Who explains, is "literally a world": the core of the planet is one big index computer, "the biggest hard drive ever", while on its surface the library-planet is said to hold every book ever written. The Borgesian and Alexandrian echoes are loud and clear.

When they first enter the library, they meet an automated librarian whose animated, fleshy, human face is stuck onto a metal pillar. The Node tells them: "I am Courtesy Node 710/aqua. Please enjoy the Library and respect the personal access codes of all your fellow readers regardless of species or hygiene taboo." As Donna remarks, distraught: "It's a statue with a real human face on it!" The hilarity of the sequence is of course that the mechanical Node is an absurd yet immediately recognizable reformulation of the librarian stereotype: an automated servant who drones on about the rules while trying to give an unconvincing performance of serviceability.

The library in *Dr. Who* has many similarities with both Borges' library of Babel – it is an exhaustive, all-inclusive, universal library that has overtaken all spaces of everyday life – and that of Eco – it is a trickster space that leads out heroes in wrong directions, driving them to get lost within its labyrinthine structure. When *Dr. Who* discovers that there are Vashta Nerada in the library, he and Donna assume that it is the cause of the disappearance of all the patrons. The Vashta Nerada, as *Dr. Who* explains, is “what’s always in the dark.” Of course, avoiding the Vashta Nerada is an almost impossible task, for what are libraries if not characterized by dark corridors and ever-expanding shadows? When Donna takes a wrong turn while trying to avoid the shadows, *Dr. Who* finally discovers the real cause of the disappearance of the library patrons: as he enters the gallery where Donna was last seen, he finds in her place a Node with her face on it that keeps repeating: “Donna Noble has left the Library. Donna Noble has been saved.” What has happened to the library patrons has nothing to do with the Vashta Nerada. Instead, the patrons have been “saved” into the library’s index computer, and their material existence has been erased. It seems that the library, much like Nicholson Baker feared will happen to all libraries, ran out of space, and instead decided to weed its material collection by saving its records in a digital form.

The *Dr. Who* episode is a hilarious and yet unsettling reformulation of the digital library as a Gothic, liminal, numinal, labyrinthine, and deadly space, that has the capacity to turn people into automated drones and reduce life to a digital record.

Lost in the labyrinth of meaning

In this chapter I have investigated the figuration of the library in the western imaginary through the dual lens of Gothic theory and feminist theory. Taking Borges' *The Library of Babel* and Eco's *The Name of the Rose* as two exemplary narratives, in which the library appears as a boundless space of the unbridled generation of text that performs the labyrinth of semiotics and the rhizome of knowledge. As I have shown, the library in the western imaginary is often figured as an uncanny space, haunted by the specters of the past, of the excluded, and of the repressed.

It would serve here to remember that in the first chapter I suggested that the legacy of Alexandria is a retrospective utopia, in which knowledge is imagined as stable and universal, and which gives access to and produces rational subjects as citizens. It should be clear that this utopian vision of the library becomes unsettled when confronted with the figuration of the library as an uncanny, heterotopic trickster space. Indeed, we could say that the labyrinthine library is a distorted mirror image of the utopia of the universal library. Whereas the utopia of the universal library is a kind of myth that naturalizes the ideology of universal reason, the Gothic library seems to reveal that the library is fundamentally a space that hides. As I have shown, what the library hides is not the secret, or any kind of powerful knowledge that will give access to the truth – what the library hides is the fact that it is empty, that the object of universal knowledge does not exist. As such, the Gothic library destabilizes and calls into question the subject of reason.

In the following chapter I will investigate whether the figuration of the library does, in fact, give space to new or different kinds of subjectivity to emerge. For if the rational subject can not be sustained in its confrontation with the labyrinth of meaning, what remains in its place? This is where the dynamics of discipline, control and resistance come into play. As I will show, the library does offer possibilities for resistance, but not by providing access to knowledge or revealing the secret of subjectivity. As such, there is no librarian, stereotypical or other, who can guide the library user towards her destiny. A different figuration of librarianship is needed in order to help us navigate the

labyrinth. At the end of the next chapter I will try to sketch out what she may look like.

4. Books and Bodies:

Death, pleasure and fire

In the previous two chapters I have established that the library is figured in the western imaginary as a myth of universal reason, and simultaneously as its nightmarish counterpart. In this chapter, I want to connect these two aspects of the imaginary library through a consideration of how the library is figured in relation to bodies and books.

As I will argue, the presence of bodies in the library is by definition problematic as long as the library is figured as a space of universal reason. As feminist critiques of reason have stressed, its very conceptualization is prefigured on the discursive erasure of the body as a site of knowledge production. Library narratives, as I will argue, formulate both the dangers of and sites of resistance to this erasure.

I will show three types of library narratives that engage this problem. Firstly, I will analyze narratives of the pathological dimension of an over-investment in the illusion of disembodied reason and the library as the space of its culmination. Both Elias Canetti and Umberto Eco have represented this pathology as a destructive force that destroys both the subject of knowledge and the library space. Popular culture, as I will illustrate, on the other hand imagines women's pleasure to be a site of resistance to the totalizing gesture of the library and its tendency to erase the body from its space. I will introduce three scenes from popular cinema that show women engaging with the materiality of the paper record, with sexual discourse in a resisting way, and with the space of the library as not only a space of reason, but also a space of intimate connections. The third type of narrative of resistance forms what I will call a poetics of destruction, in which library destruction is presented as a positive and liberating event.

I will pay particular attention to how these narratives can be reread in the context of the digital age, when the library is being reimagined as a digital record, the materiality of the book is gaining new interest, and from which emerge a new politics of resistance against the informatics of control in which

the digital record is involved. I locate in this last section a space for new figurations of librarianship that offer the most radical alternatives to the stereotype of the female librarian.

Docile bodies: Library discipline

Q. How many librarians does it take to screw in a light bulb?

A. Look it up, I'm busy.

(Eric Graeber – *Magic & Madness in the Library*, 1999)

The stereotype of the female librarian has been extensively critiqued by librarians, who consider it to be a stark misrepresentation of their profession. These critiques necessarily engage with the question of gender, female sexuality, and women's labor, since the stereotype is so thoroughly gendered – indeed, contemporary culture does not offer a parallel stereotype of the male librarian. The stereotype of the female librarian presents her as a middle-aged lady, with glasses and modest clothing, her hair in a bun, preoccupied only with stamping out books and shushing loud patrons. This humorless “shushing librarian” is commonly understood to have emerged alongside the feminization of the library profession (Mason Church 2002), and to be prevalent throughout different media, such as film (King 1990; Firebaugh 1996), literature (McDonough 1998), comic books and graphic novels (Highsmith 2002) and children's literature (Yontz 2002). Most of these studies engage with the (historically and culturally specific) North American institution of the public library. However, Austrian librarian and researcher Monika Bargmann (2005) conducted a similar study on the representation of librarians – paying particular attention to the representation of librarians in science fiction and fantasy. All these studies aim to show that the stereotype of the female librarian is widely recognized and surprisingly consistent.

While these studies are informative and insightful, most fall prey to the same challenge – they lack an adequate theorization of how gender and power are symbolically intertwined within the representational framework of library narratives, and how the stereotype of the female librarian is connected to the imaginary and symbolic aspects of western culture. This is not to say that productive attempts have not been made. Radford and Radford (1997) engage a Foucauldian framework. They locate the stereotype of the female librarian within the dynamics of power, knowledge and fear that characterize the library space, by suggesting that the stereotype both reflects and neutralizes the dangers of discourse. She reflects its dangers by functioning as a figure of

authority whose personality and selfhood is usurped by the order of the library. As such, the librarian is imagined as the embodiment of power/knowledge as ordering practice. On the other hand, the stereotype helps to manage, diffuse and disguise the library user's fear: as cultural other (she is elderly, female, and subordinated) the figure of the librarian absorbs within herself the threat of discourse overtaking and usurping the self. Radford and Radford thus suggest that the stereotype of the female librarian - the figure of a serviceable woman who manages the order of the library through visible and concrete practices, such as stamping, shelving and shushing - is a cultural expression of the paradoxical need to believe in and identify with the order of the library as a natural order (the proper order of things) on the one hand, and the necessary awareness that this order is a construction (which we can resist) on the other. As the Radfords suggest, the stereotype speaks to us in the words of Foucault:

We're here to show you that discourse is within the established order of things, that we've waited a long time for its arrival, that a place has been set aside for it - a place which both honors and disarms it; and if it should happen to have a certain power, then it is we, and we alone, who give it that power (Foucault 1972; in Radford and Radford 1997, 261).

The Radfords thus conclude "the form and the voice of the female librarian is a function of a system of power and rationality that is not of her own making" (Radford and Radford 1997, 263). As such, their contribution to the critique of the stereotype of the female librarian lends it a certain depth and scope that cannot be appreciated by merely contrasting the stereotype to the lived experiences of librarians, or by tying it to the historical development of librarianship as a feminized profession. While it is certainly useful to remember that traditionally feminized professions have tended to suffer from a lack of status (Prins & De Gier 1995, 22), the stereotype of the female librarian cannot simply be reduced to this truism. Instead, it should be considered in the cultural context of the way the library itself is imagined in relation to the power/knowledge nexus. As I have argued in the second chapter, the western imaginary of the library is dominated by the ideal of universal knowledge, predicated on reason, which in turn produces rational subjects. Since the domain of reason and the public sphere where rationality could be turned into political agency have traditionally excluded women, the stereotype of the

female librarian is a complex configuration of power, knowledge and gender. In this section I want to explore this complexity from the perspective of feminist theories of the body and the traditional exclusion of the body from the domain of reason.

Adi Ophir suggests that the library should not be viewed as a space that happens to contain books. Instead he suggests that the library is a “space of knowledge” in which social space loses its grip: “the former did not contain the latter, any more than a book contains within its volume the space of its fiction, or an observatory, the sky observed in it” (Ophir 1991, 164). As the Radfords suggest:

Libraries are segregated places of intellectual activity, in which discursive subjects are constituted, objects are posited, and both are reproduced according to the logic and power relations of a specialized discourse, not according to the logic of the social relations in whose context that discourse took place (Radford and Radford 1997, 255).

This specialized discourse, in the case of the modern library, is that of reason and positivist science. Whereas feminist critics of reason such as Lloyd (1993, 2000), Harding (1987), Fox Keller (1984) and Haraway (1988) have forcefully argued that the discourse of reason is itself gendered or connoted as masculine, the Radfords do not analyze the gendered power relations of the library from this perspective. Instead, they argue that the stereotype of the female librarian manages the fear of discourse by presenting a socially marginalized (and presumably powerless) elderly woman as its enforcer. When the librarian reminds us that “discourse is within its established order” (Radford and Radford 1997, 261), she may do so only because she herself takes up her proper place within that discourse. The library is thus not only a space of knowledge, but also a disciplinary space: it orders bodies as much as it orders books.

It seems as if the Librarian Avengers take a similar perspective on the stereotype of the female librarian to that of the Radfords. In “Why You Should Worship a Librarian” they attempt to set the record straight:

Many people think of librarians as diminutive civil servants, scuttling about “Sssh-ing” people and stamping things. Well, think again buster. [...] Librarians wield unfathomable power. With a flip of the wrist they can hide your dissertation behind piles of old Field and Stream

magazines. They can find data for your term paper that you never knew existed. They may even point you toward new and appropriate subject headings.

[...] Librarians are all-knowing and all-seeing. They bring order to chaos. They bring wisdom and culture to the masses. They preserve every aspect of human knowledge. Librarians rule. And they will kick the crap out of anyone who says otherwise (The Librarian Avengers, 1997)⁵⁰

The Librarian Avengers' manifesto is an intervention in the image of the female librarian as mousy, elderly and serviceable. The author insists on the high level of education and familiarity with new technologies required of librarians, and presents them as powerful. But simultaneously, the manifesto reinforces the ideal of universal knowledge and the power it wields – as I will argue in this chapter, there are several aspects of human knowledge that do not yield to library power. I will also show that the sustained belief in the “unfathomable power” of libraries can present a danger in itself. Moreover, while traditional libraries may be understood as disciplinary spaces, the power dynamics of the library seem to have changed in the digital era.

Additionally, Kornelia Tancheva criticizes the Radfords for not taking into account the question of representation itself. She argues that the stereotype of the female librarian is far less stable than is often suggested, and instead should be viewed through a Peircean lens. She understands the stereotype of the female librarian as part of a chain of infinite semiosis, in which meaning is never fixed (Tancheva 2005, 532-533). Tancheva identifies a tension between the Radfords' shifting deployment of a Foucauldian analysis with their suggestion that the meaning of the stereotype of the female librarian has been historically stable and fixed. Indeed, in a later article Radford and Radford offer a more cultural studies-oriented approach in which they deploy Hall's notion of the struggle over meaning, which acknowledges that the stereotype of the female librarian indeed performs different cultural functions in different eras (Radford and Radford 2003). Tancheva attempts to offer a synthesis of these perspectives by shifting focus from the stereotype of the female librarian to the sign of the library *itself* as fluid, unstable, and open for interpretation. While Tancheva's

⁵⁰ The manifesto “Why You Should Worship a Librarian” can be found on the Librarian Avengers weblog: <http://librarianavengers.org/worship-2/> (last visited 3 March 2013)

analysis is compelling, her focus on the sign of the library space as fluid casts aside altogether questions concerning the discursively produced dynamics of gender and power. The cinematic libraries she investigates (in *The Name of the Rose*, *Wings of Desire*, and *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones*) indeed feature librarians of various genders, but as my analysis in the previous chapters has illustrated, the gendered dynamics of power and knowledge cannot so easily be dismissed. Moreover, Tancheva depoliticizes meaning in a way that makes it a priori impossible to negotiate the stereotype of the female librarian in a feminist way. While Tancheva and the Radfords both offer compelling readings of the symbolic role of libraries and librarians, neither convincingly manages to negotiate the complex entanglements of these two figurations with the gendered dynamics of power and knowledge. This may in part be due to the fact that neither engages with the way in which libraries function as disciplinary spaces where the (gendered) body is subjugated and controlled.

I want to correct these oversights by suggesting that the modernist conception of knowledge in terms of disembodied universal reason is performed by the figuration of the library as a disciplinary space aimed at producing docile bodies.

Foucault's concept of discourse as operated and materialized through the production of docile bodies makes it possible to investigate how the figuration of the library - imagined as a space where knowledge is manifested as unfathomable power - informs, produces and activates the stereotype of the female librarian on the one hand, and becomes a site of resistance on the other hand. Heralded by Stuart Hall (1994) as one of the great advances in social theory that have served to decenter the Cartesian subject that stands at the basis of the ideal of the Man of Reason, Foucault's analysis of modern subjectivity as the product of historically and situationally specific operations of disciplinary power is echoed to great effect in library narratives. Foucault conceived of the relationship between power, discipline and the body that produces subjects as twofold. Firstly, he conceived of this relationship in terms of the regulation of life processes such as birth, death, sexual relations, health and sickness as a way in which modern nation-states came to control the masses (Foucault 1978). These processes can be directly linked to the archive, since, as Foucault argued, this type of control operates in part through permanent and detailed documentation (Laermans and Gielen 2007, n.p.). Foucault has argued that

what is archived in total institutions such as schools, prisons and hospitals “is no longer a monument for future memory but a document for possible use” (Foucault 1977, 191). As such, Foucault connects the archive to power in a way not entirely similar to, but certainly comparable with Derrida’s concept of the archive: as the primary locus of political power, and as a technology of power. In Foucault, however, this conception of the archive is closely linked to what he calls disciplinary power, which turns the body into an object to be trained and controlled. Foucault analyzed the prison to be one such institution in which disciplinary power is produced through panopticism. This panoptic power is produced by a directionality of vision, by which the observed conform to the expectations of the observer, whose perspective the subjects have internalized – the modern subject is thus both subject of and subjected to the panoptic gaze (Foucault 1977). Orwell’s *1984* (1949) offers an extreme version of this set-up, by showing a world in which citizens are surrounded by devices that remind them that they may constantly be observed. Big Brother has become a powerful metaphor for the way panoptic power produces docile bodies, and although it was written well before Foucault wrote *Discipline and Punish*, it illustrates how the panoptic gaze, once it is internalized by the subject, can seemingly control the masses from “nowhere”, and that this is a particularly effective disciplinary technology. As Foucault argues, “what was being formed was a policy of coercions that act on the body, a calculated manipulation of [...] its gestures [and] its behavior. [...] Thus, discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, “docile” bodies” (Foucault 1977, 138-139). As Rosi Braidotti has suggested, the (docile) body is thus “one of the terms in a process in which knowledge and power are the main poles” (Braidotti 1994, 58).

This notion of docile bodies as produced by technologies of the self, entangled with disciplinary power, forms the first of my three-point entry into the question how the relationship between the (gendered) body and the (material) book informs the stereotype of the female librarian as a dowdy old bookworm. As I have argued, the figuration of the library presents an illusion of a natural order. Although the order that the library presents is unstable and fragile, the ideal of the universal library expresses a sustained belief in its propriety. Library utopias (whether the retrospective utopia of Alexandria or the 19th century utopias of advanced civil society) express the hope that a universal library will eventually fulfill the dream of collecting and ordering all

of human knowledge in one place. On the other hand, the western imaginary is haunted by the chaotic specters of disorder that are present within the library as a constant reminder that this order is an illusion. In order to maintain the illusion of order, it has to be continually enacted through ordering practices.

The problem, of course, is that the library user forms a constant material threat to the order of the library. The user's need to browse the stacks and to remove books from their proper places conflicts with the librarian's task of maintaining the meticulously constructed and fragile order of the library. In the film *Party Girl*, Mary's transformation from socialite into a "real" librarian is thus signaled in a scene in which she berates a patron for misfiling a book. As she sits at the center of the library's reading room, she observes a patron flipping through, then casually replacing a book, and confronts him:

Excuse me. What are you doing? Yeah, you. Were you just putting that book away? It looked like you were just putting that book away. I guess you didn't know we have a *system* for putting things away. You know, I'm curious - it looked like you were just *randomly* putting that book on a shelf? Was that it? [her voice grows louder] You've just given us a great idea! Why are we wasting our time on the Dewey Decimal System when your system is so much easier! Much easier! [her voice grows even louder] We'll just put the books ANYWHERE! Here that everybody? Our friend here has given us a GREAT idea! [she is screaming now] We'll just put the books any damn place we want! We don't care? Right? Isn't that right? (*Party Girl*, 1995)

When her colleague leads her out of the reading room, she says: "I just want to do a good job, Howard." The plot of *Party Girl* thus presents Mary's struggle to become a *good* librarian: she is not only tasked with managing the classification system, but also with ensuring that patrons are reminded of their proper place within the library order. She has to embody the panoptic gaze. The latter involves what Radford and Radford have called "the humiliation of the user" (Radford and Radford 1997, 251) that ensures that users are constantly being reminded of the fact that in order to become a subject, one has to be subjected.

King's *The Library Policeman* (1990) sublimates the idea of the library as a space of humiliation. Feelings of guilt and shame over returning a library book

late drive the young Sam to follow a man who calls himself the Library Policeman into a hidden area, where he is raped. Sam's subjection to the order of the library thus makes him a victim of violence. As an adult, he projects this repressed memory onto Ardelia Lortz, the monstrous librarian who is described as being able to "see things" and as having "eyes everywhere." The bespectacled librarian thus gains much of her power from the panoptic gaze, which she is imagined as an embodiment of.

The question that remains is why the stereotypical librarian is a *woman*. Radford and Radford (1997) suggest that the answer is to be found in the fact that the librarian's femininity takes the edge off the fear of the power of discourse: "beneath the stern exterior, there is nothing to fear: there is *only* a woman" (Radford and Radford 1997, 261, italics mine). While their argument is compelling, and the Radfords seem to have been the only researchers who have aimed to analyze how the stereotype of the female librarian and the cultural work it does are connected to discourse and power, Radford and Radford fail to give a convincing account of the gendered dynamics of power – they simply assume it as fact. Their argument remains at the institutional level, for instance when they offer Ivy's analysis of feminized professions as being male dominated in organizational control to argue why the stereotypical librarian is not a straight-forward figure of forceful power (Ivy 1985, cited in Radford & Radford 1997, 262). It is therefore no surprise that the Radfords are left with the question of how the image of subservience and powerlessness that the image of the female librarian affords women can be challenged or changed. Indeed, feminist critics of Foucault have suggested that his theory of disciplinary power reduces individuals to 'docile bodies', foreclosing a priori the possibility of a libratory, feminist subject who actively resists power (Hartsock 1990).

Countering the stereotype of the female librarian becomes complicated when she is read in this way: the stereotype is not merely a misrepresentation of librarianship, nor an effect of the devaluation of feminized professions. Instead, she is a figuration of the panoptic dynamics of the library. The library user, both subject of and subjected to the order of things that the library establishes, must internalize the disciplinary gaze of the librarian. The stereotype of the female librarian presents these two aspects of the library as the two extreme ends of the pole of subjectivity: on the one hand she is presented as yield[ing] unfathomable power, awarded by the capacity of discourse to

produce subjects. On the other hand, she is utterly subjected to that power, reduced to performing the domestic task of keeping things in their place. She is not only a reminder of “discourse [being] within the established order of things” (Foucault 1972, cited in Radford and Radford 1997, 261), but also of the bodily practices involved in keeping it there. On the other hand, the quiet, shushing librarian is a non-presence – it is her invisibility that maintains the illusion that the order of things is a natural order.

As I have argued, the illusion of library order is predicated on the sustained belief in universal reason. Feminist critiques of reason thus further problematize the idea that the stereotype of the female librarian can be reduced to a misrepresentation or an effect of the historical devaluation of women’s work. As De Beauvoir already recognized in 1949, women’s life, work and experiences have traditionally been relegated to the realm of the specific site of the biological body as the antithesis to man’s capacity towards transcendental reason (De Beauvoir 1949). De Beauvoir’s argument formed a starting point for feminist critiques of reason, which have been developed from a multitude of perspectives that aimed to challenge and deconstruct the connotation of reason with masculinity. Some have concluded that “the” feminist critique of reason does not exist, since it does not form an internally or argumentatively coherent body of work (Nagl-Docekal 1999). Feminist critiques of reason that have theorized the body as an excluded site of knowledge and experience are of particular interest to understanding the stereotype of the female librarian as a figuration of the docile body.

Elizabeth Grosz’ analysis of the *Crisis of Reason* (1993) is of particular interest here. The western academic tradition, as Grosz has argued, has been predicated on the notions of objectivity and universalism, two categories of knowing that on the one hand fundamentally rely on the disavowal of the particularity the (gendered) body, while on the other hand relying on it as the site of experience from whence knowledge is produced. This paradox, Grosz argues, lies at the basis of what is commonly known as the crisis of reason, which:

is a consequence of the historical privileging of the purely conceptual or mental over the corporeal; that is, it is a consequence of the inability of Western knowledges to conceive their own processes of (material)

production, processes that simultaneously rely on and disavow the role of the body (Grosz 1993, 187).

As Grosz argues, the discourse of rational objectivity has historically privileged the mind over the body, and as such has served to turn the Cartesian body/mind dualism into the leading paradigm of western knowledge production. The crisis of reason that Grosz describes is caused by the inability of western science to adequately theorize the role of the body in the production of knowledge. The body has become a hidden domain, its role written out of the history of science. Indeed, what Grosz' analysis suggests is that disembodied, universal reason is a discourse that marginalizes the body, and hides the bodily experiences and practices that maintain the illusion of universal reason. Her argument is relevant to feminism in the sense that Grosz strives to reaffirm the role of the body in knowledge production, thereby including those domains that have been traditionally connoted as feminine.

This disavowal of the body as a site of knowledge can be recognized in the stereotype of the "shushing librarian". The shushing librarian, frozen in the quiet gesture of raising her finger to her lips when library users break the silence of the library space is one of the staple stereotypes of western popular culture. *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), *Ghostbusters* (1984) and *Star Trek: Insurrection* (1998), among many others, all show a quiet librarian who protects the space of reason from the loud and chaotic interventions of the bodies of the users. She not only models the disciplinarian gaze, but also the expectation that the body is to be left behind when the library is entered. The stereotypical librarian thus functions as an exemplar of how the body has to be disciplined and controlled – even erased – to maintain the illusion of the library as a space of reason.

While Borges' *The Library of Babel* and Eco's *The Name of the Rose* do not figure shushing librarians, they both figure libraries as sites where the mind takes precedence over the body, and from whence the body is excluded or erased. The Library of Babel consists of hexagonal galleries connected by narrow hallways, to the right and left of which there are two very small closets: "In the first, one may sleep standing up; in the other, satisfy one's fecal necessities" (Borges 1962, 75). Bodies are thus confined to claustrophobia-inducing spaces that hide and confine bodily functions such as sleep and defecation. Any other bodily engagements with the universe of the library are

not given any space. In the Library there is no space for the intimate encounters of bodies with books, or for bodies with bodies. The narrator does not mention any bodily encounters at all, and this omission is perhaps what makes the Library of Babel seem so eerily sterile.

Eco's novel, on the other hand, is rife with references to the body and the flesh. There is a curious tension in *The name of the Rose* between scientific discourses that present the body as an object to be known, religious discourses that present the body as a dangerous vat of passions to be controlled, and the body as the subjective locus of knowledge and experience that stands in tension with divine truth. The Aedificium is the materialization of these oppressive discourses that discipline and confine the body, full of distorted reflections of the body as a monstrous and dangerous entity. William and Adso reach the Aedificium by first passing through the domains of reproduction and death: the kitchen (where food is prepared out of sight), the refectory (where the practices of reading and writing take place) and the ossarium (where the skeletons of dead monks are kept). Their trajectory denotes a confinement of bodies to their proper places: a place for consumption and reproduction, a place for engagement with the textual artifact, and a place for the left over matter of dead bodies from which the mind has departed. To enter the library is to leave these places behind, to enter the space of the mind. William opens the secret passageway into the library by pressing a button concealed inside the eye socket of a skull. Although the monk and his apprentice enter the library under the concealment of night, they are reminded of the disciplinary gaze of the phantom librarian who will be watching over them. They may enter the space of reason under the condition that they leave their bodies behind.

As has become clear from this investigation, the stereotype of the female librarian is indeed enigmatic – the origins of the stereotype cannot simply be traced back to the feminization of the profession and the lack of status awarded to it. Instead, the stereotype is a configuration within a configuration: it performs a specific function within the library as it is imagined as a space of reason. The figuration of the library presents reason as universal, whereas reason is in fact been historically constructed as residing in the domain of the mind. The figuration of the library is an illusion of reason – of universal knowledge – but has to be entered physically in order to become accessible. The

illusion of reason can thus only be maintained through the continual enactment of its order.

I have suggested that the stereotype of the female librarian functions as an external reminder of the internalized panoptic gaze by which library users become both subjects of and subjected to the order of the library. But of course this still leaves open the question of why the stereotypical librarian is a woman. In the next section, I will begin to explore this question by illustrating how the library is figured as a dangerous place for men in particular.

The pathology of the library

“Bibliodementia strikes deep.”

(Eric Graeber, *Magic & Madness in the Library*, 1999)

The theme of the mutual destruction of bodies and books is prevalent throughout library narratives and is often presented as a violent and destructive effect of a desire to possess, appropriate, and even incorporate the symbolic power of language. In this section I will give two literary examples of this trope, the first being, again, Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*, and the second being Elias Canetti’s 1937 novel *Auto-da-Fé* (also, interestingly, published under the title: *The Tower of Babel*). These novels elaborate on two tropes of the mutual destruction of books and bodies: incineration and incorporation. My aim in this section is to show how the library is figured as a space that is particularly dangerous to men. This may seem counterintuitive, since I argued in the second chapter that the ideal of the universal library as a space of reason is premised on the empirical, institutional and symbolic exclusion of women. However, I will show in the following section that this exclusion may in fact offer possibilities for resistance to library power. In this section I will show that the masculine drive towards unification and possession (of reason, of the archive, of the power to name) is figured as one of the main dangers of the library.

In *Auto-da-Fé*, self-professed “learned librarian” (Canetti 2008, 370) and “greatest living sinologist” (Canetti 2008, 548) Professor Peter Kien is a tragic figure, who has no significant contact with the world beyond his scholarly reading. His marriage to his housekeeper Therese is predictably disastrous, leading to Therese casting him out, thereby locking him out of his beloved and carefully curated personal library. Kien’s failed relationship with Therese stands in stark contrast to the loving care he shows for his books. But near the end of the novel, Kien realizes that “Books are dumb, they speak yet they are dumb” (Canetti 2008, 530). In his relationship with the books, Kien holds the power of definition: he decides the proper order of things in his library. The admittedly ghastly Therese is not as docile as the Chinese manuscripts Kien loves so much: she talks back, “thwarting the unilateral direction of meaning-making envisioned by Kien” (Collins Donahue 2001, 65). But the books, it turns

out, aren't quite as docile as Kien had imagined. When he finds himself back in his library after many traumatic confrontations with the harsh outside, considering himself safe once again, he attempts to read a book. But the book rebels:

A letter frees itself from the first line and smacks him upside the head. Letters made of lead. You can feel it. Whack! Bang! Again. And again. A footnote tramples him. More will follow. He is dizzied. Lines, entire pages, all attack him. They shake him, beat him, tackle him, toss him around. Blood. Let me go! You cursed bandits! Help! Georg! Help! Help! Georg! (Canetti 2008, 551)

Books fighting back and resisting the preordained order by which they become intelligible, are a recurring theme in high modernism – the text, imagined as the passive recipient of meaning, becomes active and uncontrollable, “wreaking vengeance on the once tyrannical and now quite mad master researcher” (Collins Donahue 2001, 84).

The “semiotic insurrection” of the “formerly docile, decodable ciphers”, signifies how Kien is “ultimately undermined by the feminine, beaten [...] by the binary rigidity of an epistemological system that seeks to sort out the knower and the known along predictable gender lines” (Collins Donahue 2001, 84). In a fantastical scene of self-destruction, Kien lights a match on the library, himself (no longer being distinguishable from the library) included:

Books topple from their shelves. Holding out his long arm, he catches them. Very carefully, so that no one outside will hear him, he carries the stacks into the hallway, piling them up against the iron door. With the violent noises crushing his brain, he builds a massive tower of books. Thousands of tomes fill the hallway. He calls to the aid of the ladder. Soon he has reached the attic. He returns to his room. The shelves stare back at him. The rug under the desk is engulfed in flames. From the room by the kitchen he takes the old newspapers. He unfolds them and scrunches them up, crumples them into a ball and throws them into all corners. He puts the ladder in the center of the room, where he used to be. He climbs to the sixth rung, looks down at the fire, waiting. When the flames finally reach him he laughs more loudly than he has ever laughed in his life (Canetti 2008, 552-553)

This grotesque scene of the mutual destruction of Kien and his library inspires Collins Donahue's reading of the seemingly misogynist text - Therese is a ghastly figure, and Kien repeatedly states that women are not fit for reading, and that the most banal of literatures are "for women" - as a poignant cultural critique. Kien's misogyny runs through the text through intricate intertextual traces - "what strikes the reader at this point is not Kien's quirky perversion of texts, but the large-scale cultural availability of misogynist narratives" (Collins Donahue 2001, 67). In the end, it is not clear whether Kien destroyed the library, or whether the library destroyed Kien. The library is figured throughout the novel as a dangerously unstable, intertextual, monstrously lively system, and Kien as its willing servant.

Indeed, two points can be distilled from this reading of *Auto-da-Fé*. Firstly, that Kien's imagined domination over women is intimately tied up with his imagined capacity to order knowledge. He has at his disposal a wealth of narratives and discourses that support his ownership and control of the library. But these discourses are not capable of controlling Therese's chaotic desires - particularly because she is not invested in them the least. Kien's inability to control the order of things in the face of Therese's desire becomes obvious on his wedding night. He has built a shrine of books for him and Therese to consummate their marriage under, but Therese, in a fit of passion, topples over the tower of books. It is at this moment that Kien stops being the master of the house - whereas he was first a quirky book-lover, his degeneration into madness is set in motion at the first sign of the imminent dissolution of the order of his library.

Kien imagines himself the master of the library: he and he alone has discovered and can maintain its perfect order. This illusion of order can only be sustained by keeping the books isolated from the chaotic interferences of the realms of the social and the sexual. Therese, on the other hand, displays a very different attitude towards the library. At first, Kien thinks Therese's interest in his books belies a longing for culture, and he lends her a copy of *Die Hosen des Herrn von Bredow*. While Kien himself abhors works of fiction - understood by Collins Donahue as his reluctance to have his character "penetrated" by identification with fictional characters - he decides that the novel is an appropriate genre for women. However, when Therese reads the title, she does

not get beyond the word “trousers” and, titillated and a bit sweaty, takes the gift to be a work of pornographic fiction. Unlike Kien, Therese sees the novel’s capacity to give pleasure as its main value. But she also sees another kind of value in the books, that stands diametrically opposed to Kien’s conviction that the works have an intrinsic value vis-à-vis knowledge: When she looks at the library she does not see a compendium of universal rationality. Instead, she sees its monetary value. Whereas Kien considers even the thought of exchanging books for money to be a perversion, Therese sees the library as a nest egg. Canetti’s novel can thus be read as a warning: the illusion of the intrinsic value of the library is easily destroyed. A too-strong identification with books as pristine and *en-soi* containers and conveyors of knowledge ignores the fact that the authority of books – and the knowledge they contain – is socially, economically and culturally situated. Kien, whose sense of self was entirely tied up with the order of his library, destroys himself together with his library when the illusion of order and intrinsic value is broken.

Kien’s obsession with the order of his library reveals the pathological dimension of collecting per se. For: “What else is [a] collection but a disorder to which habit has accommodated itself to such an extent that it appears as order?” (Benjamin 1969, 60). The thin line between bibliomania and bibliodementia is easily crossed, as both Canetti and Eco remind us. As librarian Eric Graeber writes in his introduction to the anthology *Magic and Madness In The Library* (1999) – which collects literary narratives that present the library as a supernatural, insanity-inducing space – protagonists in library narratives constantly risk madness through an over engagement and – identification with books within a space that is (or seems) isolated from social reality:

Suffocated by their monk-like studies, tethered to their tomb of tomes, addicted to alluring alliterative allusions, protagonists fixated on libraries are bound to crack like a poorly bound biography. [...] Bibliodementia strikes deep (Graeber 1999, 10-11).

This bibliodementia appears in *Auto-da-Fé* as the effect of a pathological desire to appropriate knowledge and to subsume it into an order over which the protagonist claims ultimate authority. This pathological desire becomes destructive when it crosses over into *becoming* possessed by the need for and

dependence on this order. "Kien" - the image of the rational professor through which Kien identifies and functions as a rational subject - dissipates together with the illusion of order that his library once represented. No longer under the impression that he can control the order of knowledge, Kien burns his library to the ground, himself included. It is an act of both destruction and liberation.

Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* offers a similarly grand scene of incineration that consumes not only the greatest monastic library of the (fictional) Middle Ages, but also the man most involved in its preservation. Here, the blind librarian Jorge of Burgos burns a whole library in order to destroy one book. But before the library burns, the book has already made many victims through a second pervasive trope of the mutual destruction of books and bodies: consumption.

As I have mentioned before, *The Name of the Rose* can be read as intelligent and - to the keen reader - hilarious pastiche of the detective novel. William of Baskerville and Adso of Melk figure as a medieval Sherlock and Watson whose relationship mirrors the homoerotic subtext that is so prevalent throughout Conan Doyle's series. The secret of the Aedificium that the sleuthing couple eventually and accidentally stumbles upon is pleasure itself, figured through a specific, elusive tome: Aristotle's treatise on comedy. This book, assumed to have been among the books burnt at Alexandria, is in fact the driving force behind the events.

As a "male plot of ambition" (Brooks 1984), *The Name of the Rose* seems to follow the traditional narrative convention of the questing hero (William of Baskerville), who sets out on an adventure to "totalize his experience of human existence in time, to grasp past, present, and future, in a significant shape," driven by the force of ambition "that drives the protagonist forward," and which "is inherently totalizing, figuring the self's tendency to appropriation and aggrandizement" (Brooks 1984, 39). The Aedificium, of course, is not only the setting of this quest, but also its object: to discover the logic behind the maze, which is the perfect "representation of the world" is to discover the order of the universe, and one's place within it. However, as William finds out, the library instead turns out to be both the product of intricate webs of social, historical, and relational contingencies and itself the ultimately unknowable object of desire, which resists both ownership and penetration. *The Name of the Rose* thus on the one hand epitomizes the male plot of ambition, but on the

other hand articulates its pathological dimensions: obsessed with discovering the secret of the library, many monks die, the library is destroyed, and William and Adso narrowly escape the same fate.

A more in depth feminist reading of the pathological dimension of bibliodementia demands a scrutinizing look at the climactic discovery of Aristotle's treatise on comedy. When William and Adso have finally managed to blindly grope their way through the labyrinth, they find Jorge of Burgos sitting in one of the rooms of the library, with Aristotle's treatise in his lap. This is the moment when William can untangle the course of events that got them all there: the brothers have murdered one another in search for the book, or died by reading it. The old, blind monk has poisoned its pages, in order to protect the world from the dangers of laughter. Anyone who reads it will, through the very act of reading, come to his demise before being able to share his discovery. An exemplary solution, as William admits: "the victim poisoned himself when he was alone, and only to the extent *that he wanted to read*" (Eco 1984, 472).

William and Jorge engage one last time in one of their rhetorical dances, of which Adso recounts:

I realized, with a shudder, that at this moment these two men, arrayed in a mortal conflict, were admiring each other, as if each had only acted to win the other's applause. [...] nothing compared with the act of seduction going on before my eyes at that moment, which had unfolded over seven days, each of the two interlocutors making, as it were, mysterious appointments with the other, each secretly aspiring to the other's approbation, each fearing and hating the other (Eco 1989, 472-473).

The confrontation of William with Jorge - his distorted mirror image - reveals a sinister subplot within the novel: William and Jorge have been caught in a struggle over the power of definition, each attempting to fix the boundaries of meaning, to be the one to define reason, and as such to define the library. It is in this struggle that Jorge of Burgos consumes the book of Aristotle, in order to keep it forever out of the order of the library, and to erase any traces of its existence:

[W]ith his fleshless, diaphanous hands he began slowly tearing to strips and shreds the limp pages of the manuscript, stuffing them into his mouth, slowly swallowing as if he were consuming the host and he

wanted to make it flesh of his flesh. William looked at him, fascinated, and seemed not to grasp what was happening. Then he recovered himself and leaned forward, shouting, "What are you doing?"

Jorge smiled, baring his bloodless gums, as a yellowish slime trickled from his pale lips over the sparse white hairs on his chin.

[...]

He laughed, he, Jorge. For the first time I heard him laugh. He laughed with his throat, though his lips did not assume the shape of gaiety, and he seemed to be almost weeping" (Eco 1984, 480-481).

William and Adso attempt in vain to rescue the book, "Hurry! Otherwise the old man will eat up all of Aristotle!" (Eco 1984, 482), but fumble and accidentally set the library on fire. And so Jorge manages to burn a whole library because of one book: Aristotle's treatise on comedy.

De Lauretis offers a Lacanian reading of Eco's novel, which explains why the library, inevitably, must burn. She suggests that Jorge of Burgos, aspiring to be the body of the word, or what Derrida calls "the vocative absolute", the encyclopedia of the world, burns for "his presumption to incarnate the Law, truth, and the phallus" (De Lauretis 1985, 22). Although this symbolic murder of the Father fails, the desire to appropriate or to incorporate the Law remains. Indeed, as Parada argues, the retrospective utopia of Alexandria still speaks to this desire.⁵¹

The failure to symbolically murder the father is paralleled by De Lauretis with the (very achievable, and real) murder of the mother. While the library burns, Adso's lover, a young woman he encountered in the kitchen and with whom he had his first (illicit) sexual experience right before entering the library, is burnt at the stake outside of the library by the inquisition. This nameless woman, De Lauretis argues, is the figure of the abyss: to name her is prohibited by taboo. Her multiple, fluid, feminine sexuality figures the very limits of meaning that the library is resurrected to hide. "The real object of desire is right on the surface of *The Name of the Rose*. It is the text itself, metonymically

⁵¹ The desire to erect a new Alexandria which unifies and fixes for eternity all of human knowledge can thus be viewed as what Luce Irigaray has called men's unitary, phallic pleasure, articulated exactly as the desire to possess, incorporate, and unify the what Lacan calls the Law of the Father, that is: phallogocentrism (Irigaray 1977)

mirrored in the legendary text of the father of philosophy, all the more desired the more it is unattainable" (De Lauretis 1985, 23).

In both *Auto-da-Fé* and in *The Name of the Rose* male desire is figured as a struggle over the power of definition: the desire to penetrate the object, to appropriate it, and to fix it within the order of things. This desire quickly turns into pathology when it is projected onto books: while William manages to escape, he loses his identity as a man of reason. Kien decides instead to burn himself along with his books. Jorge similarly chooses suicide over an existence in which he can no longer uphold his self-image of the master of the house of text.

Another point of entrance into reading the confrontation between William and Jorge starts from Derrida's notion of the archive. Derrida draws upon Freud's work in order to conceive of it as an archive itself. For Derrida, the archive is both *arche* (commandment) and *arkheion* (the house of the representative of the law) (Derrida 1995, 9). This archive, Derrida argues, is premised on two conflicting forces: Eros and Thanatos. One is the force of affirmation of past, present and future that is present within archives and libraries – the loving care with which books are preserved can be linked to Derrida's argument that the archive the promise of the present (archivally produced) to the future (Derrida 1995, 14-15). This can be recognized in Eco's novel, when William and Adso discover tome after tome of previously considered lost or forgotten texts. With each obscure work they discover they laugh and embrace each other, eyes glistening and arms opened towards this newly discovered wealth. It is indeed as if they discover in the library a new promise for the future: a future in which William already sees himself making great new discoveries based on these forgotten texts.

But Derrida also calls to attention the death drive on which the archive is premised: the drive to eradicate, to forget, to annihilate. The poisoned pages of Aristotle's treatise embody the conflicting forces of these drives: driven by a desire for the affirmation offered by the discovery and incorporation of affirmative memories, the monks are one by one murdered because of Jorge's insistence on the destructive power of pleasure that he projects onto, and with the wizardry of the chemist paints onto, these same pages. According to Derrida, archive destruction is simultaneously the form of and the foundational dynamic of the death drive – it induces a kind of forgetfulness or amnesia and

involves the eradication of the documentary and monumental apparatus (Derrida 1995, 14). The erotic economy suggested by the archive is the transaction between the death drive – the drive to forget and to destroy the past, and to dismiss our responsibility to the future; and the pleasure principle – the desire to affirm the present in joyful confrontations with the traces of history that bear the promise of the future. As Derrida argues: “the death drive is not a principle. It even threatens any principality [...] every archontic desire” (Derrida 1995, 14). This is what Derrida calls *archive fever*: the fluctuations of desire and disorder in the archive that bear at once a promise, and incite and activate a kind of violence.

It is within this framework of psychoanalysis and deconstruction that the scene of Jorge eating the poisoned pages of Aristotle begins to make sense. Jorge’s act of self-destruction is fundamentally marked by the fantasy of incorporation, which Derrida describes in his study of mourning as a fantasy that involves: “eating the object (through the mouth or otherwise) in order to not introject it, in order to vomit it, in a way, into the inside” (Derrida 1977, 102). Jorge’s eating of the poisoned pages of Aristotle is thus a pivotal articulation of archive fever: when he consumes the pages he preserves the secret pleasure of the “lost” text within himself, and simultaneously destroys it. Jorge, in this scene, embodies the crypt. As Wigley notes with regards to Derrida’s rereading of Freudian psychoanalysis:

[The] act of “vomiting to the inside” defines a secret vault within the subject, a “crypt” [...] As both the hiding of a secret and the hiding of that hiding, the crypt cannot simply take its place in the topography it preserves. The demarcations between inside and outside, the closure established by the drawing of a line, the division of space by a wall, is disturbed by the internal fracturing of the walls by the crypt. The crypt organizes the space in which it cannot simply be placed (Wigley 1987, 168-170).

The confrontation between Jorge and William thus articulates the pathology of the library: the fluctuations of Eros and Tanathos, of the pleasure of the archive and the will to destroy it, the desire explore and revel in it, and the will to dominate it and to forcefully keep it out of reach, are two sides of the same medallion of bibliomania turned bibliodementia.

Stories of library destruction often turn to the easy and careless consumption of books by flames. Orwell's *1984* (1949) and Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 541* (1953) both envision a future in which the historical and cultural record, and with it the ties to the past and promise of the future it represents and makes possible, is recklessly and carelessly tossed into the fire. Books, in reality, do not burn so easily. Bradbury's 541 degrees alone do not suffice to incinerate the tightly packed pages of a book. Not only because in Bradbury's novel the townspeople have memorized the contents of the library, but also because the natural enemies of books are water and air, not fire. Thiem recounts how a bookseller once told him that he would first drown books, and then let them dry, so that their pages would be more crinkled up, allowing more air between them as he threw them in the fire. Only that way would they burn (Thiem 2007, n.p.). It is therefore not so easy to destroy the archive. As Derrida insists, archive destruction needs to be driven by a powerful force of will.

But even when books are drowned, then burned, and then eaten: to destroy the entire cultural and historical record is a challenge indeed. What complicates book destruction further is that books are everywhere: not only in libraries, but in schools, homes, attics, warehouses, coffins. Even manuscripts seem to find their way into safe, hidden places where they may endure natural disaster or state-sanctioned libricide. One of the texts thought to have been lost in the burning of Alexandria was found, many centuries later, when an Egyptian mummy was exhumed – his body was embalmed in the papyrus of a poetry scroll containing an anthology of Posidippus' poetry. Indeed, we could speak of a "Diaspora of books" (Thiem 2007, n.p.). *The Name of the Rose* similarly calls into question the possibility of destroying the library. Eco's novel seems to suggest that even when paper fails, language – as discourse, as phallogentrism, and as *différance* – prevails.

Jorge of Burgos and Professor Kien can both be understood as victims of a pathological desire to appropriate and control the library. Interestingly, both begin their path towards library-destruction when they are confronted with the threats posed by the chaotic interventions of the body and its desires in the meticulously constructed spaces of reason that their libraries are supposed to present. Both Jorge and Kien are pathologically obsessed with the order of the library, and resist and dismiss anything that cannot be indexed or coded within its order. That is why Kien goes mad when Therese topples over his books in a

fit of passion: when his library collapses, he collapses with it. That is why Jorge devises a murderous plot when he discovers a book that argues for the uses of laughter: he cannot imagine himself a librarian in a universe that includes the irrational. Both prefer to go down with the library, rather than letting it fall into the hands of chaos.

As I have argued in the chapter on the myth of the library, the ideology of reason is a patriarchal ideology. It may therefore seem paradoxical that the stereotypical librarian, the keeper of the library order, is a woman. But I want to suggest that the female librarian is relatively safe from the pathology of the library: as a marginalized person (a woman, elderly, common, plain) she is presumably not as susceptible to the desire to appropriate, possess, or embody the order of the library. Unlike Jorge or Kien, she is not a genius. Unlike Jorge or Kien, she is also not as prone to becoming evil in her genius plot to define and enforce the Law of the father.

Bibliodementia is consistently figured as a masculine disorder – the threat to the library posed by the feminine (that of which the stereotypical librarian is also robbed, due to her being elderly, demure, and fixed in her place behind the reference desk) is not the threat of obsessive attachment to the Law, but rather its opposite: the chaos introduced into the library by young women refusing to subject to its discipline.

Girls who Love books

“Oh golly, I love big words!”

(Alex in *Threesome*, 1994)

In the previous section I have offered that bibliodementia can be understood as a trope that narrates the degeneration of those who are too committed to the order of the library, and too overcome by the Alexandrian ambition to possess all of knowledge and to order it under one roof. This frenzied obsession with reason is presented by Canetti and Borges as a pathology that inadvertently leads to the demise of the library. It is important to note that this obsession in the cases of both Kien and Jorge is characterized by a disavowal – even a fear – of the body. Kien is unable to consummate his marriage with Therese because he is too preoccupied with his books, while Jorge is so adverse to pleasure that he cannot allow anyone to open Aristotle’s treatise on laughter without ensuring that they die before they can laugh again. They can only abide knowledge that allows itself to be ordered according to the disciplinary order of the library – an order that, as I have argued at the beginning of this chapter, tends to exclude or eradicate bodies.

Elizabeth Grosz has argued that:

[i]f the body is an unacknowledged or inadequately acknowledged condition of knowledge, and (...) if the body is always sexually specific, concretely “sexed,” this implies that the hegemony over knowledges that masculinity has thus far accomplished can be subverted, upset, or transformed (...) (Grosz 1993, 187).

Feminist epistemologists such as Sandra Harding (1987) and Donna Haraway (1988; 2004) have insisted on the body as the site from which knowledge emanates, and Haraway in particular has argued that the persistence of vision (imagined to be disembodied but figured as an objectifying male gaze) as the metaphor for scientific enquiry fails to take into account how different forms of embodiment may produce different kinds of situated, yet potentially equally valid, forms of knowledge that challenge existing hegemonies (Haraway 1988).

This is why I want to turn, in this section, to another pervasive trope in library narratives that may illustrate how narratives of women’s – particularly

girls' – pleasure and desire suggest different ways of relating to the imaginary library. As I will argue, these narratives figure women's desire as a transgressive force that breaks through the oppressive order of the library, upsets it, and destroys it from the inside – no fire required. In order to do so I will refer to three popular-cultural sources. The first is the 2001 animated film sequel to the manga series *Read Or Die*. This Japanese animation film features a young female character whose love for and almost fetishistic obsession with books lends her powerful psionic powers over paper, and allow her to battle many evil foes endowed with guns. The second is the 1994 teen comedy/drama film *Threesome*, in which a girl named Alex is mistakenly assigned a college dormitory room with two boys, and becomes entangled in a complex *ménage-a-trois*. Is the 1995 comedy/drama film *Party Girl*, which by now should be familiar. As I will argue, all three of these films show young women engaging with books in ways that resist the normative ideal of the library as a space of reason, and hint at material books – rather than texts or discourses – as objects that offer comfort and pleasure.

Read Or Die features protagonist Yomiko Readman as a nerdy young woman who *really* loves books. The film begins with a shot of Yomiko's bedroom, which immediately shows that Yomiko's interest is not so much in the order proposed by library spaces, as it is with simply collecting, owning, and living amidst books. Her books, as is clearly visible in the image, are for the most part untouched the "boredom of order" (Benjamin 1973, 59). While Yomiko is an avid reader of books, she is mostly an avid collector. Indeed, she seems to be the culmination of what Benjamin considers a book collector: her book collecting suggests "a relationship to objects that does not emphasize their functional, utilitarian value" (Benjamin 1973, 60). This already sets Yomiko apart from the bibliodemented Kien and Jorge, who are pathologically obsessed with order more than they are engaged with the objects on which they strive to impose order.



Image 1

Yomiko's engagement with books is more related to daily life than to the space of the library. In the first episode, she is seen dragging a small suitcase behind her to visit all the bookshops in the city. So far, she does seem to resemble Kien, who is also described as packing his favorite books into his briefcase before going on his daily stroll. In each bookshop she visits, Yomiko picks up some books to take along on her journey, and (presumably) to give them a home in her chaotic home library. Her investment is not that of the librarian or archivist, who is tasked with placing objects in their proper order and to preserve through these daily activities the illusion of library order as a natural order. Yomiko's bedroom is not a heterotopia in the Foucauldian sense, invested in "the idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of *general* archive" or "the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes" or "the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself out of time and inaccessible to its ravages" (Foucault 1964, n.p.). Instead, is a monument to her love of books as objects, of the particular relationship she has with each book - some are still on her bed from the night before, while others

are neatly packed away in bookshelves. To locate a book, Yomiko presumably needs to go through the same type of biographical investigation that forms the reference system of Rob's record collection in *High Fidelity*.

That Yomiko is more interested in the material object of the book and the biographical traces it bears of its previous owners becomes clear when she finds an antique, first edition copy of Beethoven's *Unsterbliche Geliebte*. Rather than appearing interested in the text on the pages, Yomiko Readman caresses the handwritten attributions and some musical scribbles on the title page. Rather than being drawn into the textual universe that the book represents, Yomiko approaches it as a material artifact. The book opens to her a universe of affect, rather than a labyrinth of meaning. She flusters and her cheeks flush as she cradles it to her heart.



Image 2

When a villainous hybrid insect-man wreaks havoc on the city in order to steal Yomiko's copy of *Immortal Beloved*, her attachment to the book is so strong that it activates a superpower in her: she discovers that she has a psionic power over paper that enables her to manipulate paper with her mind. This is the beginning of her career as a super heroine: she manipulates roles of paper tape

to form a lasso with which she defeats the mutant, takes back her book, and from then on is known as The Paper. She is brought to the British Library, where a secret international intelligence organization of superheroes welcomes her into their ranks.

Yomiko's strong commitment to paper is an interesting inversion of the investment in the power of language-as-text that is so predominant in library narratives. She is not the typical nerd who uses book-knowledge in order to hack her way through a government computer, nor a kind of librarian who quietly awaits the return of the real heroes so that she can report on her research. The Paper turns a pack of printing paper into a functional airplane and uses paper playing cards as a shield against bullets. For Yomiko, paper is a material imbued with infinite possibilities. Perhaps it is the fact that she is a collector – and not a librarian – that capacitates this superpower of relating to paper objects. As Benjamin has suggested, for the collector: “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” (Benjamin 1973, 67). Yomiko as The Paper certainly lives through the object – it is paper itself that grants her her superpowers.

It should be noted that, even though they can both be observed walking through the city carrying a bag of books, Yomiko's love for paper is of an entirely different order than Kien's obsession with books. For Kien, books are only of value for as far as they are organized within his library. Even when he is forced to leave his home, he reconstructs a library in his mind to which he adds mental books each day – until he is forced to purchase a ladder in order to be able to unpack his mental library in his hotel room each night. Yomiko, on the other hand, is perfectly happy with the disorder of her paper collection. While she is often seen caressing books, she also reconfigures their material into a paper plane when necessary, enjoys the ride, and then allows the paper to tumble chaotically back to the ground.

It stands to question whether Yomiko's love for paper can even be compared to Kien's obsession with books. It is perhaps more closely related to that curious interest young children can take in collecting bits of paper, stickers, and other paper artifacts and reconfiguring them in which ever way makes sense to them at the time. For Yomiko, paper has more to do with texture, with

malleability, with the possibility of reconfiguration than it does with the pathological need to enforce and maintain order within the paper record.

Another interesting antithesis to the pathological book obsession of Kien and Jorge is figured by Alex in the film *Threesome* (1994). The story takes place at a generic North American college some time during the 1990's, and only includes one scene in the library. As such, it is not a narrative about – or particularly based on – the specifically gendered power dynamics of the library space. The scene nevertheless is central to the plot, as it shows Alex' ability to relate in new and creative ways to the normative structures within which she is coming of age.

The plot is centered around a three-way love story between three college students. Alex, as a result of her sexually ambiguous name, is mistakenly assigned a room in an all-male dorm. She shares the room with Stuart, a typical college boy overflowing with hormones that he insists he cannot control, and who immediately falls in lust with Alex. The third roommate is Eddy, a young and very closeted gay man, who has more in common intellectually with Alex, and is simultaneously repelled by and attracted to Stuart's uncompromising sexual energy. The story is a reworking of Truffaut's classic *Jules et Jim*, and while it does not reach the same level of complexity it presents the ambiguities of juvenile desires in an amusing and sometimes even touching way.

The library scene offers an interesting illustration of what I will argue is the mirror image of the stereotypical female librarian. In this scene, Alex, in love with Eddy – whom she considers to be sensitive and intelligent enough to understand her – accosts him in the college library, set on seducing him. Alex is seen running through the library in search for Eddy – the library is staged (as is common) as a labyrinth in which the object of desire is hidden somewhere. Alex finds Eddy studying at one of the desks, and in a performance of the stereotypical seductress walks over to the desk and sits on top of it. To initiate sex in a library is of course already transgressive (and for that reason perhaps so popular) – the library is a space of knowledge, in which the body is expected to subject to its order by remaining as invisible and undistruptive as possible. Alex, however, refuses to subject herself to the discipline of the library. In plain sight of the elderly, mousy librarian, she continues commences her seduction of Eddy:

Alex: "I think there's something you should know..."

[she lies down seductively on the study desk]
“I find libraries very erotic... The smell of old books... The silence...”
[she sighs, her eyes are closed, she reaches her arms up over her head, spreading herself out over the desk]
The long aisles... To get lost in the stacks...”
Eddy: [visibly confused] “That’s...very interesting...”
Alex: [Rolling over on the desk to face Eddy] “What are you reading?”
Eddy: “Hawthorne”
Alex: [rolling onto her back, clutching a hand seductively over her chest]
“Read to me!”
Eddy: [disturbed] “Alex, I’ve got to study, I can’t...”
Alex: [rolling around on the desk, pouting, in a little girl voice] “oooh....
Please, please, please!”
Eddy: [reciting in a monotonous tone] “Soon there emerged from under a sculptured portal the figure of a young girl, wreathed with as much richness of taste as the most splendid of the flowers, beautiful as the...
[disturbed] ... day...”



Image 3

As Eddy continues to read from Hawthorne’s “Rappaccini’s Daughter”, Alex writhes around, breathing heavily, and grinding into the desk. As Eddy

continues to read, Alex gives a beautiful performance of female sexual exaltation: as he reads, she writhes, and as he reaches the words “virgin zone” she gives away a perfect performance of orgasmic exaltation. When Eddy peaks under the desk to look at Alex’ face, and asks her: “Are you alright?”, she responds, breathlessly, in a southern twanged, Scarlet O’Hara voice: “Golly... I love big words!” The elderly librarian looks on, unable to do respond beyond sighing a heartfelt: “Oh my...”



Image 4

The space of reason and rationality is for a short time transformed into Alex’ space of transgressive desire. Whereas Hawthorne can usually be found in his proper place, in between other works of classic American fiction, he is now positioned in between Alex’ legs, and Eddy can do nothing but witness in horror. The horror, of course, is suggested to stem from Eddy’s homosexuality. But his horror at Alex’ exuberant performance of uncontained and ravenous sexual desire may also be understood as an effect of the confrontation with her transgression of the code of the library. When he resists her advances, she angrily asks him “What am I? A MONSTER?” Eddy answers, of course: “No!” But from the perspective of library-reason, Alex *is* a monster, as she introjects her desire into the space of reason – as such she is a destructive force as strong

as the fires at Alexandria. She is a reminder of the precarity of library *discourse*, just as fires and floods remind us of the fragility of *books*.⁵²

The last example of the bodily presence and erotic investments of a young woman upsetting and transgressing the order of the library comes from *Party Girl*. Although Mary, who at first imagines the Dewey Decimal System as a prison, has mastered the skills of categorization and reference, she is not yet a true librarian. I have already described some of Mary's many accidental transgressions of the library's order: she refuses to dress appropriately (that is: in a way that does not draw attention to her body or her femininity); she miscategorizes books (not knowing that Freud's *Dora* is a work on psychology); she disciplines the patrons too loudly (thereby disrupting the order of the library more than the patron who misplaced a book does). But the transgression that gets her fired is when she takes her love interest, Mustafa, into the library and has sex with him between the stacks. Judy Linderdorffer discovers her transgression because Mary has left a window open, and a condom in the trash can.

Mary manages to win back the trust of her aunt only after she shows that she has indeed become a real librarian: she organizes her friends' record collection according to the Dewey Decimal System which is, she claims "perfect for small collections, unlike the Library of Congress System"; she introduces her aunt to the calm and intellectual Mustafa; and arguably it helps that she has chosen the perfect place within the library for her transgression: the Romance Language section.. It remains the question whether Judy was most impressed with Mary's inventive deployment of Dewey, or with the fact that she located her transgression so perfectly within the library order.

Of course Mary, unlike Alex and Yomiko, in the end aspires to be a librarian, and actively works towards finding a balance between being an

⁵² To the well-read spectator this scene should appear as transgressive on another level. It is of course not accidental that Alex performs her chaotic lustfulness to the tune of Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter". Hawthorne's most famous novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, has been read by feminist critics as presenting its protagonist, Hester Prynne, as existing "resolutely outside patriarchal conventions" (Benford 1991, 289). "Rappaccini's Daughter" is a less-known short story by the same author, and figures Beatrice Rappaccini as a beautiful young woman who is shielded by her father from the outside world. Of course she falls in love, and has to make a difficult decision: save her lover Giovanni by risking her own life, or saving herself at the risk that Giovanni may die. Hawthorne has been understood to have, already in the 19th century (at the time, coincidentally, that public libraries were becoming a staple in the U.S., and right before librarianship was to become a feminized profession) consistently presented complex female characters, and has as such is even considered to have been a feminist *avant la lettre* by some feminist critics (cf. Baym 1982).

embodiment of library discipline, and retaining her quirky personality. It is telling that at the point in the story when she gets fired for not complying with the rules of the library, her friends are already sick of her imposition of library order upon their wardrobes and record collections.

While in no way as complex or nuanced as Borges', Eco's and Canetti's library narratives, *Read Or Die*, *Threesome* and *Party Girl* locate a space for resistance to the silencing, disembodying order of the library. This space is negotiated in all three cases by young women who have the cunning to understand the system, but no real investment in accepting it as a universal or natural order. For Yomiko, the library is a place of paper, which she manipulates with her mind whenever it happens to be convenient (for instance when she needs to combat another mutant foe – which happens often). Her own room, where books are allowed to exist in a spontaneous disorder and are comfortable bedfellows, is far more meaningful to her than the meticulously maintained stacks in the British Library. Alex, on the other hand, takes great pleasure in upsetting library order by parodying the pathological obsession with maintaining the symbolic order that became Jorge and Kien's demise. She performs the desire for the text through a bellowing orgasm in the middle of a dreary, generic college library. Her chaotic energy is exactly what Jorge and Kien attempt to exclude from their libraries of reason, rationality, and order. Mary's presence in the library does not seem as transgressive. She does not fold paper planes with her mind, nor does she simulate orgasms in the middle of the reading room. But her embodied relations also challenge the disciplinary order of the library. She integrates those parts of the library system into her private life that she deems to be useful, and also takes her personal life with her into the library. In a way, *Party Girl* also presents the library as a liminal space: a space that is both private and public, that is ordered because of the practical benefits such an ordering system provides but which is not entirely separated from the chaos of everyday life.

Yomiko, Alex and Mary are thus all three counter-images to the bibliodemented Kien and Borges and their obsession with appropriating and defending to the death the order of the library on the one hand, and to the stereotype of the librarian who quietly and serviceably performs the domestic tasks that make that order appear as the natural state of things on the other. These three characters are embodied, desiring subjects, whose knowledge of the

world extends beyond what the text can offer them. They present different kinds of embodied knowledge, which is never presented as universal: intimate relations with the material world of objects, the alternative ways of relating to the universe of texts so as to find new pleasures within them, and ways of relating the private and the public that are radically unfaithful to that distinction.

Irigaray's corporeal feminism provides some more complexity to my reading of these three characters' chaotic interventions in the library as a space of disembodied reason. Irigaray has posited the concept of sexual difference in order to reify specific corporeal difference as a site where the phallogocentric foundations of what counts as knowledge can be undermined (Irigaray 1974). Irigaray argues that the masculine model of subjectivity, constructed by way of strict (yet imaginary) boundaries between the self and the other, cannot represent the feminine in any other way than as being the Other of this unified masculine subject. The type of specifically corporeal subjectivity that Irigaray suggests is instead founded on fluid boundaries, multiplicity, connections rather than separations, and the interdependence between different subjects rather than the strict division between self and other. In *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977), Irigaray points to the importance of women's desire, which "would not be expected to speak the same language as man's" (Irigaray 1977, 249). Phallogocentrism, she argues, defines desire in terms of sadomasochistic fantasies: "the desire to force entry, to penetrate, to appropriate for himself the mystery of this womb where he has been conceived, the secret of begetting, of his "origin"" (Irigaray 1977, 250).

Irigaray understands feminine desire to be multiplicitous – always a kind of excessive force that desires beyond the boundaries of self and other. She uses the morphology of the female body as a metaphor, by suggesting that women have "sex organs pretty much everywhere [finding] pleasure almost anywhere" (Irigaray 1977, 252). While Irigaray's theory of sexual difference has been widely critiqued for defaulting, or at least risking to retract into, a kind of corporeal essentialism, and – more notably – for being unable to theorize or to grasp other axes of difference, it nevertheless offers a fascinating lens through which to view the ways the erotic investments in the library are articulated in library narratives.

As I have argued, the figuration of the library in the western imaginary can be interpreted as a myth that naturalizes the ideology of reason (coded as a masculine domain), whereas stories of library horror and terror reveal the dark corollary of that myth. The erasure of the body from the space of reason is a particular aspect of this strange configuration. Eco and Canetti both present sinister tales of men whose disavowal of the body is so total that they elect to destroy their own bodies before allowing the chaos of bodily interventions to interfere with the library order with which they identify so completely. Stories of young women in the library on the other hand, show them quite joyously disrupting the order of the library for the sake of pleasure. Yet these two types of narratives are still narratives of destruction: whether by fire or by water, by orgasm or by origami, the order of the library is disrupted and ultimately destroyed. In the next section I will argue that library narratives indeed formulate a kind of poetics of destruction which opens up a space for reimagining the library and librarianship in a way that is more engaged with the current state of the (digital) cultural record.

Alexandria and Google: a poetics of destruction

I located the very beginning of my exploration in the entirely unoriginal, but nevertheless still fascinating, legacy of Alexandria as a retrospective utopia that has historically placed blame for the destruction of the cultural record with different historical and cultural others. I want to return briefly to this legacy to provide a background for the poetics of destruction that is so prevalent throughout library narratives. Historical speculations on the scale and contents of the “Mother” and “Daughter” libraries of Alexandria and subsequent speculations on the relevance and effects of its loss reveal historically and culturally particular attitudes pertaining to power and knowledge. Similarly, the narrative figuration of its destruction reveals particular attitudes with regards to books.

As Jon Thiem suggested in 1979, few of his contemporaries would have insisted that the burning of the library of Alexandria was beneficial to learning. Still today, the image of the library going up in flames evokes in many scholars a profound sense of loss, of “history consuming itself” (Thiem 1979, 507) In much of contemporary writing, the burning of the library of Alexandria is a traumatic prefiguration of the cultural loss when a library burns, and serves as a warning against the destruction of books, be it as “casualty of war”, as sanctioned by regimes, or in favor of new technologies such as microfilm or digitalization (Raven 2004; Knuth 2003; Baker 2001). While some authors have attempted to relativize the loss of Alexandria by claiming that its scrolls would have been lost if not by fire, then by the simple fact that papyrus is a perishable material (Bagnall 2002), or by insisting (as I have throughout my analysis) that the ideal of a Universal Library is essentially an unsustainable illusion (Parada 2004), there are few who would claim that we are better off without the burden of all those lost scrolls. Even in 2013, with the seemingly unlimited storage capacity of the internet available with a few mouse clicks, the loss of Alexandria still resonates throughout the western imaginary.

However, Thiem (1979; 1999) makes a fascinating case that this has not always been so. While I have already discussed in detail how the three-fold burning of the library has fuelled notions of cultural and historical superiority, as well as sustained the notions of barbarism and cultural otherness, Thiem highlights a time in history when the printing press lead to an explosive

increase in the publication and availability of books. This “monstrous proliferation of books” drove some early modern intellectuals to ponder whether the burning of the library of Alexandria had not been a “fortunate misfortune” (Thiem 1999, n.p.). Thiem finds authors as diverse in their views as Browne, Emmanuel, Mercier, and Cabet to appear to have agreed that the mental well being of the people would be better served if the majority of books were to be destroyed (Thiem 1979, 520). LeRoy first formulated another argument for the destruction of the library of Alexandria: had it escaped destruction, there would have been less creative impetus for the moderns, since there would have been more than enough books in the world (Thiem 1979, 514). Apart from enabling creativity, destruction and loss can also bring about an “unfulfilled longing” that drives us to appreciate the fragments of the past that have been left (Thiem 1979, 515), and as such solidify the responsibility to the future that is encapsulated in these traces of the past (Derrida 1995). Moreover, some early moderns considered the “monstrous proliferation” of books in their time to threaten the quality of the works – when everything is preserved, the bad inevitably gets mixed up with the good. In Cabet’s utopian romance *Voyage en Icarie*, one utopian host claims that: ““We do in favor of humanity what its oppressors did against it: we have made a fire to burn bad books while brigands or fanatics set fire to pyres in order to burn innocent heretics” (cited in Thiem 1979, 519).

Rather than serving as a tragic reminder of the need to protect books against the forces of nature, war and carelessness, for some early moderns the burning of the library of Alexandria served as: “a safety valve to express and diffuse this particular historical despair [at his failure to comprehend the tragic and labyrinthine past of mankind], this professional hazard of the book-learned [that the endeavor seems futile, life denying]” (Thiem 1979, 523). I would warrant to say that the image of the burning Library of Alexandria serves another, deeper purpose: it serves as a safety valve against bibliodementia: the reminder that the cultural record is inherently unstable and uncontrollable disarms the illusion of order that threatens to become a source of pathological obsession to control the archive on the one hand, or precludes the possibility for the library space to become a space of resistance on the other.

Borges’ monstrous *Library of Babel*, where books have supplanted the world in an infinite, immobile and utterly immobilizing labyrinth, may be read

to support this life-preserving tendency towards destroying books. Borges' Library of Babel may be read as the literary culmination of the fear of the early moderns who pondered the monstrous proliferation of books and its stifling effects on culture and subjectivity. Rather than revealing the truth of the universe, "great libraries with their repetitious, contradictory contents are no less perplexing than the world they are meant to explain" (Thiem 1979, 524).

Of course Borges, himself a nearly blind, yet self-professed bibliophile, who has confided that he imagined Paradise to be like a library, would never have intended his parable to be read as an argument in favor of the destruction of libraries. However, the *Library of Babel* poignantly elucidates the despair and anxiety caused by the uncontrollable proliferation of books and texts, and as such makes palpable the need to burn, if only in narrative, the library of Alexandria again and again. If Borges' text is read together with Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, the work it does becomes even more obvious: had the Aedificium been burnt before it became unmanageable, Jorge would not have poisoned the pages of the book that became his demise and that of three other monks.

Notwithstanding the above, the burning of libraries as a parable of bibliographic containment is fundamentally problematic in two ways: firstly, the violent enforcement of power through bibliographic control should not be taken as mere metaphor; and secondly, the transformations that the library has undergone (and is still undergoing) in the digital age pose new dilemma's that can not be solved (or even fantasized as being solvable) by burning the library down.

To begin with my first argument, the narratives that I have presented so far may be taken to allegorize and therefore hide the very real and traumatic histories of library destruction as a form of not only bibliographic, but also very real and violent oppression - for instance of one nation over another, or of the state over its subjects. Indeed, when Derrida speaks of archival violence, he does not intend this to be read as mere metaphor, but as both the precondition and the execution of political power per se: "there is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory" (Derrida 1995, 11). As Marlene Manoff (2004) notes, the stakes in this struggle for archival control are high: when in 1992 Georgian members of the National Guard threw grenades into the Abkhazian State Archives, much of the history of the entire region was destroyed. More recently, Iraq's National Museum, Library and Archives were

looted and burnt in the aftermath of “Operation Iraqi Freedom” (Manoff 2004, 12). In her book *Libricide* (2003), Rebecca Knuth traces the systematic destruction of books by totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century, and concludes that the destruction of great book collections does not only destroy the histories and legacies of entire groups of people, but also entails a moral debacle for all of humanity. She concludes that even a library with a very limited collection is better than no library at all: “as long as it holds any books at all, a library represents the whole of human knowledge, and with that immeasurably precious legacy, the possibility for progress and human transcendence” (Knuth 2003, 252). Knuth’s imploration is founded on a revalidation of humanist values – she does not mention Derrida’s theory of the archive, and indeed does not pay much heed to poststructuralist notions of archiviolenace. Even less does she consider the question of who has been traditionally included and excluded from the cultural record, and who has been or is being repressed through archival control – she leaves the question of which books would likely be held by a small library, and which order of things these are likely to represent out of her analysis entirely. However, her argument does echo Derrida’s concern that the destruction of the archive represents a failure of the present in its responsibility to the future (Manoff 2004, 12). To read and appreciate narratives of library destruction should thus entail an awareness of the real and very effective destruction that has already taken place throughout history, but at the same time consider the way in which still existing libraries are complicit with operations of domination and control through documentation and canonization.

The counter argument to the idea that the burning of libraries is essentially a liberating event in which culture can become unburdened of its historical baggage or garbage (Greetham 1999), is that new, digital technologies have of late caused a resurfacing of anxieties surrounding libraries and the uncontainability of the proliferation of texts. Derrida again offers an important insight with regards to this renewed “archive fever”, when he argues that the technologies of the archive *produce* events, rather than merely recording them. He writes:

As techno-science, science, in its very movement, can only consist in a transformation of the techniques of archivization, of printing, of

inscription, of reproduction, of formalization, of ciphering, and of translating marks (Derrida 1995, 16).

Again, Derrida does not intend this to be read as metaphor, but quite literally. In *Archive Fever* (1995) he traces how Freud's psychoanalysis developed the way that it did through the methods of communication, and hence the technologies of archiving, he had at his disposal. These technologies produced not only how the subject has come to be understood in the West, but also how it has come to be constituted by Freud's psychoanalytical archive. As Manoff notes, one of Derrida's most valuable contributions to archive theory is therefore his insistence that library and archival *technology* shape what can be archived, and therefore what can be studied (Manoff 2004, 12).

Anxieties with regards to the digitalization of libraries can be read against the background of Derrida's work of the archive in multiple productive ways. Firstly, digital technologies have transformed both materially and conceptually what can be archived, how this archive can be engaged with, as well as the dynamics of discipline and control that it capacitates. Whereas Borges and Eco reformulate the anxieties expressed by the modernists mentioned by Thiem (1979) and Hayes (2010) - which predominantly pertain to the monstrous proliferation of books in what McLuhan has called the "Gutenberg Galaxy" (McLuhan 1962)⁵³ - they have done so through narratives of destruction or stagnation. Their narratives engage the paradoxical conceptual exclusion of the body from the space of reason and its simultaneous inclusion and entrapment within it, but do not explicitly engage with the question how this oppressive and destructive order of the library can be resisted. To avoid getting stuck in the same conundrum, contemporary refigurations of the library should engage the question of meaning and the embodiment of knowledge simultaneously.

Katherine Hayles (1999) has forcefully argued that the discourse of *information* as text without a body is fundamentally flawed. The main flaw Hayles recognizes in this idea is that it fails to acknowledge that information, including digital information, is never nowhere, but is instead always

⁵³ In *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) Marshall McLuhan argues that the proliferation of the printed book during early modernism lead to the emergence of the Gutenberg Man, whose consciousness was changed through the medium of print. McLuhan is critical of the way movable print reduced spoken language to standard type print. He suggested that the electronic age (at his time of writing in 1962 mostly television) would mark a return to the pleasure of diversity.

materialized in a specific way. Since every type of material instantiation of a text engages different types of relating to that text, Hayles analysis resists the oft-repeated cliché that books are becoming obsolete. She argues that books and bodies have in common that they “have something to lose if they are regarded solely as informational patterns, namely the resistant materiality that has traditionally marked our experience of living as embodied creatures” (Hayles 1999, 29)

As the examples of Yomiko “The Paper” Readman and of Alex in the college library show, this living and relating as embodied creatures can engage books in explicitly sensuous and sensory ways that go beyond the “reading” or “decoding” of a disembodied text, and may even skip entirely the ordering of ideas or content within a discursive framework. Indeed, one of the anxieties surrounding the construction of a worldwide, virtual library is that it will eventually transpose and replace the library as a space of material books. In a book dealing specifically with questions of gender in an age of electronic text, Julia Flanders, who curates a digital database of early women’s writing, suggests that the transformation from the book to the electronic text marks a “loss of that body [that] can seem like a severing of the bonds between meaning and its foundation; the opening of the doors of chaos” (Flanders 1997, cited in Manoff 1999, 863).

If in the traditional library it is the body that threatens to introduce chaos into the library, the electronic archive with its ever changing ever fluctuating body of mutable and fluid texts is experienced as a threat that introduces chaos in the life world of the reader. This anxiety is on the one hand related to the above-cited experience of a loss of the body of the text as a grounding of it within lived spaces of everyday life, and on the other hand by the incredible proliferation of materials that has become available and is ever expanding. If the book invites certain types of relating to the text as not only trace, but also artifact, the digital text makes it harder to distinguish the type of material we are dealing with and how to relate with it. As Manoff notes, digitization has complicated our understanding of textual objects (Manoff 1999, 866).

Librarians, library scientists, and bibliographic instructors already foresaw that the digitization of the cultural record would have a profound impact on the way libraries could, would, and should manage information at a time when the book has lost its status as the primary barer of information. Back

when the internet was still commonly referred to as “the Net” (or even: “the information superhighway”) Taylor Hubbard (1995) suggested that information managers (a titelature that rids itself of many of the problematic but also fascinating and deeply symbolic gender connotations that the title of “librarian” carries) should take up a central position in the debate on how the role and function of the library was changing under the influence of postmodern philosophy on the one hand, and technological developments on the other. He writes:

The Net is now, and we may well continue to be an unorganized collection of knowledge and information. If what we have taught in the industrial Book Age is the organization and structure of codex knowledge and all we teach about The Net is communications software, data manipulation, and liberal attitudes, the Information Age may be more threat than promise for our pedagogy if not our profession (Hubbard 1995, 441).

In the same year, Chief Executive of the Library Association (UK) Ross Shimmon worried about what is now known as the “digital divide”: the unevenly distributed access to digital technologies along visible dividing lines of gender, class and geographical location. While Shimmon saw a role for librarians to ensure that that gap would not become unbridgeable, and calling upon them to become “cybrarians” rather than “librasaurs” he nevertheless was convinced that:

it is difficult to imagine a world without books. For some purpose, the book remains the appropriate medium and will survive and, indeed, thrive. As carriers of information, ideas and works of creative imagination, books and related print media surely have a continuing future (Shimmon 1995, 45).

While Shimmon did not elaborate on the specific purposes the book serves better than, for instance, an electronic text, or how he imagined the future of the book, the examples I offered of the affective and embodied connections that books – and of course the library as a space of books – enable will not easily be substituted. Moreover, the fact that the internet is consistently figured as a space of mutability and fluidity may lend the figuration of the library as a space

where meaning can at least be imagined to be ordered (and as such fixed, if only provisionally) added appeal.

Indeed, parallel to the internet's rise as (arguably) the most important medium for conveying information and (hyper)text, the book seems to have been making a comeback. In 2002 Katherine Hayles, for instance, published the book *Writing Machines*, in which she examines three works: the electronic *Lexia to Perplexia*, the postprint novel *House of Leaves*, and the artist book *A Humument*. Throughout *Writing Machines*, Hayles not only describes how the specific ways in which the material instantiations of these works make possible new and unforeseen ways of relating to their possible meanings, she also makes this experiential through the design of her own book itself. *Writing Machines* is designed to constantly make the reader aware of the book-ness of the book. The cover is ribbed, so that flipping through the book gives the sensation of being able to flip infinitely, around the outside as well as through the inside. A darkened block along the outside of the pages creeps lower and lower as the book progresses, as a visual reminder of the linearity of printed text. At the same time, text blocks with autobiographical asides by a fictional protagonist capacitate a hypertextual reading of the book (Hayles 2002).

Whereas Hayles makes intelligent use of modern, industrial printing techniques to highlight the materiality of her book, Eric Graeber (1999) published an edited collection of (excerpts from) library narratives in cooperation with Birch Book Press in 10 pt Caslon Old Style, and had it bound in a two-color letterpress cover. The book breathes the dustiness of old libraries, and as such materializes what the stories within it describe – a book that is a material artifact of manual labor, a book that reminds both narratively and materially of the history of the book, and evokes the experience of entering an antique bookshop. As such, the book itself – as much if not more as its contents – is an artifactual expression of the enduring “emotional investment in print and the print record as well as an attachment to the physical artifact in the face of the proliferation of bits and bytes” (Manoff 2001, 378).

It is this investment that explains why associate professor Fred White worried in 2005 about how the library space that once housed books, is “being turned over to computer workstations and digitalized media archives” (White 2005, n.p.). Concerned about libraries, White, associate professor of English, bemoans the decision of the library at the University of Santa Clara to “put its

library books in metal storage bins that will be accessible only to robotic arms” (White 2005, n.p.). White’s plea for browsing, which he argues aides the process of serendipity that is so important to the production of knowledge, echoes a premature nostalgia for the book – the same nostalgia that inspired Graeber’s *Magic & Madness*, and the more recent *The Library Book* (Bennett 2012). White’s description of the cold, soulless machinery of the technologized library is reminiscent of the moment in *The Matrix* when the camera zooms out to show thousands of people resting in pods, hooked up to inhuman and dehumanizing machinery. White’s plea shows that our cultural investment in books is not merely engaged with their content, but is one of deepest identification with the books themselves as cultural artifacts.

Julian Barnes’ short story “In Defence of the Book” (2012) expresses a similar sentiment. In this passage from a fictional history book of the future, Barnes describes how England has been evicted, and as a result has been become a poverty-stricken country. After the digitalization of all information, libraries were only visited by the elderly, so the National Coalition decided to close all remaining libraries. However, as the arsonists arrived at the libraries, they found that all of their contents had been secretly carried away in the night. Barnes imagines a future in which despite waning interest in libraries, books are still valued as cultural artifacts to be saved from the flames – no longer because they are the primary carriers of information, but because the particular way in which they embody information allows way of relating that have an enduring appeal.

The detour I have taken in this chapter has served to show that the figuration of the library in the western imaginary is an even more complex configuration than the myth of reason and the problem of meaning alone can explain. The representation of the library is indeed, as Tancheva (2005) has argued, unstable and to some extent even fluid. That is why I have chosen throughout this analysis to consider it a figuration. A figuration always implies a complex configuration of power, knowledge, discourse, symbolism and embodied experience (Haraway 2004), and offers the possibility to escape problematic modes of past epistemological representation (Braidotti 1994, 5). Although it may be tempting to see Kien and Jorge as mere representations of male pathology, or Yomiko, Alex and Mary as representations of female resistance, I have opted instead to present their stories as part of the figuration

of the library as a profoundly paradoxical site of multiple and often contradictory relations. The embodied ways of relating to the materials the library is imagined to collect, preserve and give access to are as much part of this configuration as the dynamics of discipline and control that the library enables. The poetics of library destruction and the dreams of a universal library are two aspects of the same imaginary, which involves both the desire to control the cultural record, and the fear that it is uncontrollable. It is within this heterotopic site - that posits the library as both an imaginary and a real place - that space is opened up for new figurations of librarianship. As I will argue in the next (and final) section, these new figurations engage the particular dynamics of control of the digital archive, while at the same time mediating the profound and deep-seated anxieties pertaining to the paradoxes of reason and meaning that the labyrinthine library has figured for so long.

The politics of the library in a virtual sphere: New figurations of librarianship

The debate among some librarians has been whether libraries in the information age should develop the “representation” model, or the “refuge” model. A library that aims to be a representation of the world would be curiously incomplete without computers or access to the internet. Indeed, a library fully integrated with all aspects of life will be a networked library that connects all aspects of culture and society – including those commonly referred to as the “virtual”. On the other hand, the “refuge” model of the library, expressed through De Los Reyes’ “pockets of hope” metaphor, and represented in the film *Party Girl*, and in Nikki Giovanni’s poem *My First Memory (of librarians)* suggests that libraries should strive to be safe spaces that offer refuge from the cacophony of the digitalized world, and become places of social and intellectual interaction based on personal contact and community. In this section I will investigate the ways in which librarians have been reimagining themselves and their positions in the world, in order to formulate what may be a new figuration of librarianship: a figuration that is more suitable for talking and thinking about the politics of the library in the digital age.

The fact remains that new technologies have in the past and will continue to change the relationship between the body and the world around it, and will indeed continue to change how we read and write, and as a result the form and function of the institutions engaged with protecting the cultural record. Library professionals as well as managers are acutely aware of this. It is important, when considering the transformations that libraries are undergoing, to remember that the stereotype of the old-fashioned, conservative female librarian is in that sense an even more blatant misrepresentation than is immediately obvious. Librarians world-wide have been among the front-runners to not simply adopt, but rather to critically assess and selectively implement new technologies. And libraries are also involved in the discussion and exploration of the future of the book. The Libraries of New York, for example, has affiliated itself with The Institute for the Future of the Book, which is engaged in “the techno-cultural puzzle that is the future of reading and

writing” (Institute for the Future of the Book n.d.: n.p.). However, there are other challenges that libraries will have to deal with presently and in the future. Firstly, since Web 2.0 has introduced the age of user-created content, the digital record is expanding explosively and seemingly without any order. And secondly, new technologies are transforming the way power circulates throughout the digital society, which of course will have its effects on the role of libraries.

The explosive proliferation of the digital record has been of concern to librarians since the early days of the internet. Kathryn Sutherland already pointed out in 1997 that there appears to be an internal tension between the anarchic and uncritical proliferation of electronic text online on the one hand, and the characteristics of traditional scholarship (which libraries are expected to capacitate), based on selection, critical judgment and exclusion on the other (Sutherland 1996, 11). Manoff notes in 2000 that it is exactly the lack of selectivity and standardization on the internet, together with the problem of the seeming dissolution of clear markers of authority and reliability of material located through browser searchers, that poses the question if the “electronic revolution” may be incongruous with the tenets of serious scholarship which libraries are expected to enable and to sustain (Manoff 2000, 864).

There is at least one Web 2.0 phenomenon that seems to challenge this notion of the antithesis between the “anarchic” internet and the tradition of serious scholarly investigation: the web-based, user generated encyclopedia Wikipedia does indeed have a strict vetting system by which user contributions are checked and corrected by the entire community. Wikipedia allows anyone to be a librarian engaged with the selection, organization, production, and dissemination of knowledge. Of course library authority gains quite a different meaning in this context: Wikipedia does not work according to intellectual authority, but is a product of collective knowledge.⁵⁴ That this system is quite effective in producing a more or less reliable compendium of knowledge shows in the multiple cases in which politicians, trying to gain some extra authority, padded their own pages with either exaggerated or cleaned up accounts of their accomplishments. In such instances, the Wikipedia community generally acts swiftly to correct and neutralize propagandist content. On the other hand, the

⁵⁴ See for instance the volume *Critical Point of View: A Wikipedia Reader* (ed. Geert Lovink 2011), which offers critical perspectives on the often inflated expectations that have been projected onto Wikipedia.

wisdom of the crowd also produces infinite flows of information on topics that are perhaps less of interest to the serious researcher in a traditional discipline. The amount of information on the characters of the *Star Wars* franchise - including all books and videogames - by far exceeds the entire collection of entries on 20th century continental philosophy as a whole. Wikipedia as such is the anti-Dewey: not based on a preordained hierarchical organization of topics, Wikipedia produces and preserves the knowledge that is of interest to and present within the community as a whole, but does not decide what *should* be of interest.

Apart from the explosive proliferation of texts online, it appears as if the electronic record is simultaneously under constant threat of being erased. Unlike the library of Alexandria, we cannot set fire to the internet. But as much as it is impossible to erase the electronic record altogether, its stability can also not be guaranteed. Electronic texts are constantly altered, relocated and erased. Indeed, this is what happened when the website library.nu was closed down on the 16th of February, 2011. In March of 2012 information scientist and anthropologist Christopher Kelty, vocal supporter of open source software and the free flow of information, bemoaned the loss of this source of free scholarly books in a blog post entitled . Library.nu had been a gateway to the location of countless free - mostly pirated - pdf-files of scholarly works on every topic imaginable. The site was closed down after the combined efforts of a group of large publishing companies, on the grounds of enabling information piracy. As Kelty argues, the shutting down of the site meant a great loss for many people willing and eager to learn. He accuses the publishing industry of operating on an outdated, ownership-based model of information that serves to keep information away from users, rather than making it available. Although Kelty suggests that "information pirates" (people who create and run sites that make copyrighted material available for free) will come up with "a thousand more sites, stronger and better than before" (Kelty 2012, n.p.). However, as of yet a true replacement has not been developed. I know, because I have searched extensively. Some of the "alternatives" that have come up have the look and feel of library.nu, but instead of linking to academic texts, link to commercial websites or to malware content. The digital library apparently has its own tendencies toward archive destroying, experienced when the click of a button,

instead of downloading *Archive Fever* onto your computer, instead erases your own carefully curated, private, digital library – including your own work.

The instability and mutability of the digital record has posed challenges to librarians ever since it could be referred to as “the information superhighway” without causing anyone to roll their eyes. Libraries persist in their efforts to “tame these information monsters,” despite the fact that “large databases may be archetypically postmodern in their absolute resistance to containment or control” (Manoff 2000, 861). Manoff, however, is not nostalgic about the changes libraries are undergoing. Despite the new challenges posed by digital texts, she considers them to harbor a strong potential towards sustaining and strengthening contemporary scholarship that engages with contemporary topics. “The print medium,” she writes, “demands and ensures a level of fixity in scholarly and popular discourse that is at odds with contemporary notions of the fluidity and mutability of the subject” (Manoff 2000, 865). And indeed, as I have argued the library in the cultural imaginary is characterized by tension.

What the above example of library.nu shows well, is that the internet has also served to further dissolve the boundaries between the library on the one hand, and the ideals of culture and society it is supposed to sustain on the other. While libraries are of course strictly reliant on “legal” (not pirated) material, the development of digital databases has undermined the capacity of librarians to be selective in terms of the materials they include in their collections. Whereas librarians in the past could decide to buy one, multiple, or no copies of a specific book, access to digital texts (particularly scholarly journals) is often sold in packages. Publishers may also decide to change the contents of the packages at some point, meaning that a library that has purchased access to package A in order to gain access to publications X, Y and Z may suddenly be confronted with a package change – now, the library may only grant access to publications Y and Z, together with K, L, and M. If they want to guarantee access to publication X, they will need to purchase package B, which also gives access to publications N, O and P. As such, the ability of librarians to control and maintain the coherence of the digital archive has waned tremendously. In addition, librarians now have to think in terms of the economic logic of big publishers – some have begun to refer to themselves as “information brokers”, a term that highlights the ongoing and changing

economic intertwining of library work with global commercialism (De Jong and Wieringa 2013).

At the level of the user another power shift is visible. If the narratives I have discussed throughout my analysis all in some way engage with the biopower of the library and the way it produces docile bodies, library users now can access a large portion of the cultural record from inside their homes. In fact, the majority of texts I have consulted for this work were accessed remotely, whilst simultaneously engaging in decidedly non-library-proof activities such as thinking and reading out loud, smoking cigarettes, and eating meals from a plate perched high on top of a stack of books (not borrowed books, of course – but don't tell any librarians anyway...). It would seem that in this sense the transformation of the library into a (partially) digital record would be a liberation from the disciplinary power of the library and its promulgation of a linear and atomized conception of knowledge. Indeed, early celebrators of the digital record felt that the internet would finally make Foucault's *Fantasia* an accessible reality to all – jumping intuitively and affect-driven from link to link and from text to text, the internet seemed to make possible a whole new way of producing knowledge, unfettered by the disciplinary procedures that mark academic institutions.

However, as Gilles Deleuze (1992) has noted, technologized societies are characterized by new forms of power and domination, characterized by control rather than discipline. And indeed, when jumping “freely” from link to link, the traveler in the digital labyrinth will be confronted with multiple, visible and invisible, operations of control that either limit or redirect the directions the traveler can venture into. When large publishing houses closed library.nu, an entire network of links to primary sources, commentary, and digital indexes was disbanded and dissolved. While most users of the site would download the books they intended to read, few will have gone through the pains to locally save the multiple connections those works had to other works within that networked library. Also, entire discussion threads with commentary on the availability and origins of the digital texts were erased – what was lost was not only the “easy access” part of the library, but its very philological culture and the intellectual community it produced and sustained during its existence. Another new form of control of the digital record can be recognized in the pervasive presence of commercial messages interspersing, surrounding and

contextualizing the digital texts. Indeed, it is often difficult to recognize which text on the page is part of the discourse one is investigating, and which messages are commercial. Librarians, traditionally tasked with keeping the library space pristine and uninterrupted by the cacophony of capitalism cannot perform this task for the digitalized library (Manoff 2000).

In the same vein, there are remarkable and important differences between library indexes and the way search engines have taken over this function. In *The Filter Bubble* (2011), Eli Pariser describes how Google uses complex algorithms in order to rank search results based (among other factors) on the user's previous searches, the user's profile (culled from the sea of data internet users leave behind when using almost any kind of web-based service), and other "similar" users' queries and profiles. This form of personalization may seem convenient, but Pariser argues that it has some serious and worrisome political and epistemological implications. Pariser has suggested that Google's algorithms create a kind of personal ecosystem, in which the user's ideological frame is returned to him as Google search results. The library is imagined to be an organized and orderly representation of the universe, and as I have argued it is for that reason that it is destined to be revealed as an illusion again and again: the library simply cannot hide its internal paradoxes and inconsistencies indefinitely. However, if Pariser is right, Google's algorithms manage to conjure up coherent universes consistent with the user's own online behaviors and activities. Epistemologically, this would be the antithesis of Foucault's *Fantasia*, which is characterized by chance encounters and serendipity, and produces ever new and unexpected connections, relations, and productive inconsistencies. While it stands to argue whether Pariser's analysis is correct, he has at least one librarian on his side: Jean-Noël Jeanneney argued already in 2005 that Google would always remain an imperfect substitute for a librarian. In *Google and the Myth of Universal Knowledge*, Jeanneney writes:

The new technology can promote all sorts of newly discovered connections, productive analogies, unexpected encounters, unusual speed in the circulation of ideas and the development of inspiration. Uncontrolled, however, it can lead us astray and ultimately render us impotent (Jeanneney 2005, 26).

Let me first suggest that Jeanneney - himself a librarian - takes an oddly uncritical stance with regards the library's potential to "control" the internet (or

even its own space) and expresses a view of knowledge as a “path” (and the “right one” at that) that seems untouched by the past half century of intellectual and critical activity. As a librarian himself, it is also not surprising that Jeanneney writes in defense of librarians. That he takes Google to task is what is of importance here. Despite Jeanneney’s and Pariser’s critiques, I will admit that most of the online searches that were done in the years it took me to produce this text were conducted using Google Search. And while it speaks for itself that someone with a different ideological worldview, political stance, and social and cultural situatedness would have produced a different text, Pariser’s critique begs the question if Google is fixing our position within the digital database – which in a Borgesian stance others would call the Universe – just as I have argued that the Dewey decimal System fixes texts and topics in an order that produces that order as natural, but is in fact profoundly partial towards a patriarchal and western-centric worldview. Can librarians, as Jeanneney argues, provide spaces of resistance to this new normalizing force?

I have already argued quite extensively that the stereotype of the female librarian is part of the complex configuration of the library in the western imaginary and the paradoxes it engages. I have also suggested that figures of resistance can be recognized in the images of monsters who signal the return of the repressed of the library space – a resistance to what Derrida (1995) calls the *Thanatos*, or death-drive of the archive. Women’s *jouissance* – female sexuality as formulated by Luce Irigaray (1977) – is also figured as a form of resistance to library discipline and its violence against and disavowal of the body as a site of knowledge production. However, the stereotypical librarian – being sexless and without any noticeable outward passions – automatically precludes her from taking a part of this kind of resistance. Of course there is also the trope of the sexy librarian (mostly kept alive by the Halloween costume industry, I suspect), but she is not much more than an inverted reflection of the bun lady: reduced to a body alone, to the status of object, the sexy librarian does not appear as a useful trope to investigate in terms of its potential for resistance against the commoditization and commercialization of the cultural record. So the question remains: if the digital record is marked by the informatics of control, where and how can resistance be located?

It is here that the Librarian 2.0 makes her presence known as a powerful, embodied, networked, and radically situated. I have argued earlier that the

stereotype of the female librarian cannot effectively be countered by contrasting her to images of real librarians. As long as the stereotype of the female librarian serves a symbolic function, the only recourse is to attempt to analyze how it does the work that it does, and to deconstruct the underlying assumptions, anxieties, and entanglements that inform this stereotype. However, at the dawn of a new age of the library, a certain liberty may be taken in proposing new figurations of librarianship. The following formulates an initial exploration of what new (feminist) figurations of librarianship may look like, as a more developed cultural analysis of the appearance of such figurations throughout media and popular culture lies outside the scope of this particular investigation. However, I do want to offer a short and very preliminary glimpse into where and how such new figurations can be located, and to which kinds of (political and cultural) subjectivities they can be tied.

I borrow the term 'figuration' from the work of Braidotti, who in turn has borrowed it from Haraway. A figuration, writes Braidotti, "is a politically informed account of an alternative subjectivity" that "evokes or expresses ways out of the phallogocentric vision of the subject" (Braidotti 1994). One of the most influential feminist figurations in feminist theory can be traced back to Haraway's figuration of the cyborg, which served to reimagine posthuman subjectivity as radically situated, fundamentally intertwined with technology, and produced through networked relations (Haraway 1991).

As an example of what such a figuration may look like, I offer three options. The first is Carla Diane Hayden, who won the Ms. Magazine's Woman of the Year award in 2003, when she was president of the American Library Association. When the U.S. government demanded access to the lending records of American libraries under the provisions of the Patriot Act, Hayden began an advocacy campaign that would eventually exempt libraries from having to give the FBI access to their records. Unlike my childhood small-town librarian, who would look at me disapprovingly every time I checked out a novel with decidedly unchristian content, Hayden recognizes that "what someone reads does not necessarily say anything about what they will do - there is no link between interest and intent" (Orenstein 2003, n.p.). Hayden's prerogative as a librarian is to serve the community's right to access information freely and safely, relatively free from state surveillance and intervention. As an African-American woman, Hayden expresses no dismay at

the stereotype of the female librarian as a white woman, but hopes that future librarian action figures will include a young, male librarian with dreadlocks: "Like the one we have here" (Orenstein 2003, n.p.). Hayden's commitment to diversity and the fight against ever more totalizing archival practices is an example of a new role for librarians in the technological age: not to discipline the user, but to protect them or provide solace from the informatics of control, while providing access to both the paper and the digital records.

A second example of a new kind of figuration of librarianship is to be found in Amanda Yoder's configuration of the librarian as an interface between user, knowledge, and technology. She engages Haraway's figuration of the cyborg to suggest that:

the academic librarian is a "human-machine," a physical being engaging in meaningful human interactions with students while simultaneously a machine, navigating a network of hypertext discourses, unearthing research sources through online indexes and commercial search engines, and retrieving fragments of information from such disparate sources as reference books, websites, and other human beings. Each step of the research process, the librarian utilizes his or her own judgment and experiences, as well as tools/machines, in order to guide students. [...] The boundaries between librarian, student, and the infinite supply of information suddenly explode in the reference interaction (Yoder 2003, 389).

Yoder's figuration of the cyborg librarian as interface offers an interesting new paradigm for library work, where interaction between human and non-human actors on a technologized network becomes to define what librarianship entails. The cyborg librarian is engaged with the library user, rather than upholding a position of authority, is a guide that helps navigate the complex web of the material and digital records, rather than focusing on the construction and preservation of order. The cyborg librarian is thus radically entangled, situated, and embodied as a creature of natureculture. This image of librarianship stands in stark contrast to the both the tragic and the monstrous library robots figured in *Dr. Who* and White's image of robotic arms. Rather than suggesting that technology is somehow overtaking or supplanting the

human dimension of memory, the cyborg librarian as interface suggests that technology and humanity are interwoven in the creation of new communities.

A third example of a powerful new image of librarianship can be found in the Librotraficante movement. These “book traffickers” that have begun to organize in parts of the southern United States is creating “underground libraries” where people may access banned books. The movement began as a reaction to the banning of books on critical race theory from the Mexican-American Studies programs by the Tucson (Arizona) Unified School District. The movement proposes to organize “read-easies”, a play on the “speak-easies” of the time of prohibition. The Librotraficantes offer an image of librarianship as radically engaged with the political emancipation of oppressed groups through giving not only access to the banned books (which, for all intents and purposes, could be made available online), but also providing a space where banned books and excluded ideas can be discussed. The underground libraries thus create a network of interlinked local reading communities that can sustain and inspire critical thought on matters concerning inequality and cultural representation and oppression. The notion of “travelling” is a central topos in this conceptualization of the role of libraries in a digitalized, globalized world. Rather than being stagnant bulwarks of dominant culture, these libraries are mobile, popping up where they are needed. They are therefore more committed to the politics of location and to upholding ambiguities than they are to the totalizing ambition of collecting all of mankind’s knowledge under one roof.

Library politics

In this chapter I have set out to show how the library is figured as a profoundly dangerous place to those who are too invested in upholding the illusion of its order as the Order. As I have shown, the very presence of bodies within the library already serves as a reminder that the body is a site of knowledge production excluded from this illusion. The library is figured as a space that produces docile bodies through disciplinary power on the one hand, but also as a space where this power can be resisted. As I have illustrated, the stereotype of the female librarian is too intricately tied up with the figuration of the library as a space of reason to be able to be re-imagined as the site of such resistance. However, images of (often young) women's pleasure figure new and different ways of relating to the paper record, to the discourses contained in the library, and to the library space itself.

Another form of narrative resistance against the totalizing gestures of the imaginary universal library can be found in what I have called a poetics of destruction. However, such narratives lose their potential in the context of the digital age. On the one hand unstable and fluid, the digital record is also decentered and distributed. Erasing it from our lives is not only impossible, but even unimaginable. Resistance against the ubiquity of the digital record can be found in the current reappreciation of the materiality of the book.

But librarians themselves are also engaged with the possibilities for resistance against the new power dynamics posed by the digital library in the networked society of control. While my investigation of these forms of librarian engagement and activism is very preliminary, I have argued that this is exactly where new figurations of librarianship may emerge, that embodies and signify new forms of counterpower. Such figurations, I suspect, will favor accountability over the traditional gestures of care; engagement over discipline; diversity over coherence; and ambiguity over universality.

Conclusion

Conventions in library narratives: three paradoxes

“Hunc mundum tipice labyrinthus denotat ille”
(Umberto Eco, *The name of the Rose*: 158)

When I began my research, I set out to discover where the stereotype of the female librarian came from, why it is sexist, and how it can be countered. Starting from the realization that I felt intimidated by librarians while rarely having met one who was, in fact, mean, unapproachable or authoritarian, I wondered how it could be that the community of politically aware and active, helpful, and committed information workers was so commonly being misrepresented. However, as I began my search for the stereotypical librarian I quickly discovered that on the one hand, the stereotype itself was not nearly as prevalent throughout cultural texts as the ubiquity of the stereotype in the collective imaginary appeared to be, while on the other hand realizing that there seemed to be something going on in the way the library space was imagined in literature and films, which I understood to be connected to the cultural construction of power, knowledge and gender. This dissertation is the result of the detour I had to make to understand how the nitty-gritty entanglements of the cultural imaginary of the library with the dynamics of power in disciplinary and control societies inform and sustain the negative stereotype of the female librarian.

I have presented what could be typified as a cultural panorama of the figuration of the library in different realms of the western collective imaginary, in which I trace this figuration through literature and films. This tracing involved a mapping of tropes connected to the figuration of the library: the library is conventionally figured as the ruins of Alexandria, Pandora’s (black) Box, and the prison; the crypt, the mirror and the rhizome; as a space of desire and as a space of destruction. All these tropes can be understood to come together in the figure of the labyrinth. To enter the library is inevitably to get lost: “You enter and you do not know whether you will come out” (Eco 1980, 158). This labyrinth is characterized by the discursive dynamics of power, knowledge and gender, by the dynamics of discipline and control, and by the

Eros and Pathos of archivization. These dynamics can be understood along the grain of three foundational paradoxes of library narratives.

The first paradox is formed by the library's dual status as utopia and heterotopia. On the one hand, utopian library narratives present libraries as fictional spaces that contain, preserve and order all of human knowledge, and as provide direct and unfettered access to the truth. This utopian tendency characterizes the myth of the Great Library of Alexandria, which – when read through the lens of feminist critiques of reason – functions to normalize the patriarchal ideology of rationality. The utopian library becomes problematized in the work of Borges and Eco. Borges presents the dual paradox of completeness and accessibility. For a library to be complete, it cannot only contain all those versions of the truth that are collectively considered valid, as such truth claims are always contingent on the historical paradigm or *épistème* from which they were produced and within which they are judged. The complete and universal library would thus contain each and every conceivable and (yet) inconceivable version of the truth, in every possible language. Moreover, such a library would not enforce a preordained order on its collection (such being always historical and partial), rendering it essentially inaccessible and incapable of producing meaning. Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, on the other hand, plays upon the idea that to sustain the order of the library, i.e. that logic by which the collection becomes accessible and meaningful, the collection needs to be protected from the chaotic interventions of the library user. As such, the library is made almost inaccessible to the user, and becomes a space outside of social space. The paradox presented by the dream of a universal library versus the demands of order and control shows the utopian dream of a universal library is a patriarchal illusion. The stereotype of the female librarian can thus be read a projection of this paradox: a disembodied, characterless wielder of disciplinary power, she is a mythical figuration aimed at keeping the complex entanglements of knowledge with power at bay. She figures the denial of the critique of knowledge as always partial and situated, making sure that the black box of the library remains closed, and operates as a prison guard.

I have argued that such a reading of cultural library narratives should be considered in the context of discussions on the public sphere, and women's relative exclusion from this sphere. The library as a heterotopia is at once

outside of and connected to social spaces. While it can be read as a monument constructed to commemorate the lost dream of universal knowledge, its relative isolation from the social public sphere also makes it a space of refuge where marginalized subjects can find temporary (yet limited) respite from the oppressive forces that structure everyday life. As such, I have argued that we can define dominant and resistant plots in library narratives. Dominant (male) plots are structured around what Žižek and Dean understand as the search for the secret: the sustained belief that the library harbors somewhere the secret to the universe, leading protagonists to go on epic and dangerous journeys through the labyrinth in order to discover this secret (which they never find). Resistant plots, on the other hand, foreground the library as a heterotopia: a space outside of social reality, from where the power dynamics of the social can be viewed in relative safety.

It is for this reason that I concluded that the library utopias function as a myth in dominant culture, where they serve to naturalize and sustain the patriarchal, western illusion of the rational (male) subject. Library narratives such as those presented by Borges and Eco undermine this myth, but still centralize the frustration of the male subject of reason in his confrontation with the library space and his desire to gain unfettered access to the objective truth of the cosmos. The library is figured in a radically different way in the writings of marginalized women, who instead consider the heterotopia of the library to offer emancipatory potential, as long as the space is inhabited by librarians committed to providing a safe space for their patrons in which they can negotiate their particular situationality within the library as a 'space of Otherness' that performs the dynamic of order and chaos according to particular, normalizing and marginalizing practices that constitute the knowing subject in relation to culture.

The second paradox I found to be fundamental to the way the library is figured in the western cultural imaginary is performed through the narrative construction of the library as a tomb, a house of mirrors, and a maze. I argued that library narratives engage Gothic engineering to effectuate the uncanniness of the library as a border space between reason and madness, the present and the past, and life and death. The tomblike library figures the library as a repository of dead discourse, but also as a space that is haunted by the specters of the past. Library patrons go mad when they are confronted with the

instability of the cultural record on which they have forged their identities. But most importantly, epic library journeys foreground the confrontation with the labyrinthine nature of language, and figure the library as a maze of intertextuality.

Intriguingly, in these narratives both the library and the librarian are figured as mirrors. The library is a mirror of knowledge regimes and their inability to represent the repressed aspects of identity. Reflecting both the discourse of logic and the fleeting specters of repressed memories, libraries are figured as houses of mirrors that destabilize the self-image of the person who enters them. The monstrous librarian becomes a reflective surface in which the visitor, desiring to find the truth about himself and the world, is confronted with the memories and experiences that have been erased from the cultural record.

Discussions on the digitalization of the library space reformulate this labyrinthine aspect of the library in term of the fluctuations of the network. Knowledge that was at one time accessible may be gone the next day, and as such the library is not the stable or reliable foundation for cultural identification that utopian stories make it out to be. Simultaneously, the uncanny presence of the excluded other of culture is made more present through the networked operations of the digital record. Current anxieties pertaining to the digitalization of the library can thus be read as both a radicalization of the persistent anxieties pertaining to the fuzzy boundaries between reason and madness, the present and the past, and life and death, and new anxieties pertaining to the instability of the digital record.

The third paradox I trace concerns the tension between the illusion of universal, disembodied that the figuration of the library is expected to emulate on the one hand, and the materiality and embedment of the subjects and objects of reason that enter it and threaten to upset its order. I have shown that library narratives imagine too strong an attachment to the illusion of order may even become pathological. The stories of such pathology - which I have called *bibliodementia* - without exception figure men as its victims. Sometimes the destruction of the library is figured as the only way out of its maze, but the digitalization and decentralization of the cultural record makes such fantasies per definition retrospective. On the other hand I have shown the chaotic or transgressive presence of women in the library is imagined as a positive form of

resistance to its oppressive and maddening (dis)order. It is this same engagement with the transgressive potential of libraries as a positive and emancipatory feature that capacitates, as I have argued, new forms of library activism that may inspire new figurations of librarianship that can counter the dominant stereotype of the bun-lady, and foreground the important work that librarians do as fundamentally political.

Taking the three paradoxes together, my conclusion can be summarized as follows: the figuration of the library in the western imaginary is a deeply gendered figuration, which engages historical anxieties pertaining to the relationship between subjects and objects of knowledge within utopia and heterotopia. My poetics of the library show how male and female plots engage with these anxieties in different ways. Male plots of epic adventure foreground the hunt for the secret of the universe, whereas female plots of engagement foreground the social entanglements of the library space. Both plots can be recognized as sustaining contemporary debates about the digitalization of the cultural record, although they are no longer clearly divided along dualistic gender lines.

The paradox of universality versus accessibility is engaged from two positions: the utopian position that considers the internet to be the culmination of the Alexandrian project, but lacks a critique of universal knowledge. The position that insists on libraries (whether monumental or digital) as spaces that are both outside of and connected to social reality can be elaborated from the feminist critique of reason that considers the social and cultural entanglements of all knowledge.

The paradox of the library as a border space is reformulated on the one hand as the anxiety pertaining to the continued destabilization of the cultural record, which is from that perspective still considered as the primary location of identity, and on the other hand as given rise to a discourse that privileges counter-memory as the site of cultural resistance.

The paradox of the library as space of disembodied reason, inhabited and activated by embodied subjects has given rise, on the one hand, to fearful stories of the cannibalistic proliferation of texts, while on the other hand inspiring a radically reformulated feminist figurations of librarianship that posit accountability, engagement, and ambiguity as the primary and most important aspects of librarianship in the networked society.

Indeed, it is in the gaps between the components of this complex and puzzling configuration that space exists for new and different ways of imagining what libraries are, what their role in culture is to be, and how to engage with its politics. It may also mean the end of the stereotype of the female librarian. The bun-lady is tasked with maintaining the illusion of the order of the library – she is herself an illusion, a figment of the imagination. When the spell of universal order is broken, and the responsibility of maintaining the ever fluctuating, always partial cultural record becomes a matter of collective accountability, the dowdy old bookworm may finally retire to make space for the current generation of information specialists.

Librarianship as feminist knowledge practice

It is almost a cliché to say that every research projects tends to raise more questions than it has answered. But of course that is also the case here. Whereas I began this journey through the library *knowing*, being *absolutely* certain, that I was onto something, a few years in I found myself wondering if I had been asking the wrong questions all along, whether what I had found was actually what I thought that it was. Entering into the labyrinth of the library reveals that exhausting and dizzying aspect that I have described throughout this work: it is impossible to explore every single hallway, to follow every single trajectory. At some point you must allow yourself to stop walking and to look around you. To try to see what is really there, instead of blindly groping around for some other elusive secret.

Of course, I plan to re-enter the labyrinth again, this time from another entrance – maybe through a secret passageway. There are few paths worth exploring, paths that I unfortunately could not explore this time around – although it has been tempting. I have marked them on my map and plan to visit them in the future.

The first path concerns an elaboration on librarianship as a feminist practice that is intricately tied up in and engaged with feminist knowledge production practices. I have had the great honor and pleasure to work on a book about the connection between gender studies and (women's) archives and (feminist) archives in Europe, and I insist that this topic is entirely underexplored. It is as if even in gender studies, librarians are seen as the housewives in the house of knowledge: the work they do often remains invisible, but yet we expect it to be done. Feminist librarianship or librarian feminism is part and parcel of feminist knowledge production, and may offer privileged access to a critical gaze onto our own discipline.

The second path I aim to explore in my further work concerns categorization practices, and in particular feminist efforts that have been made to improve upon existing systems (such as the ongoing attempts to render the Dewey Decimal System and the Library of Congress categorization less exclusionary and fragmented) and to devise new feminist categorizationsystems. I find both such corrections and the gutsy attempt to

think of categorizations that are not exclusionary fascinating. Here, a collaboration between gender studies and information science would most likely yield extremely useful and incredibly timely new insights into the power of information.

The third path I have marked on my map concerns the question of how feminist networks have functioned and continue to do so as a kind of *an-archive*. Indeed, if it weren't for two elderly librarians in post-Yugoslavia, who had kept in their personal care for many, many years boxes full of manuscripts by feminist authors whose work did not get accepted into either the old socialist national libraries of Yugoslavia or the new post-socialist, national(ist) libraries of Serbia, and who happened to have just put these manuscripts into the care of my supervisor, Prof. Svetlana Slapšak; and had my supervisor not decided to share with the fascinating story of the itinerary of these manuscript through different activist and feminist networks, then I would never have decided to investigate the stereotype of the female librarian, and this very text would not have existed. I continue to be fascinated by such unofficial, dispersed, networked archives, that seem to be founded more upon an ethics of care than upon the illusion of order.

There are of course many more trajectories to take through the labyrinth of the library. I have presented you here with my own, from which I have barely returned. But I plan to re-enter soon – and perhaps I may never return. Because that is the warning posed by the library: those who enter may never return, and those who do return will be forever changed.

Works cited:

Literary fiction

- Borges, Jorge Luis. "The Library of Babel." (1962) Trans. James E. Irby *Magic and Madness in the Library*. Ed. Eric Graber. Delhi NY: Birch Book Press, 1999. 75-84. Print.
- Eco, Umberto. *The Name of the Rose*. 1st. Orlando, Florida: Harcourt, 1984. Print.
- Smith, Zadie. "Library Life." *The Library Book*. Ed. Alan Benett. London: Profile Books, 2012. 139-146. Print.
- Canetti, Elias. *Het Martyrium*. (1935, 1967) 7th. Amsterdam: Athenaeum/Polak & Van Gennepe, 2008.
- Fry, Stephen. "Have You Heard of Oscar Wilde?" *The Library Book*. Ed. Alan Benett. London: Profile Books, 2012. 65-70. Print.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Telling*. (2000) London: Orion House, 2001.
- Orwell, George. 1984. London: Secker and Walburg, 1949.
- Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*. USA: Ballentine Books, 1953.
- Giovanni, Nikki. "My First Memory (of Librarians)." *Acolytes*, Nikki Giovanni. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007. 90
- Giovanni, Nikki. "The Library." *Brothers and Sisters: Modern Stories by Black Americans*. Ed. Arnold Adoff. New York: Macmillan, 1970.

Film & Television

- Birckmayer, Harry. *Party Girl*. DVD. Directed by Daisy von Scherler Mayer. USA: Party Productions, 1995.
- Chapman, Graham, Cleese, John, Gilliam, Terry, Idle, Eric & Jones Terry. *Monty Python's Flying Circus: Gorilla Librarian*. Season 1, episode 10. UK: British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 1969.
- Fleming, Andrew. *Threesome*. DVD. Directed by Andrew Fleming. USA: Motion Picture Corporation of America (MPCA), 1994.
- Hornby, Nick. *High Fidelity*. DVD. Directed by Stephen Frears. USA: Dogstar Films, 2000.
- Kurata, Hideyuki. *Read or Die*. DVD. Directed by Koji Masunari and Amanda Winn Lee. Japan: SME Visual Works, 2001.
- Lucas, George. *Star Wars Episode II – Attack of the Clones*. DVD. Directed by George Lucas. USA: LucasFilm, 2002.
- Moffat, Stephen. *Doctor Who: Silence in the Library*. DVD. Directed by Euros Lyn. UK: BBC Wales, 2008.
- Wachowski, Lana & Andy. *The Matrix*. DVD. Directed by Lana & Andy Wachowski. USA: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1999.

Bibliography

- Aguirre, Manuel. "Geometries of Terror: Numinous Spaces in Gothic, Horror and Science Fiction." *Gothic Studies* 10.2 (2008): 1-17.
- Aguirre, Manuel. "Liminal Terror: The Poetics of Gothic Space". *The Dynamics of the Threshold: Essays on Liminal Negotiations*, Eds. Jesús Benito & Ana M Manzananas. Madrid: The Gateway Press, 2007.
- Arendt, Hanna. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil*, London, Faber & Faber, 1963.
- Augst, Thomas. "American Libraries and Agencies of Culture." *American Studies*. 42. no. 3 (2001): 5-22.
- Bagnall, Roger S. "Alexandria: library of dreams". *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*. 2002. Vol. 146, no. 4, pp. 348-362.
- Baider, Fabiënne and Anna Zobnina. "(Re)searching gender in a library," in: *Teaching Gender with Libraries and Archives: Production, Regimes and Techniques of Power in Information, Knowledge and Archivization*. Sara de Jong & Sanne Koevoets. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013. (forthcoming)
- Baker, Nicholson. *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper*. New York: Vintage Books/Random House, 2001. Print.
- Bargmann, Monika, Nadine Friedrichs, Julia Hellmich, Meike Schröder: "BibliothekarInnen in Literatur und Film". Ute Krauß-Leichert, Birte Gerber (Ed.): *Interkulturelles Online-Lernen. Die Rolle der Frau in Bibliotheken und Informationseinrichtungen*. Münster: Lit-Verlag, 2005.
- Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. (1957). Trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Noonday Press, 1972. Print.
- Barthes, Roland. *S/Z*. (1973). Trans. Richard Miller. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994.
- Baym, Nina. "Thwarted Nature: Nathaniel Hawthorne as Feminist." *American Novelists Revisited: Essays in Feminist Criticism*. Ed. Fritz Fleischmann. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1982.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Unpacking My Library." Trans. Harry Zohn *Illuminations*. Ed. Hanna Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 1969. 59-67. Print.
- Benstock, Shari. "The Scarlet Letter (a)dorée, or the Female Body Embroidery." *Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism: The Scarlet Letter*. Ed. Ross C. Murfin. Boston: Bedford Books, 1991. 288-303.

- Besser H, A Borda, S Dietz, K Geber & P Lévy, "The virtual museum (of Canada): the next generation. *Canadian Heritage Information Network*. Web. 28 Oct. 2012.
http://chin.gc.ca/English/Members/Rethinking_Group/.
- Beville, Maria. *Gothic Postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity*. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2009.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Bogadóttir, Svanhildur, "Searching for Women in the Archives: Collecting Private Archives of Women," in: *Teaching Gender with Libraries and Archives: Production, Regimes and Techniques of Power in Information, Knowledge and Archivization*. Eds. Sara de Jong & Sanne Koevoets. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013. (forthcoming)
- Bostick, S. L. *The Development and Validation of the Library Anxiety Scale*. PhD thesis. Wayne State University Michigan. 1992. Web.
- Botting, Fred. *Gothic*. New York and London: Routledge, 1996.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia, 1994. Print.
- Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984. Print.
- Buchmayr, Friedrich. "Secularization and Monastic Libraries in Austria". *Lost Libraries*. Ed. James Raven. New York: Palgrave/MacMillan, 2004. 145-162
- Buikema, Rosemarie. "Literature and the Production of Ambiguous Memory - Confession and double thoughts in Coetzee's *Disgrace*." *European Journal of English Studies*. 10.2 (2006): 187-197. Web. 11 Aug. 2012.
- Buschmann, John. "On Libraries and the Public Sphere." *Library Philosophy and Practice*. 7.2 (2005): n. page. Web. 19 Aug. 2012.
- Carlisle, Heather. "The implications of library anxiety for academic reference services: A review of the literature." *Australian Academic & Research Libraries*. 38.2 (2007): 129-147. Print.
- Carter, Angela. "Afterword." *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces*. London: Vintage Books, 1974. Print.
- Castells, Manuel. "Communication, Power and Counter-power in the Network Society." *International Journal of Communication* 1.1 (2007): 238-266.
- Castricano, Jodey. "Cryptomimesis." *Gothic Studies* 2.1 (2000): 8.
- Chad, Barry. "Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper." *Library Journal*. 126.6 (2001): 19. Print.
- Cohen, Laura. "A Librarian's 2.0 Manifesto," *Library 2.0: An Academic's Perspective*, posted November 8, 2006,
 <http://liblogs.albany.edu/library20/2006/11/a_librarians_20_manifesto.html>

- Cohen, Laura. "A Librarian's 2.0 Manifesto," *Library 2.0: An Academic's Perspective*, posted November 8, 2006,
 <http://liblogs.albany.edu/library20/2006/11/a_librarians_20_manifesto.html>
- Collins Donahue, William. *The End of Modernism: Elias Canetti's Auto-da-Fé*. Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001. eBook.
- Creed, Barbara. "Alien and the Monstrous-Feminine." *The Gendered Cyborg*. Gill Kirkup, Linda Janes, Kath Woodward, Fiona Hovenden. London/New York: Routledge, 2000. 122-135.
- Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Crowell, Penny. "Not All in the Mind: A Virile Profession." *Library Review*. 29 (1980): 167-175. Print.
- de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Trans. H. M. Parshley. New York: Vintage Books, 1989
- De Jong, Sara and Saskia Wieringa, "The Library as Knowledge Broker," in: *Teaching Gender with Libraries and Archives: Production, Regimes and Techniques of Power in Information, Knowledge and Archivization*. Sara de Jong & Sanne Koevoets. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013. (forthcoming)
- De Jong, Sara, Gé Meulmeester and Tilly Vriend, "Core feminist texts in Europe online: Teaching with the FRAGEN database," in: *Teaching Gender with Libraries and Archives: The Power of Information*. Sara de Jong & Sanne Koevoets. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013. (forthcoming)
- De Lauretis, Teresa. "Gaudy Rose: Eco and Narcissism." *SubStance* 14.2, Issue 47: In Search of Eco's Roses (1985): pp. 13-29.
- De los Reyes, Eileen. "Becoming Pockets of Hope: The Challenge to Academic Libraries in the 21st Century." 10th National Conference: Crossing the Divide. ALA. Denver. 15-18 March 2001.
- De Toro, Alfonso. "Borges/Derrida/Foucault: Pharmakeus/Heterotopia or beyond Literature ("hors-littérature"): Writing, Phantoms, Simulacra, Masks, the Carnival and ... Atlön/Tlön, Ykva/Uqbar, Hlaer, Janr, Hrön(n)/Hrönir, Ur and other Figures." *Jorge Luis Borges: The Thought and the Knowledge in the Twentieth Century*. Alfonso de Toro, Fernando de Toro (eds.) Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Klaus Dieter Vervuert, 1999. 129-153.
- Dean, Jodi. "Publicity's Secret." *Political Theory*. 29.5 (2001): 624-650. Print.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*. (1987). Trans. Brian Massumi. New York: Continuum, 2004.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition* (1968). Trans. Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

- Deleuze, Gilles. "Postscript on the Societies of Control." *November* 59 (1992): 3-7
- Dempsey, Lorcan. "Scientific, Industrial, and Cultural Heritage: A Shared Approach." *Ariadne* 22 (January 12, 2000), <http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue22/dempsey> (accessed October 12, 2012).
- Derrida, Jacques. "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression." *Diacritics*. 25.2 (1995): 9-63. Web. 9 Sep. 2012.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Dissemination*. Trans. Barbara Johnson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Spectres of Marx: The State of the debt, the Work of the Mourning and the New International*. New York/London: Routledge, 1994.
- Doug Highsmith, "The Long Strange Trip of Barbara Gordon: Images of Librarians in Comic Books," 61-83
- Eagleton, Terry. *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976. Print.
- Eberle-Sinatra, Michael. "Exploring Gothic Sexuality." *Gothic Studies* 7.2 (2005): 123-6.
- Eco, Umberto. *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, 1986
- Eco, Umberto. *Six walks in the fictional woods*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.
- Eco, Umberto. *Travels in Hyperreality*. Trans. William Weaver. New York: Harcourt, 1989.
- Evans, Adrienne, Sarah Riley and Avi Shankar. "Postfeminist Heterotopias: Negotiating 'Safe' and 'Seedy' in the British Sex Shop Space." *European Journal of Women's Studies*. 17 (2010): 211-229.
- Farkasova, Etela. "Redefinition and Reconceptualisation: Feminist Projects in Epistemology (Contemporary Feminist Discussions on Reason and Rationality)." *Aspekt*. (2002): n. page. Web.
- Farnell, Gary. "The Gothic and the Thing." *Gothic Studies* 11.1 (2009): 113-23.
- Firebaugh, Judy "From Old Maids to Young Professionals: Depiction of the Image of Librarians in the Twentieth Century," master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1996
- Foucault, Michel. "Fantasia of the Library." *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*. Ed. Donald E. Bouchard. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977. 87-111. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics* 16.1 (1986): 22-27
- Foucault, Michel. "The Discourse on Language." Trans. Rupert Swyer. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon, 1972. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. "The Subject and Power." *Critical Inquiry*. 8.4 (1982): 777-795. Web. 16 Aug. 2012.

- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. A.M. Sheridan. Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1977.
- Foucault, Michel. *Power/knowledge*. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*. (1978) New York: Random House, 1990. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure*. (1985) London: Penguin Books, 1987. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things*. (1970) New York: Routledge, 1989. Print.
- Fox Keller, Evelyn. *Reflections on Gender and Science*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984. Print
- Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56-80.
- Freeland, Cynthia A. *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle (Re-Reading the Canon)*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The 'Uncanny'". *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*. 217-256. Web.
- Friedman, Susan Stanford. "Statement: Academic Feminism and Interdisciplinarity." *Feminist Studies* 27.2 (2001): 504-509. Web.
- Garrett, Jeffrey. "Missing Eco: On reading *The Name of the Rose* as library criticism." *The Library Quarterly* 61.4 (1991): 373-388.
- Gatens, Moira. *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality*. (1986) London: Routledge, 1996.
- Gilbert, Sandra M and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman writer and the Nineteenth Century Imagination*. (1979) 2nd edition. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Graeber, Eric. "Magic and Madness in the Library." *Magic and Madness in the Library: Protagonists Among the Stacks*. Ed. Eric Graeber. Delhi NY: Birch Book Press, 1999. 9-18. Print.
- Graham, Allen. *Intertextuality*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Greetham, David. "Who's in, who's out: The cultural Poetics of archival exclusion." *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 32.1 (1999): 1-28. Web.
- Grosz, Elizabeth: "Bodies and Knowledges: Feminism and the Crisis of Reason". In: L. Alcoff and E. Potter (eds), *Feminist Epistemologies*. Routledge: New York/London, 1993. 187-215
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. (1962) Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996.

- Hall, Allison. "Batgirl Was a Librarian." *Canadian Library Journal*. 49 (1992): 345-347. Print.
- Hall, Stuart. "The question of cultural identity." *The Polity Reader in Cultural Theory*. Cambridge: Polity, 1994. 119-125. Print.
- Hannigan, Jane Anne, and Hillary Crew. "A Feminist Paradigm for Library and Information Science." *Wilson Library Bulletin*. 67. (1993): 28-32. Print.
- Haraway, Donna and Merrill B. Hintikka. *Discovering Reality*. Alphen aan den Rijn: Kluwer, 1983.
- Haraway, Donna. "SF: Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, So Far." Pilgrim Award Acceptance Talk, SFRA meeting. California. July 7, 2011.
<http://people.ucsc.edu/~haraway/Files/PilgrimAcceptanceHaraway.pdf>.
- Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies*. 14.3 (1988): 575-599. Web. 11 Aug. 2012.
 <<http://www.staff.amu.edu.pl/~ewa/Haraway,SituatedKnowledges.pdf>>.
- Haraway, Donna. "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s." *The Haraway Reader*, New York/London: Routledge, 2004: 7-46
- Haraway, Donna. *Modest witness@Second millennium. FemaleMan meets OncoMouse: feminism and technoscience*. New York: Routledge. 1997
- Haraway, Donna. *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. The Haraway Reader*, New York/London: Routledge, 2004: 223-250
- Harding, Sandra. *The Science Question in Feminism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987. Print
- Harris, Michael. *History of Libraries in the Western World*. Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1995. Print.
- Hart, Chris, Manmohan Bains, and Kathryn Jones. "The myth of material knowledge: reading the image of library buildings." *New Library World*. 97.3 (1996): 23-31. Web. 18 Aug. 2012.
 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/03074809610115681>>.
- Hartsock, Nancy. "Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?." *Feminism/Postmodernism*. Ed. Linda Nicholson. London: Routledge, 1990. Print.
- Hayes, Kevin J. "The Public Library in Utopia." *Libraries & the Cultural Record*. 45.3 (2010): 333-349. Print.
- Hayles, Katherine. *Writing Machines*. Boston: The MIT Press, 2002. Print.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1999. Print.
- Hetherington, Kevin. *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Hildenbrand, Suzanne. "Library Feminism and Library Women's History: Activism and Scholarship, Equity and Culture." *Libraries & Culture*. 35.1 (2000): 51-65.

- Hirsch, Marianne, and Valerie Smith. "Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction." *Signs*. 28.No. 1 (2002): 1-19. Print.
- Hogle, Jerrold E., and Andrew Smith. "Revisiting the Gothic and Theory: an Introduction." *Gothic Studies* 11.1 (2009): 1-8.
- Hook, Derek and Michele Vrdoljak. "Gated communities, heterotopia and a "rights" of privilege: a 'heterotopology' of the South-African security park." *Geoforum* 33 (2002): 205-219.
- Hubbard, Taylor E. "Bibliographic Instruction and Postmodern Pedagogy." *Library Trends*. 44.2 (1995): 439-452. Web. 9 Sep. 2012.
- Hurley, Kelly. *The Gothic body: Sexuality, materialism, and degeneration at the fin de siècle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Institute for the Future of the Book, . *if:book*. Institute for the Future of the Book, n. d. Web. 10 Sep. 2012. <<http://www.futureofthebook.org/blog/about.html>>.
- Irigary, Luce. "This Sex Which Is Not One." (1977) Trans. Claudia Reeder *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*. Ed. Katie Conboy, Ed. Nadia Medina and Ed. Sarah Stanbury. New York: Columbia, 1997. 248-256. Print.
- Irigary, Luce. "Place, Interval: A Reading of Aristotle, *Physics IV*." (1984) Trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. London, New York: Continuum. 2005. 31-48
- Irigary, Luce. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Trans. Gilliam C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974. Print.
- Ivy, Barbara. "Identity, Power, and Hiring in a Feminized Profession." *Library Trends*. 34.3 (1985): 291-307. Print.
- Jiao, Qun G., Anthony J. Owuegbuzie, and Sharon L. Bostick. "Is Library Anxiety Important?." *Library Review*. 48.6 (1999): 278-282. Print.
- Jiao, Qun G., Anthony J. Owuegbuzie, and Sharon L. Bostick. "The relationship between race and library anxiety among graduate students: A replication study'." *Information Processing and Management*. 42 (2006): 843-851. Web.
- Kelty, Christopher. "The disappearing virtual library." *Al Jazeera*. March 2012: n. page. Web. 12 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/02/2012227143813304790.html>>.
- King, William H. "The Celluloid Librarian: The Portrayal of Librarians in Motion Pictures," master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1990.
- Kirchhoff, Thomas, Werner Schweibenz and Jörn Sieglerschmidt. "Archives, libraries, museums and the spell of ubiquitous knowledge." *Archival Science* 8.4 (2008): 251-66.

- Kirkendall, Carolyn. "Of Princess Di, Richard Dawson and the Book Review Digest." *Research Strategies* 4 (1986): 40-42
- Knuth, Rebecca. "China's Destruction of the Libraries of Tibet". *Lost Libraries*. Ed. James Raven. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. 247-260.
- Knuth, Rebecca. *Libricide: The Regime-Sponsored Destruction of Books and Libraries in the Twentieth Century*. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003. Print.
- Koevoets, Sanne and Sara de Jong, "Introduction," in: *Teaching Gender with Libraries and Archives: Production, Regimes and Techniques of Power in Information, Knowledge and Archivization*. Sara de Jong & Sanne Koevoets. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013. (forthcoming)
- Kosofsky-Sedgwick, Eve. *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*. (1980) New York/London: Methuen, 1986.
- Kraemer H, *Museumsinformatik und digitale Sammlung*. Vienna: WUV-Universitäts-Verlag, 2001.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. (1982) New York: Columbia University Press
- Lacan, Jacques. *The Language of the Self*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956.
- Laermans, Rudi and Pascal Gielen. "The archive of the digital an-archive." *Online Magazine of the Visual Narrative* 17 (2007).
- Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Lange, Lynda. "Woman is Not a rational Animal: On Aristotle's Biology of Reproduction." *Discovering Reality*. Eds. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka. Alphen aan den Rijn: Kluwer, 1983. 1-16.
- Langford, David. *The Net of Babel by Jorge L**s B*rg*s*. Fictionwise.com, 1995. eBook.
- Latour, Bruno. "Give me a Laboratory and I will raise the world". *Science Observed: Perspectives on the Social Study of Science*. Karin D. Knorr-Cetina and Michael Mulkay. London: Sage, 1983. 141-170. Web. 29 Oct. 2012. <<http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/12-GIVE-ME-A-LAB-GB.pdf>>.
- Leurs, Koen. *Digital Passages: Moroccan-Dutch youths performing diaspora, gender and youth cultural identities across digital space*. Utrecht: 2012. Print.
- Liesman, Daniel. "Looking Back to the Future: Turn of the Last Century Librarians Look Ahead to the Twentieth Century," 25-46
- Lloyd, Genevieve. "Feminism in History of Philosophy: Appropriating the Past." *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*. Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 2000. 245-264.

- Lloyd, Genevieve. "Maleness, Metaphor, and the Crisis of Reason." In *A Mind of One's Own*, edited by Louise M. Antony and Charlotte Witt, 69–83. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993.
- Lloyd, Genevieve. *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Lykke, Nina. "This Discipline Which Is Not One: Feminist Studies as a Postdiscipline." *Researching Differently: Theories and Methodologies in Postgraduate Feminist Research*. Rosemarie Buikema, Gabriele Griffin and Nina Lykke. New York: Routledge, 2011. 137-150. Print.
- MacLeod, Roy (ed.). "Alexandria in History and Myth." *The Library of Alexandria: Center of Learning in the Ancient World*. Ed. Roy MacLeod. New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2004. 1-18. Print.
- Manguel, Alberto. *The Library at Night*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. Print.
- Manley, Will. "On Facing the Public." *Wilson Library Bulletin*. 34 (1984): 630. Print.
- Manoff, Marlene. "Hybridity, Mutability, Multiplicity: Theorizing Electronic Library Collections." *Library Trends*. 49.1 (2000): 857-876. Print.
- Manoff, Marlene. "The Symbolic Meaning of Libraries in the Digital Age." *Libraries and the Academy*. 1.4 (2001): 371-381. Print.
- Mason Church, Gary. "In the Eye of the Beholder: How Librarians Have Been Viewed over Time," 5–24
- Maxwell, Nancy Kalikow. "The Seven Deadly Sins of Library Technology." *American Libraries*. 9 2004: 40-42. Print.
- McDonough, Kristin. "The 'Librarian' in Literature: From Judy Bloom to High Brow," *Urban Library Journal*. 10, 1/2 (1997/1998): 5–12
- McLeod, Mary. "Everyday and "Other" Spaces." *Architecture and Feminism*. Eds. Deborah Coleman, Elizabeth Danze, and Carol Henderson. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996. 1-37.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: the making of the typographic man*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962.
- Mech, T. F., and C. I. Brooks. "Anxiety and Confidence in Using a Library by College Freshmen and Seniors." *Psychological Reports*. 81. (1997): 929-930. Print.
- Meijer, Maaïke. "Hélèle Swarth en de constructie van mannelijkheid in de feministische literatuurbeschuwing." *Gender in Media, Kunst en Cultuur*. Rosemarie Buikema and Iris van der Tuin (eds.). Bussum: Coutinho, 2007. 230-244. Print.
- Mellon, Constance. "Library anxiety: A grounded theory and its development." *College & Research Libraries*. 47.2 (1986): 160-165. Web. 23 Aug. 2012.

- Monegal, Emir Rodríguez. "Borges and Derrida. Apothecaries." *Borges and His Successors: The Borgian impact on literature and the arts*. Edna Aizenberg (ed.). Columbia: The University of Missouri Press, 1990. 128-138.
- Nagl-Docekal, Herta. "The Feminist Critique of Reason Revisited." *Hypatia*. 14.1 (1999): 49-76. Web. 7 Sep. 2012.
- Newmyer, Jody. "The Image Problem of the Librarian: Femininity and Social Control." *The Journal of Library History*. 11.1 (1976): 44-67
- Niegaard, Hellen. "Library Space and Digital Challenges." *Library Trends* 60.1 (2011): 174-189.
- Nochlin, Linda. "Why Have There been No Great Women Artists?" *Woman, Art and Power and Other Essays*. New York: Westview Press, 1988. 147-158
- Nunes, Mark. "The Problem of Cyberspace." *Cyberspaces of Everyday Life*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006. 1-46
- Okin, Susan Moller. *Women in Western Political Thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.
- Olson, Hope A. *The Power to Name: Locating the Limits of Subject Representation in Libraries* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 4.
- Onwuegbuzie, Anthony J., Qun G. Jiao, and Sharon L. Bostick. *Library Anxiety: Theory, Research, and Applications*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, Web.
- Ophir, Adi. "A Place of Knowledge Re-created: The Library of Michel de Montaigne." *Science in Context*. 4 (1991): 163-189. Print.
- Orenstein, Catherine. "Women of the Year 2003: Carla Diane Hayden." *Ms. Magazine*. 2003: n. page. Web. 10 Sep. 2012.
<http://www.ms magazine.com/dec03/woty2003_hayden.asp>.
- Osborne, Thomas. "The Ordinariness of the Archive." *History of the Human Sciences*. 12.2 (1999): 51-64. Print.
- Pacey, Philip. "The Classification of Literature in the Dewey Decimal Classification: The Primacy of Language and the Taint of Colonialism." *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*. 9.4 (1989): 101-107. Web.
- Parada, Alejandro E. "The Library of Alexandria: time retrieved." *Greek Mythology Link*. 2004. 4 Sep 2007 <<http://www.maicar.com/GML/003Signed/AEPAlejandria.html>>.
- Parker, Deborah. "The Literature of Appropriation: Eco's use of Borges in Il Nome Della Rosa." *Modern Language Review*. 85.4 (1990): 842-850. Print.
- Postman, Neil. *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. New York: Vintage Books, 1992. Print.

- Prins, Hans and Wilco de Gier. *The Image of the Library and the Information Profession: How we see Ourselves; a report of an empirical study undertaken on behalf of IFLA's Round Table for the Management of Library Associations*. München: K.G. Saur, 1995.
- Quint, Barbara. "Don't Burn Books! Burn Librarians!! A Review of Nicholson Baker's Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper ". *Searcher*. 9.6 (2001): n. page. Web. 12 Aug. 2012.
- Radford, Gary P. "Flaubert, Foucault, and the Bibliotheque Fantastique: Toward a Postmodern Epistemology for Library Science." *Library Trends*. 46.4 (1998): 616-634. Print.
- Radford, Marie L., and Gary P. Radford. "Power, Knowledge, and Fear: Feminism, Foucault, and the Stereotype of the Female Librarian." *Library Quarterly*. 67.3 (1997): 250-266. Print.
- Radford, Marie L., and Gary P. Radford. "Librarians and Party Girls: Cultural Studies and the Meaning of the Librarian." *Library Quarterly*. 73.1 (2003): 54-69. Print.
- Raven, James: "Introduction: The Resonances of Loss." *Lost Libraries: The Destruction of Great Book Collections since Antiquity*. Ed. James Raven. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. 1-40.
- Reynolds, L.D., and N.G. Wilson. *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991. Print.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Notes Towards a Politics of Location." *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected prose 1979-1985*. London: Norton & Company, 1986. 210-232. Print.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990. Print.
- Scott, Joan. "Gender: A useful category of historical research." *American Historical Review*. 91.5 (1986): 1053-1075. Print.
- Shimmon, Ross. "The librarian at the end of the galaxy." *New Library World*. 96.3 (1995): 43-48. Web. 9 Sep. 2012.
- Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own: British women novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977. Print.
- Sibley, Rochelle: "Aspects of the Labyrinth in The Name of the Rose: Chaos and Order in the Abbey Library," in: [...] 2004
- Simpson, Richard L., and Ida M. Simpson. "Women and bureaucracy in the semi-professions." *The semi-professions and their organization*. Ed. A. Edzioni. New York: Free press, 1969. 196-265.
- Singh, Parlo. "Reading the silences within critical feminist theory." P. Freebody, S. Muspratt & A. Luke (Eds.). *Constructing critical literacies*. New York: Hampton Press, 1997. 77-94
- Sloterdijk, Peter. *The Critique of Cynical Reason*. 1983
- Star, Alexander. "Nicholson Baker's Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper." *New Republic*. 5 28 2001: 38. Web. 12 Aug. 2012.

- Stoler, Ann Laura. "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance." *Archival Science*. 2 (2002): 87-109
- Stoler, Ann Laura. *Against the Archival Grain: Epistemic anxieties and colonial common sense*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009. Print.
- Sutherland, Kathryn. "Looking and Knowing: Textual encounters of an exposed kind." *Beyond the Book: Theory, Culture, and the politics of cyberspace*. Ed. W. Cherniak and Ed. A. Gibson. Oxford: Office for Humanities Communication Publications, 1996. 11-22. Print.
- Sverdlin, Tawny. "The Feminization of Librarianship." *Dispatches From Library School*. LibGig LLC., 9 22 2008. Web. Web. 19 Aug. 2012. <<http://www.libgig.com/history/gender>>.
- Tancheva, Kornelia. "Recasting the Debate: The Sign of the Library in Popular Culture." *Libraries & Culture*. 40.4 (2005): 530-546. Print.
- Thiem, Jon. "Myths of the Universal Library: From Alexandria to the Postmodern Age." *Cyberspace Textuality: Computer Technology and Literary Theory*. Ed. M. L. Ryan. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999. 256-266. Web. 15 May. 2012. <<http://www.idehist.uu.se/distans/ilmh/Ren/bib-thiem-alex.htm>>.
- Thiem, Jon. "The Great Library of Alexandria Burnt: Towards the History of a Symbol." *Journal of the History of Ideas*. 40.4 (1979): 507-526. Print.
- Thompson, John B. *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*. Berkeley & LA: University of California Press, 1984.
- Topinka, Robert J. "Foucault, Borges, Heterotopia: Producing Knowledge in Other Spaces." *Foucault Studies* 9 (2010): 54-70.
- Van Elferen, Isabella. "And machine created music: Cybergothic music and the ohantom voices of the technological uncanny." *Digital Material: Tracing New media in Everyday Life and Technology*. Ed. Marianne van den Boomen, Ed. Sybille Lammes, Ed. Ann-Sophie Lehmann, Ed. Joost Raessens and Ed. Mirko Tobias Schäfer. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009. 121-132. Print.
- Van Slyck, Abigail Ayres. "The Librarian and the Library: Why Place Matters." *Libraries & the Cultural Record*. 36.4 (2001): 518-523. Print.
- Voss, Paul J. and Marta L. Werner. "Towards a Poetics of the Archive: Introduction." *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 32.1 (1999): i-viii
- Waaldijk, Berteke and Andrea Petö, "Introduction: Memories, Histories and Narratives – Teaching with Memories in Europe." *Teaching with Memories: European Women's Histories in International and interdisciplinary Classrooms*, ed. Andrea Petö and Berteke Waaldijk. Galway: Women's Studies Centre, 2006. 21-28.

- Ward, J. O. "Alexandria and its Medieval Legacy: The Book, the Monk and the Rose". *The Library of Alexandria: Center of Learning in the Ancient World*. Ed. Roy MacLeod. New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2004. 163-180. Print.
- Wekker, Gloria. "Disciplinariteit als strijdtoneel: Gloria Anzaldúa en interdisciplinariteit." *Gender in Media, Kunst en Cultuur*. Rosemarie Buikema and Iris van der Tuin. Bussum: Coutinho, 2007. 61-78. Print.
- White, Fred D. "Libraries Lost: Storage Bins and Robotic Arms." *Chronicle of Higher Education*. 52.6 (2005): n. page. Web. 10 Aug. 2012. <<http://chronicle.com/article/Libraries-Lost-Storage-Bins/8307/>>.
- White, Hayden. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973. Print.
- White, Hayden. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987. Print.
- Wiegand, Wayne A. *Irrepressible Reformer: A Biography of Melville Dewey*. American Library Association, 1996. Print.
- Wigley, Mark. "Postmortem Architecture: A Taste of Derrida." *Perspecta*. 23. (1987): 156-172. Web. 9 Sep. 2012.
- Williams, Anne. *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Yoder, Amanda R. "The Cyborg Librarian as Interface: Interpreting Postmodern Discourse on Knowledge Construction, Validation, and Navigation within Academic Libraries." *Libraries and the Academy*. 3.3 (2003): 381-392.
- Yontz, Elaine "Librarians in Children's Literature," 85-96
- Zizek, Slavoj. "The Spectre of Ideology," in: *Mapping Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Zizek. London: Verso, 1994
- Zizek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London; New York: Verso, 1989.

Summary:

Into the labyrinth of power and knowledge:

The library as a gendered space in the western imaginary

Sanne Koevoets, MA

To be defended on June 14th, 2013 at Utrecht University

SUMMARY:

The Library functions as a powerful figuration of power and knowledge in the western cultural imaginary, and the stories that circulate about libraries are gendered stories that link power and knowledge to masculinity and femininity in particular ways. Through an analysis of literary and film narratives, I demonstrate that stories of lost libraries, representations of libraries as labyrinths, and narratives of library destruction are closely related to the stereotype of the female librarian, as both engage profound anxieties concerning rationality, subjectivity, desire and embodiment. I argue that the figuration of the library in the western imaginary is profoundly gendered, and that the problematic stereotypical representation of the female librarian cannot be understood, let alone corrected, outside of the context of the cultural representation of libraries. I take as a starting point that libraries are currently undergoing profound transformations as they are becoming increasingly digitalized, and propose that this offers opportunities for reimagining librarianship in radically different and feminist ways.

The research can be positioned in several ways. Firstly, its context can be formulated as the “resonances of loss” – on the one hand of great library collections through the destruction of libraries by war, natural disaster, or time, and on the other hand by the practices of selection and “weeding” that are central to library practice. Secondly, its context concerns the pervasive stereotype of the female librarian as a dowdy old lady on the one hand, and the representation of women’s bodies and desires as disruptive within the library as a space of reason and knowledge on the other hand. I argue that these two cultural preoccupations are in fact two sides of the same medallion, and reflect profound cultural anxieties pertaining to power, knowledge, and gender that can be traced to patriarchal ideologies of reason, objectivity and universality.

The dual figurations of the library space and the female librarian can be traced throughout a selection of popular cultural texts that have informed, engaged with, or reformulated these tropes. I take as a starting point a close analysis of Jorge Luis Borges’ *The Library of Babel* and Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*, and demonstrate that these narratives combine the most common and most commonly referenced features of library narratives. By investigating how these features reappear throughout popular culture, such as science fiction films (eg. *Star Wars*, *The Matrix*), romantic and teen comedies (eg. *Threesome*, *Party Girl*, *High Fidelity*), thriller and adventure films (eg. *The Net*, *Librarian: Quest for the Spear*) and horror literature (eg. *Four Past Midnight*), I show that narrative representations of libraries and librarians show both a surprising coherence as well as puzzling ambiguities, that resonate in the public discourse surrounding library loss and the dislike of librarians. Theories of the archive and poststructuralist feminist theories form the dual lenses that provide a kaleidoscopic vision on library narratives as gendered narratives that negotiate three foundational paradoxes.

The first paradox I trace consists of the desire to preserve, order and control all knowledge on the one hand, and the historical instability of the cultural values and technological

practices that inform processes of selection and preservation on the other. Literary library narratives are read in parallel with the retrospective utopia of the lost library of Alexandria while a close reading of popular cultural texts reveals this mythology of the library as profoundly intertwined with the construction of reason as a masculine domain. Digital technologies, particularly the internet, have introduced new digital utopias of the universal library, but do not resolve the tension between access and control.

The second paradox I trace stems from an analysis of Gothic conventions and tropes present throughout many library narratives. These Gothic engineerings perform the dissolution of boundaries and/or the border spaces between madness and rationality, order and chaos, and language and identity. Gothic engineerings in library narratives produce profoundly uncanny effects, in which the figure of the monstrous librarian signifies the presence of the repressed (feminine) other within the cultural and ideological universe of reason the library is supposed to contain, preserve, and present as coherent. The library itself appears as a vast and inescapable labyrinth of language/intertextuality, where identities become unstable and rational subjectivity is undermined. The digital library as a network can be read as a parallel trope to that of the uncanny labyrinth, providing new insights into current anxieties pertaining to the digitalization of the cultural archive.

The third paradox I trace concerns the strange relationship the library has with books and bodies. As an illusion of reason, the library is imagined a space of the mind, yet it can only be entered by bodies that inevitably threaten to upset its order and break the illusion. The digitalization of libraries is giving rise to new figurations of librarianship formulated in terms of multiple engagements with the subjects and objects of knowledge from within the dynamics of control of the networked society.

I conclude the dual figurations of libraries and librarians in the western imaginary are constructed through a set of narrative conventions, which are still present in public and professional debates surrounding the digitalization of the library. At the same time, these new developments also provide space for reimagining the library and librarianship in terms of new ways of relating to the power/knowledge nexus.

Nederlandse samenvatting

In het labyrint van kennis en macht:

De bibliotheek als gegenderde ruimte in het westerse imaginaire.

In het westerse imaginaire functioneert de bibliotheek als een krachtige figuratie, die tot uiting komt in gegenderde verbeeldingen van macht en kennis in relatie tot mannelijkheid en vrouwelijkheid. Middels een analyse van literaire en filmwerken toon ik aan dat verhalen over verloren gegane bibliotheken, over labyrintische bibliotheken, en over de vernietiging van bibliotheken nauw verbonden zijn met de stereotype van de bibliothecaresse. Zowel de figuratie van de bibliotheek, als de stereotype van bibliothecaresse drukken fundamentele collectieve angsten uit met betrekking tot rationaliteit, subjectiviteit, verlangen en belichaming. In dit proefschrift wordt betoogd dat de figuratie van de in het westerse imaginaire in de kern gegenderd is, en dat de stereotype van de bibliothecaresse daarom niet doorgrond kan worden - laat staan gecorrigeerd - buiten de context van de culturele representatie van de bibliotheek. Uitgangspunt van het onderzoek is dat bibliotheken heden ten dage getransformeerd worden tot digitale bibliotheken. Juist dat biedt mogelijkheden om de bibliothecaresse opnieuw tot de verbeelding te roepen, als een radicaal andere, feministische verschijning.

Het onderzoek kan op meerdere wijzen worden gepositioneerd. Ten eerste vindt het plaats binnen de context van "resonanties van verlies. Enerzijds behelst dit de resonanties van het verlies van de grote bibliotheekcollecties door de eeuwen heen, bijvoorbeeld wanneer deze zijn verwoest ten tijden van oorlog of door natuurgeweld, maar ook simpelweg door de tand des tijds. Anderzijds behelst dit de resonanties van materialen die verloren zijn gegaan door middel van selectieprocessen die deel uit maken van de dagelijkse bibliotheekpraktijk. De tweede context behelst de hardnekkige stereotype van de bibliothecaresse als een charismaloze stoffige oudere vrouw. De andere kant van deze trope behelst de representatie van het vrouwelijk lichaam en vrouwelijk verlangen als een doorbreking van de orde en de stilte van de bibliotheek. Ik laat zien dat deze twee culturele tradities uiting geven aan angst en verwarring omtrent macht, kennis, en gender. Deze angsten vinden hun oorsprong in patriarchale ideologieën omtrent de rede, objectiviteit, en het geloof in universele kennis.

De tweeledige figuratie van de bibliotheekruimte en de bibliothecaresse worden benaderd middels een selectie van populaire culturele teksten die deze figuraties hebben vormgegeven, zich ertoe hebben verhouden, of ze hebben geherformuleerd. Als beginpunt dienen Jorge Luis Borges korte verhaal *De Bibliotheek van Babel* en Umberto Eco's roman *De Naam van de Roos*. Deze vertellingen, zo wordt getoond, verbinden in zich de meest prevalentie eigenschappen van de figuratie van de bibliotheek als gegenderde ruimte. Door de populaire cultuur heen krijgen deze eigenschappen steeds weer vorm - in science fiction films zoals *Star Wars* en *The Matrix*; in romantische komedies en tienerkomedies zoals *Threesome*, *Party Girl* en *High Fidelity*; in thrillers en avonturenfilms zoals *The Net* en *Librarian: Quest for the Spear*; en in horrorliteratuur, zoals Stephen Kings *Vier na Middernacht*. Getoond zal worden dat deze representaties van bibliotheken en van de bibliothecaresse in verschillende media en genres opvallende gelijkenissen tonen, maar desalniettemin meer ambiguïteit bezitten dan op het eerste oog lijkt. De kritische lens waaronder deze vertellingen en verbeeldingen worden gelegd wordt gevormd door theorieën van het archief

enerzijds, en poststructuralistisch feminisme anderzijds. Deze twee lenzen bieden samen een kaleidoscopische blik op de bibliotheek als gegenderde ruimte in het westerse imaginaire, en zal tonen dat deze figuratie op drie paradoxen berust.

De eerste paradox behelst enerzijds het verlangen om alle kennis van de mensheid te bezitten, te ordenen, en te beheersen, en anderzijds de historische instabiliteit van de culturele waarden en technologische praktijken die het archief vormgeven anderzijds. Door vertellingen en verbeeldingen van de bibliotheek te lezen in het verlengde van de retrospectieve utopie van de Bibliotheek van Alexandrië. Deze bibliotheekmythe verbergt een ideologische verwevenheid met de constructie van de rede als een mannelijk domein. Digitale technologieën, met name het internet, inspireren nieuwe utopieën, maar kunnen deze interne spanning niet oplossen of bemiddelen.

De tweede paradox wordt benaderd middel een analyse van de wijze waarop de conventies uit de traditie van de Gotieke literatuur in bibliotheekvertellingen hun werk doen. Deze "Gotieke technologie" voeren de overschrijding van de grenzen tussen rationaliteit en gekte, orde en chaos, en taal en identiteit uit. Dit roept het *unheimliche* op; in de bibliotheek verschijnen dan ook velerlei monsters en geesten. De bibliothecaresse wordt middels deze Gotieke technologie voorgesteld als een monsterlijk wezen: een verwrongen spiegelbeeld van het zelf van de rede – de onderdrukte vrouwelijk ander die door het huis van de rede waart en zich er niet uit laat verbannen. De bibliotheek zelf verschijnt als een machtige en onoplosbaar labyrint, waarin de bezoeker gedoemd is te verdwalen, ontdaan van zijn identiteit en subjectiviteit door het labyrint van de taal. De digitale bibliotheek is een netwerk kan ook erg unheimisch zijn – het internet wordt vaak voorgesteld parallel aan de traditionele bibliotheek, en als een verlengstuk ervan.

De derde paradox behelst de ongemakkelijke aanwezigheid van het lichaam in het huis van de rede. Het is deze aanwezigheid die steeds de illusie van rationaliteit – en daarmee van universele kennis – dreigt te ontmaskeren. Juist de digitalisering van de bibliotheek maakt nieuwe manieren van verhouden mogelijk, die mogelijkheid beiden tot nieuwe vormen van verzet tegen de disciplineren van het lichaam door en de drukkende macht van de bibliotheek als huis van de rede.

De conclusie die hieruit kan worden getrokken is dat zowel de bibliotheek als de bibliothecaresse in het westerse imaginaire zijn geconstrueerd middels een set van narratieve conventies, die nog altijd de boventoon lijken te voeren in het openbare en het professionele debat omtrent de toekomst van de bibliotheek. Maar nieuwe technologieën scheppen ruimte voor nieuwe figuraties, die op hun beurt weer mogelijkheden zullen bieden om de nexus van kennis en macht op andere manieren te benaderen en te doen verschuiven.

Biography

Sanne Koevoets was born on September 12, 1980 in Apeldoorn, The Netherlands. She attended the Stedelijk Gymnasium Johan van Oldenbarneveld in Amersfoort, where she graduated in 1999. Between 1999 and 2002 she worked towards a Bachelor's Degree in Humanities from the internationally oriented English language program at the University College in Utrecht, where her focus was on art history, literature and philosophy. She attended one semester abroad at the University of California in San Diego.

After successful completion of the BA program (cum laude), she was accepted into the selective Research Master Program in Gender Studies at the Research Institute for History and Culture (OGC) at Utrecht University, where she wrote a thesis on feminist pornography. She asked the question if pornography could be feminist, and if so, what criteria should be formulated in order to define it as such. After receiving her MA degree in 2005 she was awarded a one year Marie Curie Early Stage Training fellowship two years in a row (2005 and 2006), in order to develop her PhD research at the Graduate Institute for the Humanities (Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis) in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Upon returning from Ljubljana, Sanne was appointed as a PhD researcher at the OGC at Utrecht University, and simultaneously began working as a teacher at the department of Media and Cultural Studies. She has taught courses on the philosophy of science and the philosophy of media and communication; on new media and citizenship and on the politics of the network society; on narratological approaches in literature and media studies and on the spatiality of new media; and on gender studies. She has lectured on the politics of representation, on the politics of the library, and on questions concerning power, society, technology and gender. She has supervised student research at both the BA and the MA level and operated as co-ordinator of the New Media and Digital Culture specialization within the Language and Cultural Studies program. She co-organized multiple lecture series on the philosophy of science and has been involved in the organization of several conferences, seminars and symposia.

Sanne's publications include two chapters in a book she co-edited entitled *Teaching Gender with Libraries and Archives: The Power of Information* (CEU Press, 2013). She has also worked as an editor on several magazines and journals, including the Dutch Journal of Gender Studies (Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies).

Her research interests include narratives on gender and new media, the representation of difference in and through (new media) archives and libraries, transformations of power dynamics in the network society, and the political and epistemological aspects of networked culture and its institutions.