Flaubert, Foucault, and the Bibliotheque Fantastique: Toward a Postmodern Epistemology for Library Science

GARY P. RADFORD

ABSTRACT

POSITIVIST CONCEPTS OF KNOWLEDGE, MEANING, and communication, dominant within the discourse of library and information science, are facing a crisis: they are unable to adequately characterize and structure the experience of interacting with and within the modern academic library. This article addresses the issue of epistemology and library and information science by considering Michel Foucault's (1967/1977) essay "La Bibliotheque Fantastique" which is a work of literary criticism rather than a "scientific" analysis. The usefulness of considering the library experience from the point of view of literary criticism lies in its potential to provide an alternative perspective from which the rationalistic assumptions of a positivistic epistemology can be foregrounded, transcended, and critiqued, along with the conception of the academic library which it supports. Following a brief account of the implications of the positivist perspective for conceptualizing the modern library experience, this article will offer an alternative postmodern epistemology from which library scholars can rethink traditional notions of the library, librarian and, most importantly, library users.

INTRODUCTION

   Traditional concepts of knowledge, meaning, and communication in library and information science are facing a crisis; they are unable to adequately characterize and structure the experience of interacting with the modern academic library (see Budd, 1995; Radford, 1992; Radford & Budd,

Gary P. Radford, Department of Communication, The William Paterson University of New Jersey, 300 Pompton Road, Wayne, NJ 07470

1997; Tuominen, 1997; Zwadlo, 1997). The emergence of this crisis has been preceded by the advent of sophisticated information storage, processing, and retrieval technologies that are significantly transforming the nature of the library experience for both the librarian and the user. Also changing are the relationships among the librarian, user, and the texts the library houses or has access to elsewhere. The field of library and information science has taken, both explicitly and implicitly, a model of knowledge developed by the positivist social sciences as the basis for describing the nature of the library and these changes (Harris, 1986). Recently, scholars such as Budd (1995) and Radford (1992) have argued that the positivist model of knowledge, far from providing useful accounts of change, may be contributing to a profound lack of understanding of how people experience their interactions with the modern academic library. In other words, the epistemology of library science must become explicitly recognized as a significant problem to be addressed by library scholars.

This article addresses the issue of epistemology and library science by considering Michel Foucault's (1967/1977) essay, "La Bibliotheque Fantastique" (translated as "The Fantasia of the Library"). This is a work of literary criticism rather than scientific analysis, and this choice of genre is deliberate. Walsh (1987) has noted that "there exists a discourse of the Library" (p. 211) and argues that literary criticism of the library is among the "most stimulating, thought-provoking, and controversial criticism written today. The Library...is apparently ripe for decentering" (p. 212). The usefulness of considering the library experience from the perspective of literary criticism lies in its ability to provide an alternative perspective from which the rationalistic assumptions of a positivist epistemology can be foregrounded, transcended, and critiqued along with the conception of the library it supports. Thus, following Budd (1995), a major objective of this article is "to shift, first thought, then discourse, then research, by initiating a questioning of assumptions and purposes" (p. 315). Following a brief account of the implications of the positivist perspective for conceptualizing the modern library experience, this article will offer an alternative postmodern epistemology from which library scholars can rethink traditional notions of the library, librarian and, most importantly, library users.

RATIONALITY, ORDER, AND THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

In the Western literary tradition, the library has long been taken as a metaphor for order and rationality (Castillo, 1984; Garrett, 1991). It represents, in institutional form, the ultimate realization of a place where each item within it has a fixed place and stands in an a priori relationship with every other item. The rationality of the library in many ways represents the description of nature idealized by the institutions of positivist science. As the library imposes a completely consistent system upon a

collection of unique texts, so positivist science seeks the system by which unique observations derived from nature can be ordered and classified according to a set of general principles. Garrett (1991) has argued that there exists a "collective belief, unchallenged until recently, in the existence of a scientifically derived and classifiable body of knowledge" and that the library is "one of the most visible and important temples that society has erected to this belief" (p. 382).

A library is a place where knowledge is first classified and then kept, stored in texts of all kinds such as books, periodicals, and audiovisual materials. Such an understanding imposes a rigid structure of expectations that come to define the library experience for both librarian and library user. The reference interview, for example, comes to represent an interface where texts, and hence their information, can be located and acquired. Indexes, catalogs, and other information retrieval systems act as road maps to navigate this environment of knowledge. For both positivism and the library, the dominant metaphor is that of "the search." In positivist science, the search is for underlying structures that comprise the truth of the natural world. In the library, the search is among structures for a truth that will alleviate a specific "information need." In both cases, the structure to be discovered/searched is preordained, either by a supreme being or by a librarian. Indeed, the image of the "librarian-god" is common in the literary portrayal of the library (see Borges, 1962).

The association of library with order underlies many common stereotypes of librarians. The representation of the librarian as stern and forbidding is found in much popular discourse (Mount, 1966; Radford & Radford, 1997; Swope & Katzer, 1972) though two images in particular are prominent. The first is that of the librarian, usually a female (Carmichael, 1992), patrolling the library floors and saying "shhhh!" to any who would dare to make a sound. The second is that of the librarian "stamping out" the book. Sable (1969) describes the librarian stereotype as:

> unfailingly and eternally middle-aged, unmarried, and most uncommunicative. She exists to put a damper on all spontaneity, silencing the exuberance of the young with a harsh look or hiss. Her only task seems to be checking out books and collecting fines. Books to her are best left upon the library shelves where they do not become dirtied or worn. . .there at the desk she will stay, stamping out her books until her retirement. (p. 748)

This stereotype may, at first glance, seem trivial and unimportant, but library practitioners seem to be at a loss as to how to change this (Black, 1981). Such images serve to reinforce, in their very triviality and harmlessness, a particular network of power relations that connect the librarian, the user, and the text. In this network, the librarian's domain is that of the creation and maintenance of order, and the library user represents

a threat to that order. The raised finger to the librarian's lips reinforces
these roles and precedes the polarization of order and disorder. The
"strictness" of the librarian, manifest in the "stamping out" of the book,
can be interpreted as an image of flagellation, akin to the slapping of the
palm with a cane by an overbearing parent or teacher, signifying that the
next flail will fall on the user lest they not return the text to its proper
place by the designated time. In this network, the librarian's role is to be
responsible for a system where every text has its proper place. This system
demands the investment of much time, effort, and care. The image of the
perfect library, the end result of the librarian's efforts, is that of a place
where all is ultimately accounted for, of "closed and dusty" volumes in
"the hushed library, with its columns of books, with its titles aligned on
shelves to form a tight enclosure" (Foucault, 1967/1977, p. 90). The ideal
library, in this view, is one that is never used or disrupted. Order becomes
the end in itself.

    This ideal assumes concrete form in Umberto Eco's (1983) novel *The
Name of the Rose*, a murder mystery set within the confines of a fourteenth-
century abbey in Italy. Eco's library is a labyrinth contained within a for-
tress, replete with booby-trapped rooms and secret passages. The organi-
zation of texts within the library/labyrinth is known only to the librarian.
The abbot describes the library as follows:

> The library was laid out on a plan which has remained obscure to all
> over the centuries, and which none of the monks is called upon to
> know. Only the librarian has received the secret, from the librarian
> who preceded him, and he communicates it, while still alive, to the
> assistant librarian, so that death will not take him by surprise and rob
> the community of that knowledge. And the secret seals the lips of
> both men. Only the librarian has, in addition to that knowledge, the
> right to move through the labyrinth of books, he alone knows where
> to find them, and where to replace them, he alone is responsible for
> their safekeeping. (Eco, 1983, pp. 35-36)

Eco's fortress library is a place of ultimate rationality and order. It repre-
sents a universe of knowledge, truth, and moral order unto itself. On one
level, one can describe the librarian's role as simply a guardian of the
texts who keeps the physical books ordered and safe from harm. However,
as the abbot's account continues, it becomes apparent that the librarian's
powers and responsibilities extend far beyond this:

> The other monks work in the scriptorium and may know the list of
> the volumes that the library houses. But a list of titles often tells very
> little; only the librarian knows, from the collection of the volume,
> from its degrees of inaccessibility, what secrets, what truths or false-
> hoods, the volume contains. Only he decides how, when, and whether
> to give it to the monk who requests it; sometimes he first consults me
> [the abbot]. Because not all truths are for all ears, not all falsehoods
> can be recognized as such by a pious soul. (Eco, 1983, p. 36)

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 in the labyrinth. In the positivist world view, 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. In Eco's positivist library/labyrinth, the "truth" of an individual text is known relative to the underlying classificatory system of the library. It is this system that is so fanatically protected by the monks in Eco's novel, even to the point of murder. Both systems are known only to "experts" (the scientist, the librarian) who have had the appropriate training. Only the scientist/librarian can make appropriate inferences regarding the "truth" or relevance of an event/book given their privileged knowledge of the underlying system of relationships/classifications.

In contrast to the librarian, the library user is a person who must disrupt and ultimately prevent the realization of the ideal library. There is an inherent and powerful tension between the ideal library's goals of order and completeness with the goal of providing a user with service, since allowing texts to circulate inevitably introduces disorder. Librarian stereotypes, particularly those of female librarians, are manifestations of the tension that is felt by both librarians and users (Radford & Radford, 1997). As a result, an overarching concern with order does not, and cannot, lead to a satisfying and productive library experience.

Such tensions structure the experience of the modern library environment for both librarian and user. Users' are often overawed by the library. The sheer volume of texts the library contains is intimidating enough, but an equal, if not greater, problem is how to navigate within and around these texts to find the one that is needed (see Kuhlthau, 1988a, 1988b, 1990). 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. It is claimed by their creators that such systems of classification are designed with the goal of facilitating access to texts. However, viewed in the context of the tension between maintaining order and providing service, such systems can also be perceived as barriers that serve to deny that same access. A user will usually feel confident that the needed text or information is available in the library. However, the prospect of embarking on the tortuous path that must be traversed in order to locate that text may evoke a sense of fear and uncertainty. Borges (1962), in the short story *The Library of Babel*, gives literary substance to this idea:

> When it was proclaimed that the Library contained all books, the
> first impression was one of extravagant happiness. All men felt them-
> selves to be masters of an intact and secret treasure. There was no
> personal or world problem whose eloquent solution did not exist in

> some hexagon. The universe was justified, the universe suddenly
> usurped the unlimited dimensions of hope. (pp. 54-55)

However, the means by which any particular piece of knowledge could be
located was perplexing and, ultimately, impossible. In Borges's tale, to
have knowledge of the order was tantamount to having the status of a
god:

> 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. . . .Many wandered in search of Him. For a century they ex-
> hausted in vain the most varied areas. How could one locate the ven-
> erated and secret hexagon which housed Him? 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. . . .(Borges, 1962, p. 56)

Borges's tale represents, in a literary fashion, important undercurrents
that structure the user's interaction with the library. The user is con-
fronted with the "librarian-god," the guardian of rationality and knowl-
edge, whose domain of order the user dares to violate, and who has the
power to render discipline and punishment. Is it any wonder that some
library users have claimed that they will seek the help of the librarian only
as a desperate and last resort? (Swope & Katzer, 1972).

Ultimately, the dichotomy of order and disorder becomes transformed
into Castillo's dichotomy of rationality and madness. Castillo (1984) writes
that "madness cannot be translated into the language of knowledge, and
knowledge has no foothold in the world of madness. The world of mad-
ness institutes the reign of appearances and the dissolution of forms; the
world of knowledge attaches itself to science and the establishment of
new forms" (p. 45). The domain of the library is erected and makes sense
only against the presence of madness, the domain of "the other" that is
not ordered (see Huspek & Radford, 1997). The drive to create and main-
tain order is simultaneously a drive to exclude and marginalize the forces
of madness. In this system, the library user is "the other"; an ambiguous
domain which is not under the direct control of the library and, as such,
the source of disorder and madness. The modern library experience for
both librarian and user is structured by the values of order, control, and
suppression (see Chelton, 1996). Such an experience is ultimately
grounded in a positivist epistemology which renders the library an emo-
tionless, cold, and mechanistic place.

THE MOVE TO FOUCAULT

Library scholarship is becoming aware of the underlying positivist
epistemological foundation for library science and how negative tensions
and stereotypes arise from the polarizations that such a stance takes as

axiomatic. The next step is the consideration of this stance as particular rather than absolute, as produced rather than natural, in a movement toward recognizing the formation of alternative epistemological foundations that do not structure existence, values, and practice in the same manner as the positivist framework. To this end, the work of the late philosopher Michel Foucault is introduced.

Foucault's work has recently been recognized as a potentially fruitful perspective for framing epistemological issues in library and information science (Radford, 1992; Radford & Budd, 1997; Thomas, 1996; Tuominen, 1997). Similarly, Harris (1993) has described Foucault's contribution in terms of a desire to overturn the power of positivism in the social sciences and understand the political economy of knowledge production in new and innovative ways, an economy that includes libraries. Harris (1993) states that "one can only wonder at the extent to which Foucault's work has been ignored by such professions as librarianship and social work that would seem to be in a position to benefit significantly from his insights" (p. 116) and that "librarians, who consider their practice to be 'neutral' and apolitical, might find Foucault's work both challenging and disconcerting and, perhaps, redemptive" (p. 116).

Foucault does not write about the library as an abstract entity. He was very familiar with the library experience and was an experienced library user at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, as this quotation from Macey's (1993) biography of Foucault reveals:

> For...thirty years, Henri Labrouste's great building in the Rue de Richelieu, with its elegant pillars and arches of cast iron, would be his primary place of work. His favourite seat was in the hemicycle, the small, raised section directly opposite the entrance, sheltered from the main reading room, where a central aisle separates rows of long tables subdivided into individual reading desks. The hemicycle affords slightly more quiet and privacy. For thirty years, Foucault pursued his research here almost daily, with occasional forays to the manuscript department and to other libraries, and contended with the Byzantine cataloging system: two incomplete and dated printed catalogs supplemented by cabinets containing countless index cards, many of them inscribed with copperplate handwriting. Libraries were to become Foucault's natural habitat: "those greenish institutions where books accumulate and where grows the dense vegetation of their knowledge." (p. 49)

Foucault offers a perspective of the library experience that questions and dissolves the rational/irrational dichotomy that is the foundation of the positivist conception of the library. The dissolution of taken-for-granted structures is a hallmark of Foucault's work. For example, Foucault's (1961/1988) *Madness and Civilization* considers the opposition of reason and madness and suggests that the division is discursively produced in particular historical contexts. Foucault (1961/1988) writes that "madness

and non-madness, reason and non-reason are inextricably involved: inseparable at the moment when they do not yet exist, and existing for each other, in relation to each other, in the exchange which separates them" (p. x).

Foucault (1967/1977) performs a similar analysis which bears directly on the modern library experience in "La Bibliotheque Fantastique," which originally appeared as the afterword to the German translation of Gustave Flaubert's (1874/1980) *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* (*The Temptation of Saint Antony*). In this essay, Foucault draws upon "library" and "fantasia" as hitherto polarized terms and brings them together to derive an appreciation of Flaubert's text. It is Foucault's reconciliation of the library (the rational) with the fantasia (the irrational) which forms the basis of the alternative account of the modern library experience offered here.

LA TENTATION DE SAINT ANTOINE

To understand Foucault's use of the concept of "library," it is necessary to briefly consider the text which was the main focus of his essay. According to Foucault (1967/1977) and Bart (1967), *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* was inspired by Flaubert's viewing of Breughel the Younger's painting of the same name at the Balbi Palace in Genoa in 1845. The text was written over a period of thirty years through three versions and "remained Flaubert's favorite until the end of his life" (Bart, 1967, p. 581). The historical Saint Antony portrayed in Breughel's painting was a monk in the Egypt of the fourth century. Flaubert's text opens with Saint Antony alone before his hut, high on a mountain, overlooking the Nile and the desert. The hermit's hut consists of "mud and reeds, with a flat roof and no door. Inside it are visible a pitcher and a loaf of black bread; in the middle, on a wooden slab, a fat book" (Flaubert, 1874/1980, p. 61). Antony, who has "a long beard, long hair, and wears a goatskin tunic" (Flaubert, 1874/1980, p. 61), is seated, cross-legged, engaged in making mats. The sun is setting, and Antony heaves a deep sigh. He is tired of making baskets and mats; his desire to pray has been exhausted, and he has doubts about his vocation. Antony laments:

> A fine style of life this is, twisting pieces of palm tree into crooks over the fire, making baskets, stitching mats, and exchanging it all with the Nomads for bread that breaks your teeth! Ah, misery! will it never end? Better be dead! I can't bear any more! Enough! enough! (Flaubert, 1874/1980, p. 66)

Antony turns to his Bible, and the passages on which he falls suggest "feasting, carnage, and vengeance, orgy, wealth, and . . . carnal love" (Buck, 1966, p. 54). Weak from fasting, Antony becomes faint. The hallucinations that comprise the remainder of the text begin:

He leans unsteadily against his cabin. "It's the fasting! I'm losing my strength. If I could eat, just for once... a bit of meat." He half shuts his eyes with faintness.

"Ah! red meat...a bunch of grapes to bite into!...curds shivering on a plate! But what's the matter with me now? . . .What is it? . . . I can feel my heart heaving like the sea, when it swells before a storm. I'm overcome with utter weakness, and the warm air seems to blow me a hint of scented hair. Surely no woman has arrived?..."

He turns toward the narrow path between the rocks. . . .[He] climbs onto a rock at the near end of the path; he leans over, trying to pierce the gloom.

"Yes! A moving mass, down there, right at the bottom, like people looking for their way. It's over here! They're going wrong" He calls: "This way! Come! come!" The echo repeats: Come! come! He drops his arms, dumbfounded. "How shameful! Ah! poor Antony!"

At once he hears a whispered 'Poor Antony!'

"Who's there? Answer me!"

The wind that blows through cracks between the boulders is freely modulating; and in these confused sonorities he makes out VOICES, as if the air were talking. They are soft, insinuating, hissing.

First Voice—Is it women you want?

Second Voice—Money bags, rather!

Third Voice—A shining sword?

Other Voices—All the people admire you!

—Go to sleep!

—You'll cut their throats, you will, you'll cut their throats!

Objects are meanwhile transformed. At the edge of the cliff the old palm tree with its tuft of yellow leaves becomes the torso of a woman, leaning over the abyss, her long hair floating. Antony turns toward his cabin; and the stand supporting the fat book with its pages loaded with black letters comes to seem like a bush crammed with swallows.

"It's the torch, of course, a trick of the light....Out with it!"

He puts out the torch, and is plunged in darkness. And all at once, in mid air, first a puddle of water passes by, then a prostitute, a temple corner, the figure of a soldier, a chariot drawn by two white horses, rearing. These images occur swiftly, percussively, showing up against the night like scarlet painted on ebony. They gather speed. They wheel past at a dizzy pace. At other times, they halt and gradually fade, or merge; or else they fly away, and others instantly appear.

Antony closes his eyes. They multiply, surround and besiege him. Indescribable terror sweeps over him; all he feels is a burning contraction in the pit of the stomach. Despite the uproar in his head, he is aware of the huge silence which cuts him off from the world. He tries to speak: impossible! The overall bond of his being seems to dissolve; and no longer resisting, Antony falls onto the mat. (Flaubert, 1874/1980, pp. 70-72)

Antony falls into a realm of dreams and visions. Episodes crowd in rapidly, coming in and out of the saint's attention, as do parades of gods and

monsters. Foucault (1967/1977) describes *La Tentation* as being to litera-
ture what Bosch was, at one time, to painting. Buck (1966) writes that:

> In the final version, the bewildering multiplicity of the dreams and
> the nightmares is depicted and presented with consummate art. One
> is often reminded of a surrealistic film; strange and striking images
> blend and merge, one into the other; forms dissolve; everything is
> decaying and passing to oblivion. Yet new forms constantly appear.
> (p. 60)

In contrast to the text's dreamlike qualities, the figures who consti-
tute the parade of temptations and grotesques were meticulously re-
searched by Flaubert. Bart (1967) writes that Flaubert "began with the
mystics; theology and the Bible followed; and before he had written the
last lines of *The Temptation*, he had read almost all the relevant authors,
ancient and modern" (p. 175). Foucault (1967/1977, p. 89) gives a more
comprehensive listing of "all the relevant authors" that Bart alludes to. A
quote from Flaubert's (1874/1980) text provides an example of his erudi-
tion:

> Steps draw nearer.
> "What's that?"
> Hilarion stretches out his arm:
> "Look!"
> And now under a pale beam of moonlight Antony distinguishes
> an interminable caravan filing past on the crest of the rocks—and
> one after another each traveller topples from the cliff into the pit.
> First come the three great gods of Samothrace—Axieros, Axiokeros,
> and Axiokersa—bunched together, masked in scarlet and raising their
> arms. Eesculapius advances in a melancholy manner without even
> seeing Samos and Telesphorus, who anxiously question him. Sosipolis,
> the Elean python-shaped, rolls his coils towards the abyss. Doespoina
> giddily throws herself in. Britomartis, howling with fright, clings to
> the meshes of her net. The centaurs arrive at a stiff gallop, and bowl
> pell-mell into the black hole. Behind them limp the pathetic troop
> of Nymphs. Those of the meadows are covered in dust, those of the
> woods moan and bleed, wounded by the woodmens' axes.
> The Gelludes, the Striges, the Empusas, all the infernal goddesses
> mixing their fangs and torches and vipers form a pyramaid—and up
> on top, on a vulture's skin, Eurynome, blue as a blowfly, devours her
> own arms. Then in an eddy vanish all at once: bloodthirsty Orthia,
> Hymnia of Orchomenus, the Patreans' Laphria, Aphaea of Aegina,
> Bendis of Thrace, bird-thighed Stymphalia. Instead of three eyes
> Triopas has nothing but three orbits. Erichthonius, his legs flabby,
> crawls like a cripple on his wrists.
> Hilarion—"What a pleasure, don't you think, to see them all ab-
> ject and in agony! Climb up with me onto this stone; and you'll be
> like Xerxes reviewing his army." (p. 196)

Many critics viewed *La Tentation* as a failure. For example, Bart (1967)
writes that "long arid stretches of Saint Anthony are only mildly curious in

an antiquarian sort of way. Some of it is inescapably dull and unconvincing or uninteresting" (p. 585). Starkie (1967), in a similar fashion, writes that, "taken as a whole, *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* is formless and diffuse, and largely unreadable today except for those with specialized knowledge" (p. 165). Culler (1974) writes that "one might postulate that the *Tentation* was designed to be exasperating and incomprehensible, 'un livre sur rien,' in that all these phantoms and temptations amount, finally, to nothing"(p. 180).

These reactions are revealing because they represent a failure to reconcile the dreamlike with the scholarly. How can one speak of hallucinations and visions based in scholarly research? In the same vein, how can it be considered appropriate to represent scholarly work as a disordered dream? For example, Buck (1966) writes that "Flaubert apprehended the culture of venerable traditions and submitted to a severe discipline of study and research. The erudition which he brought to his dream is overwhelming—too much so perhaps for most readers" (p. 60). Bart (1967) makes a similar critique:

> Where he could find adequate sources, Flaubert reinforced, condensed, or amalgamated them to produce an accurate mosaic as the basis for a passage; only thereafter would he go beyond his historical sources to literary considerations. His effort, as he had insisted from the beginning,was to complete history, to formulate its implications and achieve its intentions; it was not to be a new start, much less a romantic and personal overlay or substitution. His erudition was to keep him from lyrical surges of personalism. Or so, at least, he hoped. In fact, however, these surges proved irresistible and, as he came to realize soon after he had finished the book, its fundamental flaw was that he had allowed himself to take the place of Anthony. (p. 176)

Flaubert's "failure" can be interpreted from two perspectives. The first is that the severe discipline of study and research overwhelmed the reader expecting to engage with a work of literature. The factualness of Flaubert's descriptions become, in this context, dull, pointless, and incomprehensible. The second is the charge that Flaubert allowed himself to incorporate personal aspects of his life into a work of detailed scholarship. *La Tentation* is interpreted as failing as both a work of literature and scholarship since the detailed scholarship intrudes and takes away from the text's literary achievements and, similarly, the work's literary pretensions intrude and take away from the work's scholarly qualities.

These perceptions of failure make sense with respect to a positivist-based notion of knowledge, and the dichotomy of order and disorder, reason and madness, that it constitutes. Flaubert's text does not represent either reason or madness, history or imagination, scholarship or literature, in a pure form. Rather, *La Tentation* presents reason in the form of a hallucination, dreams in the form of scholarship and, as such, both aspects are significantly weakened. Bart (1967) writes that "his imagina-

tion, so fertile for the production of imagery, was timid in developing historical context, the facts, so to speak, of the situation. Where his sources failed him, for instance in the appearance of Egyptian cities, he did not dare to invent but preferred to leave all such urban settings imprecise" (pp. 175-76).

Whereas these critics view Flaubert's combination of rationality and dreams as a fundamental weakness, Foucault (1967/1977) sees in *La Tentation* a profound new way of writing where the author "was responding to an experience of the fantastic which was singularly modern and relatively unknown before his time, to the discovery of a new imaginative space in the nineteenth century" (p. 90). It is this "new space" that Foucault (1967/1977) calls La Bibliotheque Fantastique—i.e., the fusing of the library and the fantastic, reason and madness, scholarship and dream, in a single literary text and a style of writing.

La Bibliotheque Fantastique

In the positivist epistemological stance, the library's embodiment of order stands in direct contrast to the notion of fantasia. Where librarians seek to order and control the materials before them, a fantasia is a work in which the author's fancy roves unrestricted by such codes or conventions. Fantasy is free play, imagination, not bound by the tenets of order but made possible by the lack of them. Foucault's essay develops a notion in which these opposites are conjoined to form a new notion of each.

The new imaginative space that Foucault posits begins with the fusion of erudition and phantasmagoria as opposed to their separation. Foucault (1967/1977) writes that: "*The Temptation* is not the product of dreams and rapture, but a monument to meticulous erudition" (p. 89) and that "it is indeed surprising that such erudite precision strikes us as a phantasmagoria. More exactly, we are astounded that Flaubert experienced the scholar's patience, the very patience necessary to knowledge, as the liveliness of a frenzied imagination" (p. 90). Foucault questions the separation of the patient and the frenzied, the scholarly and the imaginative and, unlike Flaubert's critics mentioned above, sees this uncertainty in a positive and productive manner. In *La Tentation*, such dichotomies do not make sense. To deploy them leads to the conclusion that the work is dull and pointless. Foucault argues that Flaubert's text is a space where such dichotomies are radically redefined. The disordered realm of the fantastic cannot be simply marginalized and confined to a separate domain. Madness creeps into the order of the library and the library orders the madness of hallucination.

The heart of Foucault's analysis is the claim that the realms of the library and the fantastic can no longer be kept apart. Foucault (1967/1977) writes that the "domain of phantasms is no longer the night, the sleep of reason, or the uncertain void that stands before desire, but, on

the contrary, wakefulness, untiring attention, zealous erudition, and constant vigilance" (p. 90). He continues: "[T]he imaginary now resides between the book and the lamp. The fantastic is no longer a property of the heart, nor is it found among the incongruities of nature; it evolves from the accuracy of knowledge, and its treasures lie dormant in documents" (Foucault, 1967/1977, p. 90). Finally, Foucault (1967/1977) writes that:

> Dreams are no longer summoned with closed eyes, but in reading; and a true image is now a product of learning: it derives from words spoken in the past, exact recensions, the amassing of minute facts, monuments reduced to infinitesimal fragments, and the reproductions of reproductions. In the modern experience, these elements contain the power of the impossible. (pp. 90-91)

The production of a fantasia from a domain previously given to reason, rationality, and order is what Foucault has called the "modern experience.... a literary space wholly dependent on the network formed by books of the past" (p. 91). The library is not a backdrop to this work as a separate realm but is an integral part of it. Whereas the library once contained the book, now the book contains the library. The book becomes its own library. Flaubert's book "dreams other books. . .books that are taken up, fragmented, displaced, combined, lost, set at an unapproachable distance by dreams, but also brought closer to the imaginary and sparkling realization of desires" (p. 92).

In this analysis, the dissolution of the library/fantasia dichotomy produces new conceptions of both, and it is the conception of the library that is of interest here. As the library becomes integral to the experience of Flaubert's fantasia, so *La Tentation* has taken on the characteristics of the library. For Foucault, *La Tentation* "may appear as merely another new book to be shelved alongside all the others, but it serves, in actuality, to extend the space that existing books can occupy. It recovers other books; it hides and displays them and, in a single movement, it causes them to glitter and disappear" (pp. 91-92). Flaubert's text is itself a catalog which places and orders other texts. *La Tentation* is a library, but the rationality which derives its order is of a different kind. As Foucault (1967/1977) graphically states in *La Tentation*, "the library is on fire" (p. 92).

Barthes (1971/1977) makes a similar distinction in his discussion of the "work" and the "Text" (with a capital T). For Barthes, a "work is a fragment of substance, occupying a part of the space of books (in a library for example)" (p. 156). The work is a physical entity that can be cataloged, ordered, and placed with respect to other such works. The text, however, is not to be thought of as an object that can be computed. Rather, it is a "methodological field" (p. 156) or a "network" (p. 161) that "exists in the movement of a discourse" (p. 156). The text does not, and cannot, stop on a library shelf. The text's movement cuts across particular works. As Barthes (1971/1977) explains:

[The Text is] woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages (what language is not?), antecedent and contemporary, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony. The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find the "sources," the "influences" of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read: they are quotations without inverted commas. (p. 160)

Foucault's analysis suggests that *La Tentation* is a clear exemplar of a Barthesian text; one which asserts a "subversive force in respect of the old classifications. . . .If the Text poses problems of classification (which is furthermore one of its 'social' functions), this is because it always involves a certain experience of limits. . . .The text is that which goes to the limit of the rules of enunciation (rationality, readability, etc.)" (Barthes, 1977, p. 157). Solomon (1993) has argued that the exploration of the distinction between the work and the text, the library and the fantasia, represents an "exciting challenge" (p. 63) in the field of communication research. It is certainly an avenue with much relevance to library scholarship, the implications of which are described in the following section.

"LA BIBLIOTHEQUE FANTASTIQUE" AND THE MODERN LIBRARY EXPERIENCE

Foucault's (1967/1977) "La Bibliotheque Fantastique" represents a concept far different from the vision of the library informed by a positivist view of knowledge. It is a conception that deserves serious consideration as the positivist model and the practices of actual librarians and users begin to lose touch with each other. Dervin and Nilan (1986) have argued that a "major tension" (p. 5) exists between primarily positivist conceptions and the behaviors that users and systems display in practice. This tension is seen in the stereotypical images of librarians discussed earlier and how they come to be seen as natural aspects of the librarian/user relationship. It is apparent in Rothstein's (1977) characterization of the librarian-user relationship as a "fairly straightforward matter of an informed person imparting knowledge to [a] less informed one" (p. 397). This article has attempted to demonstrate that such characterizations follow from a positivist world view in which the library and the user are placed in a specific relationship with one another; a relationship in which the library determines order and the relevancy of information for specific needs, as represented by the fortress library of Eco's (1983) *The Name of the Rose*. Library and user are separate domains; the library is the domain of order and the user the domain of ambiguity. In the librarian/user interaction, order is given to the user to alleviate disorder through the provision of texts. However, the flow of influence is essentially one way, lest madness enter the rationality of the library.

These characterizations are simply not appropriate for describing the practice of actual library searches. With the development of increasingly sophisticated information technologies, the location of specific texts or facts may not be the primary issue in most library searches, and the role of the librarian as a fact provider is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. Anthes (1985) has argued that "because of high technology any library can have vast amounts of information, much more than any student or faculty would want, need, or use. The librarian's job now becomes more one of interpretation, filtering, and evaluation" (p. 57). What is being "interpreted, filtered, and evaluated" is not which specific text is required to meet a specific need but, rather on which collection of texts and the explanation of a criteria which relates them as a coherent set. It is that which relates texts which becomes the information that is valuable rather than the specific information contained within a specific text. Where the information within a text is fixed, the relationships between texts are open and created anew each time a modern library search is carried out. Garrett (1991) makes the following point:

> Modern library searches do not lead from point *A* (the catalog, the reference desk) to point *B* (the book, the answer, the truth), but instead invite their computer-literate users to explore on their own the many recesses of a multicursal maze, placing them again and again in decision situations, at forks or nodes where multiple paths lead down through the hierarchies of subject headings, on their way to what may or may not be a useful or even existing document. (p. 381)

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 developed and made possible by the capabilities of computer searching. The experience of the multicursal maze does not lead to a particular answer located in a specific text but rather the creation of new rationalities that define the usefulness or worthlessness of any specific text. As Garrett (1991) explains, "the library user creates with every search his or her own ad hoc library of five, fifty, or five thousand book and journal citations, cut out from that great 'virtual' library that is the universe of all accessible books, all stored information" (p. 381). And from this "ad hoc library," the user must create the unique catalog which orders and unites them. In this act, every modern library user becomes Flaubert writing *La Tentation.*

In this conception of the library experience, the library user is less like a scientist in search of a single answer and more like the artist who is creating and shaping a picture. In discussing the picture of a human face, Bronowski (1974) captures the spirit of the library experience in the experience of the artist: "We are aware that these pictures do not so much fix the face as explore it; that the artist is tracing the detail almost as if by touch; and that each line that is added strengthens the picture but never

makes it final. We accept that as the method of the artist" (p. 353). In the bibliotheque fantastique, the acquisition of information in texts does not fix knowledge but explores it; the library user traces the domain of the bibliotheque fantastique as if by touch rather than by sight; and that each text located and read strengthens knowledge but never makes it final. Rather, a new text comes to make sense in the contexts of those already accessed and used, just as a new brush stroke comes to make sense against the context of those strokes already on the artist's canvas.

In the interface between the user and library system, the fantasia of imagination and the linking of disparate elements in new ways, becomes an integral part of the library experience and is made possible because of it. Foucault (1967/1977) writes that "the imaginary is not formed in op-position 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*" (p. 91, emphasis mine). In the bibliotheque fantastique, there is no longer a canon to turn to and master. Everything is potentially valu-able or worthless, depending on its position in the temporary contexts that are created in individual library searches. This is a powerful postmodernist idea in which dichotomies such as the true and the false, the important and the trivial, and the enduring and the ephemeral lose their previous importance. Using an information retrieval technology, such as World Wide Web browsers (e.g., Netscape), or search engines (e.g., Yahoo), the search for a name or phrase or subject may produce a comic strip or advertising slogan as readily as a quotation from the Bible or Shakespeare (Himmelfarb, 1996). Every source has the same weight and credibility as every other. No authority is "privileged" over any other be-yond the contexts of the author's own bibliotheque fantastique.

This notion is entirely foreign to a positivist outlook where library and fantasia are separated. The positivist framework cannot conceive of a library where collections are temporary rather then universal, subjective rather than objective, and follows structures of rationality that may be entirely different from those imposed by the library system. The search for knowledge is replaced by the idea of the construction of knowledge in the experience of the fantasia. As Anderson (1992) argues, the library is not a container of knowledge but a context for knowledge creation:

> In providing the context for knowledge, several interwoven relation-
> ships exist in libraries: the creation and management of relationships
> among information objects, the creation of context to enable the
> interaction and discussion of information between the user and that
> knowledge, and the communication and promulgation of the result-
> ing new knowledge creations. (p. 112)

The ideas of "context" and "relationship" replace the idea of "the search." In the contexts of knowledge made possible by the bibliotheque

fantastique, the positivist notion of an absolute order mediated by the "librarian-god" is circumvented. Flaubert's *La Tentation* becomes the norm, a symbol of the modern library experience. Foucault's analysis of *La Tentation* represents, in many ways, the experience of a modern library search; the uniting of texts through the creation of rationalities that are not the province of a universal order that is the ultimate goal of a positivist approach. Unlike the positivist model of the library, the ambiguity of the user, previously considered a source of irrationality to be excluded from the library experience, becomes the creative source of fantasia.

CONCLUSION

Foucault (1984) described his work as "seeking to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom" (p. 46). This freedom is made possible by a critique that will "separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think" (p. 46). The bibliotheque fantastique is an important step in that work, one that is utilized here as a way to separate out the positivist epistemology that has defined the nature of the library experience for so long and offer the possibility of no longer "being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think." The goal of the library must be to "enable the reader or author to frame knowledge without constraints and focus energy toward the creation of knowledge rather than on understanding an imposed, external organization of that knowledge. Freedom exists when the author/reader can build upon the linkages and paths of knowledge in a flexible, multifaceted world (Anderson, 1992, p. 114). Foucault's bibliotheque fantastique captures this spirit from a perspective that is not limited by dominant frames of positivist thinking. It is one that deserves serious attention as the experience of the modern library continues to elude the positivistic modes of explanation that have dominated the means by which the library has been conceptualized.

REFERENCES

Anderson, G. T. (1992). Dimensions, context, and freedom: The library in the social creation of knowledge. In E. Barrett (Ed.), *Sociomedia: Multimedia, hypermedia, and the social construction of knowledge* (pp. 107-124). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Anthes, S. H. (1985). High tech/high touch: Academic libraries respond to change in the behavioral sciences. *Behavioral and Social Sciences Librarian, 5*(1), 53-65.

Bart, B. F. (1967). *Flaubert.* Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Barthes, R. (1977). From work to text. In R. Barthes (Ed.), *Image-music-text* (S. Heath, Trans.). New York: Noonday Press (original work published in 1971).

Black, S. M. (1981). Personality—librarians as communicators. *Canadian Library Journal, 38*(3), 65-71.

Borges, J. L. (1962). The library of Babel (J. E. Irby, Trans.). In J. L. Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected stories and other writings* (D. A. Yates & J. E. Irby, Eds.). Norfolk, CT: New Directions Books.

Bronowski, J. (1973). *The ascent of man.* Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Co.

Buck, S. (1966). *Gustave Flaubert.* New York: Twayne Publishers.

Budd, J. M. (1995). An epistemological foundation for library and information science. *Library Quarterly, 65*(3), 295-318.

Carmichael, J. V. (1992). The male librarian and the feminine image: A survey of stereotype, status, and gender perceptions. *Library and Information Science Research, 14*(4), 411-446.

Castillo, D. A. (1984). *The translated world: A postmodern tour of libraries in literature.* Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University Press.

Chelton, M. K. (1996). *The communicative production of institutional authority: The example of a library service encounter.* Unpublished paper presented at the annual conference of the Speech Communication Association, San Diego, CA, November 1996.

Culler, J. (1974). *Flaubert: The uses of uncertainty.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Dervin, B., & Nilan, M. (1986). Information needs and uses. In M. E. Williams (Ed.), *Annual review of information science and technology* (Vol. 21). White Plains, NY: Knowledge Industry Publications.

Eco, U. (1983). *The name of the rose* (W. Weaver, Trans.). New York: Warner.

Flaubert, G. (1980). *The temptation of Saint Antony* (K. Mrosovsky, Trans.). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press (original work published 1874).

Foucault, M. (1977). The Fantasia of the library. In D. F. Bouchard & S. Simon (Trans.), *Michel. Foucault, language, counter-memory, practice: Selected essays and interview.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press (original work published in 1967).

Foucault, M. (1984). What is enlightenment? (C. Porter, Trans.). In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *The Foucault reader* (pp. 32-50). New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1988). *Madness and civilization: A history of insanity in the age of reason* (R. Howard, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books (original work published in 1961).

Garrett, J. (1991). Missing Eco: Reading *The Name of the Rose* as library criticism. *Library Quarterly, 61*(4), 373-388.

Harris, M. H. (1986). State, class, and cultural reproduction: Toward a theory of library service in the United States. *Advances in Librarianship, 14*, 211-252.

Harris, M. H. (1993). [Review of Michel Foucault]. *Library Quarterly, 63*(1), 115-116.

Himmelfarb, G. (1996). A neo-Luddite reflects on the Internet. *Chronicle of Higher Education, 63*(10), A56.

Huspek, M., & Radford, G. P. (1997). *Transgressing discourses: Communication and the voice of other.* Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Kuhlthau, C. C. (1988a). Developing a model of the library search process: Cognitive and affective aspects. *RQ, 28*, 232-242.

Kuhlthau, C. C. (1988b). Perceptions of the information search process in libraries: A study of changes from high school through college. *Information Processing and Management, 24*(4), 419-427.

Kuhlthau, C. C. (1990). The information search process: From theory to practice. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science, 31*, 72-75.

Macey, D. (1993). *The lives of Michel Foucault.* London, England: Hutchinson.

Mount, E. (1966). Communication barriers and the reference question. *Special Libraries, 57*, 575-578.

Radford, G. P. (1992). Positivism, Foucault, and the fantasia of the library: Conceptions of knowledge and the modern library experience. *Library Quarterly, 62*(4), 408-424.

Radford, G. P., & Budd, J. M. (1997). We do need a philosophy of library and information science—we're not confused enough. *Library Quarterly, 67*(3), 315-321.

Radford, M. L., & Radford, G. P. (1997). Power, knowledge, and fear: Feminism, Foucault, and the stereotype of the female librarian. *Library Quarterly, 67*(3), 250-266.

Rothstein, S. D. (1977). Across the desk: 100 years of reference encounters. *Canadian Library Journal, 34*, 391-399.

Sable, A. P. (1969). The sexuality of the library profession: The male and female librarian. *Wilson Library Bulletin, 2*, 748-751.

Solomon, M. (1993). The things we study: Texts and their interactions. *Communication Monographs, 60*(1), 62-68.

Starkie, E. (1967). *Flaubert: The making of the master.* New York: Atheneum.

Swope, M. J., & Katzer, J. (1972). The silent majority: Why don't they ask questions? *RQ, 12*, 161-166.

Thomas, N. P. (1996). *Reading libraries: An interpretive study of discursive practices in library architecture and the interactional construction of personal identity.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Tuominen, K. (1997). User-centered discourse: An analysis of the subject positions of the user and the librarian. *Library Quarterly, 67*(4), 350-371.

Walsh, D. P. (1987). "On fire or on ice": Prefatory remarks on the library in literature. *Reference Librarian, 18,* 211-238.

Zwadlo, J. (1997). We don't need a philosophy of library and information science—we're confused enough already. *Library Quarterly, 67*(2), 103-121.