How Libraries Make Us Believe: Space, Place, and the Academic Library as Truth-Spot

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Word Count (excluding references): 5195

Abstract

This paper considers how the physical spaces of academic libraries actively assert the belief of intellectual pursuit upon users. Taking up Thomas Gieryn's concept of "truth-spots," this paper argues that the academic library is particularly effective at encapsulating and expressing this pursuit through its own spatial configurations. Library spaces achieve this through the manipulation of time, spatial gathering and separation, an imposed order, exposure and obfuscation, as well as the library's unique or standardized configurations. This paper invites us to think about the library's metaphysicality in terms that connect abstract beliefs to the library's physical materials and spaces. The purpose of this paper is to identify the subtle, yet powerful, spatial changes occurring in recent efforts to reconfigure academic library spaces. The implications of such a consideration may aid to inform future (re)designs of library spaces.

Introduction

Several years ago, as I stepped through the doors of the historic Long Room of Trinity College Library in Dublin, I sensed a subtle, yet powerful, force, which I assumed most visitors shared. Something *about* the library—perhaps its history, soaring architecture, or general otherworldliness—resonated deeply and beckoned the question: What mechanisms of place are at work here? As visitors, we recognize, and maybe even feel, the assertion of some abstract truth upon our senses that is communicated through the built space of a library. We might sense that knowledge dwells in the library's space, that history is cultivated among its stacks, or that humanity's truths rest somewhere between the pages of its seemingly endless collection of information.

Much has been written about user behaviours, perceptions, and the sense of community within libraries (Antell & Engel, 2007; Khoo et al., 2016; Montgomery & Miller, 2011; Van Slyck, 2007). However, this paper explores how the physical spaces and materials of the academic library itself assert particular truths. Thomas Gieryn (2018), a sociologist and historian of science, identifies places that make intangible yet powerful assertions as *truth-spots* and broadly asks "what are places distinctly good at doing?" (p. 172). In response, the following paper argues that academic libraries as truth-spots are particularly good at encapsulating and expressing the truth of intellectual pursuit through their own spatial configurations. While academic libraries strive to meet the needs of users (e.g., access to resources and services), the spaces in which such endeavours occur have been integrating new user expectations while adapting to growing challenges across the institutional, cultural, and educational realms. As such, this paper suggests that an understanding of the spatial mechanisms of place within

academic libraries may provide us with a nuanced understanding towards their effective (re)design.

The following paper adopts Gieryn's (2018) concept of truth-spots to frame and discuss how the physical spaces of academic libraries express the idea of intellectual pursuit as a significant belief held by users about the space. By positioning the academic library as a truth-spot, we are invited to think about its metaphysicality in terms that connect abstract notions like education, scholarship, and intellectual pursuit to the library's physical materials and spaces. To draw such connections, this paper will define and consider two examples of truth-spots, after which it will explore the academic library to reveal how its physical spaces make us believe in the experience of intellectual pursuit. Following this, we will turn to the historical trends associated with library spaces with a view to suggest that recent changes to library design are renegotiating the mechanisms of place within the academic library.

Defining Truth-Spots

Gieryn (2002; 2006; 2018) has discussed at length how places of significance can assert particular beliefs. The basis of belief is defined by virtue of a place's location, by "the materials encrusted there," and by the narratives that have been constructed around them (Gieryn, 2018, pp. 171-172). Gieryn (2002) refers to such places of belief as truth-spots, contending that they embody a "paradox of place and truth" in which the credibility of claims that they produce are contingent on their provenance in that place while simultaneously transcending the place itself (p. 113). As Gieryn (2018) puts it, "place achieves placelessness" (p. 166). However, not all places are truth-spots, and their designation as such is not defined by the personal or social attribution to a place,

but rather it is the place itself that exerts truth "on the bodies and minds" of people, "sometimes convincing us that assertions from there are true" (Gieryn, 2018, p. 171). Thus, truth-spots enact a spatial assertion of beliefs upon the people who visit them, and these beliefs are in turn supported by cultural narratives to foster a sense of place. Such places, according to Gieryn (2018), must have fixed and unique locations, natural or manmade materials, and meaningful socio-cultural narratives and interpretations to effectively convey their truths (pp. 2-3). Virtual places (i.e., online environments), in Gieryn's (2018) view, do not qualify as truth-spots as they lack a spatial experience. However, the ever-expanding possibilities of virtual reality challenge this assertion and would provide a rich basis for further exploration of Gieryn's concept of truth-spots.

While there is no universal definition of a truth-spot, Gieryn (2018) offers several common patterns to consider: a) truth-spots manipulate time, b) truth-spots gather together (or separate), c) truth-spots impose order (or remain messy), d) truth-spots expose (or hide), and e) truth-spots are unique (or standardized) (pp. 172-177). In most cases, truth-spots embody a simultaneity between these patterns—that is, they are often both *this* and *that*. This tension of simultaneity within the configuration of physical space is what makes truth-spots different from the concept of placeness, which is an interplay of human attachment, dependence, and identity relating to a particular place (Nanzer, 2004). Truth-spots exert truths (or beliefs) upon the "bodies and minds" of people through space, whereas *placeness* is the experience of that exertion (Gieryn, 2018, p. 171).

A definition of truth-spots is by nature elusive and is better described by example than explanation. Courthouses, scientific laboratories, Henry David Thoreau's Walden

Pond, and New York City's Stonewall Inn are examples of truth-spots (Gieryn, 2018).

Each of these places has gathered cultural narratives and materials. Some are newborn

truth-spots, while others have long histories and deep socio-cultural layers. The

courthouse, for instance, with its interior design of interconnected rooms and corridors,

as well as the perpetuated narratives of courtroom dramas and the image of the

discerning judge, is imbued with a sense of truth, as a place where justice, authority,

and the law exist. These truths are simultaneously hidden, transcendent, and made

credible through an interplay of human experience and space. How such truths are

determined by those within and without the physical space is the result of a tension

between unique judicial parameters, such as "public" trials and "impartial" juries (Gieryn,

2018, p. 103). In the former case, "public" assumes exposure while the latter assumes

an obfuscation of influence. The courthouse must "architecturally manage" the

movements of the accused, the witnesses, the judge, and the jury through the

application of passages, open and closed spaces, and highly prescribed lines of sight

that determine the physical proximities of individuals (Gieryn, 2018, p. 103). As

courthouses are undeniably spatial manifestations of power, the mechanisms of place

must balance the practical needs of the judicial process with the absolute necessity of

representing it as a transparent and public place "grounded in truth" (Gieryn, 2018, p.

121).

The scientific laboratory is another truth-spot that has been imprinted in our

cultural imaginations. Like the academic library, the "ultra clean" laboratory is a staple of

many university and college institutions as a place where truths of another kind are

simultaneously created and discovered (Gieryn, 2018, p. 148). In an effort to determine

true facts about nature, nature is completely removed from the laboratory through extensive sterilization procedures and stringent experiment protocols. During the 1950s, a debate raged over the health impact of lead production. In an effort to establish evidence-based credibility for his claims, scientist Clair Patterson set up the first highly-sterilized laboratory at Caltech (California Institute of Technology) to overturn the overwhelming support for the production of the hazardous metal (Gieryn, 2018, p. 158). In order to prove that lead was having a negative consequence on people's health and the earth, Patterson understood the necessity of creating a controlled environment where truth could be measured against "blanks" (i.e., contaminant tests) and where "fact-making" could occur with the utmost credibility (Gieryn, 2018, p. 153).

As a truth-spot, the ubiquitous and ultra clean laboratory is at once a singular place bound by location and a place with truths that transcend location by virtue of the reproducibility of those truths in any other laboratory. Gieryn (2018) points to four unique aspects of the laboratory that make it a particularly notable truth-spot. First, it is disengaged and isolated from the outside world where nature is messy (Gieryn, 2018, p. 166). Second, laboratories are made transparent through observation, research, scholarly publishing, and their learning environments. They are places where access is based on a shared knowledge of the laboratory's placeness and where the culture of scientific assertions relies on collective participation (Gieryn, 2018, p. 167). Similarly, standardization—the third aspect of laboratories—"adds credibility to claims from any one of them, doing away with the specter of idiosyncrasy" (Gieryn, 2018, p. 168). Standardization also shapes the cultural experience of a scientific community that is engaged in laboratory work, wherein identity and mutual legitimacy rely on the

invariability of those spaces. The fourth aspect, portability, points toward the unbound

nature of ultra clean laboratories. Labs-on-wheels are tasked with collecting samples

from an array of natural environments with nearly the same sterility as labs fixed to a

single location (Gieryn, 2018, p. 169). Their portability bypasses nature altogether in the

field, taking from nature the smallest fragment and propping it up as proxy to nature

itself. With these aspects in mind, the essential value of laboratories as truth-spots is

transformed by the irony that they disappear from the scientific published record

altogether (Gieryn, 2018, p. 169). Scientific articles and research studies generally do

not elaborate on the configuration of their particular laboratories or the cleaning

procedures undertaken therein. Within the scientific community, the sterility of the

laboratory is understood and expected universally, and in this way the laboratory

achieves placelessness—one lab is in effect all labs, within which truths are given

credibility (Gieryn, 2018).

As we have seen, the act of identifying a truth-spot is by no means

straightforward, nor—as Gieryn (2018) cautiously notes—should we think of the process

of identification as a "checklist" of features (p. 172). Rather, truth-spots may be

identified by first exploring the "claims, assertions, [and] beliefs" about a place, "and

then ask[ing]: what exactly is it about this location—and its materiality, its narrations—

that confers credibility on those accounts?" (Gieryn, 2018, p. 172). What follows is such

an exploration of academic libraries with the aid of the truth-spot patterns listed above.

As aforementioned, these patterns should not be viewed as a checklist. Instead, they

are commonalities that invite us to explore the metaphysicality of the library in relation to

the beliefs that both dwell within and transcend the physical space itself.

The Academic Library as a Truth-Spot

Historically, physical collections were the definitive source of academic libraries' credibility and legitimacy (Pettegree, 2010). Take, for example, the seventeenth-century private collection of Sir Thomas Bodley, who donated some 16,000 volumes to the struggling Oxford University Library. Scholars and readers across Europe eagerly visited the library, despite its stringent reading rules, to consult the new collection and the expanded building that housed it (Pettegree, 2010, p. 319). Describing the Renaissance institutional library, Andrew Pettegree (2010) suggests that "these libraries offered opportunities for serious political conversation in a space where their host, the Renaissance prince, could display wealth and power through ownership of books" (p. 321). Two centuries later, the British colonial powers of the nineteenth century viewed military libraries as necessary tools in establishing bureaucratic control over distant colonies, signalling the power and legitimacy of control over peoples and places (Tetreault, 2007). Today, academic libraries are generally less concerned with overt displays of their power and control and are more closely aligned with the behaviours and needs of their users towards academic success. That is not to say that libraries are no longer symbols of power—they certainly can be; however, it is their support of education and intellectual pursuit that drive their role within the parent institution.

In keeping with Gieryn's (2018) suggestion, it is critical to explore what claims and assertions academic libraries express while also teasing out the beliefs users have about the library as a place. Such an exploration is perhaps akin to investigating "the meaning" of the library, which John Wilkin (2015) argues is a "complex interplay" of a library's role in curation, research, learner engagement, publishing, and—most

immediate to the argument at hand—"creating and managing spaces devoted to users and collections" (pp. 243, 237). However, what we seek by way of truth-spot beliefs is ultimately less operational (i.e., the functions performed within the library) and more abstract, as an expression of claims and assertions from the library space itself. To identify claims, assertions, and beliefs—a collective truth pertaining to the academic library—we must look to the gathered materials and the use of space within the library, and finally to socio-cultural narratives about the academic library. Alice Crawford (2015) approaches something akin to a totality of claims, assertions, and beliefs associated with libraries when she writes:

> [A library] is a collection of books, a center for scholarship, a universal memory, a maze or labyrinth, a repository of hidden or occulted knowledge, a sanctum, an archive for stories, a fortress, a space of transcendence, a focus of wealth and display, a vehicle of spirituality, an emblem of wisdom and learning, a mind or brain, an ordainer of the universe, a mausoleum, a time machine, a temple, a utopia, a gathering place, an antidote to fanaticism, a silent repository of countless unread books, a place for the pursuit of truth. (p. xvii)

From the Library of Alexandria to the HathiTrust Digital Library, the library continues to assert a complex set of claims and beliefs about its meaning and significance to society. Considering the academic library from the perspective of its user community—students, faculty, and researchers—one of the resounding beliefs is that the library is a place for intellectual pursuit. It is the proverbial temple of knowledge. Beyond the lecture hall, classroom, pub, laboratory, or study nooks across universities and colleges, the library is often the physical and (almost always) the intellectual center of the campus. The

historian Shelby Foote has said that "a university is just a group of buildings gathered around a library" (Shelby Foote - Wikiquote, n.d.). Pointing to a 2009 LibQUAL+ protocol for library quality assessment from the Association of Research Libraries, Jong-Ae Kim (2016) highlights various aspects—and, arguably, beliefs—about libraries as places for "inspiration… study and learning;… individual activities;… research, [and]… group work" (p. 510). Thus, academic libraries are truth-spots where the legitimacy of education is asserted, where the ethos of scholarship is engendered, and where the physical spaces facilitate the belief, or truth, of intellectual pursuit. With this in mind, we may now turn to how the physical spaces of libraries enact such a belief, and, further, how they make it credible. In an effort to contextualize the library as a truth-spot in its own right, the following section explores the five common truth-spot patterns outlined above in relation to academic libraries.

Truth-Spots Manipulate Time

Academic libraries have a unique ability to transport users through time. By collecting knowledge in the form of books and other resources that have been created over centuries of scholarship, the academic library makes tangible the vast expanse of human intellectual achievement. Gieryn (2018) states that "some places persist through time as material reminders, capable of evoking memories that can be used to legitimate" and "affirm today's preferred narrative[s]" (p. 172). Although Gieryn is referring to historical sites like Selma and Stonewall, the evocation of memory through materials echoes the library's socio-cultural and historical role as a facilitator of recorded memory. Here lies a tension between the "universe of knowledge" and the limits of curation that make the mission of intellectual pursuit what Crawford (2015) refers to as a "tangle of paradox" (p. xiv). The knowledge held within an academic

library represents our past and serves as a reflection of where we are today, but no single library can capture the entirety of human achievement. Therein lies a manipulation of time that nurtures the belief of intellectual pursuit within a place that promises the totality of time and yet is unable to fully meet that promise. We need only think of how often students or researchers express their shock at the unavailability of a published work in a library to witness this belief. As a cultural and memory institution, the academic library is both a representation of human time and a place where time unfolds through the preservation of evidence. Thomas Mann (2007) challenges the effectiveness of searching digital library collections from a "blank search box," as opposed to a physical collection in which a classified order has the ability to capture context (time) through subject headings and other forms of organization (p. 199). In other words, intellectual pursuit as a core belief is best enacted through the spatial experience of searching physical collections. The book, periodical, audio or video clip, and other resources are indeed the units of time. Thus, when library materials are accessed, put into dialogue with one another, and used to advance knowledge creation by way of learning and research, the unfolding of time occurs. As Carl Sagan once said, even the simple act of reading "is to voyage through time" (as cited in Ryan et al., 2016, p. 284).

Truth-Spots Gather Together (Or Separate)

As it has been noted in this article, the collection and acquisition of library materials has historically defined the mission of academic libraries. However, it is the spatial relationships between users and the materials themselves that confer the belief of intellectual pursuit. The library simultaneously contains the physical evidence of the pursuit (e.g., books and journals) and facilitates the movements and actions of the users

throughout the space. Book stacks often inhabit a central and, therefore, symbolically important position in the heart of the library, where they are gathered together in rows of extensive shelving. At the University of Guelph, for example, the majority of book stacks are concentrated together and are at times separated from more active, collaborative spaces through sound-muffling automatic sliding doors. Additionally, in most large libraries the stacks are spread out across numerous floors, requiring users to move among and between them. Users are never able to see the totality of a library's collection, just fragments, which propels the belief that there is always more to find. On the other hand, open collaborative spaces gather users themselves to foster engaged learning while separating them from the often individual experience of navigating labyrinthine shelving. Such a separation is evident on study floors at Brock University's James A. Gibson Library, where collaborative areas and resources are at opposite ends of any given floor. The managed movement of users throughout the space enacts the experience of "pursuit" in the form of seeking, exploring resources, engaging with other users, and crossing delineated boundaries.

Perhaps the most impactful example of how library spaces gather and separate is the ubiquitous presence of study carrels. At once together and separate, users occupying study carrels inhabit a space where their proximity to other users and the materials of knowledge around them imposes the belief of intellectual pursuit as both a communal and individual experience. Here, the tension of simultaneity is charged by the configuration of library space, and this is a prime example of how the library as a truth-spot lends credibility to the belief of intellectual pursuit. That is, the pursuit is legitimized by the oscillation between individual acts of study and the shared act of education. The

study carrel is in some way like the scientific laboratory: each carrel is spatially disengaged from all others, yet it relies on the standardization of their collective configuration to lend credibility to what occurs within them. Although other truth-spots build their credibility of beliefs by keeping people apart (e.g., the courthouse) or bringing them together (e.g., the pilgrimage path to Santiago de Compostela, Spain), the academic library does both. This speaks to Gieryn's (2018) claim that there is no "consistent and universal set of place effects that lend believability to accounts, as if *only* 'together' or *only* 'apart' would work—it depends on the particulars" (p. 174).

Truth-Spots Impose Order (Or Remain Messy)

Spatial and intellectual order are essential to the lasting mission and existence of the academic library. Much like the courthouse, the academic library adheres to prescribed notions of deliberately ordered space that delineate the boundaries of movements and actions. Rows of book stacks are positioned together, while study carrels are typically found at the perimeter of study floors or sprawl like large islands of hushed activity. Additionally, the imposition of order and movement can be glimpsed from the practice of positioning help and check-out desks or kiosks on the main floor, while special collections and archives are often located on the basement level. Considering the intellectual imposition of order, the physical collections themselves are often organized by the Library of Congress Classification scheme. This organization asserts an order of knowledge that supports intellectual pursuit through an accepted classification mechanism. As such, the academic library as a truth-spot is facilitated through imposed orders, convincing users that the wealth of intellectual achievement can be organized, discovered, and accessed, while the reality is quite the opposite. The intentional imposition of order conveys the credibility of such a belief. However, the changing

nature of such impositions also precipitates "messy" or fluid delineations of space, flows of information, and user expectations.

Truth-Spots Expose (Or Hide)

Academic libraries have historically managed the visibility of physical collections and the user experience through various forms of obfuscation and exposure. Scott Bennett (2009) identifies three progressive paradigm shifts describing the relationship between materials and users. The "reader-centered" paradigm was born out of the medieval monastic tradition of individual contemplation, wherein the user space was limited to the reading room or, in the case of monastic communities, the scriptorium, cloisters, and library (Bennett, 2009, p. 182). In such environments, the aforementioned study carrel came to define the spatial boundaries of knowledge acquisition (Khoo et al., 2016, p. 63). As such, book stacks were hidden with limited access akin to a *sanctum sanctorum* in which the arcane nature of information and knowledge legitimized their credibility of claims (truths) by the very obfuscation of the "materials encrusted there" (Gieryn, 2018, pp. 171-172).

Conversely, the "book-centered" paradigm shift during the late nineteenth century exposed information and knowledge by positioning the physical materials in the open library space (Bennett, 2009). This positioned the library as a place that contains truths on display, conferring credibility because anyone could witness the universe of knowledge in plain sight. A transition to open stacks situated within or near reading rooms became the norm, facilitating increased access to materials, serendipity, and the emergence of the librarian as facilitator of information. This is still, perhaps, our impression of the academic library as it has been traditionally configured. However, the

exposure of materials does not do away with obfuscation. As we have seen, the placement of book stacks on multiple floors, as well as the vertical shelving of books next to one another, only allows for glimpses of a library's vast collection of information and knowledge. The user is perpetually in a state of narrow viewership, and it is this shifting state within the physical space that perpetuates intellectual pursuit. Bennett's (2009) "book-centered" paradigm did not erode the library's nature as a truth-spot; rather, it advanced the notion of the public sphere in which students, faculty, and librarians as facilitators actively participate in a shared belief of intellectual pursuit akin to the monastic ethos of spiritual growth. However, Bennett's "learner-centered" paradigm of library spaces does not entirely rely on the spatial exposure or obfuscation of the materials to promote intellectual pursuit, but rather taps into the learning and knowledge creation experiences of users.

Truth-Spots are Unique (Or Standardized)

While academic libraries are unique in context, they have historically been—and to a certain extent continue to be—designed to accommodate the standard needs of their users, as demonstrated by the frequency of shelving for physical resources, a help desk, reading areas, and study carrels. Such standardization suggests that to have used one library is perhaps to have used them all. Apart from unique collections, the standard spatial organization of academic libraries also suggests that invariability facilitates the legitimization of the value of intellectual pursuit within the space. What makes the academic library a particularly effective truth-spot is its ability to assert a universal understanding of its institutional credibility while remaining individual in its collection, user community, and position vis-à-vis its parent institution.

The "Learner-Centered" Library as a Truth-Spot

As a truth-spot, the academic library within the context of Bennett's (2009) "learner-centered" paradigm has witnessed something of a precarious renaissance since the 1990s. The shift to this "learner-centered" modality is really a return to the "reader-centered" library with the marked difference that information is now abundant and virtually available instead of scarce and physically bound (Bennett, 2009). When "every space is potentially a library space—that is to say, an information-rich space," the physical environment becomes less about connecting users with resources and more about the facilitation of learning (Bennett, 2009, p. 188). It is no surprise that the increased electronic accessibility of books, journals, and vast databases has precipitated a decline in the use of physical collections. Many libraries have relocated a portion of their physical resources to offsite storage in favour of user-friendly areas, which has been one response to an "era of constrained resources, a flat budget and increased demand" in services and spaces reflected in rising gate-counts (Wilkin, 2015, pp. 242-243). Modular study areas and other collaborative environments are moving in, as well as more technologies such as computers and tablets. The integration of cafés into common areas of the library has enhanced user experience, while new services, such as makerspaces, are expanding traditional academic notions of instruction, learning, and knowledge creation. Amid these changes, librarians find themselves re-evaluating their roles and skillsets against a variety of old and new user behaviours and needs (Crawford, 2015, p. xiv; Khoo et al., 2016).

Within the Canadian context, a number of academic libraries have engaged in revitalization projects. Over the past six years, the University of Guelph's McLaughlin

Library has undergone significant renovations to its interior spaces, opting to collaborate with the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University in relocating large quantities of materials to the Annex, a shared off-site and closed-stack storage facility (TriUniversity Group of Libraries, n.d.). Similarly, Western University is currently in the early stages of a major revitalization of the D.B. Weldon Library. According to the library's strategic plan, a key goal is to "decrease collections footprints, in order to accommodate new space for learning and discovery" (Western Libraries, 2017, p. 3). Other universities are redesigning their spaces to prioritize dynamic learning environments. Most recently, Brock University has completed its Rankin Family Pavilion, an open-concept area for user engagement that is encircled by the library's makerspace, a digital scholarship lab, and a presentation room, all of which sit beneath an expansive skylight. Although these academic libraries are by no means removing all physical materials, the trend towards reduced quantities of collections in favour of open collaborative learning environments indicates that the learner-centered paradigm has taken hold.

Where book stacks, quiet reading rooms, and study carrels were once key elements of the academic library as truth-spot, the inclusion of interactive learning environments and informal user services (e.g., cafés) is redefining the mechanisms of place. Library spaces are integrating fluid spatial opportunities for knowledge creation, learning, and dynamic user experiences to confer the belief of intellectual pursuit. To be clear, the learner-centered paradigm is by no means eroding the academic library as a truth-spot; rather, it is renegotiating the terms on which assertions, claims, and beliefs (i.e., truths) are made credible by the library's physical environments. For example, time

can now be further manipulated through instant access to online resources. Collaborative areas are "messy" compared to the traditional ordered nature of designated study spaces; learning can now occur anywhere in the library. Exposure and transparency through the use of open-concept areas, increased natural light, and glass-encased rooms have become mediators of visible intellectual pursuits. The glass skylight over Brock's Rankin Family Pavilion is perhaps the ultimate symbolic expression of this mechanism of place: the sky is the limit. While all academic libraries are unique within their own context, certain spaces are becoming standard components of the learner-centered library. As we have seen, makerspaces, digital scholarship labs, and cafés have become the norm as libraries take cues from one another, effectively adding credibility to the belief that such places foster learner achievement. Furthermore, the proliferation of interlibrary loan programs is extending the boundaries of library spaces to create an era of the überlibrary where one library is at once many—a clear manifestation of Gieryn's (2018) claim that truth-spots as places have the uncanny ability to achieve placelessness.

Conclusions

The academic library as truth-spot and as an enduring socio-cultural phenomenon is undoubtedly adapting to user needs and behaviours. However, the mechanisms of place that legitimize and make credible the beliefs about intellectual pursuit—beliefs that are fundamental to the mission of the larger academic institution—are precarious. Although the current learner-centered library design balances traditional and contemporary modes of facilitating belief via space, it has the potential to tip towards an ambiguity of meaning. The "paperless library" is one such tipping point where physical

resources are completely removed in favour of their digital counterparts. Cognitive researchers have found the consequences of learning solely from digital resources to be detrimental to developing decision-making, problem solving, and sensemaking skills (McCormack, 2011). Arguably, these skills are the foundations of intellectual pursuit and learner success.

It is not unreasonable, therefore, to suggest that the academic library as a truth-spot may begin to erode if the learner-centered design of library spaces increasingly prioritizes social connectivity. To what extent this erosion is already underway could be determined by a potential future study of the availability of resource formats as well as spatial configurations and user beliefs about the library space at various institutions. When design decisions are made with a focus on financial, operational, institutional, and user demands, they push aside the less tangible, though equally important, belief structures that underpin the library as a phenomenon. What is needed is a de-centering paradigm of design that balances evolving user behaviours and needs with the enduring value of the academic library as a place for higher truths about memory, exploration, and the pursuit of intellectual growth and achievement. By infusing an awareness of academic libraries as truth-spots into our spatial planning, we can ensure that the values we strive to uphold as librarians—and as members of a global society—will continue to propel us forward.

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