The 21st Century Academic Library: Six Metaphors for a New Age
Clem Guthro

Introduction

Metaphors are a common construct in speaking and writing about most aspects of life. The understanding and appreciation of metaphor has grown so it is now seen as an "indispensable basis of language and thought" (Goatly 1997, 1). Metaphors play an important role in our use of language and how we think about our world and our work. Widely used to convey political argument (Ottati, Renstrom, and Price 2014, 197), to convey emotion (Stoddart 2013, 8; Charteris-Black 2005, xi), or to define new concepts or ways to thinking (Lakoff and Johnson 1989, 197), metaphors may help, or even cause us to think or feel differently about various things or issues (Gibbs 2014, 17; Lakoff and Johnson 1989, 3).

Gozzi (1999, 381) sees metaphors as an out-of-the-box way of thinking that breaks through routine conceptual boxes. Metaphors can be used in a transformational way to bring new understanding by joining them to something already known (McGinnis 1984, 110). Individuals and groups can help establish the meaning of a metaphor by building on shared concepts (Lankes, Silverstein, and Nicholson 2007, 18).

Methaphors and Libraries

Libraries in the academic and public sphere, in their quest to remain relevant to their sponsoring institutions, look for ways to describe their raison d'être as well as their services in ways that both resonate and redefine. This quest involves a reframing of both "library" as well as "librarians and library staff"; a much-needed reinvention for the 21st century. New metaphors is one tool that libraries are using for this important task.

The use of metaphor to understand and describe libraries is not new. Throughout history, librarians created or posited new metaphors out of a need to "describe the library as more than a warehouse or museum for books" (Giesecke 2010, 57). Libraries used metaphors to build connections that enable stakeholders to grasp the library's story and to draw meaningful conclusions (Stoddart 2013, 1). The conceptual models or metaphors that library users carry influence their perceptions of the purpose of libraries (Nitecki 1993, 255) and how libraries might be useful to them. Likewise, library administrators use metaphors to influence and redefine how librarians and library staff see their roles. Metaphors help create a mythology or story for the academic library.

The evolving role of 21st-century libraries, coupled with contemporary library architecture that challenges the past and assists new ways of doing business, calls out for new ways to think about and to explain the role and work of libraries. While considerations of new metaphors suggested here primarily come from the academy, major new public libraries in England, Denmark, and Finland have inspired new ways of looking at libraries.

At the beginning of the American Library Association in the late 19th century, librarians turned to metaphor to explain the work of libraries, because the role and work of libraries was not fully formed in the American mind (Nardini 2001, 114). The library as the "heart of the

university" emerged by 1900 (Brough 1953, 23) and has been the most widely used metaphor in the Academy through the latter days of the 20th century. Library as "storehouse of knowledge" first appeared from the writings of Librarian George Hall Baker of Columbia in 1893 and was reaffirmed by President James Rowland Angell of Yale in 1924 (Brough 1953, 26). George Langdell, Dean of the Harvard Law Library, in 1886 talked about the "library as laboratory" (Danner 2015, 2), opening up the idea for libraries to "be viewed as something other than storehouses for published works, [but] as places in which books were to be used for learning and the development of knowledge" (Danner 2015, 17). Lipscomb (2001, 80) saw the library as laboratory as providing an active role for the library to facilitate the use of information in developing new knowledge. Similar to library as laboratory is library as workshop which developed when more liberal views on the use of the collections developed (Cole 1979, 374).

With the political, economic, cultural, and technological changes of the late 20th century, libraries needed to continuously reinvent themselves and how they provided information services. In this reinvention, they assumed a variety of new social and symbolic functions (Mattern 2014, 3). As we began the 21st century, many of the traditional metaphors (library as the heart, library as laboratory, etc.) did not seem to adequately express the changing nature of libraries and the new roles, both physical and digital, that were emerging. Librarians and scholars began to look for new ways to express the nature of the library but also to look for metaphors that would help students, faculty, administrators, and the public to appreciate and accept the new roles libraries and librarians were assuming (Giesecke 2010, 55).

Six New Metaphors

I would like to suggest six metaphors that speak to the nature of the 21st academic library. Each metaphor takes elements of academic libraries that are familiar and transforms them by overlaying ideas from outside the traditional library. No single one of the suggested metaphors is intended to capture the work of libraries in their entirety, but rather suggest that each metaphor, when analyzed and applied, can contribute to the conversation on the nature of the 21st-century library, and the role that the library and librarians and staff play in the academy.

Library as Café

Many of today's libraries sport coffee shops which are, for the most part, a quick, convenient place to get an infusion of caffeine and something to eat, though not necessarily a place for engagement. While "library as café" is not the same as "library as Starbucks," there are elements of a Starbucks cafe that can and should be explored. If you head off campus to a local Starbucks or other coffee shop, you will see people using the space to work, study, engage in conversation, read, think, or just sit and contemplate.

"Library as café" evokes the rich European coffeehouse tradition of the 17th and 18th centuries, where the intellectuals of the day met to drink coffee, read the news, and discuss the intellectual, political, and social issues of the day (Ellis 2011, Preface). The café was the hub of intellectual engagement as well as a place to see and be seen, to advance ideas, make political deals, and advance careers. The coffee houses helped shape the culture of their respective cities.

Figure 1. 17ᵗʰ Century Coffee House in England. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:17th_century__coffeehouse_england_1-580x400.jpg. **Public domain.**
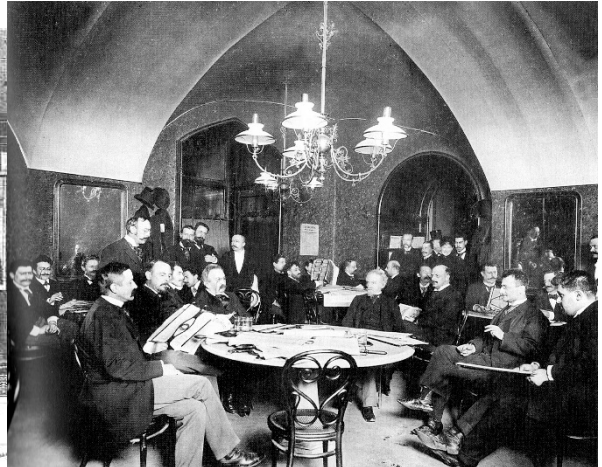

Figure 2. In Café Griensteidl, Vienna, 1897. https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:CafeGriensteidl_vor1897.jpg&oldid=310190837. **Public domain.**

Today, "library as café" evokes a place where intellectual curiosity runs rampant on everything from history to astrophysics, queer theory to politics, art to engineering. It is a place that helps build interdisciplinary connections through collections, expertise, and programs. It is also a space that can draw the campus together in new ways; a place for interaction and engagement for faculty, students, librarians, and members of the community.

In "library as café", librarians take on additional roles that help facilitate and catalyze intellectual engagement. They may function as programming librarians, exhibits planners and coordinators, facilitators of student learning communities, and faculty lecture series hosts. As well they may develop roles that help build library community engagement around cultural, political, and campus issues. These roles build on "library as café's "strong focus on intellectual and cultural engagement for students and faculty, and the general public.

Falvey Memorial Library at Villanova University comes to mind as a library that evokes "library as café." The Library runs a rich series of programs, displays, and community events (https://library.villanova.edu/events/event_series) in and near their library café, which draws the campus community together in rich and engaging ways to discuss, to view, to think, to create.

Library as Apple Store/Genius Bar

Walk into any Apple Store and immediately you see people of all ages engaging with Apple products, trying them out, putting them through their paces, engaging in playful activity, and imagining the transformational role a new Apple product will have in their life. Apple's Genius bar brings together customer service, product knowledge, and user experience expertise to connect customers to the Apple products they need and to provide answers to perplexing questions and product problems.

Library as Apple Store/Genius Bar" forefronts technology and expertise that enables library

Figure 3. Apple Store. Courtesy of Boris Anthony. CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Figure 4. Apple Genius Bar. Courtesy of James Balantine. CC BY-SA 3.0

users to navigate, investigate, and create new knowledge. Virtual reality, 3D printing, artificial intelligence, large-scale visualization, voice recognition, are examples of new technologies that facilitate the creation of new knowledge and are part of the tools of contemporary disciplinary and interdisciplinary learning, research, and scholarship. Libraries provide content, technology, expertise, and space to support learning and knowledge creation. In the Apple Store/Genius Bar model, librarians and staff play a role in helping students access and use these technologies; combining curated content, library and technology expertise with opportunities for collection, showcasing, and long-term preservation of new scholarship.

Library as Apple Store/Genius Bar can be seen in North Carolina State University's Hunt Library. The library has a complete line of technology to borrow, to use, to play, to create, to visualize, to engage in new ways of thinking, learning, and doing scholarship. Coupled with the technology, the Library also provides a complete range of information and technical expertise to help students and faculty to use and engage with the technology, information, and spaces.
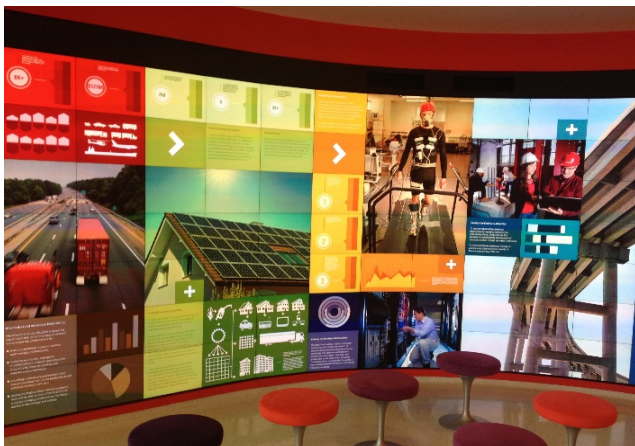
Library as Brain

Figure 5. Visualization wall - North Carolina State University's Hunt Library. Photograph by Clem Guthro
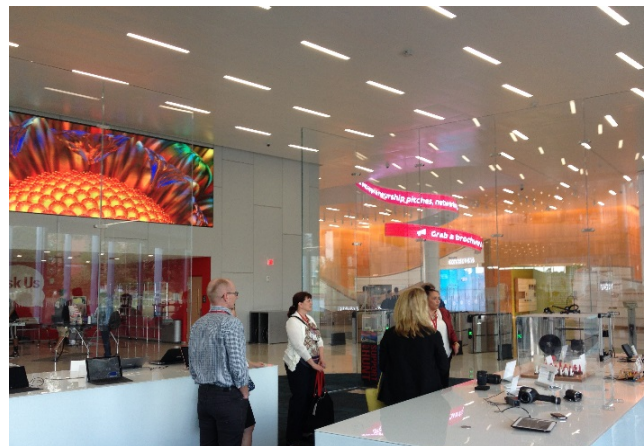

Figure 6. Technology showcase - North Carolina State University's Hunt Library. Photograph by Clem Guthro

A trip to Berlin in 2011 to attend the Theory and Practice of Digital Libraries at the Free University of Berlin occasioned a visit to its Philological Library designed by Sir Norman Foster. Shaped like a human brain on the exterior as well as the interior, this unusual library immediately engendered thoughts on how the library is like a brain. "Library as
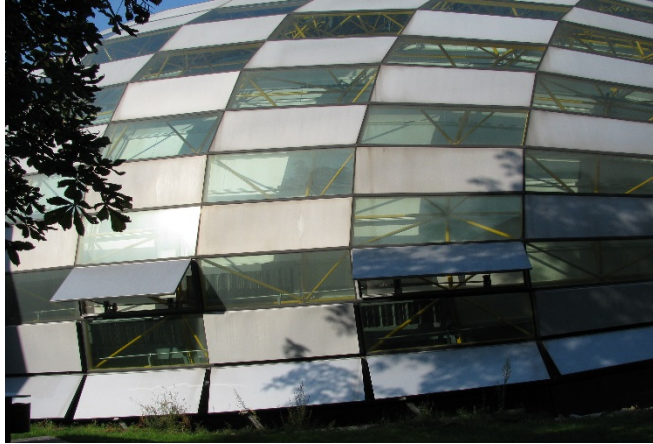

Figure 7. Philological Library – Free University of Berlin – Exterior. Photograph by Clem Guthro

Figure 8. Philological Library – Free University of Berlin – Interior. Courtesy of Jonas K. CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

brain" provides an interesting metaphor for the role of the library in academia. The human brain is the center for intellectual thought and creativity, and the brain provides the neural pathways that make connections within the brain and throughout the body. Likewise, the "library as brain" is a center for intellectual engagement and creativity, helping to make connections between ideas from classrooms, labs, studios and the stage with the knowledge and culture of the past and present.

The "library as the heart of the campus" was, to a great extent, predicated on a building in the center of campus with physical collections and librarian expertise. Students and faculty circulated from classrooms, office, and laboratories to the library and back again, often with books and journal articles in tow. "Library as brain" may function as a replacement for "Library as the heart of the campus" by transcending the important physicality of buildings and collections to also encompass the digital world with its distributed network of information resources and global expertise. "Library as brain" builds on the idea of intellectual engagement of ideas with local and global participants and of action that moves from intellectual engagement of ideas to civic engagement on a local and global scale.

Library as brain also evokes the library as an organization with its staff, technologies, and workflows. According to Morgan (2007, 112-113), the brain metaphor supports the idea of organizational learning and the development of an intelligent organization, which builds staff expertise and new ways of working. In "library as brain", librarians and staff are experts that help build connections between subject matter and users, between physical and digital collections, and between local and global content and expertise.

Library as Commons

"Library as Commons," evokes the rich tradition of the "commons"- often pasture or green space that was jointly owned, used, and managed by the community. Nobel Prize winner

in Economics, Elinor Ostrom and her colleague Charlotte Hess, expanded the traditional idea of the commons to include knowledge (Wikipedia authors, 2018) which speaks to the library's historic role of providing knowledge assets to the community but also to the current emphasis on open access/open knowledge which belongs to everyone.

In the last decade of the 20th-century libraries began to develop Information, Learning, or Knowledge Commons that hint at the idea of the "commons" with its shared space and co-located/co-managed learning services and sets of expertise. It is worth noting that the "Library as commons" has the idea of shared ownership, use, and inclusivity. "Library as commons" evokes Oldenburg's idea of "third place" (Oldenburg 1999); that place between work and home. Montgomery and Miller (2011, 1), building on Oldenburg, show how the academic library can be transformed into a space for collaborative learning and community interaction.

The idea of the commons forefronts the role of gathering place over the role of a book warehouse (Lombardi and Wall 2006, 17.2). It also highlights the role the library plays in the scholarly conversation and knowledge creation. This is particularly salient in thinking about the role that university libraries can and should play on campus. Librarians, staff, and library student workers facilitate conversations, new ways of working, student projects, and traditional and creative scholarship. MIT Libraries' director, Chris Bourg notes that libraries should include students and the community as a part of the scholarly conversation (Koerber 2016, March). Because the library is held in common by all academic disciplines, the library is a neutral space – a "Switzerland", so to speak; a space that is both safe and provocative; a space and service that supports singular contemplation as well as conversation, a place where students, faculty, library staff, and the community can do a deep dive into a single topic or make interdisciplinary connections. Like the traditions in some countries, the commons is also a place to create, to build, to protest, and to play.

Grand Valley State University's Mary Idema Pew Library Learning and Information Commons provides an example of the "library as commons". Learning, inspiration, creation, and scholarly communication are fully supported. The Commons facilitates ownership of the intellectual and creative process for students, faculty, and the community.

Figure 9. Knowledge Market - Mary Idema Pew Library Learning and Information Commons. Photo courtesy of James Haffner.

Figure 10. Common seating area - Mary Idema Pew Library Learning and Information Commons. Photo courtesy of James Haffner.

Figure 11. Union Station – Denver. Photograph by Ryan Dravitz. Used by permission.

"Library as Train Station" Similar in some ways to "library as brain", "library as train station" is a metaphor derived from a comment by Dr. Rebecca Chopp, Chancellor at the University of Denver (DU), describing DU as becoming a "Union Station" of engagement, service, and transformation—an axis for ideas, innovative thinking, and connections (Chopp 2016, iv). Chopp's comments are in reference to Denver's Union Station, which serves as a central transportation hub that not only connects diverse neighborhoods with each other and the city center, but also connects Denver to the nation's rail network and to the world at large.

Borrowing directly from Dr. Chopp's comment, and applying it to the academic library, the metaphor becomes "library as train station"; a center of engagement, service, and transformation—an axis for ideas, innovative thinking, and connections". "Library as train station" is a powerful metaphor that evokes much of the 21st century library; a melding of people, voices, languages, tracks, symbols, and spaces.

Walking into Union Station, or any large and symbolic train station, one is immediately struck with the vibrancy and energy, the pace, the people, but also the history, tradition, the grandeur, the sense of space that brings peoples of all walks of life, experience, and language together and connects them to their destination. "Library as train station" also evokes a sense of the library's global mission- a transportation hub of ideas that flow out to the world and back again, making a myriad of connections and changing the way we work and think. In "library as train station", librarians and staff serve as more than conductors but rather take on roles of helping users build connections between the local and global, and between and among disciplines. Librarians build global collections and provide language and cultural expertise to a growing group of international students and students studying abroad.

The Ohio State University's Thomson Library evokes this metaphor. Set in the heart of the campus and facing the campus oval (campus green), the library's iconic limestone architecture evokes a sense of grandeur. Designed so that students and faculty enter the building on one side and flow through the building, making use of its collections, space, and services. Its grand reading room, special collections displays, soaring atriums that showcase collections, and robust technologies engage people and ideas and send them off in new directions.

Figure 13. The Ohio State's Thompson Library – Renewed Reading Room. Courtesy of Brian Hoffsis. CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Figure 14. The Ohio State's Thompson Library – East Atrium. Courtesy of Ibagli. CC BY-SA 4.0

Figure 12. The Ohio State's Thompson Library – Front facing the Oval. Courtesy of Michael Barera. CC BY-SA 4.0

Library as Town Square

A new metaphor is emerging from a group of relatively new European public library building projects, namely that of library as town square, piazza, or ag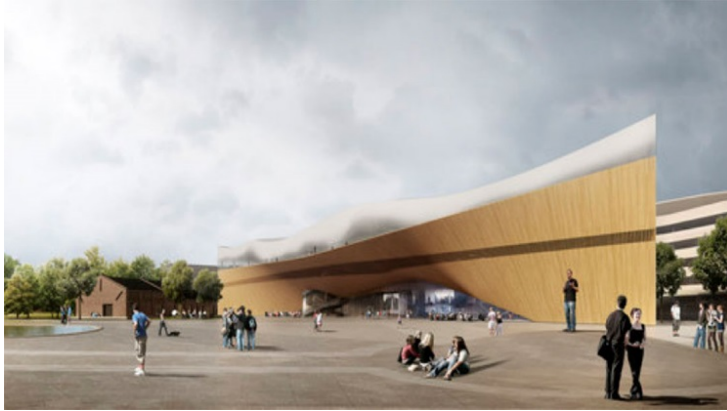ora. Three major European public libraries; Helsinki's Oodi, Aarhus' Dokk1, and Birmingham, UK's Library of Birmingham have emerged in the last seven years, having conceptualized their role as a public meeting space that is transformative at the community level. Pulling elements from the "library as commons," "library as apple genius bar", "library as train station", as well as "library as café," these new libraries see their role and their spaces as community gathering spaces that inform, create, and disseminate knowledge at both the individual and community/city level. They are extensions of the street (Frearson 2013, 26), or the public plaza (Walsh 2018, 2), designed to "engage the urban communities who use them." (Reith-Banks 2018, 5).

Figure 15. Oodi Helsinki Central Library. Image courtesy of ALA Architects.

Innovative architects have used this transformative role to create buildings with a sense of openness that encourage social interaction (Frearson 2015, 10), an environment that" fosters valuable and meaningful relationships between people" (Hohenadel 2016, 8), and a design that encourages passersby to enter and discover (Frearson 2013, 22).

In this environment, librarians and library staff roles shift to meld traditional library services with city services. The Library becomes both library and town hall and librarians roles shift to be meeting planners and conveners, to plan family entertainment services, and to be pilots or navigators for individuals and families regarding information and services.

Conclusion

These metaphors, which borrow heavily from architecture and urban design (Van Acker and Uyttenhove 2012, 260), attempt to map or describe important elements of the 21st-century library. From the number of metaphors used for libraries throughout history, and from the six

metaphors suggested here, it is clear that no single metaphor has been adequate in the past, nor will a single metaphor suffice for the 21st-century library. Mattern (2014, 2) describes a library as "a network of integrated, mutually reinforcing evolving infrastructures – in particular, architectural, technological, social, epistemological and ethical infrastructures". Likewise, the 21st-century library needs a network of overlapping and mutually reinforcing metaphors that map new roles onto the existing landscape while preserving critical elements of the past and allowing others to evolve.

As libraries have taken on new roles, there has been pushback from some members of the community who see these new roles as outside the scope of "library". For many, the preeminence of print collections overrides all other considerations. For others, student study space, digital collections, and new technologies are de rigueur. The metaphors provide six lenses which can be used to take the disparate voices and talk creatively about the 21st-century library. "Library as brain" emphasizes both the physical and digital nature of the library and its collections. "Library as Apple Store/Genius Bar" forefronts both technology and expertise. "Library as café" showcases intellectual engagement. "Library as train station" expresses global connections and diverse languages. "Library as commons" shows that the library belongs to all and encourages interdisciplinarity. "Library as town square" demonstrates community engagement.

Some may argue that too many metaphors add to the confusion or detract from a leader's ability to create a clear vision for his/her particular library. However, modern library history is replete with many metaphors, all of which have been used singly or in combination to develop a mythology for the academic library. As library leaders look for metaphors that describe/indicate/suggest the 21st-century library, they may use these metaphors to bridge gaps between what faculty, administrators, students, and other librarians see as the role of libraries and build a common understanding that allows the library to flourish (Nitecki 1993, 274). These six metaphors are offered as one method of building a new and common understanding of the 21st-century library. Rather than adding to the confusion, these metaphors are offered as additional stories for administrators to use to further develop an academic library mythology for the 21st century.

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