



PROJECT MUSE®

---

## Cruising the Library

Adler, Melissa

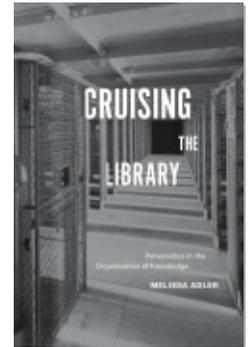
Published by Fordham University Press

Adler, Melissa.

*Cruising the Library: Perversities in the Organization of Knowledge.*

Fordham University Press, 2017.

Project MUSE.[muse.jhu.edu/book/51030](https://muse.jhu.edu/book/51030).



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/51030>

## The Trouble with Access/Toward Reparative Taxonomies

The point is not just to read the webs of knowledge production; the point is to reconfigure what counts as knowledge in the interests of reconstituting the generative forces of embodiment.

—DONNA HARAWAY, “A Game of Cat’s Cradle”

The perverse dynamic challenges not by collapsing order but through a reordering less tolerable, more disturbing, than chaos. Its difference is never the absolutely unfamiliar, but the reordering of the already known, a disclosure of a radical interconnectedness which is the social, but which present cultures can rarely afford to acknowledge and must instead disavow.

—JONATHAN DOLLIMORE, *Sexual Dissidence*

Eros can make of ontology, after all, something improper.

—DEBORAH BRITZMAN, “Theory Kindergarten”

Just how relevant to reading and library practices are the critiques in this book, given the changing nature of information retrieval systems? Knowledge seekers tend to choose Internet browsers and websites, even for information about books, far more than library catalogs, and in library catalogs, people generally tend to search by keywords rather than subject headings. Browsing the library stacks is becoming a lost and forgotten pastime, except for a few. What’s more, in the face of demands for library space and shrinking book budgets, libraries are increasingly purchasing electronic books, which dramatically alter the way we read and search. And so it may seem that one should conclude that this project is purely historical and theoretical, with limited practical application in the present. To this line of thinking I have a few responses.

First, I want to distinguish public and academic libraries from commercial websites and search engines. I regard libraries as special places

that should be protected as much as possible from some of the forces that power the Internet. It is now widely acknowledged that corporations like Google are more interested in profits than privacy. Their search technologies rely upon the commodification of users, information, and knowledge, and the algorithms that drive relevancy and page rankings are based on profitability and popularity. These algorithms are also secret and proprietary. In the case of Google, knowledge and information seekers are delivered to sites that may or may not be the most appropriate to the reader's interests but that, rather, are based on a "rapid calculation of a web page's 'PageRank,'" which involves the counting of citations and backlinks to a page to determine its "importance or quality."<sup>1</sup> As Anna Lauren Hoffmann puts the point, people who look for information using Google "are no longer situated as free and equal citizens, but, rather, as mere consumers."<sup>2</sup>

"Metadata" became a household term when Eric Snowden made public the surveillance techniques enacted by information and communication technologies in 2013. What many people don't realize is that libraries have been creating metadata for centuries for inventory and access. The catalog entry should be considered the earliest and most ubiquitous form of metadata, and librarians were the first to create standards and schemas, like classification and rules for description, for how metadata is produced. Only recently did metadata become a tool for collecting and storing data about users for profit and surveillance. Commercial search engines work as effectively as they do in large part because they rely on data generated by users, and search engine companies also use that data to reap huge profits from otherwise "free" services. Nanne Bonde Thylstrup cites this as a key problem particularly because the private sector has no obligation to the public with regard to how they access or control the digital traces left behind by their searches.<sup>3</sup> Libraries, on the other hand, don't collect user information that way. One of the primary tenets of librarianship is that privacy is essential to the exercise of free speech, free thought, and free association. Whereas search engine companies purposely integrate user data and behaviors into their product development and marketing programs, the American Library Association regards the sharing of personal information with vendors or other third parties as a violation of privacy and confidentiality. Many librarians actively work to ensure and protect the values of intellectual freedom, the freedom to read, and social justice. With the advancement of linked data across libraries and across information systems, the reach and influence of library vocabularies and classifications is yet to be known.

Perhaps the most important point to be made, however, is that, whether they are made visible or not, classifications and categories are at the heart of any information retrieval system. The methodology for analyzing the history of categories that I've been using throughout this book can be applied to all kinds of settings that index and organize information.<sup>4</sup> In the online world, where the categories truly are hidden deep beneath the hood and shrouded in mathematical formulas, it is particularly important to recognize that classifications are functioning in ways that we don't fully understand. For a case in point, I conducted a series of experiments with Google searches using different combinations of terms. The most striking set of results derived from my searches for "black lesbians" and "african american lesbians."<sup>5</sup> The difference between the respective retrieval powers of "black" and "african american" tells us a lot about perceptions and the power of words (or strings of text). The top results retrieved by "african american lesbians" included sites about coming out, dating, and celebrities—for the most part, these sites seem to be targeted toward African American lesbians and provide information, some type of community engagement, or entertainment. At the top of the list is a page from Autostraddle.com, which describes itself as "an intelligent, hilarious & provocative voice and a progressively feminist online community for a new generation of kickass lesbian, bisexual & otherwise inclined ladies (and their friends)."

The set retrieved by "black lesbians," however, is entirely different. Each and every entry in the first page of the list links to a pornography site. Also worth noting is the fact that "african american lesbians" retrieved 3,270,000 links whereas "black lesbians" brought 16,700,000 results. This is more than a fivefold difference, suggesting that in some regard the string "black lesbians" has a much higher market value. How this all happens is a mystery to me, but Safiya Noble has been documenting the ways that Google retrieves pages about black women and girls.<sup>6</sup> She concludes that large commercial search engines, with their mathematical formulations and market-driven search technologies, fail to accommodate social and cultural contexts at the peril of those who seek information. She also observes that the ways that search engines index the web is critically different from the ways in which librarians curate and catalog their collections for their publics. Indeed, other search engines operate by different formulas, and results within any engine will also vary according to time and place. The reasons for these results don't simply reside with Google but have much to do with the keywords and metadata in the websites themselves and with web traffic. And although the observations above are applied to general web searches,

related conclusions can be drawn for the Google Books product, which provides full-text access to books in the public domain and limited access to books still in copyright. The service has been extremely controversial for a variety of reasons, mostly concerning issues around privacy and the commercialization of knowledge and the public sphere. Also under fire has been the quality of metadata and digital copies, as the Google Books service is known to include inaccuracies.

I use these examples of Google searches to illustrate the danger of equating or comparing commercial services with those of the library. It is important to see what happens when control is given over to algorithms that govern the search and retrieval of full-text documents, rather than relying on the human interpretation of texts and the application of bibliographic techniques. Robert Darnton has explained that academic and public libraries do a much better job in digitizing, preserving, and making books accessible than Google, and one of the reasons is that libraries are most interested in preserving the cultural record and serving the public good.<sup>7</sup> Resource accessibility in libraries does not depend on market trends but on bibliographic control techniques applied by subject specialists. We might think of librarians as curators of knowledge. As the Library of Congress reference librarian Thomas Mann writes, the appropriate goal of research libraries “is to be found in an academic rather than a business model: research libraries are funded to promote scholarship.”<sup>8</sup> Research libraries are also meant to serve the specific needs of scholars in all subject areas and disciplines, and those needs must be recognized as being distinct from quick, everyday information seekers. Mann points out several aspects of scholarly information seeking that demand a kind of bibliographic care that commercial search engines can’t accommodate: the concern with doing an exhaustive search so as not to overlook important sources, the need to find both current and historical sources, the quest for rare or marginally used books, and the need for materials written in languages other than English. Scholars tend to be more inclined to understand that what is most relevant to their needs might not appear at the top of a list of retrieved items—nevertheless they don’t want to sift through lists of hundreds or thousands of loosely relevant titles that might arise from basic keyword searches.<sup>9</sup> For Mann, the LC Subject Headings and Classification are two devices that serve scholars well, as they facilitate exhaustive and relevant retrieval of documents according to topic. And although he recognizes certain shortcomings of these standards, he suggests that they are much more adequate to the task of serving scholars than commercial search engines are.<sup>10</sup>

I would add that losing sight of the fundamental necessity of slow information seeking for scholarly practice might be read as part of a wider turn toward the troubling marketization of the academy. The demands for quick information retrieval go hand in hand with increased scholarly production and the economization of academic units. My concern is that the values of intellectual freedom, privacy, and access to information that libraries aim to uphold become threatened when we pretend that commercial search engines perform the same functions as library catalogs and databases. In an era when libraries and education institutions are being subsumed into a neoliberal apparatus while the Internet offers the illusion of a free and democratic public space, there is an urgent need to interrogate our own contradictions, investments, values, and desires. The ideals for which libraries strive are aligned with the ideal of the public sphere. At the same time, I believe that it is imperative that we as scholars, readers, and members of different publics understand the ways in which the knowledge we seek is structured by history and politics and made available in certain contexts. I take it for granted that our public institutions are situated in and serve political and economic interests. Libraries are incredibly paradoxical spaces for the way they promote ideals of democracy through the provision of information while deploying disciplinary techniques. We should strive to understand them in their complexity and work through some of the paradoxes by engaging in dialogue about the role of libraries in history and history making. Library classifications provide a point of departure for talking about some of the most critical social and political issues.

Given the account that I've provided so far, it bears reiterating the significance of the position from which these classificatory apparatuses are produced. As the United States' oldest federal cultural institution, the Library of Congress serves as the nation's library. By creating and standardizing the rules by which libraries analyze, select, and organize knowledge, the LoC not only produces knowledge in and through power but also plays a crucial role in mapping the field of scholarship and research. It ensures that knowledge organizing techniques are reproduced and normalized across disciplines throughout the entire network of libraries, including the local main street public library in small towns, digital libraries in cyberspace, academic libraries of varying types and sizes, and libraries of all varieties around the globe.

Whereas access for all is touted as a central tenet of libraries in their efforts to promote democracy, I would argue that this vision is undermined by the apparatuses, processes, and parties involved in authorizing and providing access. Indeed some scholars have pointed out that libraries do not

live up to the democratic ideals so readily attached to them and that they are further threatened by librarians' complicity and engagement with neo-liberal models for library development.<sup>11</sup> Looking to the technologies and policies developed by the LoC provides insight into some of the forces that impede libraries' capacity to provide access to all and into some of the costs associated with access. It reveals that library classifications are in fact among "hegemony's handmaids," serving and supporting the state by imposing an infrastructural knowledge organization system that sustains dominant norms.<sup>12</sup>

Of utmost importance are the questions of how access is granted, and for whom. These types of considerations begin a number of debates, including those surrounding human rights and the digital divide, where the first step toward bridging the gap has been to work toward equity of access to hardware, software, and networks. Most digital economy scholars recognize the short-sightedness of viewing access to information technologies as a singular solution. In the library classifications under scrutiny in this book, we have seen how access is controlled by specific terms and rules. For "perverse" subjects, to be accessible is to be medicalized or cast off to a section of "abnormals" or branded "obscene." To be recognized is to be named and classed in terms not one's own and in ways that render subjects legible in the eyes of the medical/juridical disciplines and the state. Legibility is conferred by a series of techniques, and as James Scott warns, "legibility is a condition of manipulation."<sup>13</sup>

Dean Spade, who is concerned with administrative categories and their effects, notes: "We have to carefully consider the limitations of strategies that aim for inclusion into existing economic and political arrangements rather than challenging the terms of those arrangements."<sup>14</sup> I agree with Spade's contention that, for transformative change that is more than symbolic, "we must move beyond the politics of recognition and inclusion."<sup>15</sup> Emily Drabinski seems to be of a similar position when she "challenges the traditional approach of activist librarians who see as paramount the task of correcting classification and cataloging schemes until they become unbiased and universally accessible structures." Rather than relying on corrective tactics (a decidedly impossible project), according to Drabinski we should be attentive to the "contested ideological work performed by catalogers who must make these decisions every day."<sup>16</sup> While increased access by way of added and corrected headings and classes might attenuate the violations inherent to these heteropatriarchal systems, it does not free subjects from them. Indeed, the classifications reinscribe their subordinated and marginal designation as they provide access. And so we have

a critical paradox—increased access by way of identity categories serves and fortifies a knowledge organization system based in universalisms that justify violence toward “special” topics and subjects.

According to Roderick Ferguson, the academy became the model of “archtonic power” in the United States, using texts to regulate and instruct the nation on difference, and thus the academy paved the way for the administrative regulation of queerness.<sup>17</sup> He cautions: “If the condition for sexuality’s absorption into power’s archive is the managing and disciplining of sexuality so that it conforms to institutional legibility, then the story allegorizes how various forms of sexual agency become the detritus of complex systems of intelligibility.”<sup>18</sup> The practice of adding headings may actually contribute to what Ferguson and Lisa Duggan have described as the incorporation of queerness into a neoliberal political economy. They both suggest that the promise of hope brought by social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, with the creation and legitimation of ethnic studies and women’s studies, has been stymied by the state and the academy. In the academic library the practice of admitting approved sexual practices into the range of normal has reproduced and reinforced normalizing discourses that regulate sexualities. One finds a striking resemblance between the move toward inclusivity in the subject headings by adding and refining headings and classes and the mainstreaming and integration of LGBTQ people in the American political marketplace.

The library gives a certain presence to the arguments presented by Ferguson and Spade and others. The arrangements and the names given to bodies of knowledge mirror the administrative categorizations and hierarchies in our universities, social services agencies, and hospitals, and by reading the catalog and the shelves we read social structures at large. The disciplinary divisions of and within bodies of literature produce a particular materiality that brings texts from all over the globe under one roof and one universal system, unifying the disciplines and arranging how we come to knowledge, making visible the ideological mappings of the world.

### *The Schema and the Soul*

These ambiguities, redundancies and deficiencies remind us of those which doctor Franz Kuhn attributes to a certain Chinese encyclopaedia entitled “Celestial Empire of benevolent Knowledge.” In its remote pages it is written that the animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens,

(f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.

JORGE LUIS BORGES, "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins"

Foucault tells us that Borges's fictional Chinese classification first inspired laughter and then *The Order of Things* for the way that it breaks up "all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things."<sup>19</sup> The classification brings to light the limitations of knowledge organization systems, their instability, their apparent randomness, and their relation to any particular community or society's way of organizing the world. It illustrates the very possibility of grouping things together in an "unthinkable space." And for Foucault, this passage led him to wonder about the implications of a kind of disorder that brings together fragments of a large variety of possible orders within the same dimension or, in other words, "in such a state, things are 'laid,' 'placed,' 'arranged' in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible to find a place of residence for them, to define a *common locus* beneath them all."<sup>20</sup> Foucault's reading of Borges's Chinese classification helps us realize the disciplinary effects of the Library of Congress Classification system, bringing into view how the boundaries and placement of books on library shelves, while seeming logical and natural, in fact designate an impossible arrangement.

One could argue that to perform a genealogy of the material effects of disciplinary power is to inquire into the genealogy of the soul. Jean-Luc Nancy draws from Aristotle the notion that the soul organizes the body and makes it a whole: "The soul is the fact that a body exists, in other words, that there is extension and exposition."<sup>21</sup> A body occupies a given area, a space that articulates the limits of the body and distinguishes it from others. In fact, Foucault writes at the beginning of *Discipline and Punish* that his project is a "history of the modern soul," adding that the "soul is the prison of the body" and that it is *this* prison that he is interested in, "with all the political investments of the body that it gathers in its closed architecture."<sup>22</sup> According to Foucault, the soul is produced around, on, and within bodies as a function of power-knowledge systems: "It is the element in which are articulated the effects of a certain type of power and the reference of a certain type of knowledge, the machinery by which the power relations give rise to a possible corpus of knowledge, and knowledge extends

and reinforces the effects of this power.”<sup>23</sup> It is out of this process that domains of analysis as well as scientific methodologies and technologies are constructed. The soul brings a body into existence, but as it is produced and constrained by power, the soul in fact functions as a prison of the body. The regularization of knowledge results in the creation of “soul-subjects,” which are to be extracted from subjugated bodies. Extending these lines, then, a classification system should be understood as a power-knowledge technology that brings bodies of literature into existence, giving birth to certain knowledges, where being born means to be findable and intelligible and usable in the universe of knowledge—a *birth to presence*.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, these systems are inherently confining and constraining, functioning as a technology of power that operates on the soul, imprisoning the body of literature.

Judith Butler reads the Aristotelian *schema* through Foucault’s notion of the soul: “The soul is taken as an instrument of power through which the body is cultivated and formed. In a sense, it acts as a power-laden schema that produces and actualizes the body itself.”<sup>25</sup> The Greek *schema* means “the shape given by the stamp,” or “form, shape, figure, appearance, dress, gesture, figure of a syllogism, and grammatical form.” Information professionals can’t miss the association to present-day metadata schemas—a concept that has become ubiquitous in organizing knowledge in libraries and on the web, all but replacing the language of library cataloging. Indeed, there is now a vast array of metadata schemas differently designed to describe and provide access to resources of various types (audio, images, videos, architecture, websites, etc.) for different audiences, and classifications are among these. We can think of the process of subjectification—of a subject in relation—as an effect of a schema, an instrument of power that puts a subject in its place, “forms and frames the body, stamps it, and in stamping it, brings it into being.”<sup>26</sup> The call number, for example, is quite literally stamped on the *spine* of the book, indicating the discipline to which it is assigned and designating its place in the library space.

Butler asks how we “can think through the matter of bodies as a kind of materialization governed by regulatory norms in order to ascertain the workings of heterosexual hegemony in the formation of what qualifies as a viable body. How does that materialization of the norm in bodily formation produce a domain of abjected bodies . . . ?”<sup>27</sup> The task that has been set before us here is to locate the mechanisms by which norms are produced and reiterated in libraries, find the excluded and marginalized voices, and determine how unintelligible and unviable bodies of literature are banished and hidden through policies, oversights, and indecision, all of which

are enacted from positions of power to produce effects of dematerialization and abjection. The preclusion of abnormal or illegible subjects from participating in discourse serves in support of a norm, providing space against which normative subjects come into being. Normative sexualities can only be produced by “barring from cultural intelligibility—and rendering culturally abject—cultural organizations of sexuality that exceed the structuring purview of that law.”<sup>28</sup> The implications reach far beyond access to information and must be understood as being a part of a matrix of discourses, a “carceral” network, even. The “judges of normality are present everywhere,” and libraries are just one site where judgment is obviously embedded in practice. But it is in everyday spaces—schools, medicine, on the playgrounds, and in the library—where the “universal reign of the normative has taken hold and reproduces itself.”<sup>29</sup>

Scholars have long recognized LCSH and the LC Classification as active agents in marginalizing identity-based exceptions to rules. For instance, LCSH includes a heading for “Students” as well as for “Lesbian students,” “African American students,” and a wide of variety of types of students. But we won’t see “Heterosexual students” or “White students” or “African American heterosexuals” or “White lesbians.” The blatant marginalization of nonnormative subjects is obvious. My concern is that, in the present universal system, subjects associated with race and sexuality can only be added to the margins. An additive approach to access by way of subjects embraces a politics of recognition, which Nancy Fraser identifies as problematic for the way it both reifies identity categories and displaces economic redistributive efforts. Fraser argues that the present politics of recognition risks promoting the very exclusionary results it purports to be working against and may in fact promote inequality and sanction violations by reinforcing notions of who and what cultural categories are of value. Efforts to remedy misrecognition by way of identity politics may “serve less to foster interaction across differences than to enforce separatism, conformism and intolerance.”<sup>30</sup> In the library the authorization of subjects signals recognition and indicates what counts as knowledge. As Fraser suggests, equal participation in social and political life “is also impeded when some actors lack the necessary resources to interact with others as peers. In such cases, maldistribution constitutes an impediment to parity of participation in social life, and thus a form of social subordination and injustice.”<sup>31</sup> Clearly, such a conclusion brings to bear the significance of the perception that libraries facilitate equity of access to resources. Following Fraser, who argues that a politics of recognition inadequately addresses the social and institutional milieu out of which economic inequalities are

born and perpetuated, I suggest that a sort of politics of redistribution of knowledge in the library is in order.

I would also suggest that one of the purposes of this project is to articulate a need—a lack or void that universalisms fail to address. The paradox we've identified with access to information cannot fully be resolved within existing discourses and structures, but ongoing discussions of equity of access can begin to identify a vision for how we want to see things take shape. Echoing Wendy Brown, I believe these kinds of conversations offer a political richness and validation by affirming the impossibility of fairness in the present while imagining the possibility for a field of justice and equality in the future.<sup>32</sup> “Perverse” subjects provide a particularly fruitful lens through which to begin to articulate a new vision based on more just conceptualizations of the richness and relations among subjects and subjectivities—one based on localized and lived experience rather than on the state's regulation and incorporative model.

### *The Interdisciplines*

Disciplinary territorialization is not limited to perverse or queer subjects, but in fact, the questions of who does the naming, how bodies of literature are rendered intelligible for access, and to whom access is granted shoot through all of the humanities and posthumanities. Where there is a body of literature, there is a question of categories. In particular, the critical interdisciplines that bring together human and posthuman accounts of animals and disability and race and class and gender and sexuality—fields formerly under the purview of the sciences—are all similarly disciplined, and the intersectionality among the interdisciplines illustrates the limitations of library classifications. Some of the processes of coming of age for each of these categories have been similar, as each has been and is subject to policing and disciplining by the state, othering by a dominant group, and depersonalization. They have been marginalized by the academy, been named and categorized by external authorities, and been the subjects of experiments. Each of these groups has struggled to be heard and represented in their own terms. Halberstam argues that perhaps we should strive for antidisciplinarity, or knowledge practices that refuse form and content of traditional canons: “We may in fact want to think about how to see unlike a state; we may want new rationales for knowledge production, different aesthetic standards for ordering or disordering space.”<sup>33</sup> In the academy, as evidenced by classification, various knowledges are disqualified, rendered illegible, and subjugated. Foucault calls for bringing those knowledges

from below to light. We might consider resisting mastery and seek ways to invest in other modes of knowing, recognizing ways in which those knowledges that fail to live up to norms open up opportunities for creativity and cooperation through critical pedagogy, listening, and dialogue. Halberstam proposes that we consider alternative ways of thinking about success and that perhaps not knowing, undoing, and failing ought to be privileged. Failing to live up to society's expectations, what it means to be a citizen, or what it means to do research in any particular discipline can bring about growth and new knowledge. Perverse subjects confront all kinds of normal and begin the undoing of the disciplines.

Ferguson asks what might happen if we do find ways to free texts in the critical interdisciplines in the academy:

Are there other ways to disseminate and circulate minority culture and difference that do not place them within dominant systems of value?

What happens when the texts that engage minority difference disturb the expectations and systems of intelligibility put in place by disciplines and institutions? What happens if those texts are used to imagine how minoritized subjects and knowledges might inhabit institutional spaces in ways dominant institutions never intended?<sup>34</sup>

The academy as we know it needs the disciplines, according to Michael Ryan. And by their very nature, the disciplines are biased and exclusionary, with their methodologies, theories, and subjects, and "the purity of the internal arena is always already contaminated by what it seeks to exclude. . . . All knowledge operates through acts of exclusion and marginalization."<sup>35</sup> He suggests that the institutional divisions between disciplines reflect and promote an ideological structuring of the social world: "The division of the academy into disciplines . . . reflects a metaphysical conceptuality which would classify a world that denies the possibility of such classificatory divisions." Ryan argues that the very system of disciplinary divisions is a false mirror of the universe of knowledge. In other words, one cannot wrest the political from literature, language from economics, or gender from science, and the construction of disciplinary divisions denies crucial metaphysical realities. The world is not so simply divided up, but rather, everything is entangled.<sup>36</sup>

We can apply Ferguson's, Halberstam's, and Ryan's ideas and questions to library praxis, with particular regard for the ways in which we organize minority knowledges. Might we imagine ways for scholar librarians to work in partnership with academics to create and organize spaces in which subversive ways of knowing circulate and grow? Might we be able

to advance this conversation by working from the place where the academy's knowledge is collected and stored? And would a restructuring in the library have an effect on the structure of the academy such that the oppressive techniques observed by Ferguson, Ryan, and others might be altered for the better, in ways that challenge the incorporation of subjects into state apparatuses?

This project would fit within the growing movement to turn libraries into "maker spaces" for students, artists, scientists, historians, librarians, and theorists of all sorts. As libraries are often considered the center of knowledge in the university, they provide the perfect space to carry out creative, interdisciplinary projects in making meaning, exhibits, connections, and texts. What would happen if we all came together to make and unmake readings in the library at the levels of knowledge organization and intertextuality? What if we collectively and individually created new ways of mapping and organizing knowledge by assuming different universalisms and different frames?

### *Creative Critique*

Throughout this book I have tried to demonstrate various ways in which perversion exposes the limits of and exceeds the classificatory apparatuses in the library. In the first chapter we witnessed a variety of ways in which texts exceed the name "paraphilias." Chapters 3 and 4 perhaps best illustrate the irregularity and precariousness of the classification systems, particularly as applied to locating racialized and sexualized subjects spatially on the shelves. These subjects cannot be collated in any single section of the library, and where there are attempts to do so, as in HQ71, the result is a very strange mix. The Delta Collection eventually met its end, as it became clear that librarians were unable or unwilling to confine the Delta books or their contents. Indeed, the subjects and texts in question manage to escape the apparatuses in various ways. Their intertextual relations and their readers do not conform to any particular discipline or name. They traverse the bibliographic universe by way of citationality and interpretation. Nevertheless, I believe that we can do more in libraries to facilitate interdisciplinary conversations.

This project might be considered an example of "critique as creativity," which processes the negativities and "carves out active trajectories of becoming."<sup>37</sup> Critique and problematization in this view are creative undertakings, ones that inhere freedom by seeking forms of resistance that carry possibilities for creating ways of being that escape power's hold. It is

by dissecting the apparatuses that we come to recognize our positions in relation to power. To refine classifications of queer and perverse subjects by adding more names and classes to the existing hierarchies is also to make more precise the instrument by which they are rendered objects of knowledge. Exposing the limits of the systems, however, can change the terms of the games of truth. The very mechanisms by which we find and access information—the route to knowledge and how that knowledge is conveyed—are bound to the state. Critique reveals the perversity and tenuousness of the apparatus that upholds and enforces the law that sets the rules for inscribing the bodies in the library. Perverse readings constitute a process of de-formation and provide entry points into safe spaces for starting again, for uncertain, partial readings, and for entirely new relationships and interpretations. One way to theorize knowledge organization is through the concept of nomadic subjectivity, which, for Rosi Braidotti, “is a new figuration of subjectivity in a multidifferentiated nonhierarchical way.”<sup>38</sup> Such a frame honors the multiplicities of readings and enables a new way of thinking about how to organize bodies of literature, freeing them from their static positions on the shelves and from the names that might confine them and opening them to perverse readings and relations. Similarly, toward the end of his life Foucault wrote: “We must invent with the body, with its elements, surfaces, volumes, and thicknesses, a nondisciplinary eroticism—that of a body in a volatile and diffused state, with its chance encounters and unplanned pleasures.”<sup>39</sup>

No normative system can ever exhaustively capture or delimit the complexities inherent in the social relations in which subjects are formed. A system that operates through categories can only fail to accommodate and position subjects, which is why working from action rather than a category might open up ways to redraw lines of connection and meaning. A project like this must not be limited to a reappropriation of terms, as there will always be an excluded entity upon which any category operates. Citing the case of “queer,” Ferguson warns that insofar as “queerness seeks to attain status as a modern and normative mode of difference . . . queerness becomes the engine for a series of exclusions and alienations, particularly around class, gender, and race.”<sup>40</sup> Given these conditions, it bears reconsideration of the charge against the Library of Congress in its resistance to authorize “queer” as a subject heading. Indeed, it may be that the entry into the system would mark its status as a normalized subject, and as Butler tells us, “normalizing the queer would be, after all, its sad finish.”<sup>41</sup> Some would argue that queer is already finished: It has gotten caught in the trap of identity politics, strangely overdetermined and stuck. I still think

that queer theory and queer as a verb are important and possible, but part of the reason I use the concept of perversion is that it seems to me to resist identity work. I feel no need to reappropriate or reclaim “perversion,” as such a move would serve to reterritorialize it, but thinking about perversion in terms of action means we are always in motion and drawing new lines of connection and meaning, while perpetually challenging normative concepts, frames, and definitions.

Although I have been working toward a theoretical dismantling of LoC systems, I would not suggest we do away with them completely. The large-scale standards have a function in large general collections, and they allow libraries to communicate and share resources. But local and community-based taxonomies written from various points of view can augment and/or replace or even invert the universal classifications, depending on the site and context. The Lesbian Herstory Archives in Brooklyn, New York, serves as a good example. The archive contains 11,000 books and countless archival materials. It also houses a wall of subject files, which are described on the Herstory website:

Our 1,569 fascinating Subject Files fill the drawers of four, five drawer horizontal file cabinets plus overflow boxes. Think of these files as “Lesbians and . . .” The first file is “Abortion” and the last is “Youth.” In between are such topics as “African-Ancestral Lesbians,” “Bars,” “Health Care,” “Marriage,” “Music Festivals,” “Publishers,” “Religion,” “Theatre,” and “Violence.”<sup>42</sup>

Rather than a male heterosexual universal against which to arrange all other subjects that deviate from that norm, lesbians are the universalized norm and are assumed to be central to the entire system of categories. The thesaurus and subject files system radically reorient conceptualizations of universality and norms. The Herstory Archive inescapably relies on categories but moves them over and actively inverts assumed norms. This kind of practice, performed in various localities in different ways, can foster connecting, diverging, and meandering paths to reading and desire. What’s more, the archive also includes a note on describing identity in each of its special collection descriptions:

It is Lesbian Herstory Archives’ policy to acknowledge cultural, sexual, and gender identity in donor descriptions whenever it is known. This is both to aid researchers who are undertaking projects on lesbians with a particular self identification and to combat universal assumptions of whiteness and dominant cultural definitions of sexuality and gender.<sup>43</sup>

The Herstory Archive clearly states its policy with regard to identifying cultural associations for the purpose of access, disavowing universalisms and emphasizing the importance of self-identification. It also invites participation from the community so that it can be accurate and precise in assigning donors and their collections to categories. The ways that the Lesbian Herstory Archives rewrites certain archival and library practices by foregrounding and universalizing lesbians' desires and positionalities can serve as one model for organizing knowledge about sex, sexuality, and human subjects.

Indeed, many archivists and librarians are doing this kind of work: creating new indexing systems, building terminologies for queer materials, and revising existing classifications, all while acknowledging and wrestling with the challenge inherent to classifying materials that refuse to be classified.<sup>44</sup>

*Reparative Taxonomies: Sedgwick's Loom Book,  
a Rhizomatic Taxonomy, and a Perverse Cat's Cradle*

With Sedgwick's call to "become perverse readers" in mind, I have drawn from her textile artwork, Haraway's use of the cat's cradle game, and Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic taxonomies to begin to envision alternative ways of drawing connections across texts and readers. Each of these theorists suggests that we should seek new connectivities, ones unrestrained by existing hierarchies. By opening up the possibility for connections drawn from a variety of perspectives, we can collectively arrive at a range of truths that challenge the singular version from the perspective of the Library of Congress.

I propose that we think of the designs described below as *reparative taxonomies* that reflect and facilitate queer and perverse readings. Sedgwick's turn toward reparative reading as critical practice is particularly relevant here.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, paranoid critique that resides in negative space is important and necessary work. But Sedgwick suggests, drawing upon the psychoanalytic frame as articulated by Melanie Klein, that by occupying a depressive position one can move from a paranoid position to perform reparative work.

This is the position from which it is possible in turn to use one's own resources to assemble or "repair" the murderous part-objects into something like a whole—though, I would emphasize, not necessarily like any preexisting whole. Once assembled to one's own specifications,

the more satisfying object is available to be identified with and to offer one nourishment and comfort in return. Among Klein's names for the reparative process is love.

As Ellis Hanson explains, "faced with the depressing realization that people are fragile and the world hostile, a reparative reading focuses not on the exposure of political outrages that we already know about but rather on the process of reconstructing a sustainable life in this wake."<sup>46</sup> A reparative taxonomy can do this kind of reconstruction work. The aim is not to fix the existing systems but rather to reconfigure relations according to local and personal vantage points.

Indeed, Sedgwick finds taxonomies in all kinds of places—in Proust's long sentences, in Sylvan Tomkins's theory of affect, in J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, and in Foucault's *History of Sexuality*. But she views these classifications as undosings, which "open and indicate new vistas" and reveal new "kinds of possible entailments in any generalization."<sup>47</sup> In fact, much of her work can be considered taxonomic, insofar as she questions and revises existing structures and reorganizes knowledge by way of axioms and categories. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, she explains why she privileges nonce taxonomies, which arise out of devalued knowledges. For her Proust and Henry James are the exemplary nonce taxonomists, in their "making and unmaking and remaking of and redissolution of hundreds of old and new categorical imaginings."<sup>48</sup> What is clear from her description is that this process of making and unmaking taxonomies has no end. As soon as a category is made it becomes situated and risks reification and fixity. There must always be movement, a constant questioning, an unmaking and remaking. It is through the process of always becoming a perverse reader that we can continue this practice of imagining new categories and connections across them.

In the last decade and a half of her life, Sedgwick developed a practice of textile arts and crafts, inspired and influenced in no small measure by Buddhism and her travels to Japan and other parts of the world. Using a range of techniques and materials drawn from a variety of traditions and eras, nearly all of her artwork could be described as suggestions of new ways of seeing. Of these projects, her "loom book" strikes me as a marvelous model upon which we might reformulate connections across readings and texts (Figure 18). This loom book, constructed from string and text and acetate, weaves lines from Proust in layers, so as to convey the non-linear, alternate dimensionality of the phrases and clauses in Proust. For Sedgwick, this piece provided an opportunity to express her own identifi-

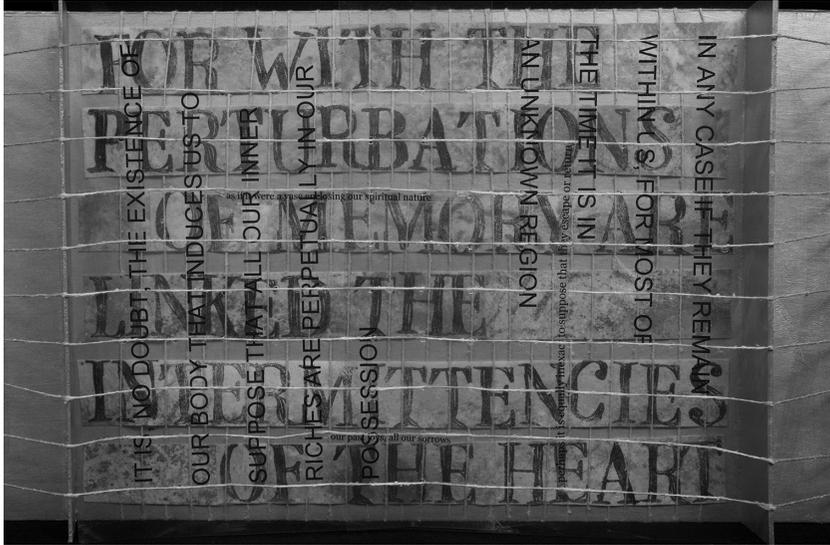


Figure 18. Sedgwick's *Loom Book*. Source: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Loom Book* (detail), board, thread, text, and acetate; 11 × 17. Photo: Kevin Ryan.

cations with the relatedness between Buddhism and Proust, their mystical meditations on the dailiness of life, and the ways that they contributed to her own sense of reality.

I would love to extend this piece and weave through it all of Proust's interlocutors, those texts that cite his lines and cite one another. We could then weave those texts together with texts that cite and recite their lines, as well. We would find what might seem like some of the most unlikely connections, and we may gather a better sense of the strength of textual and authorial connections with which we are already familiar. The beauty of this concept is that an end to such an intertextual, citational weaving is impossible to locate.

Donna Haraway's cat's cradle similarly involves complex interstitial relationships. Taking this as a model allows a resituating of knowledges that the library has put disciplinary distance between, and it encourages not only an intersection of lines but also their interknitting and entanglement.

Cat's cradle is about patterns and knots; the game takes great skill and can result in some serious surprises. One person can build up a large repertoire of string figures on a single pair of hands; but the cat's cradle figures can be passed back and forth on the hands of several players, who add new moves in the building of complex patterns. Cat's cradle

invites a sense of collective work, of one person not being able to make all the patterns alone. One does not “win” at cat’s cradle; the goal is more interesting and more open-ended than that. It is not always possible to repeat interesting patterns, and figuring out what happened to result in intriguing patterns is an embodied analytical skill. The game is played around the world and can have considerable cultural significance. Cat’s cradle is both local and global, distributed and knotted together.<sup>49</sup>

Play becomes the most productive and interesting when it involves multiple hands, and the game can go on indefinitely, changing as it passes across those hands. The cat’s cradle is a web made of “interknitted discourses,” and to illustrate how it works, Haraway uses cultural studies, feminist, multicultural, antiracist science projects, and science studies. She emphasizes that these fields are not outside or clearly distinct from one another, that they don’t simply confront one another along disciplinary lines, but rather, as the cat’s cradle reveals, they interact and knot themselves up in one another. For Haraway the tangles are the sites of a critical practice, a “nonhomogeneous, nonexclusive, often mutually constitutive, but also nonisomorphic and sometimes mutually repellent webs of discourse.”<sup>50</sup> Again, she seems to agree that some order must be followed, directed by critical scholarly thinking, as without it, one would end up with a useless tangled mess.

Deleuze and Guattari would agree that the existing classifications inhibit relations among books and that part of the problem is that the very attribution of a book to a subject confines the text and its readings: “To attribute the book to a subject is to overlook this working of matters, and the exteriority of their relations. . . . In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification.”<sup>51</sup> They argue for a reorganization of bodies into a rhizome, which maps multiplicities and endless flight of ideas. A rhizomatic taxonomy, in contrast to a treelike hierarchy (like the existing library taxonomies), allows growth from any point—from the middle, rather than the roots—and it provides a plane upon which connections and relationships are forged. “Unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature.”<sup>52</sup> Like the loom and cat’s cradle, the rhizome is ongoing, starting points can happen anywhere, and its path is impossible to trace. The rhizome gets entangled in everything it crosses in its development.

Deleuze was particularly fascinated with classifications, and his books on cinema are regarded as new cinematographic taxonomies, designed to facilitate movement and relationships that other classifications of film foreclose. Elizabeth Grosz describes Deleuze's philosophy as being a seeking of "outlines, contours, and methods of a new way of conceiving ontology, new ways of thinking and conceptualizing the real as dynamic, temporally sensitive forms of becoming."<sup>53</sup> Deleuze and Guattari relentlessly point out that a deterritorialization always risks giving itself over to a reterritorialization. I would argue that a classification and the invention of concepts are in fact always reterritorializations and reclaimings, but necessary ones, without which texts would be unretrievable, lost in a mass with every other text. The key is always to keep the categories moving, always to be open to possibilities for unmaking and remaking—not to keep adding to existing structures but to undo them and start again. By locating those spaces and concepts that escape and defy the existing systems, perhaps we can create a desiring ontology that draws the kinds of connections and ways of relating that Deleuze seems to be calling for.

It comes as no surprise that these scholars, whose work extends across and between a huge range of disciplines, are interested in the force and weight of categories. Sedgwick, Deleuze, and Haraway are each skeptical of systems and would likely agree that designing a new system is not the answer. Rather, they would all side with the notion that partial knowledges derived and viewed from multiple points, whether assembled in a rhizome, a loom, or a cat's cradle, provide us with ranges of new possibilities for embodiment and relating. Indeed, bringing these three techniques together with a variety of others already and yet-to-be invented would allow for continually expanding opportunities for engagement.

One way we might draw connections is by showing how perversion and its related concepts travel through texts through processes of citationality, exploring ways that theory and literature and science have collided, comingled, expanded, and given birth to bodies of literature by wrestling with questions of what it means to be perverse. The possibilities for the kinds of connections we could draw across historical and spatial and scholarly and personal aspects of perversion are without limits. The library has drawn a particular set of connections, and reading the library as a map tells us much about the formation of sexuality studies. It begins to reveal how bodies of literature have contributed to the becoming of queer and perverse readings. Indeed, we can extend this methodology to all the disciplines and interdisciplines. Collectively creating new readings from a variety of perspectives might contribute to ways of advancing and thinking about

sexuality in interdisciplinary work if we consider how the perverse extends to the far reaches of the library. Addressing the spatial and historical dimensions at play, such a project could trace how sexuality studies has taken shape in and through texts and scholars and students and the public. It would also convey the intertwining of sexuality with disability studies, animal studies, class, race, ethnicity, philosophy, literature, science, art, and politics. If we map these literatures by way of citationality and intertextuality, we will surely find shared histories with dissonance, conversations, violence, misunderstanding, and missed opportunities in space and time. It would show how the perverse runs through it all.