Metaphors of Privilege: Public Library Makerspace Rhetoric

Shannon Crawford Barniskis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Abstract
This discourse analysis examines the professional conversation about public library makerspaces. Articles describe makerspaces filled with advanced technological gadgets and high-tech users. This discourse brushes past familiar ways of making, such as fiber crafts or painting, to emphasize novel forms of digitally-mediated creativity. Interviews with public librarians offering makerspace services describe a more gradual evolution from long-standing library activities and creative programming to include some digital tools and some traditional tools. This research examines the tropes in the discourse, to identify legitimated ideologies or interpretive schemes. It further considers how the rhetoric might impede or facilitate public library principles such as equal access. The analysis identifies strategies and tactics for institutional control and individual agency in the process of structuring the makerspaces, revealing dissonance between the printed texts and interview discourse. As more librarians create makerspaces, this institutional discourse shapes a path for others to follow
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Contact: crawfo55@uwm.edu

1   Introduction

As more public libraries add "makerspace" to the list of services they offer, the professional conversation about such spaces hones in on advanced technological gadgets and creation. Articles and blogposts often brush past more traditional ways of making, such as fiber crafts or painting, to emphasize digitally-mediated creativity. Practicing public librarians describe translating their past activities into more high-tech services, and reframing their commitments to creative programming. The metaphors journalists and practitioners use in deliberating these transformations provide a path for others to follow.

This research examines the tropes that appear in the public library discourse to see if particular ideologies, activities, or users are privileged. It considers how ideologies could impede or facilitate public library goals such as intellectual freedom, or equal access. This discourse analysis looks at an institutional fragment of the structuration process in creating library makerspaces. It is the first part of an ongoing study looking at library makerspaces through the lens of practice theory, such as Anthony Giddens' (1984) structuration theory, and Michel du Certeau's (1984) concepts of strategies and tactics.

2   Literature Review

Linguist and social theorist James Fernandez (1986) employs the concepts of metaphor and metonym to describe how people arbitrate their present and future experiences through a symbolized past (p. 45). Metaphors act as roadmaps that shape and enable future movement by projecting synthesized past experiences (i.e. "makerspaces are like kitchens") onto future expectations in a type of *time-space distanciation* (Giddens, 1984, p. 171).

Library and Information Science (LIS) scholars have regularly utilized metaphor as an analytic tool (Bouthillier, 2000; Kuhl, 2003; Markham, 2005; Reenstjerna, 2001; Van Acker, Uyttenhove, & Van Peteghem, 2014; Vanscoy, 2014). Scholars have examined metaphors to reveal theoretic trajectories or underpinning ideologies, unacknowledged conditions, or unintended consequences (Giddens, 1984, p. 282). The interpretive schemes revealed by metaphor allow researchers to see the structure constructed by, and legitimized in, discourse.

Practice theorist Certeau (1984), like Giddens, sees society as constituted in practice, via interactions between institutional structures and individual agency. Certeau describes the *strategies* and *tactics* that individuals and institutions use to further their ends. Strategies are the ways in which institutions reproduce themselves, based in "proper" spaces that hold authority by virtue of their historical and

totalizing logics. Tactics are the ad hoc arrangements, rule-bending, hacking, and subverting activities that people do within and around institutions. Historically, makerspaces emerged from hackerspaces, and the tactics of hacking seem particularly applicable. However, in this study, the librarians' tactics are visible in the informal interview and blog data, but user tactics are not examined. Looking at metaphors in institutional discourse reveals rhetorical strategies, and opens a window onto the worldviews and practices of libraries and librarians as they consider makerspaces.

3   Methods

This study is a critical discourse analysis of fourteen news and how-to articles and blogposts aimed at or written by librarians, chosen from widely-read professional journals and blogs, and interview data from fourteen public librarians planning and implementing public library makerspaces across the United States. These makerspaces were located in libraries of various sizes, serving a variety of users, and offered a variety of tools. The analysis centers on the activities and tools the librarians and writers emphasize, the tropes they use, and the ideologies, people, or activities that appear prioritized or left out. In addition, the analysis examines described or potential strategies and tactics of the institutions and librarians.

4   Results

In speaking of makerspaces, journalists and librarians writing in the press focus almost exclusively on highly technologically-mediated activities, reflecting what cultural anthropologist Thomas Malaby (2011) calls "technoliberal" ideologies, which aggregate social gains from widespread individual use of technology. The print rhetoric examined in this study describes a type of making that is gender-specific, aimed at economic gains, and technologically deterministic. At the same time, the interview data reveals that practitioners struggle between an inclusive definition of what makerspaces are, and the need to use the technoliberal jargon that they believe funders prefer.

Increasingly, libraries are interpreting their obligation to provide equitable access with creative programs, spaces, tools, and social interactions (e.g Brady et al., 2014). In this environment, digital and socioeconomic divides may separate those who have access to the tools of creation and expression, and those who do not. Discussions on reducing or ameliorating digital divides are often framed as "instrumental, business-oriented rationales…enhancing the digital literacy of the workforce" (Murdock & Golding, 2004, p. 255), with similar political economy and gender implications as the industry-friendly technological framing of makerspaces.

4.1   Metaphors and Metanyms

The tropes journalists and bloggers used in describing makerspaces speak to technological "leaps," and socioeconomic empowerment, "leveling playing fields." Many of the metaphors emphasize newness and coolness. The "buzz" of makerspaces is that they are "beta spaces" or "hot spots" where innovation can "spark," "jumpstart" or "launch." By contrast, the practitioners use low-tech or familiar technological metaphors such as "kitchens", and speak of spirituality and social connections. Instead of novelty, the practitioners touch base with the past: "This isn't anything new," and makerspaces are "just an extension of what we've already done."

The most common metonym for makerspace is "3D printer," just as the main metonym for libraries is "book." Both the articles and interviews offer 3D printers and printing as a shortcut metonym to reference tools in makerspaces and the type of creativity supported there. Fernandez (1986) describes a metaphorical strategy in which one chooses a metaphorical domain that offers "shock value when applied to a pronoun and give perspective by incongruity" (p. 10). This may be why 3D printers are the mascot for library makerspaces, and why the front-facing rhetoric of professional articles use overwhelmingly industrial, scientific, and/or militaristic metaphors—the perceived incongruity of quiet, quaint reading spaces and high-tech tools provides a way to capture readers' interest. Certainly, the interviewed librarians described a sense of frustration with the general public's apparent inability to see that libraries have not been quiet reading spaces for decades. They described makerspaces as a way to jolt their communities into seeing libraries anew. Still, some librarians noted a danger that, just as when "books" equal "libraries" non-readers might feel unwelcome, when 3D printers define makerspaces, certain types of activities, interests, and people are sidelined, such as those already on the "have-not" ledges of digital divides.

4.2   Strategies and Tactics

Library strategies, aimed at ensuring the continuing existence of the library, are visible as libraries situate makerspace appropriateness through control over allocative and authoritative resources (Giddens, 1984, p. 33). Bratich and Brush (2011) describe how "dominant powers use visibility, gridding, and institutionalized spaces to limit possible actions. They employ *strategies* to enclose spaces, organize proper usage, and determine the pathways of action" (p. 251). Some strategies in these texts limit tactical affordances of the makerspaces. In one example, Cheng (2013) describes a library offering institutionally-controlled digital fabrication tools. The library needed to "figure out what it is about this whole maker thing that fits into a library setting," then did not allow users to use the 3D printers, instead deciding "we want to teach them." All of these phrases ground decision-making and instruction as the library's purview. The users are situated passively in this text, though they may continue "on their own," "in someone's home." Individual action can only occur outside the strategic space the library provides.

Some of the strategies in the discourses on public library makerspaces include:

- Signifying technological relevance and aligning libraries with corporate/educational ideologies of lifelong learning and technological determinism;
- Deciding authoritative resource structures with the librarian as expert, or shifting some authority to users when they incorporate volunteers as teachers or mentors, while reproducing a traditional mission of knowledge transmission;
- Legitimizing proper library activities and amending the uses of space within libraries—quiet versus noisy, or cluttered versus tidy, for example;
- Exercising allocative control over tools appropriate to a library, and who may use them.

The interviewed librarians also described a series of subverting or hacking tactics aimed at resisting institutional policies or stated aims. They described tactical alliances with library users as well, such as loosening rules over tool use, repurposing equipment, breaking noise rules, or otherwise adapting the spaces and supplies to the needs of the users. A key strategy described by librarians involved turning at least some of the governance of the makerspace over to the users.

5   Conclusion

The analysis found discordances in the rhetoric, particularly between the written texts and oral interviews. Such ruptures may reveal conceptual instability, or that two or more value systems are clashing. The tropes used in print were different than in the oral data. The articles and blog posts told a different, more technologically and economically-oriented story than the practitioners did.

The ruptures between the printed rhetoric and interview dialogue could be due to lag as the discussion catches up with practice, or vice versa. They may be evidence of front stage behavior to funders and users differing from backstage conversations among colleagues (the researcher was also a practitioner) (Goffman, 1959). Alternatively, they may be evidence of a larger-scale dissonance between the foundational principles of librarianship and the tenets of technoliberalism, the socioeconomic theory evident in library funding rhetoric ("Global libraries," 2014; IMLS, 2012, 2014; Stevenson, 2009), and the makerspace articles.

In practice, the interviewed librarians describe subverting some of their library's goals (e.g. entrepreneurialism, lifelong learning) tactically, to interpret making broadly enough to support the creative and social needs of their entire community. Yet the librarians indicate that they must speak a pseudo-corporate language to attract the attention of funders and non-users. Often the librarian and the library are embodied within the same person; individual librarians must use both strategies and tactics to serve their institutions and their users.

The conflict between serving corporate and educational interests, and the goal of satisfying community needs that do not fit within those frameworks (such as community-building, socializing, and having fun), leaves librarians spinning between rhetorical touchpoints. The ideological translations that occur when librarians speak to different audiences are not inherently problematic. However, six of the fourteen librarians described creating their makerspace based on the recommendations of the professional literature. They are following the path forged by technoliberal metaphor, which forecloses certain types of creative activities in libraries as economically or educationally irrelevant.

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