The Digital Age
Libr@ries and the Arobase: Changing Information Space and Practice
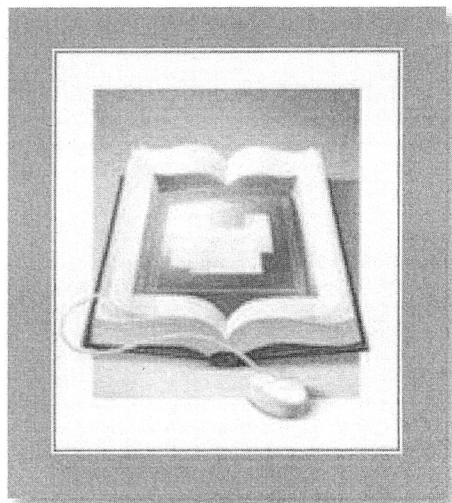by Cushla Kapitzke and Bertram (Chip) Bruce

Virtual libraries, interactive digital museum objects, scholarly databases accessed by mobile phone, blogs, Wikipedia, and so it goes. It is true that, in some ways, Eco's stagnant monastic library and Franklin's iconic civic institution really has transmogrified into Borges' prophetic and chaotic Library of Babel. Libr@ries and the arobase: Changing information space and practice, edited by Cushla Kapitzke and Bertram Bruce, provides a theorized and finely nuanced analysis of this epochal shift from print-bound places to digital environments, logics, and cultures in and through what they call, libr@ries.

For six millennia, libraries have functioned as repositories of social memory and cultural capital, and have comprised key sites for language and literacy work. In a mutually beneficial synergy, literati and librarian produced, preserved, and distributed valorized texts and knowledges, thereby playing key roles in the interconnected political economies of society and schooling. Since the inception of the library 'sciences' in the early twentieth century, the study of libraries remained isolated within the disciplinary boundaries of information and library sciences programs. One reason for this isolation was the physical separation of library buildings within school and university plant complexes. Their material status as 'other' in the material and social fields of education contributed to a perception of librarians as independent professionals who were known to be 'territorial' of their physical and disciplinary domains.

But access to information resources and services is now independent of time, place, face-to-face social interaction, and the micropolitics of institutional mediation. Bit by bit and brick by brick, online technologies and new media are literally and figuratively disassembling the institutional spaces, powers, practices, and privileges of libraries. Libr@ries and the arobase captures one slice of the current historical moment in which digitization and virtualization are transforming that traditional cultural icon — the library — into market-driven libr@ries.

The compilation brings together a distinguished group of scholars to explore the dislodgement of library discourses from an apolitical, modernist paradigm. Through a range of conceptual frameworks and empirical studies, the authors explain, interpret, and problematize the increasing de-materialization and commodification of knowledge spaces and practices. There are sixteen chapters—including those by Nicholas C. Burbules, Bettina Fabos, Phil Graham, Abby A. Goodrum, Timothy W. Luke, Mark Lawrence Kornbluh, Paul Turnbull, John Willinsky, Cushla Kapitzke and Bertram C. Bruce— exploring a range of issues around the libr@ry as emblematic of rapid change taking place in public access to information, education, literacy, and intellectual property.

Kapitzke, C., & Bruce, B. C. (Eds.). (In press). Libr@ries and the arobase: Changing information space and practice. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. Available November 2005.