



University Library, Learning Zone

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Place-ing the library

Payne, Daniel

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Place-ing the Library

Daniel Payne, MLIS, MA (Musicology), BEd
Head Instructional Services,
Dorothy H. Hoover Library, OCAD University



Space and place are basic components of the lived world; we take them for granted. When we think about them, however, they may assume unexpected meanings and raise questions we have not thought to ask (Tuan 3).

...we live in and through identities, bodies, places, and spaces in non-linear, incoherent, and fragmented ways (Schissel 1).

When does a space become a place? Much has been posited about this spatial transition, although such lines of inquiry almost inevitably drift into the domain of qualitative rather than quantitative study. Theorist Henri Lefebvre, however, provides a compelling framework for defining this well-used but illusive term by envisioning the spaces that we physically inhabit as sociologically structured by three “layers”: the abstracted domain of space planning, the emotional affective sphere of how we think or feel when occupying a space, and the social grounding of our daily usage patterns.¹

A space becomes “place” when there is a “seamless fluidity” between all three layers; thus, those who plan spaces have direct connection with usage and an intuitive understanding of how people emotionally and psychologically *feel* when present in a given location. Places are not simply environments, but ecologies where agents are empowered to explore, learn, question, challenge, interact and ultimately change a space through these activities. Librarians are often familiar with planning based on statistical usage measures; however, the middle component—how people emotionally respond to their collections—is much more difficult to gauge. Users, too, have their own triadic usage patterns that direct plans to engage with library spaces.

Imbalances in one element lead to problematic spaces that are unsuccessful; they do not achieve the status of “place.” For example, an overly planned space—one that is disconnected from usage or

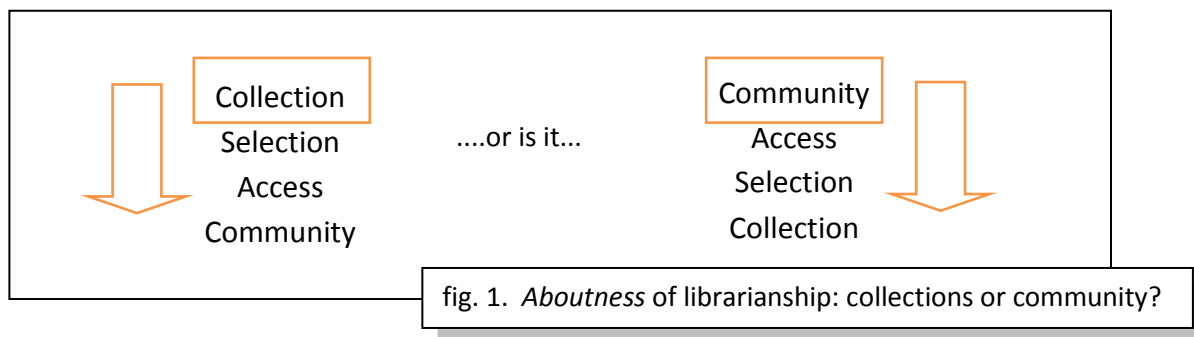
¹ Lefebvre uses the terms conceptual, perceptual, experiential space for the three levels of his spatial triad. For clarity, the terminology has been modified (planning, affect, use) and color coding used (orange, blue, green).

affective modes of spatial psychology—leads to an authoritarian level of abstraction that stultifies and ultimately sterilizes it. People holding overly romanticized idealizations of a space sentimentalize it as a site of nostalgia or fantasy, disconnected from the needs of practical daily usage. Mismatched triads between stakeholders in a space, either users or planners, can lead to territories of tension and misunderstanding rather than organic ecologies of discursive interaction.

Can this triadic analytical framework be mapped onto a library? To avoid overly abstracted theorization, I will refer to a deceptive simple definition from the peer-reviewed open source journal *First Monday* titled, compellingly, “What is a Library Anymore, Anyway?”

Ignoring the physical, technological underpinnings for now, we assert that the library is, at root, a collection of information selected for use of, and made useable for, a particular community (Keller, Michael A. et al.)

Each of the four elements listed can be mapped on the Lefebvre’s space triadic although it depends on the ultimate institutional *aboutness* of the library (see fig.1).



Stereotypical preconceptions of librarians seem to contend that they envision libraries as places for collections (i.e. books); yet interestingly, the monumental 2010 OCLC *Perceptions of Libraries* survey reveals that 75 % of all respondents in all age groups claimed that the library’s central brand is books (an increase from 69% in the 2005 survey), so in fact it is our *users* that envision libraries as places for collections. This initial affective premise inevitably dictates their usage patterns and, by extension, strategies for using a library space; all of which could preclude users from fully planning on and physically using a library for the multi-faceted visual, tactile and cognitive needs of creative production.

Librarians know, however, that successful libraries—libraries that are growing organisms (Ranganathan)²—actually begin with community. The daily practices of librarianship are all actions of selection and access that are performed in order to create a community of learners, leaders, critical thinkers, readers, activists, creators (see fig. 2).



fig. 2. Librarianship as activities of selection and access?

Librarians can *tell* our users that libraries are about “community”; however, through innovative uses of access and selection tools, they can *prove* that libraries are about community. Community and collections are both spatial entities that can be planned and used; so I contend that the tangible activities of selection and access provide the tools for managing the emotive sphere, providing a bridging action that allows library space to be qualified as place.

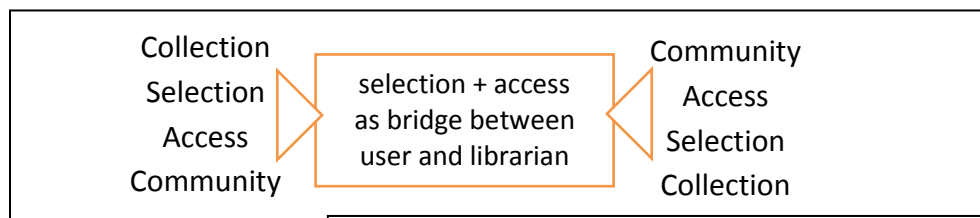


fig. 3. Selection and access to negotiate *aboutness* of librarianship?

In February 2012, a group of dedicated students, organized by self-proclaimed grOCADian Laura Headley, descended on the OCAD U Library’s Learning Zone³ space to begin building an indoor vertical garden (see illus. 4, p. 9) using open source design plans by the Brooklyn based community WindowFarms. Launching the project involved several months of planning by students and library staff

² In reference to S.R. Ranganathan’s fifth law of library sciences: “A library is a growing organism.”

³ The Dorothy H. Hoover Library’s Learning Zone (LZ) is a studio-based space where all event programming is student-initiated; a wide array of computer hardware and software is available but also low-tech cutting, formatting, collage tools are accessible for DIY-inspired production. Illus. 1 -3 (pp. 7, 8) demonstrate recent events, studio work and activities in the LZ. See www.ocadu.ca/library/learning_zone.htm for more information.

(see illus. 5, p. 9) in consultation with our campus services department in order to meet electrical codes, institutional design standards, health and safety regulations (see illus. 6, p. 10). I stopped by on the first day of construction, which was a Saturday, and remember commenting to our Learning Zone librarian Marta Chudolinska who was supervising through participation—an important qualifying distinction!—: “hey, you’re not working overtime; you’re having fun!” In informal feedback from participating students, I tried to gauge their goals, strategies and hopes for the project. Responses from two attendees, Laura Headley and Ben Verdicchio, are included in bulleted list form below. Their feedback correlates compellingly with our own official Library and Learning Zone vision and mission statements (fig. 4,5) which seems to communicate a triadic understanding of the library as a place (fig. 6).

grOCAD **PLANNING** GOALS

Q: Why did you build and eventually install them in the Learning Zone

- it's a great space on campus for **groups to gather and work together**
- the Learning Zone is an **accessible**, high profile, popular place for the **OCAD community but also for the local public community**
- the Learning Zone is a **safe environment** where students know they can **experiment and take risks**
- the space is warm and inviting through constant showcase of student work (from all disciplines)
- it's an **open and non-judgmental space**
- we wanted our project to reach as many people as possible - **the more people who see it, the more people will learn from it**
- It was a space offered to us with **staff willing and ready to collaborate**.

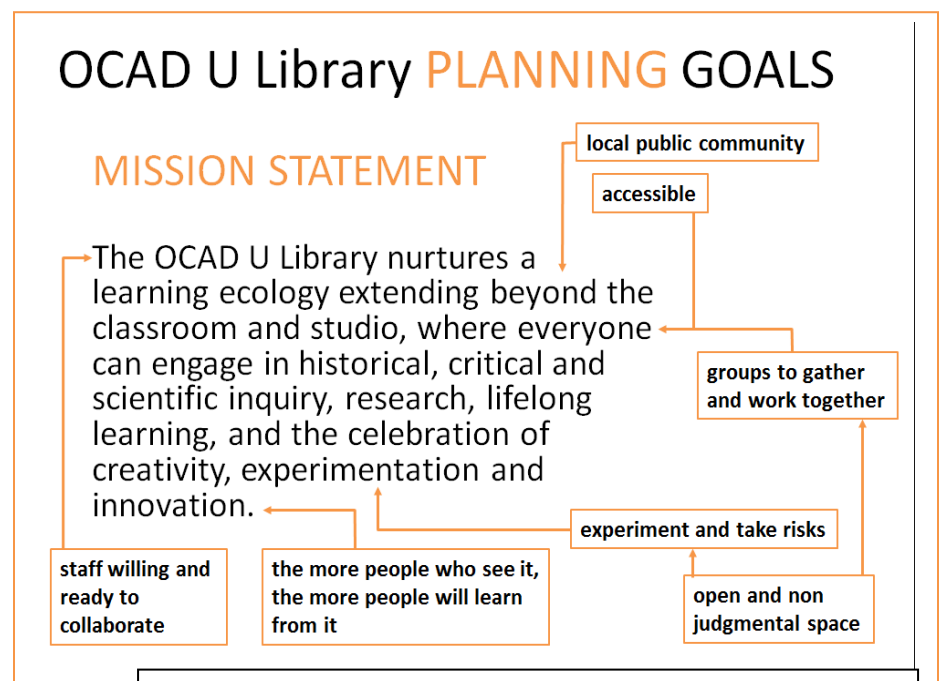


fig. 4. grOCAD planning goals compared to OCAD U Library/Learning Zone Mission Statement

grOCAD AFFECTIVE GOALS

Q: What is the ultimate goal of the grOCAD Window Farm?

- **inspire our community** to be **active problem solvers**
- **educate ourselves and others** in the future of our urban environments and gardening
- **apply and materialize our education** - work together as an interdisciplinary force to experiment, innovate and find solutions bridge art and design concepts

OCAD U Library AFFECTIVE GOALS

VISION STATEMENT

The OCAD University Library empowers the imagination and leads the university community in the creation, discovery and sharing of knowledge.

educate ourselves and others

active problem solvers

inspire our community

apply and materialize our education

fig. 5. grOCAD affective goals compared to OCAD U Library/Learning Zone Vision Statement

grOCAD USE GOALS

Q: Did the construction plans change while you were working on the project?

Q: Do you think that the grOCAD Window Farm would look or be built any differently if they were fabricated in a studio?

- Absolutely. Since this is an **open-source design** meant to adapt to each situation, we had to brainstorm as a team or make little decisions when needed.
- I'm happy that the WindowFarm is in the LZ because we have chosen materials and methods that help make the project look "more finished" (clean wood, accurate measurements, well executed electrical and plumbing systems). **If the WindowFarm were to remain in a studio, we would have worked in less accurate ways and it wouldn't have the same deliverance.**

Library USE GOALS

Library is:

- site for freedom of access

Library is:

- site for display & inspiration

Library is:

- site for learning tools that inform through form

fig. 6. grOCAD use goals demonstrating *aboutness* understanding of library as community

- materials and execution is important to our project because **we want to entice and motivate people to learn** about what and why we are doing it
- a **clean and easily understandable model is a strong solution**
- even though the LZ is a fun place to work, it is still a professional space that speaks to the community about OCAD education and the institution - we care for OCAD's image and because the project was being placed in the LZ we made sure the aesthetic of the design was professional and respectful, **but also experimental and creative**
eventually we do want to experiment with the system (i.e. change the growing containers to coconut shells instead of plastic bottles)
and **we hope to foster these discussions and showcase the experiments in the LZ**

Library **USE** GOALS

Library is:

- site for critical inquiry

Library is:

- site for peer-review through public "critiques"

In the past, OCAD U librarians have presented seminars on research strategies for projects on green roof design and vertical farming; however, the grOCAD window farm project offered a tangible means of exploring such sustainable goals using studio-based pedagogical techniques. Most certainly the grOCADians have built these structures in other environments and indeed will continue to build them elsewhere; but, for library staff and students, philosophically meeting at the emotive domain strengthens both groups. OCAD U librarians were able to *enact* a community of *scholartistry* (Knowles et al.) through implementing the strategic planning goals of using studio pedagogical structures to inform information literacy. For students, conducting studio-based production in the library space demonstrates the diversity of exploratory tools a library can provide, thereby expanding the concept of "collection" through fostering a new diversified community of critical learners. In the process, grOCADians and all users who view the structure are confronted with tangible objects that may initially bewilder, but through access to these "collections" they learn not only about sustainable design for food production in our urban environment, but also, more broadly, that the library can be a space for such dynamic enterprises.

The project, in addition to others such as our reducing and reusing initiative PlateStation where cutlery and dishware collections are available for student loans (see illus. 2, p. 8), all seek to playfully challenge the perception that "libraries = books," not directly through conventional "information literacy" sessions rooted in academic pedagogy, but by using the dynamic tactile elements of studio-based creative

research where learning occurs through interacting with tools and mediums, whether oil paints, clay, wood, or, in our case, plastic bottles! Librarians could have offered an information literacy session on research strategies for recycling, sustainability, and designing healthier spaces; however, by making things that directly address these objectives in our library spaces, a constructivist activity was used to access knowledge on sustainability and add learning objects to make our collection more ecologically responsible. Using such a student-directed activity, based on open source designs, meant that we were learning directly from them in a dialogically exploratory manner, embodying what educational philosopher Paulo Friere would describe as the democratic pedagogy of “critical consciousness.” The fact that core elements of our Library and Learning Zone vision, mission and objectives statements are unconsciously enunciated by grOCAD participants hint at a “seamless fluidity” between *our* planning documents and the emotive goals envisioned by our student creators.



illus. 1. Learning Zone librarian Marta Chudolinska (upper left hand image) and selected vignettes from the LZ; accessed <http://blog.ocad.ca/wordpress/learningzone/> and www.flickr.com/photos/moqub/5783583401/



Plate-Station

Re-usable Dish Exchange program: a *new campus initiative* jointly created by Greening the Grange and the OCADU Learning Zone.

<http://blog.ocad.ca/wordpress/learningzone/?s=platestation>

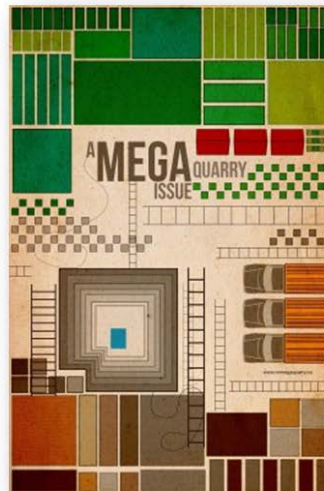
NowSpace: DIY Telepresence

Combining open source software and affordable hardware, NowSpace is a telepresence toolkit for communities to engage in cultural exchange. The user will experience NowSpace as an 8-foot square screen that provides a full-body real-time portal from which to interact with groups of remote users, using physical gestures to control and manipulate the system.

illus. 2

Great Grange Event

Wearable Art Showing within a collaborative set installation by student in the course Nature and Culture: Curatorial Practice



Mega Quarry Poster Show

- featuring posters created by students in Drawing Translation to promote awareness of the [Mega Quarry](#),
- In attendance: CBC Radio personalities, filmmakers, and Director General of the David Suzuki Foundation, Ontario and Canada's North.

<http://blog.ocad.ca/wordpress/learningzone/tag/mega-quarry/>

illus. 3

<http://blog.ocad.ca/wordpress/learningzone/2012/03/the-great-grange-event-reception-wearable-art-show/>



illus. 4



1.01 Location

The Installation of the WindowFarm will be in the Learning Zone at 122 Saint Patrick's Street. In the Learning Zone, the WindowFarm will be adjacent to the glass wall, which separates The Grange corridor and the Learning Zone.

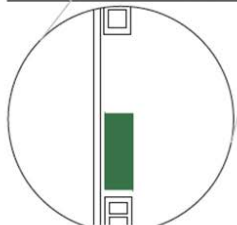
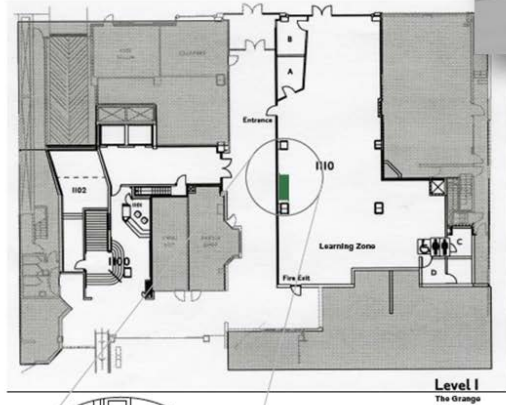
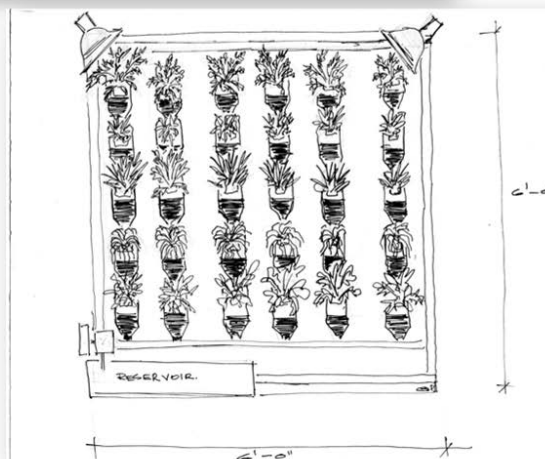
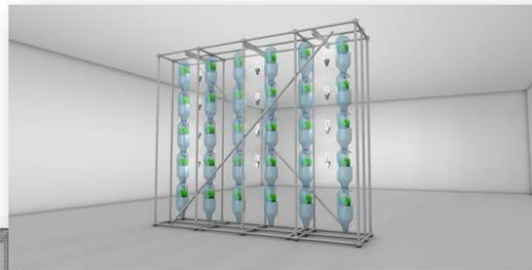
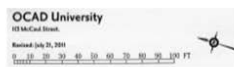


Fig. 2 The highlighted section of the floor plan identifies where the WindowFarm will be positioned in the Learning Zone adjacent to the glass wall.



groCAD, "Location." Project Plan.
18 Jan. 2012. Print.

illus. 5

Part 4: Specification Summary

Legend



Performance Window Farm Components	Health & Safety					Durability					Maintenance				Function				
	Flammability	Sharp Projections	Obstruction to Egress	Reflections (Glare)	Accessible	Structurally Sound	Secure Attachment	Color Stability	Light Farness	Abuse Resistance	Cleanability	Component Repair	Component Storage	Relocation	Health & Safety	Privacy	Color Fidelity	Acoustic Control	Energy Control
Window Farm Frame	Red	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	White	Green	White	White
Window Frame	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	White	Red	White	White
Reservoir	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	White	Yellow	White	White
Motor/Pump	Green	Green	Green	White	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	White	Green	Yellow	Green
Timer	Yellow	Green	Green	White	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	White	Green	White	Green
Lights	Yellow	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	White	Green	Green	Green	Red	White	Yellow	White	Green

groCAD "Specification Summary." *Project Plan*. 18 Jan. 2012. Print.

illus. 6

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