methods of book history and on appreciating the book as a product of its makers and their society.—Allison Jai O’Dell, University of Miami Libraries


Schnapp and Battles’ The Library Beyond the Book is a visually and intellectually playful look at what libraries can become and what they can do as humanity traverses the threshold of the information age. The authors wink at how the online information bomb of modernity intersects with the physical space of a library. Schnapp and Battles are clearly critical of the post-book visioning and “excessive exuberance of techno-utopians” (56), and those who dwell in the “constraints of bibliophilia and bookish nostalgia” (18). Rather than blowing book stacks to bits as one might envisage from the title, the authors instead focus on a compelling middle-of-the-road suggestion: libraries just need to be realigned.

This notion of realignment, Schnapp and Battles state, comes from a practical look at how societies adjust to media revolutions. Rather than providing a prescriptive direction for how to do this (a refreshing change from Walt Crawford and Michael Gorman’s 1995 book, Future Libraries: Dreams, Madness, & Reality), the authors build a pattern book—component parts of libraries called “windows” and various instantiations of libraries called “scenarios”—to uncover what people want most from libraries; those fundamental qualities of libraries past and present that can be reimagined for the future.

The authors’ disassembly of libraryness, an act they relate to steampunk, is the true pleasure of this book. A book carrel is cast as a “microcosm of retreat and enclosure within the macrocosm of the library,” (45) which hints at the authors’ idea of the library as both “cemetery and livebrary: a place of intensified, deeper sociality and commune, a place of mummification that equals a place of worship and constant renewal, reactivation, and conversation across the centuries” (29). It is also in the “windows” section where the visual acrobatics of the book design enliven and enhance the text. Each library component warrants a delicious two-page peach-colored spread with multiple illustrations.

Additional treats are the “provocations,” which run down the right side of odd-numbered pages. The entry for “Reading Taverns” envisions that “the library’s basement is transformed into a nocturnal reading room which hosts book-related social activities as well as performances, readings, and poetry slams. The Reading Tavern is the home for local literacy clubs whose job it is to curate its nooks, crannies, tables, and benches” (57). Some of the provocations are repellant, such as
a “No Sitting” area in which lying prone is the rule, but some are brilliant, such as the “Cold Spots” in which designated places in the library become the sole place of escape from the hot spots of Internet connectivity.

The real meat of the book is in the “scenarios” section that explicates the underpinnings of what libraries are and can be to society. The mausoleum and neo-cloister, for example, embody traditional library functions of deep storage, retrieval, and support for the advancement of knowledge. In contrast, libraries of the here and now are sometimes temporary creations in response to society’s emergent needs, such as the People’s Library in the Occupy Wall Street movement. The Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) is held high as an exemplar of a new library that is not bricks and mortar, but instead is a database realized as a library in and of itself.

It is at the end of the “scenarios” section that the authors, who continuously dodge making assertions about what should be done and swerve away from making predictions, suggest that libraries multiply and diversify their civic roles to address needs and opportunities of culture and society; distributing manifestations of the library in both site-specific and occasion-specific temporary and enduring instances. In a later chapter, they state that their goal with this book was to talk about “what libraries are and what they do that is flexible with respect to site, materiality, and social context; that catalyzes a new library culture of digitally inflected play, invention, and imagination” (123).

I would highly recommend this book to academicians, civic leaders, and all librarians, asking them to skim by the ivory tower Latinisms and other linguistic dropings that might isolate a broader swath of readers from this outstanding book.—Blynne Olivieri, University of West Georgia


The Map Thief by Michael Blanding is an informative account of the life and crimes of E. Forbes Smiley III, a well-known antiquarian map dealer who stole rare and valuable maps from institutions for several years, selling the materials to other map dealers and directly to private collectors. Apprehended at Yale University in 2005, Smiley eventually confessed to stealing 97 maps valued at over $3,000,000 from six libraries, agreed to cooperate with prosecutors, and was sentenced to 42 months in federal prison. He was released in January 2010.

Blanding, a journalist based in Boston, has published articles in regional, national, and online journals including The Boston Globe Magazine, Boston Magazine, The Na-