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Reference Librarianship On The Fly: Taking the Librarian Out of the Library

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*"There is good authority for going out into the highways and byways
to find guests for a feast." –Melvil Dewey (1901)[1]*

Abstract:

With the advent of mobile technologies, reference and information services to library patrons have finally come of age. However, it is no longer enough that the ubiquitous virtual reference web chat is open 24/7, or that a library's website is geared to mobile device access. What, in fact, true digital and mobile assimilation means for reference and information services of the 21st century is the ability for the library to reach out beyond its physical and mobile device-oriented structures, to extend a hand of reference and information greeting to the human user, quite literally, in the street.

This is the realm of the "Embedded" or Itinerant Librarian, whose new role is to take the library with her out into the city to meet her patrons as they go about their busy day-to-day lives. This paper presents case studies, practical professional advice and vision statements of how such services can be achieved to produce a truly 21st century library.

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[1] M. Dewey, "Field and Future of Traveling Libraries", Bulletin 40 (Traveling Libraries and Collections 2), Home Education Department (University of the State of New York: 1901): p.31.

Reference and information services provided by library and information professionals have often appeared 'extra muros', that is, outside the physical walls of a building. Writing in 1936, Ruth Wellman describes the "open-air reading rooms" of the New York Public Library (NYPL), noting the frequency of issues, popular genres, and titles of works available to the public at NYPL's "Bryant Park Open-air Reading Room", opened in 1935, and where at "10:00 the bright blue bookstalls, the magazine rack and the librarians' table are wheeled into place, the blue umbrella is opened and the day begins".[2]

Wellman adds that "there is little reference work in the strict sense of the word" but then goes on to describe how "[m]any questions lead directly to different divisions in the Reference Department",[3] while also detailing individual examples of reference use of the "reading room's" resources by this public community, which "constitutes a cross-section of life in mid-town New York… the park public."[4]

Going outside of the library, or 'out into the field', is clearly not a new facet of librarianship in action, as also the long and fertile history of mobile librarianship – spanning communities as diverse as Venezuela (with its Bibliomulas) and Kenya (camel mobile libraries) as well as the much-loved bookmobiles of many other countries – continues to demonstrate. Indeed, references to the term "field librarian" appear in English texts from the early 1900s onwards, dotting the pages of American Libraries Association (ALA) proceedings and London's "The Library Chronicle".

This "travelling librarian — the field librarian perhaps is the best word"[5] in fact shape-shifts through time and library hybridity, now manifesting in more recent periods in a newer guise as part of an academic community's recognition of the role

[2] R. Wellman, "Open-Air Reading Rooms", Library Journal, No. 61 (January, 1936): p.668.
[3] Ibid: p.670.
[4] Ibid: p.668.
[5] Papers and Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth General Meeting of the American Library Association, (American Libraries Association, 1904): p.214.

librarians can take "to improve our approach to library services",[6] here appearing as an "embedded" agent, where "[e]mbedded librarianship takes a librarian out of the context of the traditional library and places him or her in an "on-site" setting or situation that enables close coordination and collaboration with researchers or teaching faculty."[7]

Current uses of the term "embedded" however, perhaps reflect a modern mindset more influenced by media coverage of military personnel[8] and the concept of 'embedded journalism', which the US military took to heart as part of their "information warfare"[9] strategy from 2003 onwards, rather than any radically awkward shifts in professional practice, dovetailing as it does with contemporary examples termed 'field librarianship' – where both the librarian and her "office is "out in the field" as opposed to in the library".[10] Here, in the 'field of play', "the nature of… communication changes",[11] morphing from more formal or habituated modes of interaction, to individual encounters, championed both for their capacity for exploring and developing "personal relationships"[12] as well as for what Johnson, writing in 2010, flags as a specifically serendipitous nature, formed of happenstance meets and "casual…conversation".[13]

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[6] B. L. Johnson, "In the Field", Library Journal (1st February 2007): http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6727991

[7] J. Carlson and R. Kneale, "Embedded Librarianship in the research context", College & Research Libraries News, Vol. 72 No. 3 (March 2011): p.167.

[8] See, for instance, the Oxford English Dictionary's December 2006 draft additions: "embed | imbed, v.". OED Online. March 2012. Oxford University Press. 5 March 2012: http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/60835?redirectedFrom=embed

[9] J. Kahn, "Postmortem: Iraq war media coverage dazzled but it also obscured", UC Berkeley News, website (18th March 2004): http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2004/03/18_iraqmedia.shtml

[10] Job description, University of Michigan, USA, website: http://www.lib.umich.edu/users/ahaines

[11] B. L. Johnson, L. A. Alexander, "Reaching Beyond the Walls of the Library," in The Desk and Beyond: Next Generation Reference Services, ed. S. K. Steiner and M. L. Madden (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2008): p.31.

[12] A. Haines, "Out in Left Field: The Benefits of Field Librarianship for Studio Arts Programs", Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Spring 2004): p.19.

[13] B. L. Johnson, "Transforming Roles for Academic Librarians: Leading and Participating in New Partnerships." Research Library Issues: A Bimonthly Report from ARL, CNI, and SPARC, No. 272 (October 2010): p.10. http://publications.arl.org/rli272/

As well as the now more familiar 'roving reference', what all these modes and models have in common, aside from the multiplicity of terminology[14] is a key, and cardinal facet, often seemingly underplayed, or quite simply perhaps, rather misunderstood.

This is the elemental concept in operation: reference and information services being provided 'extra muros' of a central library or reference point and as a transient, and metastatic, mode of human to human interaction. Here, encounters can shift between borderless states of acquaintance, experience, co-operation and intimacy, with further transitions possible through the geographies of context in which these interactions occur between individuals in space and time. It is, in fact, a journey in several senses, and with a number of phases: that of the seeker and inquirer, perhaps first tentatively walking out into the field of search, likely seeking navigation and orientation, at once gaining ground or perhaps receding, hopefully at some point finding a solid ship from which to steer towards, now, a more amplified goal, objective or exploratory aim.

This transitory, roaming behaviour: marked in fact, by a *shift between states* (be they the personal and social, geographical, or states of knowledge-seeking behaviour, and the different states of knowledge itself) is especially the case for the nascent landscape of information and reference services which operate extra muros 'in the field', journeying themselves along the highways and byways of fluctuating

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[14] Variously noted in the literature as those "who work outside of the library proper, outreach librarian, outpost librarian, field librarian, and satellite librarian" as well as the terms "embedded, field, liaison, blended, outreach, outpost, diffuse, satellite, and disembodied librarians… librarians without walls and librarians on location". J. Clyde and J. Lee, "Embedded Reference to Embedded Librarianship – Six Years at the University of Calgary", Journal of Library Administration, Vol. 51, Iss. 4 (April 2011): p.392; and P. Rudin, "No Fixed Address: The Evolution of Outreach Library Services on University Campuses", The Reference Librarian, Vol. 49, Iss. 1 (2008): p.71; and demonstrating "the growth of embedded reference and its transformation to embedded librarianship that has taken place".

methods, practices and habits, and likely extrapolating from typical and traditional reference rules, regulations and conventions.

Such divergencies, and dispersals, typified by reference and information services let loose 'in the wild', can in fact be distinguished as "liminal" spaces of practice, that is "[o]f or pertaining to the threshold or initial stage of a process". [15] The word "liminal" stems from the Latin, "līmin-, līmen", meaning "threshold",[16] but can also be "etymologically and semantically linked to the concept of a 'harbour' (from the [Greek]) or place of safety",[17] and in the field of anthropology is associated with the work of van Genepp[18] and Turner. The work of Turner, describing the attributes of liminality and "liminal personae" as "necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space"[19] is particularly relevant.

Alongside insights from anthropology it is possible to place "liminal" cultural and architectural theory, where "applying ideas of liminality to space suggests that there are kinds of space and place that are inhabited by people between states", a borderland, if you will, of expectations, desires and needs, suggestive in fact of "some kind of journey – a leaving of one space and all its expected codes and rules and arrival in another" where it is possible to "think of the spaces of a journey – the road, the airport, the train – as liminal spaces"[20] wherein an "area of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo" or a time and space "betwixt and between"[21] exists.

[15] "liminal, adj.". OED Online. March 2012. Oxford University Press. 7 March 2012: http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/108471

[16] Ibid.

[17] A. Roughley, "Liminal Paperspaces: Writing between Derrida and Joyce and Being and Writing", in L. Kay, Z. Kinsley, T. Phillips and A. Roughley, ed.s, Mapping Liminalities: Thresholds in Cultural and Literary Texts (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2007): p.209.

[18] A. van Genepp, The Rites of Passage (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960).

[19] V. W. Turner, The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction, 2009): p.95.

[20] T. Cresswell, "Ergin Çavuşoğlu and the Art of Betweenness" in J. Rugg and C. Martin, ed.s, Spatialities: The Geographies of Art and Architecture (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2012): p.71.

[21] V. Turner, E. Turner, "Religious Celebrations," in V. Turner, ed. Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982): .p.202.

That extra muros, "itinerant" or "field" reference and information services can be *explicitly* distinguished in this way is important: it is exactly because these types of services exist 'betwixt and between' physical library spaces, and in some cases, explicitly provide a transient, ephemeral reference and information service in action, that an engagement *with*, rather than against, ambiguity, uncertainty, polysemy and chance, must be carried out.

This "liminality" of extra muros reference and information services is most ably demonstrated in some real world examples of contemporary practice, such as the work of **Radical Reference** (RR), "a collective of progressive library workers... us[ing] virtual and face-to-face reference services to reach out to members of an identified community." Radical Reference operates "[u]nlike... a traditional library/patron model" with "the relationship between these communities and information services... not necessarily fall[ing] within the traditional brick and mortar library setting", instead occurring "not just at a reference desk, but also in the streets, cafes, and parks"[22] where this service base might be gathered.

Here, quite literally on the street, reference and information service occurs, with its requirements of quick, authentic, localised and mobilised communication and interaction, at once "formal and informal",[23] originally based around "activist events" which "like protests are fluid and shifting, as are the information needs of their participants"[24] is directly analogous to the interstices of the liminal: where private and public thresholds, procedure and disorder, are broached and bridged. It is a place where intimacies can be acquired, formalities dropped or re-awoken, "a liminal zone… partaking of public and private, strangers and intimates, in their made-up

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22 M. Morrone, L. G. Friedman, "Radical Reference: Socially Responsible Librarianship Collaborating With Community", The Reference Librarian, Vol. 50, Iss. 4 (2009): p.372.
23 L. G. Friedman, M. Morrone, "The Sidewalk Is Our Reference Desk: When Librarians Take to the Streets", World Library and Information Congress: 74th IFLA General Conference and Council, Québec, Canada (August 2008): p.5.
24 M. Morrone, L. G. Friedman, "Radical Reference: Socially Responsible Librarianship Collaborating With Community", The Reference Librarian, Vol. 50, Iss. 4 (2009): p.372.

community"[25] which fundamentally for transient reference services is a changing community according to geography of range, location and context. This is, in fact, the realm of dual-liminality, where the twinfold aspects of a liminal praxis, actioned within a liminal space, happily co-exist, collide and collaborate.

Similar in "liminal" practice, if not in character or design, is the work of **The Itinerant Poetry Library** (TIPL). Founded in 2006, this "guerrilla public library service" has as its modus operandi the liminal states of space itself, opening in and occupying, temporarily, for either minutes, hours or days at a time, a specific space, before moving on to another, and another different community. These temporarily created library spaces have included more 'typical' extra muros and liminal places such as parks, outdoor cafes, fields and, once again, literally the street, but have extended across the threshold of walled space to include atypical library and information reference service locations such as cocktail bars, conferences, a warehouse, a pizza takeaway, a ladies bathroom, a radio station, a boat, a hotel, a beach hut, and last but not least, a cemetery, to name just some notable geographies of service.

Having operated in 12 countries and in 200+ individual locations worldwide, this 'pop-up' reference and information service, "reaching the parts other libraries have yet to reach"[26] was perhaps one of the first library entities to begin using Twitter,[27] and to use it explicitly to provide real time, geo-location information, so that people already local, mobile and on the move in the physical environment are able to seek it and its services out. The importance of serendipity in this process of search is here too, however, advanced by TIPL as "[a]lternatively, one of the main ways to find us is...by accident. Yes. You just actually have no idea that you needed access to a

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[25] B. Myerhoff, "Life Not Death in Venice: Its Second Life" in V. W. Turner, E. M. Bruner, ed.s., The Anthropology of Experience (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1986): p.282.

[26] The Itinerant Poetry Library motto, website: http://www.tipl.info

[27] Twitter, launched in 2006, "is a real-time information network… used by people in nearly every country in the world. The service is available in more than 20 languages" http://twitter.com/about. The Itinerant Poetry Library began using Twitter in 2006 also, broadcasting text and map-based real-time geo-locations of its service in early 2007.

library until you wander in to where we are at."[28] This notion is especially relevant for services seeking to engage with users and particularly "Generation Google" individuals, accessing a combination of technologies, and geared more than ever before towards the social and personal, localised and mobilised. Analyst Mary Meeker calls 2011 and beyond a tipping point, where half of the "population in developed markets will have a Smartphone"[29] matched to a rapid rise in always-on internet connectivity, which although dominated by the 'youth' demographic – the so-called "Google generation" – this 'technologied-up' sector is simply likely to grow, as emerging populations grow up with technologies, while ageing populations adapt and grow their own uses of such.[30]

Map this rise in social, local, mobile (currently termed in acronym-obsessed technology-land as 'SO-LO-MO') behaviour of individuals to itinerant, extra muros reference and information services, and there is, in fact, the potential for a very nice fit. Fitting well with this user behaviour is in effect the baseline for mainstream libraries if their reference and information services are to continue to succeed: reference queries in public libraries in the UK have been in continuous decline for over a decade,[31] while the number of internet workstations has gradually increased,[32] enabling users to conduct their own searches, albeit from the library's premises rather than from their own home.

[28] "Where Are We?", The Itinerant Poetry Library, website: http://www.tipl.info
[29] M. Meeker and M. Murphy, "Top Mobile Internet Trends", Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, website (February 2011): http://www.slideshare.net/kleinerperkins/kpcb-top-10-mobile-trends-feb-2011
[30] Smartphone shipments have already surpassed feature phone shipment figures for Western Europe (2010) and North America (2011) while in India, mobile overtook desktop internet use for the first time in 2012. See M. Meeker, "Internet Trends", Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, website (October 2011): http://www.slideshare.net/kleinerperkins/kpcb-internet-trends-2011-9778902 and G. Leonhard, "Mobile Internet already dominates in India", website (May 2012): http://www.mediafuturist.com/2012/05/mobile-internet-already-dominates-in-india.html
[31] Statistics compiled by Libraries, Archives, Museums and Publishing Online Statistics Tables (LAMPOST), LISU, Department of Information Science, Loughborough University, website: http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ls/lisu/lampost10/services10.html#libenq
[32] Ibid: http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ls/lisu/lampost10/services10.html#libweb2

Radical Reference note that many individuals from their own particular user base "do not take advantage of public libraries and their staff; reasons include the belief... those collections do not contain the sorts of literature and resources they need for their work and the perception (shared, of course, with members of the general public) that librarians do not offer much more expertise than that which can be acquired by spending some time on Google."[33] Reclaiming visibility, and counteracting such assumptions, requires a response, and there may well be traction in emulating TIPL's "not yet knowingly needed" service philosophy, where services are predicated on operating 'out and about', on the ground and face to face, with individuals in their own environments and locales, in the knowledge that this is where user-traction and footfall will increasingly hold sway.

One of the mainstream library services dealing with this trajectory is **The San Francisco Public Library** (SFPL), actively querying what "the best conceptual design for a "learning lab" that works within a public library and other less formal learning spaces"[34] might be. Successful Teen Services often require a lot of outreach or 'fieldwork', and the skills of SFPL Teen Services Specialist, Jennifer Collins, have been crucial to such success. Collins's work found her carrying an ensemble collection of SFPL materials to outside and external events where she knew teens would be based. The effectiveness of this approach led her to consider its potential for further, more formalised and supported, implementation of an extra muros-type service SFPL could and should offer to users.

SFPL's award of a MacArthur Foundation grant in 2011 to create the 'Learning Lab' will offer hands-on, and face to face engagement, also provided via "satellite and virtual spaces at San Francisco's branch libraries and partner

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[33] M. Morrone, L. G. Friedman, "Radical Reference: Socially Responsible Librarianship Collaborating With Community", The Reference Librarian, Vol. 50, Iss. 4 (2009): p.372.
[34] "Case Study in Digital Media and Learning Partnerships: A Youth-Centered Design Framework in San Francisco", Digital Media and Learning Conference, San Francisco, website (March 2012): http://dml2012.dmlcentral.net/content/dml-case-study-digital-media-and-learning-partnerships-youth-centered-design-framework-san

organizations…serv[ing] as a magnet for teens throughout the City and… a bridge for the digital divide in this community."[35] Collins will be working "with some youth… on the design… which will serve in a satellite capacity as well...[it's] very exciting and lots of innovative ideas [are] floating around, about to take shape any moment! On the subject of terminology, we've started using "mobile services" more lately. Satellites? Fields? We shall see where we land!"[36]

Talking to Collins in 2011, it was clear that physical mobility of physical services was a concept she was willing to explore in more detail, and she described how librarians could be sent out from the physical harbour of SFPL buildings to roam the streets, providing library and information reference services on foot, accompanied perhaps by an ipad and a selection of physical stock, akin to the current practices of both Radical Reference and The Itinerant Poetry Library. Functioning with the knowledge that not all potential users will take the initiative to come to the physical location of the service itself is, in fact, a powerful tool in a 21st century library's service philosophy. However, such a philosophy must come primed with the knowledge that such transient moments of inquiry and reference explicitly require a positive engagement with the ambiguity and uncertainty that often necessarily accompany this extra muros praxis. This recognises that inquirers and seekers, especially those wandering 'out in the wilds' of the real world itself, are in fact constantly navigating thresholds and seeking harbours, both physical and immaterial, while shifting through transitional identities or states. Understanding more about the processes of how we transition toward knowledge, and how physical location and space affect this transmission, is just one of the pieces required in completing the picture.

[35] "San Francisco Public Library Wins Grant Competition to Design Digital Learning Labs for Young Americans That Will Serve as National Prototypes", San Francisco Public Library press release, website (17th November 2011): http://sfpl.org/pdf/news/learning_lab.pdf
[36] Personal correspondence and conversations between Collins and the author (between the period April 2011 and April 2012, some in person, some in writing).

Such physical encounters with service users at The Itinerant Poetry Library, occurring out in the wilds of the world, are a mixed-bag of interactions, but often characterised by a familiarity of relations, where the intimacy of trust resounds. Ritualised via the means of performance of a librarian in situ (and importantly identified by signs and a librarian uniform), but grounded in recognising the reciprocity required between an information seeker and librarian, it is a human to human collaborative effort of seeking and finding that is engaged in, integral to which is providing a level of authority that is willing to be challenged and amended through these collaborations of resource exploration and information-sharing. Here, uncertainty and contingency are in fact key, all bound up with recognising that in some ways this process is in fact a form of revelatory experiment, that is being conducted, here and right now, together.

Users are able to contribute items directly to the TIPL's collection, this in turn representing publicly-curated material, often specific or niche to a region or locale, language or context. These items, in time and turn, are shifted to new borders and contexts, as the service physically moves 'further afield', to a new country, city, town or community, here, now, sharing these works from previous communities, and continuing to add new ones from this newly encountered company. Ambiguity and chance in fact enable the library to most efficiently operate, with accidental encounters and conversations between users and the library having initiated a San Francisco (USA) to Leipzig (Germany) relocation in 2008.

Similarly embarked upon an 'out in the field' reference and information service is **Mile High Reference Desk** (MHRD), which has recently begun a likewise autonomous operation, aiming to "[p]rovide an information resource in a traditionally closed environment that doesn't have a outlet to ask questions or browse materials users can borrow and return, not purchase." Predicated on a reference and information service operating sky-high and in the clouds, via

whatever airplane it finds itself on, "it's a carry-on baggage library! By TSA definition, it's mobile." So far, as of April 2012, there have been three flights of "@milehighrefdesk[37] each growing in scale and acceptance. The past two flights, the flight attendants allowed us to make an announcement on the PA system, and that improved foot traffic."

Ultimately, the MHRD collection fluctuates "depending on whether people remember to return the item, or have items to contribute (and can be physically carried off the plane) – reference service is altered by the availability of Wi-Fi connections, or prepared ready reference materials…The Milehighdesk librarian collects maps, public transport brochures, and other points of interest (when available) for destination locations" which ends up equalling "a tailored service dependent on the current flight's audience."[38]

The intentions of MileHighRef, just as The Itinerant Poetry Library, although more firmly located in playfulness and performance within and without the boundaries of typical library reference and information services, are to approach the flux and fluidity which is common to these liminal spaces and transient users with verve, rather than apprehension. Both are fundamentally concerned with "[e]ngaging with public… Pos[ing] to the public a re-definition of [the] commonly used term and outdated concept of "library" = not just books, and not just a place you visit",[39] and echo Radical Reference's understanding that it is "important to dispute the notion of detached objectivity in information services".[40]

This is because what is integral to these autonomous library reference and information experiences, operating extra muros, and at the periphery of mainstream practice, is the human-to-human collaboration: recognising the role users have to

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[37] Twitter 'handle' for the service. See http://www.twitter.com/milehighrefdesk
[38] All quotes from personal correspondence from, to and between Mile High Reference and the author, 28th April 2012.
[39] Ibid.
[40] M. Morrone, L. G. Friedman, "Radical Reference: Socially Responsible Librarianship Collaborating With Community", The Reference Librarian, Vol. 50, Iss. 4 (2009): p.393-4.

play in helping to curate and collate information through their acts of querying, in turn these answered queries becoming the seedbed of information and reference answers upon which new reference enquiries can be sown and grown. Radical Reference actively plays to this tune with its current "most prominent service... an online reference forum, where questions are archived, creating a knowledge base accessible to site visitors and online searchers".[41]

Working in collaboration, human to human, is also a key theme to the Occupy Movement's[42] libraries, which naturally sprung up as part of the Occupy actions around the world in 2011. Occupy Wall Street Library (OWSL) in New York (USA), known collectively as The People's Library, responded recently to the "Tucson [Arizona, USA] Unified School District['s decision] to end the ten-year old Mexican-American Studies Program and to ban books from the school curriculum"[43] with "Operation Book Bomb Tucson", shipping "[f]our giant cases of books...to distribute to the people",[44] solicited via donations from members of the public and publishers alike. Many other "occupy" street or 'camp' libraries have sprung up as part of the Occupy movement, opening up as physical library and reference spaces in the public camps and public streets of the movement's protests. Madrid (Spain), Chicago and Baltimore (USA), Vancouver (Canada), London (UK) and Boston (USA),[45] for example, all had "Occupy" Libraries seemingly overnight pop-up into existence, and for the most part entirely created from the donations of reference and information articles provided by members of the public, and often staffed by professionally qualified librarians in their own personal time.

[41] Ibid: p.373.
[42] "Occupy movement", Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, website (May 2012): http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupy_movement
[43] "Operation Book Bomb Tucson", Occupy Wall Street Library, website (24th February 2012): http://peopleslibrary.wordpress.com/2012/02/24/operation-book-bomb-tucson/
[44] Occupy Wall Street Library, Facebook update (1st May 2012): https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=349450468451944&set=a.216556918407967.56769.215569408506718&type=1&theater
[45] List of some "occupy" libraries worldwide: https://bibliosol.wordpress.com/occupy-libraries-worldwide/

At the Occupy Boston (USA) encampment, the Boston-based Radical Reference Collective began working with Occupy Boston's 'The Audre Lorde to Howard Zinn Library' (The A-Z Library), operating from the open-air "Tent City at the Occupy Boston encampment in Dewey Square" with the aim of the library being "open to the public 24 hours a day and… serviced by librarians whenever possible…" and with "an open lending policy… visitors are encouraged to borrow materials and use them in and out of the library."[46]

Occupy Wall Street Library's similarly open-ended policies[47] ultimately recognise that here, out in the terrain of terra firma, but with no firm "space" to permanently hold, library, reference and information services must respond in a similar fashion, re-fashioning themselves to acknowledge the more fluid and changeable needs and services that this mobile public requires. "One of the primary characteristics of our library is its fluidity", says OWSL Librarian Betsy Fagin, "[e]very day we re-invent ourselves. What we're doing right now [2012]… is streamlining our mobile library project and finding interim physical space for the collection",[48] this greater emphasis on mobility in fact a direct response to the very real threats and challenges which can be posed by the fluid boundaries which exist between forms of transience, and some permanency, for services operating out in the field.[49]

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[46] "Audrey Lorde to Howard Zinn Library at Occupy Boston", Boston Radical Reference Collective, Radical Reference, website (14th October 2011): http://radicalreference.info/localcollectives/boston
[47] Demonstrated by its "Lending FAQ": "Q: Can I trade you for another book? A: Totally! Take the book you want and leave the new book with the unprocessed donations so that the library can enter it in the catalog". "Lending FAQ", Occupy Wall Street Library, website (undated): http://peopleslibrary.wordpress.com/about/lending-faq/
[48] B. Fagin, "A Library occupies Occupy Wall Street", ALA Master Series presentation, ALA Midwinter 2012 conference, website (21st January 2012): http://peopleslibrary.wordpress.com/2012/01/24/peoples-library-presentation-at-ala-midwinter/ The OWS Library first came into being in September 2011 in Zucotti Park, located in New York's Wall Street financial district, before contentious dispersal occurred, it contents being forcefully downsized and thus a period of re-organisation now taking place (see footnote below).
[49] "Packed Press Conference Documents Ruins of Over 3,000 Books", Occupy Wall Street Library, website (23rd November, 2011): http://peopleslibrary.wordpress.com/2011/11/23/packed-press-conference-documents-ruins-of-over-3000-books/

Ultimately, all these forms of interaction reach back to the traditional ethics of librarianship, but use a new mode of user dialogue and engagement, which requires not just a manipulation of mobile tools such as Facebook (OWSL's Facebook page has 3k+ "likes") and Twitter (TIPL has 2k+ Twitter "followers") but matches this with the ability to go out and meet library users in real time, physical locations outside of any library building itself.[50] Engaging in such practices is, of course, challenging, and not without failures and setbacks, which are, in fact, par for the course when the nettle of the liminal is truly grasped: in this space such momentary and ambiguous encounters are entirely the norm, and it's why the role of serendipity, interwoven with curiosity and conversation, can mean what's required, or indeed, what happens, may be by chance or accident.

This also, necessarily, means being prepared for it to go right…or wrong: the motto here, and frame of reference should obviously belong to Samuel Beckett: "Try again. Fail again. Fail better." In conclusion, although technology may drive us ever forwards into a shifting and certainly uncertain future landscape, it is the narrative of history which can provide a more permanent foundation from which to explore, develop and devise these itinerant, transient modes of library, reference and information services today, and tomorrow, in a world where "cheapness and quickness of modern methods of communication has been like a growth of wings, so that a thousand things which were thought to belong like trees in one place may travel about like birds."[51]

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[50] Friedman and Morrone (2009) helpfully also provide somewhat of a synoptic US history of earlier contemporary alternative and extra muros reference and information services. The more recent examples, found in the work of Radical Reference, The Itinerant Poetry Library, Occupy Libraries and MileHighRef, interestingly are all also situated outside of the mainstream of the librarianship field, and operating as autonomous entities or collectives. This speaks to both their "liminal" nature as self-appointed agents of information and reference services and their "liminal" states of practice, and perhaps points, in fact, to the process of innovation and development as often emerging from peripheral and experimental forms.

[51] M. Dewey, "Field and Future of Traveling Libraries", Bulletin 40 (Traveling Libraries and Collections 2), Home Education Department (University of the State of New York: 1901): p.8.