‘Innovation for people who still believe in material reality: Or why books do [still] furnish a room’

Image: A bookshelf in Eduardo’s study
‘To me a room without books is missing an essential feature, as important as lights, chairs, or carpets... in their way, books are like pictures on a wall; they reveal whether you are a minimalist... a maximalist with generously filled bookcases, or an anarchist whose preferred method of storage is an untidy heap’ – *Books do Furnish a Room*, p.14.
The minimalist-cum-design conscious hipster décor style
The cluttered-cum-serious intellectual book decoration style
The Alcove-Library Hotel, Saigon, Vietnam
Walter Benjamin’s ‘Unpacking my Library: A Talk about Book Collecting’

- The relationship of the collector to his or her books is not purely functional or instrumental.
- Memory and biography play an important role in the associations books have.
- The magic of the collection stems from the atmosphere/sense of enchantment produced by all the objects being assembled together.
- Handling the books and noticing their material properties/patina contributes to the magic of the collection.

NB: I will leave to one side the issue of whether the psychological and aesthetic properties of individual and institutional collections differ radically.
• What about libraries in the age of so-called ‘disruption’?
WHAT IS A LIBRARY?

By Katie Gilbert

JANUARY 2, 2014

Quaint vestige of the Gutenberg era, or cutting-edge panacea for social needs? For a broad swath of the neediest New Yorkers, the humble public library is proving its business is about far more than just books.
Future-Proofing the Research Library
The inaugural Judith Nadler Vision Lecture
by George M. Eberhart | May 26, 2014
Thomas’s lecture cites Richard Watson’s (2008) *Future Files: The 5 Trends that will Shape the next 50 years* which claims the following things will be extinct by 2019:

- Post offices
- Butchers
- Free parking
- Sit-down breakfasts
- Libraries
• Thomas herself is more optimistic. She claims: ‘In 2033, the research library will have shifted from its role as a knowledge service provider within the university to become a collaborative partner with a rich and diverse learning and research ecosystem’.

• To remain relevant libraries need qualities such as:

  (1) Great leadership;
  (2) Skill to avoid the pitfalls of discarding what is precious;
  (3) Flexibility to accommodate change;
  (4) Strong values and an ethical code
  (5) The ability to connect with other people and institutions;
  (6) Respect for all who benefit from libraries and librarians.
The Eco-Leader: ‘working across boundaries’

- **Internal organizational eco-system**: creating thinking spaces, breaking silo culture, connecting and communicating, working with feedback loops to respond to change, creating an organizational architecture that enables distributed leadership thus creating an adaptive organization.

- **Eco-leaders also focus on the external environment**: political and environmental trends, stakeholders, competitors, realizing the interdependence between their internal organizational ecosystem within a wider eco-system. This is no-longer considered an altruistic act, but vital for sustainable success.

- Corporate social responsibility, sustainability and ethics, continuity and change, and leadership spirit are key attributes of eco-leadership.
Apple’s Business Ecosystem (Excerpt)
The Maintainers: A Conference

APRIL 7-9, 2010 · STEVENS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY · HOBOKEN, NEW JERSEY, USA

Introduction

Many groups and individuals today celebrate “Innovation.” The notion is influential not only in engineering and business, but also in the social sciences, arts, and humanities. For example, “innovation” has become a staple of analysis in popular histories – such as Walter Isaacson’s recent book, The Innovators: How a Group of Hackers, Geniuses, and Geeks Created the Digital Revolution.

This conference takes a different approach, one whose conceptual starting point was a playful proposal for a counter-volume to Isaacson’s that could be titled The Maintainers: How a Group of Bureaucrats, Standards Engineers, and Introverts Made Technologies That Kind of Work Most of the Time. Conference participants come from a variety of fields, including academic historians and social scientists, as well as artists, activists, and engineers. All share an interest in the concepts of maintenance, infrastructure, repair, and the myriad forms of labor and expertise that sustain our human-built world.
Messages?

- Real innovation ≠ technology alone
- Real innovation ≠ management fads
- Real innovation ≠ starting from scratch
- Real innovation ≠ is not driven by the ‘lone genius’
- Real innovation ≠ copying what seems to have produced amazing results elsewhere
The we want a MONA too syndrome...
“[W]hen we are involved in [creativity], we feel we are living more fully than during the rest of life’.
• Creativity is a state of positivity and accomplishment. How so?
• Let’s think about a thought-experiment - How do we change an ‘either/or’ into a ‘both-and’?
• Closed    Open  Flexible
• Autonomous Constrained  Linked
• Simple    Complicated  Complex
• Slow      Fast     Timely
• Same      Different  Integrated
• Amateur   Expert   Experienced
• Body      Mind     The hand
• Broken    Perfect  Repaired
‘The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function’.
• Perhaps real innovation involves two things that libraries and librarians have always been very good at – craft and curating.
Features of craft-work:

- Respect for the material (including its imperfections);
- Love of the activity;
- The ability to imagine and re-imagine what can be done;
- You don’t become an expert overnight;
- Mentoring and collaborating greatly benefits everybody.

In short: craft is very much like life!
Curation, or the art of selecting useful information to form meaningful collections, is the new buzzword... But curation is a far more powerful and deeply relevant idea than we give it credit for. It answers the question of how we live in a world where problems are often about having too much, and shows how we keep growing in a world of excess. Acts of selecting, refining and arranging to add value help us overcome information overload.
• Do books furnish a room? I would argue not a trivial question. Libraries are material and nonmaterial spaces.

• By adopting the perspective of the craftsperson/curator we can be both innovative and hold on to traditional possibilities of the library such as, for example, the serendipity of discovery.

• Discovery means different things in digital and non-digital worlds. Is that a distinction we want to keep and work with rather than completely do away with?
Megatrends
Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives
Updated Especially for this Edition! With a New Introduction
John Naisbitt

High Tech, High Touch: Library Customer Service Through Technology
Lynn Jurewicz