A Third Library is Possible

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Introduction

Welcome to "A Third Library is Possible," the CLIR Postdoctoral Fellowship Curated Futures Project!

Now that you know the title, the questions you may have are, What is a "curated futures project," and why in the world are we doing it? Focusing on the processes of curation and collaboration, the concept of "curated futures" speaks to the possibilities of imagination and speculation. In contrast to creating strict boundaries around what could, or could not, be produced or conceptualized as an academic contribution, this project's editorial team seeks to bring together a wide variety of works that reflect the interests and investments of multiple individuals with their own creative talents and goals.

The process of collaborating on this project creates space for freedom and expression not only in the contributions but also in the selection of contributors from the alumni community of CLIR's Postdoctoral Fellowship Program. Pairing scholars and digital cultural heritage practitioners from across institutions and areas of interest, Curated Futures invites innovation in form and function. Therefore, the editors for this project have encouraged the contributors to imagine less conventional forms of producing scholarly work.

Similar to CLIR's first two collaborative writing projects, *The Process of Discovery* and *A Splendid Torch*, Curated Futures gives authors and readers opportunities to change the way that we think about, and work with, research, libraries, archives, and museums. Through its commitment to CLIR's focus on the preservation and accessibility of cultural heritage and research, the Curated Futures Project offers a structure and format that speaks to the ever-changing needs of our increasingly digital and disconnected socio-cultural environment.

Unlike previous collaborative writing efforts, this year's project reflects the uncertainty and unrest that came with the global COVID-19 pandemic and climate crises, as well as with the governmental, institutional, and political changes, and the multitude of social justice movements and protests. In contrast to the past two publications, this project's collaborators and team leaders began their work

with the knowledge that in-person engagement would be impossible. With many dealing with issues of physical, and sometimes digital, (in)access to libraries, archives, and sites of exploration, these groups of collaborators were tasked with addressing questions we may not have imagined in previous years.

Beginning in 2020, the contributors to this project wrote and imagined, envisioned and created, through Slack channels and Zoom chats and via direct messages and Miro boards. Within this "new normal," digital tools and technologies provide ways to be in community and in support of each other outside the realms of physical place and institutional space. Therefore, in this third CLIR Postdoctoral Fellowship collaborative project, we are well positioned to imagine the possibility of a "Third Library," a new space transcending individual institutions by challenging what we have come to know about the libraries of the past in order to create the library of the very near future.

Defining the "Third Library"

By centering this project around the concept of the "Third Library," the curated futures project draws from the speculative possibilities of the "third university," a notion developed by la paperson in the book *A Third University is Possible*. la paperson takes a decolonizing approach to our understanding of the universities of the past in order to create the institutions of the future. Contending with the settler colonialism of land grant universities that choose to exist within the theoretical and technological constructions of the capitalist machine, la paperson's text works through the construction of the university system and strategies that can be used to deconstruct it.

While the amassing and settling of Indigenous land to create college campuses is one method of accumulation, universities engage in multiple capitalist imperatives that privilege profit and gaining resources. These resources include, but are not limited to, the constant push for growing student populations, more buildings and larger campuses, routine fundraising initiatives, as well as investments in other economic holdings. In the era of COVID-19, this ever-increasing aggregation has also led to a questioning of the logic behind this accumulation and the purpose of university endowments and other holdings.[1]

la paperson conceptualizes the relationship between the first, second, and third universities by considering the accumulation and imperialism of the first university, the colonization and critique of the second university, and the decolonizing potential of a Third University. Drawing on the histories histories of colonization from accross the globe, he offers a transnational critique of Empire that hold the

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[1] As stated in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, one of many realities of the COVID-19 pandemic is the widening wealth gap between universities and the role that endowments and emergencies play in this divide.

university accountable for its own neocolonial imperatives and efforts. Critiquing the university system for its voracious accumulation of land and economic resources at the expense of marginalized communities, he offers an in-depth understanding of the relationship between the goals of the university and the desires of the nation-state.

Expanding beyond this critique, la paperson also provides a way forward through a definition and demonstration of decolonizing efforts. Specifically, he writes that decolonization requires the "rematriation of land, the regeneration of relations, and the forwarding of Indigenous and Black and queer futures [as] a process that requires countering what power seems to be up to" (2017, "Introduction", para. 3). la paperson uses the concept of the "*scyborg*" to encourage us to bring together "persons who have picked up colonial technologies and reassembled them to decolonizing purposes" (la paperson, "Introduction", para. 2). Reminiscent of Kara Keeling's "Queer OS," the *scyborg* works to disrupt the operating system of the university by calling forth the potential of dreaming, imagining, and remixing the materials made available to them (Keeling 2014). By bringing together both people and machines, the concept and construction of the scyborg serves as a method of doing decolonial work from the inside out, fundamentally transforming institutions and university systems.

As a call to awareness and a call to action for scholars and activists both within and outside of the university system, la paperson writes that:

> *To call these efforts a third university is not to say that they are in political solidarity with one another but rather to call their decolonial possibilities into existence. More precisely, we call forth a contingent collaboration across all these efforts—a transnational, multicampus, multiscalar self-awareness. It is an AI emerging. The analytic work here is to consider how the third world university emerges out of the first, in our respective locations. The political work is to assemble our efforts with a decolonizing spirit and an explicit commitment to decolonization that can be the basis of transnational collaborations and transhistorical endurance. (2017, "A Third University Strategizes", para. 4)*

Building on the possibilities of the Third University, the Curated Futures Project calls forth and mobilizes the "decolonizing possibilities" of a Third Library by uniting scholars across locations to work together in collaboration and community-building. Like the Third University, the Third Library is focused on critiquing the role of the academic library and on revealing its potential for decolonization both within and outside of the university. By erasing the boundaries and borders between the academic library and the university, as well as the barriers between the university library and community, this collaboration illuminates some of the problems within these institutions while lighting a path toward systemic change.

The Curated Futures Project provides the space to ask, "*What do we want from the institutions of the future and how do we create them*?"

Using the tools of speculative fiction, design thinking, mapmaking, media production, and other creative, future-focused modalities, the Third Library is imagined as an ethical, socially just, and hope-filled ecosystem of knowledge and cultural productions.[2]

However, instead of creating a utopic, or even a dystopic, imagining of this future, the Third Library offers a practical approach to speculation that relies on an understanding of technology, infrastructure, history, and activism. It envisions the future not as some far-away space in time, but as an almost present moment that needs to be understood through the sociopolitical context and intersectional matrices of our current society.

In speculating on the future, the Third Library is built on our own collective knowledge and imaginings of the past. As a response to these imaginings, the Third Library prioritizes greater inclusion and collaboration across a diverse breadth of communities that have been previously excluded from the process of world-making. Therefore, this project draws on an understanding of Afrofuturism, transformative digital humanities, and speculative ethics in order to realize its decolonial and antiracist efforts.

Afrofuturism and Speculative Futures

The future has been commonly envisioned according to a technology-centered, "post-racial" timeline. While being extraordinarily imaginative about scientific advancements, the architects of science fiction systematically excluded the perspectives of Black people and other people of color. As such, Afrofuturism emerged during the mid-1950s as a science fictional Black aesthetic. Afrofuturism can be defined as the reimagining of time and space through fantasy or technology in order to speculate about the future. It provides a fantasy-driven remedy for the sense of alienation that African Americans may feel in the United States.

Afrofuturism reclaims an imagined homeland wherein we have equitable access to resources or suffer the consequences of failing to value and prioritize them. Major Afrofuturist aesthetic themes include Black female empowerment and autonomy, an interrogation of the disconnection from a conceived homeland and its ripple effects, the manner in which water creates and destroys, and communicating what has been lost through global anti-Blackness (Abraham 2017; Dery 1994; Mayer 2020; Richardson 2012).

The digital humanities offer a continuously evolving set of tools to challenge traditional ways of managing and promoting the use of of data, from creation to discovery to reuse (Society of American Archivists n.d.). Applying an Afrofuturist conceptual perspective to the

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[2] See Nowviskie 2017 for more examples of the tools and techniques alluded to here.

frameworks and capabilities across digital humanities can support efforts to decolonize the library and reinforce diversity, equity, inclusion, and access initiatives in a manner that centralizes BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities; people with a range of health conditions or physical, mental, developmental or intellectual disabilities; and other groups who have been negatively affected by the white supremacist paternalism at the core of these institutions. Through this lens, we can (1) build and support a data community[3] and culture with collaborative partnerships that promote engagement with researchers, students, and community members; (2) sustain interest and investment, not only financially but also intellectually; (3) expand support and education for content producers, curatorial interpreters, and target audiences; and (4) provide a framework for research data services training that considers decolonization and social impact at each step.

As we conceptualize the cross-institutional core values and mission of The Third Library through a speculative Afrofuturist lens, the digital humanities offer tools and workflows for practical applications of this work. Digital humanities practitioners are able to make data and tools more widely available through open access, open source, and other free platforms in a way that target audiences are able to discover and access.

The global Black Lives Matter protests of summer 2020, and the labor movements of the months following, launched the industry of higher education into a moment where there is increased pressure to take steps within institutions to create healthier work environments, more equitable research cultures, and a more inclusive positioning vis-a-vis their surrounding communities.

Although the individual collaborators within this publication may not have personally adopted an Afrofuturist perspective, the works herein consider theoretical and practical applications that align with the tenets of Afrofuturism and expand the conversation to include other communities that could benefit from this positioning within speculative futures.

The contributors recognize the need to decolonize academic libraries and the need for a diversity of ways to rebuild these spaces to be less exploitative in their collecting practices and internal bureaucracies, to promote new means of curating and distributing content, and to reconsider their positioning within and beyond the industry of higher education.

Introducing the Contributions

Each contributor to the CLIR Collaborative Writing Project was chosen not only on the basis of their own unique skills and abilities, but

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[3] Cross-institutional, collaborative community of data creators and practitioners throughout galleries, libraries, archives, museums, and beyond.

also for how those different standpoints and perspectives could be used in collaboration with others. Inspired by the research interests and experience of these scholars, each project team was carefully constructed and curated to exist within the parameters of a specific theme arising from the conviction that a Third Library is possible. From this open coding of the project contributors and their unique strengths and interests, the following five pieces of work emerged.

Analyzing the relationship between libraries and the communities they serve, the theme of **Remaking Place and Space** led to a collaboration between scholars with a vested interest in practical tools such as data visualization, maps, and GIS technologies. Through the essay titled "Geographies of Engaged Digital Scholarship," this group challenges our theoretical understanding of the boundaries and borders of the library through a remaking of the roles of curators and cartographers in the context of libraries, museums, and academic institutions. The collaborators begin their argument with a reflexive approach that offers their own positionality as current and former librarians. They ask practitioners to reflect on how their own lived experiences impact efforts related to community building. They invite gallery, library, archive, and museum (GLAM) institutions to consider who is defined as part of their communities, either within or beyond the physical boundaries of the university campus. They move on to describe the ways digital humanities tools can both increase accessibility and create barriers that arise from financial and capacity constraints. Finally, they offer steps for how to get started with building more equitable community partnerships depending on one's role within the library.

Offering critical-cultural approaches to BIPOC archives in the face of climate change and the increasing importance of digitizing collections, the authors exploring the theme of **Archives and Cultural Heritage** focus on the future of preservation through a collaboration across platforms and institutions. Through the creation of a podcast series entitled *FLAME: Future Libraries, Archives, and Museums in Excavation*, each of the contributors and guests bring a unique perspective on libraries and memory institutions, as well as on the use of archives by the public and practitioners. The interviewees discuss the ways in which digital humanities tools, methods, and programs can be used to decolonize GLAM institutions, contribute to environmental planning (particularly in regions prone to natural disasters), and mitigate the ways technology has been used to further colonization. Additionally, they discuss how to develop internal and external partnerships and support as a means for project sustainability and advancing engagement with BIPOC audiences. The podcast also centers BIPOC scholarship by interviewing folks who identify with a wide spectrum of non-white groups, further allowing the producers to capture some of the nuance within those communities that are often underrepresented due to tokenism and dominant representations of racial and ethnic groups.

Centering creativity and play as two areas that encourage us to reimagine the world by sparking new ideas and neural pathways, the theme of **Creating the Library of Games** offers an analysis of games

and gaming, in all its forms. The essay "Game-Based Design for Inclusive and Accessible Digital Exhibits" offers multiple examples and possibilities for the role of games and game cultures for the present and future. Through a focus on design thinking, creativity, and storytelling, the project contributors offer a vision of a library of games in which these tools engage audiences by providing new avenues for interaction with scholarly and cultural resources and encouraging collaboration and creativity. The authors also consider the implications of gamifying collections through an examination of digital exhibits with gaming elements, the preservation of digital games, and interactive digital storytelling. They conclude that games can be incorporated as a method to evolve librarianship and appeal to technologically inclined generations who seek to connect and grow through virtual platforms and social media.

Responding to the theme of **Deconstructing the Library,** the next group of collaborators offers a treatise on "The Third Library and the Commons." By questioning the concept of the library itself and the politics of librarianship, this essay explores the role that institutions play in how we define the library and the professions of academic research and librarianship. Centering the role of labor and workers in their analysis, this collaboration works to mobilize readers toward more agency in the face of social instability. The collaborators question the conceptualization of the "commons" by expounding upon three necessary qualifiers for creating access: to what, by whom, and for whom (presented in sections on the knowledge commons, the workplace commons, and the physical commons). They contend that librarians are able to advocate for increased open access to the knowledge commons through the use of technology and interoperable metadata that counteract institutional capitalist aims to limit access in exchange for financial or labor capital. The library is also undergoing a moment of internal evolution as the workplace commons is becoming increasingly unionized; the authors point to the potential for using that collective bargaining power to call for more inclusive and equitable conditions for staff as well as to dislodge the traditional white supremacist and paternalist positioning of the library and librarianship. Through the diversification and expansion of the physical commons, librarians are seeking to connect resources to broader audiences. The collaborators also encourage opportunities to demonstrate the physical labor of librarianship, developing a pedagogy that allows students to consider issues around ethical data management and discoverability as it relates to content creation.

Uniting each of the previous contributions through a visual curation of digital projects that promote the theme of **Scholarship for Social Change,** the final group's mapping project and short essay reflects on the power and possibilities of scholarship to push for transformation and evolution both within and outside of libraries and academic institutions. Offering a meta-analysis of the Curated Futures Project, this "curation of the curation" honors other projects that are in alignment with its scope, looking within and without for examples of the decolonizing and antiracist work that inspired the project contributors and the concept of "A Third Library is Possible." Calling for community engagement and collaboration outside of the project and its contrib-

utors, this interactive component not only links together the previous pieces, but also encourages audience members and interlocutors to give their own input on what projects should be included within this dynamic mapping, and why. We hope that this project will encourage readers to speak back to the contributors by submitting their own projects, or projects that they remember or imagine, that exemplify socially impactful collecting, research, teaching, and learning.

Taken on their own, each of these projects speaks to a diverse audience of students, scholars, practitioners, librarians, leaders, and activists by modeling how speculation and imagining can be used to create a vision for our ever-changing world. Taken together, they offer examples of the role that digital scholarship, libraries, museums, archives, and other cultural institutions play in our understanding of a future built on the acknowledgment of inequity and an engagement with social justice and activism.

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