

RESIST*RS

A Political Economic Analysis of Public Library Makerspace Rhetoric

Shannon Crawford Barniskis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

INTRODUCTION

Since 2010, public library creative spaces, often labeled “makerspaces,” have evolved rapidly from an esoteric concept to a popular phenomenon. The professional literature and librarians frame these spaces as ensuring widespread access to advanced technologies, tools of production, and new literacies. The spaces are often positioned as novel, though libraries have long acted as social and creative community centers.

Public libraries are in a unique position to provide extensive access to social making. They offer free and equitable services as a matter of principle. Staff are trained in literacy instruction and in fulfilling information needs. Libraries are prevalent in communities of all sizes. In offering makerspace services, public libraries may become the place in which people not only seek information, but also create, share, and mobilize information through social making.

However, if libraries are to promote public library makerspaces as facilitators of access, education, or other community and individual benefits, and if Library and Information Science educators are to prepare students for futures including these spaces, a critical eye must be focused upon their potential for promoting social justice and resistance to—or co-optation by—inequitable socioeconomic and governance structures.

PROBLEMS

- Are public libraries privileging particular socioeconomic interests, and/or facilitating opportunities for resistance to inequitable, hegemonic socioeconomic structures?
- What are the ethical implications for the types of makerspace services and activities, especially regarding access?
- Are practitioners and the professional literature talking about the same things when they talk about “makerspaces?”

THEORY

This study examines these research problems from the perspective of structuration theory (Giddens, 1984; Orlikowski, 1992, 2000, 2010) and political economy (Mosco, 2009).

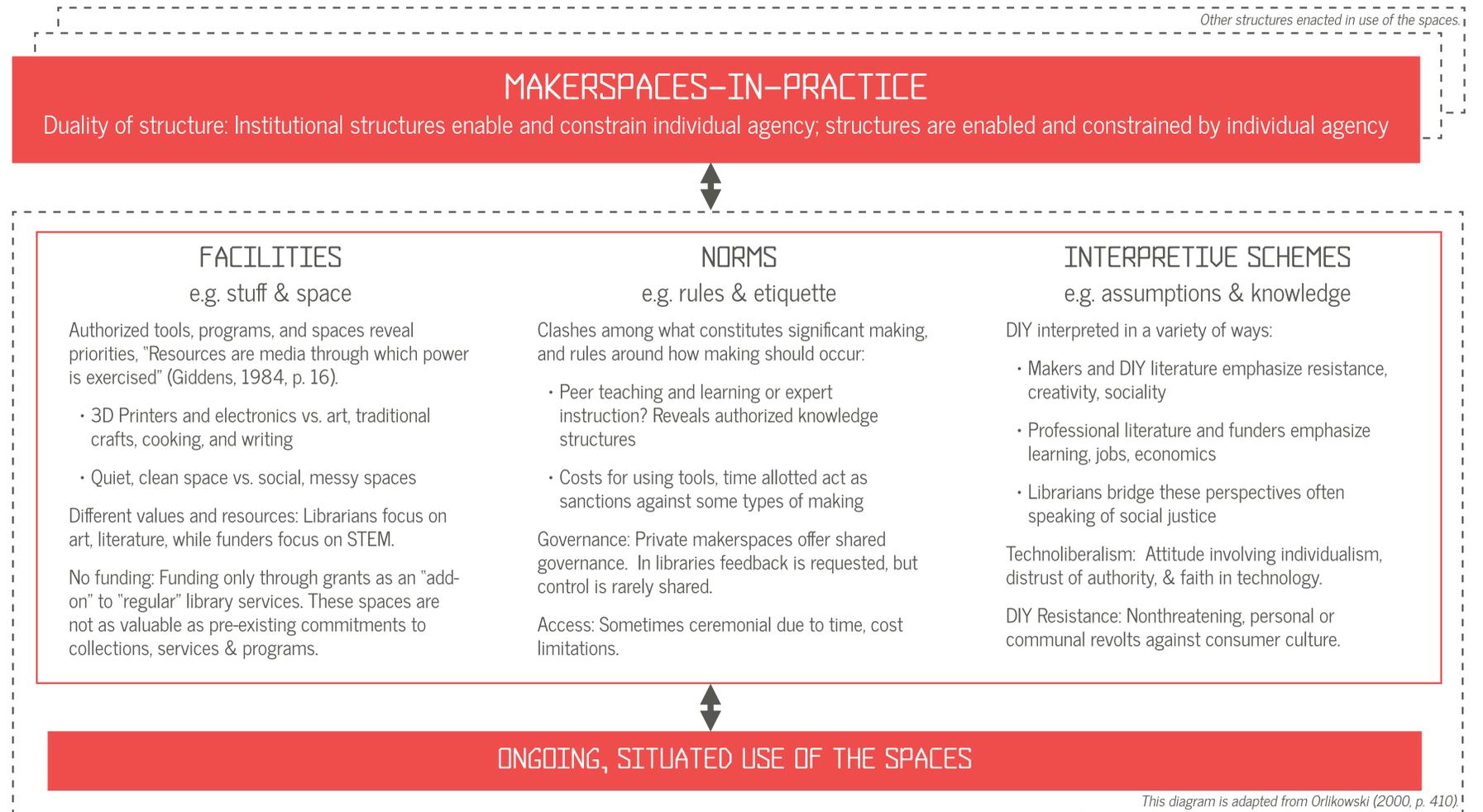
The concepts of technoliberalism emerges from Malaby (2011), and resistance and DIY/critical making is from the work of Tanenbaum et al. (2013) and Ratto & Boler (2014). Social justice is approached through the capabilities approach of Martha Nussbaum (2003, 2011).

KEY POINTS:

- * Public libraries are situated within the economic structures that some makers are resisting.
- * The professional literature and funders emphasize technoliberal interpretive schemes, while librarians include the ideas of social justice and resistance in their interpretations of these spaces.
- * Librarians are sustaining communities of practice to support maker needs, but they are generally not providing governance options for makers to control what occurs in the spaces.

STRUCTURE

AGENCY



METHOD

- Semi-structured interviews with 13 librarians from a variety of public libraries across the country
- Analysis of 24 articles, blog posts, & multimedia about public library makerspaces, maker resources
- Ongoing discourse analysis of professional literature, & practitioner interviews

REFERENCES & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For a complete list of references, and the full abstract, go to <http://goo.gl/oUcAET>

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Contact me at crawfo55@uwm.edu

