

ICS Seminar Series

INSTITUTE FOR CULTURE AND SOCIETY

The Library as an Ordered (Reading) Space

Jen Li

Date

Thursday 25 September

Time

11.30am – 1pm

Venue

EB.2.21 Parramatta
(South) Campus

Abstract

The public library is a heterogeneous space, where a number of different activities may be occurring simultaneously: reading, writing, studying, chatting. These activities each have different spatial requirements, and consequently the public library becomes a composite of multiple spaces. Where these different events occur, and how the spaces are located in relation to each other, are carefully planned by librarians and architects. This paper draws on findings from semi-structured interviews with librarians and library users in three Sydney municipal libraries, to explore the design and use of these spaces.

In this paper, I look specifically at the arrangement and order of books in the library, and how the organisation of books (whether by genre and subject, or in alphabetical order by author surname and the Dewey Decimal Classification system) reflect broader ideas of what the public library is and aims to be as an institution, and what this ordering says about power, governmentality, and the intersection between commercial spaces and public spaces.

Biography

Jen is in the third year of her PhD at the Institute for Culture and Society, studying the dynamics of library spaces and reading lives of library users. She completed her undergraduate degree in geography, marketing and management at the University of Sydney. She did her Honours project on independent bookshops in Sydney in 2008, and has since worked as a research assistant in geography at the Urban Research Centre (UWS) and the University of Southampton. In 2013, she read 94 books, of which 59 books were fiction. 24 of those titles were chick-lit and 18 were crime fiction, indicating a rather low level of cultural capital. Many of those books were read while in a public library, somewhere.