CHALLENGING THE CONDITIONS THAT MAKE ALTERNATIVES NECESSARY: LIBRARIANS, THE NEWS MEDIA AND THE INFORMATION LITERATE CITIZEN

by Jeff Lilburn

The development of “lifelong learners” is framed as a central aspect of the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. Information literacy is described as “a key component” of lifelong learning that contributes to producing educated students and citizens. Phrases such as “informed citizens,” “informed citizenry,” and “educated citizens,” appear throughout the introduction to the Standards, reinforcing not only the idea that information literacy skills are central to informed and active citizenship, but also the view that librarians have a role to play in ensuring that citizens have these skills. Absent from the Standards, however, is any mention of political issues or of how the information literate citizen uses information in a socially responsible manner. What’s more, the Performance Indicators and Outcomes for Standard Five – the standard that asserts that “the information literate student understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally” – appear to place greater emphasis on compliance with economic, legal and social issues, rather than critical understanding of these issues. Performance Indicator 2, for example, suggests that rather than think critically about the socio-economic issues surrounding the use of information, the information literate student instead follows accepted practices, regulations, and etiquette, uses pre-approved passwords and other forms of ID, and complies with existing institutional policies. In other words, instead of critically engaging with the economic, legal and social issues and the political forces involved in determining what and how information is made accessible, the language used in the Standards suggests that the information literate student and citizen accepts things as they are and does not question why or how things came to be as they are. The question of who benefits from “things as they are” is also left unaddressed by the Standards.

This disconnection between the Standards and a genuine consideration of the social, cultural and political context in which information is produced and disseminated is but one of the criticisms directed at the Standards and research on information literacy in recent years. The library literature has also been criticized for failing to engage with pedagogical and literacy
research from outside of the library community, for a lack of engagement with theory, and for constructing an information literacy framework based on standards and the acquisition of skills rather than on theoretically informed understanding of the ambiguities involved in learning and research. While there is a growing body of interdisciplinary and theoretically informed research situating libraries and library and information workers within their socio-political context, the links between this research and research on information literacy instruction are only beginning to be explored.

This paper draws on recent politically and theoretically informed work from both within and outside of LIS to discuss the significance that absence of political issues from the Standards has on the meaning of the concept of “informed citizenry” as used in the Standards. In particular, this essay is concerned with the question of whether the form of citizenship constructed in the Standards entails active participation in a community, including participation in discussion and decision-making with respect to social practices, policies, rules and laws, or whether citizenship merely means allegiance to and compliance with an existing way of life, what Henry Giroux refers to as “patriotic correctness.”

This paper also addresses how we as librarians view our role as teachers of students and citizens. More specifically, it addresses the question of whether it is sufficient for librarians to teach students information and media literacy skills, or whether librarians should be more closely involved – and encourage students to become involved – in confronting the issues and problems we help them to recognize when searching for and evaluating information. In other words, should the focus of information literacy teaching be on giving students the tools and skills needed to work around conditions that impose barriers to access to information, or should the focus be shifted and expanded to address and directly confront those conditions? These questions will be addressed in the context of the criticisms of information literacy research already discussed, of the decades-long debate over ideological and political neutrality for librarianship and, to begin, of criticisms of the mainstream commercial news media and of one specific attempt, that of Independent World Television, to challenge and directly confront the broadcast news environment by imagining and creating a new model for the delivery of news and information to mass audiences.

**Challenging the Status Quo of Broadcast News**

In contrast to the ACRL IL Standards, a report prepared by the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee Subcommittee on the Impact of Media Concentration on Libraries released in June 2007 recognizes that current social and political trends render traditional, passive and so-called neutral approaches to acquisitions and the provision of other library services unacceptable. The report has as its main purpose the provision of a centralized list of strategies and actions to be used by libraries and librarians to help fulfill one of our key responsibilities: providing “access to a diverse
collection of resources and services” (9). Responding to an ALA resolution passed in 2003 opposing the FCC’s proposed rule changes that would have encouraged further concentration of the media (9, 24), the authors of the IFC Subcommittee report note that “with the growing concentration of media ownership, independent voices decrease and locally produced and locally relevant information, news, and cultural resources diminish” (10). As a result, “libraries cannot ensure the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources, unless they counter the detrimental impact of media consolidation on the diversity of ideas and localism in their communities” (10). “In an era when democratic discourse is more essential than ever,” the report continues, “the information system is out of balance [and] librarians must be vigilant and assertive in seeking out alternative voices” (10-11). In other words, the report responds to the imbalance of power in the systems that create, disseminate and regulate the news and information required by citizens to fulfill their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

The report echoes the work of media commentators and scholars such as Ben Bagdikian and Robert McChesney who have, for many years now, been warning of the consequences of increasing concentration of media ownership and of the implications for democratic civil society of an increasingly de-regulated commercial media system. Henry Giroux makes these points as well, noting that “without a democratic media, it is impossible to maintain a democratic society or to provide the conditions for a critically informed citizenry” (18). The media, Giroux contends, “are now the most powerful pedagogical force for framing issues, offering the languages to decipher them, and providing the subject positions that enable people to understand their relationship to others and the larger world” (18). “As long as a handful of corporations controls the media,” Giroux argues, “it will also control the conditions under which politics is defined, understood, engaged and carried out” (18).

Providing an alternative to the mainstream media and interceding with the currently accepted norms of network and cable television journalism is what the new not-for-profit news and current events network, Independent World Television (or IWTNews), has set out to do. Independent World Television, or The Real News as it is now also known, is a web-based news network conceived with the intention of challenging and changing the status quo of current broadcast news. More specifically, it is being developed in response to the same imbalance of power identified in the IFC Report – an imbalance that leaves a vast majority of TV news reporting in the hands of fewer and fewer commercial interests.

IWTNews intends to confront this imbalance by broadening “the definition of what’s important” and by refusing to “blindly follow wire services or official press releases that attempt to set the news agenda” (IWTNews, What’s Real). IWTNews believes that “serious news and informed debate on which democracy depends are disappearing from TV – the medium most people rely on for news and information” (What’s Real) – and, as a
result, “movements for the rights of working people, women, children, immigrants, indigenous peoples,” and movements for peace and “the health of our planet” will be considered news at Independent World Television (What’s Real). In other words, citizens actively using their understanding of economic, social and political issues to intervene and participate in the world will be seen as newsmakers.

IWTNews also aims to challenge and change the economics of TV journalism. As network CEO Paul Jay explains, IWTNews wants “to create an environment for doing news that is not so subject to the external pressures of government funding, corporate funding and advertising” (IWTNews, See the Patterns). To achieve this, IWTNews has developed a membership-supported funding model that will enable the network to remain independent, uncompromising and immune to worries about “quick ratings results [or] the withdrawing of advertising or government subsidies” (See the Patterns).

What International World Television is attempting to do for broadcast news is, I would like to suggest, consistent with what librarians do for library collections every day: address imbalances, increase diversity and fill in gaps. But IWTNews is attempting to do this by not only expanding TV news coverage to issues and stories not currently covered by mainstream sources, the network is also challenging the economics of TV news and the monopoly on repetition and amplification.

The network is at once offering an alternative to mainstream TV news and challenging the existing system by imagining and inventing a new model for TV news that recognizes the important role played by the news media in defining and modeling active citizenship.

The strategy employed by IWTNews is one that librarians might use when addressing imbalances in the library: in addition to attempts to increase diversity by filling in gaps, librarians must also recognize, acknowledge, and challenge the sources of these gaps and imbalances – namely, the economic, social and political forces that have an impact on libraries and on the production, dissemination and regulation of information. Such an approach would be consistent with the IFC Subcommittee report which urges librarians to do more than promote local and independent sources of information or to otherwise work around the power and dominance of the mainstream media and commercial publishing systems. Included in the report is a section entitled “The Library Profession as an Advocate for Change” in which the report’s authors assert that “librarians working together...can compete for and win the battle to shape...information policy in the public interest” (23). Specific actions recommended in the report include opposition to “changes in media ownership rules that encourage further concentration of the media,” opposition to “copyright laws, regulation [and] rules...that limit the public’s access rights,” and support for “anti-trust actions against attempts by large media companies [and] publishers to merge” (24). In other words, included in the report and embedded in the efforts of IWTNews is a call for librarians to not merely
work around issues and problems by offering alternatives and innovative services, but also to confront head-on the conditions that make alternatives necessary.

Making Power Visible

The absence of genuine consideration of the political factors affecting the production, dissemination and regulation of information in the *ACRL IL Standards* is contrasted not only by the IFC Subcommittee report’s call for increased librarian involvement with these issues, but also by Toni Samek’s view of the library as a “point of resistance” and Henry Giroux’s work on critical pedagogy. In her most recent book, *conceived as a “direct challenge to the notion of library neutrality”* (7), Samek notes how an examination of the “relationships in society among people, information and recorded knowledge and the cultural record” reveals “local, national and international issues related to the production, collection, interpretation, organization, preservation, storage, retrieval, dissemination, transformation and use of information and ideas” (8). Among the contemporary examples Samek identifies that are relevant to our work as library and information workers are “biometrics, intellectual property, global tightening of information and border controls, and public access to government information” (8). The current climate of war, global market fundamentalism (7) and the adoption of legislation with implications for issues such as “access to information, privacy, civil liberties, and intellectual freedom” also, Samek argues, have repercussions for library and information workers and the communities we serve (8).

Given what she sees as the close interconnection between broad social and political issues and the work of library and information workers, Samek views the library as a “point of resistance” (9) and library and information workers as “active participants and interventionists in social conflicts” (7). To not participate in social struggles over these and other issues, Samek argues, makes the profession “vulnerable to control networks such as economic and political regimes” (8). To not participate, to claim a position of neutrality, is to accept and endorse the status quo.

As Ryan Gage (2004) and others have already shown, cultural critic and theorist Henry Giroux addresses these same issues in his work on critical pedagogy. Giroux asserts that “there is no space outside of politics” (14) and argues that teachers “must be able to critically analyze the ideologies, values and interests that inform their role as teachers and the cultural politics they promote in the classroom” (7). For Giroux, critical pedagogy is a “discourse for asserting the primacy of the political and the ethical as a central feature of educational theory and practice” (4). Critical pedagogy is also “dedicated to revitalizing democratic public life” (5) by making power visible and accountable (19). Most importantly for Giroux, perhaps, is that critical pedagogy links the language of critique to the language of possibility in order to enable students to recognize that they can be “political actors in shaping the world that they inherit” (19). Like Samek,
Giroux acknowledges the importance of intervening with the goal of working towards social change.

The concern with power and opposition to power is also a central feature of critical theory, and LIS literature includes a modest though already long tradition of exploring ways in which critical and social theory can be applied to librarianship. Ryan Gage, for example, has suggested that critical theory “as a diagnostic model for addressing traditionally marginalized subjects” can help “the library profession avoid the pitfalls of status quo thinking” and provide frameworks for better understanding “librarianship’s connection with issues related to capitalism, culture, ideology, power and information technologies” (2004). James Elmborg builds on the tradition of critical theory and on the work of Giroux, Paulo Freire, and LIS scholars such as Troy Swanson to suggest that librarians need to develop “new guiding philosophies” (192) that take into account both the growing teaching role of librarians and the fact that education is a “profoundly political activity” (193). Elmborg notes that consideration of political and cultural agendas has been largely absent from information literacy debates since information literacy researchers have tended to separate “students from social and economic contexts” (193-94). He proposes that a “critical literacy” which “focuses on the links between the educational process and the politics of literacy” would provide a way for librarians to “more honestly align themselves with the democratic values they often invoke” (193).

Critical theory, Elmborg asserts, “examines schools as agents of culture and shapers of student consciousness” (193). Drawing on the work of Freire, Elmborg explains that schools, examined “through the lens” of critical theory and critical pedagogy, are seen “to enact the dominant ideologies of their societies” and, as a result, “educators must either accept [that] ideology or...resist it” by positing “alternative pedagogies” designed “to create critical consciousness” in students about information, knowledge and education (193). As an example, Elmborg asks whether librarians should be content to teach the “grammar of information” – the structures that organize information such as library classification systems and LC subject headings – or teach that grammars of information are in fact “reflections of a particular world view” and emphasize the library’s role in “creating privileged discourse” (197). Elmborg argues that for information literacy to have a “critical dimension, it must involve both an understanding of how various classification systems work, and...an exploration of how they create and perpetuate powerful categories for representing ‘knowable reality...’” (197).

Elmborg’s arguments are also consistent with the interests of cultural historian, media scholar and author of The Anarchist in the Library, Siva Vaidhyanathan, who has argued, in the form of a bibliographic manifesto, for the unification into one field of the broad array of works concerned with “the ways in which culture and information are regulated” (293). Vaidhyanathan proposes to call this field Critical Information Studies (or...
CIS) and describes it as a “derivation of both critical theory and information theory,” with library science as one of the fields that has influenced and continues to inform CIS (296).

CIS considers the “relationships among regulation and commerce, creativity, science, technology [and] politics”(293) and engages with matters of public interest such as copyright, technology, corporate control of information, and access to information. CIS scholars also reach “beyond the spheres of scholarly discourse” to influence, and intervene in, matters of “public interest” such as the open content and open journals movements, Creative Commons, and advocating on behalf of users rights (303). In other words, CIS is concerned25 with many of the same issues addressed by LIS but its approach is interdisciplinary and, like the critical information literacy discussed by Elmborg and the critical pedagogy discussed by Giroux, it is also concerned with power and the transformative potential that comes from critical engagement with information and the rules and systems governing the regulation of information.

It is this concern with power and recognition that imbalances of power can be challenged and changed that is lacking from the ACRL IL Standards. An understanding of economic, legal, social, and political issues should lead to more than compliance with existing policies and the following of established etiquette. Identifying and discussing ethical, legal and socio-economic issues – to use the language of Performance Indicator 126 – is a start, but discussion without a sense that knowledge can be transformative does not represent fully the role of an informed citizen who is active and engaged in the communities of which he or she is a member.27 The form of citizenship the Standards appear to construct is one that is passive rather than active, acquiescent rather than interventionist, and conformist rather than critical. It is a form of citizenship which mirrors the traditional, so-called neutral position of the library profession. By teaching information and media literacy skills to students without also teaching them that their knowledge can be transformative – without including what Giroux calls the language of possibility – librarians model to students a form of citizenship that passively accepts the world as it is rather than a form of citizenship that is active and participative and seeks to challenge inequity and change unfair policies and practices.

Citizenship and the Practice of Political Judgment

In his recent Hart House Lecture,28 “One Nation Under Google: Citizenship in the Technological Republic,” Darin Barney describes citizenship as “a way of knowing and acting, a way of being in the world, a practice” (11). And the practice of citizenship is, he suggests, “at its core, the practice of political judgment” (13). In other words, to be a citizen “is to engage in judgment about common things in relation to and with others”(13). It is judgment “brought to bear on claims about justice and...a life lived well in common with others” (15). Much of Barney’s lecture is beyond the scope
of this paper, but his argument that citizens should be involved in the political judgments regarding new technologies is, I believe, relevant to the issues addressed here. Barney takes issue with the fact that technology is not the object of political judgment of citizens and that decisions about the “design, development and regulation of technology” are instead left to “private interests” (24). For the most part, Barney argues, “we citizens just take what we can get when it comes to technology: we live in the world of cell-phones, the automobile, the jet airliner, pharmaceuticals, plastic, video surveillance... whether we like it or not: nobody asked us” (24-25). Barney contends that citizens should be permitted the chance to exercise political judgment on new technologies, not merely as consumers who choose what to buy and use, but as citizens since new technologies and systems, and the manner in which they are used and regulated, can “have such dramatic consequences for human social, economic and cultural relationships and practices” (23).^29

Barney’s argument can, I would like to suggest, be extended to the news media and media policy. Barney observes that individual technologies are always political “in both their genesis and their outcomes” – that is, political interests are at stake and determine the course taken by new technologies – but they are also depoliticizing in the sense that “technological societies remove from political judgment and contest questions that belong in the political realm,” including questions about technology (8-9).^30 A similar argument could be made regarding the media and media policy.

In Canada, for example, citizens are permitted to participate in discussions about media regulation and, earlier this summer and in advance of the September Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) hearing to address the rules governing media ownership, the public was invited to have its say. However, the public’s say, and the fact that the public has the right to have a say, receive little coverage by the media who stand to benefit from changes to the rules governing media ownership. In other words, the media’s failure to adequately cover issues related to media policy and regulation remove from public view the political nature of the media and conceal the opportunities citizens have to exercise political judgments about media policy.

The important role played by politics and political choice in the development of media technology and policy is finely documented by Paul Starr in his history of modern communications in the United States. Starr shows how “constitutive choices” about the modern media in the US took place “in the context of larger political and economic transformations” (2). The story of modern communications, Starr notes, is usually told as “a narrative of revolution” such as the printing revolution or the electronics and computer revolutions and the usual understanding of these revolutions is that “radical change” in communications and society stems from the introduction of a new medium (4). The reality is that “social change stemming from a new technology...relate[s] less to a medium’s intrinsic properties than to constitutive choices about its design and development” (4). Starr points
to the decision to operate the telegraph as a private enterprise (Western Union) and notes that once decisions such as this are made, they can appear “natural and inevitable, as if there could be no other way” (4-5). But, as Starr shows throughout his book, the development of communications media in the US followed the path it did – a path different in many ways from the ones followed in Europe and Canada (2-3) – because of political decisions. Decisions made about the telegraph in the nineteenth century could have been different just as decisions made about the media system today can maintain current rules and trends or help create a more democratic and equitable media environment.

Modeling Active Citizenship

The primary argument of Darin Barney’s Hart House Lecture is that “technology poses a significant challenge for citizenship” (8). The explanation of this challenge is complex – in Barney’s words, it is “both complicated and troubling” (8) – but in part has to do with the observation that in our technological society “the progress of technology is closely associated with possibility of well-being and self-realization” (34) and the fact that the “pervasive […] everydayness of technological experience works to obscure its contingency as an ethical claim that might be subject to political judgment in relation to competing claims” (39). But to be a citizen and to make judgments about the good life, we must, Barney argues, be open “to the possibility that [the good life] might entail something different from the way things just happen to be at the moment” (38-39).

Once again, Barney’s arguments regarding citizenship and technology inform the issues addressed in this paper. A commercially driven media system that obscures questions that belong in the political realm and that marginalizes viable alternatives (alternative voices, views and sources of information, but also alternative ways of regulating the media or society) poses a challenge for citizenship just as significant as that posed by technology. Future research may consider in greater detail strategies librarians might use to actively confront this challenge. We might begin by revising the form of citizenship constructed in the ACRL IL Standards to one that is open to the possibility that the rules and systems governing access to and use of information could be different from the way things just happen to be at the moment. Also, by recognizing as relevant to our work as librarians and information workers the attempt of Independent World Television to challenge the status quo of broadcast news, and by addressing and actively confronting issues such as big media’s attempts to loosen the rules of media ownership, librarians can provide concrete examples of how economic, legal, social and political factors play a role in the creation, dissemination, and regulation of information and, at the same time, model for students a form of citizenship that refuses to accept unchallenged imposed conditions that limit diversity both inside and outside our libraries. Similarly, the continued integration of critical theory and critical pedagogy into library and information literacy discourse, and
further inquiry into interdisciplinary research such as the newly named “transfield” of Critical Information Studies proposed by Vaidhyanathan, may help broaden our discussions and help emphasize the need for greater research focus on imbalances of power and on the role librarians can play as interventionists and advocates for social change, as recently recommended by the IFC Subcommittee report on Media Concentration and Libraries.

Works Cited


Gage, Ryan. “Henry Giroux’s Abandoned Generation and Critical Librarianship: A


Footnotes

1. The Information Literacy Standards for Student Learning prepared by the American Association of School Librarians and Association for Educational Communications and Technology, for example, include three “Social Responsibility Standards.” Standard 7 emphasizes the importance of information – and equitable access to information – to a democratic society.


3. See, for example, Wiegand (1999), who expresses concern about the failure of LIS discourse to engage questions raised by critical theorists and philosophers of science about “connections between power and knowledge” (23); Buschman (2006) who provides an overview of recent attempts to address the lack of theoretical basis in LIS; Pawley (2003) who suggests that debates over “what, fundamentally, we are trying to do when we engage in information literacy practices... requires us to draw on scholarship not only in LIS but also in education, epistemology, ethics, politics, and social theory...” (445); and Riddle (2003) who suggests that, despite common ground and common interests, there is a “research void” between the areas of information literacy and service learning (71).

4. Simmons (2005) argues that the “published literature about information literacy tends to focus narrowly on the acquisition of skills...” and suggests that the ACRL definition of information literacy “lacks a critical element in which assumptions about information are called into question” (299). She further suggests that “helping students to examine and question the social, economic, and political context for the production and consumption of information is a vital corollary to teaching the skills of information literacy” (299) and that Standard 5 “should infuse all instruction” (300). Simmons proposes that IL instruction be extended to include tenets of genre theory as a means of fostering an awareness of the social construction of discourses (302). Doherty and Ketchner (2005) argue that “librarians have been guilty of a patriarchal and privileged positioning of their expertise in relation to the users they serve” and take a “critical theory view of libraries, information and library users” (1) to help develop a “more critically grounded theory of information literacy instruction” (2). The authors propose a librarian-user partnership based on “equitable power” that would enable “authentic, empowered, intentional learning” (4). Swanson (2004) argues that the standards “that drive information literacy limit its true potential” and “send librarians and instructors down a path of purely functional education that risks disconnecting from the lives of students” (75).


7. Definitions of citizenship vary and are closely related to competing definitions and models of democracy and active political participation. It is not the intent of this paper to argue for one particular definition of citizenship but, rather, to discuss the form of citizenship constructed by the ACRL IL Standards.

8. Giroux writes: “...the ideologically driven conservative corporate media substitute entertainment or patriotic correctness for any responsible effort to make dominant authority and institutions accountable for their actions” (111).

9. There is a long tradition of questioning the assumption that librarians should be ideologically and politically neutral. This tradition, linked to the social responsibility movement and, as Samek (2001) has documented, extending back to the 1930s, posits that there can be no neutral position for librarians since librarians and libraries are subject to the same issues and distributions of power that affect the communities in which they work and operate. Samek offers the views expressed by David Berninghausen in a 1972 Library Journal article as an example of the position of those who objected to the concept of social responsibility. Berninghausen argued that “impartiality and ‘neutrality’ on non-library issues serve as the central principle of the profession” and that the concept of social responsibility was a “New-Left tactic” that threatened this neutrality (4).

10. See McChesney (2004) chapter seven (The Uprising of 2003) for a discussion of
the political and economic factors at play in the FCC’s attempts to change rules on media ownership.

11. For example, McChesney argues that increased media consolidation increases the likelihood that official press releases will be used word for word, increases reliance on PR, and leads to a decline in investigative journalism (80-81). Deregulation usually means “government regulation that advances the interests of the dominant corporate players” (19-20). McChesney contrasts the commercial media to non-profit, public service broadcasting which is accountable to citizens and does not rely on the market to determine programming (241). Similarly, Grant and Wood (2004), in their study of market dynamics and cultural products (books, movies, television, recorded music, etc.) argue the drive to maximize profit can “preclude programming that serves a public interest in, for example, educational programs for children or a fully informed citizenry” (51).

12. The network will provide existing independent and alternative media with the means to substantially increase its reach and compete with the “amplifying conduits” (the network and cable news channels) that act as echo-chambers for voices widely heard in the mainstream media.

13. Bybee, Fogle and Quail (2004), in their article examining the lessons commercially produced news teach young people about the meaning of democracy and citizenship, argue that “we must rethink the idea of news” and “add to the task of news...that it be a watchdog of the ways in which the interests of economics intersect with, conflict with, and potentially undermine the interests of participatory democracy” (par 75). They conclude that “the critical role the news plays in both defining citizenship – and potentially modeling active citizenship – must be recognized” (par 76).

14. Policy decisions that lead to increased concentration of media ownership, policies that lead to media deregulation, decisions to cut funding to education, public broadcasting and other public services, policies that favour a commercial rather than a public media system, cuts to university presses, to name but a few examples, all have an impact on libraries and the communities we serve and all require political action to ensure that future policies and decisions take into account the public interest.

15. Suggested actions for change are not limited to this one section. For example, the suggestion to lobby the Library Congress for revisions to misleading subject headings and index and abstract companies to include more diverse media in their databases appear in other sections of the report.

16. The provision of alternative and independent sources of information remains, as I have elsewhere argued (Lilburn 2005) and as the IFC Subcommittee report emphasizes, an essential task for librarians if libraries are to do more than merely reproduce the inequities and imbalances outside our libraries.

17. Samek here acknowledges the work of Capurro and Hjorland (2003).

18. Gage argues that Giroux’s work is “highly translatable and applicable to librarians because he constantly puts forward trenchant critiques that draw out and illuminate the ways in which the production, circulation, and consumption of information, knowledge, and meaning are never innocent but instead sutured to issues of power, political economy, and specific subject positions organized along class, racial, gender and sexual orientation lines.”

19. The term critical theory is used in different ways. Although I refer here primarily to theorists associated with and influenced by the Frankfurt School of critical theory (Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Habermas, to name but a few), critical theory can also be understood more broadly to include theoretical approaches associated with structuralism, poststructuralism and postmodernism (Kellner, Critical Theory). As described by D. Kellner, critical theory (as opposed to traditional theory which “uncritically reproduces the existing society”) was developed as an interdisciplinary social theory characterized by a synthesis of social science and philosophy which could “serve as an instrument of social transformation” (Crisis). The Institute for Social Research (Frankfurt School) developed theories of monopoly capitalism, the new industrial state, the role of technology and giant corporations in monopoly capitalism, the key roles of mass culture and communication in reproducing contemporary societies, and the decline of democracy and of the individual (Kellner, Critical Theory). Kellner explains how the Frankfurt School eventually become known for its “theories of ‘the totally administered society,’ or ‘one-
dimensional society,’ which analyzed the increasing power of capitalism over all aspects of social life and the development of new forms of social control” (Critical Theory). Critical theory is “motivated by an interest in emancipation from capitalism and provides a philosophy of social practice engaged in ‘the struggle for the future’” (Kellner, Crisis).

20. See, for example, Budd (2003), Buschman (2006), Kapitzke (2003), Raber (2003) and Radford and Radford (2005).

21. Swanson (2004) argues that information literacy “can move away from the mechanistic approach offered by the various information literacy standards towards a new view of information literacy by drawing from critical pedagogy” (69). Critical pedagogy theory can allow librarians to develop a broader perspective of information literacy that recognizes that education, technology and information are not apolitical (71-2) and also “recognizes the potential for information literacy to support society’s status quo...” (67). Elsewhere, Swanson (2004a) offers an example of how the critical pedagogy model can be applied to the research paper component of a first year composition course.

22. Kapitzke, as part of her critical analysis of the current information literacy framework, also proposes a “critical information literacy” which would “analyze the social and political ideologies embedded within the economies of ideas and information” (49).

23. Elmborg here refers to the work of Giroux, Peter McLaren and, in particular, Freire whose “banking concept” of Western education based on the ideology of capitalism is discussed in detail. It is Freire who posits an alternative pedagogy designed to create critical consciousness in students.

24. Elmborg here refers to the work of Hope Olson. For Elmborg, “a critical information literacy involves developing a critical consciousness about information and learning to ask questions about the library’s... role in structuring and presenting a single, knowable reality” (198). The task should not be to define information literacy, but to develop a critical and theoretical informed practice of librarianship (198).

25. Vaidhyanathan offers the following “rough definition” of CIS: CIS “interrogates the structures, functions, habits, norms, and practices that guide global flows of information and cultural elements. Instead of being concerned merely with one’s right to speak (or sing or publish), CIS asks questions about access, costs, and chilling effects on, within, and among audiences, citizens, emerging cultural creators, Indigenous cultural groups, teachers and students. Central to these issues is the idea of ‘semiotic democracy,’ or the ability of citizens to employ the signs and symbols ubiquitous in their environments in manners that they determine” (303).

26. Three of the four outcomes for Performance Indicator 1 (Standard Five) begin with the words: “Identifies and discusses.”

27. Benjamin Barber, for example, has argued that in a strong, participative democracy, citizenship must “stand for something more than taxpaying and voting” (xxviii). Citizens “need not participate all of the time in all public affairs, but they should participate at least some of the time in at least some public affairs” (xxxi). Democracies, Barber writes, are “easily overthrown” not from without, but are “eroded gradually from within, consumed unprotestingly by complacency in the guise of privatism, by arrogance in the guise of empire... by passivity in the guise of deference to experts...” (xxxi). Democracy can only survive as a “strong democracy, secured not by great leaders but by competent, responsible citizens” (xxxi).

28. Darin Barney’s 2007 Hart House Lecture is part of the student-organized Hart House Lecture Series at the University of Toronto.

29. Barney argues that technologies are “not just neutral instruments or means, they are rather intimately bound up in the establishment of prohibitions and permissions, the distribution of power and resources, and the structure of human practices and relationships” (23-24).

30. “When it comes to matters of technological design, development and regulation,” Barney contends, “the stakes are too high [and] the risks are too great... to subject technology to something as unpredictable as politics, particularly the politics of democratic citizenship” (31). In a “resolutely technological society, citizenship is basically a risk to be managed” (31).

31. The Diversity of Voices Public Hearing addressing the issue of media concentration
in Canada was held in Gatineau, Quebec, beginning on 17 September 2007. Although a number of earlier studies addressed this same issue (including the 1970 Davey Report, the 1983 Kent Commission, and the 2003 Lincoln Report), this hearing, according to CRTC Chairman Konrad von Finckenstein, marked “the first time that the CRTC has held a comprehensive policy review of its approach to media ownership and the impact it may have on the diversity of voices available to Canadians.” Public notice of the hearing and the invitation for written comments was released on 13 April 2007. The deadline for receipt of written comments was 18 July 2007. Of the twenty major Canadian daily newspapers indexed in the Canadian Newsstand database (accessed via McGill University on 21 September 2007), only The Globe and Mail and National Post reported on the 13 April CRTC public notice. The National Post piece made no mention of the call for public input and the Globe and Mail noted only that “submissions will be accepted until July 18” but did not explain that the public was entitled to make a submission.

32. Barney’s full argument cannot be summarized here, but his explanation of the challenge is also related to the observation that technology serves as a “unifying common project that lends coherent purpose to a diverse people.” (35) Barney argues that Canada’s so-called “innovation agenda,” a project of “economic restructuring to which capitalist and state elites in Canada have been committed for at least the past two decades,” has been presented as a “technological project, connected seamlessly with Canada’s historical destiny as a technological nation.” (35-36) As a result, Canadian elites have been able to efface “the deeply political nature of this project.” (36) As long as “ours is the dream of a nation made strong and whole by technology,” Barney contends, “it will be very easy for the captains of commerce and industry to invoke technology as a reason to exclude questions of justice and the good life from the political judgment of citizens.” (36).

33. Technology, Barney also writes, “so thoroughly occupies the foreground of our experience that it eclipses both its own ethical background and any possible alternatives.” (38).