DISCUSSING DIVERSITY
DIGITAL RIGHTS MANAGEMENT
CRITICAL THEORY & LIBRARIANSHIP
E-BOOKS, SOCIAL NETWORKS & LEARNING
 BRAVERMAN PRIZE ESSAY
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• supporting activist librarians as they work to effect changes in their own libraries and communities.
• bridging the artificial and destructive gaps between school, public, academic and special libraries, and between public and technical services.
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• facilitating contacts between progressive librarians and other professional and scholarly groups dealing with communications and all the political, social, economic and cultural trends which impact upon it worldwide, in a global context.

from PLG website at http://libr.org/plg/statement.php
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THE DIVERSITY DISCUSSION: WHAT ARE WE SAYING?

by Lisa Hussey

The diversity discussion in LIS has been going on for decades. There is a plethora of literature, both scholarly and practice based, on the need for diversity and steps to introduce it into the professions. The plans, suggestions, and programs include a wide variety of approaches, including hiring guidelines, scholarships for graduate students, fellowship programs for recent graduates, diversity committees at institutions levels, mentoring programs, community outreach, and many other suggestions and practices. The professional LIS organizations have all made commitments to improve diversity, began programs, and instituted policies to support these commitments. The importance of diversity and the commitment to the process is clearly demonstrated in the literature, in monetary commitments for programs and scholarships, and in the espoused values of LIS organizations and institutions.

However, in spite of all the discussion about diversity, the LIS professions have, at best, shown incremental improvements in diversification. The obvious question is: Why? Why, in spite of the commitments, the discussion, and the various initiatives, has there been so little improvement? Why is diversity still a problem to solve rather than a way of being in LIS? Why are we still struggling with how to truly integrate diversity into the profession?

These are complex questions that cannot be answered easily. Rather than review the numerous and varied initiatives and programs, perhaps a better starting point is to consider how LIS as a profession approaches diversity and the rhetoric and terminology used to describe the process and the intended outcomes. From this view, the question is not why are we lagging with diversity, but what are we trying to achieve? What influences the construction and descriptions of these programs? What are the stated and intended outcomes? Once these questions are considered and the answers, or lack of answers, are analyzed, we as a profession may be able to recognize some of the underlying influences that drive the diversity discussion and help to maintain the status quo. For example, what words or terminology are used in the diversity discussion? How does word choice influence the direction and impact of programs and initiatives?

Words have meanings beyond accepted definitions and uses. “Words have consequences...they symbolize something beyond themselves, they do so by convention, and they are public” (Searle, 66). To put it another way, words have power and how they are used can increase their influence and impact.
impact. The words used to introduce and describe diversity initiatives and programs provide the framework of expectations and reveal the cultural and/or hegemonic influences guiding and shaping the ultimate outcomes. When dissecting meaning and analyzing word choice, perhaps the best place to begin is with the term diversity as the catchall term for issues related to and programs focused on differences and is a “term used widely, often without consideration for its meaning and roots” (Peterson b) 21. While there is a large selection of literature on diversity, there is little discussion to explain exactly how diversity is defined, and whether it is defined the same way every time. The term is generally used as if there is an accepted universal definition. However diversity is simultaneously a nebulous, vague, and extensive idea. It can imply difference regarding uncomfortable concepts, such as race, religion, ethnic heritage, and sexual orientation; but it can also refer to more benign differences, including variety in musical tastes and hobbies. In fact, given that diversity is such a broad notion, it may not be possible to definitely define the concept universally. However, within LIS, there are some common ideas and definitions of diversity.

One of the most common uses of diversity is as a method for acknowledging differences among people with a particular emphasis on the inclusion of librarians of color especially of the “four protected minority categories recognized by the U.S. Equal Opportunity Act: African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian American, and Native American” (Adkins & Espinal 53). This definition has widespread, tacit acceptance within LIS as most diversity initiatives are specifically aimed at individuals who are members of one of the four ethnic classifications. This is clearly illustrated by the Spectrum Scholarships from the American Library Association (ALA) and the Career Enhancement Program (CEP) from the Association of Research Libraries (ARL).

The Spectrum Scholarship, established in 1997, is designed to “address the specific issue of under-representation of critically needed ethnic librarians within the profession while serving as a model for ways to bring attention to larger diversity issues in the future” (ALA). Spectrum’s website encourages the recruitment of new professionals from “underrepresented groups” (ALA). ARL’s uses similar language to describe their CEP program. The intended outcome is “to provide practical experience to MLIS graduate students from underrepresented groups and to create a diverse research library community that will better meet the challenges of changing demographics and the emphasis of global perspectives in higher education” (ARL). Both programs use broad terminology, such as underrepresented and ethnic to describe potential applicants. On the overview page, ALA uses more explicit language to define eligible applicants as “librarians of color… American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Island” (ALA). ‘Librarians of color’ is a phrase used often to describe diverse librarians. The phrase, which strongly connects the idea of diversity to race, does not add anything to the conversation other than to highlight the fact that diversity involves ‘others.’ The CEP requires that applicants “be a member
of a racial/ethnic minority group as described by the U.S. Census Bureau,” the same classifications as used by ALA. In both programs, diversity is defined in terms of representation based on ethnic and racial background. This understanding of diversity, while well intended, has the potential of creating a process based on visual diversity; one that highlights difference based characteristics such as skin color and facial features, one that often relegates diverse ethnic groups into broad, all-encompassing classifications that downplay or ignore unique attributes and rich histories associated with each subgroup. The U.S. Census classifications (African American, Asian American, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American) are broad terms that fail to express the vast variety of language, custom, and culture. For example, Asian American refers to individuals with ethnic backgrounds from a large geographical area, ranging from the Middle East to Japan, each with different languages, religions, cultures, and worldviews. Yet, the classification ‘Asian American’ groups them all together as one cohesive group. It is an approach based in simplicity rather than dealing with the complexity of difference. “It is simply more efficient to be aware of group members’ common histories and experiences than to discover every element about each organizational member” (Grimes, 400).

Much of the LIS literature uses the broad, abstract idea of diversity. As Christine Pawley (2006) points out, in LIS we are happy to address the idea of diversity, however it is defined, but LIS rarely deals with issues of race. This is supported by a recent search in the Library Literature database where ‘race’ as a keyword returned 408 results in comparison to 1295 for multicultural/multiculturalism and 1702 for diversity (divers*). There are many possibilities for this discrepancy including the popular practice of using more politically correct terms, such as diversity. However, it is also likely due to the fact that discussions of race are complicated and often uncomfortable for people hesitant to point out differences. Diversity is a “palatable word for an idea that is unappetizing to many – the idea that people are different from one another and we should celebrate the differences.” (Kniffel 32). However, “without a clear and intellectually rigorous understanding of race as perhaps the major components of multiculturalism [and diversity] we fail in our research and teaching to go beyond” the palatable, abstract and unthreatening concept of difference. (Pawley 153). Diversity without the discussion of race relations and their history in our society and in the LIS professions only provides a façade of change.

Diversity is not the only commonly used word within the discussion. Another often used term to consider is ‘difference.’ While the focus of diversity is generally on ethnic and racial groups, the discussion about diversity is often about difference and how difference can help the organization and/or the profession. To speak of diversity is to imply a commitment to difference, without explicitly defining the difference, or what the differences are compared against. The term ‘underrepresented groups’ provides an image of people who want to be a part of an organization, but who are not included. It offers no explanation as to why these groups are underrepresented. The
commitment implied is only for representation, not addressing issues as to why these groups are not represented within the profession.

Diversity and difference are ambiguous terms that fail to address the history of discrimination and race relations in the United States and within social institutions, such as libraries, archives, and other information centers. “If the language makes no distinctions among differences, the legacy of segregation, discrimination, and oppression can be denied.” (Peterson (b), 31). Diversity, in this context, focuses on a superficial integration of difference, but does not deal with the long history of racial tensions in the United States. Defining diversity as merely a surface or visual difference means true differences can be chalked up as merely minor physical or philosophical differences and the true cost resulting from a lack of diversity will be treated as unimportant.

The central role of ‘difference’ in the discussion provides a subtle insight into the complexity of diversity. The concepts of diversity, multiculturalism, and race are not limited to members of the U.S. Census classifications (African American, Asian American, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American) or librarians of color. All three concepts also include majority or white culture. The influence of white culture in the diversity process should not be ignored or minimized. “[W]hen whiteness is accepted as an invisible norm…white people, their assumptions, and ways are empowered” (Grimes 382). However, as with race, the role of white culture in LIS is rarely directly addressed, which can have a powerful effect. “[T]o ignore white ethnicity is to redouble its hegemony by naturalizing it” (Roediger 6). The focus on a broad spectrum of difference rarely acknowledges the advantages inherent in being part of the majority culture, or white culture, a concept known as ‘white privilege.’ White privilege has been discussed and researched in a variety of disciplines, including sociology, psychology, political science, and to some degree, LIS (Peterson (b), Lipsitz). In framing these discussions, the authors often define white privilege within the context of racism as most discussions of race relations include an underlying assumption of “hierarchical relations between blacks and whites;” (Guess 657) where whites are higher on the hierarchy.

This unequal standing is reflected in the use of ‘diversity’ as the identification and celebration of ‘difference,’ often done with tacit or unconscious assumptions regarding the standards for measuring difference. In order to identify difference, one must first decide on a standard for what is not different or what is normal. Who or what acts as the standard against which all others are compared? In LIS, as with most American social institutions, the answer is that the practices, values, and culture associated with white ethnic groups act as the basis for defining difference (Dovidio 52). However, rather than state this basis for comparison, discussions of diversity focus on the groups identified as different, which assumes a common understanding of ‘not different.’ The failure to address this assumption, that acts as a fundamental basis for diversity programs and initiatives, results in an increase in its influence. “Difference is a justice, dignity, and equity issue –
a point too many multiculturalists fail to make” (Peterson (b) 31). Instead,
diversity is often wrapped up in broad, easy to accept terms, which create
a “humanly impoverished notion of diversity, excluding personality, social
class, spirituality, taste and private passions” (Cronin 40), that ignores past
actions. When past issues of racial discrimination and ethnic oppression
are minimized to underrepresentation of certain groups and the inclusion
of librarians of color, the roles of white culture and white privilege are
not addressed. As a result, one may end up with a diversity program
where “difference is celebrated at a superficial level, but white people and
their ways are implicitly presented as more ‘normal’ or more important”
(Grimes 389) and the impact of historical racism and current inequality are
minimized.

Race, like all socially constructed concepts, has evolved as society has
evolved, and the resulting racism is in essence “to be nothing but the friction
between different groups of people” (DuBois (a) 10) where one group
has more power and influence than others. This power struggle between
races has a long history in the United States and social institutions, such
as libraries, archives and museums, are influenced by this history. In LIS,
as in the wider American society, we often “adopt the values of society,”
many of which “reflect racist traditions” (Dovidio 52). However, racism
as the overt discrimination and degradation of others is no longer the
main concern or cause of issues related to racial issues in the professions
and the work place. In its place is a more subtle and nebulous process
of discrimination, a new form of racism that is usually institutionalized
and often presented as rational arguments against minority enhancement
policies. New racism, also referred to as symbolic racism, modern racism,
or racial resentment, is characterized by a focus on the individual rather
than the group – i.e. individuals not taking advantage of opportunities,
individuals not working up to potential rather than groups being unable
to improve based on the power and influence of other groups, such as
whites. This view allows whites/majority culture to assuage their guilt
over privilege by denying the existence of privilege by highlighting the
importance on individual accomplishment and the idea that anyone can
succeed as long as they try hard enough. “Overemphasizing individuality
allows the importance of group issues to be ignored…such a focus implies
that fairness to individuals is all that matters” (Grimes 400). There is no
need to make accommodations for particular groups if the expectation is
that everyone is evaluated and judged on their individual accomplishments.
It is a view that assumes that everyone begins at the same point, with
the same opportunities. It does not, however, address racial inequities
in essential social foundations, such as education and basic health care
(Lipsitz 6), which then allows members of white culture to “both deny
the experience and privileges they enjoy because of their group status and
attribute their success solely to individual effort” (Grimes 400). Instead
of questioning existing power structures and policies that implicitly favor
those who begin with advantages bestowed by white privilege, those “who
conceive of racism in individual terms may be more in favor of instituting
individual-level interventions like diversity management training programs
that attempt to change individuals’ attitudes and beliefs” (Unzueta & Lowery 1496). The changes that result are generally superficial and do little to address the policies and practices that reinforce white privilege.

There is, however, research and discussion regarding white privilege and its influence on organizations and social institutions. When including the concept of white privilege, the framework and outlook of diversity is changed. Within this framework, racism, as traditionally represented as overt actions and blatant discrimination, is not the main issue in dealing with diversity. Rather, it requires looking below the surface at the more subtle influences, such as institutionalized practices and tacit acceptance of white culture as the basis for ‘normal.’ It also requires those participating in the process to consider and question the “othered status, that is the non-white status in America’s racial hierarchy” (Guess 649) and how this perception of race relations shapes and influences diversity initiatives and programs. In other words, it begins to consider power and power structures in society. Within the diversity discussion, it is important to think beyond just difference and skin color and recognize the role of power. “Race and racism are matters of interests as well as attitudes” (Lipsitz 3). Those individuals and groups with the most power and influence do not want to surrender it. Diversity can be seen as a threat to established structures of authority and influence. “If diversity were as non-threatening a concept as the rhetoric of difference would lead us to believe, then expressions of anger would not occur when practices to readdress past discrimination are enacted” (Peterson(a) 18).

This brings the discussion back to the use of language in diversity. As already mentioned, it is important to consider what words and terminology are used. The use of specific terms over others, such as diversity rather than race, communicates as much about the process as the descriptions and goals. These words and terms “mean or represent or symbolize something beyond themselves” (Searle 60) and act as representations of majority culture or hegemony. To put these words into a public forum is to support their use and to accept the implicit and implied meanings. “To speak the official language, without further specification…is tacitly to accept the official definition of the official language of a political unit” (Bourdieu, 45). The framework for how diversity is defined and how it is understood is set by those who set and enforce policy and by those who define parameters for success and failure. Whoever controls the rhetoric and terminology, controls the perception of the process, as well as strongly influencing the outcomes. In this sense, words have power. The use of diversity presented as a celebration of difference rather than the direct focus on racial tensions and past discrimination weakens the impact of programs, even when they are aimed at specific ethnic or racial groups. “All linguistic practices are measured against the legitimate practices, i.e. the practices of those who are dominant” (Bourdieu, 53). In the United States and in the LIS professions, the dominant racial group is White/Caucasian (Dovidio, U.S. Department of Labor). The language used for diversity is often the language approved by those in power, which allows for diversity to be restricted to a specific
framework, one that does not seriously challenge or change the existing powers and privileges enjoyed by whites.

Where should LIS go from here in regards to diversity? To begin with, the profession needs to continue to ask difficult questions regarding the views and expectations that help to shape the concept of diversity. We also need to approach the issue with more than just good intentions and vague expectations. “Nor is it enough here to have simply the philanthropic impulse – simply a rather blind and aimless desire to do good.” (DuBois (b) 292) In other words, LIS needs to look beyond the obvious answers and begin to question the assumptions that have supported and influenced the profession for decades. Real change requires a strong commitment of those involved to recognize that there is more than one point of view and that how-it-is is not always how-it-should-be. It requires everyone to question their perceptions and assumptions and accept that they may be wrong, or perhaps not entirely correct.

The classifications and categories used to identify diversity, such as Asian American, librarians of color, and underrepresented, also need analysis and revision. These groupings and identifications can be both limiting and overly broad. While this is an issue that will not be easily solved, the first step may be to allow classifications to be determined by the various groups themselves rather than by those with the most influence and power. This would be a complex and complicated process, but one that has the potential for integration of ideas, inclusiveness of the many rather than of a few, and the identification of new associations and relationships among and across the different classifications and categories.

In his article “Libraries & Memories: Beyond White Privilege 101”, George Lipsitz (2009) clearly lays out many of the practices, attitudes, and expectations that strengthen the role of white privilege in society and through this process, renew and reinforce the subtle structures and patterns of racism in the United States. He ends the article by encouraging librarians and other LIS professionals to join the fight for racial justice and reminds us of our role in “deciding what will be remembered and what will be forgotten, who will be included and who will be excluded, who will speak and who is silenced.” In other words, Lipsitz is asking LIS professionals to take a hard look at themselves and ask what are we doing, how are we doing it, and who are we doing it to? If the answers to these questions are not uncomfortable, perhaps we need to question our answers.

While the best way to fully incorporate all diverse views into the profession would be to start over, begin at the beginning, to bring in all views to create the most inclusive profession, the idea is unrealistic. However, just because it is not realistic to start at the beginning, it does not mean that we cannot look at the issues from a real starting point, one in which integration rather than assimilation is considered; one where all viewpoints are evaluated and analyzed on their merits rather than against the existing standard; and to require that the majority view – the white privilege view – be evaluated
alongside all of the others. “The best way to make readers aware of such taken-for-granted assumptions is to disrupt them; otherwise they reinforce racial and gender status quos in organizations” (Grimes, 395).

Works Cited

DIGITAL RIGHTS MANAGEMENT AS INFORMATION ACCESS BARRIER

By Jason Puckett

The first step was to declare an amnesty for the books and set them free from their chains. But, even after they were unchained and were permitted to be taken out for use and handled by readers, there was not, for a long time, a generous recognition, on the part of those that maintained and managed libraries, of the right of readers to an unhampered use of books (Ranganathan 3).

As librarians, our mission is to provide information. We have an obligation to provide, to the best of our ability, information in a form that readers can access according to their needs, with respect for their self-determination and minimal barriers to its free use.

Digital rights management (DRM) technology creates intentional and artificial information usage barriers. In doing so, it compromises libraries’ mission of providing free access to information – “free” in the sense that users can make their own determination about how to use that information appropriately and ethically. By providing and supporting information that incorporates DRM, we choose to privilege a system that allows the publisher or vendor to intervene in the reader’s freedom of information use. It has become increasingly apparent that libraries must adopt a position on the issue of DRM and begin advocating for DRM-free information systems.

DRM: Definition and Issues

Digital rights management is the name given to a set of technologies used by publishers of digital content (like music, video, or electronic texts) to control the ways in which content consumers (like library users) are able to use information. DRM usually works by encrypting a digital object like an audio, video, or text file and providing some method for the user to decrypt it and use it only in ways specified by the publisher: perhaps only on a specific device, or for a set number of uses, or only on screen (that is, disabling printing or reading via screen reader software).

DRM is a form of cryptography, the process of protecting information from unauthorized use by transforming it so that only the authorized receiver can read it. The sender – in this context, the information vendor or provider – encrypts the digital object via a “key” of some kind. The recipient – the information user – may decrypt it for use with a copy of the same key, usually automatically. The information is protected from “attackers” – unauthorized users, or uses – who lack the key.
The provider treats the information user as authorized recipient in this scenario, providing her with the key (embedded within software) to read the digital object. It also treats the user as unauthorized recipient or “attacker,” however, by preventing those uses that the provider chooses to disallow. In essence, DRM treats the information user as attacker on her own computer, blocking uses of information undesired by the provider, regardless of whether the information object is legally owned and whether the use in question is otherwise legally permissible. (This is one reason why most DRM is usually cracked very quickly: in order to access the digital object at all, the vendor must provide the receiver with the object, the cipher, and the key, rendering all DRM schemes potentially vulnerable to cracking [Doctorow, “Content” 6-7].)

DRM may be applied by vendors and publishers to nearly any format of digital information. It is frequently used in digital audio and video, and is frequently designed to permit playing content only on specified devices or for a limited time. For example, DVD manufacturers employ a form of DRM called region encoding, in which publishers control when, and for how much, DVDs are released in different parts of the world by preventing DVDs from one region from working with players from another. Vendors of online research databases often implement controls that prevent copying and pasting of text from electronic articles.

I construct the question of DRM here with two sets of stakeholders: first, commercial providers of digital information to libraries such as e-book and database vendors; and second, users of that information as provided to them in turn by libraries. (This is a vast simplification for the sake of this particular argument, of course, and ignores other stakeholders such as content creators with whom libraries rarely have direct dealings.) In its present form DRM and the regulations surrounding it privilege the commercial providers at the expense of information users.

The Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998

Changes in how audiences interact with media cause copyright and fair use to take on a new importance in cultural life. Copyright law was originally written to apply to companies and publishers – “Big Content,” to use activist Cory Doctorow’s phrase – who had the means of mass copying and distribution, to protect them from unfair competition. What has changed in the twenty-first century is that now we all have those means. Thanks to the way computers and the internet operate, every content consumer now triggers laws never originally meant to apply to individuals. Every instance of accessing information online requires copying: from the host server to the destination computer and hops in between, and even internally on the user’s computer between memory and hard drive (Boyle 50-51). These copies are not theft, they are the result of routinely accessing information, and so copyright has become more important in daily information interactions because we constantly engage in behavior to which copyright could potentially apply.
DRM became a much more significant factor in digital copyright with the passage of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) of 1998. The DMCA is key because it upsets the carefully crafted balance between copyright owners and information users (more about this below). It also strengthens DRM (in legal code, not software code) by making it illegal to bypass.

Commercial interests have held a strong influence over copyright law for a century, beginning with the revision of copyright law with the Copyright Act of 1909: “Because the technical details were beyond the grasp of the legislature, representatives of industry were enlisted to help the copyright office draft the legislation.... This form of deliberation had become tradition by the time the DMCA came around” (Gimm 7-8).

Over time, the U.S. entertainment industry wanted greater control over copyright law. They lobbied for increasingly stringent international copyright treaties. By the 1990s these treaties exceeded simply punishing copyright infractions to actually prohibiting the circumvention of new anti-copying technologies. This lobbying process ultimately led to the creation of the DMCA in the United States (Von Lohmann and Seltzer 26).

The DMCA and harm to fair use

The doctrine of fair use dictates that certain uses of copyrighted material are legal and valid regardless of, and potentially in contradiction to, the wishes of the copyright holder. Fair use is, by definition, a use that the copyright holder has not authorized in advance (Erickson & Mulligan 993). These uses may include criticism, comment, classroom exhibition and creating derivative works, and fair use distinguishes between commercial and noncommercial use. The exact parameters of fair use are intentionally left ambiguous to render them subject to human judgment on a case-by-case basis (Gillespie 59).

DRM restrictions, on the other hand, are enforced by computers that cannot serve up case-by-case judgments. Copyright law is not easily reducible to code, and “only those policies that can be reliably reduced to yes/no decisions” can be successfully decided by pre-programmed logic (Erickson & Mulligan 992).

Under the DMCA it became illegal to circumvent technological measures like encryption and DRM, even if the circumvention is undertaken for a legal fair use (Boyle 87). A library user with a physical book can use her own judgment to determine whether photocopying some or all of it is reasonable and defensible as fair use. If that same user has an electronic edition of that same title, the publisher may use DRM to remove the user’s determination from the equation: attempting to bypass DRM to make a similar copy is illegal under the DMCA, solely because of the electronic rather than physical format. (One analysis of the debate framing the DMCA’s passage indicates that legislators tended to side most often...
with content providers rather than user advocates or other stakeholders (Maxwell 11).

But at least the e-book user might have the option of resorting to a paper edition free of restrictions. For purely digital media like audiovisual materials there may be no such equivalent. A professor who wishes to excerpt a collection of video clips to show as part of a class discussion would likely be covered squarely under fair use. However, if he uses DVDs encrypted with DRM from the university library as his source material he is breaking the law. Even if he obtains permission from the films’ rights holders to use the clips, the use is illegal because he may not legally bypass the DVD encryption. “Under the DMCA, legality doesn’t depend on how the copy will be used but rather on the means by which the digital content is copied” (Von Lohmann and Seltzer 26).

The combination of the DMCA and DRM can make a crime out of an otherwise legal information use. “[O]ne must not only have a fair use right to use the material but one must also have the permission to gain access to the work to make a fair use of it in the first instance…. It is as if the landowner is allowed to…erect a locked gate across the public walkway or point of access leading to the park or public space. Even if one ‘sneaks’ over the fence to make a lawful ‘fair use’ of the land, the law will still see harm in the act of fence hopping” (Lipinski 829-830).

Every use of a digital work involves copying in some way: copying from a web server to a browser or from a hard drive to RAM, for example. This renders every use of a digital work subject to copyright as enforced by the provider’s DRM, and “the definition of piracy has been altered such that every incidental, automatic ‘copy’ made in the random access memory of home computers is now included as potentially infringing” (Gimm 16). The degree of control that DRM enacts upon digital works, however, is far greater than the equivalent restrictions that copyright law enacts over physical works (Lessig 99). This can effectively make fair use of some materials impossible for the average user: since the code is the arbiter of what uses are authorized, there is no venue for them to “challenge the code” and exercise fair use in defiance of the DRM (Erickson & Mulligan 994).

Users, consumers, pirates?

By changing the terminology used to describe computer-related actions, copyright owners control the discourse. Thus, sharing becomes stealing, Creative work becomes private property, Corporations become victims of piracy (Halbert 101).

Entertainment industry (that is, information provider) heavyweights like the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) and Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) have taken great pains to construct scenarios of the dangers of the internet and unfettered copying
They have lobbied for stricter copyright controls that favor the producers of digital information at the expense of consumer rights by consistently casting new technologies in the good-and-evil rhetoric of crimes like theft and violence. Initial examples of this include former MPAA president and CEO Jack Valenti’s comparison of the then-new VCR to the Boston Strangler (Boyle 109). The content industry’s favorite metaphor, however, one that has become so common that we forget that it is a metaphor, is that of piracy.

In support of technological measures like DRM and legal measures like the DMCA, the entertainment industry and legislators co-opted the term “pirate” decades ago to describe those who violated intellectual property and copyright law. The strategic and calculated framing of IP infractions as “piracy” is a scare tactic that bears some examination. EFF attorney Fred von Lohmann argues that “the term ‘pirate’ is misapplied to the kinds of activities that go on in digital networks among everyday users” (Postigo 1016).

Literal piracy refers to crimes of theft, usually accompanied by violence, committed in transportation vehicles. The term pirate has been applied to many different contexts that make use of its frightening connotations to support legislation like the DMCA, to the sole benefit of information providers. Metaphorical acts of “piracy” that involve violations of intellectual property law “obliterate the differences between stealing, all forms of copying and pirating ... ‘[P]iracy’ has been applied to violent acts across transportation vehicles and to virtually every communication medium” (Gimm 15-16).

The use of piracy as a metaphor for intellectual property infractions is not new. “[P]reviously unrelated, undesirable activities were labeled a form of piracy. In fact, metaphoric use has always been, by and large, limited to the realm of communication law. The reason has everything to do with some of the first people to invoke the metaphors being printers” – information providers, not users. “A quick glance at the historical record shows that the pirate metaphor was resurrected each time a new communication technology encountered the threat of copyright or licensing infringements” (Gimm 11-12).

The term piracy carries implications that the entertainment industry has used to its advantage in the debate surrounding the DMCA and similar legislation: theft, violence, and foreign threats. This represents a strategic and calculated framing of language.

Framing copyright infringements in this way is to use “theft” to describe an act that does not involve stealing as it has ever been historically understood. Content owners have used this framing for legal influence. For example, ReplayTV was an early competitor of the TiVo, manufacturing digital video recorders capable of skipping commercials and transmitting recorded programs to other devices. Jamie Kellner, former CEO of Turner
Broadcasting System Inc., called skipping commercials “theft” and in a lawsuit involving 28 major entertainment companies, sued ReplayTV for copyright infringement in 2001. The company went bankrupt and its successor settled the case by removing these two features from future models of the ReplayTV device (Von Lohmann and Seltzer 26). Opponents of this framing point out that the theft metaphor breaks down because unlike real property, IP is “an infinite resource, infinitely replicable” and in giving away an idea, the original owner is no poorer (Postigo 1013).

The piracy metaphor also implicitly defines the problem of infringement as crimes primarily committed by foreigners against the United States, allowing advocates to use the DMCA as leverage to enact international enforcement (Gimm 22). United States trade negotiators have pressured Canada and several other countries in Europe, Asia, Latin America and elsewhere into adopting copyright laws similar to the DMCA as a requirement for trade agreements with the U.S. “U.S. entertainment companies are successfully spreading the copyright code changes established by the DMCA around the world.” (Von Lohmann and Seltzer 26).

**Valuing vendors over users**

It is to the advantage of those who sell information – publishers and vendors – to limit the ways in which that information can be accessed and used: on a single device, for a limited time, in limited ways. They can maximize profits by rendering a plentiful commodity, information, artificially scarce. It is to the advantage of those who use information – library users, among others – to have information in formats that are platform-agnostic and free from restrictions. This allows them to use information on their own devices to best suit their own needs.

This tension renders these two stakeholders in opposition to each other with regard to free information use. Libraries stand as middlemen between them. We usually serve as the only point of contact or negotiation between vendors and library users. Users have no opportunity to advocate with information vendors on their own behalf, and may not even know the issues at stake. One obligation of our role as information professionals is to serve as informed advocates and take the part of the library user in this conflict of interest.

Publishers argue that because accessing digital information typically involves making a copy (usually downloading to the user’s computer from a vendor’s server), they are justified in exerting greater controls over the use of that copy than they could place on the equivalent physical work (Eschenfelder 207). As a result, DRM frequently has the net effect of preventing users from freely making use of information they have legally purchased, or legitimately accessed via their library. Civil liberties organizations such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation also fear that DRM serves as a means to erode users’ fair use and other rights (Nisbet).
Copyright out of balance

New media scholar Hector Postigo cites protection, incentive and balance as three “historically enduring themes” used by policy-makers and copyright owners in constructing copyright (Postigo 1011).

Protection is the theme of increasing protection in copyright law against the making of illicit copies. Copyright holders have used this argument to construct consumers as thieves and pirates on the assumption that if they could make improper copies of digital objects (a process that only gets easier and easier over time) they would. This assumption becomes a greater problem as users use digital tools to create and remix in addition to passively consuming media (Postigo 1012).

Incentive is the argument that changes in copyright law should favor the production of more intellectual property: copyright is, after all, intended to promote creation. Unfortunately copyright owners have used this law to convince lawmakers to increasingly circumscribe the privilege of fair use. Since the DMCA legally protected DRM, fair use is no longer guaranteed and can be negotiated away in license agreements accompanying digital media (Postigo 1012).

The balance theme states that copyright holders’ rights should maintain a balance with the rights of the public, and that changes to copyright law should not disturb this balance. Copyright has always been a system that grants certain rights to the intellectual property owner but reserves other ones (notably fair use) to the user of the IP. “It has been widely accepted by legal scholars that whatever balance in copyright there was prior to the passage of the DMCA has been disturbed in favor of copyright owners” (Postigo, 1011).

Copyright law increasingly frames ownership of IP as an absolute, as total control, with fair use a loophole limited by the circumstance of whether the information user can happen to get physical access to the media in question. “The question is whether the Congress has the power to add a new right of access-denial to the intellectual property monopoly it is constructing, undermining – as to some works and some fair uses – the balance that the law sets up” (Boyle 108). By passing the DMCA, Congress established a new intellectual property right in favor of copyright holders: “a law aimed directly at expression, that made it illegal to get access for the purpose of making fair use even when you legally bought the physical book, or the physical DVD, and now wish to quote it or parody it....Congress had now, by law, allowed a copyright owner to distribute a particular work with the exclusive rights but without some of those limitations” (Boyle 95-96) [emphasis in original].

This issue of balancing copyright holders’ rights and information users’ rights is perhaps the most critical one for libraries’ mission of providing access to information. The British Library has published a manifesto
explicitly addressing the question of copyright balance and the challenges to libraries presented by recent developments in digital copyright. They note recommendations for change beginning with “Digital is not different,” discussing the danger of erosion of users’ rights to use digital content in the same way as the physical equivalent, and the threat DRM poses to “Fair Dealing,” the British analogue of fair use.

**DRM and search tools**

Many library users find online research tools difficult enough to use under ideal circumstances. DRM measures implemented by vendors of research databases often make the situation worse. Libraries often provide users with information discovery tools that cripple or disable standard behaviors of their computers. Some forms of DRM, particularly for text resources such as licensed e-resources, use a range of restrictions that make common uses like copying, pasting, printing and saving intentionally difficult to use (Eschenfelder 206). For example, e-book vendors may discourage printing too much text at once by forcing users to access the material in small chunks, or disable standard context menus to prevent use of the clipboard copy feature (Eschenfelder 209, 213).

License restrictions like these provide barriers to our users on a regular basis. Adding to this mix DRM that purposefully disables the behavior of standard functions confuses and discourages information seekers still further.

**Users with disabilities**

DRM is especially problematic to users with disabilities. Publishers of e-content often apply DRM that makes it incompatible with compensatory technology like screen readers. Adobe and Microsoft build DRM technology into their e-book software that allows publishers to disable text-to-speech capability, making the content useless to visually disabled readers (Kramer).

In early 2009, publisher Random House and the Author’s Guild convinced Amazon to activate a feature of the DRM in its popular Kindle e-book reader, disabling the text-to-speech function on selected titles. This feature allowed the Kindle to read electronic books aloud, a useful feature for those with visual or textual handicaps. Amazon disabled the feature on the disputed titles, remotely and retroactively downgrading the functionality of the Kindle device. An ALA representative recently testified to the U.S. Copyright Office that this represents a case in which DRM has negatively affected the access of disabled persons (Terry).

**Audio books**

Library users who check out paper books are free to read them anywhere they wish. Library users who check out physical copies of audio books –
on CD, for example— are free to listen to them on any player: in their cars, at home, on a portable player, and can move the content between devices freely. One of the advantages of digital online audio books is, theoretically, convenience, but thanks to DRM the user who checks out a downloaded audio book online has by far the fewest options for using the information. The Dekalb County system in Georgia, for example (the author’s public library), offers downloadable audio books from NetLibrary, one of the largest vendors of library e-books. NetLibrary provides audio books in a mixture of formats. Some are Windows Media files with DRM that renders them unplayable on iPods, the audio device used by a vast majority of personal media player owners. Some are MP3 files, which will play on nearly any device (NetLibrary). This confusing mix of formats and restrictions means that the user must not only locate the book she wants, but sort out which books can be used on her device of choice.

DRM that restricts hardware playback is usually only compatible with one kind of hardware, forcing libraries to made a decision about which type of devices to support. Most people use more than one device in their daily lives—a laptop, a desktop, a work computer, a smartphone, a portable media player—and libraries should strive to provide content that will work with as many of these devices as possible.

One-source devices

A recent trend in personal media players is the “one-source” device model. A device that uses electronic content like books or music is often designed to work (either solely or most easily) with content created by a given vendor, usually the device’s manufacturer. These devices can lock the customer (individual or library) into a near-monopoly relationship with that vendor. The first problem is simply that it is difficult or impossible to purchase content from other sources. The second is that once the customer has invested a collection of media for the device she cannot change to a different hardware platform without losing access to that collection. DRM usually renders media content unusable on other devices: imagine if audio CDs would only play on one brand of CD player, and libraries could not buy another brand of player without losing the use of all their collected CDs. “[T]o the extent that it imposes restrictions on the access, portability, and use of legally bought digital products, DRM may also reduce the value of such products for consumers....[T]he most limiting restriction for consumers [is] the requirement of limiting songs to only one device and that this lowered utility for all consumers” (Sinha, Machado and Sellman 42).

This model is potentially dangerous to freedom of information because it allows the vendor to act as gatekeeper for information with little accountability. Users have little or no recourse when the vendor chooses to block or disable a given use of the device.
For example, the Apple iPhone has only one source for available software, an online repository called the App Store. Users can only install programs (free or commercial) that Apple has approved for inclusion in the App store. In 2009, a programmer named James Montgomerie created an iPhone program called Eucalyptus to access the free Project Gutenberg archive of public domain books. Apple rejected Eucalyptus because it permitted viewing of what it considered inappropriate content: the Gutenberg text edition of the *Kama Sutra* (von Lohmann). Note that Eucalyptus contained no e-text content of its own; it simply provided access to an online collection of e-books. This is the equivalent of denying permission to install a web browser because it could potentially be used to view sites that your computer’s manufacturer finds inappropriate.

Apple did eventually relent in the case of Eucalyptus, perhaps because of the negative publicity the incident generated, but their App Store remains the sole source for content for the iPhone. The vendor, not the device’s owner, decides what may be installed on an iPhone. Apple maintains that users who attempt to install any other software on their iPhones violate the DMCA (Hayes).

This is just one example of many similar devices on the market. Amazon restricts its popular Kindle e-book reader to only allow online purchases from Amazon.com. The Kindle does allow users to load their own texts in other formats like PDF, but retains DRM-based controls on books purchased from Amazon. In 2009 Amazon used a previously unrevealed feature to remotely delete Kindle editions of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* and *1984* from customers’ devices. A high school student sued Amazon after his homework notes, kept on the Kindle, were rendered useless by the deletion (Kellogg). Amazon has not informed customers what other remote applications of its DRM may be possible.

**Obsolescence and Preservation**

Libraries and archives that deal with electronic formats have long been concerned about the problem of format obsolescence, information that becomes inaccessible because it cannot be read by modern hardware. DRM harms long-term prospects for preservation of digital information by making content difficult, impossible or illegal to copy or convert. It is “rarely designed to allow for ‘fair dealing’ and legitimate library uses and often impair[s] successful preservation in the long term by preventing any copying or software updates....Preservation necessarily involves making copies of content, if only as a backup or to mitigate against wear and tear, and perhaps migrating them from one medium to another (‘format shifting’)” (Gibby and Green 67).

Because DRM is typically tied to one specific vendor, access to data encumbered with DRM is often limited by the lifespan or business decisions of that vendor. When a digital media company goes out of business or
decides to discontinue or change its DRM practices its customers may suffer loss of access to their digital files.

Figure 1: This comic concisely and bluntly points out the disadvantages of owning media files encumbered by DRM. “Steal This Comic” by Randall Munroe, http://xkcd.com/488/

This can happen even when the provider ceases to use DRM and moves to an unencumbered format. In 2008 Walmart discontinued selling DRM-encrypted music files and began selling DRM-free content. When the company shut down its DRM authentication servers, it emailed all customers who had purchased music in the previous format informing them that it would no longer support access to those files. Customers were advised to rip their files to CD before the DRM’s expiration date to avoid losing their music entirely (Doctorow, “Wal*Mart”).

Loss of access may even be out of the hands of the vendor. In early 2009 the e-book company OverDrive ceased doing business with the consumer e-book vendor Fictionwise, cutting off access for customers to previously purchased OverDrive e-books with DRM. Fictionwise made an effort to provide its customers with access to lost titles via other vendors, but
in many cases no substitute for the OverDrive content was available (Fictionwise).

To date this scenario has mostly affected purchases from information vendors by individual consumers, but it could happen as easily with library vendors. OverDrive, for example, does provide e-books and audio books to libraries as well as to consumers.

**Action and Opinions**

*DRM makes solving many of these problems both legally and technically impossible. For example, libraries have the right to circumvent DRM for a work in order to evaluate whether they want to purchase it. However, they cannot do so without the software tools to crack the work’s DRM protection. But the distribution of those tools is illegal under DMCA* (Bailey 125).

The difficult question is what librarians can do about it. DRM is, at present, a solidly entrenched aspect of a great deal of online digital content. Realistically, we cannot simply refuse to purchase any DRM-encumbered content for our libraries: this would cut off our users entirely from much of the content they want and need. On the other hand, it represents a significant usage barrier. “DRM changes the fundamental relationship between the creators, publishers, and users, to the detriment of creators, users, and the institutions that serve them. DRM, if not carefully balanced, limits the ability of libraries and schools to serve the information needs of their users and their communities in several ways” (American Library Association).

I see two ways in which librarians can best approach the problem of DRM. First, we must help to educate our users as consumers of information. Whether they realize it or not, they regularly encounter DRM throughout their online lives, and as information professionals we owe it to them to help make them aware of the issues. Part of the DRM strategy is to change users’ perceptions of culture and technology, to encourage them to adopt a passive attitude toward using information content. “Those who design and deploy DRM systems tend to think of culture as something to be sold and consumed; fair use, remaking, tinkering and critique are outside of the paradigm within which they understand what they do” (Gillespie 227).

We should inform users that the library does not impose DRM restrictions on the content we offer, but that often we must agree to the restrictions in order to be able to provide online content at all. We should emphasize which collections are compatible with the widest range of devices and operating systems, and explain that we are not always able to offer content compatible with every system. (For example, for several years there were no vendors that sold Apple-compatible audio content to libraries.) In the absence of a DRM-free library vendor, we should encourage users to utilize for-pay vendors that do not use DRM as an alternative: for example,
Amazon.com now sells DRM-free audio content. Users that are better educated on the issues will come to see the library as their ally, not as an information obstruction.

Second, libraries are the primary customers of many vendors that sell DRM-encumbered information. We must vote with our wallets by voicing our problems with DRM to vendor representatives when we negotiate contracts, and by supporting companies like Springer and BWI that offer online content without DRM (Houghton-Jan 54). Publishers and vendors do respond positively to customer concerns about DRM: Knovel and Referex, among other vendors, have removed DRM systems in response to library and user complaints (Eschenfelder 218).

Information vendors are not evil. They are in business to make money, and they see DRM as one way to protect their means of income. But on this issue, libraries should take a stand against the pro-DRM stance of many of the companies we deal with, and ally ourselves with anti-DRM and pro-fair-use activist movements like EFF and Defective By Design to advocate for open, freely usable digital content.

A significant part of our role is to serve as an advocate for the user’s unhindered access to information, and when we do nothing to protest unreasonable DRM restrictions we implicitly give our consent. That puts us on the wrong side of the debate: that of the vendors, not that of the library users for whom we should be advocating.

References


There are disparate notions among people within the broad field of information and library science regarding exactly what comprises information science. One broad definition is provided by Tefko Saracevic: “Information science is a field of professional practice and scientific inquiry addressing the problem of effective communication of knowledge records – ‘literature’ – among humans in the context of social, organizational, and individual need for and use of information” (1055-1056). At its most basic, it seems that information science could be a neutral science if, indeed, it studies everything that is communicated, in any form. However, as noted in the above definition, the actual professional practice of information science involves placing value on the tools used for communication, thereby adding a burden of subjective interpretation.

Sandra Harding explains the myth of neutrality in the sciences, bringing up many examples which illustrate that what is considered important is dictated by Euro- and androcentric dominant traditions. Although more men work in the scientific fields, Harding explores implications of class and Western imperialism to explain why a feminist or critical stance can improve science by allowing alternate voices to be heard. She writes, “Science is politics by other means, and it also generates reliable information about the empirical world… It is a contested terrain and has been so from its origins. Groups with conflicting social agendas have struggled to gain control of the social resources that the sciences – their ‘information,’ their technologies, and their prestige – can provide” (10).

To the extent that library and information science (LIS) is, by self-definition, a science, we can learn from Harding’s assertions regarding Euro/masculine dominance and tradition, realizing that alternate methods of evaluation and obtaining books should be encouraged – for the growth of the science, and for the health of libraries as a part of communities. Challenging the status quo and questioning libraries’ compliance with outsourcing, for example, means welcoming alternative viewpoints and methods for evaluation. Ultimately, this questioning can shape our concept of what culture is, what is worth preserving, and what values are shown by our professional praxis.

Collection development tools are generally based on some type of statistics. Many of the tools that libraries routinely use for selection and weeding are
essentially based on quasi-scientific measurements, such as circulation and in-house use statistics. Another method might be comparing the collection to a comparable institution. Librarians also make use of census statistics and similar community analysis tools. While these are very useful, they also serve to reduce our own liability in making a wrong decision about what we should put in our libraries. However, at some point some expression of values surfaces, whether in discussing what types of books people should be reading, what should be made available, and even our conceptions of topics such as literacy (i.e., what people should know in order to participate in society).

As John Buschman and others have pointed out, there have been diverse applications of Foucauldian theory to LIS, but that Foucault’s contradictions cause difficulty in application. Looking back further (and further afield) to Marcuse and Giroux might provide a more coherent application of critical theory for LIS, as viewing information science through the lens of critical discourse exposes the political implications of our research, education, and practices (Buschman).

Libraries as Agents of Social Change

The idea of libraries as agents of social change has been reiterated for years. Benjamin Franklin, noting the impact of his 1729 public subscription library, writes in his autobiography, “Our people…became better acquainted with books, and in a few years were observ’d by strangers to be better instructed and more intelligent than people of the same rank generally are in other countries” (61), suggesting some level of social amelioration because of the presence of his library.

Sidney Ditzion’s Arsenals of a Democratic Culture traces the cultural foundations of American libraries, noting that post-colonial advocates saw libraries as a means to advance science and learning, prevent crime, and help raise the poor to higher social standing through diligent self-education while at the same time serving to keep the rich morally oriented through good literature. According to Ditzion, early American public libraries were fashioned as a means to create “a new order of merit based on intellectual culture rather than on wealth which had hitherto been the only title to eminence” (12).

Part of Andrew Carnegie’s philanthropic efforts for “the improvement of mankind” (Bobinski, 3) was giving “some $36,000,000…for library purposes” (7) around the world between 1880 and 1899. Even Melville Dewey’s 1893 motto, “The best reading for the largest number, at least cost,” has a connotation of the value of providing “the best reading” for social improvement.

Authors today have differing opinions on the wisdom of this social role connected with librarianship. In the compilation Questioning Library Neutrality, Jack Andersen, John J. Doherty, Shiraz Duranni, Elizabeth
Smallwood, Ann Sparanese, and others scrutinize libraries’ philosophical and/or practical role in American society. Andersen’s essay urges librarians to see themselves as neutral agents in the scholarly communicative process. By divorcing themselves from any particular doctrine or literature (of, for instance, the social sciences), librarians can view only the technical aspects of the transmission and storage of information. Doherty’s essay invokes the writings Friere, Giroux, and Budd in order to revisit the concept of a self-reflective praxis in librarianship, defined by Budd as “action that carries social and ethical implications and is not reduced to technical performance of tasks” (as quoted in Doherty, 109). Furthermore, Doherty relates selection of materials to the “Western cultural paradigm…that the resource selection process in libraries is hegemonic depending as it does on privileged source lists and methods of collecting titles” (111). Durrani and Smallwood emphasize the importance of libraries remaining rooted in their local community over a focus on collecting national bestsellers. They write that the “myth of the ‘neutral librarian’ needs to be exploded. There is no way that librarians are or can be neutral in the social struggles of their societies. Every decision they make…is a reflection of their class position and their world outlook” (123). They discuss the need for librarians to take part in the local struggles and to reject outsourcing of traditional librarian jobs, which are all too easily accepted and endorsed by the scientific-rational model of neutrality.

Sparanese writes a vivid account about her own experiences building collections that reflected her library’s diverse constituency: “I think I started to make the connection [between my former life as an activist and my life as a librarian] when I realized that my library…was not really serving the whole of our community.” She wrote, and received, a grant to buy lots of books, “even the most controversial ones,” about “Black life, Black writers, and Black history” to meet the needs of her service area. She then turned to the needs of the Hispanic population. As she explains, “the concept of activism or advocacy is seen as contrary to the idea of neutralism or neutrality in libraries” (74).

The purpose of the current article is to extend the above articles by examining culture-centered lenses through which library neutrality might be viewed. The lenses are related in that they offer criticism of the non-neutral systems which currently inform librarians as they develop programming and order books which attempt to support a non-homogenized constituency. Each of the cultural lenses demonstrates that information needs do not always fit a norm, and that information needs can not be met with a normative, privileged and homogenized product.

Cultural Propositions

In order for libraries to retain or reclaim a position that supports the full diversity of human cultural experience, they must look beyond mainstream media and easily obtained products. The systems in place that make librarians’ jobs easier (that is, the publishing and ordering systems) are
part of what D’Angelo calls the state of “Postmodern consumer capitalism [which] transforms discourse into private consumer product and as such reduces knowledge to mere information or entertainment” (1). The authors argue that librarians’ roles in the U.S. go far beyond merely providing access to products of the dominant culture, and that there is evidence that demonstrates a conflict between dominant and marginalized cultures within the library milieu. This argument proposes that:

- information does not equal communication,
- communication occurs within a larger realm of culture,
- communication involves knowledge and some knowledge is privileged above others,
- challenging what is privileged is a way to break down barriers, and
- challenging what is privileged is necessary to retain the democratic ideal of librarianship.

We will address each of these propositions in turn.

**Proposition 1: Information does not equal communication**

*Information* can be minimally defined as a message, passed from one entity to another (see Shannon and Weaver, and Beltran). But in addition to the transfer of scribbles, murmurs, or bytes of data, the transmission of information requires that there be a receiver, a human with the awareness, reasoning and judgment to decipher the message (Case), with the meaning and use of the message receiving more emphasis than the transmission of the message (Losee). In other words, “information remains nothing unless it is meaningful” (Lax, 4). With this definition, the value of information is found with the transfer of an idea. If no cogent message is transferred, no information has been passed or received (Losee). The act of informing, then, is the transfer of a message in a single direction. This passing of information is independent of feedback, response or even acknowledgement of reception of the message.

It is *communication* that adds a component of reciprocity, a two-way flow of information, incorporating the phenomenon of response or reaction to a sent message (Beltran). As the communication of information includes the presence of a human transmitter and a human receiver, information is inherently a social entity, an entity or concept that requires the company of “Others.” Information affects all levels of the social hierarchy and holds great potential as an equalizing tool.

**Proposition 2: Communication occurs within the larger realm of culture**

Language equally forms and is formed by culture. The words that people use to communicate, whether spoken or written, are observable expressions of culture. Those words influence how the word-users are perceived—that is, they are observable by outsiders. They are symbolic of the culture from which they spring, and they influence how culture is transmitted.
Literacy itself is one facet of language, and that with which libraries are fundamentally concerned. Language and culture work together to help people express ideas and identity.

By the same token, “when people control one another, they do so primarily through communication” (Beltran, 12). There is, to a certain extent, an industry behind the production of cultural goods. Editors and publishers make books available to us based in some part on how well they are predicted to sell. Producers finance television shows based on their appeal to a mass audience. French sociologist and public intellectual Pierre Bourdieu discusses the struggle between the dominant and dominated languages and cultures in the context of the educational system; he also specifically addresses the importance of the publishing industry’s role in legitimating one language (or, in reinforcing proper or dominant use of language):

The position which the educational system gives to the different languages (or the different cultural contents) is such an important issue only because this institution has the monopoly in the large-scale production of producers/consumers, and therefore in the reproduction of the market without which the social value of the linguistic competence, its capacity to function as linguistic capital, would cease to exist (Bourdieu, 57).

Public library services are specifically designed with the intention of drawing in more library users from the community. This cultural industry is caught between appealing to the largest possible audience and appealing to a more specific but underserved audience.

Nonetheless, libraries are not obliged to recreate the dominant culture by oppressing non-dominant cultures. Shiraz Durrani discusses the role of libraries in creating a space for the preservation and promotion of local culture. He cites multiple examples of libraries going against the grain of a corporate publishing world to support the local people—"to understand working people’s lives and struggles, be one of them, and then seek ways of creating a relevant library service" (162). His idea of library as agent of activism says that libraries should support popular movements by providing information and communication technologies with which members of otherwise suppressed groups can record their own viewpoints, which the library can then collect and distribute.

Durrani recommends that libraries team up with other cultural groups – local arts, music, drama, and poetry groups, for instance, to “[connect] people through non-print media” (292) in order to expand the boundaries of the library – to challenge the hegemony of the printed word. The goal of his suggestions is to reach across the boundaries that are imposed by the ideal of who a library is for (i.e., people who want to read popular books) to becoming a place where local culture can flourish.
Proposition 3: Communication involves knowledge, and certain knowledge is privileged above other

There are a number of different ways to think of culture, but we can begin with the premise that the products of some cultures, recognized as ‘high culture,’ are deemed more worthy of study and preservation (and thus promotion) than other types of culture. Another type of privileged culture is ‘popular culture,’ that culture that feeds and is fed by mass media. This is problematic on a number of levels for librarians, notably because the idea of the library is that it is a place that is supposed to promote equality.

If one adheres to the Library Bill of Rights, one might agree that:

I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.

II. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment. (ALA, n.p.).

Equality is not possible when one culture is valued above another; the institutions then become tools of the dominant society (for better or worse). They become agents for the reproduction of existent socio-political power structures, vested in the preservation and promotion of a particular type of cultural record, whether those records and documents exist, rather than people’s access to the tools necessary to thrive in the public sphere. The writings of Herbert Marcuse and Henri Giroux provide a way for us to conceptualize the problem of libraries in relation to linguistic (or cultural) minorities in society. The problem here, then, becomes not what is worthy of our attention as librarians, but how we can work to expand equality in the world of what we pay attention to.

Proposition 4: Challenging privileged information is a way to break down barriers

Traditional Marxist thought dictates that the world in which we function is controlled by a certain group of people, a ruling class, which we can call the dominant group. This group controls not only material goods but also culture, that is, what is recognized as legitimate, and what is not recognized, or is considered inferior in some way to that of the dominant culture, or what we could call ideology. Legitimization of that culture is a process of reification by institutions, which might include schools and libraries. Williams explained cultural ideology in Marxist thought as:
(i) a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group;
(ii) a system of illusory beliefs – false ideas or false consciousness – which
can be contrasted with true or scientific knowledge;
(iii) the general process of the production of meanings and ideas (55).

Under this framework, then, ideology is part of cultural hegemony, which
utilizes economic and social forces to influence the direction of society as
a whole, in favor of a particular group of people. Furthermore, the group of
people with the most power is the one which holds the most capital.

Language is one observable and recordable aspect of culture. When
cultures collide, one way to observe how conflicting cultures or languages
are interacting is through expression in the written word. Literacy can
demonstrate how a culture manages its resources and creates its own
evolution. When members of a culture use literacy for their own authentic
purposes, they work toward changing the conditions of their existence.
However, one problem found in studying multiple literacies—especially
one which is considered less important or counter to national homogeneity
– is that the vernacular is sometimes hidden; it is hard to observe in many
common public settings.

We can turn to Foucault to provide an explanation of this phenomenon;
furthermore, his explanation provides reason to embrace local literacies. In
private settings, or settings in which the dominated is the dominant, people
can be observed without the constraints of society’s gaze. However, in
public the dominant language or behavior will arise. Foucault [19] explains
this effect as panopticism, which occurs when disciplinary powers force a
person who is deviant (or different) to change his own behavior or language,
in effect disciplining himself. The ‘different,’ that which falls outside of the
norm, becomes a social flaw. The function of discipline “arrests or regulates
movements; it clears up confusion; it dissipates compact groupings of
individuals...[and] establishes calculated distributions” (219). In regards
to a dominated population, this division and domination is evidenced
by a police force and work system that reinforce systems of inequality:
“The constant division between the normal and the abnormal, to which
every individual is subjected...the existence of a whole set of techniques
and institutions for measuring, supervising and correcting the abnormal
brings into play the disciplinary mechanisms...which, even today, are
disposed around the abnormal individual, to brand him and to alter him”
(Foucault, 199). Viewing literacy practices in situ (that is, looking at how
individuals communicate within their own culture) is one way to find
out how people are shaping their own existence, in their own terms. Are
libraries disciplinary agents of the state, or proponents of cultural equality?
If, indeed, libraries embrace cultural differences and individuality (rather
than serve as a disciplinary force) we can see the importance of taking part
in production of local literacy products: it legitimates the authentic needs
and purposes of the people the library claims to serve.
Herbert Marcuse supplied an interpretation of critical theory which guided the propositions outlined in this paper. Although it has been applied to many situations, one goal of the critical theorists was to empower the lower classes through political means—to legitimate alternatives to a capitalist-driven cultural and ideological hegemony. The ultimate goal would be to create a world in which individuals are able to achieve freedom (that is, to become responsible for their own happiness) outside of the status quo (Marcuse, 138). Critical theory’s concern “with human happiness, and the conviction that it can be attained only through a transformation of the material conditions of existence” (Marcuse, 135) demonstrate the importance of library science’s continued resistance to library systems that submit to the global information hegemony. In short, critical theory posits that human happiness is held hostage to current “material conditions of existence,” and that increased happiness can be obtained by changing those conditions to ensure that oppressed peoples receive a more just and equitable treatment in the larger culture.

Three current studies of resistance

Library literature provides clear evidence of an attempt to change the material conditions of existence for library users. In some cases, these attempts are encouraged by libraries; in others, it is the communities themselves who work to produce the change. Adkins, Bossaller, & Thompson found evidence that libraries and community organizations were engaging in bilingual language and literacy instruction. This instruction attempts to place Spanish-speaking people in the mainstream society, thereby giving them a voice in the larger community. At the same time, many shops in a particular neighborhood had signs in Spanish and bilingual or Spanish-speaking employees. This demonstrates an effort by the Spanish-speaking community to validate its own language and culture by enabling people to obtain the resources they need without having to negotiate a potentially hostile culture. Locally produced literacy products demonstrated economic needs and material or experiential desires of Latinos living in a large metropolitan area. That message may have been hidden if one only studied the messages provided by the dominant culture.

Librarians use various tools to find out what they should provide for their communities. This is an effort to try to serve everyone in their service area—users, as well as non-users. This puts local collection development efforts at odds with the industrialization of the library profession. Heather Hill examined discourse in Requests for Proposals and other documentation regarding public library transitions to corporate ownership. In the RFPs, she found little regard for actual community needs: “Instead, the statements are cookie-cutter responses and lend credence to the idea that the contractor has some sort of master proposal with areas that read ‘insert library name here’” (Hill, 75). Furthermore, by putting the contracted company in the role of ‘expert’, the community loses its authority. Hill notes that when a formerly public library becomes a privately owned entity (that is, it outsources every function of the library so that the employees
are no longer public employees), “the library may be redefined in this
process by commodified, capitalist rhetoric that changes the relationship
with the community by positioning the library as a business” (Hill, 12).
The effect is that “underserved populations that are more difficult to reach
may be excluded in the outsourced library as the contractor focuses on
those benchmarks easiest to achieve with a narrower, convenient to access
population” (Hill, 8).

A third study by Annette Goldsmith explores how “editors’ decision-making
processes and motivations [illuminate] the current state of children’s book
translation publishing in the U.S.” (Goldsmith 1). Goldsmith discusses the
importance of having “culturally conscious (children’s) books,” defined
as those “that appear to present an authentic sense of the culture from
an insider perspective,” available to children in the U.S. (1). Culturally
authentic translated books enable the reader to see a different world, by
preserving the original meanings and viewpoints of the foreign text. She
finds that although some excellent books are published, many more are not
published because of business considerations (such as the risk of publishing
something which might not be popular, and the cost of translating).
Additionally, publishers often intervene in an authentic translation in favor
of one that is altered in order to fit a potential market – making it less
authentic in order to be more profitable.

Hill’s and Goldsmith’s studies illustrate the importance of the market in
decision making, or the ‘norming’ of the language of the marketplace in
public discourse. It also points toward the danger of rational technological
mentality in decision-making. Marcuse famously coined this tendency
“the Establishment,” defined as the “susceptibility of all disciplines to
organization in the national or corporate interest” which “has made the
goods of culture available to the people – and they help to strengthen the
sweep of what is over what can be and ought to be, ought to be if there is
truth in the cultural values” (Marcuse 17).

**Proposition 5: Challenging what is privileged is necessary to retain the
democratic ideal of librarianship**

One’s perceptions of culture are largely based on one’s identity and one’s
affiliations. Marcuse said that “the ‘validity’ of culture has always been
confined to a specific universe, constituted by tribal, national, religious, or
other identity” (15). When one is embedded within a particular culture, be
it the dominant culture or the culture of one of many various immigrant
groups, there is always an “Other” or even an “Enemy,” an outcast or
divergent culture that is viewed in opposition to one’s own culture. To a
native-born American, the Spanish-speaking immigrant may be the Other,
and even if the native-born American wants to welcome that immigrant, it
is done through the mores and values of the native-born American.

The integration and resistance of a linguistic minority in relation to the
dominant culture has implications for wider cultural participation.
Practically speaking, linguistically isolated people are vulnerable—communication with banks, community officials, and others is limited, and the numbers of linguistically isolated people are rising. According to the Census Bureau, “in 2000, 4.4 million households encompassing 11.9 million people were linguistically isolated” (Shin and Bruno 10). Beyond purely practical reasons, though, language use has implications for libraries and other cultural institutions. How libraries and other cultural institutions try to include vernacular cultures will determine who participates. When a library staffed by English speakers works with a Spanish-speaking community that uses primarily vernacular (Spanish) communications, that library’s attendance will reflect the particular portion of the community that is more comfortable using English, but may not reflect other portions of that community. When a library chooses to provide only bilingual books, rather than Spanish-monolingual books, that library is making a statement as to the relative worth of the Spanish language.

Libraries exist to promote and preserve culture. It is natural, then, that there should be an argument within librarianship regarding how to work with people outside the dominant culture, including the role of libraries in becoming an inclusive institution. Whether or not the library, as an institution, serves to reify the social structure or to defy it is a matter of great importance, because the stance one takes in this regard dictates what will be included in the services of that library. This extends to all areas of culture, including which languages it will support and how that support will happen. Libraries responding to multicultural populations are constrained by both the dominant culture and the cultures of the patrons. A library that provides fotonovelas, Spanish-language books for adults that use a comic book format, is serving a particular population, perhaps at the expense of another population. One librarian reported that when she asked about fotonovelas at the Guadalajara Book Fair, she was told that those were the kinds of things read by truckers and laborers (see Adkins, Bossaller, and Thompson). However, it is worth noting that Mexican attendees of the Guadalajara Book Fair are generally more literate and book-oriented than the average person, much as an American attendee of Book Expo in Chicago might be. The acceptance or rejection of fotonovelas as a valid form of literature may be indicative of a site of resistance between dominant and non-dominant cultures in Mexico.

In the study of Kansas City Latino print culture (Adkins, Bossaller, and Thompson), a variety of languages was noted in public settings, but the emphasis in many settings is on teaching and learning the dominant language. Cesar García Muñóz wrote in the Spanish newspaper El Mundo that the Spanish language lacks cultural power in the U.S., and will not gain influence here as a result of that. Humberto López Morales, editor of the Enciclopedia del español en los Estados Unidos (Encyclopedia of Spanish in the U.S.), suggested that the Spanish language had become a territory of affirmation and resistance for Spanish speakers in the U.S.
Social agencies, libraries, and schools often celebrate multiculturalism within the constraints of the dominant culture. That is, there are certain things which are encouraged, such as art, while use of the vernacular language is discouraged, or thought of in terms of deficits. Spanish language materials for children are often bilingual, rather than monolingual Spanish. One librarian we spoke to said she purchased bilingual materials as a way for the library to support English-language acquisition. The library, as an agent of the dominant culture, felt that acquiring the dominant language was a more pressing need for its patrons than maintaining their mother tongue. However, maintenance of the mother tongue was supported passively, as the library had not limited its collection to English as a Second Language learning materials.

The same librarian who tried to buy fotonovelas mentioned the importance of children and parents being able to share a work of literature regardless of the parent’s English-language literacy. Stable family relationships and the development of literacy are assumed to be supported by both the dominant and non-dominant cultures in this scenario. Goldsmith indicates that the editors who decide to publish foreign children’s books might feel they have less control over an already-published text which they cannot substantively change. The editors who sought international children’s works for translation and publication in the U.S. valued these books as potential bridges between cultures and nationalities, helping American children to learn about their peers in other countries. However, the U.S. publishing industry does not have a mechanism developed for training editors how to acquire and publish culturally-conscious children’s materials (Goldsmith 120). This suggests that these materials are viewed as marginal to the success of the American publishing industry.

**Implications and Conclusions**

This article discusses the disconnect between the professed library values and the business-driven information machine which librarians rely upon. It reiterates the idea that information science cannot be a neutral science; it is laden with values, as is any science. Because we ultimately strive to serve all people, we cannot simply reduce our professional decisions to available technological tools and outsourcing. There are important implications in considering the notion of information science as a tool for social progress, and as a tool which must be thoughtfully employed for the good of society. The social divide or gap is the issue that is truly of concern. When Harding said:

> It is a challenge for feminism and other contemporary countercultures of science to figure out just which are the regressive and which the progressive tendencies brought into play in any particular scientific or feminist project, and how to advance the progressive and inhibit the regressive ones. The countercultures of science must elicit and address these contradictory elements in the sciences...(11),
she could have been explaining the technical-rational model used by libraries which make it more difficult to look outside of what is easily supplied to our users. The Frankfurt school said that positivist science cannot be used to justify the ends; ethics should be employed when making decisions. Giroux, reflecting an ideology that is difficult to put into practice, said that “what is important to stress is that fundamental categories of socio-historical development are at odds with the positivist emphasis on the immediate, or more specifically with that which can be expressed, measured, and calculated in precise mathematical formulas” (15-16).

“Differentials in power and privilege” result in haves and have-nots on various levels, including those who have quality food supplies, health care, and education resources and those who do not (Galtung and Wirak). Social stratification fragments society, creating marginalized and peripheral groupings that remain out of reach of the increasingly individualized access to information that benefits the development of a society. Social thinker Frantz Fanon wrote that decentralization of information resources is key to political and social development. The switch in focus to information literacy, or the ability to acquire and use information to meet daily needs, for example, leads to a certain amount of decentralization, an inextricable step in political and social development. As citizens have more open access to legal and political resources, they make better-informed decisions. Having access to reliable medical websites or knowing whom to call in the case of an emergency creates independence and can cut health costs. In business, the trend is moving toward a system where, rather than report to a hierarchical management structure, workers are required to actively participate in the management of the company and contribute to its success. Virtual program teams and online education require that workers and students possess skills beyond those of the basic reading, writing and arithmetic.

Technology gives us the ability to make our jobs easier; we can easily analyze exactly what gets checked out from our libraries, and we can outsource our ordering, so that all that we have to do is (similar to bookstores) put the books on our shelves, without ever thinking about what we’re doing. The ease which is bought by technological tools comes at a price, though; we need to constantly be vigilant about what we’re doing so that we don’t mindlessly become part of the machine that excludes and reinforces inequalities. This is accomplished by going out into the world to see what is not easily available, who isn’t easily served, what we collect, and what we preserve.
References


This talk in some ways channels a familiar cast of characters from my book, *The Late Age of Print*: people like Oprah Winfrey, an institution like Amazon.com, and a technology like the electronic book. But I hope to take them in a somewhat different direction. The story that I tell in *The Late Age of Print* is a fairly optimistic one, but unfortunately I will set things off on a bit of a dour note by talking about the abuses of literacy, Amazon Kindle, and the right to read.

On October 24, 2008, the media mogul Oprah Winfrey went public with the details of her new love affair. It had begun innocently enough over that summer and her appearance that fall day on “The Oprah Winfrey Show” would leave no doubts about just how smitten she’d become. There was no reason to believe that Winfrey would be leaving her long term partner, Stedman Graham, anytime soon however. The new object of her affection was just that: it was an object, or rather a gadget. “Anyone who knows me knows that I’m really not a gadget person at all, but I’ve fallen in love with this little baby,” Winfrey reveals. She was referring to the Amazon Kindle, the handheld electronic reading device that is sold exclusively on and designed by Amazon.com.

For others, though, the love affair with Kindle has been anything but candy and roses. In June 2009, seventeen year-old Justin D. Gawronski was anticipating the start of his senior year at Eisenhower High School in Michigan. His Advanced Placement English teacher, anxious to hit the ground running come September, had issued a summer reading assignment and so Gawronski did what any honors student worthy of the name would do. He promptly got the book and got right down to work. Rather than purchasing the print edition of the required reading, however, Gawronski downloaded it wirelessly onto his Kindle. Over the next few weeks he carefully read his way through about the first third of the e-book, bookmarking pages, highlighting passages and typing in notes in preparation for the start of the fall term.

But when Gawronski booted up his Kindle on Friday, July 17, 2009, he was dumbstruck to see the volume that he had been reading disappear from the device. It had been deleted remotely by Amazon. Amazon had pulled...
not just any book from the young man’s Kindle, but George Orwell’s paranoid novel of life under totalitarianism, *1984*. One can only respond: “Oops.” It was hardly an isolated case, in fact, prompting more than a few Big Brother analogies to follow in the wake of the incident’s revelation in the news media.

Gawronski’s story shows how Kindle isn’t just another handheld mobile device. It belongs to an increasingly prevalent type of technology, what Jonathan Zittrain calls “tethered appliances.” He explains, “they are appliances in that they are easy to use while not easy to tinker with. They are tethered because it is easy for their vendors to change them from afar long after the devices have left warehouses and showrooms.” In other words, tethered appliances oblige you to enter into enduring relationships with corporate custodians who make it their responsibility to manage the inner workings of these devices, despite what your wishes may be.

My argument today is that, however convenient a Kindle may be for acquiring e-books and other types of digital content, it nevertheless predisposes the act of reading to serve a host of inconvenient, we might even say illiberal, ends. My broader related claim is that Kindle personifies a challenge to a core set of liberal democratic principles, which also happen to share an enduring relationship to reading in the United States. Ultimately, then, there is more at stake than just a smoldering obsession with a high tech gadget when we’re talking about Kindle. There’s a need, I want to argue, for a new and fundamental right to counterbalance the illiberal tendency it embodies, with what some would call a right to read, which in the United States would complement the existing right to free expression.

*Into the Amazon*

Kindle was probably the first standalone e-reader to provide for real time communications between bookseller and consumer, thanks to its on board 3G mobile phone technology. One result is that readers can download the complete contents of any Kindle-formatted book in under a minute, provided of course you’re within range of a cell tower. It’s little wonder, then, that the Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos describes Kindle as a service and as “an extension of the Amazon store,” rather than more generically as a handheld mobile device or even more specifically as an e-reader. Much has been made about Kindle’s downstream capabilities, but what about the data Kindle transmits upstream, back to Amazon.com? The language that Amazon uses in its promotional materials describes the flow of data in this direction, upwards. It suggests little more than user friendliness, as if Kindle’s backup and syncing features existed only for the sake of helping bibliophiles to make the most of their digital libraries. Yet the Kindle license agreement and terms of use tells a rather different story: “The Device Software will provide Amazon with data about your Device and its interactions with the Service (including available memory, up-time, log files and signal strength) and information related to the content on your

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Device and your use of it (such as automatic bookmarking of the last page read and content deletions from the Device).

Once the data arrive in the server cloud, these and other bits of information including any textual annotations and highlights you may have made, become subject to the Amazon privacy notice. The latter, the privacy notice, ironically opens up quite detailed information about your personal reading habits to a host of uses beyond the express purpose of backing up and syncing. I’ll return to this point shortly, but first let me say a few words about some of the changes that Amazon has made to its corporate identity and core mission. The shift started sometime around 2002 when the company began looking for ways to improve its hardware utilization. The issue was the overcapacity of the servers and other computing infrastructure that had supported its website, which the company had designed or scaled in anticipation of meeting sudden but infrequent increases in demand. As Nicholas Carr observes in his book *The Big Switch*, “Amazon had to construct its system to be large enough to accommodate the burst of shopping during week after Thanksgiving even though that week comes around only once a year. Most of the system’s capacity went unused most of the time.” Consequently, Bezos and company decided to rent out its excess computing capacity to just about anyone willing to pay. Amazon.com subsequently spun off a new division of the company, Amazon Web Services or AWS.

Launched officially in 2006, AWS belongs to a broader movement into technology known as utility computing. Whereas the philosophy of personal computing stresses widespread computer ownership just in case, the philosophy of utility computing perceives that as a waste of money and other important resources. Instead, the latter stresses only the barest minimum of computer ownership, and mostly then of web facing devices that have been significantly downscaled in terms of both memory and horsepower. If you’ve ever heard of the thing called the netbook, this is kind of what utility computing people have in mind as the future of computing. So, in the event that someone requires additional storage space, processing capacity or the like, a large centralized provider will be happy to deliver it just in time via the web, typically for a fee.

So the point here is that Amazon is not just the retailer that many of us think we know. It’s also becoming what *Business Week* has called “a kind of 21st century digital utility,” not unlike free services that are ad supported such as Google and Facebook. Now Amazon has been collecting, analyzing, and making use of customer information since its inception back in 1994. But in conjunction with its recent emphasis on web services, it seems apparent that Kindle is deepening and widening the company’s data mining efforts in several ways. First, by allowing Amazon to drill down beyond the retail layer, a proven source for what Oscar Gandy calls “actionable customer intelligence,” into the bedrock of everyday life itself. Second, and more specifically, by transforming people’s idiosyncratic and heretofore mostly private reading itineraries into data generating activities. And finally,
then, by implicating those acts into a larger system of technological and productive relations, what you might call the ambient informatics of cybernetic capitalism.

The upshot of this is that Kindle raises all sorts of questions about propriety. In the emerging world of tethered appliances, to whom does reading belong? To whom, and this is a strange question, should it belong? What happens once our reading becomes the object of another’s persistent scrutiny?

**Propriety**

Many of us were taught at a young age that it’s impolite to read over someone else’s shoulder. Doing so amounts to an intrusion of the reader’s personal and cognitive space, or stronger still, a violation of his or her privacy. The everydayness of this simple life’s lesson provides a complicated history of readers and reading whose intellectual origins can be traced back to classical liberalism. In 1859, John Stuart Mill referred to “the inward domain of consciousness as the locus of absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects,” a conception of the self that has helped to frame subsequent understandings of how and why people read. Consider the novelist Vladimir Nabokov, for instance, who claimed that readers were born free and ought to remain free. Essayist Sven Birkerts offers a similar opinion, suggesting that “reading is the intimate, perhaps secret part of a larger project, one that finally has little to do with the more societally-oriented conceptions of the individual.”

At the heart of the liberal formulation of reading, then, we find sovereignty and solitude as its optimal, perhaps even normative conditions. This, of course, begs the question of what happens to reading and to the broader sense of privacy with which it’s been associated over the years once our books and periodicals become exposed to the world. Indeed, this seems to be the fundamental question that Kindle poses. As a tethered appliance, it subjects readers and consequently their reading habits to ongoing surveillance. Now this statement merits some qualification, however, because the surveillance that I’m talking about doesn’t necessarily involve active human scrutiny, at least in the first instance. It’s perhaps best described as algorithmic in the sense that most, if not all of the eavesdropping and data mining take place automatically, carried out by Amazon’s powerful computer systems. So in this case there’s no conscious doer behind the deed in other words, of course beyond the computer programmers whose interests should extend strictly to the collection and not to the substance of Kindle data, at least hypothetically they don’t. And yet, there nevertheless remain important reasons to be concerned about this kind of data gathering, despite the apparent lack of active scrutiny on Amazon’s part. The crux of the matter comes down to what I want to call information repurposing. In his book *The Digital Person*, Daniel J. Solove asserts there are few effective measures in place to control the afterlife of digital data, what he calls (and I love this phrase) “the perspiration of the information age.”
Corporate privacy policies offer varying levels of protection, in most cases insuring against the most egregious abuses of personal information. But on balance, Solove argues, these policies tend to be full of loopholes and exceptions that render them dangerously confounding. For its part, Amazon states that it may transfer a customer’s personal information to affiliate businesses in the event of mergers or acquisitions, but pledges that it “remains subject to the promises made in any preexisting privacy notice.” So far, so good. The problem, however, stems from the practicalities of delivering on promises such as that, where personal information flows from one large organizational, technological, or policy setting into the next. What Solove calls “privacy drift” is one well documented outcome in which compliance with an institution’s express privacy goals falls off or becomes ineffective the farther that personal information migrates from the party who had collected it initially. Given Amazon’s sprawling corporate holdings, privacy drift seems like a reasonable and even pressing concern. Amazon’s corporate holdings are extraordinary: everything from the Internet Movie Database all the way to Zappos.com and shoes.

Also troubling here, though, is Kindle’s potential to render users vulnerable to unprecedented levels of government surveillance of their everyday reading activities. Now library loan records and bookstore sales receipts are well established mainstays of criminal investigations. This, of course, is so despite the best intentions of very good booksellers and very good librarians. The assumption on the part of government officials is that evidence of what a suspect has been reading may ultimately help them to establish a pattern of behavior leading up to a crime. What’s important to note is the legal standard that applies in such cases. Typically, investigators need only acquire a subpoena to access a suspect’s library records or bookstore receipts. In contrast to search warrants, subpoenas are issued not by neutral magistrates but by prosecutors who, like the police, have a strong interest in catching criminals and thus are predisposed to honor the requests. Kindle, however, runs afoul of the liberal belief in the sanctity of reading and hence the impulse to safeguard the sovereignty of readers. According to Amazon’s privacy notice, “We release account and other personal information when we believe release is appropriate to comply with the law.” This isn’t an unusual statement at all. What is unusual, though, is the nature of the personal information that Amazon maintains in the case of Kindle users, namely the bookmarks, the highlighted passages, the annotations, and so forth that I have previously mentioned. Amazon possesses detailed records of not only what, but indeed how people read, information that would ordinarily be subject to fourth amendment protections against unreasonable searches and seizures which typically require a search warrant. But because these data are transmitted electronically to the company and then archived in its computer cloud, United States federal law considers these not to be private information but instead, stored communications. This is a special genre of information that the law considers to be beyond the scope of the fourth amendment because it is shared with and maintained by a third party. The upshot is that the everyday reading itineraries of Kindle owners suspected of crimes are
subject not to the probable cause warrants standard but instead to the much more relaxed requirements of a subpoena.

A Right to Read

The name Kindle harkens back to the myth of Prometheus the Titan, who in Aeschylus’s play *Prometheus Bound* brought fire to humanity along with mathematics, medicine, metallurgy, and other forms of knowledge that helped free us from the power of our absolute rulers, the Greek gods. Thus, with Kindle Amazon has channeled one of the most enduring fables of human liberty only to stand it on its head. The question that I want to wrap up with is, what happens when a people either chooses or is compelled to read on a device that is so connected electronically, that it manages to disconnect that people from some of the key tenets of liberal democratic culture?

The connection between reading and liberal political culture is a contingent, and a necessary one. It’s an always fragile union forged out of historical circumstance and it promises to weaken and maybe even dissolve unless steps are taken to strengthen it in perpetuity. Julie Cohen, for her part, argued that what’s needed to secure the sanctity of reading in the wake of technologies like Kindle is nothing less than a right to read. Such a right, she contends, is grounded in the right to free expression, and is codified in the first amendment to the United States Constitution. Cohen says, “freedom of speech is an empty guarantee unless one has something, anything, to say, the content of one’s speech is shaped by one’s response to all prior speech, both oral and written, to which one has been exposed.” Cohen goes even further than this, however, suggesting that the right to read should include the ability to do so anonymously. Reading has always been an expressive activity in its own right, resulting in dog eared pages, marginalia, and other types of communicative qualities. But tethered appliances clearly raise the stakes of this expressivity. When a reader’s private scrawl is no longer secreted away in the odd corner of a random volume, but is instead archived in third-party databases where it is identifiable and accessible, one must wonder what would happen to the expressive circuitry of a people. Cohen rightly fears that it could be scrambled or short-circuited, pointing to, as she puts it, the likely chilling effect that ubiquitously exposed reading would have on people’s willingness to select, access, and engage reading materials controversial or otherwise.

“The right of freedom of thought and intellectual inquiry necessarily includes, (I would even say demands as a communications scholar), the freedom to read unobserved.” This is currently impossible with Kindle, regrettably, since Amazon offers no choice but to opt in to the device’s innocuous sounding backup feature. But what a right to read might help put in place then, beyond the freedom to enjoy an e-book without someone peering over your shoulder, would be a strong, pro-reader default. You might think of it as a legal touchstone whose purpose would be to represent readers in absentia, in contexts where their interests might otherwise
be forgotten or inadequately accounted for. So on its own, Kindle isn’t abusive, at least as far as I’m concerned. It’s nothing more and nothing less than, as Oprah Winfrey put it, a gadget, albeit something of an enthralling one. But the network of legal, technical, and economic forces to which it presently belongs does manage to expose Kindle users to all sorts of abuses of literacy. And those abuses are likely to continue and perhaps even escalate, absent the protections of a right to read.

Transcription produced by Beth Friese
TOWARDS A CRITIQUE OF DIGITAL NETWORKS FOR LEARNING

by Ulises A. Mejias

(Editors note: the bulk of this essay is a talk given at the Georgetown University Library, Scholarly Communication Symposium on “Social Media in the Classroom: Implications for Teaching and Learning” February 19, 2010. Portions of an earlier - and highly interesting blog post on “The Tyranny of Nodes” {http://blog.ulisesmejias.com/2006/10/09/the-tyranny-of-nodes-towards-a-critique-of-social-network-theories/} were used to frame the argument in the absence of the papers to which Mejias was responding. That blog posting was also the basis of the invitation to speak at Georgetown.)

Most critiques of the rise of the network as a model for organizing social realities focus on what it has replaced: tightly-woven, location-specific communities (a community itself can be defined as a particular kind of network, but for the moment let’s stick to these conventional terms). Wellman (2002) traces how social formations have developed from densely-knit traditional communities to sparsely-knit but still location-specific “Glocalized” networks (think cities connected to other cities), to networks unbound to any specific physical space, or what he calls Networked Individualism, where “people remain connected, but as individuals rather than being rooted in the home bases of work unit and household.” (p. 5). An important characteristic of Networked Individualism is the overcoming of physical space. Today’s networks connect individuals regardless of the distance between them. More than its elimination, Networked Individualism promotes the reconfiguration of distance: it is not only our relationship to the far that is changed, but also our relationship to the near. Critics sensed a threat to the near in this reconfiguration, and saw in Networked Individualism the destruction of communal location-specific forms of sociality (i.e., the irrelevancy of the near). However, this has not proven to be necessarily the case, as Network Individualism can play a part in (re)connecting people to the local. The network then also becomes a model for “reapproaching nearness” (Mejias, 2005), with the added benefit that nearness now encompasses new forms of global awareness.

In the context of education, we find similar tensions: while on the one hand digital networks (and specific sets of tools like social media) are said to expand the horizons of what we can learn and how we can learn it, there are also concerns about the kinds of knowledge they might devalue. Accordingly, I want to offer three points and critiques for further examination: The first is that there is a danger that digital networks and
social media could produce learners who can’t think outside the network. Second, the fact that using social media tools controlled by corporations might be convenient and cheap, but it might not always be in the best interest of the learner or the learning process. And finally, I’m going to end with what I think the role of the university should be.

Learning and Thinking Outside the Network?

There is a danger that social media could produce learners who can’t think outside of the network. I teach a class called Social Networks on the Web, and there is a moment early in the semester where my students acquire what I call “network goggles.” They start reading all of the literature on networks, and they start seeing networks everywhere: in the sciences, in the natural world, in their lives. They get very excited. I’ve been thinking about what that means, what acquiring this information does to us. Basically, I think the network has become a very powerful episteme. In other words, it’s not just a learning method, a way of going about learning about the world; it’s also a way of making sense of the world. I think what has happened is that networks are not just metaphors we use to describe groups of things, they have also become templates, and they have become models. But we use them not just for making sense of the world, or interpreting the world; we use them to actively organize and shape our social reality. My work is about exploring the limits of networks as templates: what they make possible or what they make impossible; through what dynamics they include and through what dynamics they exclude.

A couple of concepts make it easier to describe these dynamics. The first one I call nodocentrism. In network theory, the distance between two nodes is understood to be finite. If you have two nodes in a network, there’s a way to link to them, to connect them. But the distance between a node and something that is outside the network is for all practical purposes infinite. If something is not on the network, if something is not a node, it cannot be rendered or displayed in the network. If roads and highways connect any two nodes, they also allow for the commuter to quickly bypass the space between the nodes. Those locations may be nodes in other networks, but from the perspective of the two nodes being connected, they do not matter. In other words, a network is a way of organizing reality that recognizes only other nodes—which is why I call this property nodocentrism.

In response to that, I offer the concept of paranodality. When we think about a network diagram, what do we usually see? We see a lot of nodes connected by links, and then there’s a lot of empty, white space, between the nodes. I’m arguing that this space is not empty, it is not dead. This space is actually populated by multitudes that do not conform to the organizing logic of the network. From the perspective of the network, the paranodal is perhaps ineffable; it is that which cannot be Googled. But we are interested here in precisely those things that fall outside of the organizing logic of the network. The network is an epistemology, a way of interpreting the world, a model for organizing reality. But the paranodal represents the only site
from where it is possible to unmap or unthink the network, to disidentify from it and think alternative forms of identity and reality.

If we were to apply these concepts to the learning process, we could ask which kinds of things are included and which kinds of things are excluded when learning happens as an activity within the network. We could start to think about the networked social media tools we use as facilitating a form of epistemic enslavement. If a specific form of knowledge cannot be rendered with these tools, then it cannot be part of the network, and it might as well not exist. The question then is: who gets to decide what to include and what to exclude from these networks? This brings me to my second question and critique.

Convenient and Cheap, but in the Best Interest of the Learner or the Learning Process?

My thesis is that networks are machines for increasing participation, but these machines simultaneously increase inequality. If we look at the science of networks, there is a law called preferential attachment. Basically it means the following: if you have a new node joining the network, and that node has a choice between linking to other nodes that have very few links, or linking to other nodes that have lots and lots of links, what do you think they’re going to do? They’re going to link to the nodes that have more links. This is basically what allows scale-free networks to scale, what allows networks to grow very rapidly and very efficiently. The result is that the rich become richer in network terms. Those nodes that already have a lot of links keep accumulating more and more links so they become wealthier.

Think about it this way: if you have an educational video and you want to share it on the Web, where are you going to go? Most people would say YouTube. Or if you want your students to try micro-blogging, where are you going to direct them? Most people would send them to Twitter. This is why the monopsony is the dominant market structure of Web 2.0. Let me explain what I mean by monopsony. We’ve all heard of monopolies. In a monopoly you have a single seller. A monopsony is a kind of the reverse: you have a single buyer and many sellers. I think this captures very well what we have in this era of user-generated content because we are all producers of media. We all generate digital content. But increasingly, there are fewer and fewer options for where we go to upload that content—the monopsonies. Hence I say that the monopsony is the dominant market structure of Web 2.0.

I want to argue that using these monopsonies, these tools, can be cheap and can be convenient, but the problem is that the relationship between learners and social media companies is not symmetric. When we promote the use of these privatized social media tools in education, we have to be very careful about addressing disparities like surveillance: the fact that many of these companies monitor and track our very movements when we
use their products, sometimes without our knowledge. We have to think about intellectual property issues: the fact that when you upload a picture to Facebook, you might be surrendering certain property rights, etc. We have to think about the pervasive presence of advertising, and perhaps the kind of advertising that promotes unsustainable habits of consumption. All of these disparities are involved with social media. We are all familiar with the narrative of the Internet ending the era of one-to-many communications of traditional media. Supposedly, the Internet has ushered in an era of many-to-many, peer-to-peer communication. We no longer have to depend on the monopolies. However, what I’m arguing is that one-to-many is not giving way to many-to-many without first going through many-to-one, the monopsony. This is the scenario that we have: the many sellers uploading their content to one buyer.

The Role of the University

I return to my point about paranodality and the idea that it is only the outsides of the network where we can unthink or disidentify from the network, from the mainstream. If universities are part of the mainstream, they could still help us remain critical about the application of digital networks in the learning process. For instance, when it comes to the impact of monopsonies, I argue that universities should develop alternative social media tools and release them as public goods. We could promote their use through projects both within and outside the university. The university should be a laboratory for these kinds of tools, and it should strive to provide these alternatives to the public openly, instead of partnering with corporations in the creation of more inequality. This, of course, is not the direction things are currently going. But faculty and staff, I believe, can play an important role in promoting the development of these open source tools, and the promotion of online public spaces that are basically free of some of the influence of monopsonies.

Transcription provided by Tracy Nectoux

References


In the spring of 2009, newly enrolled at the University of Texas (UT) School of Information, I piled in the car with my partner and a friend and drove north up I-35, a major highway that segregates Austin by class and ethnicity. At Southwestern University, the Feminist Studies Program was hosting “Trangenderism and Citizenship: A Dialogue” between Eli Clare and Matt Richardson. Talking together, the two authors and scholars modeled a possibility for thinking through connections among ethnicity, nationality, class, disability, gender, and sexuality. After the event, Richardson and I began to talk about cataloging. From the violence of borders drawn by highways to those drawn by language, I wanted to attempt a new possibility for building relationships and visibility in the library catalog. After teaching women’s and gender studies and documenting feminist bookstores as vital distribution sites that changed publishing as bookwomen lobbied for (and as) women readers, I saw a need for librarians to amplify their similar roles, particularly in a changing book industry.

Richardson, UT faculty in the English Department, the Center for African and African American Studies (CAAAS), and the Center for Women’s and Gender Studies (CWGS), had already asked UT Libraries Women’s and Gender Studies subject specialist Lindsey Schell whether it would be possible to improve catalog access to and representation of Black Diasporic LGBT materials at the UT Libraries. When I proposed, with Schell’s support, a student project changing subject headings for select titles, staff in the cataloging department responded by dismissing the “complex” project for such a “small collection.” Frustrated, I created an independent study that summer with UT School of Information professor Melanie Feinberg to imagine a critical cataloging practice for Black queer and trans materials; through this course, I drafted a proposal to change UT...
cataloging and to develop a critical theory for library staff. Richardson and I used the proposal to garner support from CAAAS and CWGS, both of which pledged funds for growing the collection. The proposal and coalition fueled advocacy for what would become the Black Queer Studies Collection (BQSC).

This spring, Schell presented the proposal to Jee-Hyun Davis, Assistant Department Head, Cataloging and Metadata Services. Davis approved the proposal, and after negotiations with her supervisor, is implementing the proposal. Fifty items purchased with Richardson’s library funds form the core of the collection. Catalogers added to these records a uniform identifier, “Black Queer Studies Collection,” approved by the CAAAS Executive Committee, in the searchable MARC field 590, used by UT Libraries to designate other virtual collections. Bibliographers can identify records and catalogers can add the MARC identifier with a single grouped process. To grow the collection, I compiled a list of OCLC numbers for all materials listed in the groundbreaking bibliography Carry the Word: A Bibliography of Black LGBTQ Books (Fullwood, Harris, Moore) and currently owned by the UT Libraries. Catalogers will add the BQSC identifier to this list of over 450 items. Richardson will serve as liaison with Schell to continue additions at the recommendation of local scholars, and I have developed publicity to promote use of this research and visibility tool.

The BQSC project provides an ideal entry into articulating the critical practice of library staff because scholars of its subject, the field of African and African American LGBT studies, explain how categorization and naming have played a central role in supporting historical and ongoing oppression. Concerns of categorization, erasure, and renaming remain at the core of African and African American Studies and its intersections with fields including queer theory and transgender studies. Institutions have used quantification and categorization to oppress each and all of these identities. In turn, social movements founded in liberal rights-based theories of liberation have appealed for entrance into categories of acceptability, thus indicating the power of identity categories.

The work of African American Queer and Trans Studies tracking categorization as a tool of oppression demonstrates that librarians, as critical practitioners, have a responsibility to explore and resist this categorical violence. Iconic queer theorist Michel Foucault argues that the “homosexual” identity was consolidated in the 1800s by a discourse which recognized the “homosexual” as pathological. Roderick Ferguson critiques the limitations of this history by challenging readers to examine how systems of identity categorization (medicalization in this case) engage with narratives of sexuality not apart from but steeped in narratives of race and gender, both also medicalized categories: “As Foucault’s text takes psychoanalysis and medicalization as racially denuded procedures and as the taken-for-granted domains of sexuality’s emergence, the text has monopolized the conversations about sexual formations and steered them away from considerations of race” (86). With limited institutionally-
recognized categories for human value, Ferguson emphasizes, “African American elites learned the tactics of sexual and gender regulation from the itineraries of imperialism, imposing those tactics onto black poor and working-class folks. […] By adopting normative gender and sexuality, African American elites waged war against the state’s racialized exclusions, teaching their children the same strategies” (98). By separating race, gender, and sexuality studies, information organizing practices drive these category-reifying strategies of exclusion in pursuit of acceptance and an end to violence.

For example, library studies scholars Hope Olson and Rose Schlegl contribute to a body of work on how the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) support the erasure of marginalized communities. Olson and Schlegl point out that LCSH can create significant barriers to information access and contribute to the oppression, particularly because LCSH entries are prominent in catalog records: “the omissions and racist, sexist, xenophobic, etc., biases in subject headings are presented to us directly on the screens of our online catalogues” (66). Olson and Schlegl also emphasize that classification and, thus, context similarly constructs a narrative that can support or obscure researcher access to and perception of materials: “Biases in classification are more subtle and many library users, as well as some librarians, regard classification as simply a shelf address, disregarding the influences of context on how a work is perceived” (66). The BQSC addresses both naming and context through creating a virtual collection that creates a significant context for the materials. Olson supports this use of MARC records to reimagine the catalog: “Use of this MARC authority field could be expanded to other types of relationships between specific headings or more specific codes could be added to the subfield that defines relationships” (534). As BQSC use of MARC radically suggests, LIS professionals have the tools to easily create significant change.

Because of the shortcomings in library systems of information organizing, the BQSC use of an independently-published bibliography to recognize relevant records acts as a model of librarianship taking direction from a grassroots initiative. Community-generated bibliographies indicate the ongoing need for more innovative information organization and emphasize the role of information organization in perpetuating or interrupting narratives about its subjects. Marginalized communities have acted as their own librarians and developed bibliographies to connect readers with resources obscured by naming, classification, and collection policies. Carry the Word, the 2007 joint project of two independent Black queer presses, RedBone Press and Vintage Entity Press, offers an extensive bibliography along with interviews with contemporary Black LGBT authors. In his introduction to the research tool, author Reginald Harris writes the editors’ hope “that libraries and bookstores will use this bibliography to assist in expanding their collections; that scholars will use it as an aid to their research and curriculum development; and that readers will use it to discover books they may have missed and discover new authors to explore” (Fullwood, Harris, Moore x). Harris’ specific goals and the recent publication of this
bibliography emphasize the urgent need for innovative research services in this field. Librarian Tatiana de la Tierra supports this call. Thwarted in her research of Latina lesbian literature by Boston University’s (thus, Library of Congress’) cataloging practices, de la Tierra explains the relevant function of alternative research tools: “petitioning catalogers to modify subject headings as appropriate is a good strategy, because the catalogers who have the power to name, to brand, and to label a book are only human. But beyond book-by-book petitioning, writers and publishers need to employ bibliographies” (102). The use of such bibliographies indicates a niche where librarians might articulate their value to scholars. When scholars, authors, and publishers are participating in a revolution of information organization, librarians should take this as an indication of user need and as an opportunity for communicating and demonstrating to a public the vital role of librarians in their research. I suggest that librarians can reclaim their centrality to the research process by reflecting on their practices and creating, in collaboration with scholars, innovative tools for research.

Because librarians cannot change information organization without reflecting on their own unearned privilege and how that privilege is reflected in exclusionary information systems, I participate in that self-reflection here. Erasing myself in this narrative would enact my own white privilege. I am a white, anti-racist, queer LIS student. These identities, some of my categories, begin to describe how this proposal establishes my identity, just as the work of library professionals establishes not a neutral practice but a specific embodiment of their own identities. LIS scholar Anthony Dunbar counters the fiction of objectivity, noting of archivists’ work: “when a record is created, it establishes at least two identities, that of the documenter (or records creator) and the documented (the subject of the record)” (124).

As a white anti-racist scholar calling for the revision of library practice around materials by and about African and African American lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, I draw on feminist theory to emphasize the importance of my initial collaboration with and the need for library professionals’ continued collaboration with scholars of African and African American queer studies in carrying out this project. Librarian and Kenyan-exile Shiraz Durrani notes the concrete effects of identity, of representation, within institutional structures: “Change will only come when there are enough Black librarians in the position of power at local and national level. Those who wield power in the profession also control finances, research grants and make policies” (88). As a queer, white lesbian I participate as an involved ally with queer people of color, and I recognize, with Ferguson, that narratives of sexuality cannot be separated from those of race, gender, class, nationality, and ability.

This recognition of a need for agency of historically marginalized people within the profession does not absolve the responsibility of those whose identities do not align with the subject at hand. Feminist ethicist Linda Alcoff points to feminist and critical race theorist Gayatri Spivak’s
explanation that rejecting responsibility under cover of referring to a more "authentic" speaker essentializes the speaker, makes the same assumptions that LIS puts forth now about neutrality, that a particular speaker could divulge an absolute and objective truth by virtue of her location (Alcoff 491). To acknowledge that it is, thus, impossible for anyone to speak objectively is to identify each speaker as a theorist, one who reflects on and contextualizes their narratives, and is to identify the LIS professional herself as theorist, critical cultural worker who creates identity (Feinberg). Alcoff concludes that we “should strive to create wherever possible the conditions for dialogue and the practice of speaking with and to rather than speaking for others” (491). This ethic of dialogue is most dear to me as an anti-racist activist and teacher; central to the process of proposing the BQSC has been generating a vibrant dialogue around information systems and scholarship at the University.

This dialogue between scholarship and librarianship identifies the vital need for the BQSC to redress violences carried out by silences in the catalog. In Matt Richardson’s 2006 afterword to Aunt Lute Books’ new edition of the novel Her [originally published in 1995], Richardson demonstrates the power of a list of texts when he employs an abridged version of a Black lesbian bibliography to dispute claims that ‘there's not much out there’:

[Cherry Muhanji’s novel] Her is not alone as a Black lesbian text that challenges conventional perspectives on Black history and culture. It joins a body of work published since the 1970s by African American women with explicitly lesbian themes, such as Ann Allen Shockley’s Loving Her (1974) and Say Jesus and Come to Me (1982); Gloria Naylor’s The Women of Brewster Place (1982); Ntozake Shange’s Sassafrass, Cypress, & Indigo (1982); Audre Lorde’s Zami, A New Spelling of My Name (1982); and Jewelle Gomez’s The Gilda Stories (1991). The Serpent’s Gift by Helen Elaine Lee (1994); Po Man’s Child (1999) by Marci Blackman; Callaloo & Other Lesbian Love Tales (1999) by LaShonda K. Barnett; and The Bull-Jean Stories (1998) and love conjure/blues (2004) by Sharon Bridgforth are only a few of such titles published in the U.S. after the publication of Her. (“Black Queer Memory” 193-4)

Richardson’s list emphasizes a body of literature and points to how critical librarianship, by creating or not creating similar lists, substantiates or undermines a field, a literature, and a readership. Through lack of adequate subject headings and research tools which make the materials difficult to locate individually and impossible to locate together in any significant number at a single time, the pre-BQSC UT Library Catalog continued historical erasures of African and African American lesbian, gay, and transgender materials and, thus, identities. The following obstacles to research in the catalog interface offer opportunities for professional librarian engagement.

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Progressive Librarian #34–35
Current subject headings insufficiently describe the subjects of African and African American lesbian, gay, and transgender materials (Valentine; Olson); Table 1 collects four examples from the Library Catalog. Among these examples, subject headings easily identify *Carry the Word* as a text relevant to African and African American Lesbian, Gay, and Transgender Studies. The remaining records, their subjects obscured by their records, are *Erzulie’s Skirt*, Ana-Maurine Lara’s novel also published by the Black queer publisher RedBone Press and about two African Caribbean women lovers’ creation of home in a stratified Dominican Republic; *love conjure/blues*, another RedBone Press novel and about African diaspora and queer participation in southern African American communities; and *Stranger Inside*, a feature film by well-known African American lesbian filmmaker Cheryl Dunye and about Black lesbians and the prison industrial complex. These records are under-identified and, in the case of *Stranger Inside*, mis-identified. A subject heading for *Carry the Word* still includes the term “homosexuality,” regarded by scholars to be a strictly medical and pathologizing label (Foucault; Queer Students Alliance 27).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author: Publisher</th>
<th>Subject Headings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| *Carry the Word*    | Steven G. Fullwood, Reginald Harris, & Lisa C. Moore  
American authors -- Bibliography  
Gays’ writings, American -- Bibliography  
Lesbians' writings, American -- Bibliography  
Bisexuals’ writings, American -- Bibliography  
Transgender people’s writings, American -- Bibliography  
Homosexuality and literature -- United States -- Bibliography  
African American authors -- United States -- Interviews  
Gay authors -- United States -- Interviews  
Lesbian authors -- United States -- Interviews |
| *Erzulie’s Skirt*   | Ana-Maurine Lara  
RedBone Press | Families -- Dominican Republic -- Fiction  
Women -- Dominican Republic -- Fiction |
| *love conjure/blues* | Sharon Bridgforth  
RedBone Press | No subject headings                                                                 |
| *Stranger Inside*   | Cheryl Dunye  
HBO Home Video | Reformatories for women -- Drama |

Table 1.
The challenges of the library catalog are in many cases symptomatic of systemic problems within an increasingly anti-professional LIS field that devalues library workers, casting them as technical assistants rather than critical practitioners (Feinberg; Samek). The Libraries can remedy this on a local level and model a response to widespread problems of access generated by a lack of self-reflectiveness within the profession. By acknowledging that a catalog is not neutral and redressing the erasure of Black diasporic lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender materials by the current absence of information organization tools, library professionals can counteract anti-professional claims to objectivity in LIS and take a rightful role in critical engagement with knowledge organization’s production of meaning (Dunbar; Olson & Schlegl). Melanie Feinberg suggests information organization requires that library professionals take up a critical practice: “an inclusive approach to information system design might involve the definition and justification of a particular stance toward the information, as appropriate for the use context of a particular system. Instead of one domain to be discovered, I submit that there are multiple domains to be created.” Responding to this call for active creation of multiple contexts, with a focus on self-defined contexts for materials by historically marginalized communities, will articulate the value to the University of library professionals’ work.

Infrequent local catalog intervention reinforces the identity of library professionals as interchangeable technicians. Because it is not locally controlled, WorldCat as a standard search interface for an increasing number of university catalogs exacerbates existing catalog problems. Biases in computer systems, “if the system becomes a standard in the field” can become “pervasive,” Batya Friedman and Helen Nissenbaum observe. A centralized catalog may also be more difficult to change: “Unlike in our dealings with biased individuals with whom a potential victim can negotiate, biased systems offer no equivalent means for appeal” (Friedman & Nissenbaum 22). The creation of the BQSC emphasizes the critical work of librarians.

The BQSC ultimately enables a radical transformative reading practice. Categories, context, and information organization form the core of Richardson’s proposed methodology for reading a Black queer subject:

[A] different kind of Black women’s history will come into focus if research brings a Black queer subject into full view. […] In order to study Black female subjects who are not feminine and feminine Black female subjects whose sexuality is not produced solely in relation to men—in other words, subjects whose gender is not predicted by biological sex (femininity not assumed for female bodies)—analyses must take into consideration the way categories of gender and desire are produced for raced subjects. There is no telling what can be accomplished from breaking secrets and telling other truths. (“No More Secrets” 73)
Richardson calls on scholars to redefine the categories of gender and sexuality as well as to examine “the way categories of gender and desire are produced for raced subjects.” LIS professionals must claim their responsibility in this and related scholarly discussions in order to support and collaborate in a critical practice that works towards liberatory information systems that do not oppress or marginalize.

Works Cited


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Author’s note: My gratitude to Melanie Feinberg for theorizing about the ethos of information systems and for the challenging and pleasurable independent study that prepared me to write the proposal for the Black Queer Studies Collection and this article. For the Black Queer Studies Collection, I thank collaborators Matt Richardson for his writing and activist vision, Lindsey Schell for her advocacy, and Susan Sage Heinzelman and Omi Osun Joni Jones for their interest and support.
LOOKING BACKWARD, IMAGINING FORWARD: CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF PROGRESSIVE LIBRARIAN

by Elaine Harger

There are more books to contemplate than stars in a night on the high seas. In this immensity, how is a reader to find his personal constellation, those books that will put his life in communication with the universe? And how is a single book among the millions to find its readers?

Gabriel Zaid, 2003

In the early 1990s, the political constellation for self-identified progressives included shared books, experiences, ideas and perspectives, which provided a more-or-less common ground for activism. Reference points might include: the writings of thinkers as diverse as Karl Marx and Alice Walker; experiences, either lived directly or through the media, of boycotts, sit-ins, draftcard- or bra-burnings, union organizing, window-smashing; and reading, maybe even writing or photographing or cartooning or distributing, for the free/underground/alternative press. The 20-, 30-, 40-, 50-something progressive at the beginning of the end of the 20th century would probably have opposed covert U.S. military actions in Central America, the overthrow of Salvador Allende, endless Israeli violence against the Palestinians, and to have been aware of the dictatorial natures of those that U.S. foreign policy considered “friends and allies” – Saddam Hussien, the Taliban, the Shah of Iran, Manuel Noriega, etc. The progressive would also be a more-or-less critical friend of socialist governments around the globe, participate in anti-apartheid boycotts, understand the neoliberal, capitalist intent of the Republican’s (and increasingly Democrat’s) “downsizing government” policies and, in general, stand in alliance with liberation movements of women, blacks, labor, gays, disabled and seniors – and be conscious of how such labels worked to both limit and liberate members of the groups identified. A progressive could be relied upon to be something of a critical thinker, to practice “reading between the lines,” to be adept at cutting through the
b.s. of Madison Avenue and Cold War propagandists, and to be skilled at simultaneous translation of “doublespeakese.”

From this milieu arose the Progressive Librarians Guild, founded by librarians alarmed to be witnessing the language, practices and priorities of commerce gaining foothold within our profession. The editorial in the first issue of Progressive Librarian, published in the summer of 1990, described the concern that led to the establishment of PLG,

We saw in our libraries the move towards commercialization, we saw “marketing” or “merchandising” enthusiastically embraced as a “strategy” for public library development, we saw our main forum, Library Journal, moving towards the world of controlled market circulation where the line between advertising and articles disappears. In short, we saw that the line behind which the library stood as a moral and educational force in society was being breached by the tide of fads of the American way of doing business.

This essay has a two-fold purpose – to celebrate 20 years of the publication of Progressive Librarian and to attempt to articulate some ideas regarding the next 20 years of progressive librarianship. What it is not is a description of any official position of the journal or the Progressive Librarians Guild, but rather the product of my own reflections regarding librarianship and the world within which we now find ourselves working (or not) as librarians.

Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.

Frederick Douglass, 1857

Two thousand and one was not the first year that the U.S. government declared a “war on terrorism.” As Noam Chomsky reminds us, the first “war on terrorism” was declared by President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s during the U.S.-sponsored terrorist wars across Central America, the Middle East, and Africa. The Reagan administration called terrorism a “plague spread by depraved opponents of civilization itself.” In keeping with this sentiment, in 1987, the United Nations General Assembly proposed a strongly worded condemnation of terrorism. One hundred and fifty-three countries voted for it. Only the United States and Israel voted against it. They objected to a passage that referred to “the right to self-determination, freedom, and independence...of people forcibly
deprived of that right...particularly peoples under colonial and racist regimes and foreign occupation.” Remember that in 1987, the United States was a staunch ally of apartheid South Africa. The African National Congress and Nelson Mandela were listed as “terrorists.” The term “foreign occupation” was taken to mean Israel’s occupation of Palestine.

Arundhati Roy, 2004

The first issue of Progressive Librarian (PL), published in the summer of 1990 on the heels of the founding of PLG, was given its title by none other than Sandy Berman who exclaimed that the journal of PLG could have no other title than Progressive Librarian (the subtitle, A Journal of Critical Studies and Progressive Politics in Librarianship, came later in 1998 with issue #14). The first issue was to be a contribution to the debate taking place within the American Library Association (ALA) in which the upper ranks of power in ALA were attempting to overturn the association’s official support of the cultural boycott against apartheid institutions in South Africa. The “Preview Issue” as we called it reflected the determination of members of PLG to contribute to a librarianship that acknowledges the political engagement of professionals, their associations and workplaces, and critically examines their various roles in either maintaining or challenging social, political and economic power. In the case of the cultural boycott, one of the forces behind attempts to call off ALA’s support was none other than the publishing industry, in the form of the Association of American Publishers, with the active support of former ALA Director Robert Wedgeworth. Another boycott opponent was the journalist Nat Hentoff who joined AAP in arguing that the boycott was actually an act of censorship. On the pro-boycott side were members of ALA’s Social Responsibilities Round Table.

While it is beyond the scope of this essay to describe in any depth the boycott itself, ALA’s initial support of it, or the debate to end this support, the editors of PL, in support of the cultural boycott, expressed:

…the hope that the articles and documents published here make clear that American First Amendment rights are really not the issue; the issue is the reality of power in South Africa. By turning the sanctions debate into a question of censorship, we ignore the relationship between information and power in any society. 5

“The relationship between information and power...” – should not this relationship be of central concern to librarianship, to library and information science? While many within the profession insist that information is politically neutral and that librarians must maintain that neutrality, PLG argued from its inception that “neutrality” is a bogus claim. The “PLG Statement of Purpose (draft),” which appeared in the Summer 1990 issue states, “…we will dispute the claim for the library as a neutral, non-political organization that serves best when preserving the status quo…” One very clear example, at the time, of the political nature of librarianship, and of
ALA in particular, was the fact that one of the articles published in this first issue of PL had, in fact, been solicited for publication by *American Libraries* and then rejected. This piece, “The Starvation of Young Black Minds? A Critique” by Al Kagan and Corinne Nyquist, was an insightful and accurate analysis of an Association of American Publisher’s report calling for ALA’s abandonment of the cultural boycott on the grounds that it was tantamount to censorship. After much debate, supporters of the boycott within ALA were victorious and the anti-apartheid movement continued to receive support from American librarianship. (For background information on the various boycotts against apartheid in South Africa see Howard Clark’s short article “Actions and Solidarity campaign with South Africa.”)

The point of this example from the early days of PL is that it serves to illustrate the spirit of critique and activism that animated the journal, the organization, and the members of PLG at that time, as well as today.

Essential to an understanding of PLG’s opposition to professional “neutrality” is the fact that the notion that a relationship exists between knowledge (information) and power is nothing new. This recognition, after all, is at the root of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which establishes legal protections for freedom of speech and the press. The history of librarianship itself is sprinkled with instances of librarians who refuse to wear the mantle of neutrality. Why then, does librarianship so persistently claim that a position of neutrality (rather than advocacy and partisanship) is the only legitimate one for librarians as individuals and in association?

In addressing this question, it is important to note the fact that neutrality has many forms, and yet mainstream librarianship tends not to recognize the complexity of the idea or the ways in which context differently defines “neutrality.” In an attempt to “unpack” the notion of neutrality, I think it helpful to look at the following aspects of the term and its contexts in trying to understand its appeal as a position for the field:

Neutrality in History – The roots of librarianship are imbedded in service to ruling elites: monarchs, religious authorities, commercial interests. Our profession came into existence in symbiotic relation to the rich and powerful, relationships that continue to this day albeit modified in some cases by political developments such as democracy, the growth of the public sphere, and ideals of human equality. However, any librarian who wanted to stay in the good graces of his patron would certainly maintain at least a neutral position toward the wishes, expectations, and demands of that patron no matter what the librarian’s own views.

Neutrality as Respect – Once librarianship entered into service to the public at large, neutrality gained legitimacy in, at least, one sphere: in the behavior of the librarian toward the library patron. Patronizing attitudes, expressions of superiority, sexist/classist/racist behaviors and policies
poison relationships in libraries that exist to serve all people. Such behaviors, whether consciously or unconsciously expressed, are rightfully prohibited and a neutral demeanor demanded by our profession. Although we might wish it were not so, we recognize that there are, for example, racist and sexist librarians. However, expressions of personally held, mean-spirited beliefs or conduct conveying any level of disrespect are not acceptable at either the reference desk or in policies that regulate relations between the library and its constituency.

Neutrality as Balance – Related, in spirit, to the above is the idea that librarianship must be content neutral in collections and services. We must not exclude from the library ideas to which we (individually or collectively, privately or publicly) are opposed – even those that serve to undermine the library itself, the public good, social relations, and the environment.

Neutrality as Fear – The librarian’s fear of being fired from her or his job and the library’s fear of budget cuts or other loss of support foster legitimate concerns, especially in hard economic times, but this fear is a tremendous, even fatal, point of weakness. Fear…bringing us full circle back to our roots, as servants to power.

For these reasons, the insistence on neutrality is a powerful one – in the first instance, the continuation of the historical and present relationship of librarianship to power is obscured through claims to and insistence upon political neutrality; in the second, it addresses a very real impediment to the humanistic, democratizing mission of the library; in the third, we are called upon to collect a full range of views, but more-often-than-not we don’t, or in our neutrality we treat both truth and lies as equals; and in the fourth instance, the notion of neutrality both justifies compliance with power and offers a modicum of protection from it. PLG is opposed to a blanket acceptance of neutrality as a guiding principle for librarianship on three basic grounds – first, that it is rooted in fear, second that it is a roadblock in the democratizing and liberating missions of libraries, and third that it is a myth. As for behavioral neutrality, as long as it carries with it a tinge of friendly helpfulness, then it is, of course, to be embraced.

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My assistants and I believed that we should attempt through books to take each individual... and develop him to his full potential as a reader, widening his interests and deepening his understanding until he came to know that he was a member of one race – the human race – and a citizen of one planet – the earth.

Margaret A. Edwards, 1970

There have been, of course, librarians who do not accept that neutrality (in all its aspects) should occupy the position of polestar in the constellation
of librarianship. The belief expressed above by Margaret Edwards is not neutral, but acknowledges another guiding light – the concept of social responsibility. Indeed, the idea of the social responsibilities of librarianship is nothing new and through the years progressive-minded librarians have made many demands of the power structures of their times: open stacks and foreign language collections as advocated by John Cotton Dana in 1903; library services for teens advocated by Margaret A. Edwards in the 1950s; an end to Jim Crow libraries and library associations demanded by E. J. Josey in the early 1960s; out-of-the-closet library services and librarians; and a wide variety of revolutionary library services/collections/jobs/cataloging for all as articulated by contributors to publications such as *Revolting Librarians* (1972), *Alternative Library Literature: a bienneal* (1984-2002), and *Revolting Librarians Redux* (2003).\(^\text{10}\)

In late 2004, depressed over the re-election of George Bush as president, John N. Berry III, former editor-in-chief of *Library Journal*, reflected on the failure of librarianship in respect to our mission as a democratizing influence within society. Berry was haunted by a passage from the 1852 report establishing the Boston Public Library:

> For it has been rightfully judged that – under political, social, and religious institutions like ours – it is a paramount importance that the means of general information should be so diffused that the largest possible number of persons should be induced to read and understand questions going down to the very foundations of social order, which are constantly presenting themselves, and which we, as a people, are constantly required to decide, and do decide, either ignorantly or wisely.

In thinking about the failure of librarianship in providing information that would have helped the public make wise decisions at the ballot box, he wrote:

> As for inducing citizens to read and understand those issues, only a very few of we timid librarians have ever dared to even attempt that challenge. We have not even dared to tell the citizens that they need to know the truth, and that we have it in our collections and services... This is the civic failure of the public library in America, in the world. Librarians have been excellent servants, effective instructors in information seeking, great builders of diverse and deep collections, but they have not confronted the citizens with this reservoir of information.\(^\text{11}\)

He notes that, of course, there are exceptions. If he were to name any, Margaret Edwards would probably make the list. She and her colleagues, after all, worked to bring the truth of racial equality into the minds of young readers during the era of Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Movement. Another might be, John Cotton Dana worked to make acceptable the idea that books in all the languages of a community belonged in the library.
Also on his list might be members of ALA's Social Responsibilities Round Table, maybe even some PLG members.

The idea of the social responsibilities of librarians and libraries is closely related to the notion that “persons should be induced to read and understand questions going down to the very foundations of social order.”

The introduction to the Mission, Priority Areas, and Goals of ALA's own policy manual states:

ALA recognizes its broad social responsibilities. The broad social responsibilities of the American Library Association are defined in terms of the contribution that librarianship can make in ameliorating or solving the critical problems of society; support for efforts to help inform and educate the people of the United States on these problems and to encourage them to examine the many views on and the facts regarding each problem; and the willingness of ALA to take a position on current critical issues with the relationship to libraries and library service set forth in the position statement.  

Does this charge not call upon librarians to dare to tell our library users that they need to know the truth about our society and its problems?

*Progressive Librarian* is committed to publishing articles that might assist readers in developing an understanding of the role the library, its practices and policies play within society at large. Not that false or misleading or seemingly irrelevant information doesn't have its usefulness, after all, sometimes it is when we are most lost that the truth, once glimpsed, shines most brightly.

An example of *PL*'s work to publish insightful examinations of the profession can be found in this issue, in the article by Bossaller, Adkins and Thompson who describe the role ideology plays in the exercise of power. This theoretical approach serves as a way-marker, as a polestar in the constellation of progressive librarianship. It is a simple, but potentially liberating insight that

...ideology is part of cultural hegemony, which utilizes economic and social forces to influence the direction of society as a whole in favor of a particular group of people...the group of people with the most power is the one which holds the most capital.

The role that ideology plays in both perpetuating and challenging social injustice, political oppression, economic exploitation, and the position the library occupies along the transmission route of ideologies that support these injustices have been regular themes in the pages of *Progressive Librarian* since the first issue. *PL* is, after all, “A Journal for Critical Studies and Progressive Politics in Librarianship.” In the pages of *PL*, readers have found critical analyses of the ways in which librarianship
either supports power structure status quos or joins in opposition to them as allies to liberatory social movements. From Kagan and Nyquist’s exposure of the economic interests of publishers who opposed the cultural boycott against apartheid institutions within South Africa, to Berman’s description of the ideologies inherent in subject headings in his “The ‘Fucking’ Truth about Library Catalogs (PL Summer 1992), to Good’s “The Hottest Place in Hell: the crisis of neutrality in contemporary librarianship” (PL Winter 2006/07) and to this issue’s publication of PLG’s statement regarding Wikileaks and the Library of Congress (p. 75), the editors of Progressive Librarian have worked to bring to the attention of our profession the dire need for awareness and change if librarianship is ever truly to become an “arsenal of democracy.”

Teacher seeks pupil, must have an earnest desire to save the world. Apply in person.

Daniel Quinn, 1992

According to all the information we possess, it is all too likely that we must reckon with a worldwide collapse of the ecosystem during the lifetime of the middle and younger generation, not even waiting for the youngest generation to reach maturity. In our country – beginning probably on the coasts and rivers – the collapse will be especially dramatic.

The resulting attempt by people to save their own situation will lead to a frightful struggle of all against all. Perhaps we could call in our military to keep order for a time and especially to secure supplies from outside. But the latter is by no means certain, because weapons are spreading rapidly. In twenty years there will be far more nuclear-armed countries than there are today…and nuclear terrorism. And we know how vulnerable our complex infrastructures are.

If we want to avoid this, we must face the danger now while we still have a braking distance that might just be sufficient. Admittedly nobody can say what exactly is the degree of irreversible damage that can never more be made good, although certainly no exterminated species can be resurrected. But let us agree on a plan to prevent the ultimate overloading and resulting collapse of the biosphere and the atmosphere. We can do this if we put our heads together and rein in our egoism.

But we must begin with ourselves.

Rudoph Bahro, 1987
A founder of the German Green Party, Bahro’s description 23 years ago of his thinking in regard to the future rings true today, but with ever and ever more urgency as each page of the calendar floats off into the past. Were he alive today, Bahro would see how close to the mark he turned out to be – has not the U.S., for instance, been calling in our military “to secure supplies from outside” in Iraq? Every time I drive down Puget Sound’s Highway 99 (tank filled with gas extracted from imported oil) there is a person, usually a young man, but I’ve seen a young woman too, with a big, arrow-shaped sign that bounces in the air “Guns & Ammo.” The sign points to a shop – an eye-catching, low-tech advertising campaign along a road that has nearly as many gun shops as espresso shacks. Apparently, people in my neighborhood are arming themselves at discount prices. Today in the U.S. we have also come to the point where every person who boards an airplane is treated as a possible terrorist – are we being prepared to “get used to the idea” that the person standing next to you, or the family living next door, or the kid walking down the street, just might be a terrorist, perhaps deserving detention, questioning (or more) by the authorities? Is the TSA actually softening us up (while they either radiate or feel us up) as a prelude to a new sort of racial profiling in which, for safety’s sake, we learn to tolerate treatment for middle class, white Americans that we already accept for Blacks, Hispanics, punks, and others? In early 2004, the New York Times reported a Pentagon study on climate change, and quoted the British newspaper The Observer’s description, “Pentagon tells Bush: climate change will destroy us. Secret report warns of rioting and nuclear war.” Should we expect the military to use peaceful means to handle civilian unrest when crops begin to fail and infrastructures collapse? If librarians are to engage in our social responsibilities, we not only need to be aware and to understand today’s social problems and the direction in which they are headed, but we must also develop our capacities to creatively conspire with our communities to change the way we live.

For the remainder of this article, motivated by my own sense of urgency regarding (1) widespread social complacency, despondency, duplicity and denial in regard to environmental matters, and (2) our unstable economy, I wish to suggest an approach progressive librarianship might take in the times we now live (and are entering) that recognizes, accepts and enthusiastically embraces the challenges of the present by engaging in work grounded in the social responsibilities of our profession. This task is personal and political, involving changes in mindset and lifestyle, challenging everything we’ve been led to believe about ourselves as individuals, as people living in the United States of America, and as one strand in the web of life on Earth.

My reading, conversations and experiences of the past 20 years prompt me to identify some areas of engagement – personal and political – which might help guide in the task to use whatever “ braking distance" society might have to avoid sudden collision, collapse and catastrophe that is in store for us when the oil runs out (or becomes too expensive for anybody.
but Bill Gates or the Pentagon to buy) and when our polluting ways catch up with us.

Mindfulness – as individuals we must foster within ourselves and in relation to others the ability to think critically and to live mindfully and compassionately. We must challenge our notions of who we are. We are headed toward an identity crisis of all time and must prepare ourselves for the transition.

Welcoming – as individuals and in association we must be prepared to welcome every person into the task of transitioning from where we are now to where we wish to go.

Truthfulness – in pursuing the unfinished quest for equal rights and opportunity as our ultimate goal, not only for humans, but for every species that still lives on this planet, a commitment to the highest levels of truthfulness, in a society sickened with spin and b.s., where opinion rooted in self-interest masquerades as “freedom” of speech, will be indispensable in navigating toward uncharted regions.

Advocacy – we must continue to oppose false ideals of neutrality and accept our role as advocates for truth and equality within our communities, and put our skills as librarians at the service of movements for social change – movements that desire decent lives for everyone, of course.

Transition – we must engage as individuals and as members of community in the creative challenge of transforming our current (fossil fuel intensive) way of living to one that will not continue to destroy life on this planet. We must also demand that our professional associations, local communities and the businesses that serve both join in these efforts.

Librarianship stands at the intersection where knowledge and individual meet. We are certainly not the only ones in this position, but we clearly could assist our communities in confronting decades of inertia, propaganda and feelings of uselessness in meeting the challenges that industrial nations have brought down upon the heads of all.

Chicken Little (and Hollywood, and the Pentagon) was right. The sky is, indeed, falling. We can let it fall or we can do something to prevent total collapse. We have a choice – inaction or action? The science tells us that time is running out. We can’t sit around doing nothing, carrying on business-as-usual for another decade. So where to start?

As Rudolph Bahro wrote, “We must begin with ourselves.”
So, what’s a librarian who wants to save the Earth to do? Here’s a brainstorming of ideas:

Believe that change is possible and that, while the going might be tough at times, the process will be filled with possibilities of creativity and community that we can hardly imagine:

– subscribe to Yes Magazine, let library patrons have a source of good news for a change;
– feature Democracy Now! http://www.democracynow.org/ on your library’s homepage;
– support community gardening, circulate garden tools as well as books;
– invite Social Forum activists to use the library, encourage them to become friends of the library.

Begin the process of changing one’s own views on the relationship between self and planet:

– help launch Northwest Earth Institute discussion groups;
– let your feelings of urgency motivate selections of readings for book clubs and topics for programming.

Bring to the attention of our communities ideas regarding humans and planet that truly assist in the project of transitioning toward a way of life which is “mutually beneficial” to every being and every thing that rests on this planet:

– invite community members who experienced WWII rationing programs and victory gardens to talk about them in the context of discussions about rationing and gardening for transitioning from fossil fuels to whatever energy source is next;
– harness bike-power to run amplifiers for concerts or other festive events.

Breathe new life into every nook-and-cranny that constitutes librarianship and ask questions!

– We love books, but to what extent is the publishing industry merely an ideological and physical arm of the consumer society, making its own special contributions to the destruction of the planet?
– Ask to what extent do librarians act as runners between the dealers and the addicts of mindless reading? Think “ideological hegemony” here and take a close look at your public library’s periodical section.
– Computers are great, but are they and the infrastructure required to support them sustainable? And, if not, what does that mean for our profession?
– Libraries usually do a wonderful job serving our communities, but when times get tough (think of the riots the Pentagon is worried about) can we say we played a role in contributing to dialogues that
enabled the diverse elements of our community meet the transition peacefully?

– Our research institutions are absolutely necessary, but how much of what they do is actually helping in the transition ahead?

– Does an individual’s personal urge/habit/“need” to consume the Earth’s inhabitants – whether mineral, animal, plant or human – entitle him or her to do so? Is my desire to fly home for the holidays worth the damage done to the atomic structure of the atmosphere? When do we start putting the planet and all its life ahead of individual desires that are fueled and supported by economic and social structures that are unsustainable?

– And, as one last sample question, yes, China is catching up to U.S.-levels of planet destroying activity, but don’t we need to clean up our own home before we inspect that of another? The hypocrisy of talk-show hosts and politicians needs to end.

Plant a seed, help it grow, see for yourself that nature is beautiful and generous, and know from this experience that, fundamentally, human nature is the same.

This essay began with a quote from Gabriel Zaid’s *So Many Books: Reading and Publishing in an Age of Abundance*. We are no longer living in an “age of abundance.” There is no longer an abundance of fresh air, clean water, jobs or oil, although in some areas we do have great abundance – of ignorance, depression, mean-spiritedness, violence, weapons, and death. But as far as life supports go, we are facing an age of scarcity and limits in every respect except one – human will, creativity and courage.

Reading and publishing, libraries and librarianship must engage in some very deep questioning as we approach the future. Resources are dwindling and our environment is increasingly poisonous. For example, as a school librarian, I find myself wondering how long the seemingly endless production of children’s books should continue. How much does this industry contribute to the perpetuation of a consumer mentality? Might the resources – oil for shipping, trees and water for paper, creative energies for writing and illustrating – be put to better use? To what extent are libraries complicit partners with a culture industry that overloads, distracts, anesthetizes, and dumbs-down our citizenry? What role do almost countless book awards play in perpetuating the publication of all the stuff that really isn’t worthwhile? Sure, readers are provided with a tremendous range of “choice” but at what cost – morally, environmentally, socially? In 1969, Margaret Edwards wrote,

…we librarians are not to blame that Americans are the worst-read people of the world’s democracies… or are we?

While the many book clubs and the proliferation of paperbacks have
stimulated reading, we cannot by any stretch of the imagination say that the citizens of the United States, who are expected to lead the free world, are reading enough to make them worthy of the trust. We can’t derive much understanding and vision from cuddly children’s books, cookbooks, and Bob Hope.

Today one might add romance novels, car magazines, X-box, etc. to her list, but Edward’s question stands the test of time – are the citizens of the most powerful nation on Earth “worthy of the trust”? While an answer in the affirmative would be naïve to say the least, one can – for the moment – leave the question unanswered and allow history to judge. However, trust is earned and librarianship has quite a bit of work to do to make up for lost time. Time now for mindful librarians to confront library patrons, in a welcoming sort of way, with the wealth of truthful information in our collections in order to help our communities transition toward whatever awaits the planet in the not-so-distant years to come, and Progressive Librarian stands ready to serve as a forum for dialogues essential to these tasks.

End Notes
2. Progressive Librarian, Preview Issue, Summer 1990; inside front cover.
5. Progressive Librarian, Preview Issue, Summer 1990; inside back cover.
6. ibid; p. 44.
13. Bossaller et al. This issue *Progressive Librarian*, p. 31.
PRESS RELEASE

Librarians and Human Rights:
PLG Member Kathleen de la Peña McCook
Presents 2010 Coleman Lecture

Dr. Jean E. Coleman was the first director of the Office for Literacy and Outreach Services of the American Library Association. The Coleman lecture series is a tribute to her work to ensure that all citizens, particularly Native Americans and adult learners, have access to quality library services. The lecture series will focuses on librarians’ roles in providing equity of access.

Kathleen de la Peña McCook, distinguished university professor at the University of South Florida, School of Library and Information Science in Tampa was selected to present the 2010 Coleman lecture. Kathleen is the author of *A Place at the Table: Libraries and Community Building, and Introduction to Public Librarianship*. She is a member of the Coordinating Council of the Progressive Librarians Guild.

In her lecture “Librarians and Human Rights” Kathleen explored the philosophical basis of librarians’ commitment to human rights and human development as grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). She made the following key points:

1) instruments that provide the foundation for the librarians’ role as primary promoters of the rights are detailed in the Universal Declaration
of Human Rights and the Millennium Development Goals;  
2) international statements and declarations on peoples, regions, situations 
and specific rights contribute to a universal understanding of the need 
for more assertive models of library and information services; and 
3) the eighteen public library service responses used by the Public 
Library Association will increasingly be informed by a human rights 
philosophy.

By presenting U.S. public library practice in the framework of human 
Kathleen provided U.S. public librarians with the context and documentation 
for the development of an expanded commitment in the service of human 
capabilities.

Many friends and colleagues who attended the 8am Coleman Lecture on 
June 28, 2010 have committed their life work to aspects of the Universal 
Declaration. By introducing these individuals Kathleen was able to provide 
specific human examples of activist librarians. Recognized were:

- Diane Austin, asst. director, University of South Florida, School of 
  Library and Information Science, making technology accessible to all.
- Alma Dawson, Russell Long professor at Louisiana State 
  University, School of Library and Information Science, ALA Equality 
  Award Honoree.
- Cora P. Dunkley, University of South Florida, School of Library and 
  Information Science - Professor and member ALA Coretta Scott King 
  Awards Task Force.
- Barbara J. Ford, Mortenson Center distinguished professor, first 
  Coleman lecturer and past ALA President.
- Barbara Immroth, professor at University of Texas, past president of 
  ALSC, Beta Phi Mu honoree.
- Alicia Long, SPECTRUM Scholar at University of South Florida, 
  School of Library and Information Science, REFORMA member.
- Bill McCook, 47 year member of United Brotherhood of Carpenters.
- Satia Orange, past director of ALA OLOS.
- Katharine J. Phenix, Adult Services Librarian Rangeview Library, 
  Adams County, Co. past chair ALA Committee on the Status of 
  Women in Librarianship.
- Henrietta M. Smith, Professor Emerita, University of South Florida, 
  School of Library and Information Science ALSC Honoree, Coretta 
  Scott King Task Force.
- Ann Sparanese, past ALA Futas Honoree, Head of Adult and Young 
  Adult Services, Englewood Public Library, NJ, Coleman Committee;
Sponsored by the Office for Literacy and Outreach Services, the Jean E. Coleman Library Outreach Lecture is presented each year during the American Library Association’s Annual Conference. PLG member Ann Sparanese served on the Coleman lecture Committee in 2010.

Website:

www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/olos/olosprograms/jeanecoleman/jeanecoleman.cfm
On Wikileaks and the Library of Congress:  
A Statement by the Progressive Librarians Guild

The Progressive Librarians Guild (PLG) condemns in the strongest possible terms the blocking of Wikileaks by the Library of Congress and rejects on all grounds their arguments in defense of this move.

The action is a violation of American librarianship’s historic commitments to the public’s right to know, to freedom of the press and to the very essence of the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States. It is also in violation of the American Library Association’s most fundamental commitments to intellectual freedom as embodied in the Library Bill of Rights.

We call on the American Library Association (ALA) to condemn unequivocally this move by the Library of Congress to actively conspire in preventing access to information in the public interest. Blocking access to this published information is censorship, plain and simple, and supporting sanctions against reading is endorsing abridgment of intellectual freedom. The documentation’s open publication by an agency of the free press, Wikileaks, renders its government classification status irrelevant.

For the Library of Congress, blocking access and rationalizing censorship is an unacceptable acquiescence to the government’s abusive attempt to put the genie back in the bottle with regards to leaked documents which, among other things, expose the government’s own malfeasance, malevolence and even criminality in the conduct of the people’s affairs. In matters of vital public concern, citizens’ fullest knowledge and discussion are in the interest of democracy, freedom, peace, rule of law and good governance here and around the world.

We also call on ALA to oppose the government’s directives barring individuals in other Federal agencies, the armed forces and working for government contractors from viewing published material discomfiting to the authorities.

We call on ALA as well to join us in condemning the ongoing and escalating US government-led witch-hunt against Wikileaks and its founder Julian Assange.

PLG Coordinating Committee, December 4, 2010

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THERE IS POWER IN A UNION — 2009-2010

by Kathleen de la Peña McCook
AFT Local 7463

*It looks like class war to me, and I, for one, will not surrender without firing back.*

— Ann Sparanese, union librarian in Englewood, New Jersey

Economic recession took a heavy toll on the library workforce in 2009-2010. Lay-offs, cuts in hours and benefits and full out BIBLIOPOCALYPSE in Buffalo and Erie County were just some of the challenges faced by union library workers. Library workers also stood in solidarity with union hotel workers throughout this time supporting boycotts and drafting resolutions in support of collective bargaining (Stephens, 2010).

The percentage of libraries that report that all librarians and other professional staff are covered by collective bargaining agreements increased from 21 percent in 2005 to 25.1 percent in 2010. The percentage of libraries reporting that all support staff are covered decreased from 17 percent in 2005 to 14.4 percent in 2010 (Sager, 2010).

In 2009-2010 only a few items on library unions were indexed in Library Literature & Information Science. Major articles that were indexed: Applegate’s “Who Benefits? Unionization and Academic Libraries and Librarians” (2009); Westlund’s, “Libraries and Unions: Not Such an Odd Couple.” (2009); and the Progressive Librarian’s union summary series (McCook, 2009). The 2010 edition of the Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences included the article “Unions in Academic and Public Libraries” (McCook).


The PLG Project, *Union Librarian*, a blog of library union news, is the basis for the 2009-2010 union highlights in this review.
January 2009

§ The first legislation signed in the Obama administration was the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which allows more leeway for women and others seeking justice over pay discrimination. George Miller, chair of the U.S. Congress Committee on Education and Labor stated: “With President Obama’s signature today, we ensure that women and other workers who are discriminated against while on the job have the ability to receive a fair remedy. Ongoing pay discrimination is an attack on all working Americans and must be stamped out. The Congress and the President restored the law today and ensured that discriminatory paychecks are not immune from challenge.”

February 2009

§ Jean Dickson, activist union librarian, who has been grievance officer, vice president and president of the Buffalo Center Chapter of United University Professions, the union representing UB faculty and professional staff was profiled in UB Reporter (Wesolowski, 2009).

March 2009

§ The U.S. Department of Labor’s Wirtz Labor Library is the recipient of the 2009 John Sessions Memorial Award, an honor presented by the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) and named for John Sessions, former American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) co-chair of the AFL-CIO/ALA Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups. Wirtz Labor Library was selected for its efforts in supporting the history and contribution of the labor movement in the United States. In addition to maintaining unique and historically significant collections, including rare international material, the library particularly impressed the committee with its recent efforts to make its collection more accessible to a broader audience through digitization and to increase visibility of the library through the Wirtz Labor Library Lecture Series.

§ Toronto Librarians Split from CUPE Local 416 to form own unit. After a nasty battle, the city’s 2,400 librarians voted overwhelmingly to leave the city’s powerful outdoor workers’ union. With about 50 per cent voter turnout, more than three times as many librarians voted to split away from Local 416 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees - which also
represents garbage collectors and parks workers – as voted to stay. Library unit chair Rob Rolfe said “the time had come” for his members to form their own unit.

§ Ann Sparanese essay on the Employee Free Choice Act appears in *Library Worklife*.

§ Eileen Muller, AFSCME Local 1482 President, profiled on the blog, AFL-CIO NOW. The president of AFSCME Local 1482/Brooklyn Library Guild attributes a great deal of her personal and professional growth to union membership. Eileen Muller’s story, and those of other women who have benefited from union membership, are recounted by James Parks on the AFL-CIO NOW Blog; visit the March 8 posting.

§ The American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress (AFC) reports the death of Archie Green March 22, 2009. Dr. Green, North America’s most prominent scholar of labor-related folklore, has been an essential guiding force in the history of AFC. It was largely through his efforts that the Center was created. From 1969 to 1976, Green put his academic career on hold to live in Washington, D.C. and lobby Congress for the passage of the American Folklife Preservation Act. Green earned a Master of Library Science degree from the University of Illinois in 1960, and a Ph.D. in folklore from the University of Pennsylvania in 1968 (Archie Green).

April 2009

§ *Agitate! Educate! Organize!* Lincoln Cushing and Timothy W. Drescher (ILR Press, 2009). Lavish full-color reproductions of more than 250 of the best posters that have emerged from the American labor movement ensure that readers will want to return again and again to this visually fascinating treasury of little-known images from the American past. Some of the posters were issued by government programs and campaigns; some were devised by unions as recruiting tools or strike announcements; others were generated by grassroots organizations focused on a particular issue or group of workers – all reveal much about the diverse experiences of working people in the United States. [L. Cushing is a PLG member].
May 2009

§ Librarians in Rocky Hill, CT members of Sub-local 39 of UE Local 222/CILU, have a new four-year contract that locks in their health insurance percentages through June 30, 2012 and increases wages by 15.4 percent. In the old contract they had annual maximum dollar caps on the annual premium contributions members had to pay, as did the other public employee unions in Rocky Hill. The committee was prepared to fight as long as necessary to maintain those caps, and not to be the first union to eliminate them. (“Librarians Lock Up,” 2009).

§ King County library unions merge to form second-largest local in Council 2. Several years ago Local 1652-LM, King County Library Maintenance, had about 15 members who were the only union workers in the library system. The local has now merged with Local 1857, the King County library workers, and the resulting local is 970 members strong. The rapid growth in the local has its origin in 2002. It was then that 550 members of the library voted to join Council 2. At the time they became local 1857 and eventually bargained their first contract. Then, last year, 400 library pages voted to join Council 2. Now the 550 members of local 1857 have merged with the pages as well as the original maintenance workers to become one big local 1857, putting it second only to the City of Spokane local, which has 1,100 members. “Our eventual goal is to negotiate one contract for all of these library workers,” says Council 2 Director of Organizing Bill Keenan. “That is one of the benefits of merging them into one unit.” In addition to the newly merged local, Council 2 represents the 83 supervisors, Local 1857-s, of the King County Library System. They recently joined Council 2 and now have a contract as well. (King County Library Unions Merge 2009).

June 2009

§ Jack Henning, a spellbinding orator and forceful presence who was an icon of organized labor in California and beyond, died in June 2009. He was 93. The son of a charter member of the plumbers union, Henning rose to become the longtime head of the California Labor Federation before his retirement in 1996. As the state’s top labor advocate for more than a quarter-century, Henning gained legendary status as a fierce defender of workers and an avid foe of the perils of “capital” left unchecked. (McDonnell, 2009).

July 2009

§ There were two major union programs at the American Library Association annual conference, “There is a Union Difference.” Lydia Morrow-Ruetten, Nina Manning, Carol Thomas, William A. Thompson. ALA-APA Programs for the People, July 11. The program highlighted the difference in union and non-union support staff salaries found by the Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO, using ALA-APA data.
The program also included a discussion of other salary-related topics such as the Employee Free Choice Act. The program featured speakers from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

§ Michael Torres, Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library, AFSCME Local 3395, was honored as the winner of the Sirsi-Dynix – ALA-APA Award for Promoting Salaries at the networking breakfast, July 12, an opportunity to network with colleagues who are interested in unions.

§ Springfield, IL. “Metaphorically, the 10 layoffs are equivalent to taking a meat cleaver and amputating an arm or a leg of the library’s workforce, crippling our ability to provide basic service to the public,” said Bob Moore, an employee at Lincoln Library for 22 years. “Services will definitely suffer dramatically,” said Moore, who is not one of the 10 employees facing layoff. Union representatives told Springfield IL aldermen and the mayor that 10 workers scheduled to be laid off at Lincoln Library are “not fat hiding in the budget.” The city has told nine union employees and one non-union library worker that their last day at the library will be Aug. 6. The council took several budget votes this week that saved the jobs of 67 police officers and firefighters who also had received layoff notices, but not those of the library employees. (Poole).


August 2009

§ The nation’s largest teachers union sharply attacked President Obama’s most significant school improvement initiative saying that it puts too much emphasis on a “narrow agenda” centered on charter schools and echoes the Bush administration’s “top-down approach” to reform. The National Education Association’s criticism of Obama’s $4.35 billion “Race to the Top” initiative charged that “Race to the Top” contradicted administration pledges to give states more flexibility in how they improve schools. (NEA Slams Obama’s School Reform Plan).

§ NY Library Association Affiliates with New York State United Teachers. “We feel partnering with NYSUT will increase our ability to advocate for the interests of our members, protect against potential cuts, and further our legislative agenda,” said Josh Cohen, NYLA President. The state Library Association has entered an agreement with the much larger and hugely more influential New York State United Teachers union in which NYSUT will lobby on its behalf (NYLA Affiliates with NYSUT).

September 2009

§ Toledo-Lucas County Public Library to Cut 10% of Work Force. Between 30 and 35 workers — up to 10 percent of the work force in the Toledo-
Lucas County Public Library system — will be jobless next month, library officials announced September 2, 2009. Association of Public Library Employees. UAW Local 5242 – Region 2B. [Communication Workers of America Local 4319, which represents circulation clerks, custodians, maintenance workers, and book processors.] “Members should know that the economy is tough right now and everybody is suffering,” said Harry Johnston, a representative from Communications Workers of America. His union represents clerks and custodians. “We’re working very hard with the governor’s office to get funding and restore those positions,” he said of the pending layoffs (Tharp).

October 2009

§ Progressive Librarians Guild opposes the actions of the Hyatt Company. “Be it hereby resolved that the Progressive Librarians Guild opposes the actions of the Hyatt Company in its mass firing of housekeepers in Boston and Cambridge. We also oppose the actions of the Hyatt Company in having regular employees train temporary employees to cover for regular employees’ vacations, then use those newly trained temporary employees to permanently replace the regular employees. We urge all librarians to avoid using Hyatt facilities during the 2010 Midwinter Meeting of the American Library Association.” Approved by the Progressive Librarians Guild-Coordinating Committee, October 14, 2009.

§ Toni Samek, Professor, School of Library and Information Studies, University of Alberta was Keynote Speaker: “Academic Freedom and the Responsibility of Librarianship” at the Canadian Association of University Teachers. Librarians Conference. Negotiating for Parity: Closing the Librarian/Faculty Gap. [October 23-25, 2009]. (Canadian Association of University Teachers. 2009).


November 2009


§ Rockford Library Union Cuts Finalized. With a Rockford library board vote and a signature, a lengthy debate between the library union and administration comes to an end. “We have an agreement with our bargaining unit,” says Library Executive Director Novak. Library Union President Karla Janssen, “I think it was the best decision that we could make given the circumstances.” It’s a one-year deal with some key changes that save
the library close to 600-thousand dollars. It freezes 2010 wages, eliminates overtime for working Sundays and allows the library not to fill vacancies when employees decide to leave. But administrators are still planning to lay off between 14 and 16 union workers (Barr, 2009).

§ Toronto Public Library Workers Union (TPLWU) ratifies new collective agreement. CUPE 4948 has ratified their first collective agreement.

December 2009

§ Wisconsin-Labor History in Schools Bill Becomes Law. Gov. Doyle puts signature on the bill; calls for labor history to be state standard. Governor Jim Doyle made it official Thursday, Dec. 10: He signed into law AB 172, the Labor History in the Schools Bill, culminating 12 years of efforts by key legislators, workers, unions and others to pass legislation to assure the teaching of labor history and collective bargaining (Wisconsin Labor History).

January 2010


February 2010

§ Elissa C. Cadillic, President AFSCME Council 93 Local 1526, representing approximately 270 library assistants, custodians, and clerical and maintenance workers in the Boston Public Library system defends workers against unfair editorial.

§ UAW Local 2282 Amalgamated / Moline Library Unit Agreement. The City of Moline and the Moline Library Board of Trustees have announced that a wage concession agreement for cost-saving measures has been reached with the UAW Local 2282 Amalgamated (Moline Union).
March 2010

§ Roosevelt University library receives John Sessions Memorial Award. The Murray-Green Library at Roosevelt University, Chicago, is the recipient of the 2010 John Sessions Memorial Award, an honor presented by the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) and named for John Sessions, former American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) co-chair of the AFL-CIO/ALA Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups. This annual award recognizes a library or library system that has made a significant effort to work with the labor community and has consequently brought recognition of the history and contribution of the labor movement to the development of the United States. Through its development of resources such as the “Oral History Project in Labor History,” the Murray-Green Library has made an ongoing commitment to preserve and increase the public’s accessibility to labor history. [Roosevelt University named its library after two men who began their working lives as coal miners before becoming rival presidents of the most powerful labor federations in America. William Green led the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and Philip Murray headed the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) to the peak of their respective power. Both men died within weeks of each other in November 1952, three years before their organizations merged in 1955 to form the AFL-CIO.]

April 2010

§ Cincinnati and Hamilton County librarians Vote to Decertify Union (Oder).

May 2010

§ Library workers avoid layoffs in Hamden CT. — Library employees have ratified an agreement that includes furlough days, but eliminates the need to lay off any workers at the three libraries. Larry Dorman, spokesman for Council 4 of AFSCME said that a majority of the library system’s 38 employees unanimously approved the agreement (DeMatteo).

June 2010

§ Labor Rights are Human Rights. Program at ALA Annual Conference. Washington, DC. Labor rights are at the heart of the struggle for human rights. The freedom to associate, to organize and to have equal opportunities in the workplace is under attack around the world. The program discussed labor rights, including the role of unions in promoting democracy and economic prosperity, and the attack on workers’ rights as part of an international phenomenon. The importance of unions to the salary and status of women was a special focus of this program. Speakers: Bama Athreya, International Labor Rights Forum, Executive Director; Carol Rosenblatt, Coalition of Labor Union Women, Executive Director.
July 2010

§ Members of the union representing Queens Library workers have overwhelmingly rejected a plan to cut their benefits to save the jobs of 46 fellow employees facing layoffs in August. The Queens Library Guild voted 297 to 50 against a package of concessions proposed by the library administration. “Queens Library workers are willing to sacrifice to help their co-workers and friends keep their jobs with the caveat all concessions must be temporary and guarantee no layoffs for the fiscal year,” said John Hyslop, president of the Queens Library Guild, Local 1321. (Colangelo).

September 2010

§ SRRT announces Guide to Union Friendly Hotels in an article in its September 2010 newsletter informing SRRT members about hotels and their current labor status in San Diego. The article encourages SRRT members to support unions and research hotels prior to making reservations for ALA conferences. (Stephens).

October 2010

§ Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library Reduces Hours 26%. (from 1,324 to 980 hours) effective October 3, and it has plans to eliminate 35 to 40 jobs before the end of the year. Michael Torres, the local chair of AFSCME Council 62, Local 3395, which has represented 320 out of 424 benefit-eligible staff since 2007, told LJ that morale at the library was low.

November 2010

§ “Our Profession’s Values….and Why They Matter” – Massachusetts Library Association and the Hyatt 100. Statement “As we advocate for libraries, it is often difficult to articulate and crystallize into manageable sound bytes all of the pertinent information that defines us and why we believe that library services and programs are essential to a strong democracy. It is even more challenging to find opportunities for public discourse regarding the values integral to our profession, and why they matter.” Jackie Rafferty, President, Massachusetts Library Association. [The MLA Executive Board determined that it was essential to take a stand for the Hyatt 100 by communicating our professional values to Hyatt management and requesting to be relinquished from our contractual obligations].

§ Buffalo & Erie County Library supporters have protested the county’s plans to cut $4 million from the Buffalo & Erie County Library.”We’re here to make some noise!” rallied Timothy Galvin, president of the union that represents county librarians (Becker).
The Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library system has taken another hit laying off 37 employees. The layoffs are the latest in measures aimed at closing a $4 million shortfall caused by declining property tax dollars. Last month, the library system slashed its hours, closing most branches an extra day each week. “We all knew this was coming, but honestly, I think they could have handled this better,” said Michael Torres, AFSCME Local 3395 which represents roughly 315 of the library’s 793 employees. Torres said most averaged $9-$18 an hour.

“Check the ‘facts’ on Englewood workers.” Letter from Ann Sparanese, librarian at Englewood (NJ) Public Library. A few excerpts to NorthJersey.com:

- Some of Englewood’s wealthiest residents are on a campaign to out Christie Christie on our municipal budget. .. willing to distort the truth and scapegoat all city workers to win.
- As a librarian at the Englewood Public Library, I feel compelled to address the anti-public worker nonsense.
- At the library, there is only one person who makes a six-figure salary, and that is the director, who is, of course, non-union.
- Our “extremely generous” package includes evening and Saturday duty with no differential pay.
- At the library, we work hard to serve the public, in the most fundamental, salutary way with more business hours than any other department (except for police and fire of course.)
- It is mean-spirited for people who have multi-million dollar homes to target people who make 40, 50 and 60 thousand dollar salaries.
- Stop painting every city worker, every public worker, every union member with the same brush, as if we are the ones responsible for the economic downturn. We aren’t the greedy ones.
- There is a gale force wind against public workers in New Jersey...It looks like class war to me, and I, for one, will not surrender without firing back.

December 2010

Rising Number of Librarians Covered by Collective Bargaining Agreements. The percentage of libraries that report that all librarians and other professional staff are covered increased from 16.4 percent in 1997 to 21 percent in 2005, then to 25.1 percent in 2010. The percentage of libraries reporting that all support staff are covered decreased from 20.3 percent in 1997 to 17 percent in 2005 then to 14.4 percent in 2010 (Sager).

Continuing effort is being made to pass ALA Labor Resolutions. Drafts had been submitted prior to ALA Annual Conference 2010 by SRRT and the ALA/AFL-CIO Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups, and endorsed in principle by IFRT and IFC. They were not passed. These were being discussed on the ALA Council list the week of December 10, 2010 with plans to present them to the ALA Council meetings at

Progressive Librarian #34–35
the 2011 Midwinter Conference. See ALA Council List archives for full discussion.

References

BOOK REVIEWS

Building a Case Against Neoliberalism in LIS from the Ground Up: An Essay Review of John Budd’s Self Examination: The Present and Future of Librarianship¹ and Knowledge and Knowing in Library and Information Science: A Philosophical Framework²

review by John Buschman

After reading the two works by John Budd in the title of this essay review, and after thinking it through, I was going to proceed on the considered opinion that John Budd’s recent Self Examination is a very useful book (a highly complimentary description in my vocabulary). Further, Self Examination provides an extended excursus from the point at which he ended his earlier (and also highly useful) book, Knowledge and Knowing in Library and Information Science. I’m still going to proceed this way, but recent publications in Library Quarterly – Michael Buckland’s review of Self Examination and Paul Jaeger’s two (I argue, linked) articles on developments in LIS theory – have made the job more interesting.

Knowledge and Knowing

First, the basics: Knowledge and Knowing, written in 2001 and winner of the Highsmith Library Literature Award, is a very sound intellectual guide through the philosophical bases upon which library and information science (LIS) is (often unwittingly) grounded – and the philosophical issues with which (again, often unwittingly) it is permeated. It is also an excellent guide to subtopics such as the portions relevant to LIS of the history of scientific thinking and positivism, the relevance of epistemology, an overview intellectual history of LIS thought and theory, and an argument for a blending of approaches to achieve a form of praxis through a variety of philosophical hermeneutics. Budd’s approach to thinking these through is not the one we must take (and he does not make that argument), but it is a thorough and well-grounded review of a large and sophisticated literature characterized very well and brought legitimately to bear on the issues of theory and practice in LIS. One could quibble here and there, but Budd is engaging in the very current and difficult task of putting intellectual traditions, schools, and discourses in dialogue with one another – and he did this very successfully in Knowledge and Knowing. This is very much in tune with the broader trends of current intellectual and philosophical work: we have many theoretical insights – and they seem to contradict and cancel out one another at base. To be productive, these insights and lines of thought need to “talk” to one another. Thinkers like Seyla Benhabib and Richard Bernstein have been at this for a while, and Budd’s work brings LIS into this fold. In all, Knowledge and Knowing is more than worth the intellectual work to read and think along with Budd.
Why, you ask, do I begin with a nine year old book? First, because after around 300 pages, Budd comes to some uncomfortable (and relevant) conclusions and questions for the field:

What is needed in LIS is...attention given over to the meanings that...inhere in the things we do and the things we say...[in other words, what do we really mean]...[Our practices do] “not have as its meaning or ultimate purpose conformity to some set of rules... rather observing those rules give effect to some other objective....” Reflection...means that theorizing is a part of life for serious practitioners. The professional, in constantly reflecting on action, is constantly theorizing... (p. 287).

There may have been...a shift in the symbolic capital of the library from an accepted recognition of selectivity of contents... and purpose based on edification of the reader to a received symbol of public institution.... Once objectified, the definition of the symbolic capital is removed from its previous holder.... As a cultural good, the library has in many ways drifted from the realm of the pure to that of the commercial. The current symbolic capital of the library allows it to transform itself from an agency in denial of the economy to one embracing it (p. 325).

Effective praxis means a sound form of reflection, and his tour de force in Knowledge and Knowing brings us to this point – and a questioning of the relationship of the library to the functioning of the market and the economy as institutional models. Second, in his recent Self Examination Budd picks up and carries on from this point. To understand Budd’s recent book, I argue, it is very helpful to know where his project left off in Knowledge and Knowing.

Self Examination

Self Examination, in many ways, simply reviews, evaluates, and situates the contemporary manifestations of the same issues and problems Budd confronts at the end of the earlier work. The work is, again, highly useful as a broad overview of the history of libraries, parsing the philosophical meanings of core ALA value statements, the relationship of LIS and libraries to education, and so on. The chapters and sections of chapters on information and informing, ethics, democracy and technology are excellent. Upon reading Self Examination, one will come away with a clear idea of the thrust, importance, and relevance of many recent theories within LIS – and how they relate to one another and to key intellectual issues. The literature review is again broad and deep – this time much less overtly philosophical, but one can see clearly the concerns expressed in the earlier volume brought up to date:

The library exists to assist people on their paths to understanding, not merely to help people navigate through a building, a catalog.
or a database as an end in itself.... In other words, the action is intended to lead to learning.... Christine Pawley expresses [it] well: “we need to recognize that information ‘access’ is not just about information consumerism but also about individuals and groups of people actively shaping their world...in a way that renders the consumer-producer dichotomy irrelevant” (pp. 232-233)

Budd is explicitly making an argument for what he calls the “moral information society” in a series of contrasts arranged as a taxonomy: information as something “to be transmitted, used, bought, sold, given, or horded” versus “exchanged through discourse”; democracy as an “aggregation of preferences according to which officials legislate and adjudicate” versus a “deliberative engagement through which majority and minority voices are heard”; and a library as an “archaic and obsolete warehouse” versus a “place and space where people engage with information and with one another to learn, read, and grow” (pp. 219-221). Budd is particularly specific on the destructive connections between neoliberal ideas about information, technology, markets, democracy, and libraries. In other words, he has built a critique of the public consequences (for libraries and beyond) of the ethos and domination of possessive individualism and neoliberalism from the ground up through these two books. Self Examination is not a jeremiad, but Budd’s thinking through and linking of ideas is very clear – and you do end up at solidly-grounded basis of critique. The book is very well done, and the project is successfully carried through both books.

Challenges

So far, so good. However, Michael Buckland, an august emeritus LIS professor and author, trashed Budd’s recent book in a Library Quarterly review: The book is “a tract from a socialist democratic perspective... suitable for...readers with an appetite for reading about ethical issues in U.S. librarianship and who do not mind a narrow focus, a parochial view, and a dogmatic tone.” Buckland is explicitly challenging an examination of “civic and political aspects” of librarianship: “It is widely accepted that libraries are important for sustaining Western liberal democracy. But so is oil, and, more to the point, libraries can also be important assets in nondemocratic regimes.” He has made this same point many times in, for instance a letter to the editor of JASIST. In it he asserts that advocates for the links between libraries and democracy seem to inherently posit an “essential” relationship (meaning libraries = democracy and/or democracy = libraries by definition). In contrast, he argues that libraries are shaped by their context. Therefore, libraries are neutral tools, to be used by the regime or institution that sponsors them. So, while libraries are important to democracy, “so is oil” (he uses this phrase often). Buckland goes on to cite Lenin’s librarian wife, the library-centric actions of Mussolini’s minister of education, and the Nazi’s use of interest in libraries for their purposes. He cites his own textbook as already authoritatively refuting
the relationship of LIS to democracy, concluding that, LIS thinkers don’t engage democratic theories of LIS because they “have found it to be an unproductive line of inquiry.”

On another – more thoughtful – front, Paul Jaeger, an editor of Library Quarterly, advances a thesis in two articles published in the same issue. In the first, an editorial essay, he deals with the longstanding struggle in LIS with/for theory. In so doing, he cites Budd, Wayne Wiegand, Michael Harris (and me) among others describing the problem. The common denominator is that, in each case, the cited author is suggesting a rich source of theoretical insights from critical theorists outside LIS. Jaeger is making an argument for home-grown or “native” LIS theory. To be sure, he wants to see theory grow in importance in LIS graduate education, but “not even” the vaunted “iSchool movement has brought greater emphasis to theory” (p. 204). Jaeger argues against “borrowed theory” that is, in the cases he cites, of a critical-theoretical type. Why? Because it is “an intellectual dead-end that bodes rather poorly for the long-term viability of an academic discipline” (p. 206). Habermas or Gramsci or Mouffe apparently are what is holding us back. In the review article he fleshes out (as I am arguing) at least part of the crux of the matter: “the hand-wringing opposition to computers and the Internet” (p. 290) and that “technology is a necessary part [of libraries] that must be better understood” (pp. 297-298). Negative analytical treatments of technology are less than helpful. Jaeger takes to task an author that, he argues, “is pining for a past that never was and is angry at the present, yelling at information scientists to get off the lawn” (p. 296). Change – especially technological change – must be accepted, whether for good or ill. In the end, it seems that Jaeger wants theory to ascend in LIS education, but through the course of these two pieces, he wants to warn us off being too critical and questioning in our theory. Native theory good, imported critical theory bad.

**Conclusion: Back to Budd**

Budd’s work, as I noted, is engaging LIS in a very current, very sophisticated, and very difficult intellectual practice of putting intellectual positions and discourses in productive dialogue with one another. To do so is difficult enough; to do so to end up informing the practical and pragmatic tasks of libraries is more so. To be fair, Jaeger’s points are not the mean-spirited jabs of Buckland; he is genuine about the task of producing valid theoretical insights from within LIS. But both of these authors seem to want theory that doesn’t question too much – especially technology and its overarching social-economic context. Buckland is the most obvious in this. Addressing the “Five Grand Challenges for Library Research” (oh my...), Buckland says that a “major research front...[is] the central question... ‘What has been the influence of technological modernism’? By technological modernism we mean the impact of positivism, scientific management, efficiency, and algorithms” (p. 679). This is exactly, precisely, right-on-target what Budd’s project deals with. Ah, but Buckland wants it both ways. In the next sentence he limits the inquiry to “technology, standards,
systems, and efficiency [which] lead to engines for social progress.” Budd has clearly gone off the rails by not limiting his inquiry in such a way that he’s already defined the answer (capitalism driving technological “progress”). No wonder Buckland was so cranky with him in the LQ review: he was coloring outside the lines! Elsewhere in his self-cited authoritative textbook, Buckland helpfully defines (and similarly limits) theory for us: “The body of generalizations and principles developed in association with practice in a field of activity (as medicine, music) and forming its content as an intellectual discipline” (p. 33). Nope, can’t get to critique of the market or concerns for democracy there either. Readers of this journal should be steeped in the critique of Buckland-style false neutrality – and it is what Budd parses carefully throughout both books. Ditto democracy and libraries. It is the complex interaction between the institution and its political context that should be the object of becoming more informed about in LIS – that is Budd’s point about neoliberalism and democracy in Self Examination. You can’t be neutral on a moving train, Howard Zinn said. Jaeger is concerned about democracy and libraries broadly – but he seemingly does not want to push to hard on the social and political ripples that technologies produce in libraries and democracy – nor the system that finances and produces technologies.

Buckland in this instance is playing the technocrat who simply rules out of order thinking that crosses his boundaries – much like the definitions of rational action in economic theory. Jaeger is, I believe, pulling oars in the generally the same direction as Budd and others he cites who want to increase the profile of theory within LIS and LIS education. He simply prefers theory developed within LIS – and sees it as core intellectual challenge to the field. In addition to the limiting effects of how Jaeger frames the matter, I would argue that LIS need not produce a Pierre Bourdieu or even a “lite” version of him. LIS should, however, grapple with the insights of a Bourdieu: neoliberalism is a “programme of the methodical destruction of collectives. The movement toward the neoliberal utopia of a pure and perfect market is made possible by the politics of financial deregulation.... [Neoliberalism] is a logical machine that presents itself as a chain of constraints regulating economic agents” and in the process obviating politics and the legitimacy of public or common concerns. That was written twelve years ago. A library is nothing but a collective, brought together by and for another collective: a community, a school, a university. How is this not core and key concern for us? However much the “iSchools” run away from them, the collective of libraries is still the engine of LIS. Roma Harris’s recent essay makes that abundantly clear. So, like the field of education, LIS has an enormous body of institutions and institutional practice to deal with. And like education, much of LIS training is, and will be – pragmatic. There simply is no reason not to utilize, adapt, and respond to the body of theoretical insights in other fields. Why not stand on those shoulders? To avoid doing so is to circle the wagons in precisely the same breathe-our-own-air way that led to lacerating critiques of LIS (and educational) scholarship. LIS tended to devolve into cookbook, rule-following discourses with that mindset. Knowing something well about
the bigger theoretical world out there is healthy for LIS, and Budd’s work is a key effort in connecting the two.

End Notes


MONTHLY REVIEW PRESS: an overview

by Michael D. Yates

(Editor's note: When Progressive Librarian was approached by Monthly Review Press with a request to accept MRP books for review, we reluctantly had to decline the offer due to our policy of reviewing books directly related to the field of librarianship. We do, however, want readers of Progressive Librarian to know about Monthly Review Press and so are publishing here a description of this venerable, leftist publishing house.)

Monthly Review Press (or MR Press as it is commonly known) is one of the world's premier publishers of radical nonfiction. An offshoot of Monthly Review magazine, it was founded in 1952 with the publication of distinguished journalist I.F. Stone's *The Hidden History of the Korean War*. The decision to start a press at the height of the Cold War and with a book that sharply challenged the U.S. government's rationale for sending troops to Korea was a courageous act. The magazine's editors, Paul Sweezy and Leo Huberman, knew the risks but concluded that such a venture was not only necessary but could succeed in keeping radical ideas alive and introducing them to new generations of readers. They were right. The Press has been in continuous operation for fifty-eight years, a remarkable achievement in a nation as antagonistic to left-wing ideas as is the United States.

Stone could not get his book published, but Sweezy and Huberman were convinced that his history was correct and of great importance for the public to understand. As with so many MR Press books, Stone's analysis was vindicated by later scholars, most notably Bruce Cumings, while his contemporaries either ignored or condemned it. Another case in point is the arguments put forward by Paul Sweezy and Paul Baran in their seminal book *Monopoly Capital*, by Sweezy and Harry Magdoff in several later MR Press books, and most recently by Fred Magdoff and current Monthly Review editor John Bellamy Foster in their book, *The Great Financial Crisis*. They argue that advanced capitalist economies are prone to slow growth or stagnation (and accompanying labor market problems) and that the explosion of the financial sector has served in large part as a compensation mechanism helping to stave off this problem. Not only did they show that a crisis-free capitalism is a contradiction in terms, but they presciently predicted the current financial debacle and accompanying "Great Recession."

The revolutionary ferment of the 1960s and 1970s spurred great interest in Monthly Review Press books. I remember how I would look forward to each new catalogue, always finding exciting titles to order in preparation for teaching my college classes. Terrific books like William Hinton's China classic *Fanshen*; Eduardo Galeano's *Open Veins of Latin America* (the book Hugo Chávez gave to President Obama, boosting our sales considerably); what I consider the best book ever written about work,
Harry Braverman’s *Labor and Monopoly Capital*; and John Bellamy Foster’s brilliant introduction to our environmental catastrophe in the making, *The Vulnerable Planet*. What makes MR Press books so valuable is that they combine depth, clarity, and accessibility. After I read Hans Koning’s expose of the brutality of Christopher Columbus, *Columbus: His Enterprise*, I gave it to my mother and grandmother. They said they’d never celebrate Columbus Day again. And they were Italian-Americans!

Monthly Review Press publishes books that critically educate people, whether they be teachers, organizers, or ordinary working men and women. What is more, this critical education is aimed not just at those who live in the United States but rather at the world community. MR Press books have been translated into languages as far apart as Spanish, Greek, Turkish, Vietnamese, and Chinese. Our friends in India publish MR books in inexpensive additions so that those who are poor can read them too. MR Press authors live in every inhabited continent; they and our readers comprise a far-flung radical family.

If Monthly Review Press books are, in the deepest sense, educational, they also seek to change the world and most of its component parts. For example, MR Press books have sought to put modern education under the microscope, pointing out the many ways in which it serves to reinforce the power of the property-owning elite and effectively habituates working people to their own exploitation, as well as how education might be made to serve more progressive and humane ends. David Noble’s *Digital Diploma Mills*, Joe Berry’s *Reclaiming the Ivory Tower*, Murray Levin’s *Teach Me*, and John Marsh’s *Class Dismissed* (forthcoming) are each models of what a good radical book should be. At the level of society as a whole, Monthly Review Press is known for publishing books that critique capitalism itself and point the way forward to the building of a society that aims to allow each human being to develop fully his and her capacities. The list of books here is a long one. Recent titles include Michael Lebowitz’s provocative *The Socialist Alternative*, István Mészáros’s *The Structural Crisis of Capital*, and Samir Amin’s *The World We Wish to See*.

Finally, Monthly Review Press publishes books that you simply won’t find anywhere else. Al Sandine’s remarkable *The Taming of the American Crowd*, Steve Early’s labor insider critique *Embedded With Organized Labor*, Michael Yates’s quirky travelogue *Cheap Motels and a Hotplate*, and John Tully’s magisterial history of the rubber industry, *The Devil’s Milk* demonstrate that Monthly Review Press is not only alive and well but still doing the job its founders envisioned when they published I.F. Stone’s muckraking masterpiece so many years ago.

review by Kathleen de la Peña McCook

A much needed updated critical approach to technologies and networked information resources in libraries has been assembled in the context of market pressure to adopt new innovations. Gloria J. Leckie and John E. Buschman have gathered an impressive roster of thoughtful writers to address both the metalevel analysis and overviews of technologically related issues and the macro-and microlevel processes and effects surrounding information-technology relationships and their implications for librarians and the LIS discipline. The Introduction by Buschman and Leckie helpfully frames the sources of critical approaches, and then Information Technology in Librarianship is divided into two parts.

In Part One, “Foundations,” Chapter 1 is “Critical Theory of Technology: An Overview” by Andrew Feenberg, Canada Research Chair in Philosophy of Technology at Simon Fraser University, explores the concept of technical action and the illusion of transcendence that accompanies it. Chapter 2: “Surveillance and Technology: Contexts and Distinctions” by Gary T. Marx, Hixon-Riggs Professor of Science, Technology and Society at Harvey Mudd College in Claremont, examines the new general ethos of surveillance. Nick Dyer-Witheford, faculty member at the University of Western Ontario and author of Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggle in High Technology Capitalism assesses elements of techno-capital and its appropriation of the Internet in Chapter 3: “Cycles of Net Struggle, Lines of Net Flight.” An overview of the literacies associated with the Fordist Keynesian welfare state is provided in Chapter 4: “A Quick Digital Fix? Changing Schools, Changing Literacies, Persistent Inequalities: A Critical, Contextual Analysis” by Ross Collin, who studies dominant literacies and is a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Michael W. Apple, John Bascom professor of Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Policy at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Sandra Braman, professor of communication at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee has conducted research on the macro-level effects of the use of new information technologies and their policy implications. She is the author of Chapter 5: “Theorizing the Impact of IT on Library-State Relations,” in which she offers a compelling reason for libraries to care about larger theoretical concerns and perspectives.

Part Two, “Applications,” begins with an essay by John M. Budd, professor at the School of Information Science and Learning Technologies at the University of Missouri. In Chapter 6: “The Prospects for an Information Science: The Current Absence of a Critical Perspective,” Budd takes apart the phrase ‘information technology’ and draws upon Wittgenstein to
posit that LIS needs to transcend the paradigm to institute a more critical study of informing. Chapter 7, “Librarianship and the Labor Process: Aspects of the Rationalization, Restructuring, and Intensification of Intellectual Work” by Michael F. Winter, social and behavioral sciences librarian at the University of California, Davis Library and author of The Culture and Control of Expertise: Toward a Sociological Understanding of Librarianship examines the elements of library work within modern capitalism. Roma Harris, author of Librarianship: The Erosion of a Woman’s Profession and professor in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at the University of Western Ontario has written Chapter 8: “Their Little Bit of Ground Slowly Squashed into Nothing: Technology, Gender and the Vanishing Librarian” in which she observes that the complete disappearance of librarians would be tragic for libraries and their users. In Chapter 9: “Children and Information Technology” by Andrew Large, CN-Pratt-Grinstad Chair in Information Studies at McGill University, issues are raised surrounding children’s use of IT.

Chapter 10: “Open Source Software & Libraries” by Ajit Pyati, assistant professor of the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at the University of Western Ontario, explores the challenges of OSS for libraries and articulates the political side of the debate. “Technologies of Social Regulation: An Examination of Library OPACs and Web Portals” is the subject of Chapter 11 by Gloria J. Leckie, of the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at the University of Western Ontario; Lisa Given, associate professor at the University of Alberta, School of Library and Information Studies and Grant Campbell, Faculty of Information and Media Studies at the University of Western Ontario. They use regulation theory to examine long standing information retrieval problems. Chapter 12 is a review of the extensive literature surrounding the topic of digital preservation. “Libraries, Archives and Digital Preservation: A Critical Overview” by Dorothy A. Warner, preservation librarian at Georgetown University and author of A Disciplinary Blueprint for the Assessment of Information Literacy concludes with the observation that solutions to problems of digital archiving are still years away. Co-editor John Buschman is Associate University Librarian for Scholarly Resources and Services at Georgetown University Library and author of Dismantling the Public Sphere: Situating and Sustaining Libraries in the Age of the new Public Philosophy. In his concluding essay, “Just How Critical Should Librarianship Be of Technology?” Buschman uses James O’Donnell’s book, Avatars of the World: From Papyrus to Cyberspace to remind readers that the reinvigoration of a public sphere will not occur without a critical approach to technologies and that librarianship cannot play a positive role in the “democratic consequences” of IT without this critique.

Information Technology in Librarianship is a book of robust thought, insight and clear analysis. Recommended for foundational reading in library and information science education programs and to all library workers who wish to gain understanding of the complexities of our future.

A Review in Two Parts

Part I by Martin Wallace

The DIY Media: Movement Perspectives on Critical Moments series is a five-part series “curated from the best material in Deep Dish TV’s 22-year-old grassroots media archive.” Each multi-disc part of the series includes several original Deep Dish TV features, a compilation screener consisting of clips from the features and “bonus materials”, and a panel discussion of media activists commenting on the series.

The overall film and video production quality of the series is about what one would expect from a project titled “DIY Media”. However, there are several DVD production errors that could have been caught and corrected before this series was released. Examples include typos and misspellings in the on-screen descriptions of the features, broken menu navigation links, and incorrectly listed play lengths. These are most obvious in Part One, but I found problems like these in all three parts that I reviewed.

The bonus materials included in the compilation screeners are not easily identifiable. One must watch the screener fully, even after watching the full-length features, in order to find the bonus footage. Of the three parts I reviewed, only Part One: Expression=Life has its bonus material listed on the DVD package. I can’t help but wonder why the additional footage is hidden away in such a manner.

Expression = Life – ACT UP, Video, and the AIDS Crisis

Of the parts of the DIY Media series that I reviewed, this one has by far the most dated material and the roughest production quality. Expression=Life includes three features: Angry Initiatives, Defiant Strategies (1988), DIVA TV (1990), and Transformation AIDS (1991). Beside clips from the three features, the compilation screener also includes scenes from “Book of James” by Ho Tam and James Wentzy (c.2004) and interviews with AIDS
activist Ray “Jesus” Navaro that highlight his protest against the Catholic Church’s disinformation campaign on AIDS and homosexuality (date unknown). The panel discussion focuses on the strides made by AIDS activists and the state of AIDS activism today.

The first feature in this part, Angry Initiatives, Defiant Strategies, is a compilation of local DIY features from sources such as public access cable programs, art films, recorded plays, and educational videos. ACT UP and the Testing the Limits Collective are introduced and explored. The second feature, DIVA (a.k.a. “Damned Interfering Video Activists”) TV, includes footage from protests, scenes from non-violent civil disobedience training, and public service announcements (PSAs).

The final feature in this part, Transformation AIDS, is the best segment of this segment of the series. Bob Kinney provides historical, critical analysis of Ronald Reagan’s first speech acknowledging AIDS, detailing a grab bag of indictments against Reagan, Congress, and corporate interests.

As stated above, Part One is the most dated of the entire series, and most of it looks as though it was shot on VHS and copied directly to DVD without any cleanup. I found the audio to be too low in the first feature. In the second feature, a strung-together succession of short video pieces, the audio goes from too low to too high and I found myself constantly adjusting my headphone volume. The panel discussion is nearly unwatchable due to an annoying buzz (microphone feedback) throughout much of the session; and, about six minutes in, the audio falls out of sync with the video causing speakers’ mouths not to coincide with their voices. Two other production flaws with the panel discussion are that the on-screen title says the discussion was held in April 2008, whereas the DVD cover lists 2007; and, this session is only 42 minutes, not 90 minutes as noted on the DVD cover.

Many Yeses, One No – Confronting Corporate Globalization

Of the three parts that I reviewed, this part is probably the most compelling in subject matter and the most provocatively and creatively produced. Many Yeses, One No includes five features: The Debt Game (1992), A Cry for Freedom and Democracy (1994), Redwood Summer and Beyond (1994), Showdown in Seattle (1999), and Breaking the Bank (2000). In addition to
clips from the five features, the screening compilation also includes clips from The Fourth World War (2003). The speakers in the concluding panel try to answer the questions: “is the anti-globalization movement dead? If not, what happened to it after 9-11?”

The first feature in this part, The Debt Game, comes across as an educational reel and includes film and video clips interlaced with cute animations in the “Schoolhouse Rock” style. A voiced-over narrator tells the story of how Latin America – using Brazil as its primary example – became victim to the IMF and World Bank’s structural adjustment schemes.

The second feature, Redwood Summer and Beyond – the features do not follow the same order specified on the DVD cover – explores issues surrounding clear cutting forests in the U.S. and then later exposes the human disaster caused by militarily enforced, corporate-backed clear cutting in poorer, undeveloped regions of the world such as Central America and Malaysia. This film is shot in true documentary style, drawing out the tension between environmentalists, working class loggers, and the logging companies. Earth First is introduced, and the positions of activists along with forestry experts in academia (as well as “forestry experts” in corporate marketing and the U.S. forest service) are juxtaposed. The second half of this feature shows how first-world demand has led to monoculture cash crops (bananas, cotton, coffee, and beef) which have in turn led to clear cutting of forests in Central America and Malaysia. This has caused the removal and relocation of indigenous peoples and even the genocide of Sarawak natives in Borneo.

The third feature, A Cry for Freedom and Democracy, is another compilation of film and video featurettes highlighting the plight of the Zapatistas, the cause of their struggle and the reasons for their armed uprising in Mexico after the passing of NAFTA in 1994. “Celebrity guest” interviews include Super Barrio (A flamboyantly caped and masked Zapatista spokesperson in Southern California) and indigenous rights leader Leonard Peltier.

The fourth feature, Showdown in Seattle, is perhaps the Grand Opus of anti-globalization documentary films. This was the first large-scale production of the emerging Indymedia network, filmed at the front lines of the WTO protests in 1999, Seattle. With a production style affectionately labeled “activist porn” in some circles, Showdown is fast paced and energizing and includes a modern urban soundtrack. The provocative film makes you want to do something--NOW. Though the film does provide critical glimpses into the dark heart of the WTO, at its core are vignettes of passionate protesters non-violently struggling to shut down the WTO meetings at all costs, even when confronted violently by pseudo-militaristic police thugs.

The fifth and final feature in this part, Breaking the Bank, is a reprise of the above, produced by Indymedia at the front lines of the World Bank protests in 2000, Washington D.C. Breaking the Bank again takes the “activist porn” approach, but this time interweaves footage of action from the
streets with level-headed critiques of the World Bank provided by experts on IMF & World Bank policies from various social justice organizations. Also explored are the “Black Bloc”, and a revealing survey of corporate media coverage of the protests.

The compilation screener for this set includes teaser clips from the feature documentary The Fourth World War. Since a lot of the panel discussion for this set revolves around the compilation screener, including Fourth scenes, it is worthwhile to skim the screener before viewing the discussion. This panel discussion is quite interesting, extremely informative and also a very good production – leaps and bounds above in terms of quality compared to the production quality of the panel discussion in Part One. Notables such as Rick Rowley (producer, This is What Democracy Looks Like) and David Solnit (author, Army of None) are among the panelists.

Other than the disordered sequence of features mentioned above, and a few misspellings in the subtitles in A Cry for Freedom and Democracy, Part Three contains far fewer of the glaring production issues that Expression=Life contained. The video quality is also much better, and in this part we even see some professional quality documentary style, as well as the introduction of digital video.

Resistencia Y Solidaridad – El Salvador, Colombia, and the U.S. Solidarity Movement

Of the three parts that I reviewed, this one is debatably the most optimistic, as it portrays just how far movements of social justice have advanced in Central and South America. Resistencia Y Solidaridad includes four features: A Dish of Central America (1988), No Hay Paz (1992), Flying South (1994), and We Fight with Our Staffs of Authority (2006). The compilation screener also includes clips from The Sanctuary Movement (date unknown). The panel discussion emphasizes progress that has been made in Central and South America over the past 20 years, and the role that activist media has played in that progress.

A Dish of Central America, the first feature in Part Four, is a pastiche of film and video footage that introduces the viewer to Central America and the many struggles for dignity and social justice, and against dictatorship and corporate control in the region. The one-hour feature provides a timeline of U.S. intervention in Central America, as well as its support for undemocratic and dictatorial regimes. The most notable of these include the kidnappings, disappearances and mass killing of students, labor leaders and peasants in Guatemala and El Salvador. The second feature, No Hay Paz, introduces the El Salvadoran refugee community in Boston and explores their difficulties in attaining refugee status in the U.S. and the constant threat of deportation. Mostly in Spanish and subtitled in English, I found the subtitles to be too lengthy and to move to fast to keep up.
The third feature in this part, We Fight with Our Staffs of Authority (again, not in the same order as listed on the DVD cover), documents the 2006 National Itinerant Congress, a gathering of over 300,000 indigenous rights supporters, in North Cauca, Colombia. The Congress is tricked by and then brutally overtaken by the Colombian National Guard, their belongings, including transportation and housing, are burned. This footage is shocking and heart wrenching, as all of the action unfolds before our eyes on video.

The final feature of the series, Flying South, is a documentary exploring the civil rights movement of the Afro-Colombian segment of Colombia. Relegated to urban slums with poor quality of life, this minority community is contrasted to its rural indigenous counterpart but shares many common struggles. African American ambassadors from the U.S. visit black leaders in Colombia to share their experiences and learn about the ongoing civil rights movement anew, from the Afro-Colombian perspective.

The panel discussion following this part and thus concluding the series provides a hopeful message to depart with. Panelists discuss recent advancements for social justice and democracy in Central and South America, including Bolivia, Venezuela, and perhaps most importantly, El Salvador. There is still much work to do in Colombia, but even there, advances benefiting the disadvantaged have been marked in social and economic terms; and the alternative and independent media have shed a spotlight on abuses that have gone on for decades in the region.

Conclusion

It is difficult to give a series of this size and variety a detailed content review, but in a nutshell, I find the entire series to be of extreme importance and value. With the wide variety of subject matter included in this series, and the fact that each part includes its own compilation screener, it is easy to say that there is something here for everyone. The hefty price tag may make it unattainable for the casual viewer, or even for grass-roots organizations. Institutional licensing is available it is recommended that public libraries with larger budgets for DVDs and academic libraries, especially those that serve Peace Studies and Latin American Studies programs, purchase the entire series for use in their respective communities. The series can also be purchased in part, with individual or institutional licenses.

End Notes

2. I reviewed three of four parts of this series. Part Two: Access To Oxygen – Environmental Justice Hits the Small Screen is being handled by another reviewer.
3. This feature is only 32 minutes, not 58 minutes as stated on the DVD cover.
4. Paraphrased, not quoted, from the panel moderator.
Deep Dish TV, the first grassroots satellite network in the United States, was created in 1986 by Paper Tiger TV as a “distribution network, linking independent producers, programmers, community-based activists and viewers who support movements for social change and economic justice” (Deep Dish, Mission). Rather than present “short, single bits of news broadcast on the commercial networks, Deep Dish gives many reports on the same issue” (Halleck 417). Deep Dish TV not only “demonstrates how national in scope the issues are,” but communicates social problems “opposite of what decontextualized fragments of mainstream network news does. On Deep Dish, issues are contextualized and made coherent” (Halleck 418).

Deep Dish TV’s Access to Oxygen – available as a three DVD set that can be ordered through the Deep Dish Web site or downloaded from Internet Archive - is really a set of “films within films” that explore hazardous waste policy, environmental justice, environmental racism, and the affect of toxic and hazardous wastes on human health and ecosystems. Through documentary footage of government hearings, demonstrations, personal accounts, and community case studies, Access to Oxygen not only illustrates the personal is political, but suggests the notion of street science as conceived by Jason Coburn. Street science springs in part from local or community knowledge, which Coburn (p.12) describes as “the scripts, images, narratives, and understandings we use to make sense of the world in which we live.” Street science is also a practice of science, political inquiry, and action, which is situated and evolves in a community (Coburn, p.44).

Disc 1 of Access Oxygen includes the film “Garbage,” produced by Carolyn Rogoff in collaboration with Staten Island Community TV (1990). Through interviews with community members, hearings and news footage on the infamous Fresh Kills landfill on Staten Island situated within the Fresh Kills estuary, once the world’s largest garbage dump, “Garbage” investigates the politics of trash. This segment also importantly links the evolution of scientific thinking of “swamps” as throwaway land to the current understanding of...
the criticality of wetlands as wildlife habitat and in moderating climate. In addition to these topics, policy aspects of landfill and incinerator siting are discussed via the sociopolitics of NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) and NIABY (Not in Anyone’s Backyard). Included within the “Garbage” documentary are Roger Bailey and Paul Connett’s film “Auburn Maine Incinerator and & Ash Landfill” and the classic Greenpeace film “Rush to Burn.” Disc 1 also contains the 1994 film “Breathless,” produced by Cathy Scott and Susan Levine of Paper Tiger TV, which explores New York City’s announcement to permit seven incinerators in a low income community.

Disc 2 of Access to Oxygen includes the film “Environmental Racism” (1990), which explores hazardous waste incineration in South Chicago and American Cyanamid’s shipping of mercury waste to Thor SA for “recycling,” a practice that resulted in contamination of the Zulu drinking supply in the community of Land of a 1,000 Hills. Within the documentary is a discussion of rancher encroachment and poaching of natural resources on Waura Indian (Brazil) sacred lands and historical footage from the Interdenominational Hearings on Toxics in Minority Communities featuring testimony from minority industrial workers. Additionally, Disc 2 includes “Toxic Wars” (1994), a series of interviews and footage of Maquilladora industries responsible for transboundary pollution in the towns of Brownsville, Texas and Motamoros, Mexico.

Access to Oxygen Disc 3 includes a panel discussion with filmmakers held at NYU on October 3, 2008. Of note from the panel discussion is a call for a systemic approach to waste policy that not only emphasizes a reduction in product packaging, but active waste reduction, recycling, reuse, and community responsibility for the wastes they generate, as in the model of the European Union’s Green Dot system. Adoption of sustainable waste programs would not only transform existing waste-handling by way of a systems approach, but retire those practices that continue to compromise human health and ecosystems – and impinge on environmental rights.

Access to Oxygen is highly recommended for purchase by a wide range of libraries that wish to enhance their environmental policy collections as well as support alternative media. Equally worthy is linking the series through the library’s OPAC to Internet Archive, where patrons may discover Deep Dish TV socially-relevant work.

Works Cited


End Notes

1. Defined by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies,” see http://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/.


4. Producer Carolyn Rogoff said of the relevance of Access to Oxygen: “the films could have been made yesterday.”

Deep Dish TV’s Facebook Image

Editor’s Note: As this issue was going to press, Deep Dish issued Part V in this series. The following description is from their website.

Behind the Bars: Exposing and Transforming the Prison Industrial Complex
Production Year: 2010
Runtime: 4:05:00
Series: DIY Media: Movement Perspectives on Critical Moments
Subjects: Crime, Law, and Justice, Racism, Prisons
CatalogueNumber: 03524

Behind the Bars: Exposing and Transforming the Prison Industrial Complex showcases four programs from the Deep Dish TV archive and a fascinating discussion with a rare gathering of prison activists, filmmakers, and media theorists, who dissect the history of grass-roots media coordination in America and its role in confronting the prison industrial complex. Part five of the series, DIY Media: Movement Perspectives on Critical Moments.
Notes on Contributors

Denice Adkins is Associate Professor at the University of Missouri’s School of Information Science and Learning Technologies and a former Fulbright Scholar to Honduras. Her interests include public libraries’ services to the Latino population and language issues related to library services.

Jenny Bossaller is an Assistant Professor of Library Science at the University of Southern Mississippi.

John Buschman is Associate University Librarian for Scholarly Resources & Services, Georgetown University Library, Washington, D.C. John holds a B.S. in history and sociology and an M.L.S. from Ball State University, and an M.A. in American Studies from St. Joseph’s University and is a doctoral candidate in the Liberal Studies program at Georgetown. His most recent book is Critical Theory for Library and Information Science: Exploring the Social from Across the Disciplines coedited with Gloria Leckie and Lisa Given, published by ABC-Clio in 2010.

Elizabeth E. G. Friese is a doctoral student in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of Georgia in Athens, GA. Her research involves youth and their literacy practices in library contexts.

Elaine Harger is a teacher-librarian at Meadowdale Elementary School in Lynnwood, Washington, and a co-founder of the Progressive Librarians Guild.

Kristen Hogan is Project Director for the Women’s Rights Initiative, funded by the Embrey Family Foundation, at the University of Texas at Austin Center for Women’s and Gender Studies. She has worked as a professor of English and Women’s and Gender Studies and as a book buyer and manager at feminist bookstores. An August, 2010 Masters of Science in Information Studies graduate of the University of Texas at Austin School of Information, Kristen Hogan believes it is a responsibility of librarians and information studies specialists to advocate for diverse literatures and to work against systems of oppression. Her writing has also appeared in Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, ThirdSpace: A Journal of Feminist Theory & Culture, and Rain & Thunder: A Radical Feminist Journal of Discussion & Activism.

Lisa Hussey is an assistant professor at Simmons College in Boston. Her interest in diversity issues began with a pilot study examining the motivations of ethnic minorities to enter librarianship that eventually grew into her dissertation. Lisa’s other research interests include management and popular culture in LIS.

Susan Maret is a member of the Progressive Librarians Guild Coordinating Committee and a lecturer at the School of Library and Information Science, San Jose State University.

Kathleen de la Peña McCook is a member of AFT Local 7463 and Distinguished University Professor at the School of Information, University of South Florida, Tampa. A life member of REFORMA, Kathleen will be keynote speaker at REFORMA’s 40th anniversary program in 2011 during the ALA Conference in New Orleans.
Ulises A. Mejias (ulisesmejias.com) is an Assistant Professor in the Communication Studies Department at SUNY Oswego. He holds an Ed.D. in Technology and Education from Teachers College, Columbia University. Most recently, he published “The Limits of Networks as Models for Organizing the Social” in the journal New Media & Society, and “Peerless: The Ethics of P2P Network Disassembly” as part of the 4th Inclusiva-net Meeting organized by Medialab-Prado in Madrid. Dr. Mejias’ research interests include network science, critical theory, philosophy of technology, and political economy of new media.

Tracy Marie Nectoux is a Quality Control and Metadata Specialist for the Illinois Newspaper Project at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She’s been a member of the Progressive Librarians Guild for four years. Transcribing the Georgetown presentation for John Buschman was a pleasure and an honor.


Ted Striphas is Associate Professor in the Department of Communication and Culture, Indiana University. He is author of The Late Age of Print: Everyday Book Culture from Consumerism to Control (Columbia University Press, 2009). He blogs about media, philosophy, and the politics of culture at “Differences & Repetitions” (http://www.diffandrep.org) and about book history at “The Late Age of Print” (http://www.thelateageofprint.org).

Kim M. Thompson is Lecturer in Information Studies, Charles Sturt University. She received her PhD at the School of Information Studies, Florida State University, and her research and teaching specialize in Evaluation in LIS (including usability analysis), ethical leadership in and management of information organizations, social studies of information, information studies within the cultural context, and information poverty.

Martin K. Wallace is a Science & Engineering Librarian at the University of Maine’s Raymond H. Fogler Library. He is a co-editor of the forthcoming book Edge-worn and Unclassed: Generation X Perspectives on Librarianship, McFarland, 2011.

Michael D. Yates is Editorial Director of Monthly Review Press and Associate Editor of Monthly Review magazine. He is Professor Emeritus at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown and Adjunct Professor of Labor Studies at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. His most recent books are Why Unions Matter, second edition, The ABCs of the Economic Crisis [with Fred Magdoff] (both Monthly Review Press), and In and Out of the Working Class (Arbeiter Ring Publishing).
Progressive Librarians Guild
providing a forum for the open exchange
of radical views on library issues

Statement of Purpose

Progressive Librarians Guild was formed in New York City on January 1990 by a group of librarians concerned with our profession’s rapid drift into dubious alliances with business and the information industry, and into complacent acceptance of service to an unquestioned political, economic and cultural status quo. (See the 1997 Letter from Mark Rosenzweig to PLG members describing changes in the organization that had come about up to that point. http://libr.org/plg/PLG-why.php.)

PLG reaffirmed, significantly, that the development of public libraries was initially spurred by popular sentiment which for one reason or another held that real democracy requires an enlightened citizenry, and that society should provide all people with the means for free intellectual development. Current trends in librarianship, however, assert that the library is merely a neutral institutional mediator in the information marketplace and a facilitator of a value-neutral information society of atomized information consumers.

A progressive librarianship demands the recognition of the idea that libraries for the people has been one of the principal anchors of an extended free public sphere which makes an independent democratic civil society possible, something which must be defended and extended. This is partisanship, not neutrality.

Members of PLG do not accept the sterile notion of the neutrality of librarianship, and we strongly oppose the commodification of information which turns the ‘information commons’ into privatized, commercialized zones. We will help to dissect the implications of these powerful trends, and fight their anti-democratic tendencies.

PLG recognizes that librarians are situated as information workers, communications workers, and education workers, as well as technical workers. Like workers in every sector, our work brings us up against both economic and political issues. Cataloging, indexing, acquisitions policy and collection development, the character of reference services, library automation, library management, and virtually every other library issue embody political value choices. PLG members aim to make these choices explicit, and to draw their political conclusions.

continued on inside back cover