SPECIAL ISSUE: Edmonton PLG Chapter Symposium

Commodification of Information
Publishing Revolution
Fracking and Information
Neoliberalism and LIS
2014 Union Review
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Guest Editors: Lindsey Panjvani, Michael McNally, Erik Christiansen, Alex Carruthers (Edmonton PLG Chapter); Al Kagan, David Lesniaski, Kathleen de la Peña McCook, Katharine Phenix, Mark Rosenzweig. Managing Editor: Elaine Harger. Book review editor: Michael E. Matthews
*Progressive Librarian* formatted by Edgardo Civallero

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St. Paul MN 55105

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October 18, 2014 marked the Edmonton chapter of the Progressive Librarians Guild’s fourth annual symposium. The event was held at the University of Alberta’s School of Information Studies and, for the first time, our compelling speakers came from across Canada and the United States. We are proud to share the symposium’s proceedings with the larger Progressive Librarian community. The theme of this year’s event was the commodification of information and library services. The theme was chosen because of its broad relevance to librarians, archivists, and information professionals, and the papers and presentations from the symposium do an excellent job of highlighting the diversity of issues in commodification along with the importance of resistance to this commodification by progressive librarians.

PLG Edmonton has been an active group during the five years of our existence. We begin this collection of essays with a short history of our chapter by co-founder Braden Cannon. Cannon faithfully reports the chapter’s successes, challenges, and controversies as we grow and respond to the contradictions inherent in an organization of radical professionals.

Samuel Trosow’s keynote did an excellent job of setting the tone for the day, highlighting many themes that were explored by the presenters. He implored progressive librarians to consider the political economy of information as we advocate for information policy and determine the future of the profession. Michael McNally, in his response to Trosow, points to a number of essential works of political economy and LIS scholarship that would support any attempt at a holistic analysis of information policy and commodification. Trosow also spoke to the necessity of reversing the process of commodification through alternatives such as the open access movement. This topic is further explored by Robyn Hall who draws out the challenges experienced by librarians offering
open access publishing in the face of ever-stronger commercial academic publishers. Without understating the scope of the task, Hall argues for increasing the role of libraries in publishing and creating transformative change in the publishing industry.

The impact of neoliberalism, also raised by Trosow, was a common theme featured most prominently in the works by Courtney Waugh and Jonathan Cope. Waugh’s piece provides an insightful analysis as to how neoliberal rhetoric is being increasingly used in academic libraries’ strategic documents to describe our professional values and purpose. Cope’s piece provides a valuable discussion of the neoliberal view of the market as the ideal allocative mechanism for information, using Karl Polanyi’s idea of the fictitious commodity to address the weakness in the neoliberal conception of information.

Bartlomiej Lenart and Miranda Koshelek, grounding their theory of human rights in human need, argue that the unique dependency between librarians and library users is the foundation of the human right to information, which makes librarians duty-bound to protect those rights. Lenart and Koshelek’s piece is one answer to questions that reoccurred throughout the symposium: when and how are we empowered to make transformative change, and when and how can we communicate to our colleagues about these issues? LIS education was also identified as an essential site for encouraging future professionals to engage with these issues.

Concluding the symposium was a unique presentation by Wendy Highby. Her contribution combined the narrative of her transformation from a neutral to an activist librarian, an analysis of a corporate-sponsored educational website about the controversial process of hydraulic fracturing, and performances of the satirical protest songs that form part of her resistance to the oil and gas interests in her home town. Included here is an annotated libretto of her upcoming musical in tandem with an interpolated bibliography of resources sure to be of use to librarians interested in the intersections of environmental activism and information work.
With the fifth anniversary of the unofficial founding of the Edmonton chapter of the Progressive Librarians Guild coming in spring of 2015, now is perhaps an auspicious occasion to reflect on our brief but eventful history with the goal of learning from our experiences and sharing these experiences with the wider PLG. Please bear in mind that I do so from my own subjective experiences as a charter member, rather than the official undertaking by the chapter as a whole.

From the onset, the Edmonton PLG was a different breed of PLG chapter, one made almost entirely of people working in the information field. We did not arise from a university or a library program and never had an official connection to any such institute of higher learning. No students were involved in the formation of the chapter and this, coupled with a wide membership including librarians, library technicians, and archivists, made our group unique among PLG chapters. Furthermore, we are a Canadian chapter, and at the time of our foundation, the only PLG chapter in the country (the Halifax PLG was the first chapter to form in Canada in 2008, but that group was defunct by 2010).

The impetus to form the Edmonton PLG came from a lunch meeting that I had with Amanda Bird of the Edmonton Public Library and Toni Samek of the University of Alberta’s School of Library and Information Studies (SLIS). Toni had heard that I had been involved in the formation of the Halifax PLG and wanted to know about that experience, and so Amanda introduced and joined us for a lunch that ultimately led to a commitment to form an Edmonton chapter of the PLG.

Over the summer of 2010, further conversations with colleagues led to the recruitment of two more interested individuals, Raymond Frogner (then...
of the University of Alberta Archives) and Rene Georgopolis (then of the St. Albert Musée Heritage). The five of us proceeded to plan our inaugural event, a panel discussion on a host of topics related to social justice and the information profession. The event, dubbed *Social Justice in the Stacks*, was held at SLIS in November 2010 and was designed to both engage the wider information community in social justice topics and to attract more members. The event, promoted through word of mouth and through various professional listservs in the Edmonton area, was well-attended. The interest generated from that event led to a large spike in our membership and in December 2010, we held our first official meeting. These meetings have been held on a monthly basis ever since.

**Laying a Foundation**

The importance of infrastructure was greatly emphasized from that first meeting in late 2010. My experiences with the Halifax PLG taught me that a basic structure to the chapter and to its meetings would be essential in creating a lasting organization. Furthermore, the Halifax experience showed that while the enthusiasm and fresh perspectives of students is invaluable, the Edmonton chapter would not survive if it relied entirely on students. The Halifax chapter was composed entirely of students and faced a substantial turnover every two years. In addition, that chapter maintained a very informal approach and did not have any defined positions or keep minutes of its meetings. Once the charter members of the Halifax PLG graduated, the loose structure of the organization did not survive beyond two years.

With this in mind, the Edmonton PLG elected a secretary, treasurer, and communications officer at its first meeting. The secretary was responsible for ensuring that agendas were made for monthly meetings, keeping minutes, maintaining the chapter’s records, and dealing with correspondence. The treasurer was responsible for the chapter’s bank account and for ensuring that dues were sent to the central PLG. Finally, the communications officer was responsible for maintaining the chapter’s email account and online presence, including our website and social media accounts.

The most important facet of these officer positions is that they are directly accountable to the chapter membership and hold absolutely no executive power whatsoever. Through quorum, the chapter democratically makes all decisions in our monthly general meetings; the officers merely ensure that the business of the chapter is attended.

A second plank in our foundation was the creation of chapter bylaws, a document designed to ensure the survival of the group beyond the participation of its founding members (see Appendix A). There was some discussion on the necessity of such a document, but my experience in Halifax was a good
argument in favour of taking the time to draft and maintain bylaws. At the
beginning, the bylaws were all self-explanatory and we were sure to add a
clause that would allow for easy amendments. The bylaws have subsequently
been amended several times as new situations arose that could not have been
foreseen from the onset.

A third foundational decision was to keep minutes at every meeting, both
general and committee meetings, and to adopt a loose interpretation of Robert’s
Rules so as to prevent meandering, directionless meetings. The imposition of
Robert’s Rules was perhaps the biggest subject of debate in those early months
but quickly became the standard by which our meetings are run.

Because of these decisions, the Edmonton PLG has run smoothly for nearly
five years now, holding general, monthly meetings and keeping a record of our
past decisions and discussions in order to hold each other accountable and to
ensure that decisions made by the membership are acted upon in due course. If
there is one bit of advice that we could offer other PLG chapters, either existing
or potential, it would be to impose organizational structures such as these.

Building Momentum

Having established our organizational structure, we began planning
events and actively engaging with the wider community. Our first event, in
February 2011, was related to Freedom to Read Week and consisted of creating
“censored” versions of paperbacks by wrapping the covers with white paper
with a warning to not read the “censored” book. These covered books were
then distributed at random sites around the city with information about the PLG
Edmonton inserted inside. This project was intended to get the word out about
both our chapter and Banned Books Week.

We also reached out to other groups across Canada in order to strengthen
ties of solidarity and build a network of information workers. The chapter
actively supported and reached out to colleagues who found themselves under
attack at their jobs at McMaster University, Toronto Public Libraries, and the
University of Western Ontario. We stood in solidarity with these workers by
drafting statements of support and distributing said statements through listservs
and email. These solidarity statements were well-received by the affected
colleagues as well as colleagues from across the country and helped raise the
profile of the PLG in Canada.

In addition to building networks with information workers across the
country, we also reached out to leftist organizations and movements in Edmonton
in order to create a tighter bond between our focus on information work and
wider issues affecting our community. This led to a working relationship with
the Edmonton branch of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) as well
as highly visible participation in Edmonton’s annual May Day march, for
which we made a PLG banner that never fails to attract attention from fellow marchers. Our relationship with the Edmonton IWW led to an organizer training workshop put on in 2012 by the IWW specifically for PLG members, most of whom work in white-collar information settings such as libraries and archives. The Edmonton PLG has emphasized the need to organize in the workplace and therefore has made an effort to educate its members in the tactics and strategies of grassroots, workplace organizing as expounded by the IWW.

Another highlight in 2012 was the remarkable organizing that evolved in response to the federal government’s cuts to Library and Archives Canada, including the dissolution of the National Archival Development Program, which funded archives work across the country and was an immensely successful project. The Edmonton PLG spearheaded protests against these cuts that culminated with the Archivists’ On to Ottawa Trek. The Trek was composed of simultaneous protests in Edmonton, London (mounted by the PLG chapter at Western University), and Ottawa, where over 100 archivists and allies marched and held a funeral for archives funding at the steps of Library and Archives Canada. The Edmonton protest had approximately 30 attendees who gave Edmonton residents the unlikely and bizarre sight of angry archivists marching and chanting through the streets of downtown Edmonton and outside of the federal building.

Another point of emphasis in our early years was the importance of a wide spectrum of membership across professional divisions. While we are a leftist organization and do not seek to become an umbrella for all manner of information workers, including those who do not actively agree with our principles, we do strive to make our organization welcoming for all those information workers and students whose beliefs align with ours. With that in mind, we have made
active and continual attempts to recruit not just information workers who hold graduate degrees, but also students and information workers from technical services and related fields.

To give a fair assessment, our attempts to create a PLG chapter of all manner of information workers and students have had mixed results. The chapter’s membership in 2011 and 2012 was definitely a cross-section of the information field, with active participation from librarians, archivists, technicians, and students. Since that time, many students have come and gone as they graduate, which is to be expected, but we have also lost the participation of all of the technicians who used to be involved. This is decidedly a failure of our stated goal, and as of writing, we have had no success in reversing this trend. We still endeavour to include a wide variety of information workers, however, and visit both SLIS and the library technician program at MacEwan University annually to introduce those students to the PLG and what we are about.

Organize & Assemble

Since 2011, our biggest undertaking has been an annual symposium, Organize & Assemble. We decided that we wanted an event that would allow for an open exchange of ideas, theories, and practical advice related to social justice movements and the information field. We wanted such an event to be fundamentally different from professional conferences in that the stated goal was not only to provide a forum for leftist discussion but also to build a wider movement, hence the name of the event, which refers to the professional activities that we are engaged in as well as the organization of an information workers’ movement.

The first Organize & Assemble was held in October 2011 and featured presenters speaking on a host of topics. It did not have a theme, as we wanted to encourage as much participation as possible. The result was a success; we had a strong lineup of presenters and attracted attendees from across the province and even from British Columbia and Saskatchewan. For a more in-depth discussion of these proceedings, please refer to Stephen MacDonald’s Conference Proceedings: Organize & Assemble – the First Symposium of the Edmonton Branch of the PLG in Progressive Librarian 36/37, 2011.

The second Organize & Assemble followed in October 2012. Likewise, it did not have a specific theme but saw presentations on such topics as digital labour and innovation rhetoric in the library field (please see Stephen MacDonald’s Organize and Assemble II: Progressive Librarians’ Guild Edmonton’s Symposium in Progressive Librarian 41, 2013). The 2013 edition of Organize & Assemble was the first to have a theme, which was precarious labour in the information sector. This symposium featured a presentation from Gil McGowan of the Alberta Federation of Labour, who spoke on the challenges
facing the labour movement due to the Temporary Foreign Workers program. Other presenters talked about providing library services to Temporary Foreign Workers as well as efforts to unionize at academic libraries.

Organize and Assemble IV took place this past October and focused on the commodification of information. The issue of Progressive Librarian at hand is devoted entirely to those proceedings so you can see for yourself the strength and relevance of the program.

Since 2011, organizing the annual symposium has been the major, on-going project of the Edmonton PLG and an entire article could be devoted to these experiences. For now, we want to provide a brief overview of the development of Organize & Assemble and refrain from further analysis until a later date.

**Hitting a Wall**

Like all chapters of the PLG, the Edmonton chapter is composed of volunteers and there is a limit to the time and energy that volunteers can give. We are proud of what we have accomplished, but there have been some hiccups along the way. Some projects started with lofty goals and have yet to reach fruition due to the same impediments with which all volunteer organizations struggle.

First among our on-going but as-yet-unfulfilled projects is the Alberta Radical Research Collective (ARRC). ARRC was designed to facilitate the preservation of records related to radical leftist organizations in Alberta in a cooperative model that would allow creator organizations to maintain their own archives while simultaneously making them accessible for research into leftist movements in the province (see Appendix B for further details).

Our second on-going but as-yet-unfulfilled project is the Rise with the Ranks Workshop (RWR), designed to be a weekend-long workshop devoted to creating an egalitarian information workers’ movement through grassroots organizing (see Appendix C). RWR was initially scheduled for summer of 2013 but was postponed indefinitely. The current plan is to launch RWR in the first half of 2015. As with Organize & Assemble, an entire article could be written about our attempts to mount RWR, but for now, we want to use it to illustrate the fact that volunteer-run organizations such as ours can only achieve so much in due course.

**Membership Principles**

During the course of our nearly five-year history, there has been only one major issue that has generated a significant amount of internal debate: the creation of membership principles specific to the Edmonton chapter of the PLG.
The issue arose, ironically, from the success of our organization. After several well-attended events and *Organize & Assemble* symposia, we received an influx of new members who did not actively involve themselves in the organization but were able to read our minutes on the internal listserv. Some of these new members were in positions of authority, which was an issue for students who would soon be entering the workforce and were concerned that their political activities might be used against them by potential employers who had access to PLG minutes. The concern was serious enough that it became a topic of great discussion at several of our general meetings.

Eventually, it was decided that we needed some form of membership principles that would protect our members from possible repercussions from inactive members misusing information from PLG minutes. A committee was struck to compose draft principles, which were brought back to the chapter. After months of sometimes intense debate, new membership principles were adopted in March of 2014 and the chapter bylaws were amended to reflect the change (see article VIII of the bylaws in Appendix A).

The membership principles are not an attempt to enforce ideological purity; rather, they exist to protect our members, ensure that we are all working toward the same ends, and to set a minimum level of commitment to one’s fellow workers and to the wider social justice movement. Specific mention was given to maintaining academic freedom for professors and students, so that students would not be penalized in class by professors who might be aware of students’ activities with the PLG, and to building a democratic workers’ movement so that employers would not be able to use knowledge of employees’ PLG activities against them in the workplace. Violations of these principles by PLG members would result in dismissal from the Edmonton chapter. So far, absolutely no controversy or dismissals have arisen as a result of the implementation of the membership principles, although at least one former PLG member quit the Edmonton chapter due to the principles being adopted.

**Looking Ahead**

Just shy of our fifth anniversary, the Edmonton PLG has much to be proud of and much to experience and achieve in years ahead. In 2015, we will see *Organize & Assemble V*, another May Day march, and hopefully the launch of the *Rise with the Ranks Workshop*. We will also continue work on the ARRC project and welcome any new initiatives that our members choose to mount.

Over the years, we have seen many members come and go, many involved members take a backseat, many inactive members get more involved, and an ongoing enthusiasm that drives our work forward. We believe that even if all of the members who were involved in 2010 and 2011 were to leave the organization now, the Edmonton PLG is in such a healthy state that it would
continue on the efforts of newer members and those who will join in the coming years. This is a great success and a testament to the tremendous effort spent over the years by dozens of Edmonton PLG members.

On behalf of the membership of the Edmonton PLG, we wish to express solidarity with the wider PLG and to invite you to the frozen north where you will find comrades in the Edmonton chapter.

Appendix A: Bylaws of the Edmonton Chapter of the PLG

I. Meetings

1. General meetings are to be held monthly.
2. Quorum for meetings is five members of the PLG.
3. Meetings will be run according to Robert’s Rules of Order with a rotating chair and recording secretary elected for each meeting.
4. Only members of the PLG may propose motions and vote at general meetings.
5. Motions will be carried by a straight majority.

II. Officers

1. There are three officer positions: Secretary, Treasurer and Communications.
2. Officers are elected annually in December of each year with the term to start in January.
3. Only members of the PLG may run for and be elected to an officer position.
4. Officers cannot serve more than two consecutive terms.
5. The duties of the Secretary are as follows: to prepare meeting agendas, to provide access to meeting minutes, to manage chapter records, and to act as the liaison with the main PLG.
6. The duties of the Treasurer are as follows: to manage the chapter’s bank account, to provide financial reports at each general meeting, to collect dues and arrange payment of national dues if necessary.
7. The duties of the Communications position are as follows: to manage the chapter’s email and web presence, to manage the chapter’s listserv, and to act as the main contact for public inquiries.
8. The secretary and treasurer will have signing authority over the bank account.
9. If any officer is seen to be negligent in their duties, they may be recalled by a notice of motion to recall at a general meeting followed by a vote...
to recall at the following general meeting. Recalled officers can then be replaced as soon as possible.

**III. Bylaw Amendments**

1. Bylaws can be amended or added to as needed.
2. Bylaw amendments are to be announced through a notice of motion to amend bylaws at a general meeting followed by a vote to amend bylaws at the following general meeting.

**IV. Annual General Meeting**

1. The annual general meeting (AGM) will be held in December of each year.
2. Officers will be elected at the AGM, with nominations for positions to open at the November monthly meeting and to be closed by the chair of the AGM prior to the vote.
3. The vote will be by secret ballot, administered by two returning officers elected at the AGM.
4. After the vote, the ballots are to be destroyed by the returning officers.
5. Quorum for the AGM is five members of the PLG.
6. Officers are to present an annual report on chapter activities at the AGM.

**V. Special Meetings**

1. Any member with a second member may call a special meeting.
2. A call for a special meeting must be posted on the PLG Edmonton listserv and to the chapter blog.
3. Special meetings can be held no sooner than 24 hours after they have been called.
4. Quorum for special meetings is five members.
5. Minutes from special meetings must be posted on the PLG Edmonton listserv. If a meeting involves money, minutes from that meeting must be distributed to the list within 24 hours of the meeting.
6. Another regular or special meeting under quorum can reverse a decision.

**VI. Position Statements**

1. Any member may draft a position statement and send it to members using the PLG Edmonton listserv.
2. The statement may be approved by the internal mailing list.
3. The motion will be approved by 5 members.
4. The person who wrote the position statement will track votes on the position statement.
5. Votes should be posted to the internal list instead of being sent to the member who wrote the statement.

**VII. Membership payments to PLG Central Committee**

1. Members will renew their membership no later than the date of PLG Edmonton’s AGM.

**VIII. Membership Principles**

1. Membership in the Edmonton chapter of the PLG is contingent upon the upholding of the following principles:
   - Stand in solidarity with struggling workers and refuse to cross picket lines;
   - Uphold freedom of speech, thought, and expression in the workplace and classroom;
   - Strive for democratic workplaces and classrooms;
   - Uphold academic freedom in educational institutions for faculty and students;
   - Critically examine and oppose any power imbalances in the workplace; and
   - Not accept the notion of the neutrality of information workers and strongly oppose the commodification of information that turns the information commons into privatized commercial zones.
2. Membership shall commence upon the signing of the statement and submission to the said document to the chapter secretary.
3. If a member is found in contravention of these principles, membership in the Edmonton chapter will be revoked but remain in the central PLG. The affected member’s local dues will then be transferred to the central PLG.
4. If a member is accused of violating the principles, the accused member has the right to defend their actions at a general or special meeting, as defined by the bylaws and subject to the accused member’s availability within reason and prior to the next scheduled general meeting.
5. Membership status can only be revoked subject to a motion for expulsion from the Edmonton PLG, seconded and passed as per chapter bylaws.
IV. Membership Fee

The Edmonton Chapter of the PLG charges all members $20 for the membership year.

Appendix B: Alberta Radical Research Collective Mandate

The Alberta Radical Research Centre (ARRC) is a project of the Edmonton branch of the Progressive Librarians Guild (PLG) and is managed by Edmonton-area archivists, librarians, and related information professionals who seek to apply professional knowledge and research support to social justice movements in Alberta.

ARRC exists to document grassroots, community-led movements, organizations, or projects and the individuals involved therein that are based in or are related to Alberta and that actively work toward social, economic, or community justice. These movements, organizations, or projects can be related to labour, immigration, race, poverty, environment, community activism, or gender and sexuality, among others.

The documentation of these movements, organizations, or projects will consist of collecting original records and publications by and about these groups, as well as conducting supplementary research. Special consideration will be given to how these movements, organizations, or projects are managed with priority given to de-centralized, grassroots, co-operative, and democratic models. Priority will also be given to marginalized and under-represented communities where these communities intersect with the social justice focus of ARRC.

Appendix C: Rise with the Ranks Workshop Statement of Purpose

The Rise with the Ranks Workshop is predicated on the principle that library and information workers should not strive to rise from the ranks but rather rise with the ranks, to paraphrase Eugene Debs. We believe that cooperative, non-hierarchical methods of organization are essential to the social justice ideals embraced by our profession. Therefore, the purpose of the Rise with the Ranks Workshop is to:

- provide a counter to hierarchical, business models of management within the library and information industry;
• equip participants with the skills and tools needed to affect meaningful change within the industry and wider society;
• foster a specific worker identity among library and information workers;
• build a workers’ movement within the library and information industry based on collaboration and solidarity; and
• encourage the growth of self-management, egalitarianism, and worker empowerment within the library and information industry.
Concern about the commodification of information is not new in the field of librarianship. Nor are concerns about the erosion of the public sphere and the corresponding pressures to cut costs and adopt managerial approaches borrowed from the private sector. These problems have all been recognized for several decades and each has been discussed in the literature of library and information studies (Schiller & Schiller, 1988; M. Harris, 1986; R. Harris, 1992, Buschman, 2003; Trosow and Nilsen, 2006; Buschman, 2006).

Yet as market forces continue to impose themselves in our day-to-day practices and in the way librarians think of themselves, their services, and their relationships to the communities they serve; there is growing danger of resignation and adaptation to these changes (see Coffman, 1998). I sense a weariness in the will to question the results of managerial and market-oriented imperatives, which increasingly arise within the public institution itself.

In this essay I will argue that the political economy of information and the notion of the public sphere are two central concepts that need to be linked together and given considerably more emphasis in the field of librarianship. Based on these concepts, we can develop information policies in a holistic and critical manner (Trosow, 2010) that allow us to approach a “progressive librarianship,” one that protects the public sphere, resists marketization, defends the notion of information as a public good, and which builds general support for public information services.

In presenting a theoretical framework which can support the development and growth of a critical approach to information services, or more directly: a
framework for progressive librarianship, I hope to actively push back against and resist developments that threaten the normative assumptions and goals of our field. Central to this approach are the two interrelated concepts of political economy of librarianship and the preservation and development of the public sphere.

**The political economy of librarianship**

In one of the few articles directly addressing the political economy of librarianship, William Birdsall (2000) begins with the argument that:

> The potential transformation of libraries due to developments in information technology cannot be divorced from political and economic forces driving technological change. Consequently, this paper argues that there is a need for a political economy of librarianship.

Ruth Rikowski (2001-2002) adopts a similar approach, stressing the incursion of the corporate model into library practices in the U.K. I would also adopt this approach and link it to the concept of the public sphere and the need for an overall holistic and critical approach to information policy. Birdsall’s article provides a good introduction to the history and background of “political economy.” He says:

> All the great eighteenth and nineteenth century founders of modern economics—Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, David Ricardo, John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx—were political economists because they recognized the intimate connection between economics and politics, between economy and state. ... [these] political economists were attempting to explain not only the new phenomenon of the capital market but also its relationship to the state and the welfare of its citizens.

Despite the significant differences between various schools of political economy, they all shared in recognizing the linkage between the economy and the polity. But by the end of the 19th century, economics and political science started to become separate fields. These separate disciplines began to take on their own identities, their own areas of research and their own separate approaches. The direction taken by mainstream economics was decidedly market-oriented and based largely on notions of efficiency. This efficiency model is based on a number of assumptions about how markets operate and how an efficient market is the ideal allocative mechanism to maximize social welfare. These assumptions include perfect competition without barriers to entry, perfect information, stable consumer preferences and the absence of
externalities. But the overriding assumption is that rational and self-interested actors will engage in utility-maximizing transactions that will optimize their own welfare. The operation of this efficient market depends on the construction of supply and demand curves where buyers and sellers state their preferences of how many units of goods they will buy and sell at various prices. The classic upwardly sloping supply curve assumes that as prices increase, producers will increase supplies. In contrast the downwardly sloping demand curve assumes that as prices fall, the quantity of goods purchased by consumers will increase. While partial market failures (imperfect competition, lack of information or information imbalances, and externalities) can all be accommodated within the price system, the “public goods” problem is considered a total market failure which cannot be reconciled with the price system. The difference between public goods and private goods as the terms are used by economists is a crucial distinction that warrants further elaboration (see DeLong and Froomkin, 2000; Murray and Trosow, 2013, pp. 11-15).

Public goods are non-rival in their consumption and do not have an effective exclusion mechanism. Non-rival consumption means that the enjoyment of the good can be shared without depletion. Goods that exhibit rivalry in consumption are depleted upon use.

Physical consumer goods that populate store shelves are rival in consumption. When a widget is purchased it is no longer on the shelf for the next shopper. Depletable energy resources are another classic example of rivalry in consumption. When we say that public goods are non-rival in consumption, we mean that the consumption of the good by one person does not reduce the amount of the good available for consumption by others. If you walk down a street illuminated by a street light, the light is not depleted because you enjoyed its benefit. (Murray and Trosow, 2013, pp. 11)

Where goods lack an effective exclusion mechanism, the user can enjoy the benefit of the good without paying for it. Examples of exclusion mechanisms have included the toll-booth, the need to place coins in a vending machine, a turnstile where tickets can be collected, and the check-out line at a retail store. In the digital world the common exclusion mechanism has been the password, which is now being supplemented by various types of digital locks and digital monitoring of usage.

Common examples of public goods include a lighthouse, street lighting, national defense and the air we breathe. With public goods, the construction of the demand curve is impeded as the rational buyer is not going to assign preferences to how much quantity of a good will be purchased at different prices. Hence the concept of total market failure. Table 1 reiterates the characteristics
of public and private goods. All of the assumptions underlying the efficiency model are idealized, abstracted from reality, and oblivious to power relations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Good</th>
<th>Consumption</th>
<th>Exclusion Mechanism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pure Public Good</td>
<td>Non-rival (joint) consumption; use does not result in depletion of the good</td>
<td>Exclusion mechanism is not present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure Private Good</td>
<td>Rival consumption; use results in depletion of the good</td>
<td>Exclusion mechanism is present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Characteristic of Public and Private Goods

Much information policy making fails to look beyond the same types of assumptions underlying economic analysis and uncritically accepts the superiority of the market system as the ideal allocative mechanism. The assumption is that the public goods nature of information is a problem that needs to be cured in order for the price system to work properly. This “cure” involves crafting policies designed to induce scarcity, promote rivalry in consumption, and, most significantly, to create new exclusion and control mechanisms, all with resulting negative social costs. Some examples of negative social costs brought on by excessive emphasis on proprietary rights include barriers of access to educational and teaching materials in the case of copyright and barriers to access to seeds and essential medicines in the case of patents.

Information goods are inherently non-rival in consumption as they are not naturally subject to an exclusion mechanism. The physical container that holds the information (i.e. a printed book, a DVD) is itself rivalrous in its consumption and it is subject to an exclusion mechanism. But the information contained in the book or in the DVD itself is non-rival and not exhaustible. As information resources become digitized, we see a separation of the underlying intellectual good from the physical container that holds it. Further, the marginal cost for information goods approaches zero. For those with a stake in the market system, public goods present a serious problem.

Under the predominant efficiency-maximizing approach much in favor with contemporary policy-makers, these social costs are often justified based on the need to foster economic incentives. On the surface at least, it would seem that economic analysis plays an important role in the information policy process. But when one looks below the surface, it appears that the policy process is not driven by any real economic analysis as much as by the power of economic interests. In particular, copyright and patent policy developments can be located within a broader framework of commodification and the logic of capital, which require a critical theoretical framework rooted in political economy to address.

There is now a growing recognition that the division of the polity and the economy is an artificial one, and indeed a very ideological one at that. What
holds these two fields together from a critical perspective is the recognition and criticism of existing power relations.

**Applying the critical political economy approach to libraries**

Getting back to Birdsall’s analysis with respect to libraries, he summarizes his basic argument by saying:

No profession concerned with the administration of a public institution, such as the library, can ignore the need to pursue serious research into the politico-economic sphere of public policy. Understanding the enduring link between economics and politics is crucial to understanding the current political realm of librarianship. Achieving this understanding is the reason for the need to develop a political economy of librarianship.

The framework of critical political economy could provide a useful way of thinking about the advocacy work of the library community. Yet this approach is generally avoided as it would run up against norms of political neutrality. It would also require a departure from a conservative managerial approach because critical political economy is focused on questioning existing power relations. Library associations tend to be dominated by managers who will not call existing arrangements into question. Instead, library advocacy efforts are typically focused on the particular narrow issue at hand and are designed to obtain limited results. Birdsall says the most attention is given to library funding issues but that there is a need to go beyond that:

...librarians need to devote more effort researching the political and economic dynamics that define the past and current environment of libraries. Libraries are the creation and instrument of public policy derived from political processes. Understanding these processes includes appreciating the connection between the polity and the economy.

Now there has certainly been an expansion of advocacy efforts beyond library funding issues – copyright and censorship come to mind. But even here we can see some serious problems that arise by taking a narrow institutional approach and not looking at broader political, economic and social questions. By looking at issues in isolation and focusing on short term efforts, we often miss the inter-related aspects of various substantive issues and fail to recognize the central issue of power relationships which underlie them all.

It is essential that when we talk about individual information policy issues, be it digital locks, cuts to public information services (i.e., Library and Archives of Canada, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Statistics Canada, and
Canada Post) or the dismantling of publicly supported research programs; we have to look for how new exclusion mechanisms are being imposed and how they aid the transition from public good to private good, and ultimately how they weaken the public sphere. This movement is the operational essence of the process of commodification. It is the creation of an exclusion mechanism that is the key to commodification as rivalry in consumption is generally not an issue, especially in the case of digital goods.

It is important to note that not all restrictions on the “free flow of information” involve the imposition of an exclusion mechanism in order to facilitate commodity transactions. Laws protecting the privacy of personal information, as well as those that limit hate speech and obscenity are all examples of restrictions on otherwise “free flows” of information, but they are based on policy goals other than aiding in the transformation of a public good to a private good. But expanded copyright restrictions, new fees for services, cuts to public funding and contracting out are related to this transformation.

In addition, it is not enough to try to hold back the process of enclosure and commodification. We have to be thinking of ways to reverse the process once it has begun. Some examples of reversing the process include the adoption of user-friendly Open Access publishing and fair dealing policies, open data initiatives, and extending the public provision of information services. Where services have been contracted out, the contracts need to be carefully reviewed for compliance and reincorporating the services into the public sector should be considered. Similarly, in the crucial area of copyright policy, it is not enough for us to oppose new methods of enclosure (such as digital locks) but we also have to be thinking of alternatives to the existing IP regime that reward creators and encourage the production of art and science while de-emphasizing the market driven imperatives of strong proprietary exclusion mechanisms (See Murray & Trosow, 2013, p. 217-233).

Having put so much stress on the difference between the two competing paradigms of mainstream market-oriented economic analysis and critical political economy, we need to step back and realize we are not here to become economists or economic theorists. We are concerned about these economic issues as they relate to our field in a very concrete way which leads to the need to frame information services as an essential component of the public sphere.

The Library as Public Sphere

Gloria Leckie (2004) has written an exceptionally succinct and accessible article entitled “Three Perspectives on Libraries as Public Space” (see also Habermas, 1974, for an accessible encyclopedia entry on the public sphere). Leckie provides us with a good starting point to understand this concept and its importance for librarians.
She argues that the concept of the public sphere is important “because the spaces where members of the public congregate and mingle freely are seen as being essential to the public sphere, that area of life that is neither the home nor the sphere of the state” (p. 234).

Leckie boils Habermas down to a few essential concepts “in effect as a sphere of criticism of public authority” (p. 234). Historically, she says, “the public sphere was primarily a literary and discursive space, where debate on important public matters took place in: coffee houses, reading rooms, academies, salons and theatres and through the early mass media of books and journals” (pp. 234).

Eventually, she adds, specific public institutions began to emerge based on the idea of free and open access to information (and in particular the public library). Still, Leckie recognizes that the question of whether the library has met the challenge of being part of the public sphere is a contested one. Some think that public libraries have lost their focus on the “self-education of the citizenry to become participating members of democratic society” (p. 234) and have rather sought to become a popular attraction for entertainment to attract more users.⁴ Leckie concludes with the observation that “there is plenty of evidence to show that public libraries are highly successful public spaces....and are still valued highly” (p. 236).

While recognizing some of the critiques of public library services (serving only certain segments of the population) Leckie maintains that:

> there is currently no other public space quite like the public library where citizens can engage in quiet reflection and study, able to pursue their own intellectual projects and personal growth free of the commercial practices and ideological positions that permeate almost every other aspect of life. (p. 236)

Speaking in 2004 she makes the observation that “...thankfully the 1990s are over and we can stop being seduced by the relentless advances in telecommunications technologies [and that] we can begin to see the forest instead of the trees” (p. 236). John Bushman had made the point a year earlier that “[l]ibraries as entertainment centers, as sites of economic (instead of democratic) value, and sites of potential customer identification are weakening libraries’ embodiment of the public sphere” (2003, p. 75). There is ample evidence that in 2015 we are still in the same cycle of being overly-enamoured with technological advances, by the chasing of fads and by an emphasis on entertainment services in order to capture the attention of the public and funders. Some current examples include the captivation of some public libraries with entertainment centric “maker-spaces” and the emphasis on “data-management” in academic libraries.
Quite appropriately Leckie concludes her essay on the public sphere with another reference to John Buschman who says the threat to libraries as public space is not digital resources per se, but the ideology of the library as business and the pressure to conform to the model of the market place. Buschman asks: “As a society, do we really need another model of market and market-driven consumer space, or do we need another alternative in the public sphere” (2004, p. 42).

This question remains relevant in 2015, and it is imperative to the survival of our field that it be affirmatively addressed. We need to take a critical assessment of whether the recent practices of the library community (including library institutions themselves as well as the associations that purport to speak for them) are effectively asking this question and working toward effective solutions.

I would reframe the question and ask:

Is librarianship itself succumbing to the commodification of information and to the erosion of the public sphere, all to the detriment of what we had thought were our basic values of intellectual freedom, broad access to information and public control over the policies that determine information policies?

Responses to commodification and the erosion of the public sphere: Can we do better?

This section considers how the field of librarianship has, through its associations, responded to these developments and how could these responses be improved?

How we respond to the commodification of information and the erosion of the public sphere is the crucial challenge for progressive voices in the library community. Efforts to resist access-destructive commercialization of information goods and services and protect the public provision of these services are typically met with resistance. It is no surprise when commercial interests external to the library community take strong positions to protect their business models and extend them through new markets. What is more perplexing though is when these positions arise internal to the library community. Efforts to resist commodification and protect the public sphere are also met with resistance within the library community; they often will run right up against the persistent ideology of neutrality (Blanke, 1989), against the wall of institutional conservatism and risk-aversion (Trosow, 2010a), and against the continued allure of new technologies. All of these factors interact and will continue to plague library advocacy efforts to influence the policy-making process in order to counter commodification and to protect the library as a space in which the public sphere can flourish. Three recent examples will help illustrate the point. The first concerns developments at Library and Archives
Canada (PLG, Toronto Chapter, 2013), and the failure of the Canadian Library Association (CLA) to participate in the critique of LAC management (Oliphant and McNally, 2014; Dekker, 2012, 2012a; Lockhart, 2012). After the Canadian Association of University Teachers launched the “Save Libraries and Archives Canada” campaign in 2011, which was highly critical of LAC management (Save Libraries and Archives Canada, 2011), the CLA distanced itself from CAUT. Rejecting CAUT’s critical approach, the CLA President said:

While the Canadian Library Association shares some of the concerns outlined in your correspondence, particularly in the areas of acquisitions and the provision of services by qualified professional staff, we also understand that Library and Archives Canada must adapt to the digital age and address competing demands from its mandate as well as from the political realities of the day. With all federal departments facing increased scrutiny and requirements to produce significant budget reductions, LAC has to take difficult decisions with regard to its collection and services. (Adams, 2011)

The second example concerns copyright policies in educational institutions (Katz, 2012; Trosow, 2012), and CLA’s failure to take an explicit position on the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) Access Copyright model license which remains in effect in many colleges and universities. In a non-committal statement issued in June 2012 on the license, CLA said that the negotiation of blanket licenses “is a welcome development for post-secondary institutions” (CLA, 2012). It also said that: “CLA fully understands that university and college administrators must consider many factors before making decisions regarding the need for a license at their own institutions.”

The third example concerns the failure of CLA to issue a statement on the events leading up to the G-20 conference in Toronto in 2010, despite the recommendation from their Intellectual Freedom Advisory Committee that they do so:

…after the Ontario provincial government quietly promulgated Regulation 233/10, the Advisory Committee prepared a position statement expressing concern and opposition to the use of the 70-year-old Public Works Protection Act to curtail freedom of expression during the Toronto G20 Summit. Our statement pointed out how these actions were at odds with CLA’s Position Statement on Intellectual Freedom. We asked that CLA request the Government of Ontario to revoke the regulation before the summit, and also to review the Act under which it was adopted in order to ensure future transparency and accountability in the law-making process. Unfortunately, the CLA executive was not
willing to adopt our recommendation, so CLA remained silent on the issue. (Trosow, 2011, p.11)

All three of these examples evidence a flawed policy analysis which takes a narrow institutional approach and which fails to consider broader political, economic and social questions. In all three of these situations, CLA failed to consider, much less appreciate and act or recognize, the central issue of power relationships which underlie them all. In all three of these situations, the formulation of a response would have benefitted from an analysis informed by the concepts of political economy and the public sphere. All of these examples are also rooted in the neutrality principle, along with undue institutional conservatism and risk aversion on the part of CLA. The stubborn insistence on maintaining neutrality will time and again disable meaningful advocacy efforts and it will impair the ability of the library community to achieve its purposes. Insisting on neutrality will derail efforts to resist the commodification of information and the erosion of the public sphere.

We can’t hold back from participating in the democratic process and stay silent on some things that need to be said. But the default has become abstaining from taking positions that may be contrary to some of our institutions or others in the profession.

The *Statement of Purpose of the Progressive Librarians Guild* links the protection of the public sphere with opposition to the commodification and enclosure of information within the context of a progressive librarianship:

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. (n.p)

This statement has withstood the test of time as it remains fresh and relevant in the over two decades since its adoption. But these values need to be better infused into library associations more broadly, given more emphasis in our LIS programs, and generally incorporated into the advocacy work of the library community.
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NOTES

1 This essay is based on the keynote address by the author at the 2014 Progressive Librarians’ Guild, (Edmonton Chapter) held in October 2014 at the University of Alberta. The author would like to acknowledge the helpful exchanges with and comments from the participants in the symposium and would particular thank Dr. Michael McNally and Alex Carruthers.

2 Jennifer Dekker (2012) provides a broad definition of “library community” which (1) all information workers - managers, non-managers, librarians, archivists and other staff; and (2) all those invested in the products of libraries and library labour, including researchers, policy makers and (3) citizens.

3 See Trosow (A Holistic Approach to Information Policy, 2010) for several examples of this narrow institutional approach.

4 For example, the Edmonton Public Library states in their mission statement: “We are Edmonton’s largest lender of all kinds of information and entertainment. We are experts in providing access to the world’s information, ideas and entertainment - enabling a lifetime of learning, engagement and possibility for every Edmontonian.” (n.d.). http://www.epl.ca/mission-values-business-plan They also recently won “Library of the Year” from Library Journal, the first Canadian library system to do so.


6 No formal statement was issued from CLA explaining why they rejected the recommendations of their Intellectual Freedom Advisory Committee. However, the British Columbia Library Association did send a letter expressing the concerns raised by the Committee (British Columbia Library Association, 2010).
I want to begin by noting that it is an honour and privilege to respond to Dr. Trosow’s keynote, as he has served as my long time mentor. From teaching me in my first MLIS class to co-supervising my doctoral dissertation and now working as research collaborators, it has been a very fortunate set of opportunities.

Dr. Trosow’s keynote should be commended for several reasons. His call for a holistic and critical approach is key as information issues, particularly policy issues, become increasingly entangled. Concerns regarding access to information often bring up conflicting issues related to privacy, rights to information and copyright. Approaching these as separate and distinct policy spheres misses the important interaction between these policies. Secondly, he has raised the crucial point of examining power relations that shape information practices and policies. Finally, his call for a critical approach to technology is particularly welcomed in a field that often suffers from technophilia but at the same time cannot afford to be technophobic.

In regard to building a critical political economy of librarianship, Dr. Trosow has identified several important works within the field of library and information studies (LIS), and I want to expand the discussion by suggesting some other bodies of literature that are important for scholars and practitioners.

A critical political economy of librarianship must engage with not only more recent works on political economy, but also the foundational works in this area. The logical starting point in such a discussion is Adam Smith. While Smith crudely highlights the importance of self-interest (“It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner,
but from their regard to their own interest”) and the invisible hand (“led by an
invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention… pursuing
his own interest he frequently promotes that of society more effectually than
when he really intends to promote it”) in *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith is much
more careful to underscore the limits on self-interest in *The Theory of Moral
Sentiments*. The first chapter of Marx’s *Capital*, with its thorough discussion
and delineation between labour value, use value and exchange value, remains
important for anyone interested in the concept of commodification; however,
it is also important to consider Bastiat’s alternative conception of value which
emphasizes labour time saved and satisfaction produced rather than the labour
put into a good, which Marx criticized fiercely.

Two works of classical political economy remain eminently useful – Marx’s
*Grundrisse* and Mills’ *A System of Logic*. The passages on the fragmentation of
machinery and the general intellect’ have been fruitfully explored by several
modern scholars on the information age including Dyer-Witherford and
Terranova, among others. Underappreciated, though, are the insights from
Mill with regard to motives in economic analyses, despite his being the bastard
father of *homo economicus*. In the fifth essay in * Essays on Some Unsettled
Questions in Political Economy*, Mill defines political economy as, “the science
which traces the laws of such phenomena of society as arise from the combined
operations of mankind for the production of wealth, in so far as those phenomena
are not modified by the pursuit of any other object.” However, Mill is aware
of the weakness of relying solely on self-interest as the only human motive,
stating,

> So far as it is known, or may be presumed, that the conduct of mankind
in the pursuit of wealth is under the collateral influence of any other
of the properties of our nature than the desire of obtaining the greatest
quantity of wealth with the least labor and self-denial, the conclusions of
Political Economy will so far fail of being applicable to the explanation
or prediction of real events, until they are modified by a correct
allowance for the degree of influence exercised by other cause.

More importantly, Mill’s call for a science of political ethology, which
would study the diversity of human motives and aim to understand relations
between the individual, state and society, has been largely ignored. Indeed,
perhaps rather than a critical political economy of librarianship, we should
strive for a critical political ethology.

A critical political economy (or ethology) of LIS also requires examining the
field to engage with works that have been particularly influential in theoretically
informing neoliberal economic theory. Jonathan Cope’s article in this special
issue (page 67) is an important contribution in this regard. In addition to
Hayek and others mentioned by Cope, I would suggest that scholarship within the field of law and economics, also known as the economic analysis of law, be critically studied as this scholarship has been particularly influential in the area of intellectual property rights. Specifically, LIS practitioners and scholars should read Coase’s articles, “The Federal Communications Commission”\(^\text{16}\) and “The Problem of Social Cost,”\(^\text{17}\) both of which are critical of the role of government regulation in the economy. Further, Coase’s essay, “The Lighthouse in Economics,” is an important contribution as he highlights the weakness of the lighthouse as an example of a public good.\(^\text{18}\) In reference to Dr. Trosow’s keynote, this essay provides a critical counterpoint on the nature of public goods. While Richard Posner has written extensively on patents and copyrights as both a scholar and judge, his paper “Utilitarianism, Economics, and Legal Theory,” is particularly interesting.\(^\text{19}\) His suggestion that wealth maximization is an ethical framework, and one that is superior to utilitarianism,\(^\text{20}\) highlights the perverse normative assumptions that underpin law and economic scholarship (and jurisprudence).

Finally, if we want to consider the library’s role as a place for critical and rational debate in the public sphere, I suggest it is also necessary to consider the antithetical view that the library is a hegemonic apparatus. This claim is not new, but has received little attention within LIS. Specifically the work of Harris\(^\text{21}\) and Pawley\(^\text{22}\) must be considered when we discuss the library’s contribution to the public sphere. For example, to what degree do traditional conceptions about the importance of authoritative sources, which serve as a basic element in most information literacy instruction, serve to entrench dominant power relations?

Finally, need to stop thinking of librarianship as being about a place – the library – and instead view it is a mental tool kit for dealing with issues of info access, innovation and technology and of property, commodification and ownership. Dr. Trosow’s keynote has raised numerous important issues for the field and I want to echo his sentiment that as a profession and discipline we must continue to strive for a progressive librarianship.

REFERENCES


NOTES

10 Cope’s article within this special issue (page 67) also discusses LIS explorations of Marx’s idea of the general intellect.
The open access movement began alongside the wide scale adoption of the Internet in the 1990s, and it has continued to gain momentum through the efforts of research organization and university advocates aiming to make peer-reviewed research freely available to anyone who needs it. Still, the vast majority of academic journal literature remains locked behind paywalls and is only accessible through expensive subscriptions most often paid for by academic libraries. This paper investigates the extent to which a growing number of academic libraries offering not-for-profit open access publishing services can impact systemic, transformative changes to a largely commercial, for-profit publishing industry. Through establishing and maintaining publishing services—including open access journal hosting and institutional repositories—I argue that academic libraries in Canada and beyond can reposition and empower themselves as not only subscribers and lenders of online scholarly resources, but also as producers of the information their users need. However, I argue further that this can only be accomplished through careful consideration and implementation of sustainable, cost-efficient allocation of resources.

The Call to Open Up Academic Publishing

Each year in North America, billions of tax payer dollars are given to granting agencies and universities by governments in order to fuel research and innovation (Boroush, 2013; Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2013). Academics put this money towards research projects that result in findings disseminated through peer-reviewed journals. In turn, libraries subscribe to...
these journals to make these research findings available to students and faculty members to inform their studies, instruction, and scholarship. This is a well-established system that has thrived for decades, largely facilitated by a select number of commercial scientific publishers, namely Elsevier, Springer, Taylor & Francis, Sage, and John Wiley & Sons (Alexander, 2014). The problem with this situation is two-fold. First of all, commercial publishers control a monopoly over publicly funded academic research output, turning it into a commodity that is mainly accessible to those affiliated with universities and research organizations that are able to afford it. Second of all, the publishers running this industry have amassed increasingly high profits for their products, straining libraries’ ability to provide users with what they need to conduct academic work (see Baveye, 2010; Khabsa & Giles, 2014; Morrison, 2014b; Suber, 2012; Van Noorden, 2013).

From the commercial publisher’s perspective, these revenues drive innovation and ensure sustainability. In a 2012 interview, Alicia Wise, Director of Universal Access for Elsevier, pointed out that commercial publishers are able to provide long-term, financial stability in an otherwise unpredictable environment within higher education. Furthermore, these publishers invest in creating and marketing new journals where there is emerging demand; they develop new technological platforms to facilitate discovery of research and improve researcher productivity (e.g., Scopus, CrossRef); and through an economy of scale they efficiently carry out tasks like copyediting and proofreading to ultimately supply customers with the highest quality of information possible (Poynder, 2012). Indeed, it is important to not underestimate the time, money, and resources required to produce an academic journal. However, in 2013, Elsevier reported profits of €2,126 million, with an adjusted operating profit of €826 million (Reed Elsevier, 2013). As pointed out by Heather Morrison (2014a), Assistant Professor at the University of Ottawa’s School of Information Studies and long-time open access advocate, this equates to a profit margin of 39%. She suggests that the library budgets feeding these profits could surely be spent more wisely, and she is not alone in thinking this way: people all over the world have been actively seeking alternative, cost effective ways of disseminating academic research findings for more than a decade.

Led by academics, students, librarians, funding agencies, governments, and others, the open access movement has resulted in a prolific number of freely available open access journals across disciplines. The Directory of Open Access Journals (or DOAJ, available at http://doaj.org) lists 10,039 to date, a number that has doubled over the last five years (Bernstein Research, 2014), and that includes 265 journals actively being produced in Canada. While many of these journals fail to boast high impact factors, a questionably flawed measure of a journal’s worth based on how frequently articles it publishes are cited (see for instance Alberts, 2012; Lozano, Larivière, & Gingras, 2012), they do promise
heightened value by virtue of being available to anyone, anytime, freely online. In addition to open access journals, OpenDOAR, or the Directory of Open Access Repositories (http://opendoar.org), lists more than 2600 institutional repositories worldwide, 64 of which are in Canada. These online, digital archives—typically run by libraries—provide access to archived research output including peer-reviewed articles (where the author has maintained copyright), datasets, theses, and technical reports.

One of the driving forces behind making research available through the production of open access journals and repositories has been mandates adopted by research funders, universities, and governments. A wide variety of newly emerged policies require academics and, in some cases research grant recipients, to make the products of their research available through archiving the peer-reviewed versions of their works online in institutional repositories, or by publishing their findings in open access journals, or both. Such mandates have been adopted by institutions and organizations worldwide including Harvard, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the National Institute of Health, Wellcome Trust, the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), and the European Research Council (many more are listed in the Registry of Open Access Repositories Mandatory Archiving Policies at http://roarmap.eprints.org). In Canada, the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) instituted an open access policy in 2013 requiring that research it funds be made available through either a repository or a publisher’s website within twelve months (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2013). Additionally, an open access policy announcement similar to that of the CIHR is expected from the Tri-Council Agencies (comprised of the CIHR, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada [NSERC], and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada [SSHRC]) in fall 2014 (Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, 2014).

As research funders and institutions have begun mandating open access, large commercial publishing companies like Elsevier, Wiley, and Springer have gotten on board by producing open access journals that charge author processing fees as a means of remaining both sustainable and profitable. Elsevier currently publishes 118 open access journals, while another 1600 offer open access options in addition to subscription content (otherwise known as ‘hybrid’ open access journals); open access author fees for these journals range anywhere from $500-$5000 USD (Elsevier, 2014). Meanwhile, Springer charges $3000 USD to publish articles with unrestricted access (Springer, 2014), and Wiley charges anywhere from $1500-$3000 USD depending on the journal (Wiley, 2014). Non-profit open access publishers have also adopted author processing charges as a means of sustaining operations, including the Public Library of Science, which charges between $1350-$2900 USD per article (Public Library of Science, 2014). In fact, approximately thirty percent of all open access
journals indexed in the DOAJ charge some form of a fee to publish an author’s work and make it openly available (Suber, 2013).

It would be difficult for academics to come up with this type of money each time they wished to publish. To this end, the term “author processing charge” is misleading. A comprehensive 2009 study of scientists’ experiences with open access around the world found that only 12% of researchers had paid publishing fees out of pocket, while 59% used money from research funds, and 24% used university funds (Dallmeier-Tiessen et. al., 2011). In Canada specifically, there are at least 14 university open access funds, which are provided by academic research libraries (Canadian Association of Research Libraries, 2014). As an increasing amount of research is required to go in to open access venues, and as more academics hear the calls from the open access movement to make their works more openly available, libraries offering these funds may ultimately find their budgets stretched even further through paying publishers author fees for open access content while also paying for journal subscriptions (Bernstein Research, 2014). While the potential benefits and drawbacks of author funds have yet to be fully realized, this does raise questions as to where academic libraries might best leverage institutional investments to support and enable open access moving forward. In what follows, I suggest that locally managed library publishing operations reveal an emerging area for libraries to start focusing more attention and resources as a means of providing access to academic literature, and potentially, significantly transforming the current commercial publishing industry for the betterment of academia and society.

Libraries as Transformative Players in the Open Access Movement

A recent economic analysis carried out by Bernstein Research (2014) concluded that the open access movement proves no threat to leading subscription publishers because it lacks a clear focus and provides no clear solutions. The report alleges that there are too many diverse calls for open access (by academics wanting their works cited, librarians wanting costs to go down, and activists wanting broader overall access to publicly funded works), and that “this lack of clarity on which problem OA is trying to solve, in turn, means that it is difficult to achieve any of these goals” (p. 10). What the report fails to recognize, however, is that the common objective shared by each of these groups is straightforward and unified: affordable, discoverable, sustainable publishing models for the dissemination of academic scholarship. Additionally, the report fails to acknowledge that academic libraries, the ones currently providing the primary source of revenue for these large publishers, are among those leading the way in implementing open access alternatives. Recent open access publishing models hold much potential for lowering library costs for resources, ensuring higher discoverability—and therefore higher
citation rates—of academic works, and providing free access to publicly funded research findings to anyone in the world with an Internet connection.

Literature on the open access movement has largely cast libraries as made up of staff cheering on the sidelines, while publishers, authors, governments, and funding agencies are the major players making it happen. Portrayals of library involvement have focused on the role of librarians as advocates within their professional spheres: there to help students and faculty better understand the issues at play and make educated decisions about where to disseminate their own works, and access the works of others (see for instance Laakso, Welling, Bukvova, Nyman, & Björk, & Hedlund, 2011; Palmer, Dill, & Christie, 2009; Cryer & Collins, 2011; Thiede, 2014). At the same time, however, academics and students have turned to the library for technical assistance and staffing for experiments with digital scholarship over the last two decades; this supportive role has increasingly become formalized, morphing into full-fledged publishing services in both small and large universities, thus placing libraries in the forefront of open access knowledge production (as outlined in Hahn, 2008; Lippincott, Skinner, & Watkinson, 2014).

Socio-technical transformations theory (STT) is useful for understanding this scenario where libraries are gaining prominence as open access publishers, and envisioning a potential future for this emerging service area. STT “is focused on understanding trajectories of socio-economic development and practical interventions to re-orient systems towards sustainable pathways” (Riddell, 2013, p.138). It looks at how ‘socio-technical regimes’ built by the co-evolution and interdependence of institutions and technologies become highly resistant to change. It then investigates how these regimes might be transformed through grand discourses around more sustainable, alternative structures to those currently in place. Over time, niche alternative practices are envisioned and advanced, opening up new structures within current contexts; these new structures, in tandem with further new and emerging novel approaches, can create spaces for transformation (Fuenfschilling & Truffer, 2014; Grin, Rotman, & Schot, 2010; Riddell, 2013). This type of change requires the players involved, in this case, librarians, academics, and university administrators, to look beyond current structures, and actively imagine, explore, contribute to, support, and build alternative, more sustainable practices and perspectives, and then strategize, negotiate, and improve upon results as they unfold. Against the backdrop of open access mandates currently in place, and with lessons learned from early experimentations with digital scholarship to currently active, thriving open access journals run by established publishers, the potential for library publishing services to emerge as a transformative, sustainable, and dominant practice holds much momentum. As I will discuss in the following section, there are already numerous libraries that are engaged in library publishing, which is proving to be both affordable and effective through the support of university
administrators, scholars, and librarians working hand-in-hand. However, these services are not without challenges that still need to be overcome for library publishing to become a sustainable, mainstream practice, and compete with current commercial publishing operations.

Library Publishing in Action

In 2013, the Library Publishing Coalition was launched, made up of 60 North American academic libraries working together to share knowledge, collaborate, and develop common practices (Lippincott et. al., 2014). Recently, they released a directory of detailed information on 115 library publishers producing 391 faculty-driven journals (Library Publishing Coalition, 2014). Of those listed, most reported using Open Journal Systems (OJS), open source journal publishing software that was originally developed in Canada by the Public Knowledge Project. OJS helps facilitate every step of the academic publishing process from submission to peer-review to copy-editing and publication. According to the OJS website, there are at least 24,000 users of the software worldwide, and at least 7,021 journals actively producing 10 or more articles each year (Public Knowledge Project, 2014). Other options include Digital Commons, which is available to libraries that use this product for hosting an institutional repository and costs approximately $20,000 annually (Poynder, 2014), and Scholastica, which currently charges a $10 per-article processing fee or $5 for law reviews (Scholastica, 2014).

Considering the costs involved, for libraries that have the technical infrastructure to support locally hosted digital content, an open source software publishing product like OJS provides a flexible and sustainable solution for library publishing. However, it does require technical expertise to perform tasks such as installation of the software, running updates, investigating technical glitches that may arise, integrating digital preservation strategies, and making any aesthetic changes to the rather limited out-of-the-box design elements that the software comes with. One helping hand for this type of work is the open source community of users who, in the spirit of openness, tend to share code on sites like GitHUB (https://github.com), and engage with other user in online forums to come up with solutions to problems as they arise while also building upon software functionality. It is, however, also imperative for an academic library to have a strong team of information technology specialists in-house to help these projects along. It can be a lot of work initially, but with the right supports in place, products like OJS, as well as open source institutional repository software products like Fedora and DSpace, have proven to be a viable option in many Canadian university libraries and around the world. Furthermore, some libraries offer journal hosting for others who do not have the technological supports to run the installation at their institutions, including the
University of Alberta (Betkowski, 2014), and consortia initiatives are emerging whereby a group of libraries come together to support a shared network of institutional repositories (see for instance the CAUL - CBUA Atlantic Islandora Repository Network project at http://www.cairnrepo.org).

Apart from technical requirements and supports, open access journals and institutional repositories need people to do the actual work of helping content creators put content online. In library publishing, this is all too often an understaffed enterprise facilitated by a single librarian acting as both a repository and journal software manager working alongside a part-time library staff member or graduate student, as outlined in a majority of entries in the Library Publishing Directory (Library Publishing Coalition, 2014). Library publishing services require staff to work with and for scholars to perform a variety of tasks to ensure end results are of academic and enduring quality. These tasks can include software training, DOI assignment, ISSN registration, assigning metadata, reviewing analytics, performing outreach and promotion, assisting with digitization and video/audio streaming, giving copyright advice, ensuring long-term digital preservation, and providing support for processes such as copy-editing and peer-review management (Lippincott et. al., 2014). Failing to fully support any one of these processes threatens the credibility of an institution and the academics involved in its publishing initiatives, as well as limiting the discoverability and use of the work produced. There are already far too many open access journals online that are entirely lacking in quality and credibility (see Beale, 2014). In response, the DOAJ has begun imposing stringent quality standards upon the publishers it indexes by implementing a detailed application form, and a seal of approval for journals that meet set criteria around best practices in open access publishing (Directory of Open Access Journals, 2014). It is incumbent upon library publishers to strive to meet these quality standards if they are to ensure that the services they offer are worthwhile and sustainable. A number of libraries have taken strides in this direction by developing Memorandums of Understanding signed by journal managers and library publishing service providers that outline the roles and responsibilities of each party to ensure an ongoing quality product, including the University of Victoria (http://journals.uvic.ca/journalinfo/Memorandum_Understanding.pdf) and Dalhousie University (http://dal.ca.libguides.com/ojs_getting_started). An additional, necessary requirement to ensure quality and sustainability, however, is sufficient staffing and skill development to support these services and all of the necessary tasks outlined above.

Institutional repositories present their own set of challenges in addition to requiring adequate staffing and resources for technical support and the day-to-day management of content. Copyright restrictions and low faculty uptake present significant barriers to the viability of these initiatives, and the benefits they can bring to current publishing practices that restrict access to research.
As outlined in Dorothea Salo’s article “Innkeeper at the roach motel” (2008), repositories have done a poor job of attracting faculty members, particularly when those faculty are expected to contribute works themselves. Meanwhile, many publishers—including Wiley, Springer, and Elsevier—will only allow author accepted manuscript to be archived and not the final copy-edited version of a work. This creates confusion around version control (e.g., what is and is not peer-reviewed) when works are discovered in repositories, or more frequently, in research indexes like Google Scholar, and does not appeal to faculty members who want the best-quality, copy-edited, professional version of their works available to other academics. There are ways around these barriers, however. First of all, with adequate staffing, repository staff can go through faculty CVs, annual reports (if available), and research indexes like Scopus and Google Scholar to identify works by faculty members at their institutions that can be archived, and then deposit these works on the faculty members behalf. In addition to publisher’s websites, a service out of Norfolk University in the UK called SHERPA RoMEO (http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo) makes it relatively easy to look up brief summaries of journal archiving policies. Additionally, institutional mandates like the one created by Concordia University in 2010 (https://library.concordia.ca/research/openaccess/SenateResolutiononOpenAccess.pdf) can help facilitate collecting works for repositories further by requiring that faculty members deposit published works within 12 months of publication.

To assist with version control, there is a practical workaround that has been adopted by users of Digital Commons, and can be integrated into other repository software functions (or done manually). This is the practice of creating cover pages for author accepted manuscripts explaining whether the work is or is not a peer-reviewed version, along with providing a complete citation and link to the publisher’s version (which is information that many publishers already require be included with archived works anyway). This makes it clear to a researcher who may happen upon a work in an index like Google Scholar what version they are looking at, while also drawing attention to where they can obtain the official version of record if they wish to do so. Another creative way that repositories are being adapted to be as “open as possible” in light of copyright restrictions is the use of a “request a copy from the author” button researchers can use to email the author directly (Sale, Couture, Rodrigues, Carr, & Harnad, 2010). Using this method, the metadata for academic works can still be listed in open access repositories, and anyone can still conceivably obtain a copy; they just need to request it directly from the author, a practice that is allowed under fair dealing in Canadian copyright law.

As I have outlined in the examples above, current library publishing processes have the means of providing digital access to academic literature through both open access journals and repositories, but these processes can only be furthered, improved upon, and strengthened with adequate resources,
appropriate software, and sufficient staffing. To this end, Morrison suggests that “there is more than enough money in the budgets of academic libraries to fund a fully open access scholarly journal publishing system” (2014a, para. 1). Borrowing from an analysis by Morrison (2014a) applying slightly more recent figures, according to the *STM Report: An overview of scientific and scholarly journal publishing* (Ware and Mabe, 2012), libraries contributed approximately 68-75% of the $9.4 billion USD revenues major scientific, technical, and medical publishers took in for 2011. An analysis of a variety of publishers reveals that those published in journals using OJS are the least expensive to produce at approximately $188 per article (see Edgar & Wilinksy, 2010 as cited in Morrison, 2014a). If one were to multiply this amount by the number of scholarly articles published per year at approximately 1.8 million (Ware & Mabe, 2012), then it would work out to a total cost of $338.4 million, which is significantly less than the 9.4 billion USD in publisher revenues cited above (which, it should be noted, amounts to each article costing approximately $5000 USD). With this knowledge in hand, it is unlikely that libraries will unanimously cancel all current subscriptions with for-profit publishers and dive headlong into the business of publishing journals in-house to create a more affordable open access publishing system. However, this breakdown of costs does draw attention to the inherent value brought about by affordable, niche alternative publishing practices that are underway in libraries, and that can bear significant impact upon current publishing structures through production that is focused on the needs of scholars and the public rather than on those of profit-seeking investors (Morrison, 2014a).

**Conclusion**

A recent study published in *PLoS ONE* estimated that 27 million, or 24%, of the 114 million English-language scholarly documents available through Google Scholar and Microsoft Academic Search are freely available on the web (Khabsa & Giles, 2014). While this is not nearly as much as open access advocates would like, it shows a significant step in the right direction. Though the authors of this study fail to acknowledge the sources of this free information, it can be surmised that library publishing initiatives—including open access journals and institutional repositories—have contributed greatly. For these initiatives to remain viable and grow to potentially compete with and transform the dominant, closed-access means through which much scholarship is communicated, however, it is important for library publishers to demonstrate value over time. Both administrators and scholars need to see library publishing as a strategic and purposeful service area that is valuable and contributing positively to the current publishing ecosystem in order to warrant involvement, support, and funding. This can be accomplished through giving...
careful consideration to best practices that are currently being established, built
upon, and shared by libraries already engaged in thriving publishing services
(see for instance Hahn, 2008; Crow, Ivins, Mower, Nesdill, Newton, Speer, &
Watkinson, 2012; Brown, 2014). Furthermore, ongoing viability requires the
implementation of sustainable and cost-efficient allocation of existing resources
towards software and staffing that can support a successful publishing program.
It is not enough to simply install publishing or repository software, make it
available to scholars, and trust that these services will take care of themselves
with minimal support. Adequate, skilled staff and appropriate software can
provide the foundations for library publishing services that serve to produce
and make information available rather than restrict access to a select few, which
is, after all, at the core of what libraries do.

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Introduction

Two years ago I attended the CAUT Librarians’ & Archivists’ Conference, the theme of which was Contested Terrain: Shaping the Future of Academic Librarianship. Much of the program examined the incursion of corporate managerial practices into the daily work-life of academic librarians under the broader ideological agenda of neoliberalism. There are many definitions of neoliberalism, but I would like to share one that I came across by Saunders (2011) via the Feral Librarian blog (Bourg, 2014) that works well in this research context. Saunders defines neoliberalism as “a varied collection of ideas, practices, policies and discursive representations...united by three broad beliefs: the benevolence of the free market, minimal state intervention and regulation of the economy, and the individual as a rational economic actor.” As the dominant political ideology for almost forty years, neoliberalism has seeped into our collective conscious and has become part of the figurative furniture of our culture, extending itself into our public institutions and shaping them in economic terms (Buschman, 2003).

I began thinking about and wondering how academic libraries are engaging with these neoliberal ideas and concepts — because as the conference discussions played out, clearly we are. What are we saying about ourselves
and our profession? What things do we emphasize or value? What are the implications of adopting neoliberal language to describe who we are and what we do? How are we using this language to frame our institutional identities - language that often runs counter to traditional librarian core values, such as equity, democracy, privacy, and intellectual freedom (Fister, 2010; Gorman, 2000).

This study explores the impact of neoliberal language on three Canadian academic libraries in an attempt to understand how they are engaging with the language of marketization and corporatization through the institutional discourse of their public planning documents. This research aims to contribute to our understanding of how language shapes meaning and impacts practice.

**Why Strategic Plans?**

Strategic planning documents are “key sites to institutional discourse” (Gaffigan & Perry, 2009) that can be used to understand organizational practice. Academic library strategic plans respond to strategic priorities outlined in the planning documents of their parent institutions, such as university mission and vision statements and strategic plans. Library planning documents offer a window into how libraries are responding to mounting and diversifying global economic and political pressures. As the public face of the library, these documents reflect lengthy development and planning processes that involve stakeholder consultations and require significant investments of time and resources. They are used to outline strategic goals and identify future trends, and they function as the framework under which library services are developed and assessed. As institutional priorities reflect wider changing societal practices and dominant discourses, examining the language used in these planning documents may shed some light on how deeply neoliberal thought permeates the strategic visions and goals of academic libraries (Ayers, 2005; Gaffigan & Perry, 2009; Greene & McMenemy, 2012).

**Relevant Literature**

There is evidence in the literature that universities and libraries are choosing to include neoliberal language in their public planning documents. My study is based on the work of Greene and McMenemy (2012), whose landmark study combined content analysis and critical discourse analysis to examine neoliberal discourse in UK public library planning documents between 1997 and 2010. Their findings acknowledge the discursive power of neoliberal language to influence the language of librarianship, and reframe not only the public’s perception of library services, but also the services themselves. Their study also echoes LIS scholar Budd’s (1997) assertion that language is not neutral, and can
be used as a powerful rhetorical tool to rationalize policies that undermine the public democratic function of libraries.

I also drew on a 2007 review of Canadian post-secondary education (PSE) policy by Kirby. In examining major reports from four different provincial systems, Kirby identified an “increasingly utilitarian, market-oriented ideological outlook on post-secondary education’s raison d’être.” Four dominant influences characterized these reports: privatization, marketization, quality assurance, and internationalization. These four themes capture ongoing debates contrasting the interests of the market and the public good and the values of institutions and professional librarians.

Methods

The libraries

The strategic planning documents of three Ontario Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) member libraries were analyzed: Western University (Vision: Integration as Key Partners in the Academic Enterprise 2010-2013), Queen’s University (Queen’s University Library Annual Plan 2013-4), and McMaster University (McMaster University Library Strategic Plan 2010/2013). These three universities fall within the “Medical-Doctoral” category as defined by Maclean’s magazine for its annual survey and rankings, and were chosen because they are comparable institutions supporting research and teaching for a wide range of undergraduate, graduate, professional, and medical doctoral programs. This sample also allows for comparison across the consistent context of a single province with regards to post-secondary education policy and funding.

Approach

Using Fairclough’s (1993; 1995) method of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the documents were analyzed for evidence of how broader social practices and discourses impact the language of librarianship, influencing or re-contextualizing the meaning of selected words and concepts. The content of each document was analyzed and coded for words and phrases that represent the four broad themes of neoliberalism identified by Kirby: privatization, marketization, quality assurance, and internationalization. The focus of the analysis was the identification and expression of these neoliberal themes. Repeated use of the same or similar words or phrases within a single document suggested an emphasis on one or more themes, with each library showing a preference for certain themes. These four themes are interconnected and at times overlap, and words and phrases representing each theme may fit within more than one theme.
By looking at strategic documents we can explore the degree to which academic libraries engage with this language as an outward expression of their institutional identity. What’s harder to see is how this language is operationalized.

Findings and Discussion

All four of the neoliberal themes identified by Kirby (2007) were present in the three academic library strategic plans to varying degrees. For the purposes of this study, words and phrases were coded for the theme or definition that best fit. For example, while the use of the phrase “customer service” may be borne out of a desire to demonstrate quality service, and is related to the theme of quality assurance, the idea of customer service as argued by Budd (1997) implies an economic exchange or a trade in commodities. For this reason, language related to customers and customer service was coded for the theme of marketization.

In this paper, I will be discussing the findings related to the theme of marketization by highlighting a couple of interesting examples of how this theme is manifest in the documents and by offering some thoughts and interpretation.

Marketization

Marketization refers to the use of business language or the language of commerce to describe and characterize library services. Two main sub-themes emerged under the umbrella of marketization: customer service and innovation.

Customer Service

The language of the customer was evident in two of the three strategic plans, those of Western and McMaster; however, the word “customer” was used sparingly and often alongside other more neutral terms. In describing the people who use the library, Western Libraries employed the term “user” quite heavily throughout the document except in two instances. The lengthy first section of the plan (“Vision”) describes the staff’s “customer centred approach to service delivery” and the shorter second section (“Implementing the Plan”) talks about the importance of staff development related to “customer service.” As vision statements are used to paint a compelling picture of what the organization will be upon implementing the plan, including “customer service” in the Vision section suggests that the creators of the Western document see “customer service” as important for carrying out the operations of the library. Students are seen as consumers in a library market.
McMaster’s plan contains a short summary statement as well as short sections broken down by Vision, Mission, and Values. The plan also includes a “Strategy Map” outlining high level strategic priorities, as well as a Strategic Initiatives document that lists specific action items and outcomes. As with Western, the term “user” is used throughout the document, and is included in the summary, Vision (“user centred”), and Strategy Map sections of the plan; the term “customer service,” however, is reserved exclusively for the Values section. From the perspective of the document’s creators, “customer service” is a core priority in the organizational culture and is key to shaping priorities and actions within the organization.

This raises a few questions, the first being why the ambiguity? Why use both user and customer? Are these terms equal or are they different? And if they are different, what is the distinction? One observation is that, in the case of Western, “customer service” is used exclusively in relation to staff. From this it would appear that the user becomes a customer at the point of a service transaction or when they interface with staff.

Queen’s chose not to engage with the language of the customer; rather, they characterize their service as “people centred.” “People” is the term of choice used throughout the Queen’s document which, like McMaster’s, is broken down into three sections: Vision, Mandate/Mission and Principles/Values. The term “community” is also used in the body of the Queen’s document. It is only in the Goals and Priorities portion of the plan (essentially the action part of the plan) that the term “user” comes into play. In describing the people who use the library and the services it provides, the language in the Queen’s library strategic plan is more inclusive and takes a more non-consumerist approach.

**Customization**

Another way that the theme of customer service was represented in the documents was through the concept of “customization.” Variations on the term (i.e., customizable, customizing) were used exclusively by Western in relation to library services, who also used the related phrases “tiered levels of personal services” and “self service access.” Customizing services is nothing new, for most library services allow for varying levels of personalization, but compared to McMaster and Queen’s, the creators of the Western Libraries plan make an effort to highlight language that emphasizes the individual. Customized services respond to the citizen as consumer, empowering the individual through an emphasis on choice — in this case, choice in the selection and use of library services.

The rhetorical use of choice was observed by Greene and McMenemy (2012) to legitimize the consumerist approach to public library services in the UK against other options, because it appealed to the emotions and logic of the
individual. In other words, it is common sense — who wouldn’t want choice? Budd (1997), however, points out that the idea of choice presumes that library users know what information they want, and understand the range of resources and services that are available to them, when in fact that may not be the case.

The language in McMaster’s and Queen’s plans focuses less on the individual — there are no references to customization, personalization, or self service, although I do not doubt that they offer these types of services. McMaster’s plan speaks more broadly, providing “exemplary service that is responsive to user needs.” Queen’s, in their Principles/Values section, promotes “service that is people-centred, high quality, discipline-focused, and inclusive.”

I am not suggesting that libraries cease to provide customized options for users. However, by focusing on individualized services in our public documents, there is a tendency to highlight or elevate the user as the expert, which may have the inadvertent consequence of devaluing the professional knowledge and skills of librarians and other library workers. The first priority initiative listed under the goal “People” in the Queen’s Goals and Priorities document is “staff redeployment,” and Western’s plan acknowledges the library system’s “practical limitations on staffing” as justification for developing new service models with an increased emphasis on self service access. If the expert user is more prominent in the documents, and staff knowledge and skills are minimized, then that can open the door to legitimize claims that staffing efficiencies are a positive necessity.

Neoliberal rhetoric works by appealing to common sense logic and ideal messages like efficiency that are hard to argue against. It works slowly to erode and undermine alternative discourses like the professional rights, roles, core principles, and ethical guidelines of librarians. As de-professionalization and labour precarity are increasingly part of the neoliberal post-secondary education institutional landscape, it behooves academic librarians to make their work visible in their public documents on their own terms and in their own professional language.

The Western plan uses some interesting market language to describe the contributions of librarians and staff. The plan states that it is the “intellectual capital” of the staff that plays a direct role in providing “knowledge based services.” This language appeals to neoliberal notions of the new knowledge economy, and aligns itself with human capital theory and the growing emphasis on the marketability of knowledge and the commercialization of scholarship (Ayers, 2005; Kirby, 2007). This way of referring to staff reinforces an economic vision of the library by framing knowledge as a commodity.

So what might libraries be saying when they adopt a customer service stance? Many have commented on the customer service phenomenon. Budd (1997; 2012) suggests that when library users are cast as customers there is a perception of the library as a place that “trades in commodities.” Budd
(2012) further states that by adopting corporate language and a consumerist ethos, libraries will be forced to re-define their mission and frame outcomes in terms of commodities. Buschman (2003) suggests that a focus on “customer driven librarianship,” as he coins it, reflects an “institutional and professional acquiescence to the new public philosophy” and “reinforces an economic vision of librarianship.” And finally, Huzar (2014) powerfully states that, “As ‘customers’ rather than ‘patrons’, ‘users’ or simply ‘people’, certain possibilities of what the library can be are closed down, while others are reinforced, and yet others are opened up.”

The customer service narrative is as polarizing as it is pervasive; although it was not present in all three strategic plans, it reflects a dominant discourse in our profession (Buschman, 2003).

**Innovation**

A second sub-theme of marketization evident in the strategic plans is innovation. The concept of innovation was described in various ways in all three strategic plans. The words “innovation” and “innovative” were used by both McMaster and Queen’s, but not by Western.

The concept of innovation is quite prominent in the McMaster plan. It is used several times in what is a very short document. As the Vision statement reads, “McMaster University Library will be recognized as Canada’s most innovative, user-centred academic library.” The terms innovation and innovative are also used in the Mission and Values statements of the document indicating that it is a core priority from the aspirational to the operational level. McMaster also talks about how it has “transformed” itself in recent years and how it will continue its “ongoing transformation” through the implementation of its strategic priorities. Innovation is often a catalyst for transformation, and for that reason, the terms related to transformation were coded for the sub-theme of innovation. “Risk taking” and “creativity” are related concepts that are listed alongside innovation in the Values section of the plan, and these terms were also coded for the sub-theme of innovation.

Queen’s also includes the word “innovation” in its Vision and Principles/Values sections, and employs the related terms “experimentation” and “excellence” (related to research and scholarship) in its Mandate/Mission section, indicating that it is a core priority for the library.

Western does not use the term “innovation” but articulates a possible vision of innovation by committing to “take the steps necessary to achieve the required transformation to become [a] 21st century academic library.”

Innovation is a hallmark of the “knowledge economy” narrative to improve society through economic growth. Innovation drives change and feeds institutional marketing initiatives by demonstrating what sets institutions apart.
Innovation also intersects with the theme of internationalization, as it is viewed as a driver for global economic competitiveness. As money often follows innovation, universities are increasingly forced to compete for research funds based on their potential social and economic contributions (Pekkola, 2009). The need to become innovative is a rhetorical mantra used to reinforce the pervasive “libraries in crisis” narrative, hitting the profession where it is most vulnerable: its professional identity. After all, a profession that fails to innovate becomes obsolete.

But what does it actually mean to be innovative? As often as this word is used, it is still a difficult concept to pin down. In their investigation of innovation discourse in library white papers and website features, Rubin, Gavin and Kamal (2011) state that “innovation for libraries is a highly amorphous concept, potentially including every aspect of the library.” I would argue that this is also true for the ways in which innovation is used in these documents. Aside from one example in the McMaster plan where innovation is used in relation to technology, the term is not defined in any way and seems to relate to any number of things. In this sense, one could argue that the term innovation has been overused to the point of becoming hollow. This brings us back to Budd (1997), who cautions against the blind adoption of language as it can become empty and devoid of meaning.

Concluding Thoughts & Further Exploration

This paper explores how Canadian academic libraries are engaging with neoliberal concepts, particularly marketization, through an examination of institutional strategy discourse. In examining the strategic plans of three academic libraries in Ontario, it was evident that these institutions are choosing to engage with potentially problematic market language in their public planning documents. They are also, however, choosing to include language that reflects librarian core values such as diversity (e.g., “inclusivity”) and equity (e.g., “barrier free access”). The ambiguity in the documents is at times striking, which leads one to question whether it is intentional or just happenstance (Abdallah & Langley, 2014). This ambiguity suggests that there is more than one discourse at play, that the neoliberal path is not absolute, and that there yet exists a space for librarians to exercise their professional agency. Librarians need to raise more questions about how strategy documents are created, consumed, and interpreted, and explore alternative discourses that uphold the social role of libraries.

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REFERENCES


Introduction

Information professionals argue tirelessly for the right to access to information that is free from censorship as well as technological and economic barriers; it is quite surprising that their call for unobstructed access to information is not more ubiquitously answered by individuals outside of the profession. Disagreement on this issue becomes especially dangerous when entrepreneurial interests outweigh the public good and as corporations anticipate financial gain from placing limitations on information access. Similarly, there is a general concurrence among information professionals regarding the importance of privacy, even though arguments for the permissibility of privacy invasion purport user benefits and fortified security through the tracking of personal information such as individual search habits and reading histories.

Unfortunately, the ethical convictions of information professionals are not always easily and clearly transmissible. This stems from the generality of professional codes of ethics which leave guidelines open to interpretation, making them less normative and thereby weakening their ethical action-guiding force. The information profession can benefit from a grounding of its core values in a robust moral framework that can be easily communicated and can coherently place demands on interested parties. We argue that grounding the core values of privacy and ubiquitous access to information in a needs-based theory of rights is most suitable within the unique context of the information profession. Although the theory we propose has broader moral implications,
including a thorough reconceptualization of the notion of personhood, our aim in this paper (due to space constraints) is to sketch a theory of rights that best suits the information profession.

**Grounding Rights**

Rights have traditionally been understood as entitlements, a concept which most philosophers agree on despite contention regarding how such entitlements are to be theoretically grounded. Mill (1861) writes:

> When we call anything a person’s right, we mean that he has a valid claim on society to protect him in the possession of it, either by the force of law, or by that of education and opinion...To have a right, then, is, I conceive, to have something which society ought to defend me in the possession of. (p. 54)

One general, but useful distinction is between positive and negative rights, where the first oblige others toward certain actions while the latter are rights to noninterference. Rights to education or welfare are positive rights, while rights against being assaulted or killed, for example, are classic instances of negative rights (Narveson, 2001). In the context of information, an example of a positive right would be the right to access to information, while an example of a negative right would be the right to privacy.

Rights can be understood as consisting of two integral parts, the first being their structure, or how they arise and are related to a particular context within which they exist, and the second being their function, or what they do for those who have them. Different approaches to understanding these two aspects of rights produce different accounts of rights.

Although there are various accounts of rights, due to space restrictions, we have opted to survey the theoretical landscape along well established moral lines, namely approaches to theories of rights that fall into the Deontological (Kantian) and Utilitarian traditions as well as a Needs-Based Approach, the latter of which is the focus of this paper. We begin with the first two: (1) Contract-based rights (see Rawls, 1971) are deeply rooted in the concepts of rationality and autonomy and thus contract theorists insist that a right makes an individual into “a small scale sovereign” (Hart, 1982, p. 183) insofar as that which the right guarantees falls within the domain of the right holder. Such approaches are often grounded in the Kantian (1785) conception of personhood and deontological approach to morality. The function of a right on this approach is to give the holder of a right control over the duty others ought to have toward her. (2) Interest-based rights, on the other hand, deriving their origin from thinkers such as Jeremy Bentham (1789, 1796), focus on outcomes that best
meet the right holder’s interests. The function of a right on the interest approach is to further the right-holder interests in order to make the right holder better off.

Although both approaches are classical proposals and both enjoy the status of orthodoxy, they nevertheless have serious failings. The contract-based approach entails a conception of right holders that is highly exclusionary since it relies on a very stringent notion of rationality and autonomy, which many humans lack. The reason for this is that rights, on this approach, are agreements meant to restrict actions and constrain freedoms so as to benefit all who enter into them. Such agreements are supposed to be fair and impartial and thus are assumed to be made between equals.

However, not all people stand in equal relations to others; many people find themselves in relations of dependence and some, especially those with cognitive disabilities or severely debilitating physical ailments, are heavily dependent on their care providers. The rationality and autonomy necessary to secure rights on the contract-based account leave a large number of people without a properly grounded set of rights, meaning that their moral worth, along with the accompanying rights, is grounded in a lesser moral standing (the distinction between moral agents and moral patients is often used to delineate this difference in the source of a person’s moral worth).

The interest-based approach avoids the elitism of which most contract-based accounts are guilty. However, the interest-based account suffers from another shortcoming, namely the problem that there are many interests that do not guarantee or necessitate rights, such as the interest to vacation in a luxury resort. The interest-based approach understands interests in a broad sense where preferences, desires, as well as needs are included under the term ‘interests.’ As we argue, a narrow understanding of the term ‘interests’ as signifying ‘needs’ can, within an appropriate theoretical structure, avoid the problem the interest approach encounters.

Moreover, neither of the above approaches are particularly well suited to the information profession. The contract-based account is too exclusive due to its built in ratio-centricity and thus fails to encompass the right to information access of every library user, including those with cognitive disabilities (for discussions of ratio-centric conceptions of personhood and rights in connection to disability studies see Kittay, 2003a; Lenart, 2014; Wilson & Lenart, in press). Moreover, the contractarian approach assumes that an agreement is made between two parties, which fails to capture the objective and universal nature of the core values that define and guide practice within information professions. The American Library Association (2014) states that:

All information resources that are provided directly or indirectly by the library, regardless of technology, format, or methods of delivery, should
be readily, equally, and equitably accessible to all library users. The ALA opposes any legislative or regulatory attempt to impose content restrictions on library resources, or to limit user access to information, as a condition of funding for publicly supported libraries and information services. (B.2.1.14)

The ALA is concerned with ubiquitous access to information for all library users regardless of their ability or willingness to enter into binding or restrictive contracts.

Although the interest-based approach may be better suited to the purposes of the information profession than the contractarian approach, it too fails to fully grasp a core value deeply rooted within the field. The goals of libraries are much more nuanced and are thus inadequately captured by simply focusing on interest satisfaction; the goal of the information profession is to stand in a relation of need identification and service provision based on an assessment of possible barriers to the satisfaction of information needs. Libraries, therefore, stand in a special relation to citizens whose information needs they serve, where citizens depend on the services and resources libraries offer. A needs-based approach to the right to information access can ground ALA values in a moral theoretical framework that focuses on relations between agents as well as communities of agents rather than on contracts or mere interest satisfaction.

What Are Needs-Based Rights?

The needs-based approach is usually referred to as the care approach or the care-ethical approach to morality and rights. Care ethics is a relatively recent addition to the pantheon of moral theories, but what makes it distinctive is that rather than voicing disagreement on particular aspects of a well-established tradition, it critically analyzes the tradition itself. Although initially dubbed as a feminist ethic (Gilligan, 1982), a better way of conceiving of the enormous program of this emerging tradition is to understand it as a way of bringing relationships into the foreground of moral theorizing (Baier, 1987; Grimshaw, 1992). This serves to acknowledge the origin of moral thinking as having a beginning in the home (Noddings, 2002; Ruddick, 1983, 1989), placing an emphasis on the early moral development of children. Furthermore, the care approach places emotionality, empathy, and dependency (Jaworski, 2010; Kittay, 1999, 2003b; Slote, 2007) on an equal moral footing with such concepts as rationality and autonomy, which traditionally enjoyed an elevated moral status, while arguing that the concept of autonomy is ridden with relational dependencies. Moreover, care ethicists argue that entering into certain care relations gives rise to obligations and rights (Held, 1983; Miller, 2005; Noddings, 2002).
So how do rights arise from needs? Noddings (2002) offers a familiar example:

Ms. A is at her wit’s end with the noise in her house. Finally, getting everyone’s attention, she says, “Mommy has a right to some peace and quiet!” How is this “right” justified (if it is)? Supposing that the group addressed contains at least one person old enough to understand Ms. A’s claim, the argument may be laid out as follows:

1. There is a situation, a set of conditions, that gives rise to a need.
2. The need is communicated in clear terms.
3. At least someone in the group of hearers interprets the statement of need accurately and sympathetically. The reaction is “I can see that...”
4. Having acknowledged the legitimacy of the need, the group now examines its own role in producing the noise and its (potential) power to reduce it. The response is “We can do that.”
5. The need is formally granted as a right; that is, the group of hearers recognizes the legitimacy of the need and its own power to meet the need: “We should meet this need.” (p. 54)

Figure 1 shows an illustration of the structure of a needs-based right:

![Diagram of needs-based right]

Figure 1: From Shadow People: Relational Personhood, Extended Diachronic Personal Identity, and Our Moral Obligations Toward Fragile Persons, p. 291, by B. Lenart, 2014.

Information as a Needs-Based Right

Information, abstracted from the need for it, is not a right. In other words, there is nothing about information, in and of itself, that makes it a right or an entitlement. Thus access to information is not essentially a right. Moreover,
there are negative rights owed to individuals that restrict access to a great deal of information, such as private information pertaining to search habits or to other personal details that individuals have the negative right to maintain undisclosed. The ALA (2014) is quite sensitive to this fact; for example, it states that “[p]rotecting user privacy and confidentiality is necessary for intellectual freedom and fundamental to the ethics and practice of librarianship” (B.2.1.16).

A needs-based account of rights is a perfect fit in the information profession precisely because such an approach bars unauthorized access to information by only granting access based on genuine need, where a mere desire or interest to access someone else’s private information does not qualify. Rather, the needs-based approach buttresses the ALA’s established policies and already delineated core values.

A needs-based approach, then, not only ensures that privacy remains a library user’s right, but also that unnecessary privatization of information or other unwarranted limitations to access of information will be judged morally unjustified. Furthermore, libraries are in a remarkable position to initiate special relations with library users in virtue of their unique ability to satisfy information needs. Information professionals work hard to recognize various information needs and, with the aid of the resources of libraries and library systems, information professionals are in a position to satisfy those needs. This unique context transforms a library user’s need into a right, which, in turn, morally compels action.

Information as a Basic Right

Although there is little question regarding whether access to information is a democratic right, one may wonder if it can genuinely be understood as a basic human right. Before addressing the latter question, we would like to flesh out the first claim. Lankes (2012) makes the connection between a healthy democratic society and its stance on information accessibility. He writes:

To be clear, you can have libraries without democracy and democracy without libraries—one need only look through history. However, I would argue that in order to have a true liberal democracy, libraries are a requirement...Why are libraries so important for a liberal democracy? The short answer is that a true democracy requires the participation of an informed citizenry. The core mission of libraries, public and otherwise, is creating a nation of informed and active citizens. (p. 20)

Understood within the needs-based approach, Lankes’ argument not only speaks to our political inclinations, but also to our moral faculties. Citizens of
a true democracy need access to information in order to be properly informed, which in turn is necessary for an active exercise of the citizens’ democratic rights. Libraries, in virtue of their resources, are in a position to provide services that can satisfy the citizens’ information needs. Therefore, libraries, being in a unique position to address the democratic need for access to information, transform the citizens’ needs to be informed into moral, and not merely political, entitlements to access to information.

Of course, citizens of various nations have many entitlements unique to their particular societies, including rights that human beings *qua Homo sapiens* are not entitled to merely in virtue of their species membership. For example, the right to vote is a right only citizens of a nation or members of a particular group possess. And insofar as information is necessary to such activities as voting, those particular citizens or members of those particular groups have a right to the necessary information in virtue of their specific need for it.

However, the question of interest here is whether access to information is similarly linked to what we commonly consider basic human rights, such as the right to food, drinkable water, shelter, and a basic level of health care? Such a link, if it exists, entails that all humans have a moral entitlement to information. We think that such a link does indeed exist, but before we can discuss it, a brief analysis of the nature of information will prove useful.

Classically, information was defined as a process of being informed. The Platonic notion of forms is closely related to this understanding of information.

This is the oldest meaning one finds in the writings of authors like Cicero (106–43 BCE) and Augustine (354–430 CE) and it is lost in the modern discourse, although the association of information with processes (i.e., computing, flowing or sending a message) still exists. In classical philosophy one could say that when I recognize a horse as such, then the ‘form’ of a horse is planted in my mind. This process is my ‘information’ of the nature of the horse. Also the act of teaching could be referred to as the ‘information’ of a pupil. In the same sense one could say that a sculptor creates a sculpture by ‘informing’ a piece of marble. (Adriaans, 2013, 2.4)

In modern conceptions of ‘information,’ one of the basic intuitions about how to measure the amount of information contained in something is the fact that information reduces uncertainty. “When we are absolutely certain about a state of affairs we cannot receive new information about it” (Adriaans, 2013, p. 3).

Returning to such basic needs as the need for food, drinkable water, shelter, and basic medical care, which are basic human rights in virtue of various
dependency relations capable of satisfying these needs, one thing all such needs have in common is the fact that without access to correct information, such needs cannot be satisfied properly. For example: (1) such things, among a myriad of others, as information regarding the sanitary standards of a favourite restaurant, the internal temperature of chicken at which salmonella no longer poses a threat, or information regarding the toxicity of native plants, mushrooms, and berries are all essential for an appropriate satisfaction of the basic human right to food; (2) the need for drinkable water cannot be satisfied by the granting of access to polluted water, which entails that the access to clean water requires information regarding the water’s source; (3) informative details pertaining to the safety of building material, such as whether asbestos was used, are essential to the selection of shelters that fulfil their proper functions, which is to protect; and (4) access to appropriate health care necessitates access to information about health practitioners, such as their credentials, as well as other salient information that can have a serious bearing on human welfare, such as the various medical procedures and treatments, along with their potential risks and side effects, that are available to patients.

More generally speaking, according to Adriaans’ conception of information, wherever there is uncertainty regarding nutritional choices, water sources, safety concerns pertaining to shelter, or issues arising around medical care, there is a need for information. Where there is a need for information, and where that information can be provided, there is, on the needs-based approach, a right to access to that information.

This means that insofar as our basic human rights cannot be genuinely honoured without some necessary information, we have a right to access information that will genuinely allow us to enjoy the rights to which we commonly assume we are entitled. Libraries, in virtue of their unique purpose, ought to function as places where all individuals have equal access to that kind of information; this entails that the role of information professionals, with the aid of the resources of libraries, is to enable basic human rights, which, without the necessary information are inert relics of beneficent minds.

Although understanding information as a right enabler is enough to merit entitlement to it, we think that information is better understood as constitutive of such basic entitlements as the right to nutritious food, drinkable water, safe shelter, and basic medical care. That is, without access to the appropriate information, basic human rights cannot be fully realized.

However, there is more. In virtue of our deep dependency on information, human beings have a genuine need for the ability to navigate the enormous amount of information that floods, and sometimes overwhelms, them on a daily basis. Not only is there a need for information professionals who can assist in accessing, navigating, and acquiring pertinent information, but there is a need for information literacy education. Information professionals, in virtue of their
unique position as information experts and in virtue of their close relations with library users, are in a special position to provide such services. Information professionals are, therefore, instrumental in transforming the public need for information and information literacy into a right to access to information and a right to the educational resources to acquire the ability to properly and efficiently navigate the information made available.

Conclusion: Implications

When grounded in the needs-based account of rights, the unique dependency relations between libraries and their users entail three things: (1) library users have a basic human right of access to, and the utility of, information as well as a basic right to information literacy education, (2) libraries and information professionals, given the moral framework we propose, have a duty (in virtue of standing in a unique relation to information users) to ensure those rights are being respected, (3) the need for adequate funding for libraries and information professionals is a social entitlement all citizens have against unwarranted funding cuts.

A broader implication of our argument that rights should be understood as entitlements grounded in relational contexts that prioritize needs over contracts is that such an approach to rights challenges the conception of rights utilized in jurisprudence. A needs-based account of rights entails a re-evaluation of the language of rights utilized in both the moral and legal spheres to guarantee that the needs of the underprivileged and marginalized are just as morally considerable as those of the privileged and well represented.

REFERENCES


Neoliberalism and Library & Information Science
Using Karl Polanyi’s Fictitious Commodity as an Alternative to Neoliberal Conceptions of Information

Within Library and Information Science (LIS) a critical literature examining the implications of neoliberalism for libraries and educational institutions is emerging (Buschman, 2012; Seale, 2013), and it has been a hot topic in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. These are important developments; however, little attention within LIS has been paid to the key ideas of the most prominent thinkers associated with the development and popularization of neoliberal thought (i.e., F.A. Hayek), and most of the LIS literature on neoliberalism has not directly addressed its conception of information and knowledge. This lack of direct attention is an issue for LIS and Knowledge Organization (KO) because neoliberalism’s most powerful arguments are about how markets — broadly considered — are the most powerful “information processors” humanity has ever known (Mirowski, 2013) and how information and knowledge are always limited and imperfect. On the surface, an economic theory originally developed by Austrians during World War II would seem to have little direct relevance to contemporary LIS. However, attempts to develop information policies in the public interest must engage neoliberal discourse and its understanding of information, markets, and society. Given the impact that

Jonathan Cope

 Jonathan Cope is an Assistant Professor and a Reference/Instruction Librarian at the College of Staten Island, CUNY. His research is focused on the ways in which library and information literacy work is situated within specific social, cultural, economic, and disciplinary contexts.

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neoliberal conceptions of information and markets have had on global politics and economics since the 1970s, this is a major — if understandable — lacuna in LIS literature.

In this paper I briefly examine the LIS and KO literature on neoliberalism. I examine some of neoliberalism’s key arguments related to information and markets (e.g., Hayek) and argue that neoliberalism raises specific normative political challenges for LIS. I then briefly explore recent discussions of technological change (e.g., the Internet) and their relationship to neoliberalism. I conclude by using the work of Karl Polanyi (2001) to problematize the notion of information as a commodity and to argue that neoliberalism’s conception of the market as the key neutral arbiter of information bifurcates “the market” from “society” in a manner that creates political limitations for libraries and other public-minded institutions that work in LIS and are interested in developing normative arguments about creating information policies in the public interest.

Neoliberalism’s Conception of Information

In North America the term neoliberal often causes as much confusion as it does clarity. Since the 1930s, in the United States the term liberal is tied in popular consciousness to center-left and social democratic politics, not necessarily the classical liberalism of John Locke or the market liberalism of classical political economy. These traditions emphasize freedoms that the political philosopher Isaiah Berlin (1998) called “negative” (i.e., freedom from as opposed to freedom to) and a general policy of “laissez faire” with regards to economic questions. Most advocates of neoliberalism do not currently use the term to describe themselves, thereby adding to the confusion. Even the key popularizers and developers of neoliberal doctrines (i.e., Milton Friedman, and Friedrich Hayek) were hesitant to use the label — although they did do so, particularly from the 1930s to the 1950s (Mirowski, p. 38). Despite this tendency, Philip Mirowski (2013) identifies a coherence in the different strands of thought that he dubs the Neoliberal Thought Collective (NTC), and he recommends the use of the term neoliberal because of its descriptive power. What follows is the introduction of a few key concepts rather than an exhaustive overview of neoliberalism.

A concise definition offered by Daniel Saunders (2010) is that neoliberalism is “united by three broad beliefs: the benevolence of the free market, minimal state intervention and regulation of the economy, and the individual as a rational economic actor” (as cited in Bourg, 2014, para. 16). Notable critic of neoliberalism David Harvey (2005) argues that the neoliberal project was, and is, primarily a political effort to reassert the class power of capital. For Harvey this occurs through the reduction of state services, the active protection of private over collective property rights, and a general promotion of market mechanisms
over state regulation when possible. Mirowski does not disagree, but he posits that at its core neoliberalism is an argument about the nature of information; in short, the market is the most powerful information processor humanity has ever conceived. Moreover, Mirowski finds that neoliberalism is a call to action to perpetually reconstruct society and the state to facilitate the development of a specific kind of market society. The progenitors of neoliberal thought such as Friedrich Hayek were very clear on this point, and their arguments about the limits of knowledge should be familiar to many readers: central planners fail because their information is always imperfect.

In Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) (published during World War II) he argues that social actors engage in such a wide array of enormously complicated activities that it is impossible for any institution or planner to comprehend. For Hayek, the “planner” cannot see the infinite complexities present in the economy and the social world. Therefore, the planner, even the well meaning one, rules through a kind of authoritarian imposition that distorts the self-correcting mechanisms of the market and has unforeseen consequences. The origins of the worst authoritarianisms (e.g., Nazism, Stalinism) can be found within all such “planning.” Whatever undesirable outcomes occur as a result of market social relations — Hayek freely admits that “inequalities of opportunity” exist in capitalist society — things turn out worse when “the planner” becomes involved.

For Mirowski neoliberalism is different from classical market liberalism and libertarianism in that it sees a robust role for the state in ensuring that specific market forms prevail over the often fickle nature of a democratic polity. The state must continually insure a framework in which markets can flourish; a strong state is an essential tool to be used as a guarantor that the neoliberal vision of the market is protected and promoted. Hayek himself argued that “democracy is essentially a means, a utilitarian device for safeguarding internal peace and individual freedom” (p. 78). For Hayek, competition in markets is the essence of freedom, and to interfere in these processes through planning leads inexorably towards authoritarianism. Mirowski cites Michel Foucault’s early observations about neoliberalism and argues that Foucault “presciently observed in 1978 (that) ‘Neoliberalism should not be confused with the slogan ‘laissez-faire,’ but on the contrary, should be regarded as a call to vigilance, to activism, to perpetual interventions’” (as cited in Mirowski, p. 53).

Hayek and his neoliberal followers’ arguments about markets are related to an argument about information: there is a seemingly infinite number of actions and exchanges that produce information, and the market is an “information processor more powerful than the human brain but essentially patterned on brain/computation metaphors” (Mirowski, p. 54). Therefore, markets are the neutral mechanism through which information can be determined to have value. Although these are economic arguments, their relevance to LIS should
be readily apparent. The normative basis for a great deal of LIS work is the concept that a democratic society requires the wide availability of myriad forms of information, many of which have no clear economic use or monetary value. LIS thinkers such as Olson (2002) and Drabinski (2013) have developed strong arguments about the ways in which traditionally hierarchical classification structures that are presented as being ideologically neutral can contain hegemonic assumptions that in practice limit the ability of social subjects to see themselves reflected in library classification structures. These thinkers have developed ethical frameworks that can be used by LIS practitioners to foster more socially just and inclusive information systems. The subtle ways in which the neoliberal conception of markets and society undergirds contemporary systems of information production, dissemination, and organization is similar to these older systems of “high modernist” information organization in that neoliberalism is presented as being ideologically neutral—because it views market exchange and selection as a non-ideological arbiter of value. Neoliberalism creates a discursive framework in which the value of information is determined by its ability to be monetized.

The methods of search and classification (such as search engines, user-generated content, social tagging, and folksonomies) that were made possible by distributed computing networks — developed with the promise that they would democratically empower users — sit in a complicated relationship to the neoliberal ideal of the market. Popular and scholarly publications have extolled the promises of distributed computing as harvesting “the wisdom of the crowd” (e.g., Niederer, S., & Van Dijck; 2010, Shirky; 2008). Yochi Benkler’s (2007) concept of social production argues that a new mode of communicative production has developed that contradicts neoclassical economics in that the collaborative forms of production that occur via these online networks exist outside of the market, because the individual producer does not receive direct wages or compensation for this production and the commodities that are produced are not physical but informational. Clay Shirky (2008) further contends that “most of the barriers to group action have collapsed” (p. 22) due to the rise of the Internet. These newer methods of information consumption and production more easily facilitate specific kinds of group action as they allow users to create content and more easily “talk back” to an ever expanding variety of informational forms.

However, Joacim Hansson (2013) argues that “[i]n this new (dis)order lies a fundamental illusion of the non-prescriptiveness of the semantic web... one prescriptive order has been replaced by another” (p. 390). This dynamic is analyzed in the work of Sofia Umoja Noble (2013) and her examination of how a supposedly neutral Google search (specifically the Google search for “black girls”) acts to reinforce racial and gender stereotypes and to render “the interests of Black women, coded as girls, invisible” (para. 7). Noble demonstrates that
although new forms of information production, classification, and retrieval may offer potential avenues for communities to emerge that actively challenge dominant cultural narratives about race, gender, sexuality and/or concentrated economic power, these forms are thoroughly enmeshed in the communicative circuits of 21st century neoliberal capitalism.

The guidance of Evgeny Morozov (2013, 2014) regarding “the Internet” demonstrates a productive way to think about the relationship between the neoliberal market, the Internet, and democracy. Morozov polemically argues that digital technologies are “made up of tools, ideologies, market incentives and laws” (2014, para. 8) and that to think of “the Internet” as a tool that has determined characteristics assumes the same traits of the “the market” in neoliberal argumentation. To presuppose that there is a coherent “Internet” that is static is “to replace political argumentation (about the future of education or publishing or healthcare) with just one reductionist argument: Because … the Internet” (2014, para. 17). In other words, both the market and “the Internet” are not autonomous entities “that we cannot predict or fathom but we can only accommodate ourselves to” (Morozov, 2014, para. 11); instead they are the product of complex human relationships, and society can shape them in ways that further normative social and political goals.

As more information is produced in distributed networks that have new and ambiguous relationships to the specific geographical and educational communities, which libraries have traditionally served, it is LIS’s responsibility to articulate a vision of how to view information as a public and common good. Any socially engaged LIS endeavor will have to be aware of how information that may not be considered useful by the market may still have value to be used towards different normative ends. Information is a commodity in particular contexts, but an ethically engaged LIS and KO must develop a more analytically precise way to understand the nature of information as a commodity in order to disrupt and complicate the neoliberal idea of the market as the ultimate processor of information.

LIS, KO, and Neoliberalism

Within the fields of LIS and KO little attention has been paid to capitalism and the role of markets, let alone neoliberalism. This is a major shortcoming in the literature, especially if one accepts Jack Anderson’s (2008) contention that “society is the basic unit of information organization” (as cited in Hansson, 2013 p. 384). Information and the systems that organize and make it accessible are embedded in a complex web of ideological, social, and economic dynamics. The key epistemological and ontological claims about information that have been used to rationalize the economic system of “the global north” in recent years (i.e., neoliberalism) should be scrutinized because this system has
produced the worldviews in which the contemporary systems of information and knowledge have developed.

In one of KO’s few attempts at evaluating the role of political economy in shaping information, Joacim Hansson (2013) argues that “the shift from ‘knowledge’ to ‘information’ has not only changed the meaning of the word ‘ontology’; it has turned knowledge into a product with defined economic value” (p. 390). Hansson contends that “[i]n the late capitalism we live in today, economic value of documents in a simple Google search govern [sic] the pattern of retrieved documents…the documents most likely found in a specific search pattern are the ones that give economic revenue, which in turn make them the ones most likely to be retrieved” (p. 390). Hansson uses three different projects (Diderot and D’Alembert’s Encyclopédie created in 1751, Sweden’s rejection of Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) and subsequent development of the Swedish Library Classification system (SAB) system in 1921, and the development of the Semantic Web (or Web 2.0) to illustrate the historical specificity of these KO projects and what they say about the epistemologies of the societies from which they emerged. He draws particular attention to the Swedish adoption of DDC in 2008 and argues that “as the social democratic welfare state has been systematically deconstructed during the last two decades, epistemological, technological, and practical grounds were laid also for the introduction of DDC” (p. 388). In the much commented upon rise of the World Wide Web, Hansson finds that questions of economic value have obtained primacy in the retrieval of documents and that this is indicative of a new epistemology. Hansson concludes that “we need further analyses of contemporary productive forces, and to acknowledge them as determinants of systems of currently legitimate knowledge claims” (p. 390). In other words, the Swedish social democratic postwar moment contributed heavily to the perceived importance of the SAB as a national project, while the rise of global neoliberal discourse helped to bring about its demise (even in the comparatively social democratic Sweden).

Ronald Day’s (2002) critique of the concept of “social capital” in knowledge management uses the thought of Italian autonomist Marxist Antonio Negri to argue that the nature of late capitalism requires that intellectual and affective labor (e.g., child-raising, education, social communication) be generalized throughout society and the economy in order to become decoupled from the wage relation so that new spaces for capital can be opened for the generation of profits. For Day, the attention paid to this kind of tacit knowledge by knowledge management means that new communicative technologies will be used by capital to enhance its power over labor and to create profits with little regard for participatory democratic goals. Cope (2012) follows this line of inquiry by arguing that in order for librarianship and classification to be practiced as an idealized intellectual craft, the political economy of neoliberalism must be
altered to materially support classification work in the public interest and to support public policy that guarantees universal livable wages and leisure time for all.

Within LIS literature some analysts have specifically addressed neoliberalism; however, this work focuses primarily on the entanglements between educational institutions, libraries, and neoliberal policies. This focus is most evident in the work of John Bushman, starting with his examination of what he terms a “new public philosophy” that weakens support for public institutions and a normative democratic public sphere (2003) to his most recent interrogation of marketing’s intrusion into the classroom and library (2012). Bushman has paid persistent attention to how the forces of neoliberalism have impacted libraries and educational institutions. For methodological purposes, Buschman cites Gerald Mara (2008) in arguing that neoliberalism is a social practice and, if viewed as such, “neoliberalism must (and can) be countered on its own terms” using the method of immanent critique; therefore, Bushman argues that “we must encounter neoliberalism and its operation in its specific educative institutional contexts in a democracy” (p. 54). Buschman then seriously considers neoliberalism’s appeal (e.g., the encouragement of individual control, more opportunities to make individual choices, the idea of the market as a neutral arbiter of value) in light of his examination of classroom and library marketing before drawing from different strands of democratic theory (e.g., Alexis de Tocqueville, communitarianism, deliberative democratic theory, Jurgen Habermas) to develop a critique of market-based culture that “seek(s) to capture the dialogic and discursive bases of democracy and adapt it to contemporary conditions” (2012, p. 91).

Maura Seale’s (2013) examination of the neoliberal library highlights the ways in which information literacy discourse has uncritically adopted the neoliberal worldview. Citing the work of Saunders (2000), Seale finds the figure of the autonomous agent exemplified in the concept of “homo economicus” or, “the individual who consumes, is rational and autonomous” (p. 51) in a great deal of information literacy discourse. In John Budd’s (2007) call for public library leaders to consider both society and the individual in pursuit of a democratic public interest he identifies neoliberalism as the key ideological influence pushing libraries to view themselves as “businesses in a market” resulting in “long-lasting damage to any conception of the role they ought to play in a democratic society” (p. 9).

This work provides an excellent foundation for exploring the role of neoliberalism as it relates to LIS’s institutions; however, none of this work has focused specifically on the neoliberal conception of information and the questions it poses for both KO and LIS. As we have seen, neoliberal thought makes several key points about the relationship between markets, information, and knowledge. Developing normative, democratic justifications for public
libraries and educational institutions is vital work; however, LIS must address how neoliberal conceptions of the market have shaped the ways in which information and knowledge are viewed. If “society is the basic unit of information organization” (p. 102) as Anderson argues, then the implications for LIS of the idea of the market as the ultimate information processor must be addressed. The economic historian Karl Polanyi’s idea of fictitious commodities provides LIS and KO with a particularly robust and analytically useful way to examine these issues.

**Polanyi’s Pendulum**

Karl Polanyi’s *The Great Transformation* (2001) (first published in 1944) is a landmark of economic history. A contemporary of Hayek, Polanyi argued that an idealized market separate from society has never existed; markets are always shaped by the social forces present in the societies in which they exist. For Polanyi, markets have always been embedded in society and as a market-based culture spreads into all parts of the social world within a given society it “inevitably provokes a corresponding countermovement for the ‘protection of society’” (Silver, 2003, p. 17). Polanyi focuses on the rise of capitalist markets in 18th and 19th century England and the governmental, juridical, and cultural changes that had to occur for a market society to develop and what Polanyi terms the “movements for the protection of society” that emerged as a response. Polanyi argues that this was part of a by no means natural or inevitable political project — the classical liberal and the neoliberal conception of a self-regulating market developed as the product of a range of societal and state interventions that created a market society. *Homo economicus* was fundamentally a social and political creation.

As with any influential thinker, aspects of Polanyi’s findings have been criticized. Charles Kindleberger (1974) found his historical account of how market-based modern economic behavior emerged an important corrective to the neoliberal “Chicago School” of economics, but reductionist in its overemphasis on forces outside of society. Nancy Fraser (2013) argues that while particularly perceptive about conflicts between society and the market and highly applicable to recent economic crises, Polanyi is blind to forms of oppression rooted in society (e.g., racism, patriarchy). Fraser argues for a “triple movement” that incorporates Polanyi’s insights about markets and society into an understanding that in certain cases the introduction of markets can act in a liberatory manner (e.g., the introduction of women into the workplace) and that forces for cultural emancipation be added to his analytical framework. However, Polanyi’s theorization of the fictitious commodity provides LIS with a particularly useful way to examine the role of knowledge and information in the informationalized capitalist economy of the early 21st century.
Central to Polanyi’s analysis is the insight that the commodities land, labor, and money are fictitious because the state and society have to continuously, and actively, shape, create, and regulate social institutions in order for markets in these commodities to exist at all. For example, a specific conception of property rights must be enforced by the state for a market in property to exist; the development of an industrial wage-based economy necessitated legal and cultural changes to complete the transformation from how labor was conceptualized and regulated in the guild system; and the state continually makes decisions to create and regulate the supply of money. As information becomes more of a central concept in a globalized marketplace, treating information and knowledge as a Polanyian fictitious commodity proves insightful.

Information has value as a commodity to the degree that individual economic actors use the state’s intellectual property protections and/or social norms to guarantee its value in the marketplace. The market value of information is temporally variable because its value may shift dramatically over time. For example, advanced information about a specific global market fluctuation that is not common knowledge in a specific market is worth a great deal.\(^1\) Marx’s concept of the general intellect explored by Negri and, in LIS, Day is a particularly important framework for expanding the analysis to examine what Jessop (2007) (in his examination of the potential of using Polanyi’s fictitious commodity concept to examine information) calls the knowledge based economy and the ways that information is subsumed under the logic of fictive capital (i.e., information itself can be a vehicle for speculative investment). There are instances when information’s value as a commodity is limited due to social practices (e.g., trade secrets). Jessop finds that although information is what economists call a nonrival good (i.e., not scarce) it “acquires a commodity form insofar as it is made artificially scarce and access thereto depends on payment of rent” (p. 120). Moreover, information and knowledge becomes “disembedded from its social roots” (p. 120) in ways that call to mind Polanyi’s treatment of the enclosure of the commons in his analysis of the history of land as a commodity. Jessop argues that the knowledge-based economy necessitates a rethinking of the fictitious commodity concept and that “it is the integration of...fictitious commodities into the circuits of capital and their real subsumption under the competitive pressures of capital accumulation that lead to their treatment as if they were real commodities” (p. 124). In other words, for capital to continue to accumulate it needs to constantly find new commodities and things to commodify.

It is no coincidence that some of the most contentious debates about information policy since the rise of the Internet have focused on questions of copyright and intellectual property. As Benkler (2006) asserted, the marginal cost of producing, altering, or sharing in a networked and social environment is near zero, yet the legal framework, labor regime, and the cultural norms in
which information is created is still contested. Global citizens are creating and consuming massive amounts of culture, information, and data in online spaces that have an undefined relationship both to markets and values such as freedom, equality, and democracy. However, determining what information is most important for the common good and for the functioning of democracy is a complicated normative question. What information should be decommodified and made part of a digital commons? How should the labor of those who create digital value be compensated if the general intellect is not directly tied to activities historically considered labor? What mechanisms should society use to determine the value of knowledge and information?

By updating Polanyi’s concept of the fictitious commodity, LIS and KO can move beyond the neoliberal notion that markets are the ultimate information processors. Markets may be very efficient at responding to price signals for commodities that have a defined use value, but — even if information functions as fictive capital — information only has value because of the intervention of society and the state. Polanyi’s insights provide LIS and KO with a way to consider the questions of information policy in a manner that embeds market exchange within the social. Margaret Somers and Fred Block (2014) argue that Polanyi viewed civil society, social relations, politics, and cultural practices as constituting the social — the space in which “politics can effectively redefine the meaning of ownership” (Somers & Block, p. 32). LIS and KO are well situated to participate in a Polanyian countermovement with regards to information, because the Polanyian social frames such questions not as a debate about an abstract perfectly functioning market versus a public interest outside of the market, but as a conversation about the type of markets that exist and ways in which libraries and educational institutions can pursue normative democratic goals embedded within different types of market societies. A first step in this process would be to recognize that there is nothing “natural” or “neutral” about a singular “market,” because there are a wide variety of ways that markets and society can interact. Although the Polanyian concept of the fictitious commodity needs updating to account for developments that have occurred since he wrote The Great Transformation in 1944, it reminds us that it is only through the active intervention of society and the state that markets exist; therefore, LIS must use politics for the creation, expansion, and preservation of the informational commons that a democratic society requires.

Conclusion

If one argues that the neoliberal market is not a universal and immutable entity, then LIS can participate in the active shaping of institutions that organize and make information accessible. In this paper I have expanded on the LIS and KO literature critical of neoliberalism and examined its central claims about
the nature of information, markets, and planning. As mentioned earlier in this paper, one of the challenges of discussing neoliberalism is the fact that very few people would describe themselves and their ideology as being neoliberal. Therefore, only critics of neoliberalism have to address the charge that they are being “ideological” because the cultural logic of neoliberalism views the market as being non-ideological. However, as Polanyi argues, it is the neoliberal ideal of the market as the universal value-neutral-arbiter-of-all-things that is a highly ideological and ultimately utopian project — a pure market has never existed in the history of capitalism, and it can never do so without ravaging society.

When Internet writers claim that newer forms of collaborative and non-proprietary production are “non-market” forms of production and they bracket them off to a space called “social production” outside of the market, they ignore the vast amounts of investment and institutional infrastructure needed to create the information revolution. Importantly, they ignore Polanyi’s perspective about how markets and society developed in tension with one another. For libraries and educational institutions, moving beyond a neoliberal conception of information means that, while acknowledging that the market may be very effective at processing certain types of information, the future of an egalitarian and participatory democratic culture depends on developing and maintaining public institutions that pursue an information policy in the public interest. Polanyi teaches us that any space outside of markets will not remain there for long unless a corresponding counter-movement for the protection of society emerges.

The theme of today’s symposium is the “Commodification of Information Goods and Library Services.” Now, I would like to turn to the Progressive Librarians Guild’s (PLG) Statement of Purpose (n.d.) that clearly states that library and information work “brings us up against both economic and political issues” and that “PLG members aim to make these choices explicit, and to draw their political conclusions.” One of the political conclusions I would like to draw from this exploration of neoliberalism and the work of Polanyi is that debates that position an abstract “free market” in opposition to “the common good” ignore that markets have always been shaped by the state and, to use Polanyi’s phrase, “movements for the protection of society.” Classifying and making accessible forms and types of information that may well be social goods that markets fail to recognize is not acting against an abstract notion of the market; it is simply recognizing the market is not the ultimate information processor. Social and political movements based around information should understand that this tension between “the social” and “the market” has been a feature of liberal democratic capitalism throughout its history. Mirowski (2013) argues that one of the reasons for neoliberalism’s continued political success is that beneath the soaring rhetoric about markets it recognizes that the state plays a fundamental role in shaping markets. Libraries and educational institutions
can expand and protect an information infrastructure and a commons that can help to shape markets and society towards a wide variety of normative political goals. Polanyi once defined socialism as “the tendency inherent in an industrial civilization to transcend the self-regulating market by consciously subordinating it to a democratic society” (as cited in Somers and Block, 2014). Polanyi’s conception of fictitious commodities provides a particularly rich avenue for LIS to pursue an agenda in which the true democratic potential of the information economy can be realized.

REFERENCES


NOTES

1. Michael Lewis’s (2014) recent examination of high frequency trading illustrates this dynamic well.
2. Laurel Ptak’s *Wages for Facebook* campaign raises key questions around this issue.
Critiquing and Conveying Information about Fracking through Song Parody
The Annotated Libretto of
*Frackville, the Horizontally Drilled Musical*,
with Interpolated Bibliography

**Introduction**

When an oil and gas boom caused a frenzy of insufficiently-regulated hydraulic fracturing (fracking) in her hometown of Greeley, Colorado, the author’s concern for the environmental future of her community and the planet pushed her to move away from an uninvolved political stance into the role of an outspoken environmental activist. Highby’s commitment to environmentalism in her community has taken many forms, including organizing Weld Air and Water (a grassroots environmental watchdog group), speaking out at public meetings, assessing and critiquing the quality of information shared in her community by oil and gas interests, and writing her own protest song lyrics. The songs are adaptations that call attention to the environmental risks of fracking, which range from earthquakes induced by injection wells to noise pollution to benzene exposure, to name just a few.

At PLG Edmonton’s 2014 Symposium, Highby presented a critique of a corporate-sponsored oil and gas website and advocated that librarians take on more critical roles in the processes of information production, dissemination,
and interpretation. She also encouraged them to take action to ensure that information is used in ways that enhance participatory democracy. Finally, she pressed for situationally-dependent non-neutrality by information professionals. Punctuating Highby’s critique were her parody songs, which join the long tradition of leftist protest songs. She is inspired by the satiric work of Reverend Billy and the Yes Men and suggests that the use of comic counterframes is therapeutic, subversively entertaining, satiric, and didactic. Below is a libretto, the lyrics of a sampling of seven song parodies, interpolated with first person commentary and an extensive bibliography of sources informing the lyrics.

See Further


Weld County, Colorado, and Alberta, Canada share a common challenge. Weld County is experiencing a fracking boom, and the province of Alberta is home to the Athabasca tar sands.

We’re all river valley denizens living upon
Eastern Plains of the Rocky Mountains
Beneath us Earth replete with fossil fuels
Be they Athabasca tar sands or Niobrara shale
Corporations and governments collude to extract these resources
Yet they should be left in the ground to save our planet
From suffering the worst effects of disastrous climate change
To prepare, we must strengthen our sociopolitical culture and ORGANIZE!

See Further


Maps


Part Two: When Will We Become Frackville? Coming Soon to a Backyard Near You

The first song parody is about Greeley, Colorado. It used to be infamous for its odiferous feedlots and meatpacking industry; now it’s becoming infamous for its fracking. I have been writing song parodies for the last two years as an act of creative resistance against the encroachment of urban fracking in my community. The working title of my musical in progress is “Frackville: the Horizontally Drilled Musical.”

Using comic counterframes is one of the most subversive, therapeutic, and effective ways to convey information, especially when it is of an existentially threatening nature, as in the case of climate change. As we face a local and regional political situation in which power is unbalanced, very much a proverbial David v. Goliath battle, comedy is a sane response. Plec and Pettenger (2012) argue that comic counterframes of resistance “offer the consumer alternative frames within which consumer and environmental activists can challenge and re-appropriate the messaging process. If a comic frame can emerge, then so too might the angry consumer who does not want to be deceived by the sins of greenwashing” (p. 471). These ideas inform my work.

The lyrics convey, with self-deprecating humor, the oft-times painful experience of testifying before my City Council and going against the dominant pro-oil and gas economic narrative of my community. My intent is self-therapeutic, but also to seize the opportunity to be satirical and didactic. For instance, in the following song, I wanted to make people aware of Bill McKibben’s “Do the Math Tour” regarding global warming.
We’re Fracked


Greeley was a cow town
Now it is an oil town
Searching for a sobriquet
Is it unexpected
That it’s greatly ground up
Caught up in this fracking net
We’re fracked we’re fracked
We’re rackin’ up the carbon debt
We’re fracked we’re fracked
Hijacking generations hence
Get renewable Greeley

NIMBYs are a problem
Spreadin’ lots of rumors
Weld Air and Water fractivists
We tell you that the fracking’s
Proven to be safe now
But you stir the hornet’s nest
Relax, chillax
You fear mongerin’ fractivists
Relax, chillax
Crazy ecoterrorists
Get back tree huggers

I’m no Nostradamus but I see two pathways
Diverging for this fracking town
One redemptive science
Another leads to ruin
Perhaps the science will win out
The path the path
Have you done Bill McKibben’s math
The math the math
Of global warming’s ruin and wrack
It adds up Greeley

Wendy’s a tree hugger
Organized the NIMBYs
Raises bogus fears ‘bout health
Claims she finds good research
But her views are biased
Shaky as her Parkinson’s
Don’t want no facts
Shut up about the peer review
You’re cracked, you’re whacked
Don’t want a jeremiad from you
Shhh Marion Librarian

Once you take the water from the Ogallala
There’s no turning back the clock
Once the seismic action moves the Earth’s formations
There’s no relocating rock
Tick tock tick tock
You’ve set the global warming clock
Tick tock tick tock
Disturbin’ Niobrara chalk
It’s no hopscotch game Greeley

See Further


Part Three: Taking the Best Evidence, Impact Science, to the Frackville City Council

Bierman, Kulp, and Foote (2011) found that prior to 2010, most literature on fracking did not address environmental concerns. The extant literature was chiefly in two areas: geology/geophysics and petroleum engineering (p. 339). Thus, the research lags behind the technology.

When I testified before our City Council, I gathered the best information possible from impact science. Impact science is defined by sociologist Aaron
McCright (2013a) as science that supports the understanding of human impacts on the environment and human health. Examples of impact science include environmental science, technology assessment, and conservation biology. Impact science contrasts with production science, which is science that serves economic production. Examples of production science include physical and engineering sciences such as polymer chemistry, nuclear physics, and petroleum geology.

**See Further**


**Part Four: Pleading for the Precautionary Principle before the Frackville City Council**

What else do you need in order to convince your elected officials, once you are armed with the best scientific evidence? You need moral support from friends to encourage you to speak publicly. And you need to be able to ethically justify your position, advocating that fracking be suspended until it is proven to be safe and non-threatening to public health. This ethical principle is known as the precautionary principle. Accordingly, I deem it ethical to use precaution
and slow down or stop fracking until it is proven safe and not harmful to public health and the environment.

Here is a song parody acknowledging the strong feelings involved in the decision to act publicly and politically along with the courage such action requires.

*The Reluctant Citizen*


Ecru and eggshell and white picket fences
Lovely beige tanks on which benzene condenses
My neighborhood platted neatly so square
Fracking’s not dangerous they wouldn’t dare

Civil and pleasant and rarely debated
Measured and moderate not overstated
My neighborhood has innocuous tanks
My neutral pretense hides paralyzed angst

Why be neutral why immobile when you can take a stand
Just simply remember your reasons for courage
And then you won’t feel so bland

Focus grouped adverts and well-tailored jackets
Commercials for natural gas pretty press packets
My neighborhood kids are soon to be fracked
Oh I am afraid that it’s courage I lack

Don’t want to make waves and hate public speaking
What will my friends say, bad things they’ll be thinking
My neighborhood kids are soon to be fracked
For them I’ll find courage meet the attack

Why be neutral why be passive when you’re not alone
Remember we’re with you there’s safety in numbers
And then you won’t feel so scared

I wrote these words to encourage the parents of children attending Frontier Elementary School. A fracking site was proposed just a few hundred feet from their school playground. Discernment is accomplished by clarifying our
values. Does the situation rise to a level that justifies taking a position? In this example, the endangerment of children rose to a level that arguably justified non-neutrality. Zinn’s autobiography, *You Can’t Be Neutral on a Moving Train* (2002), is a useful example here. In explaining his title, he notes its application to situations in which “events are already moving in certain deadly directions, and to be neutral means to accept that” (p. 8). I contend that fossil fuel induced global warming and the public health implications of fracking constitute movements in certain deadly directions.

*See Further*


Claren, R. (2013). Fracking is a feminist issue: Natural gas drilling may disrupt not just the environment, but your health. *Ms.* 23(2), 48-49.


**Part Five: Using Librarians’ Strength to Stop or Slow Down the Frackville Train**

The analytical skills of librarianship transfer well to the arena of political advocacy. And while professional neutrality is sometimes appropriate, you don’t have to be universally neutral; every situation needs to be examined for the proper course of action. Of course, neutrality should remain a central tenet of the ethics of librarianship, especially in collection development and reference service provision. But non-neutrality should be chosen when discerned to be ethically appropriate for a given situation.
Andersen (2008) encourages librarians to become public intellectuals and
to publicly practice information criticism. I’d add to Andersen’s theory the fact
that librarians are uniquely positioned to become information critics because
they often have fluency in a multiplicity of disciplines, and high comfort level
with inter-disciplinary approaches to an issue—what might be characterized
as a holistic or systems-oriented view. Librarians are trained to navigate the
scholarly communications system and so have an awareness of the impact of
politics and economics on the knowledge production, communication, and
organization processes.

See Further

library neutrality: Essays from Progressive Librarian (pp. 97-108). Duluth, MN:
Library Juice Press.

library neutrality: Essays from Progressive Librarian (pp. 89-96). Duluth, MN:
Library Juice Press.

Part Six: Train Wreck in Frackville – When Corporate Information and
Science Information Collide

McCright (2013a) observes that the seeming conflict over environmental
science-related issues is really, at heart, a conflict over competing values
regarding economics:

Much research on public scientific and technical controversies finds
that what often appears at first glance to be a conflict over science is
more accurately defined as a conflict over competing values. . . Our
study here supports this finding. We find that political ideology aligns
closely—but not perfectly—along a fault line between views defending
the current economic order and views promoting reform of the current
economic order to protect environmental and human health (p. 7).

Last Train from Frackville

Sung to the meter of “Last Train to Clarksville” by Boyce, T. and Hart, B.

Take the last train from Frackville
There’s no Greeley oasis
Five hundred feet from frack spills
So rare the unfracked spaces
No No No
No frack free zone
No frack free zone

So I’m crying and I’m mourning
Toxic ‘sposure makes me leave
Flee town I that was born in
And how it makes me grieve
That I must go
To a frack free zone
To a frack free zone
My home town’s become a sacrificial zone

Take the last train from Frackville
Break up with this colony
I refuse to drink the Kool-aid
Or the frack fluid
That they’ve kindly offered me
Won’t sign the lease
Won’t sign the lease
D-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-dotted line dotted line
Dotted dotted line

Take the last train from Frackville,
Now I must give up the fight
I can’t hear you from this noisy wellpad
Where it’s lit up all the day and night
No frack free zone
No frack free zone
My hometown’s become a sacrificial zone

Take the last train from Greeley,
Ground up in this great gas gush
They have pawned the public health
In this mad corporate profit rush
So just say no
So just say no
So just say no
Don’t let it become a sacrificial zone.

May 8, 2014 was a difficult day. The Denver Post reported on a study by the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences that indicated much more serious levels of air pollution than previously estimated.
Oh I Need Clean Air Babe

Sung to the meter of “Eight Days a Week” by Lennon, J. and McCartney, P. (1964). EMI.

Ooh I need clean air babe
Guess you know it’s true
Know you need clean air babe
Just like I need you
Inhale exhale
Inhale exhale
CRED says we’ve got blue skies
Eight days a week
Eight days a week
They air T-V commercials
Eight days a week
Our air pollution they ignore
May 8th read Bruce Finley
Guess you know it’s true
In the Denver Post babe
Can’t hide it from you
Inhale exhale
Inhale exhale
Ain’t got nothing but bad news
Eight days a week
Headline, it said
“Seen from air, it’s dirtier”
19 tons an hour
The amount of methane
That they spew

NOAA’s Petron measured
Emissions in our air
NoCo’s atmosphere much
Worse than we had feared
Inhale exhale
Inhale exhale
Ain’t got nothing but benzene
Eight times the rate
Eight times the rate
C-D-P-H-E knew of
Eight times the rate
Do they expect us to sit back?
V-O-Cs are doubled
In our county’s air
Climate is in trouble
I am in despair
Inhale exhale
Inhale exhale
Ain’t got nothing but methane
Three times the rate
Three times the rate
E-P-A estimated
Three times the rate
We’ve got to increase the setbacks.

Loveland’s next to Greeley
Larimer’s next to Weld
Air knows no firm boundaries
By storm fronts it’s impelled
Westward eastward
Northward southward
Greeley’s unexpected
Drifting gift to you
We’ll share the risk
With all adjoining counties
Our ozone drift
The gift that keeps on giving grief

Say yes to safety setback
Two thousand feet or more
Preserve urban oasis
Vote for a buffer zone
Retro-fit wells
Inspect often
Got to stop pollution
Right at the source
Eight times the risk
To public health and safety
Eight times the risk
We’ve got to take a stand today

See Further

Center for Western Priorities. (2014, April 15). Analysis: Colorado oil and gas front group’s $2.5 million PR campaign to win the public’s trust [Web log post]. Retrieved


### Part Seven: Corporate & Science Communication – Why It’s Not Reassuring to Hear that Frack Fluid Ingredients Can Be Found Under My Kitchen Sink

A good example of hard-to-access information is the proprietary nature of the contents of frack fluid. Colorado does have the Hydraulic Fracturing Chemical Disclosure Rule 205-A with the following requirements:

- Filing within 60 days of the fracking process a list of all the chemicals used, and their concentrations, with FracFocus.org (the publicly accessible, independent online database).
- Filing with the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission for any proprietary chemical a company does not want to disclose, claiming under penalty of perjury that the chemical is a trade secret (and must disclose the chemical family of any trade-secret chemical and its concentration).

Nevertheless, a Harvard Law School study by Konschnik, Holden, and Shasteen (2013) notes that the FracFocus Registry is not a panacea because it:
• Prevents states from enforcing timely disclosure requirements
• Creates obstacles for compliance for reporting companies
• Allows inconsistent trade secret assertions

Here’s a spoken word/song parody revealing the ingredients in fracking fluid. Although the whistleblowing figure is made up, the ingredients come from a real list of chemicals from the Endocrine Disruption Exchange.

Frack Fluid No. Nine


I took my gas lease
To Coinman & Sons
An urban fracking company they run
They’ll give me a bonus
if my lease I sign
They’re injectin’ wells
with Frack Fluid No. Nine

I asked Coinman ‘bout the ingredients
Been wonderin’ ‘bout them since 2010
He looked at my acreage and made a dollar sign
Said what you need is
A swig of Number Nine

He bent down and turned around and gave me a wink
Said all the ingredients were under my sink
It smelled like silly putty and looked like gooey slime
I held my nose I closed my eyes
I took a drink

I didn’t know if it was day or night
I started signin’ every lease in sight
But when I finished signin’ I felt so much remorse
I knew I was mistaken
I had to change my course

I took my worries to Greeley’s planning board
But concerns they pretty much ignored
The vote was four to two and one planner chided us
She ridiculed our fears o’er
Frack Fluid Number Nine
I took my troubles to Denver’s Capitol dome
Oil ‘n gas lobbyists the halls they roam
Workin’ hard to keep trade secrets under wraps
Keep it proprietary
The parts of Number Nine

To endocrine disrupters add formaldehyde
A little pinch of acetic anhydride
Then you add carcinogens some mutagens and more
But say its brine don’t make them fear
Frack Number Nine

I didn’t know if it was day or night
I started tellin’ everyone in sight
It’s your right to know what’s in your water
Air you breathe
Public health debacle
Frack Fluid Number Nine

Stepped out to Colfax tried my mood to fix
Takin’ a break from crooked politics
Psst down at the corner shadow figure
Gave a sign a whistleblower offered me
Some Fluid Number Nine

I took the fluid to the chemist’s lab
‘Bout five percent I couldn’t wait to blab
Apothecary’s formula I’m gonna give to you
Here’s what they put in
Frack Fluid Number Nine

Developmental toxicants make up the soup base
Two-butoxyethanol and more for the chase
Ethylene glycol and methanol too
Isopropanol and dazomet
I took a hit

They say FracFocus brings it all to light
But self-reporting has no teeth, no bite
It’s your right to know
What’s in your water, air you breathe
Information slowdown
Frack fluid number nine
I surfed the web lookin for any news
Found Theo Colborn’s site revealed the brews
She’s got lists of chemicals on her web page
At endocrine disruption dot com she’s the sage

Five chloro two methyl to be continued
Four iso-thia-zotin three one okay
Monoethanolamine and then you bake it
Sodium bicarbonate and that’s all it takes

I didn’t know if I was wrong or right
But we need more from COGCC oversight
The fugitive gasses are escapin’ all the time
Chemicals dispersed from Frack Fluid Number Nine

See Further


Part Eight: Accidents Happen – A Lesson about the Importance of Information

The next song parody uses a minor traffic accident to underscore the need for accurate information to address the many industrial dangers inherent in fracking-related procedures. Based on a real life situation, the event makes clear the importance of keeping up-to-date Material Data Safety Sheets.

“Frack Fluid Truckers’ Blues”


Fracking is safe and sound I swear
Just like the truth stretched out
So tight like rubber bands
It snaps back to sting you
You’re never gonna change
The truth by your spinnin’

So there are many associated tasks
Involved in the process
To cull from shale natural gas
On and ‘neath the surface
Wastewater ‘n pipelines
Don’t forget infrastructure

I’ve got a job full time
The economy is booming
Every day and sometimes overtime
I drive a truck
Oil service sector

Today I transported down the road
A tank full of fluid
To be flocculated fast
It slipped off my truck bed
Splattering Highway 34
Snarling traffic

So I just did me some talking on the phone
The Greeley firemen
Responded then hazmat
Wouldn’t touch with poles ten
Feet even longer
They said it’s not our problem

We tried to recall the protocol, oops
Were data sheets tossed out
So long ago in trash?
Gone material safety
We waited for two hours
For corporate cleanup

But tell those fractivists
Those Chicken Little foil heads
To get over their hysterics
It’s just stuff found in
The kitchen cupboard

Greeley fireman he said
“Had it been raining we’d
Be great because it would
Probably…be gone” those
Raindrops they cleanse us
They dilute our pollution

But there’s one thing to know
The chemicals not harmless
They need proper handling
Emergency preparedness
Intensive training

Greeley needs help from you the state
Slow down the fracking
Until we are more prepared
Ready for the worst case
This was a wakeup call
And thank god that it was small
Fracking’s a heavy industry
Traffic and transport of
Frack fluid’s fraught with risk
Trav’ling through our city
We’ll refuse egress
You imperil our children

It’s not care free
Fracking’s heavy industry

See Further


Part Nine: How Many Progressive Librarians Does It Take to Change the World? While There Are No Dumb Questions, I Might Suggest You Phrase Your Question Differently

It’s time for progressive librarians to put their intellectual prowess to public use. We’ve got to organize citizens at the grassroots, to stop being neutral on this moving train. We need to work on our local sociopolitical infrastructure, to develop the networks necessary to survive impacts of climate change. Howard Zinn (2002) ended his autobiography saying:

We don’t have to engage in grand, heroic actions to participate in the process of change. Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world. . . . And if we do act, in however small a way, we don’t have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory (p. 208).

Here are some happy lyrics, inspired by the rallying calls of Zinn and his fellow progressives, Naomi Klein and Ralph Nader.

Greeley’s Great from the Ground Up

Sung to the tune of “Oh What a Beautiful Mornin’” by Rodgers, R. and Hammerstein, O., II. (1943).
Greeley’s great from the ground up meat products
The gases of greenhouse are warming the globe
The grain-feeding livestock increasing the load
Oh what a legacy Greeley
Oh what a legacy Weld
Think what you’re leaving your grandkids
Climate change we can foretell

There’s a rumble beneath Niobrara
Mother Earth’s reached
Her limit of carbon it’s true
We’ve got to go fossil free
It’s up to you
Oh it’s your legacy Greeley
Think what you leave to your young
Sobriquet bragging of greatness
Hubris it rolls off your tongue
There are ways to make
Everything cool down
Conservation of energy
Be locavore
Share transportation
You’ll think of much more
Oh what a gentle soft footprint
Transform the bad legacy
Greeley is great from the ground up
When we tread earth so lightly

Progressive librarians can change the world (with small acts, in concert with millions of others)! Perhaps in a concert singing the satirical parodies within! Don’t let anyone’s backyard become Frackville, because fracking is a global public health issue. Go forth and be public in your critique, selective and situational in your neutrality, and active in your political participation.

See Further

The following is a review of union activity in the information sector in 2014 as documented on the Union Library Workers blog (http://unionlibraryworkers.blogspot.ca). Union Library Workers is a project of the Progressive Librarians Guild and is maintained by Sarah Barriage.

**Reports & Publications**

According to the United States Department of Labor’s (2015) annual survey of union membership, in 2014 overall union membership fell to 11.1% from 11.3% in 2013. Workers in education, training, and library occupations continue to have the highest unionization rate among all occupational sectors at 35.3%.

Several reports and publications related to union activity in the information sector were issued in 2014, including:

- The fourth volume of *The Journal of Collective Bargaining in the Academy*, which was themed “Academic Collective Bargaining Under Siege.”

Sarah Barriage is a member of PLG’s coordinating committee, serving as the editor of both the *Union Library Workers blog* and the *PLG Bulletin*. She is currently a doctoral student at Rutgers University’s School of Communication and Information.

KEYWORDS: Bibliographies; Labor unions – Australia; Labor unions – Canada; Labor unions – India; Labor unions – Ireland; Labor unions – Malawi; Labor unions – United Kingdom; Labor unions – USA; Labor unions and similar labor organizations
• “‘The Union Can’t Sit Idly By’: 2013 Union Review” by Sarah Barriage in issue 42 of Progressive Librarian.
• In Solidarity: Academic Librarian Labour Activism and Union Participation in Canada, edited by Jennifer Dekker and Mary Kandiuk, and published by Library Juice Press.

Awards

• The Local History & Genealogy Department of the Toledo-Lucas County Public Library was the 2014 recipient of RUSA’s John Sessions Memorial Award “for its extensive efforts in building an ongoing legacy recognizing the labor community” (“Most distinguished librarians in reference announced for 2014 achievement awards”, 2014).
• Gene Suchma, AFSCME District Council 37, won the 2014 International Labor Communications Association Visual Communication Award for Print & Internet/Best Cartoon/Local Unions for his cartoon that was included in “Communities and DC 37 mobilize to stop library sell-offs”, an article in New York DC 37’s Public Employee Press (“Labor media award winners 2014”, n.d.).

Events & Conferences

• The University of California San Diego acquired the Farmworker Movement Documentation Project, a digital archive of the United Farm Workers of America (Binkowski, 2014).
• Labor posters from the collection of activist Stephen Lewis were on display at several libraries in Massachusetts.
• The Canadian Union of Public Employees sponsored a panel session at the Canadian Library Association Conference in May 2014 (Canadian Union of Public Employees, n.d.). The session was titled “The Impact of Precarious Work in Canada’s Libraries” and featured president of Toronto Library Workers Union (CUPE 4948) Maureen O’Reilly, president of CUPE Local 2329 Dawn Lahey, and Dr. Marlea Clarke from the University of Victoria.
• The American Library Association Annual Conference held in June also featured sessions related to employment and labor. ALA-Allied Professional Association sponsored a session titled “Earn What You’re Worth: Salary Negotiation for Library Workers”. AFL-CIO-ALA Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups, RUSA sponsored a session titled “Labor Solidarity in a ‘Right-to-Work’ State” with speaker James P. Kraft.
• The Canadian Association of University Teachers hosted From Talk to Action: Building Successful Campaigns to Action, a conference for librarians and archivists on October 31 and November 1.
Union Activity

January 2014

• Librarians and other academic staff represented by the Association of University of New Brunswick Teachers went on strike after failing to come to an agreement with administration on key issues of pay and workload (“Staff strike at University of New Brunswick after talks fail to produce deal”, 2014). The strike ended after a deal was reached with the help of a government-appointed mediator (“University of New Brunswick strikes tentative deal to end academic staff strike”, 2014).

• Librarians and other faculty at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick went on strike after being unable to reach an agreement with administration on several key issues (“Mount Allison strikers get national show of support”, 2014).

• Strike action was averted at Cape Breton University after the faculty association and university administration reached an agreement (“Cape Breton University and faculty reach tentative contract deal”, 2014). The previous collective agreement had expired in June 2013.

• The Treasure Valley Education Association, the union representing faculty and librarians at Treasure Valley Community College in Ontario, Oregon, issued a vote of no confidence in the college’s president (Marfice, 2014).

• Librarians and other academic staff, all members of the University and College Union, at post-secondary institutions across the United Kingdom engaged in a series of two-hour strikes in response to a wage dispute (Kershaw, 2014). Several universities responded to this strike action by threatening to withhold a full day’s pay from anyone engaging in the two-hour strikes.

• Librarians and other faculty at the University of Victoria in British Columbia engaged in a successful union drive and formed a new faculty labor union (“University of Victoria faculty vote to form a union”, 2014).

February 2014

• The strike at Mount Allison University ended after the Mount Allison Faculty Association and university administration agreed to binding arbitration (“Mount Allison University says strike over, classes back on”, 2014).

• Post-secondary education workers across the United Kingdom went on strike, with UNISON, Unite, University and College Union, and Educational Institute of Scotland coordinating strike action (“University staff hold third strike”, 2014).
• Staff at Nelson Public Library in British Columbia, members of CUPE 339, reached a new collective agreement with the city of Nelson after nearly a year and a half of negotiations (“Nelson library workers ratify new contract”, 2014).

• Librarians and other faculty at the University of Illinois-Chicago engaged in a two-day strike amid ongoing negotiations with university administration (Rajwani, 2014).

March 2014

• Librarians at British Columbia’s Okanagan Regional Library, who are represented by the Professional Employees Association, and other library staff members, who are represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees, reached new contract agreements with the library (“ORL agreement reached”, 2014).

April 2014

• After a vote by members of the Harvard Union of Technical and Clerical Workers, workers at Dumbarton Oaks, a Harvard library and museum located in Washington, DC, became eligible to join the union (Klein, 2014).

• The Wellesley Free Library Staff Association in Wellesley, Massachusetts reached a new collective agreement after negotiations that began in 2011 (Mayblum, 2014). Members of the association had engaged in an online campaign to bring attention to their ongoing contract dispute with the town of Wellesley (Claffey, 2014).

May 2014

• Librarians and other faculty members of the Faculty Association of Simon Fraser University in British Columbia voted to become a certified union (Driver & Abramson, 2014).

• The National Tertiary Education Union (n.d.) organized a campaign in response to proposed library restructuring at the University of Sydney in Australia.

• Members of Grand Rapids Employees Independent Union staged a protest outside of the main branch of Michigan’s Grand Rapids Public Library in response to budget cuts and the proposed elimination of 18 positions (Vande Bunte, 2014).

• Workers at the National Library of Wales, who are represented by Prospect Cymru and the Public and Commercial Services Union, planned a vote on a
motion of no confidence in the library’s administration in response to issues with wages and decision-making practices (“National Library management ‘no confidence’ threat”, 2014).

June 2014

• Seven school librarian positions were eliminated from the London District Catholic School Board in Ontario, leaving 29 librarians for the district’s 45 elementary schools (Daniszewski, 2014).
• Libraries were among the civic offices represented by IMPACT that engaged in a one-day strike in South Dublin County, Ireland over pay cuts (Ryan, 2014). A second one-day strike was deferred after talks began with the Labour Relations Commission.
• Workers at Gibsons and District Public Library in British Columbia, members of CUPE 391, reached a new four-year collective agreement (“Workers finalize new agreement”, 2014).

July 2014

• Proposed redundancies at La Trobe University in Bendigo, Australia included nearly half of library staff members (Yu, 2014).
• Amid ongoing negotiations with the Windsor University Faculty Association, University of Windsor president Alan Wildeman issued a letter denouncing the refusal of the faculty association to give in to the administration’s demands and threatened cuts to employee benefits (Pearson, 2014). The letter was condemned by the Canadian Association of University Teachers, stating that the administration had “chosen to launch an unprecedented attack on the rights and benefits of academic staff” (“University of Windsor administration condemned for ‘intimidation tactics’”, 2014).
• More than one million public sector workers, including library staff, across the United Kingdom took part in strike action in response to austerity measures (“’Poverty pay’ #J10 strike begins across UK”, 2014).
• Library staff and other employees at Allahabad University in India went on strike, resulting in library closures and class cancellations (“AU staff strike hits teaching”, 2014).
• The Wisconsin Supreme Court upheld Act 10, legislation that limits public workers’ collective bargaining rights. Justice Michael J. Gableman stated “collective bargaining remains a creation of legislative grace and not constitutional obligation” (Davey, 2014).
**August 2014**

- Staff and supporters participated in a rally at the University of Sydney in response to planned job cuts and other changes to library services and structure (Brennan, 2014).
- Windsor University Faculty Association voted in favor of strike action (Chen, 2014a).

**September 2014**

- Staff at the National Library of Wales went on strike over a wage dispute (“National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth shut over strike”, 2014).
- Teachers in British Columbia accepted a new collective agreement, ending strike action that began at the end of the previous school year (“B.C. teachers’ strike is over”, 2014).
- Faculty at the University of Windsor took part in a one-day strike (Chen, 2014b).
- UNISON, the biggest public sector union in Wales, organized a demonstration across the country in response to job losses and wage cuts (Shipton, 2014).
- A proposal put forward by the Education and Library Sciences Group of the Public Service Alliance of Canada faced scrutiny for its requested inclusion of “aboriginal spirit friend” to the list of individuals for whom employees can take bereavement leave (Hume, 2014).
- The union representing library workers at Louisville Free Public Library in Kentucky filed a lawsuit against Louisville Metro Government, alleging that the government violated their collective agreement by filling full-time positions with part-time and subcontract workers (Sonka, 2014).
- Workers at Sechelt Public Library in British Columbia, members of CUPE 391, signed a new four-year collective agreement that grants the library workers wage increases and better benefits (“Sechelt library workers ink four-year deal”, 2014).

**October 2014**

- Workers at Lincoln Public Library in Rhode Island signed a new three year contract that includes wage increases but also increases in pension payments and health insurance premiums (Boisclair, 2014).
- Service Employees International Union Local 205, which represents staff at Chattanooga Public Library in Tennessee, was excluded from discussions
regarding the library’s adoption of city personnel policies (Smith, 2014). A union representative stated that this exclusion is a violation of the memorandum of understanding between the city and the union.

• A new three-year agreement was reached with the California Faculty Association, which represents librarians, coaches, counselors, and other faculty at California State University, and the university administration (“California State University reaches tentative three-year labor contract with faculty union”, 2014).

• Staff at Greenwich Library Service engaged in multiple one day strikes, resulting in all but two of the system’s branches being closed (“100% strike turnout [sic] of Unite members in Greenwich Library Service”, 2014; Read, 2014a).

• Huge demonstrations once again took place across the United Kingdom, with thousands of members from unions including Unite and UNISON marching and engaging in rallies and demonstrations (Johnston, 2014).

• After months of negotiations, the Windsor University Faculty Association signed a three-year collective agreement with the University of Windsor that includes pay increases for full- and part-time faculty (Chen, 2014c).

• Staff at the National Library of Wales again walked off the job in response to an ongoing wage dispute (“Library staff walk out for third time over pay row”, 2014).

• Library staff at Brown University in Rhode Island were joined by members of the Brown Student Labor Alliance in handing out fliers and gathering signatures for a petition showing solidarity with unionized staff amid ongoing negotiations with university administration (Gantz, 2014a).

• Queens Borough Public Library in New York ended the private contract for custodial services that had replaced unionized custodians in 2013 (Colangelo, 2014).

November 2014

• Workers at Quincy Public Library in Illinois reached an agreement with the library board after earlier voting to strike (“Quincy Public Library union employees agree to new deal”, 2014).

• Further strike action by staff at Greenwich Library Service was prevented after they reached an agreement with Greenwich Leisure Limited (Read, 2014b).

• Workers at New Hampshire’s Rochester Public Library, members of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, signed a new two-year collective agreement (Markhlevskaya, 2014).

• Prospect union launched a petition in protest of the proposed closure of England’s Imperial War Museum library (“Petition opposing closure
of Imperial War Museum library receives more than 5,500 signatures”, 2014).

- Staff at Stark County District Library in Canton, Ohio, members of SEIU District 119, signed a new collective agreement (‘Stark County District Library board OKs contract with union”, 2014).

- IMPACT trade union stated that the union does not support a new plan for staffless libraries in several counties in Ireland (Rogers, 2014).

- Unison launched a petition against plans by Leicestershire County Council in the UK to look for volunteers to take over thirty-six of its library branches (Martin, 2014).

**December 2014**

- Library workers were among the thousands of Montreal, Quebec city workers that took part in a one-day strike in protest of proposed changes to pension plans (“White-collar workers in Montreal holding one-day strike”, 2014).

- Library workers and other staff at the University of Malawi engaged in strike action, demanding a 45% wage increase (Muheya, 2014).

- Library media specialist in Calaveras Unified School District in California are among employees slated to be laid off in 2015 (Castro, 2014).

- Librarians and other faculty at the University of Vermont approved a new collective agreement (“UVM says faculty approves union contract”, 2014).

- Four unions representing employees of the city of Chicago, Illinois, as well as twelve current and former employees, filed a lawsuit against the city in response to proposed changes to employee pension plans (Spielman, 2014).

- The National Labor Relations Board ruled that non-tenure track faculty at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington are not managerial employees and therefore have the right to unionize (Jaschik, 2014). The ruling will impact many private colleges and universities as it included a set of standards for determining if faculty are considered managerial employees.

- Library workers at Brown University signed a new three-year collective agreement with the university administration (Gantz, 2014b).

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