Higher Learning and the American Academic Library in the Twilight Era of Neoliberalism

a review essay by John M. Budd and Bart M. Harloe

The Great Mistake: How We Wrecked Public Universities and How We Can Fix Them by Christopher Newfield (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016)
Lesson Plan: An Agenda for Change in Higher Education by William G. Bowen and Michael S. McPherson (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 2016)
Reimagining the Academic Library by David W. Lewis (Lanham, Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016)
The Dialectic of Academic Librarianship: A Critical Approach by Stephen Bales (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2015)

> *And the future does not look promising. The cost of a university education has risen since 1972 at more than triple the overall rate of inflation. Between 2001 and 2012, funding by states and localities for higher education declined by fully a third when adjusted for inflation. … Even when account is taken of the discounts from full tuition made possible by scholarships and fellowships, the current level of American college completion has been made possible only by a dramatic rise in student borrowing. Americans now owe $1.2 trillion in college debt.* Robert J. Gordon (2016)

Introduction: What Was Neoliberalism?

The four books under review in this essay depict and analyze the current state of higher education in the United States from the perspective of faculty, administrators, and librarians. In the wake of the financial crisis of 2008-09, we will argue that the privatized system of higher education

John Budd is Professor Emeritus with the University of Missouri. He's still active academically and professionally. He serves on the Editorial Board of *College & Research Libraries* and his latest book is *Six Issues Facing Libraries Today: Critical Perspectives*. Bart Harloe is University Librarian Emeritus at St. Lawrence University, where he served as library director for 16 years. From 2004 until 2014, Harloe served as Coordinator and then Executive Director of ConnectNY, an academic library consortium comprised of 18 libraries located in New York State.

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built over the last 40 years has not only put at risk democratic access to education but also undermined the scholarly communication system that allows students and faculty to participate effectively in research, teaching and learning. In order to fully understand our predicament and to be able to offer constructive solutions requires that we understand the neoliberal regime that underlies not only the higher education sector but also frames our conception of what constitutes a just order in the 21st century. We will argue during the course of this review that rising inequality is not just a "bug" of the system, but rather it is a determining "feature" of a higher education sector that is used to justify ever more dysfunctional outcomes for middle and working class families especially.

Defining Neoliberalism

If we are to critique higher education and academic libraries in an environment of neoliberalism, it is incumbent upon us to define the term as we intend to employ it. David Harvey (2005) offers the beginning of a definition: "It holds that the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transaction, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market" (p. 3). He (2005) expands to relate how neoliberalism can affect what he refers to as the dispossession of a substantial portion of the populace:

Accumulation by dispossession comprises four main features:

1. *Privatization and commodification*.
2. *Financialization*.
3. *The management and manipulation of crises*.
4. *State redistributions* (pp. 160-63; italics in original).

In addition to Harvey's four main factors, we would add one more determining element (especially in the American context) and that is:

5. A sublime *faith in the ability of technology* to provide solutions to higher education problems in general and to stimulate economic productivity in the process.

More and more, campus leaders are being hired not from the faculty, but from the private sector. With these hires (as single- or multi-campus leaders) and with the proclivity of governing boards to seek out such individuals, the total environment of the institution is altered.

There are still others who have written critical observations about neoliberalism and its effects on higher education:

> Neo-liberalism has spread its clutches globally in the sphere of higher education. Its powerful discourse can be witnessed in terms of change in public higher policy. The basis has shifted from a traditional welfare approach to a more privatized, market-oriented approach. The

self-interested individual, free market economics, a commitment to laissez-fairism and free trade are the defining characteristics of this "new brand of neo-liberalism" that has fundamentally brought changes in higher education policy (Gupta, 2015, p. 6).

Inclusion of the welfare approach is not common in critiques, but it does have application to discussion of the environment of colleges and universities. Tania Gupta (2015) goes on to say, "Marketing in education is right out front. The increased demand for higher education has led to changes in the supply. Higher education, initially a government-supported service has entered the marketplace. Governments are not thinking much about how the universities are managed" (p. 10).

We will further argue that higher education is at the center of the neoliberal system because it justifies a "meritocracy" and, at the same time, rationalizes the unequal distribution of resources by in effect hiding the wealth factor in plain sight. Indeed, as Walter Benn Michaels has argued, "Schools loom larger in the neoliberal imagination than they did in the liberal imagination because schools have become our primary mechanism for convincing ourselves that poor people deserve their poverty. Or, to put the point the other way around, schools have become our primary mechanism for convincing rich people that they deserve their wealth." (Michaels, 2006, p.97).

Finally, while all of the foregoing observations have merit and should be heeded, the primary usage of the word (for the present purposes) is provided by Wendy Brown (2015). She readily admits to the economic and political impact of the neoliberal imperative, recognizing that the elements of the above definitions do obtain. However, among other things, Brown (2015) observes that "neoliberalism" can be termed an empty signifier, in the language of semiotics (p. 20). This means that a word or term may not have a stable referent, that it points to no universal and agreed upon meaning. Brown's observation would appear to present a problem for the present examination, but she goes on to present a useful and cogent way of studying neoliberalism and the conditions it spawns. Quite succinctly, she (2015) says, "Neoliberalism is a distinctive mode of reason, of the production of subjects, a 'conduct of conduct,' and a scheme of valuation" (p. 21).

Brown's usage of the word includes the awareness of the historical frame of the condition as it necessitates expanding the notion to a sphere of rationality. Because in many ways the management of academic libraries in the early part of the 21st century exemplifies this mode of reasoning, we will follow this logic deep into the technical and administrative systems that are evolving rapidly in the neoliberal twilight period of history, post-hoc the so-called "Great Recession." We hope to demonstrate in the process that this kind of rationality can be seen as a pervasive mode of thinking, not merely about the operations of higher education and academic libraries, but the very idea of purpose as well.

Christopher Newfield, a professor of literature and American Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, has witnessed the dire impact of neoliberalism firsthand. The author of two highly regarded books on public higher education, he has been able to marshal his experience in the UC system to develop a sophisticated and very critical account of the decline of the public university in America. In his latest book, *The Great Mistake* (2016), he posits his thesis early on in the book: Higher education "has been broken by too much private funding and service to private interests" (p. 4). It may be the latter in Newfield's diagnosis that is most pertinent to the present discussion. He analyzes the state of affairs further and even offers some possible ways of resolving many of the problematic issues that plague higher education today. In furthering his diagnosis he (2016) says, "Turning universities into private businesses is not the cure for the college cost problem, but rather its cause" (p. 26). There are several ways the costs have increased—for everyone—and Newfield discusses some of the causes for the problems that students, faculty, and institutions face.

Consistent with a reaction to neoliberal forces is a workable idea of "public." Higher education, according to Newfield and others, is supposed to be a public, rather than a private, good. A task that faces any analysist is defining that idea of public. Raymond Geuss (2001) tackles this task in the form of some essential questions:

> (a) What kind of and how extensive a sphere is it advisable to have that is defended from encroachment by "the public"?
> (b) What is meant by "the public" in (a): does it mean only the government, or does it include more general social institutions, practices, public opinions?
> (c) For what reason is it advisable to defend the private sphere . . . from "the public" . . . ?
> (d) How is the defense to be enforced (e.g., through legal means, economic means, etc.)? (p. 80)

Is higher education constituted by the public? Does it encroach upon the private? Newfield answers the first question in the affirmative and the second in the negative. In fact, he (2016) says that "a public good is a good whose benefit continues to increase as it approaches universal access" (p. 64). If all qualified individuals had access to public higher education, the growth of the benefits to society could possibly be geometric, rather than arithmetic. A mitigating factor to the growth of education as a public good, however, is the fact that higher education is a rivalrous good. That is, if individual 1 is admitted to institution A, it may be that individual 2 cannot be admitted to that institution; there are limits to effective enrollment (see Newfield, 2016, pp. 64-66 and Mettler, 2014, pp. 8-9). Related to higher education as a rivalrous good (which is an economic principle) is the reality that while potential students and their families may have a notion of enrollment in a university as having private, market-based, benefits, those people have a poor understanding of the non-market private and social benefits (Newfield, 2016, p. 69).

It is the non-market benefits that are opposed to the neoliberal ideal of solely market-based private benefits. Also, the non-market benefits are in opposition to the "transaction" principle of neoliberalism. What this means is that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to measure the two sides of a decision to attend a university in the terms of a transaction. If someone can afford—or can absorb sufficient debt—to attend a university, that person can trade the monetary or debt resources for a set of skills that will render the person employable in a particular field. There are multiple aspects to the transaction and its outcome. For one thing, the exchange actually results in the person acquiring skills; for another, the person may acquire a "simulacrum" of skills that still enables the person to become employed. The result is a transaction that is nominally favorable to the person who undertakes it. That, though, is only one result; another may be a state in which the graduate is not fully able to engage in the polity of a community (or state, or nation). As Mettler (2014) observes, "Because education powerfully affects who exercises a political voice, the quality of our democracy itself is at stake" (p. 39). In order to break with the transaction mentality, according to Newfield, emphasis must be placed on higher-order thinking. Vocational instruction has a place in education, but universities ought to offer intellectually demanding courses, have high expectations for students, and work to minimize work for pay by making the acquisition of a degree affordable, among other things (see Newfield, 2016, pp. 265-66). Emphasis is on the affordability element and the diminution of student debt. The high costs and the rising debt have been offshoots of the transaction character of public higher education. To quote James Kwak (2017), "Competitive markets can be a wonderful thing. The problem is that the popular case for free markets is too often applied unthinkingly to virtually the entire sphere of social interaction, with little or no regard for the complexity of the real world" (p. 15).

The competition that Kwak speaks of is addressed by Newfield. In particular, Newfield decries the quest for external funding for a few reasons. Among the most pertinent here are that the search for funding takes away time from teaching and actual inquiry, and that the attraction of external funding has costs associated with it. In fact, the costs tend to exceed the money that is brought in to the university. He (2016) writes, "universities have only half the market picture. They are good at seeking revenues and raising costs, but bad at controlling them. Market discipline is the missing piece of the puzzle here" (p. 147). He presents data that illustrate how the direct expenditures related to seeking funding lead to net losses when one considers the time taken to write proposals, manage the funds, siphon off funds to operate offices of research, and money taken from indirect costs. In public institutions the losses can only be covered by state appropriations and student tuition. As the former shrinks, either the latter must cover the losses or the deficit spending grows. He also points out that the direct expenditures related to sponsored research is restricted; that is, money dedicated to, say, biomedical research cannot be used to fund graduate students in the English department (even if there is a need for money to be spent on the graduate students).

The foregoing challenges all have an impact on academic libraries. The sources of funding, the size of student debt, the management of research affect what libraries aim to accomplish and how they aim to meet the needs of the institution. One additional phenomenon can have an even more direct effect on academic libraries and the manner in which the libraries and librarians seek to foster academic goals. In recent years, massive open online courses (MOOCs) have been developed for many reasons—reaching more students efficiently, standardizing instruction at some levels of education, and fixing teaching costs. Little will be said about the structure of MOOCs here; for more on their means of operation, see, "The Pedagogical Foundations of MOOCs," (2013). Newfield (2016) explains part of the attraction of MOOCs: "The revolution sprang from thinking of education as an information and telecommunications industry in which the main obstacle to learning was the lack of digital delivery. Traditional colleges had come to depend on an expensive physical plant, and that was a needless bottleneck" (p. 229). Also, MOOCs seemed to have the potential to tap into a global market for educational courses.

Newfield critiques the premises upon which MOOCs have been built, including the claims that quality of instruction is as high as traditional educational models and that costs would be uniformly lowered in ways that would render the technological solution a cost-effective one. Perhaps of primary importance is a meta-analysis he cites that shows placing existing courses online does not prove to be effective as a learning strategy, while traditional courses can benefit by incorporating online technologies into a thorough-going pedagogical effort (Means, et al., 2009). He further mentions that the pass rates in many MOOCs are disappointingly low, indicating that the mass-market approach does not work as an effective pedagogical tool. He (2016) concludes, "Concentration, focus, repetition, failure, self-correction, and practice—these are among the essential learning processes that good technology can assist but not replace" (p. 253). Further, social differences tend to be ignored in MOOCs, teacher contributions tend to be stereotyped, pedagogical research tends to be ignored, and results tend to be misstated (see Newfield, 2016, p. 255).

Newfield's solutions include reforming funding for higher education, emphasizing in general that education is a genuine public good. He urges that tuition rates reverse their course, ultimately leading to no tuition charged to students. Ideally, student debt should be reduced to zero. The opportunities for higher learning must achieve equity with respect to race and class so that there is no more "elite" student body in terms of socio-economic demographics. Ultimately, if his reforms could be put into place, the goal would be that there are increased pressures for wages. Newfield is not a voice crying in the wilderness. Walter McMahon (2009) states that "the non-market returns are separate and discrete from the market returns" (p. 6). McMahon maintains that the non-market returns are real and measurable. What Newfield (and others) are trying to convey is that, not only are there serious problems with higher education today and that those problems have neoliberal roots, but that there can be solutions to the problems if everyone realizes that higher education is not solely market-based or grounded in the mentality of transactions.

Moving from the world of public higher education so well described by Chris Newfield to the elite world of private higher education that William Bowen occupied for over 40 years is very much a journey from the privation of the public to the commodified world of privilege in the Ivy League. Bowen and co-author Michael McPherson set out in their last book what they consider to be a *Lesson Plan: An Agenda for Change in American Higher Education* (2016). In this book, the authors describe the many ways in which extreme income inequality undermine both access to (and the experience of) higher education by lower and middle-class families. They even provide well-constructed social science data analyses to show this impact at both the micro and macro levels of the systems of private and public education. But they insist nevertheless, that while "growing inequality is, in our view, a serious national problem," it is also "one that is outside the purview of this study." (Bowen and McPherson, 2016, p.51). Again and again they outline a critical problem and then step back from a serious approach to reform that might allow for real change. For example, they recognize that the financial aid system really is non-transparent in ways that does real harm to families for the lower and middle income sectors of American society. They might even agree with Sara Goldrick-Rab (2016, pp. 251-252) in her description of how the emphasis on so-called merit rather than need works to the detriment of a truly egalitarian approach to financial aid:

> Spending on non-need based aid perpetuates inequality. Twenty eight percent of all state aid and 31 percent of all institutional aid distributed in this manner flows to students from families in the top 25 percent of income distribution. Students from well-off families not only have no unmet need but their needs are overmet – while those of middle and working-class families go wanting.

The idea that the tax structure might be altered in any way to try to overcome the escalating problem of inequality is beyond the pale. They conclude solemnly, "these considerations lead us to doubt the wisdom of stating that free tuition should be even an aspirational goal. It is important to keep ideology under control and to recognize that, as economists say, there is no free lunch." (Bowen and McPherson, 2016, p. 90). Rather, the authors recommend that "we put aside all-or-nothing solutions to financing higher education and focus instead on the real questions of balance, trade-offs, and affordability." (Bowen and McPherson, 2016, p. 76). Thus, while Newfield outlines a bold approach for change in his book, Bowen and McPherson's "Agenda" focuses on a more conservative transactional approach. The latter might be appropriate for those working within the confines of the elite private higher education arena like Bowen and McPherson, but this more incremental strategy compounds the problem for those experiencing the ongoing crisis of public higher education in places like California's UC system.

As Newfield indicates, at the center of the neoliberal approach to higher education is an economic model of pricing based upon the notion of what Bowen and his colleague William Baumol call the "cost disease." (Bowen and Baumol, 1966). This model suggests that colleges have to increase the price of tuition because economic efficiencies are hard to come by. In brief, this is because teaching and learning turn out to be very labor intensive. This argument, first set out in an article that they published in 1966, compares teaching to the work of a Mozart string quartet – any performance would always require four players and it would last approximately the same amount of time. Labor saving in the form of staff reduction is not an option in this case. And the players would have to receive increased wages over a period of time merely to keep up with existing wage increases in other professions; but productivity would more or less remain the same. Higher education is thus very prone to the so-called "cost disease," they conclude, which explains why there are increases in the price of college that seem somehow out of control.

However, built into the "cost disease" model are some neoliberal assumptions: (1) that higher ed. is essentially a business and that economic modes of analysis are central to understanding how it can be improved; (2) that private markets are "progressive" in nature and produce (almost automatically) increases in productivity and efficiency while sectors like education are part of the "stagnant" sector, where "productivity is constant or growing very slowly;" (Baumol, 2012, p. 25); (3) Consequently, "innovation" is very hard to come by in higher ed. as these basic economic constraints make real gains very difficult. (As Bowen frequently remarks, it is even difficult to decide what the measurable metrics might be in most cases); (4) Nevertheless, Bowen and McPherson confirm that it is important to keep on trying to find the kind of economic efficiencies that would make American higher education more competitive and more affordable, including especially new technologies that might save dollars and provide for more effective kinds of teaching, learning, and scholarship.

Now let's take a deeper look at the so-called cost disease, especially in relation to the way academic libraries are funded. The first thing to say about it is that even on its own narrow economic frame of reference, the cost disease analogy is problematic. As the economist Robert Gordon has remarked, "Even though Baumol was writing in 1967, the constraints imposed by this disease were already loosened as long ago as July, 1877, when Thomas Edison invented the phonograph." (Gordon, 2016, p. 186). The cost disease argument becomes even more problematic when it comes to organizations like academic libraries, whose overall purpose might said to be supporting teaching, learning and research by providing resources and staff in support of those overriding missions. Libraries build collections and provide technology-based solutions that enable teaching and scholarship – the idea of focusing on the cost disease model as a way to think about these kinds of activities seems to be on its face a kind of category mistake. And while academic libraries usually deploy resources and staff with a very critical view of cost and the impact on local budgets, etc., that critical view does not ultimately determine final resource allocation decisions in most cases. We will return to this argument in a moment, but for now, suffice it to say that the narrow economistic argument detailed in the so-called "cost disease" analogy really does not fit the case of higher ed. in general or libraries in particular.

At this point, the neoliberal argument developed by Bowen (and other academic administrators) takes what we might call the "technology turn," that is, we begin to see an increasing focus on how technology in the 21st century can provide ways and means for delivering education at both the classroom and network levels in an efficient and cost effective way. Or at least that is the mantra. Christopher Newfield is rightly suspicious of the role of MOOCs, especially for public higher education. The decline of quality of instruction for undergrads seems like a probable outcome and the assessments that have been done so far indicate that online learning in general has yet to find a model that can come even close to the kind of pedagogy regularly experienced by undergrads at Yale and Princeton. In Bowen's other recent book entitled *Higher Education in the Digital Age* (2014), he admitted that "a big barrier to greater acceptance of online learning is the lack of evidence concerning both learning outcomes and cost savings." (Bowen, 2014, p. 157). Despite this lack, the neoliberal infatuation with technological solutionism continues apace. What does this mean for the "post-modern" academic library? Chad Wellmon (2015) provides an excellent point of departure for a deeper exploration of the role of academic libraries in this new environment: "New information technologies have taken over some of the research university's traditional functions. For well over a century, the research university organized bibliographic information, because the university research library was the primary repository of print-based knowledge. But now Google's search engines and related online tools made possible the creation of bibliographies outside the university library; its book scanning project provides access to many of the world's books without the mediation of a university library." (2015, pp. 271-272).

Whither Academic Libraries?

What should be the role of the "unbundled" academic library in the new media ecosystem and how should libraries organize themselves in a world where print and digital intermingle and students and faculty seek to access information and build credible knowledge that can be both shared and communicated? In his new book entitled *Reimagining the Academic Library* (2016), David Lewis scouts out a new path for a profession interested in creating an effective organization able and willing to meet the scholarly needs of the 21^{st} century. We will first examine his idea of the *innovative academic library* and then provide an alternative model for those interested in moving beyond the neoliberal mode of analysis.

Lewis begins his book with the following statement: “Today academic libraries are in the midst of a transformation of the basic strategies they use to provide documents and the information they contain. In so doing, we are altering centuries-old practice.” (Lewis, 2016, p.xx). Lewis first outlines what he calls “The Forces We Face,” and then in the second part of the book, he articulates the steps libraries need to take to make the transition to the digital world. The “forces,” Lewis argues, define the parameters of what academic libraries will be able to do in the near term, thus setting the stage for a set of strategic considerations he calls “The Steps Down the Road.” Finally, he concludes his book with a very practical chapter entitled “Ten Things to do Now” (Lewis, 2016, p. 155-158):

1. Retire the legacy print collection.
2. Develop a space plan.
3. Have a materials budget Strategy to Manage the Transition from Traditional Publishing Models to Open Access.
4. Support the Creation of, Access to, and Preservation of the Scholarly Content Created on your own Campus.
5. Commit to the Special Collections Your Library Will Support and Make the Required Investments.
6. Infuse the Curriculum with the Skills Necessary to Create and Consume Information Productively.
7. Understand the Demographics of Your Organization and Have a Plan to Hire and Develop the Expertise that Your Library Will Need.
8. Get the Culture Right.
9. Support the Development and Sustainability of Network-Level Tools and Services.
10. Sell the Change.

Lewis seems to assume that most academic libraries will be able to pursue these kinds of very practical recommendations. And for the most part, the book lays out a plan that is reasonable and rational, if the reader assumes that library leaders are in a position to pursue these goals. There is not space here to unpack all the good logic behind his approach. Rather, we would like to focus here on #10; that is, *how do library leaders indeed “sell the change(s)” within the culture of the current neoliberal academy?*

In other words, given the institutional setting described by Newfield and Bowen and the constraints that Lewis himself outlines, how can library leaders build a narrative for change that has the potential for positive impacts in academe? Here is where Lewis goes astray as he seeks to build his own arguments around the business theories of Clayton Christensen and the notion of “creative disruption.” It is hard to imagine a more inappropriate approach if one really wants to make the case for change in academe. Why embed your arguments about strategic change for an academic library in a business theory that is in fact hostile to the ways and means of academic culture in general and libraries in particular? It is important to note that the so-called *Innovative University* (2011) imagined by Christensen and his colleague Henry Eyring is really just another privatized corporate space to be mined for its content and data and then marketed to those willing to be exploited by this system. In fact, there is a reason why the word *library* never appears in *The Innovative University*, published in 2011. In this world of unbundled entities formerly known as the American university, there really is no need for the kind of scholarly culture that is focused on building specialized knowledge or even an ecosystem intended to promote teaching, learning, and scholarly communication.

It is therefore disappointing to see Lewis try to make this intellectual move when he probably knows better – the outcome of the disrupted university will not be a set of library institutions designed to promote scholarship, but rather a privatized business entity designed to maximize profit. "Useless" specialized knowledge in the humanities, social sciences, and the natural sciences simply will not be supported because it does not promote the bottom line. Whether the final entity be the University of Phoenix or the UC System, the intellectual life of the mind that libraries nurture and support will be beside the point in this new "disrupted" environment. Innovations that cannot extract value from the community will simply be ignored and remain undeveloped. As one critic of the fetish of technological innovation has put it, "The object of the game is not to create a successful business, but to exit through an IPO or acquisition before the business fails. In spite of their abuse of the environmentalist's lexicon, they do not create sustainable 'ecosystems' at all, but rather scorched-earth monopolies…" (Douglas Rushkoff, 2016, p. 34).

There is, of course, another narrative that can be developed and Lewis describes it early on in his book when he quotes the work of Lavoie and Malpas on the need to move the management of the scholarly record from "local" to "network" scale. Stewardship of the evolving scholarly record, they argue, will be a function of "conscious coordination," rather than the "invisible hand." Local decisions will be taken "in the context of broader system-wide conditions; more explicit collecting and curating responsibilities within collaborative arrangements; a greater degree of specialization in collecting activities; and deeper, more robust resource sharing mechanisms." (Lewis, p. 32). In this environment of mutual reliance and interdependence Lewis is right to note that "the politics of this situation will be exacerbated, as there will inevitably be free riders." (Lewis, p.41).

A library cooperative strategy that is based upon the tradition of scholarly sharing in the disciplines would, we argue, have more of a chance of succeeding on a purely rhetorical level with faculty stakeholders and committed administrators at most colleges and universities. Of course, university boards, frequently populated with "thought leaders" from the world of finance and the tech sector, will always be open to the rhetoric of "disruptive" innovation, but the history of colleges and universities in the United States is also replete with many more powerful examples of non-disruptive knowledge development that has had a positive impact on research and scholarship and not infrequently leads to new economic innovations and cultural discoveries.

In fact, on a more practical level, the library world has built up an entire sector composed of non-profit consortial cooperative "best practices" that have resulted in some very creative forms of knowledge sharing and content development. Rather than focus on the so-called disruptive models of the tech world, we will outline a different strategy for academic libraries interested in taking those "steps down the road" described by Lewis. A good place to begin is the newly emerging "shared print initiative" which has allowed academic libraries, large and small, to work together to identify materials that can be stored locally and shared globally. Regional consortia across the country are not only addressing the issue of journal back-runs, but also taking on the far more complex process of dealing with the scholarly monograph. The analytical tools that have been developed for the latter project have allowed libraries for the first time to really take advantage of the historic lack of overlap in monograph collections and build that feature into the resource sharing arrangements for books going forward. This, in turn, sets the stage for not only more robust systems for sharing books in printed format, but also allows academic consortia to begin to establish trusted relationships for the purpose of moving toward a shared ownership model for e-books. These two strategies can also set the stage for local academic libraries to provide more resources while also renovating and modernizing their collection storage technologies and the teaching and learning spaces in the library, as Lewis has rightly recommended. We shall return to this theme of collaboration and cooperation in our conclusion to this essay.

Neoliberalism and the Modern Capitalist Academic Library (MCAL)

In his 1979 book, *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-François Lyotard writes,

> The nature of knowledge cannot survive unchanged within this context of general transformation. It can fit into the new channels – and become operational, only if learning IS translated into quantities· of information. We can predict that anything in the constituted body of knowledge that is not translatable in this way will be abandoned and that the direction of new research will be dictated by the possibility of its eventual results being translatable into computer language (p. 4).

This quotation sets a tone for Stephen Bales' work on the dialectic of academic librarianship (2015). Bales' book is of a different type from those that have been examined thus far. This work presents a particular philosophical analysis of the academic library and librarianship as it exists today. It should be noted that, while the approach is primarily philosophical, there is a definite practical bent to the book, and pragmatic recommendations that can inform academic librarianship at this stage in their development.

Bales (2015) says that the object of his analysis is the “modern capitalist academic library,” or MCAL. He clarifies what he means by MCAL: “Today’s academic libraries either live and work in a deeply ingrained social formation, neoliberal capitalism, or else they live and work in a social formation that is influenced by neoliberal capitalism” (p. 6). The introduction to this paper describes neoliberalism in its multiple forms and also depicts the results of neoliberal thinking and action within institutions. It has also been noted that neoliberalism, as a historic working ideology, can be pervasive; that is, its tenets can be encompassing of the ways people think and act as part of their lives in those institutions. Moreover, the pervasive mode of neoliberalism can be such that the individuals are not fully aware of the influence and the outcome. One of the results of pervasive neoliberalism is a structural fragmentation that can lead to inequalities which become entrenched in the social fabric. Bales argues, rightly in the minds of the authors, that neoliberal capital formation has a profoundly deleterious effect on public institutions (whose putative goals may include democracy, equality, and justice). Bales (2015) quotes Slaughter and Rhoades (2004), who offer the observation that the emerging system “values knowledge privatization and profit taking in which institutions, inventor faculty, and corporations have claims that come before those of the public” (p. 29).

Bales’ means of examining the MCAL is that of dialectical analysis. The first question that may occur to the reader regards the meaning of dialectics. Bertell Ollman (1993) offers a succinct definition: “dialectics is a way of thinking that brings into focus the full range of changes and interactions that occur in the world. As part of this, it includes how to organize a reality viewed in this manner for purposes of study and how to present the results of what one finds to others, most of whom do not think dialectically” (p. 10). Bales presents a definition that serves as a philosophy and as a method for his study:

> The dialectic of academic librarianship is nothing more than the application of [the] reflective and active approach towards reality qua flux to the academic library as a social institution and academic librarianship as an aspect of this institution’s being and identity. It aims for the critical apperception of the academic library as an integral locus and expression of the constantly changing total reality (p. 51).

Bales elaborates on precisely what he means when he speaks of reality as an element of dialectics: “the dialectic of academic librarianship is an ontological, epistemological, and practical application of a mode of thought and understanding of reality to the historical and material reality of the MCAL” (p. 57). This is sweeping coverage—it encompasses what can be considered as real, as knowledge, and as a path to action. The material reality may be the most straightforward component of his vision here, but historical reality is extremely important to dialectics. The material and the historical are related. The institution of librarianship exists in the actual world, and it exists in time. The latter observation requires some further explanation; librarianship exists both in *and* through time. It has a past that, itself, is material and has been influenced by internal and external forces, including the external forces of the neoliberal college or university. Its existence is, in some important ways, fraught because of the external forces that impose a particular mode of being. In the extreme, the existence of higher education described by Brown, Lauder, and Ashton (2011) obtains: "The stark reality is that what the few can achieve the majority cannot regardless of how educated they are. Wage inequalities cannot be narrowed through better education or increasing skill levels because the global labor market is congested with well-educated, low-cost workers" (p. 12). The contributions of libraries and librarianship are thus limited because of the conditions under which the majority works.

The foregoing limitation is addressed by Bales in the context of the dialectical method he employs. He (2015) writes, "The typical MCAL is a *conservator* of the sociocultural landscape in which it sits" (p. 80, emphasis added). As he says, the library does this in a variety of ways. One way is conscious and intentional in that the MCAL seeks materials and access to information that mirrors the material that is produced by the corporate sources. Another way is less deliberate in that the MCAL is not fully conscious of what society maintains and preserves in an effort to disseminate information that reflects, and even embodies, the dominant capitalist mode of production. Of course these are not the only kinds of materials that the MCAL collects and makes accessible. The multiplicity of informational objects creates a tension for the library and librarianship in that conflicting ideological bases exist simultaneously, and without any demarcation of the ideological distinctions. There is another component to Bales' observation; librarianship, perhaps particularly in its mediation role, also does not always recognize the ideological tension. The current state of affairs embodies a history, through which the collections, access mechanisms, and consciousnesses of librarians have developed.

Ollman (1993) suggests a reason for the state of affairs (in general, but which is applicable to the MCAL). He says, drawing from Marx, that the world offers itself to us through means of "abstraction" by which the thoughts we have about the world can be broken down (p. 24). He (1993) goes on to say that "most people are lazy abstractors, simply and uncritically accepting the mental units with which they think as part of their cultural inheritance" (p. 26). Ollman is, once again, emphasizing the historical element of the dialectic—a feature that does not escape Bales. One might ask how people may become lazy abstractors. Bales (2015) offers a possible cause for the phenomenon: "Wittingly or not, those working at the MCALs help to fulfill this function on behalf of the dominant societal class's interests, unless they achieve theoretical consciousness of the underlying circumstances that they are supporting" (p. 94). Bales touches upon a specific aspect of ideology, although obliquely, that has pertinence to the above state of affairs. A persistent ideology that appears to permeate the MCAL is the act of providing informational resources and services that are based on "neutrality." The intellectualizing of neutrality frequently takes the form of fairness, in that all points of view have some inherent value. The problematic is a complex view of reality; if one would study the impact of a neoliberal state, one requires the materials on that topic. The MCAL consciously adopts a neutral attitude towards the informational content, in an effort to present a non-ideological stance (Bales, 2015, p. 132). The irony that is lost is a part of the MCAL.

In his conclusion, Bales concentrates on the dynamism of the library: the MCAL did not arise full blown as an entity in service of neoliberal capitalism. The lack of stasis signals the possibility for change in the future, especially if librarians can become more fully aware of the historicity of librarianship. In summing up, Bales (2015) writes,

> Dialectics accounts for the vigorous and perpetual change occurring in the real world. . . . Therefore, when approaching the MCAL dialectically, the institution becomes more than a fixed entity or idea. Instead, the MCAL is experienced as a phenomenon that is forever in process. More precisely, the library is experienced as a set of relations" (pp. 150, 151).

It is the acceptance of the dialectical nature of the library that holds the potential for transformation of the history that has typified the MCAL. The important message to take away is that consciousness must become deeper so that the dialectical processes can be fully understood and the ideological formation of society must be grasped so that it is not merely adopted as a necessary component of the library. If these transformations can be achieved, the MCAL may disappear and be replaced by a different kind of institution and a more critical form of librarianship.

In order for this kind of change to happen, however, we will need to pursue new, more creative forms of organizational changes at the societal level and also within the higher education sector. We will need a new political vision, one that goes way beyond the narrow and self-defeating limitations of the politics of the neoliberal academy. For as Christopher Lasch argued almost a quarter of a century ago,

> the activities of 'academic radicals' do not seriously threaten corporate control of the universities, and it is corporate control, not academic radicalism, that has corrupted our higher education. It is corporate control that has diverted social resources from the humanities into military and technological research, fostered an obsession with quantification that has destroyed the social sciences, replaced English language with bureaucratic jargon, and created top-heavy administrative apparatus whose educational vision begins and ends with the bottom lines." (Lasch, 1995, p. 193).

In other words, we will need a conception of cooperation and collaboration that is based on a moral imagination that encourages a critical approach to dealing with the "inequality disease" that afflicts both our polity and our public and private higher education sectors. In the concluding sections of this essay, we will sketch out a set of recommendations that seek to build on the insights offered by Newfield, Bowen, Bales and Lewis in order to suggest some concrete changes that might arrest the continuing devolution of the neoliberal regime in the early part of the 21st century.

Conclusion(s) Investing in Creative Approaches to a Collective Future in the 21st Century

> *College has a price and it is not free today for a reason: because higher education today is broadly considered a privilege and not a right.* Sarah Goldrick-Rab (2016)

The economist Robert Gordon (2016) concluded in his sweeping history of the American economy since the Civil War that it has become very clear now that the higher ed. sector of the American economic system is acting as an accelerator of inequality and a huge "headwind" inhibiting future economic growth. Argues Gordon,

> almost all high income families send their children to four-year-college, whereas virtually none of the poorest Americans do so. College completion for households in the top quarter of the income distribution rose between 1970 and 2013 from 40 percent to 77 percent, whereas for those in the bottom quarter, it increased only from 6 percent to 9 percent." (2016, p. 624).

Indeed, as we have seen, this is precisely how class gets produced and reproduced by the higher ed. sector: the more "selective" a college happens to be, the more likely it is to favor attendance by the top 1% and disfavor attendance by the bottom 60%. As reported recently by the *New York Times*, "At 38 colleges in America, including five in the Ivy League – Dartmouth, Princeton, Yale, Penn, and Brown – more students came from the top 1 percent of the income scale than from the entire bottom 60 percent." ("The Upshot," *New York Times,* January 18, 2017).

While we now know that the neoliberal elite model of meritocracy is not functioning well, how can we move toward a different more egalitarian approach to higher education, one that might have a more positive outcome for American democracy and also help us begin to overcome the dire effects of the *inequality disease*? Drawing from the ideas and examples elucidated in the books reviewed above, we will attempt to outline some strategies for thinking about the future of universities and academic libraries.

In terms of higher education, a good first step is the very simple idea proposed by Senator Sanders last year during his presidential campaign: FREE EDUCATION FOR ALL! His free public higher education tuition proposal clearly resonated with a large part of the electorate. In fact, the idea that access to higher education might be considered a right, not a privilege is now being actively explored at the state level in both New York and Tennessee, where new statewide programs now provide significant tuition subsidies for middle-income families attending institutions of higher education.

While this strategy falls far short of the kind of approach needed to fund the full cost of higher education for working and middle-class families, it is clear that we will need more experiments like these if we are to learn how to move beyond the neoliberalism "meritocracy" that privileges family income as a predicate to access to higher education in the United States. If neoliberalism is characterized by the transaction, the majority of Americans are closed out of the transactions that enable attendance at postsecondary institutions. Consequently, the democratic debate on this set of issues has already begun and the aggressive pursuit of such goals can have an invigorating effect on democracy, as the education activist Tressie McMillan Cottam has indicated (2015, p.116-117):

> I do not care if free college won't solve inequality. As an isolated policy, I know that it won't. I don't care that it will likely only benefit the high achievers among the statistically unprivileged – those with above-average test scores, know-how, or financial means compared to their cohort. Despite these problems, today's debate about free college tuition does something extremely valuable. It reintroduces the concept of public good to higher education discourse – a concept that fifty years of individualism, efficiency fetishes, and a rightward drift in politics have nearly pummeled out of higher education altogether…Those of us who believe in viable, affordable higher ed. need a different kind of language. You cannot organize around what you cannot name.

Neoliberalism, Open Access, and Scholarly Communication

Both David Lewis and Stephen Bales recognize that the neoliberal market simply cannot address the issue of providing effective ways to support scholarly work at both the article and the monograph level. In fact, the market left to itself in the age of journal conglomeration and publisher consolidation will only result in an unaffordable system that will undermine and defeat the need to advance both scientific research and traditional scholarship in the humanities and social sciences. As Peter Suber has argued, it is time to create a "public" market for scholarly communication: "The idea is to stop thinking of knowledge as a commodity to meter out to deserving customers, and to start thinking of it as a public good, especially when it is given away by its authors, funded with public money, or both." (Suber, 2012, p. 116).

The "Open Access" (OA) movement for journal publications is now recognized as the way forward for much of the academic community. As a recent report argues: "Members of the academic community, either at established not-for-profit organizations or through informal groups of editors and advocates, must break the corporate publisher conglomerate by taking control of journals and developing funding, access and distribution models that work for their disciplines." (*Democratizing Academic Journals,* 2017, p.3). The research library community, perhaps with funders like the Gates Foundation, can now creatively invest in a system that promotes the widespread use of publishing services that encourage local control by universities and scholarly societies – rather than continue the destructive outsourcing to corporate entities that will only accelerate the trend of monopolization that private corporations like Elsevier have used to corner the market for new research over the last three decades. It is time for higher education to fulfill the objective of "creation" of knowledge by completing the production cycle.

Similarly, the need for new form of hybrid publication of the scholarly monograph is necessary, but will not happen without sufficient financial support outside the neoliberal marketplace. Here we would like to follow the argument of Scott Sherman (2014), who correctly recommends that:

> The AAUP (American Association of University Presses) should take the lead in calling for a national effort—involving interested foundations, university administrations, IP centers, libraries and many other kinds of campus-based digital venues—to develop a publishing process that coordinates university press resources with many new publishing channels. (2014, p.23).

Sherman further argues that this effort will require that leading funders and leading research universities with large endowments devote a significant amount of their financial resources toward the support of new initiatives in the genres of both journal and monographic (long form) scholarship. In any event, as Suber notes, OA books are now part of the scholarly landscape:

> Today there are many more OA books online than print books in the average academic library, and we're steaming toward the next crossover point when there will be many more gratis books online than print books in the world's largest libraries, academic or not. (Suber, 2012, p. 111).

We Need to Work Together in the Aftermath of Neoliberalism

Finally, we believe that an initiative that focuses on a collaborative approach to creating a 21st century system of scholarly communication would also benefit from statewide and regional consortial cooperatives organized so that libraries can multiply their investments through a kind of network effect. This is a facet of librarianship that Lewis clearly knows about to the extent that he mentions it in passing, but it is not sufficiently addressed as a way to focus both mind and energy going into the post neoliberal world. To put it bluntly, academic libraries organized into effective consortia can complement the economic investment at the local level by also investing in creative publishing projects organized and maintained by consortia throughout the country. This kind of cooperation can create in effect a "public" market for the products of the scholarly community as they are developed in different states and regions. We need diverse and sustainable non-profit platforms for publishing academic content and it is not going to happen without a serious long-term investment in the ongoing output of the scholarly community.

The good news is that the infrastructure for this kind of system already exists in the form of the many active consortia that currently live in the library ecosystem comprised of the institutions active in the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC). Consortia with different governance, technical systems, and collaborative cultures all tend to focus on resource sharing as a primary mission and that by itself leads to a more equitable system for small, medium-sized, and large public and academic libraries. Since there is usually little overlap between various library collections, putting these collections into a resource sharing relationship means that all the partners gain from the systematic sharing of resources.

What is needed now in addition to progressive sharing of content is imaginative leadership at the local and global levels, able and willing to experiment with collaboration that can create technical platforms that allow for effective sharing of scholarly information in published forms. If we create the kind of sustainable projects described above, we will be able to gradually overcome the negative features of inequality that currently obstruct and inhibit the scholarly communication of ideas and information in the higher ed. system. And at the same time, this system will stimulate a more democratic culture for higher education by providing widespread and economical access to important ideas and evolving scholarship. We do not need to accept a world with the kind of radical inequality that has developed in the early 21st century. Indeed, libraries engaged in active collaboration can work to overcome it in practice, even as new ideas for educational advancement emerge at the state and national level. We cannot continue the problematic systems that neoliberalism has developed over the last 40 years and as the authors of these four books have noted, we now need to move toward a different more democratic approach to education.

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