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 2017 Library Publishing Forum

Library Publishing for the 99%: Why Neoliberalism and Scholarly Publishing Need a Divorce

INTRO

Happy Monday, everyone.

I'm really excited to be in attendance at this year's Library Publishing Forum and am honored to talk with you all this morning. The Library Publishing Coalition is an exciting community and one with great potential. I'm the Open Publishing Librarian at the University of Virginia. I also consider myself to be a critical librarian, which, if you ask Maura Seale (2013), places me on the "fringes of librarianship," or if you ask Donald Rumsfeld, makes me a radical, militant librarian.¹

I have a couple of disclaimers:

- At this point you know that this isn't a case study or how-to. My talk is structured as a system-level analysis split into discourses of critique and possibilities.
- Also, sorry to say that if you were looking for slides, I don't have any.
- And my final preface is: if you don't like what you hear, please don't shoot the messenger.

In many ways my talk is a continuation of this morning's keynote (by Eileen Joy) and John Willinsky's 2015 keynote at this conference. He made a call for co-ops, as others have done as well. In my discourse of possibilities I'm going to make an even more urgent call for the cooperatives as an organizing principle of our work. But I'm going to approach that possibility by first incorporating critical, economic, and political theory in a critique of neoliberalism, which I suggest is the true cause of the serials crisis. I'll also differentiate models that propose reform, but largely reinforce and perpetuate neoliberalism and the existing power structure, from those that seek to truly revolutionize the system.

NEOLIBERALISM

As a starting point, I think we need to contextualize the serials crisis by situating it as part of a larger political economy. By understanding the ideology that underpins our economy we can gain a deeper understanding of the serials crisis and use it to identify alternative ways of organizing.

The first step in challenging a hegemonic structure is acknowledging it; and it's neoliberalism. It's amazing how little discussion and critique there is of this ideology is given its pervasiveness. One of the immediate impacts of the Bernie Sanders campaign was the opening of space to have this type of honest discussion.

So what is neoliberalism? I think the easiest way to picture it is as the trans-Atlantic love-child of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher.

Henry Giroux, who wrote a brilliant book called *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education* in 2014, defined neoliberalism in an interview that year as:

... an ideology marked by the selling off of public goods to private interests; the attack on social provisions; the rise of the corporate state organized around privatization, free trade, and deregulation; the celebration of self-interests over social needs; the celebration of profit-making as the essence of democracy coupled with the utterly reductionist notion that consumption is the only applicable form of citizenship. But even more than that, it upholds the notion that the market serves as a model for structuring all social relations..²

According to David Harvey (2005), who wrote the definitive book, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, it's a theory of political economic practices that promotes: human well-being through individual entrepreneurial freedoms, strong private property rights, "free markets," and "free trade." What does this translate into? —Deregulation, privatization, and the withdrawal of the state from social provision. The concept of the "public good" or "community" is also eliminated (Martinez & Garcia, 2016). It is replaced with a market culture where more goods and services are commodified, privatized, or financialized to achieve what Harvey calls "accumulation by dispossession."

Harvey says that neoliberalism has become hegemonic; that is, it's so pervasive that it's incorporated into common sense and the way we interpret and understand the world. It appeals to "common sense," tradition, and cultural values, including individual freedoms and human dignity, by conflating itself with democracy and by giving the illusion of freedom. Neoliberalism leads us to believe that it's natural, it's necessary, "there is no alternative," as Thatcher claimed, and that the debate is over. You're familiar with the neoliberal utopian clichés: that it eliminates bureaucratic red tape, increases efficiency and productivity, and lowers costs for consumers. If I had more time, I'd pause so we can play the National Anthem. However, these promises usually don't appear and neoliberalism's ability to appear as "common sense" is misleading and disguises real-world problems.

Neoliberalism fetishes the so-called "free market." You can't see it, but on my paper "free market" is always surrounded by quotes because it's really not all that free. Harvey says that neoliberalism values market exchange as an ethic itself; that social good increases through greater reach and frequency of market transactions. It wants to bring all human activity into the market. Neoliberalism's advocates credit the market with being a site of competition and innovation.

However, the promised neoliberal utopia turns out to be a nightmare for the 99%. The evidence is plentiful—neoliberalism leads to monopoly power, consolidation, lower corporate and personal taxes, social inequality, and concentrated power in the upper class. It benefits the 1%—the business owners, major shareholders, and C-level corporate managers. In practice, neoliberalism subverts

freedom and democratic principles. It wants to foreclose the possibility for a democratic alternative, one which requires cooperation and solidarity. When persuasion and co-optation fail, it resorts to bribery and threats to maintain its power.

Tensions & Contradictions

Neoliberalism is riddled with tensions and contradictions. Individuals and communities are often pitted against each other. And public and social goods are replaced with a desire for a good business climate. Contradicting itself, neoliberalism wants governments to be hands-off, but intervene to create and enforce markets and protect private property. It wants to “starve the beast,” but commercial publishers rely on public and taxpayer-supported non-profit universities to provide about 70% of their revenue.³

The trend to monopoly formation is another tension. Neoliberal theory assumes that market actors have the same information and operate rationally. Monopolies distort the functioning of markets. Increasingly asymmetric power relationships develop between monopolists and individuals.

I want to share some examples of how journal publishing embodies the 4 major elements of neoliberalism. There is some overlap, but they include: the primacy of the so-called free market, privatization, deregulation, and using individualism to attack the public good.

1. Primacy of the “free market”/ market culture

- Lariviere and co-authors summed this all up nicely in their PLOS ONE article, “The Oligopoly of Academic Publishers in the Digital Era”⁴ (That is *oligarchy* + *monopoly*)
 - They connected the dots between the high profits, consolidation, monopolization, and internationalization of the top 5 major publishers, who accounted for over 50% of all articles in 2013
 - 3 publishers (Elsevier, Springer, and Wiley-Blackwell) accounted for nearly 50% of all natural and medical science articles in 2013
- The “free market” allows Elsevier to acquire Mendeley and SSRN
- & the Web of Science was sold last year to two private equity firms.⁵

2. Privatization

Examples

- Wholesale commodification and privatization of research and scholarship. State power is used to protect the private property of corporations.
- Elsevier’s partnership with the University of Florida, described by Ellen Finnie as a Trojan horse, is also a form of privatization. Richard Poynder said it “turn[s] the repository into a search interface and promotional tool for content hosted and controlled by Elsevier.”⁶ The University of Florida’s letter of agreement with CHORUS is no better.

3. Deregulation

Keep the market unregulated and prevent the government from doing anything that reduces profit, even if it would protect consumers and the public

Examples

- Research Works Act – this was an Elsevier-supported 2011 bill that would've prohibited public access policies and reverse the NIH public access policy
- Richard Poynder notes that “publishers have been degrading and emasculating green OA policies.”⁷ We see this in lengthy embargo periods and the implementation of the OSTP memo.

4. Using individualism to discredit the public good (and cut social services)

This is really where you see the propaganda at work, the historical amnesia setting in, the manufacturing of consent. It starts with an appeal to freedom and individual liberty, hence the “liberal” in neoliberalism. The neoliberal project wants us to view everything as a market transaction, and to make this thinking so widespread so as to discredit, crowd out, and block the concept of the public or social good. And we've reached a point where many of us are so used to only playing defense that promoting non-market values such as a freedom to read, freedom to access knowledge, or a discussion of the UN Human Rights Declaration virtually impossible.

Examples

- This is most concretely manifested in the assault on the library as a democratic public sphere; the reduction of the library to a purchasing agent
- We also see it in APCs, which atomize authors and remove them from a larger social context. Neoliberalism exploits the precarious status of faculty, who are reduced to alienated producers afraid of questioning the status quo

Effects of Neoliberalism

If neoliberalism leads to catastrophic outcomes for the 99%, if it disempowers people, especially those already oppressed due to hierarchies of race, class, gender, nationality, and sexuality, as Harvey noted, if it:

- Moves away from social justice
- Dismantles social services and programs
- Creates the disposable worker
- Increases income and wealth inequality
- Consolidates economic and political power among elites
- Subverts democracy

And if the system of scholarly journal publishing is rooted in this ideology, then we need a new system. In hindsight, the serials crisis was inevitable. It's the product of a system that worked the way it was designed.

We need to critically reflect on these outcomes and make sure they aren't replicated as we identify and construct a new system.

APCs: NEOLIBERAL OA

I feel obliged to make a few comments on APCs before moving onto co-ops. The proposals I've read for all-APC OA models describe a dystopian future. An all-APC system would be a form of economic Darwinism, taking the survival-of-the-fittest ethic to a new extreme.

That's because APCs represent a neoliberal form of open access. It parallels the Affordable Care Act in many ways and won't cover everybody in a cost-effective or fair way. APCs:

- haven't proven to be a sustainable form of OA (Shulenberger)
- Doesn't have price controls
- Increases inequality by favoring the favored (those with grant funding and at wealthy institutions)
- And is exclusionary and anti-democratic

Instead of rejecting the neoliberal project, APCs would mostly support the same power structure that caused the serials crisis and, while creating some OA, will not create the necessary system change.

DISCOURSE OF POSSIBILITY - COOPERATIVE

The remainder of my talk is a discourse of possibility, and it centers on the idea of library-publisher cooperatives. I'm hardly the first person to call for a cooperative model, but I hope to do so with a heightened sense of urgency. John Willinsky and the PKP are finishing a two-year OA cooperative study, where they've generated data to demonstrate the financial viability of a co-op model. Tyler Walters of Virginia Tech and others have proposed this timeless way of organizing as a potential solution to our modern problems as well.⁸ And the Open Access Network proposal deserves much consideration.

A cooperative is a democratic way of organizing that doesn't require a blind-faith in the magic of the "free market." It would allow us to begin the desperately needed process of decommodification and to treat research and scholarship as a public good.

Walters (2012), was correct when he said that:

a benefit of the cooperative model is that its members wield more market influence together than individually. They also can share in the infrastructure and expertise, as well as spread out the cost burdens associated with scholarly publishing.

Principles

Cooperatives can take many different forms, but two types are most relevant: worker cooperatives and consumers' cooperatives.

In short, a worker cooperative is an organization that's owned and managed by its members. It's democratic in nature with each worker having an equal say in the operations. There are no outside

owners or shareholders, which means that workers can't be controlled by an international private equity fund.

Consumers' co-ops are also democratically-managed organizations, and they provide goods and services to their member-owners. They may take the form of food co-ops, housing co-ops, credit unions, or library collections consortia.

You can also have a co-op of co-ops.

Cooperation Jackson, an organization that advances economic democracy produced a list of core principles of co-ops.⁹ Because the research and scholarship we're concerned with is mostly in the realm of public institutions and non-profits, we'd have to adapt these principles imaginatively. Co-ops are:

- voluntary organizations; open to all who agree with the principles
- Are member-owned and democratically controlled. The members are equal partners. All governing structures are ultimately responsible to the entire body of members.
- Co-ops are autonomous organizations. Members maintain independence and don't cede control to outside individuals or groups
- Members contribute equally to the capital of the cooperative and the capital is treated subordinatedly
- Co-ops are self-managed— balancing collective effort with individual responsibility. All members participate in management.
- Cooperation within and among cooperatives
- Co-ops provide education, information, and training for members
- Co-ops promote solidarity and social transformation, especially among allies in the quest for economic democracy, peace, and justice

We need to think this through together and do so creatively. If it's any consolation, it's worth noting that Mondragon, the world's largest co-op and Spain's 7th largest company, was created in the depressed Basque region in aftermath of the Spanish Civil War with just a handful of members.

Latin American Response to Neoliberalism

Throughout Latin America, cooperative ways of organizing have emerged in great force in the past 15-20 years to replace neoliberal economics. Latin America was used as a testbed for neoliberalism with the prime example being Chile in the aftermath of 9/11. That is the original 9/11 of 1973, when democratically elected Salvador Allende was overthrown and Pinochet and disciples of Milton Friedman implemented neoliberalism. It was a disaster. Latin America suffers from some of the highest wealth inequality in the world as a result of neoliberalism, neocolonialism, and white supremacy. However, cooperatives, including organizations like SciELO and Redalyc have emerged from these conditions as the notion of the public good has been restored through democratically elected governments. SciELO (Scientific Electronic Library) is a major publisher of OA journals. It started in Brazil twenty years ago and now includes over a dozen countries across Latin America and

South Africa. Redalyc is a Mexican organization that does much of the same. It is not an accident that these organizations don't get as much attention as they deserve in the US.

THE FAIR DEAL (It's a *Bigly* Deal)

I want to close by sharing my idea for a new Fair Deal. Donald Chump would call it "a bigly deal." In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if we find out that back in 90s a corporate publishing executive got the brilliant idea to name their journal bundling scam "the big deal" after reading Chump's "The Art of the Deal."

The Fair Deal, unlike the "big deal," won't require the use of quotation marks. I'm still working through this, so I'm eager to hear your thoughts. Right now I'm picturing it as a partnership of two co-ops: (1) a purchasing or subsidizing co-op constituting all academic libraries and (2) a nationwide cooperative of library-publishers. Remember that you can have a co-op of co-ops, so it's possible that both of these cooperatives will be a federation of smaller co-ops. Maybe the members of the Library Publishing Coalition can become the first nationwide publishing cooperative. Alternatively, library-publishers can start organizing state or regional co-ops. Of course, some state systems like the University of California are already doing this for the most part, but the rest of us are too atomized. Right now I'm in conversations with colleagues across Virginia about what it would mean to publish together. What opportunities, efficiencies, and impact are we losing by not doing this?

Because library-publishers are just a subset of all academic libraries and are publishing on behalf of the entire scholarly community, they should be supported and subsidized by all libraries acting as agents of their respective institutions. This purchasing or subsidizing co-op already exists in a balkanized form as library consortia. If these consortia can federate they'll be able to directly fund library-publishers on a large scale and in a democratic manner. Rebecca Kennison and Lisa Norberg have already done a lot of great work in sketching out what this might look like in their OA Network model. In effect, it's a single-payer system where the money gets pooled in one pot that's library-controlled. Then library-publishers or the larger publishing co-op itself would apply for subsidies or block-grants. Money would be disbursed in a democratic and transparent manner to library-publishers. There won't be APCs for any discipline.

The neoliberal model of journal publishing is more fragile than it appears. Adam Smith said that profits are the highest right before a collapse. The system is yearning to be democratized which we can do by organizing cooperatively.

If we don't change the system quickly, then I'm afraid the future will be even more dire. Donald Chump might hear about paywalls, fall in love with the idea, and try to get Mexico to build more of them.

I'd love to hear your thoughts and questions, unless you're from CNN or the failing New York Times. Thank you.

ABSTRACT

In this presentation, I will argue that the “serials crisis” and the subsequent need for library publishing are best understood not by focusing on the singular actions of individuals or publishers, but through an analysis of neoliberalism—the nation’s predominant economic ideology. In a discourse of critique, I will analyze scholarly journal publishing using the following major elements of neoliberalism: the primacy of the “free market,” privatization, deregulation, and using individualism to justify cuts to social services and to discredit notions of the public good. Critics argue that neoliberalism, a set of political and economic policies that have become widespread over the past 35 years, is a pernicious system that disproportionately benefits a small number of major corporate shareholders. Its effects, which include widening inequality and being prone to crises, are masked by the public’s ignorance, historical amnesia, propaganda, indifference, and austerity.

In a discourse of possibility, I will discuss the transformative potential of library-publishers creating and participating in cooperatives. Library publishing can attain greater sustainability and impact through a more robust system of state and regional partnerships based on two major types of cooperatives: worker cooperatives, where the creators of goods and services collectively decide the fate of their work, and purchasing cooperatives, where members mutually benefit by acquiring in solidarity with each other. Cooperative economics is increasingly seen as a viable alternative to neoliberalism, and there are successful stories across the globe. Additionally, the transition by several Latin American nations away from neoliberalism by democratizing their economics and emphasizing the public good and cooperation will be explored.

Attendees will be able to contextualize the so-called serials crisis with greater clarity, advocate for library publishing more compellingly, identify more impactful solutions, and have an increased sense of individual and collective agency.

¹ Maura Seale. "The Neoliberal Library." *Information Literacy and Social Justice: Radical Professional Praxis*. Ed. . Lua Gregory and Shana Higgins. Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press, 2013.

² Giroux, H. 2014. Henry Giroux on the Rise of Neoliberalism. <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/26885-henry-giroux-on-the-rise-of-neoliberalism>

³ Lariviere, Haustein, & Mongeon. 2015. The Oligopoly of Academic Publishers in the Digital Era

⁴ See Lariviere

⁵ <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/acquisition-of-the-thomson-reuters-intellectual-property-and-science-business-by-onex-and-baring-asia-completed-300337402.html>

⁶ http://www.richardpoynder.co.uk/Clifford_Lynch.pdf

⁷ See Poynder

⁸ Walters, T. 2012. The future role of publishing services in university libraries. Portico.

⁹ <http://www.cooperationjackson.org/principles>