The New Technocracy: Positioning Librarianship’s Core Values in Relationship to Technology Is a Much Taller Order Than We Think

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Introduction

“Technology” as a term covers an endlessly broad range of processes, products, and social arrangements. This volume is on library values—specifically, the American Library Association’s (ALA) Core Values—and emerging technologies. One of the goals of the volume is to explore “theoretical models for understanding and interpreting…library value[s] in context of a relevant technology.”1 Implied within that is a focus on a subset of technologies: “the Internet… and cybersociety brought about… by information and communications technologies [resulting in] virtual relations, interactivity, personalization,… online communities” and now social media.2 Thinking about and interrogating these new and emerging technologies is still embedded in the broader critiques and analyses of technology. That, as the reader will see shortly, presents something of a problem. One further point will go some ways toward contextualizing what follows. The exploration of our current social, economic, and cultural conditions assumes that they are not sui generis, but “explicable in terms of ongoing, if accelerating, trends…identified and explained effectively by…thinkers” who have looked long and carefully at
modern, liberal, capitalist societies and their development. As such, longstanding fundamental questions about broad social and economic arrangements are key parts to their analyses, and “technological expertise… is mostly peripheral” to those concerns. That will be (partially) the case here. The chapter will proceed as follows: the problem of technology criticism is explored before turning to three frames that do a better job of explaining and situating technology and its critique. Those frames are: I, postmodernity (as contrasted with postmodernism); II, the context of neoliberalism; and III, the new technocracy. Each works—and fits—together as illustrated by the discussion of core values and the new technocracy that follows. The chapter concludes with one possible new approach to realizing a key core value: privacy.

To Break the Pattern

Twenty-five years ago, I wrote that “we must account for and join that established body of theoretical and critical scholarship [on technology] if the profession … is to make responsible decisions about libraries” and their technologies—a point I repeated nine years ago in updating that analysis. While the point remains true, theoretical critique of technology is moribund. It is not unimportant, but it is at something of an impasse or in a quagmire—it is difficult to tell which (one is a dead end; the other is difficult and entrapping). Technology critique draws from an analytical wellspring that resembles “those mechanical toys that endlessly make the same gesture when everything else has changed around them.” The broad outlines of technology critique have been set in some cases for many decades:

- technology as rationalization, control, and monitoring
- the capital control and purpose of technology
- technological change as ideology
- feminist critiques of technology
- technological utopianism

These, in turn, overlap and have been combined and recombined into various meta-analyses: that “technology reduces nature and humans to resources,” that it reduces “thought to… instrumental rationality,” or that “society itself is a massive machine that individualizes and disciplines humankind,” tending to engender either a sense of helplessness or simply a walking away (Miller 2011). The critical exercise has thus devolved into a series of small moves to account for new developments (like touchscreens or GPS). The result is that “critique has been miniaturized like computers,” and often the technological objects of philosophical analysis are so de-worlded that they are, in the end, uninteresting because they become isolated and analyzed “facts” rather than as the product of rich social processes. The result is a “lite” technology critique—essentially
a consumer review that does not debate the alternatives, costs, and tradeoffs, but merely the “cognitive and emotional costs of... existing [technologies, circumstances or problems versus] leaving it as it is.... Disconnected from actual political struggles and social criticism, technology criticism is just an elaborate but affirmative footnote to the status quo.”

Much technology critique actually consists of simply “getting consumers to change their behavior”; that is, to utilize technology more intelligently and make discerning choices among technologies, masking the broad and fundamental assumption that this represents the full extent of the issues.

Reasonably direct parallels (of the critique-of-technology critique) can be drawn to large swaths of librarianship’s work. For instance, librarianship’s instructional efforts have moved from “bibliographic” to “information literacy” instruction in the last three decades or so, and this shift has responded to and assumed the centrality of technology in information access and storage, and thus the “literacy” that is to be mastered through these efforts further embeds this hierarchy and relationship. Information literacy instructional efforts largely replicate the pattern of the focus on consumer behaviors: “technology can only do so much—no matter how sophisticated a search engine or indexing system is, students still need to learn how to search for and evaluate information.”

Even some of the critical information literacy work assumes the centrality of technology in efforts and responses to de-center the hegemony of knowledge production in the form of (technology-enabled) user-generated content and blogs. I have written previously of the field’s leadership “crisis culture” that points to technological change as the reason to declare a crisis in librarianship, indicated by the lack of speed in adapting to and more effectively utilizing technologies. This is essentially inventing an ideology to justify acting an ideology out and represents a profession-wide meta-form of blaming the consumers’ behavior for technological inefficacies.

Latour continuously referred to the rigor of the military’s efforts to “constantly revise... strategic doctrines, [and] contingency plans, [and that] we alone [seem to] be saved from those sorts of revisions” in our analyses of technology. He notes that critique was always “useless against objects of some solidity”; that is, puncturing the silly (a wild conspiracy theory) is a much different (and easier) proposition than taking on an existing social situation (a war, environmental causes of disease). Critique fell into picking and choosing easy targets that fit the deep grooves critique had worn, or de-worlding something until it can be a mere, dull fact, and thus easier to analyze. Taking a cue from Whitehead, he challenges the turn to epistemology (“how do we know it?”) as an evasion of what is actually confronting us (“what is there?”), and what makes that situation possible; as critique is now constructed the question of “infrastructures whose makeup is never interrogated” tends to focus on
the “mere superficial consequences of powerful hidden causalities.” For Latour, critique is a matter of “experience and of experimentation”—an assemblage of the “many participants [—human and technological—who] are gathered in a thing to make it exist and to maintain its existence.”

Morozov can be adapted to this framework and librarianship in that highlighting the “political costs of framing the issue through the lens of technology” should become part of our new process of analysis (and decision making): the question is not adapting to “better” information-querying design changes, but rather why is this change being made at all? Otherwise, we are asking library users to “internalize the costs… around them [because the problem] probably stems from their lack of self-control or their poor taste” in choosing and deploying technologies in the vein of the consumer-behavior analysis. This is precisely what much information literacy instruction does, and it represents much of the ideology invented to act out a crisis culture ideology among the field’s leaders. The task of this analysis is to avoid some of these pitfalls and assemble the actors—both the human and non-human in the spirit of Latour—that will contextualize and help formulate some of our responses to technology. While this effort cannot be comprehensive, it helps to explain why technologies affect librarians and library users in particular ways now. In light of this, some particular actions will be explored that will situate and allow us to act on technologies in libraries differently. Those actions will be constructed in light core values and not technological trajectories. This chapter will propose three framing infrastructures in place and how they interact. Altered library relationships to relevant technologies (though not all of them) will then be put forward in light of core values. This chapter will conclude with an exploration why these responses are important despite the seeming hegemony of the frameworks. This, then, is an exercise in Latour’s dive into experience and of experimentation to assemble participants in our current state of affairs.

Frame I: Postmodernity

We start with a helpful but underutilized distinction between postmodernism and postmodernity. Broadly, postmodernism is the intellectual parallel—in aesthetic and critical postures—to the social and cultural changes represented by postmodernity. That is, postmodernism represents an intellectual challenge to “subject-centered reason, monological texts or readings, grand narratives, general truth claims and the normalization of Enlightenment rationality.” To this list one can add assertions of groundlessness—whether in science, representation, culture, belief, social categories, identity, or language—to the challenges: since these have human origins and can be demonstrated to have changed and evolved over time, there are no foundations or stability to any of them. Postmodernity,
in contrast, consists of the social and cultural trends and arrangements that characterize (most) contemporary societies—and is our focus here. For instance, spatial arrangements (e.g., urban concentrations) have been at times reversed in postmodernity, with some movement toward smaller groupings and the “ethos of particular places and particular local cultures.” This, in turn, is reinforced by an emphasis on identity and “maximal opportunity for self-creation” in social and political arrangements, which is particularly impactful on the family. Implied within these moves is de-industrialization: the move to a media-intensive, finance, and information-manipulation based economy.

In postmodernity’s media-heavy environment, there is an eclecticism, a “diversity [and] plurality of surfaces which is possible to produce [by] the rich technological bases of modern cultural production which enable us endlessly to simulate, reproduce, reiterate, and recapitulate.” As a result, culture is now separate from ideology and does not cohere as it formerly did, and it spawns a variety of dynamisms: individualization and homogenization (in the form of self-selection in grouping), deterritorialization (media-infused culture is cut loose from site-specific origins and limited dissemination), and distancing from the work and productive processes that are still taking place (very few of us live near slaughterhouses or canning facilities, and they tend to be closed factory spaces that mask the activity). The results pull in multiple directions simultaneously: enabling globalization at the same time as fragmentation and localization, challenging the concept of a state or nation via borderless flows of people, money, media—and, thus, common social and political interests—while creating violent ethno-nationalisms along with specialized groupings that are mediated by technology, but are not actual communities with all that implies. In the process, our sense of space and place is fundamentally changed (an “Irish” bar or a Starbucks or a Sheraton Hotel are much the same everywhere), and much of this is enacted through consumption enabled by technology via production and/or marketing. This is to say that we live in postmodernity quite apart from one’s attraction to or disagreements with (or ignorance of) aspects of postmodernism or any of its primary theorists.

Frame II: Neoliberalism

Put simply, postmodernity implies neoliberalism. That is, there is a logical cultural progression from de-industrialization/post-industrialism to a technology-fueled globalizing finance-media-entertainment and service economy, resulting in two simultaneous effects: (1) postmodernity and the “postindustrial, information or knowledge society [implies] new social formation[s],” and (2) globalization—the “internationalization of the economy and of culture—reflect back on national
societies [and change] local ones” as well. Put simply, markets do not merely coordinate society only in the economic realm, they are themselves a “form of social organization”; that is, they imply the neoliberalized person who should operate socially as an entrepreneur in her/his daily life, always being a rational choice-maker in consumption and social investments.

What are these new social-local-global formations? First, capitalism is now fast: technology enables rapid response in production (services, objects, and media) to the market and cultural changes. Second, as a result, job skills are much less stable and the jobs themselves are much more mobile, meaning that communities are significantly less stable: “the economy does not [foster] personal skills and durable purposes, nor social trust, loyalty and commitment.” Third, the neoliberal role of the person as ever and always a rational choice-maker in the market is itself a “destabilising force [that] disrupt[s] established means of making accommodations between individual wants and collective result[s]”; that is, this role and its social effects also have political implications as well. Fourth, the upshot is to isolate the individual (or at best, the nuclear family) from broader networks and structures of social support (like extended family or community or politics) and leave her or him or them with commodified market-based choices in deeply personal areas, like one’s spouse, child care, eldercare, healthcare, housecleaning, or education, all of which are layered on top of self and identity formed through consumer choice.

Fifth, all of these together change the meaning and stability of spaces and places; classrooms, libraries, or family time at home are experienced differently when they intersect with mobile technology enabling consumption and entertainment in their midst. Inevitably, this all happens unevenly, and there is a time-lag between these processes and their effects and the ability of people individually and collectively to process, adapt to, and shape them, leading to further disjuncture. By its economic arrangements and social-philosophical commitments, neoliberalism redoubles the “liquid” nature of postmodernity.

Frame III: Summation in the Form of the New Technocracy

Neoliberal postmodernity has given rise to a new technocracy and the role of technology is pivotal:

- The combination of neoliberal postmodernity does not only destabilize, it also solidly rationalizes and solidifies in particular ways. First, as an economic and ideological regime, it has “effectively close[d] out any competing ways of looking at economics and… policy” and can plausibly be described as a totalizing hegemon. Second, in its intertwinem with technology, this combination continues to imply a deep grammar of binary rationalism, no matter how sophisticated and flexible the application
or result seems. Both of these are crushingly ironic: postmodernism valorizes “dispersion and difference [and] attacks all forms of totalizing discourse… in the belief that… is the logic of technocracy,… but [the results] are not the products of rigid bureaucracies… sapped by a new… individualism, but of flexible centers of command that are well adapted to the new technologies they have designed and implemented.” The new technocracy, like the old, is deeply rational and traditional at its core.

- Technocracy’s growth spurt coincided with the technology that fueled industrialism, essentially demanding that labor adapt to the capacities of machines. This continued into the postindustrial era, extending the logic into the social realm wherein the shift to knowledge-technology-media work implied core sociological shifts (people as personnel, an emphasis on technical skills, and symbol manipulation) which were adopted. The new technocracy continues this trajectory. Neoliberal entrepreneurship is one example, and Treanor repeats an illustrative joke: a Marxist states that “the workers have nothing to sell but their labour power,” and the neoliberal replies that “I offer a course on How to Sell Your Labour Power Like a Shark.” Merit is another: “How can one become valuable and useful in the eyes of others?” is now the core question; the answer (for the labor-buyer) is in the “technology of searching for unusual talent”; that is, potential ability as demonstrated through testing that is particularly adaptable to the fast, flexible, and technology-saturated organization demanded by neoliberal postmodernity. “The intensity of assessment has increased, and firms now regularly use psychological tests to select candidates,” leading to “derivative professions,” like life- and test-coaches that feed these technologies of sorting and selection, reinforcing entrepreneurship-as-identity as a personal survival/coping strategy. People and social arrangements continue to be shaped in the new technocracy.

- Like the old, the new technocracy is defined neither by its technology alone “nor purely a form of social organization; rather, it is a synergistic process” that has advanced considerably in recent years. Put simply, “inclusion on the network is a requisite for full participation in today’s society.” As such, we have altered some fundamental relationships and concepts. One of these is privacy: “surveillance is the business model of the internet” and the concept is essentially meaningless as we have historically formulated it. The business goal of Google and other new technocracy companies is no longer to simply study user behaviors and match up the person, the behaviors, and advertising (like the ads that follow you around the internet), but rather to predict and shape behaviors on an individual basis through massive data, and in the form of “smart” and
networked clothing or beverages generating data on how they are used or consumed—or even disposed of. This follows hard on the heels of the harnessing of user/customer feedback through Web 2.0 platforms to shape products, cast as responsive to “needs” and “desires” to then, in turn, further market those products to the consumers who, in effect, helped to design them in unremunerated labor for the company. If this all seems far removed from libraries, consider that surveillance is used to monitor student behaviors (cheating) in online environments, 2.0 technologies create an environment where the production of scholarship is shaped and is deployed to model services in libraries (like user-tagging of materials or technology innovations), and social media are monitored to protect the “integrity” of and proprietary interests in standardized test questions; that is, one can’t share information even from memory.

Core Values, Technology, and the New Technocracy

In the spirit of Latour, this chapter asks, “What is there?” and “What makes that situation possible?” instead of the epistemological “How do we know it?” Ours is a task of experience and experimentation in the light of the infrastructures that place restricted and constructed (technological) choices in front of us: the political costs of framing the issue as merely technological and the question of what the drivers are of this particular (technological) change and the costs to the users and their needs. A very recent article captured the mindset and approach to technology broadly taken in librarianship:

Technology continues to be a powerful driver of deep and sweeping changes in... libraries. At the same time, libraries are facing unprecedented challenges due to massive cuts in public spending and increased requirements for accountability and transparency. In this environment, librarians need to think more strategically about technology and to look at how it can offer energizing possibilities and solutions to address these challenges. Technology provides the chance for librarians to innovate, boost quality, measure success, and align services with the priorities of their organizations. With technology, librarians can reintroduce themselves as visible, valuable, and essential partners in achieving common goals. This is especially important in the context of today’s tight funding climate and the never-ending struggle to advocate for and secure necessary funding and support for libraries.... While consumer-oriented, social media technologies
have become ever present and widely used, they continue
to evolve and can be quite adaptable to use as discovery and
dissemination tools.... Ultimately,... the story [is] of librarians
trying new approaches that disrupt library business as usual....

Nearly every theme from the Frames is embodied in this quote. The troubling
aspect of such calls is that proponents argue that these changes ultimately mean
“more freedom in modern society, a fluid freedom... [but] my quarrel... is not
whether their version of the new is real [but rather] that these changes have not set
people free.” In other words, it is not merely a question of energetically adapting
new technologies—or doing so for good purposes in libraries. Rather, it is more
explicitly recognizing the broader source and import of the factors cited (“massive
cuts,” “increased accountability,” the urgency for librarians to be “visible, valuable,
and essential”) instead of assigning technology as the “powerful driver” and looking
to “consumer-oriented technologies” as the positive disrupter of “library business as
usual.” In this account, the neoliberal environment is the (unrecognized) dominant
power relation, and it, in turn, is shaping (in good new technocracy fashion) “desires
and beliefs” and making “conflict disappear” as if these were autonomous processes
to which people must enthusiastically and creatively adapt, even if against their “real
interests.” In the process, technology has been reified, “presented as... valuable in
[its] interrelationships with... practices that determine [its] meaning and function”—it is made real and autonomous.

While a comprehensive review of all core values is not possible, a subset of
interrelated ones can be addressed and explicitly linked to the challenges of this
new environment: the interrelated core values of Privacy, Intellectual Freedom,
The Public Good, and Democracy. They are interrelated because, as the political
theorist Danielle Allen argues, each is tethered to a commitment to the truth:
first they assume truths about the modern bases of a good life: “freedom from
domination” (Privacy, Intellectual Freedom), “equality of opportunity to use the
tool of government” (The Public Good, Democracy), “use of egalitarian methods
to generate collective intelligence” (Intellectual Freedom, The Public Good), and
“equality of agency... through practices of reciprocity” (Privacy, Democracy).
These are truths about social goods because their absence or opposite are
inequality, tyranny, and bad government. In turn, these are supported by social
institutions whose “grounding commitment is to truth” such as universities,
courts, journalism, democracy—and libraries. Indeed, to rely and act upon the
opposites as a foundation—“deceit, guardedness... the restriction of freedoms”—is
to undermine social cooperation and trust, the very bases we rely upon to function
in modern society. Truth is not an absolute or authoritarian undeniability, but
rather a proposition that one entertains and reflects upon, weighs evidence for
and against, and affirms; the most fundamental of these (like the importance and meaning of human equality), Allen argues, are self-evident.

Bringing these two strands together, we can say that the nexus of developments that have culminated in the new technocracy posit direct challenges to core values to be achieved through technological means:

First, “what we mean by intellectual freedom… is inseparable from the character of the media of communication through which information is conveyed.” Our current technologies are part of constructed “mediascapes” [which] tend to be image centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality… [that] can and do get disaggregated,” especially by advertising. This environment is untethered from questions of truth or falsehood; “such questions do not apply” since “words ask to be understood [but] pictures ask to be recognized.” Technologies come with a “curriculum” that, given the way we’ve deployed and adopted them, works against the truth-assumption and purposes of Intellectual Freedom.

Second, “the way you communicate through this space is not to send messages (or compose texts). Instead, you fashion a ‘package of stimuli’ that will ‘resonate’ with what is already and continuously communicated…. It is not that print is dying, and with it abstract, sequential thought. It is not that the image is triumphing over the word. These statements are true but they fail to notice what else is happening: in the media, in politics, and even in intellectual life, the search for the ‘responsive chord’ is crowding out all other impulses. Neither public discourse nor private expression can survive such a shift.” Intellectual Freedom certainly can’t.

Third, as a result, politics in Democracy are no longer driven by a vision of The Public Good, nor necessarily bound by fact or truth; rather, they are tuned to the “temporalities, rhythms, and pace governing economy and culture”—the new technocracy and its technological enablement. Thus, an “anti-political ethos inherent to those systems… turn[s] democratic praxis into largely irrelevant shadow boxing.” Evidence and facts—the bases of truth—are now filtered through commitments and beliefs largely shaped by technology and media, rather than the other way around of personal and social stances shaping the consumption and reception of media, and we are currently in a political “situation [where] the first person who happens to have mastered the new communications architecture is also filling those channels” with bigotry and lies.

Fourth, “the capacity for critical subjectivity shrinks in conditions of diminished Privacy” (capitalization added) quite apart from questions of the capacities for Democracy or even innovation in an era of radically expanded surveillance. At base, these are developmental issues as well: children are shaped by the new technocracy environment we construct for them. We are in a situation which
Tocqueville anticipated, but not from all of the sources: not only government but contemporary data-driven marketing and surveillance reflects a desire to “guide and to instruct… in the various incidents of life… quite independently of… consent,” and the “immense and tutelary power which takes upon itself alone to secure… gratifications and to watch over” people is as much rooted in our “incessant… endeavoring to procure the petty and paltry pleasures with which they glut their lives,” serving to keep people “in perpetual childhood”; the people “neglect their chief business, which is to remain their own masters.”

Fifth and last, “postmodern[ity] raises very serious questions about the capacity of society to cohere” not least because it is a consumerist culture that, in a whipsaw effect, must also have the rational discipline to produce in the form of “performance ratings, budget specification and… strategic plans” that must be adhered to. Consequently, we find ourselves in a situation of unsettled and de-centered publics that have not reckoned with the new technocracy forces that have been unleashed (the arguments for which they putatively agree), the results of which have economically, politically, and socially victimized large swaths of people and territories.

Conclusion: What Then Must We Do?

Librarianship’s core values share a broad overlap with many related fields. At the center is the concept of verifiability—that some information can (and some cannot) be verified, that this does not depend on who is doing the verifying, that this is based on evidence, and the way to foster verification is to organize information for easy and accurate access. In other words, librarianship works off the proposition that there is more-true information, there is value in finding it, knowing it, and acting on it. This is a concept very closely linked to the development and health of democracy and clearly related to the other core values already highlighted here. The core values list is not a mere grouping of words onto which any given hierarchy can be imposed, ignoring their context. There are reasons why this list was chosen as core. In the non-boldface text attached to the values a context emerges. Words, phrases, and clauses like “First Amendment,” “social responsibilities,” “citizenry,” “right,” “educate,” “freedom,” “community,” “constitutionally,” “critical issues,” “publically supported,” “equal,” “equitably,” “government,” “democratic societies,” “social needs,” and “examine… facts regarding each problem” are shot through the list. References and links are made to the Library Bill of Rights and Freedom to Read statement, self-consciously evoking democratic constitutional rights and contexts. The implication is obvious: this list and this inflection of meaning are meant to support the democratic society from which it sprung. But it is not so simple as using this to divide the good technological applications from the bad.
What not to do

If we return to the hierarchical stacking of core values in note 71, it is clear that Access has been valorized to characterize and color some core values and to question others. This is a vision of technologically mediated, neutral access to information. The problems of neutrality—its apolitical (almost amoral) pallidness—and the very real difficulties in actually achieving it in a meaningful way (versus striking a neutral pose for effect or convenience) are legion. This vision is, in short, a technocratic and neoliberal interpretation of librarianship’s core values. By privileging Access, the inherent bias is that librarianship’s core values should be neutral and instrumental in their execution and that favoring “one particular political and social philosophy” (Democracy) is improper and controversial. This neat schema has reshuffled the values deck in favor of the new technocracy. The context of recent political developments in the form assertions so demonstrably false demonstrates that library instrumentality and neutrality, in this case, would serve to mask the full meanings of verified and verifiable fact or falsehood (as the media did during most of the campaign). Into the teeth of all of this stepped the American Library Association (ALA) in a press release “posted in error” that “show how libraries support policy priorities of [the] new administration.” Another press release offered “expertise and resources to the incoming administration” in finding common policy ground. There was a non-retraction about a week later that expressed regret about the way the original press release was publicized and received. Documents were taken down from the web (the image of the document was captured and re-posted), and a retraction of the original press release was issued in the end stating the need to “fight to advance our core values” after another week and a continuing storm of protest. In the process, the corporate and new technocracy nature and structure of ALA was laid bare. This did not happen out of the blue. ALA has long promoted corporate-style discipline, each next fashionable wave of technology, and neoliberal administrative trend-speak. It would be difficult to find a less propitious environment to productively understand and apply core values to technological choices than these.

What to do

Returning again to the prospectus of this volume, we are faced with “emerging technologies” that have “become easier to use,” and librarians “are increasingly tasked with making decisions regarding which technologies to use, promote, and provide support for” while at the same time deciding “how to interpret and apply the ALA’s Core Values of Librarianship” in this context and to provide “a framework
for decision-making.” It would be comforting to be able to return to a classic source like Lewis Mumford’s parsing of democratic and authoritarian technologies and social arrangements and simply choose the democratic ones. But the analyses of Latour, Morozov, and our three Frames have already warned us that we are in less familiar territory. So, let us first acknowledge a useful distinction: our technology makes things very much easier and convenient, but it does not make those things possible; what we do now has for a long time been possible, just slower and less efficient; “convenience is an essential part of what most contemporary commercial propositions promise to bring us.” In that process, we must acknowledge that every new app, every new product both gives and takes away. Mobile devices enable quick and convenient information access and seriously erode privacy; social media enable fast, convenient and broad communication and enable darker forms of interaction. Our choices take place in a complex and shifting environment, and our thinking, professional rhetoric, and technology skills should come together to reflect this distinction and inherent tradeoffs in our choices and developments.

Privacy in library use is now undeniably mediated through technology and is arguably a linchpin for the interrelated core values—Privacy, Intellectual Freedom, The Public Good, and Democracy—that this chapter has implied stands as the essential reason for having professional core values at all. It is difficult to see the other three realized in library contexts without Privacy, and in turn this suggests a practical point of entry. Librarians could pursue a form of collective privacy protections, backed by tort law because it is built into standard contracts negotiated collectively. LIS attempts collective solutions for cost savings through group purchasing (http://nerl.org/about, http://www.valenj.org/about/overview), usage data for electronic resources (http://www.niso.org/workrooms/sushi), and in standard fair contract language (http://nerl.org/working-nerl). The field also attempts to shift the balance of power in copyright (http://creativecommons.org/, https://openaccess.commons.gc.cuny.edu/) and in making the hurdles to desirable and enforceable contract provisions and language simpler to enact in legal terms (http://www.niso.org/workrooms/seru). Additionally, easy-to-implement resources to assist in the protection of privacy (http://academicworks.cuny.edu/lacuny_conf_2015/7/) can be as much a feature of library work as directories of open-access journals. Corporate information vendors respond to risks and market demands—that is what corporations do. Privacy as a collective goal pursued collectively would look very much like a variation on these existing initiatives tapping into the risk-sensitive nature of both users concerned about privacy and the vendors in protecting their markets—at least as a beginning.

Habermas seeks to keep alive the “productive power of discursive disputes [and rational] arguments,” which is not the brutal rationalism that has produced NSA and Google algorithms of surveillance, control, and monitoring. There are always
political spaces which can be created that sidestep some of the problems noted earlier, and I am suggesting here that librarians address the tort and technological contexts of privacy for their communities. Our problems are global—migration, climate change, economy, labor, inequality, disease, and privacy—and the solutions cannot be individual. Our notions of privacy and the agency it engenders—and where that action takes place—need to pull up alongside these ideas. The many initiatives in this volume are not casual efforts, and it is important to set systems to delete patron borrowing records, but it should be joined with a set of purposes informed by the broader theoretical understanding of technology outlined here.

Notes

1. The ALA Core Values are: Access, Confidentiality/Privacy, Democracy, Diversity, Education and Lifelong Learning, Intellectual Freedom, Preservation, The Public Good, Professionalism, Service, and Social Responsibility (http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/statementspols/corevalues), in turn, linked to professional ethics and competencies (http://www.ala.org/aboutala/governance/policymanual/updatedpolicymanual/section2/40corevalues). This book's prospectus, which is where the quote came from, can be found at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1lEBBV4Y37pQQukiFTiZMN8b2otipXsfp1zhANJLoI/edit.
3. Webster, Theories of the Information Society, 262.
8. Siva Vaidyanathan noted that his book, The Googlization of Everything was “days away” from being finalized and submitted for several months in 2008–2009 due to the GoogleBooks court settlement and its near-daily developments at the time (https://mediapilot.georgetown.edu/ssdmcms/i.do?u=101d702e04204f9). In fact, his book did not come out for another two years after this. Albert Teich has produced a dozen different editions of Technology and the Future over forty years that (probably inadvertently) illustrate both the stasis of critical technology theory and philosophy, and the incremental nature of theoretical changes (see http://www.alteich.com/). It comes as something of a pleasant surprise that in the LIS literature, Neil Postman (1988, 38) put forward Latour's thesis almost twenty years earlier in discussing the core library
value of intellectual freedom—that our assumptions “are dangerously outdated and require reassessment” in light of communication technologies and the “nature of information.”

11. Ibid.
14. Leckie, Given, and Campbell’s (2009) analysis of the technology-driven assumptions buried in these approaches can hardly be improved upon, but it would be pointless to repeat the gesture as Latour has noted. Seale (2013, 40) helpfully gathers together recent work from theorists and practitioners of critical information literacy work.
15. Seale, “Information Literacy Standards and the Politics of Knowledge Production.”
19. Ibid., 242
20. Ibid., 243–44.
24. This is much of the type of critique that Latour (2004) says has run out of steam.
27. This is a distinction drawn by a number of thinkers (see Hartley 1994; Coles 1997; and the summary of earlier thought by Webster, *Theories of the Information Society*, 229). Broadly, this distinction has not been as sharply defined as is attempted here; that is, the social condition and the theories/theorists of postmodernism are, in the words of Hall (1986, 45), “involved, not simply in identifying new trends or tendencies, new cultural configurations, but in learning to love them. [T]hey collapse these two steps—analysis and prescription—into one.” This focus on culture is not to exclude economic factors to which we will turn in the next Frame.


37. Neoliberalism has been the dominant public philosophy for decades now wherein all public, collective, and governmental initiatives are viewed as inefficient and market-insulated—public
schools/universities, unions, private universities, the social safety net, tenured faculty, and public libraries among them—and neoliberals seek to universally extend the discipline of markets (Buschman 2012; Sniegocki 2008; Harvey 2007; Mhone 2005; Treanor 2005). One tally of its deficits notes that “the market is insensitive to the distribution of income and wealth among… classes and geographical locations,” that “left to its own devices, the market does little to alleviate the burdens of the dislocations it induces [in the form of] the struggles of communities and regions [and their] declining economic sectors,” that “the market does little to ameliorate the tensions that women experience between workplace and family or to reduce persistent inequalities [or] discrimination,” that “the market does not achieve a self-regulating balance between consumption and investment [and] imperfect information[distorts market choice], externalities [are] not factored into… prices, [and there is] inadequate provision of public goods that undergird sustainable economic growth,” that the market will exhaust “global ‘carrying capacity’ [in] a rapacious and exploitative attitude toward nature” leading to ecological disaster, and that the market is indifferent to “the quality of human relationships it entails” along with the substantive quality of individual lives and work it engenders (Galston 1993, 37). The focus here is on the socio-cultural effects of neoliberalism, but the sources cited all discuss the broader economic and policy moves and implications.

41. Neoliberals claim they do so the most efficiently.
46. The issue around consumption choices and authentic identity are quite contentious.
48. And logically, if consumption of products or media is central to self-formation, there is much more at stake both in the choices and the effects on the spaces.
49. Buschman, Libraries, Classrooms, and the Interests of Democracy; Miller, ”The iPod, the Cell Phone.”
50. Appadurai, “Dead Certainty.”
54. Buschman, Dismantling the Public Sphere, 152, 158-160.
57. Treanor, “Neoliberalism: Origins, Theory, Definition.”
58. Sennett, The Culture of the New Capitalism, 129; ibid., passim.
61. Webster, Theories of the Information Society, 107.
70. Such concepts—false consciousness and reification—remain controversial since they are rooted in Marx and were later attacked in postmodernism as presumptuously speaking for people’s values from a “higher” intellectual plane, but Lukes (“Power,” 60–61) rightly calls this out as squeamishness: “any view of power that cannot allow for this possibility fails to account for
what we can all recognize to be both a possibility and, indeed, a widespread actuality, however uncomfortable we may feel in justifying that recognition.”

71. This subset is a direct challenge to a recent “Interrogation” of the core values list (Anderson 2013) wherein some were found to be “fundamental,” some “subordinate,” and some “questionable.” At the very top of this pyramid is Access (“about as fundamental as a library principle can get”), which then colored two other fundamental values, Intellectual Freedom (“how and why we impose structure on access”) and Service (“A library without service is nothing but a collection of documents sitting in a building”). Subordinate values then feed into this Access-driven view: Confidentiality/Privacy “protects intellectual freedom,” Diversity “helps ensure equitable access,” Professionalism “should characterize our services,” and Preservation “ensure[s] continued access.” The questionable (and remaining) core values are “certainly not bad or wrong in and of themselves, but troublesome in… their real-world application… or [are in] conflict with other values”: Education and Lifelong Learning (potentially wasteful and expensive to support mere leisure), Democracy (is support for “one particular political and social philosophy” and prejudicial to anti-democratic users), Social Responsibility (unworkable amid diversity of opinion), and The Public Good (“purely subjective… a truly diverse profession will inevitably disagree on what best serves the public good”). See my fuller analysis (Buschman 2017, forthcoming) for why this is so damaging. This is not just flotsam from the internet: it is sponsored by a venerable and important publication in the field and written by an administrator of an ARL library.


75. A moment’s reflection on how this underwrites everyday activities like crossing the street on a green light or a walk sign, or pulling out a credit card to pay for a service or an item, or leaving one’s house—even locked—in the morning makes her point.

76. Allen, Our Declaration, 137.


92. Values entailing disagreement or diversity of opinion (defined as controversial and therefore tout court non-neutral and off-limits) are relegated to the realm of the subjective, unrealistic or unattainable—and thus could not really be core in the logic of the “interrogation” cited in endnote 70.


95. This is risible. That a state and a society have an inherent interest in fostering a way of life and institutions and social arrangements that sustain and perpetuate them is a principle known as long as there have been politics.

96. John Buschman, “The Library in the Life of the Public.”

97. For examples see:

98. This sequence, links to copies of rescinded documents and subsequent noted facts can found


103. Siegel, “Being Human in the Age of the Electronic Mob.”


Bibliography


