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Résumé de l'article

Cet article s'ouvre et se clos par une provocation : je déclare que le refus en
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d'Audra Simpson, Kyle Whyte, Eve Tuck, Mario Tronti et Rinaldo Walcott pour
examiner les sites d'impossibilité du refus dans la pratique de la
bibliothéconomie universitaire au sein des établissements d'enseignement
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pour fixer la limite de la pratique du refus à travers des études de cas d'action
directe, notamment la grève des femmes islandaises de 1975 et la grève Scholar
Strike Canada de 2020. Enfin, j'identifie la propriété privée et l'histoire comme
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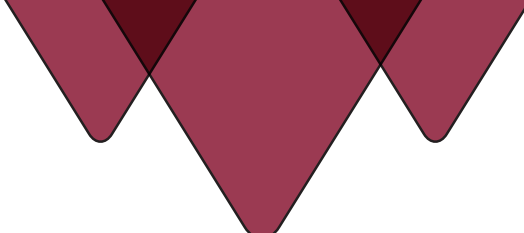
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Articulating Our Very Unfreedom: The Impossibility of Refusal in the Contemporary Academy

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ABSTRACT

This paper begins and ends with a provocation: I argue that refusal in librarianship is both impos-sible and necessary. Reviewing examples of crisis narratives which permeate both American and Canadian universities, I take a materialist perspective on the idea of refusal within academic librari-anship. To do so, I draw on the work of Audra Simpson, Kyle Whyte, Eve Tuck, Mario Tronti, and Rinaldo Walcott to examine the sites of impossibility of refusal in the practice of academic li-brarianship within contemporary neoliberal education institutions. Then, I analyze the totality of capitalism in setting the limit for the practice of refusal through case studies of direct action, includ-ing the Icelandic Women's Strike of 1975 and the 2020 Scholar Strike Canada. Finally, I identify private property and history as key frames for understanding the contradiction at the heart of re-fusal of crisis. As such, any refusal that does not address the centrality of labour and private prop-erty relations can thus be understood as harm reduction rather than emancipation. Ultimately, I argue that for librarians to refuse would require an abandonment of liberalism as librarianship's guid-ing philosophy, and a redefinition of librarianship as such.

Keywords: *capitalism · history · labour · materialism · private property · strikes*

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article s'ouvre et se clos par une provocation : je déclare que le refus en bibliothéconomie est à la fois impossible et nécessaire. En analysant des exemples de récits de crise qui traversent les universités américaines et canadiennes, j'adopte une perspective matérialiste sur l'idée de refus au sein de la bibliothéconomie universitaire. Pour ce faire, je m'appuie sur les travaux d'Audra Simpson, Kyle Whyte, Eve Tuck, Mario Tronti et Rinaldo Walcott pour examiner les sites d'impossibilité du refus dans la pratique de la bibliothéconomie universitaire au sein des établissements d'enseignement néolibéraux contemporains. Ensuite, j'analyse le capitalisme dans sa totalité pour fixer la limite de la pratique du refus à travers des études de cas d'action directe, notamment la grève des femmes islandaises de 1975 et la grève Scholar Strike Canada de 2020. Enfin, j'identifie la propriété privée et l'histoire comme des cadres clés pour comprendre

la contradiction au cœur du refus de crise. De manière concrète tout refus qui ne traite pas de la centralité des relations de travail et de propriété privée peut être compris comme un geste palliatif plutôt que comme une action vers l'émancipation. En fin de compte, je soutiens que pour que les bibliothécaires refusent, il faudrait abandonner le libéralisme comme philosophie directrice de la bibliothéconomie et redéfinir la bibliothéconomie en tant que telle.

Mots-clés : *capitalisme · grèves · histoire · matérialisme · propriété privée · travail*

> "The enslaved didn't seek the reform but the elimination of the plantation." - Harney and Moten, "the university: last words"

> "We need the tactics of organization in order to arrive at the strategy of refusal." - Mario Tronti, *Workers and Capital*

TALKING about the refusal of a crisis requires us to be precise and particular. On the one hand, the current financial crisis in which the academy finds itself is manufactured. As Nancy Fraser reminds us, "financialized capitalism is an inherently crisis-prone social formation" (2019, 38) and the budget cuts, job losses, and academic restructuring which follows them are all results of the effects of financialization on post-secondary education. The causes of this crisis are not inevitable or pre-determined, but the intentional workings of the neoliberal project to continue to extract exchange value from all areas of life. On the other hand, the consequences of the financial crisis are concrete. The fact that three individuals now possess as much wealth as 50% of the population is a crisis to those concerned with justice and equity (Collins 2019; Sanders 2021). The fact that most PhD graduates have no substantial prospect of landing a tenure-track position is a crisis (Walters, Zarifa, and Etmaski 2020; Peters 2021). The climate catastrophe cannot be willed away even if we all agree to refuse to accept it.

While I argue that crises narratives are a product of the neoliberal project and must be rejected by connecting the practice of librarianship to its history and notions of private property, I also make a broader connection between librarianship and liberalism as a founding philosophy in the profession. In other words, while neoliberalism as a specific form of political and economic ideology is different from classical liberalism, I agree with Stuart Hall in that the ideas of neoliberalism "are rooted in the principles of 'classic' liberal economic and political theory" (Hall 2011, 708). Specifically, crucial to the development of these ideas are "the enclosures of common land, the agrarian revolution, the expansion of markets (in land, labour, agriculture and commodities) and the rise of the first commercial-consumer society in the eighteenth century" (708). Enclosures of Indigenous land by the capitalist

state continues today and manifests in events like the 1990 Oka standoff, the 2020 Tyendinaga railway blockades, and the Wet'suwet'en land defense protests. While the examination of the relationship between liberalism and settler colonialism is beyond the scope of this paper, political scientists note the growth of scholarship in this area (Arneil 2012; Bell 2016; Choquette 2021; Coulthard 2014). Though classic liberal principles have been transformed to suit the needs of a global, post-industrial capitalism, it is nevertheless reasonable to understand neoliberalism as being "grounded in the idea of the 'free, possessive individual'" (2011, 706). Certainly, the idea of an abstract individual endowed with rights but free from social relations and material constraints underpins most library service design decisions, from policies on late fees, collection development, space use, or reference, for example.

Further, Hall reminds us that liberalism "is an ideology of the modern world. It appeared as the modern world emerged" (2021, 236). The development of libraries in the United States and Canada coincides with the development of industrial modernity. As demonstrated by Popowich (2019), the history of librarianship in North America is the history of capitalism in its close coordination of the design and implementation of library spaces, collections, staffing, policies, and operations. Thus, I wish to problematize the assumptions at the core of librarian practice (autonomous individuals, negative conception of freedom, possession of inherent rights, for example) and frame them as a product in the development of history. I do so by drawing on examples and theories outside of librarianship to demonstrate materialist analytical approaches to concepts of refusal. Consequently, Hall's Marxist analysis is helpful in reminding us that political liberalism "has its roots in the struggles of the rising classes associated with these developments to challenge, break and displace the tyranny of monarchical, aristocratic and landed power" (2011, 709). The notion of struggle and positionality in history is challenging to librarianship because of liberalism's hegemonic hold on the professional discourse and self-conceptualization. After all, the claims of liberalism are universal, as Hall argues: "But what happens when these general conceptions are applied to specific societies, to particular historical circumstances and institutions?" (2021, 235).

In this paper, I recognize the emancipatory aspects of education, but begin with the assumption that librarians are first and foremost workers within state institutions whose roles are socially reproductive in nature: we trade our labour for wages in order to form neoliberal subjects capable of producing value in the exchange economy. In doing so, I challenge the assumptions that librarians act as free agents in a liberal democratic society. This is why I also discuss 'librarianship' categorically rather than focus on librarians as individual workers. My goal through such discursive moves is to highlight the 'boundedness' of academic librarians in

the history of academic institutions in North America as branches of the settler capitalist state. By virtue of working for state institutions, librarians are implicated in the politics of the settler state, even if individual workers may prioritize the liberating aspects of access to information in their practice. Popowich points out this ideological contraction, for example, where librarians —whether working in public or academic environments — "as committed to intellectual independence as we are, are constrained in a double sense: we are both workers and agents of the state" (32), thereby being both enforcers of state policy and its subjects. This history also includes the professionalization of the contemporary researcher in North America (Harris 1976; Jackson, Herling, and Josey 1976). Specifically, Harris states that by accepting research as one of its basic functions around the turn of the 20th Century, "the university in effect institutionalized and professionalized scholarship" (1976, 81). As both Popowich and Harris point out, the very idea of a service ethic as a defining element of the profession emerged from public libraries in the mid-19th Century in cities like Boston and New York, which sought to justify public spending on their facilities and services (not to mention millions invested by industrial magnates Rockefeller and Carnegie). Such an ethic is founded in individualist property relations rather than ethics of care, reciprocity, and the commons.

Examples of capital never wasting a crisis abound in academia, manifesting in librarianship through tensions between the service ethic and imposed budget cuts (Elrod 2019; Guarria and Wang 2011; Throumoulos 2010), or the discrepancy between professional discourse and policy implementation (Yousefi 2017), for example. The 2008 financial crisis, for instance, has resulted in multiple publications providing useful and practical tips for thriving in turbulent times (Nicholas, Rowlands, Jubb, and Jamali 2010; Tumbleson and Burke 2010; Murray 2011; Oh, Harris and Wallis 2020). Nicholas et al., for example, note the presentist understanding of the financial crisis when they discuss that the participants of their study "felt that what was being experienced now was something different" and the convergence of political, economic, social, and educational factors "was all conspiring to create a 'perfect storm'" (2010, 378). In their study of libraries' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, Subramaniam and Braun have found that "library policies and structure are not agile and flexible enough to allow staff to immediately pivot toward fulfilling the imminent needs of their communities" (2021, 12) and that the norm across organization is, in fact, "to be reactive" (13). It is not surprising, then, that observing such ahistorical conception of professional practice in the face of socio-political forces, Drabinski has pointed out that "for librarianship, the present is always exceptional and always requires exceptional attention to take action for the coming future" (2016, 28). One only needs to examine the MIT Libraries vision statement to observe the convergence of these themes into a single, resonant call for urgency. MIT Libraries see the

COVID-19 pandemic, rather than ongoing inequity required by capitalism to function, as a crisis that "demands an accelerated transformation of our library into a platform for the creation, discovery, use, dissemination, and preservation of knowledge that is fully open and equitably accessible" (2020).

Theorizing Refusal: Philosophy and Practice

Refusal as an activist research method has been theorized in the fields of Education, Women and Gender Studies, and Anthropology (Simpson 2014; Tuck and Yang 2014a; 2014b; Ahmed 2018). Emerging as a critique of social sciences where researchers collect "pain narratives" of over-surveilled populations and turn them into exploitative knowledge for the academy, policy makers, and the state (Tuck and Yang 2014a), ethnographic refusal draws attention to the conditions which make some communities knowable. As such, advocates of ethnographic refusal seek ways to pursue inquiry without giving the academy what it wants. They do so by turning the lens of analysis onto the institution itself, focusing on desire as a generative force, changing citation practices, and honouring the sovereignty of the communities being studied (specifically Indigenous peoples). Eve Tuck, for example, describes such strategies in her talk "Biting the Hand that Feeds You" (2015) and in her chapter with K. Wayne Yang "R-Words: Refusing Research" (2014a). Ethnographic refusal thus asks the fundamental question, "Does sovereignty matter at the level of method and representation?" (Simpson, 104). In doing so, scholars note its social nature, in that refusal cannot be understood at an individual level but must be seen as a collective effort.

Yet scholars note the challenges of building solidarity, "even among insurgent scholars" (Grande 2018, 60), as a consequence of a systematic individualization and alienation which neoliberalism has pursued. In the context of the entire university, the librarian contingent is usually the smallest group of academic workers, if they are part of the academic union at all, which makes it difficult to build solidarity among faculty who may not prioritize librarians' concerns as their own. Of course, this assumes that faculty unions exist on university campuses in the first place, which is predicated on state laws and labour history. In contrast to ethnographic refusal, Mario Tronti frames his book *Workers and Capital* as a militant manifesto to labour organizing, which I believe is a useful text for academic workers at this time. In search for a strategy and tactics of refusal, he writes,

> The working class must no longer shoulder the requirements of capital, even in the form of its own demands; it must force the class of capitalists to present its own objective needs and then subjectively refuse them; compel the bosses to task, so that the workers can answer with an active, organized 'no.' (2019, 275)

Such a proposal is destabilizing to librarianship's neutrality ethos, the same one that fears to perpetuate an "us versus them" position and thus sees no sides, because it has implicitly bought into the assumption that it is always already on the side of capital. By this, I refer to every public library annual report that seeks to demonstrate the value returned to the municipality for every dollar invested or every makerspace promoted as raising a generation of entrepreneurs. While individual librarians may perceive their work as actively opposing the progress of neoliberalism, my point is directed at the profession more broadly, which includes library leaders making discursive and material choices for their organizations as a whole. Additionally, because our work is steeped in liberal idealism, it is often positioned as emancipatory and already beyond critique. Many facets of liberal idealism in librarianship have been explored to date, including spirituality and sacredness of the work (Maxwell 2006), vocational awe (Ettarh 2018), democratic discourse (Kranich 2001), and civilizing projects of libraries (Schlesselman-Tarango 2016). This contradiction between the liberating power of library work and the need to play by the rules of capitalism in order to continue to receive funding is why Tronti claims that "to fight against capital, the working class must fight against itself qua capital" (273). This is also why the myth of aristocracy of labour vanishes as faculty and librarians are de-designated of academic status and dismissed from tenured positions as capital accelerates its rate of value extraction. If under whatever passed as normal circumstances in the past librarianship had trouble seeing itself as working class, then perhaps the age of budget cuts and state assault on academic freedom may force both librarianship and academic labour more broadly to finally see itself as working class. Therefore, this is the first step to any kind of refusal in Tronti's materialist framework. As Drabinski and McElroy routinely point out, "the boss is the best organizer" (2021; 2019). In the United States, I believe this is why we are seeing organizing efforts among Amazon workers (Feliz Leon 2021), University Press workers (Duke University Press 2021), librarians at the University of Michigan (Van Horne 2021) and the University of California Graduate Student Researchers (Student Researchers United n.d.) and the consequent resistance and defeat that comes with such efforts.

Much like Tuck urges us not to conflate decolonial efforts with other symbolic projects (2012; 2014a), I must emphasize that refusal as a strategy within the struggle for Indigenous sovereignty cannot be equated with refusal within librarianship. Librarianship is not a nation sharing a collective history or culture. One is not claimed by librarianship nor bound by sets of kinship relations. For example, Sandy Grande argues that the ultimate goal of Indigenous refusal is "Indigenous resurgence; a struggle that includes but is not limited to the return of Indigenous land" (2018, 60). But this form of refusal is incongruent with academic refusal. Thus, much like the

Abolitionist Studies movement, which sees the university as a criminal institution and works toward its elimination (Harney and Moten 2013, 2020; Undercommoning Collective 2016) perhaps librarian refusal would mean rejection of librarianship as such and a pursuit of education against and beyond the institution. Such a move would mean re-commoning the land on which universities practice extractive knowledge production, which, in turn, requires the abandonment of such practices in the first place. Certainly, land-based education is one form of possibilities highlighted by Indigenous scholars (Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox and Coulthard 2014; McKenzie, Tuck, and McCoy 2016; Mitchell 2018; Johnson and Ali 2020), but librarianship has not yet deeply engaged with such possibilities.

In centering "the traffic between theory and event" (Simpson, 100) ethnographic refusal is an important method of active rejection of false dichotomies of knowability under capitalism, but without a labour dimension, refusal alone cannot end the exploitative conditions of knowledge production in which we function today. Nevertheless, librarianship has a lot to learn from theorizing ethnographic or epistemological refusal as a productive force that brings forward new possibilities, as 'a third option' in a conceptual deadlock. As Simpson eloquently states, in setting boundaries on what the researcher can obtain "rather than stops, or impediments to knowing, those limits may be expansive in their ethnographic nonrendering *and in what they do not tell us*" (2014, 113). In other words, refusal at the level of methodology and epistemology offers a new way to look at the very conditions of knowability. Simpson, for example, positions herself in the history of anthropology as a discipline of empire building, but for librarianship to deploy a refusal of crisis, it must first see its role in the history of reproduction of colonial knowledge. It reminds those who steward knowledge about its political agenda: for whom does this knowledge exist and why? Under what circumstances was it created and reproduced? As such, refusal is a way to exist beyond the binary coercion masked as "choice" by power. In order for refusal to do more than just compel us to imagine otherwise, the ultimate goal, according to Kelley (2016), is to create in the present a future that overthrows the logic of neoliberalism. My argument here is that the material and ideological structure of capitalism, in which librarianship operates, works precisely well and makes the creation of such a future nearly impossible. This is perhaps why our neoliberal epoch has been described as an age of impotence, where the old is dying and the new cannot be born (Baudrillard 2010; Fraser 2019; Berardi 2019a).

While there are many examples of labour strikes in the last century, I believe the challenges faced by librarianship exist at the nexus of gender, race, class, as well as material and immaterial labour performed. The following case studies were chosen to examine the concept of refusal in the domains of intellectual labour and/or feminist struggle with a focus on a materialist approach to action. Both of the following

examples can be seen as problematic, incomplete, or unsuccessful instances of refusal, depending on how one defines success in terms of collective struggle. However, in my view, they are epistemologically demonstrative rather than empirically proximate to the field of Library and Information Studies. They can be helpful for librarians to examine the connection of thinking and doing, as well as the limitations of uniting the two under existing conditions of global capitalism.

Case Studies

Icelandic Women's Strike 1975

The Icelandic Women's Strike of 1975 is not the first general strike (see for example, the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike, 1954 Honduras general strike), but it is notable in its gendered focus as well as a high degree of commitment to the effort. The United Nations declared 1975 an International Women's Year. On 24 October 1975, Icelandic women went on strike for the day to "to protest the wage discrepancy and unfair employment practices by demonstrating the crucial roles of women in Icelandic society" (Global Nonviolent Action Database 2009). At the time, the event was publicized domestically as Women's Day Off. Schools, shops, nurseries, and fish factories were closed or operating at reduced capacity (Guardian 2005). Men took children to work, and no housework was performed by women. The country had no telephone service, newspapers, air flights, or bank service for the day because 90% of Iceland's female population participated in the strike (Global Nonviolent Action Database 2009).

The idea of a strike was first proposed by the Red Stockings, a radical women's movement founded in 1970, though it was seen as being too confrontational by some women (Guardian 2005). While it is arguably a crucial moment in women's history, those engaged in the strike at the time noted that it did not achieve its most radical goals. In fact, the original vision was toned down to appeal to older women of Iceland in order to gain buy-in and participation. As Vigdis Finnbogadottir, the country's first female president, stated, "Things went back to normal the next day, but with the knowledge that women are as well as men the pillars of society" (Brewer 2015). Interestingly, in 1985, a women's news journal *Off Our Backs* reported on another labour strike, which took place on the 10th anniversary of the Icelandic Women's Strike. Calling it both a protest and a strike interchangeably, the journal noted that more than 25,000 women walked off the job and were "angrier than those in 1975" citing that Icelandic women's economic circumstances were worse off than they were 10 years earlier (*Off Our Backs* 1985, 6). At the time, though 80% of the country's 120,000 women participated in the paid labour force, they still earned 60% of men's

average wages. Clearly, a single day did not bring about the end of capitalism in Iceland, but many have noted its impact through the years. For example, in 1976 the Icelandic Parliament passed a law guaranteeing equal rights to women and men. This event materialized gender-based walk-offs and provided a public venue for collective anger. It set precedent and established bonds across generations, as women of all ages gathered in public space. Additionally, though Iceland is routinely recognized as a country that has achieved gender-parity in the workforce, the gender pay gap continues to exist, and women's representation in parliament, on corporate boards, and other decision-making bodies continues to be low compared to that of men.

What is interesting about this particular case of refusal of paid and unpaid labour is the high degree of solidarity and expression of social power, as seen in Figure 1 below.

FIGURE 1   Icelandic Women's Strike, 1975. Photographer: Ólafur K. Magnússon (1926-1997) / Women's History Archives

As any organizer can attest, achieving 90% buy-in from the group is not easy. Librarianship, being a profession made up predominantly of women, can draw lessons from the 1975 Strike. I particularly note the joyous elements of singing songs and dancing together with other women, publicly, in social space as a political strategy. Such actions are not a negation of experience, but an affirmation of life. Some may argue that the COVID-19 pandemic effectively replicated these conditions, with many women losing their jobs and being forced to stay at home with their children in the absence of childcare services. However, I would argue that if the Women's Strike took place under the 2020 conditions —that is, women staying home

individually —the collective experience, the connection, and interdependence would not be possible.

Echoing Tronti, Popowich argues that academics must join the broader sector of workers who have struggled against capital over the last 300 years, especially as they have become proletarianized in the neoliberal age: "We have to learn from their strategies and their tactics, their means of organization (which have hitherto not been our means of organization)" (2021). What is interesting to me about the original 1975 Icelandic women's strike, which paved the way for other similar expressions of collective refusal, is that it sought to achieve exactly this. October 24, 1975 was a strategy of emphasizing the unpaid, physically and socially reproductive labour that women perform in a society, as well as tactics of mass organizing, walk-outs, and public demonstration. It seems nearly impossible to imagine an event like this taking place in North America today —to be able to convince and ensure a majority of women are indeed able to walk out of work or home even for a single day.

Scholar Strike Canada

Scholar Strike originated in the United States when on August 26, 2020 Anthea Butler, inspired by the striking WNBA and NBA players, put out a call for a similar labour action from academics (Butler 2020). In September 2020, 2,251 academics across Canada signed a statement of support on the Scholar Strike website and participated in the initiative. Organized by Beverly Bain and Min Sook Lee, Scholar Strike Canada called for racial justice and an end to anti-Black police violence with "a specific focus on anti-Indigenous, colonial violence" (Scholar Strike Canada 2020). In addition to the list of demands put forward by faculty, instructors, librarians, and students, Scholar Strike positioned itself as a labour action and social justice advocacy campaign that would suspend regular university teaching and research activity from September 9-10, 2020. Instead, academics who joined the Strike delivered online teach-in events including talks, seminars, and shared other educational resources publicly.

The organizers of the campaign have indicated that its dates were chosen intentionally due to the Strike's proximity to Labour Day. Many have noted the paradox of the language of labour. Certainly, observing university administrators promote the event gave some indication of how Scholar Strike was interpreted by capital. Many Canadian university administrators recognized the importance of the effort and encouraged students and staff to participate in the events (Ryerson 2020; Simon Fraser 2020; University of British Columbia; University of Calgary 2020; Western University 2020). Yet some academic librarians were asked to take vacation days by their administrators, leading to question the material commitment to such efforts from the institution (Yousefi 2020). In other words, is a strike truly a strike

when the presidents effectively co-opt the event to further the goals of the institution for promotion and prestige?

Other commentators, like Harvin Bhathal, for example, have noted that the voluntary nature of the initiative meant low participation rates. For example, only 34 out of thousands of scholars (including faculty, sessional instructors, post-docs, librarians, and students) at Simon Fraser University took action during September 9-10, even though no one received any backlash or negative consequences for doing so (2020). As Bhathal goes on to question the impact of Scholar Strike's discursive focus,

> If education is about working with students to participate in the issues of their time, then facilitating discussion about important social issues already happens often in a university setting. Is another two days of facilitating discussion as a footnote in a lecture/seminar/tutorial more effective, or is it more effective to take an organized stand against the oppression of racialized groups?

My argument here is that Scholar Strike is a powerful example of public scholarship and community engagement, but it is not a labour strike as such. In fact, it is a prime example of why in *Capitalist Realism* Mark Fisher (2009) argues against short-term rolling strikes along with marking bans, which are prevalent in the UK. He states that such refusals are welcomed by the administration, knowing that the efforts will not destabilize the institution as a whole and will in fact save them money on wages. Using the language of labour is a strategic choice that draws attention to the exploitative relationship between the employer and employees, but in the case of Scholar Strike, the labour aristocracy of the academy undercuts the proletarian underpinnings of the term. In other words, if the university can co-opt the activity delivered during the strike toward its own goals, to claim its benefit, and extract a kind of reputational profit, the goals of the strike are undermined. One can claim that intellectual labour, operating under the logic of the gift, is much more easily subsumed into capital, and corrupted toward the goals of extraction, but social reproduction theorists remind us that all work under capitalism carries that risk (Bhattacharya 2017; Cakardic 2020; Federici 2019; Mezzadri 2019). What is childcare, housework, sex work, and self-care if not the greasing of the machinery of capitalism in order to create new workers as well as make existing workers more productive (by being happier, more energized, etc.)?

Additionally, intellectual labour in its very immateriality is one of the prime reasons researchers routinely note the difficulty of drawing a boundary between work and life, a phenomenon exacerbated and well-documented during the COVID-19 pandemic. Franco 'Bifo' Berardi explores the dissolution of the working day and the permeation of intellectual labour into all aspects of life in his book *The Soul At Work* (2009). Thinking about your next article, learning new tools necessary for the

production of research, engaging with other scholars on social media, and managing stress resulting from a toxic work environment by attending therapy, are all activities that make up the totality of intellectual labour yet often happen outside of "regular business hours" of scholarly life, if such a concept is still relevant. Thus, I would argue it is easier for a sports team to strike by not playing a game for wages than for academics to strike.

So why did academics participating in the 2020 Scholar Strike not adopt the tactics of Chicago Public School Teachers (Smith and Davey 2019) or any number of education union strikes? For one, under Canadian legislation, most collective agreements are very specific about under which conditions labour action can take place. Second, school board strikes are highly local affairs, usually independent of other school boards. Scholar Strike was important in demonstrating the possibility of a cross-provincial, cross-institution solidarity, which academia generally lacks. It sought to offer a collective response to the totality of capital. This is perhaps why refusal is so challenging in the contemporary capitalist experience: any attempt at radical gesture, at withdrawal from the system that does not challenge the structures of the system is expertly pulled into the logic of the system itself, to continue its expansion into whatever domain of operation: attention, knowledge, care. Scholar Strike is absolutely significant in demonstrating the generative power of possibility, of collective action, and I believe it will precipitate other campaigns in the coming months. However, rather than eschew the tactics of the working class, I believe academia, including academic librarianship, can only benefit from embracing the ethos of labour. After all, Marxist-feminist scholars remind us that work is the primary way we engage with the world, and many daily activities constitute work (Federici 1975; 2012; Rowbotham 1973). Immaterial and intellectual labour, while incredibly rewarding, generative, and social, is also work. Mystification of this fact does not help the cause of precariously-employed, unemployed scholars, or students, just as mystification of housework and carework does not help the cause of women in the struggle for justice to this day.

Key Frames

History

I would now like to explore two foundational concepts which help elucidate why refusal of crisis is both critical and impossible currently. As mentioned earlier, avoiding crisis narratives requires new epistemologies. In his work "Against Crisis Epistemologies," Kyle Whyte explains that "Epistemologies of crisis involve knowing the world such that a certain present is experienced as new," which hinge upon liberal

assumptions about the primacy of the settler state in national origin narratives (2020, 53). These assumptions refer to the abstraction of the experience of time, shifting the national discourse away from reliving the settler colonial violence, consigning Indigenous peoples to the past, and otherwise insisting on the modernity of settlers at the cost of the First Nations. Epistemologies of crisis operate through various mechanisms, including what Whyte refers to as presentist narratives:

> One possible structure of a crisis epistemology that I've sometimes seen is a presentist narrative. By structure, I just mean how something (here, a way of knowing the world) is organized, which includes what it's made up of and how it's put together. As a structure of crisis, a narrative is made up of time. A narrative is a way someone arranges the unfolding of time and articulates that arrangement to others. That a narrative is presentist means that time is put together (arranged) to favor a certain conception of the present as a means of achieving power or protecting privilege. (54)

Thus, proliferating stories of crisis are not innocent happenstances, but indeed discursive structures that seek to build power and reify existing privilege of those who have it. Additionally, according to Whyte, presentist narratives of crisis are often based on presumptions of unprecedentedness—where past lessons are assumed to be non-existent, not applicable, or not useful in addition to being urgent, and thus requiring immediate action. When one examines any number of changes required of the contemporary neoliberal university, in which academic libraries are often implicated, one sees how often these presumptions are operating as well. In 2019, after facing a cumulative reduction in funding at the hands of the United Conservative Party equivalent to 26% of its 2018 Campus Alberta Grant budget, the University of Alberta proceeded on a massive reorganization of its academic and administrative structures (University of Alberta Annual Report 2018-2019). This resulted in restructuring the university from eighteen faculties into three colleges, each managed by an "executive dean," as well as elimination of over 1,000 staff positions. The president and provost presented such actions both as a response to unprecedented budget cuts as well as an extremely urgent matter which had to be addressed in a matter of months to meet budget timelines. No reference to the history of budget cuts or fluctuation of provincial funding over the past century was made in official discourse from the University administration, for example, which would challenge such a presentist conception of circumstances. Consequently, the urgency and speed of action set into motion by the University administration have implications for how the library organizes its services in relation to the faculty structure. Arguably, this is why Whyte states that the presumption of unprecedentedness "makes it possible to willfully forget certain previous instances or lessons related to a crisis" while the presumption of urgency "suggests that swiftness of action is needed to cope with imminence" (55).

In contrast to epistemologies of crisis so dominant in the construction of the majority of western knowledge, Whyte proposes epistemologies of coordination, which refers to ways of "knowing the world that emphasize the importance of moral bonds — or kinship relationships — for generating the (responsible) capacity to respond to constant change in the world" (53). Such epistemologies are conducive to responding to mundane and expected change without validating harm or violence. How might we define kinship in this case according to Whyte?

> Kinship relationships refer to moral bonds that are often expressed as mutual responsibilities. The moral bonds are similar to familial relationships in the sense of local and broader families that can engage responsibly in coordinated action together to achieve particular goals that they have. Examples of kinship relationships are care, consent, and reciprocity, among others. (58)

While most individuals would rarely be opposed to care, consent, and reciprocity, I would argue that at an institutional level, the powers of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, patriarchy, and industrialization that Whyte cites earlier, make moral bonds nearly impossible to put into action, as they reduce any relationship to the logic of exchange. Capitalism disrupts kinship bonds by centering the logic of exchange in how we understand each other: it requires us to move for the job in order to survive; it treats children, elders, people with disabilities, and houseless individuals as unproductive burdens; it externalizes the cost of environmental damage to society rather than the corporate exploiter. I am not yet aware of any academic libraries that materially—not just rhetorically—bases its operations on "care, consent, and reciprocity" or a university that invokes any reference to moral bonds in discourse or practice. What obligation does the university have to academics it dismisses under the guise of crisis beyond access to Employee Family Assistance Programs for a brief period post-layoffs? What moral bond connects us to librarians pushed out of the profession due to burnout, racism, ableism, or precarity? These questions are incongruent with liberalism's hegemony in librarianship, because such an ideology presumes we are all abstract individuals operating freely in pursuit of individual goals rather than bodies and minds enmeshed in histories, class, race, gender, sexuality, and other facets of the social. My argument here, then, is that the conditions in which academic libraries function make any possibility of refusal of the logic of exchange toward an epistemology of coordination highly unlikely. In other words, violation of moral bonds is the basis of capitalism, and any refusal requires a restructuring of the material conditions which make up our socio-economic experience. In this sense, knowing our history is an important frame in contextualizing our interdependence and our current conditions. However, knowing history alone will not restructure these conditions toward a world where moral bonds are privileged over exploitation and exchange.

Property

In his 2021 pamphlet *On Property*, Rinaldo Walcott zeroes in on the concept of private property as a component necessary to make abolition of police and the larger "criminal punishment system" possible. Walcott recalls that all social order is constructed and therefore is amenable for re-construction: "The very idea of what constitutes a successful society is currently organized around the private ownership of property, for which an entire apparatus has been developed to perpetuate and protect" (88). In my view, universities and academic libraries are part of this apparatus. As a result, I am arguing for viewing our work as that of management of private property relations rather than provision of access to information resources. After all, what is buying journal packages, proprietary software licenses, specialized hardware, or complex databases but the business of organizing private property, including intellectual property? What is teaching students how to navigate such products, how to use software tools, how to tweak the settings on closed systems but their continued installment into a set of relations that do not seek to benefit the commons but the very few who profit off them? For example, the recent "pivot" by Cricut, the maker of laser cutters used in many educational makerspaces, to a subscription model has been met with frustration by the education technology community (Campbell 2021). Yet this move merely parallels other corporate models to monetize both the hardware and the software needed to produce creative objects, even if their ultimate goal is non-profit, personal, or education use. While much of the discourse around Open Access, Open Hardware, and Open Scholarship, and other Open education movements borrows the language of shared infrastructure, it cannot escape the enclosure of knowledge through mechanisms such as patents and copyright, among others. This is why I do not see Big Deal cancellations (McKenzie 2018; SPARC 2020) as the extent of academic refusal if they are not also accompanied by refusal to labour for such infrastructure. The co-optation of intellectual labour into the machinery of scholarly infrastructure, is a topic that can fill an entire library building. Rather than try to cite recent LIS efforts to refuse the scholarly communication infrastructure, I wish to emphasize that any attempt at refusal must account for the role labour plays in the making of material conditions. As Harney and Moten posit, in order to approach something like an exodus from the current conditions, a rent strike must accompany labour action and hence "the demand to be paid must be accompanied by the refusal to pay" (2020, 12). However, the totality of contemporary experience under capital is a well-established problem (Popowich 2019), and therein lies the challenge of Open Access, Open Scholarship, and any number of similar initiatives: there is no space outside of private property relations as such beyond small enclaves may exist on a hyperlocal scale.

Erik Olin Wright's work is perhaps helpful for librarianship to explain why the state—and by extension, institutions of the state—cannot truly escape capitalist social relations which define how we understand ourselves and our work. Structurally dependent on taxes and private property, their success is dependent on the economic viability of the capitalist society: "The state is dependent on a vibrant, healthy, profitable capitalism: without profits, there is no investment; if private investment declines, income and jobs decline; if income and jobs decline, taxes decline" (2019, 97). This is a sobering reminder why libraries, whether public, special, or academic, are dependent on the state, and even though they do not pursue profits as such, they are nevertheless bound in what Wright describes as "the institutional design of the very machinery of the state," which contributes to the reproduction of capital (96). Franco 'Bifo' Berardi echoes other theorists of capitalism in *The Second Coming* when he discusses why a political exit from capitalism seems unthinkable today, "as in the new technical and anthropological framework, political decision is replaced by automatic governance. Therefore the end of capitalism tends to be imaginable only as the end of civilization itself" (2019b, 25). Most importantly, however, it's the "sanctity of private property rights" inscribed in mechanisms like the rule of law, "combined with the procedural rules that govern courts" which ensure that property is protected and upheld (Wright 2019, 97). Libraries are not yet outside of these mechanisms.

Since its January 2021 publication, Andreas Malm's *How to Blow Up a Pipeline* has come under criticism for its unbearable whiteness of being and erasure of Indigenous resistance to environmental exploitation around the world (Aravind 2021). While I agree that Malm's analysis could benefit from drawing on a number of strategies taken by First Nations around the world, the proposal to consider sabotage and destruction of private property is the main provocation of the work. This critique is primarily directed at the bourgeois tactics adopted by movements like the Extinction Rebellion in Europe. In his book, Malm adopts a Leninist approach when advocating for radical and destructive strategies. Drawing on the history of peaceful abstainers, refusers, and protestors, he emphasizes that the state is quick to step in to exercise more coercive power when softer hegemonic strategies like recognition, dialogue, and negotiation have not subdued the demands of the people. Citing R. H. Lossin, Malm defines sabotage as a specific strategy that consists of "prefigurative, if temporary, seizure of property" and can be considered a "justifiable and effective form of resistance and a direct affront to the sanctity of capitalist ownership" (68). However, we know that the state swiftly exerts violence against saboteurs. Animal rights and environmental activists, for instance, are routinely labelled "terrorists" and face arrest, fines, and imprisonment (CBC 2008; Brown 2019a; 2019b; Mehaffey 2019).

Nevertheless, Walcott also examines the riot as a specific form of sabotage in the history of collective refusal. If riot, as marked by purposeful destruction of property, "achieves something that other forms of protest rarely do," (2021, 53) then we can understand the burning of the Minneapolis Third Precinct police station (during the protests in the wake of George Floyd's killing) in this tradition as well. Waltcott argues that this was "akin to the enslaved burning crops and buildings during slavery: it was an act meant to send a message about one of the sources of black suffering" (60). To borrow Martin Luther King's 1967 Stanford University speech metaphor, riot is the language of the unheard. Similarly, Malm views sabotage, as a purposeful destruction of property, not general violence against people, as having a "smashing effect: it disrupts the civic order and so raises the costs of ruling for an incumbent regime" (2021, 61). Clearly, there are distinctions between the two examples of refusal. First, Malm's sabotage is generally carried out individually, and usually by white people. Jane Fonda, and other wealthy white celebrities who encourage climate change activists to be arrested have been well criticised for the privileges afforded to them to avoid police brutality, steep criminal charges, and for receiving positive media coverage instead. Walcott's riot, on the other hand, is a form of collective action, by large groups of predominantly black people. The language of the unheard comes from poverty, disenfranchisement, exclusion, and state abandonment, which is why it is also seen as dangerous and must be managed.

But it is nearly impossible to imagine librarianship committing such acts because librarianship inherently sees itself as one of the mechanisms that make the civic life ordered. By this, I mean those aspects of the operational and ideological elements of the work that align well with the "legalistic conception of equality and the rule of law" (Hall 2021, 232) at the core of liberalism's negative conception of liberty. These include modelling so-called "good citizen" behaviour to children such as returning materials on time or facing financial penalties, a commitment to intellectual freedom in the abstract and legalistic rather in historically specific form, requirement of residence for library membership, hosting election debates in branches, and the increasing connection between libraries and police through events and partnerships, among others. The democratic discourse of librarianship critiqued by Popowich (2019) is precisely a means to avoid sabotage. And yet, in her essay "Plantation Futures" historian Katherine McKittrick (2013) asserts that the plantation as an organizing model remains crucial in our modern imagination that drives ideas around service, city functionality, the value of some groups over others. She argues that the logic of possession extends from the material experience of commodity production to immaterial experiences of cultural practices, power, authority, and other social relationships. Walcott adds that, in fact, "the ideas forged in the plantation economy continue to shape our social relations, and those historic social relations, in turn,

have consequences for how we encounter each other in the present and how we then process these encounters" (21). Such terms are seen as too radical, too painful, and left in the American past to be of relevance to the practice of knowledge management in the contemporary Canadian academy. And in a world where the patenting of COVID-19 vaccine technology is justified to allow a few private enterprises to profit off the state, what claim can one have against the primacy of private property in the face of global mass death?

Conclusion

To echo Robert Nichols, the goal of critical scholars is to demonstrate not only what, but *under what conditions* something is possible. Because of their historic integration with state power, refusal is nearly impossible for academic librarians as workers. Under current conditions of neoliberal expansion, refusal, whether from within the job (slow work, disobedience, negligence), or against the job (strike, exodus) will likely mean disciplinary action, dismissal, and deprofessionalization. Efforts to weaken academic labour power within universities through elimination of tenure (Flaherty 2017), academic de-designation of non-faculty academics (Armstrong 2019), and continued precarity of the academic workers are well underway in institutions across North America. In the absence of collective strength, evidence of mass firing of rebelling workers, such as Walmart employees' efforts to unionize, have been documented (Berfield 2015; Greenhouse 2015). The current over-supply of academic workers, including librarians, means that refusing workers may be replaced by the institution or forced to accept lower standards of employment. This is also what makes material refusal of crisis absolutely necessary. Librarianship's ahistoricity of practices and rituals, as well as the mystification of its role in management of private property relations, do not help any efforts at refusing the crisis in which it finds itself. Focus on labour and collective action must be central to epistemological and material approaches to refusal of crisis. Sabotage, slowdowns, degrowth, illegal strikes, mutual aid, and other forms of action must be explored by the dwindling community of academic workers. Therefore, librarianship cannot imagine refusal without re-imagining new forms of relating to the land, each other, and to knowledge. In order to do so, librarianship must let go of liberalism as a guiding philosophy of the profession and seek alternative intellectual frameworks in order to understand itself as a group of workers collectively seeking mutual liberation and reversal of climate catastrophe.

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