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Résumé de l'article

Les récits de crise sont des histoires destinées à persuader que l'on existe dans un état d'urgence. Sous le capitalisme extractif, les récits de crise délimitent le comportement éthique en réponse à la crise. Une fois fixées, ces éthiques de crise favorisent la conformité des pratiques de travail pour éviter la catastrophe. Céder les moyens d'auto-définir les priorités, les valeurs et l'identité de la profession de bibliothécaire universitaire crée une main-d'œuvre plus malléable. Cet essai utilise des méthodes critiques et philosophiques pour appliquer les leçons apprises des territoire dévastés par le capitalisme extractif à la pratique professionnelle de la bibliothèque fracturée par l'aliénation, la disjonction et la dépossession. Une critique de l'exploitation de l'éthique de la peur et de l'espoir est proposée, ainsi qu'une méthode pour les identifier telles qu'elles apparaissent dans les récits de crise. L'essai se termine par une recommandation de poursuivre une éthique de l'unité, fondée sur la promotion de l'épanouissement par le mutualisme professionnel, le dévouement à l'action directe et l'accent mis sur la durabilité.

Towards an Ethics of Unity: An Ecological Approach to Overcoming Dispossession in Academic Libraries

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ABSTRACT

Following on the results of an earlier survey, this study uses semi-structured interviews to Crisis narratives are stories meant to persuade that one exists in a state of emergency. Under extractive capitalism, crisis narratives frame the scope of ethical behaviour in response to crisis. Once set, these crisis ethics promote conformity in labour practices to avoid catastrophe. Surrendering the means to self-define priorities, values, and identity of the academic library profession creates a more pliable work force. This essay uses critical and philosophical methods to apply lessons learned from landscapes ruined by extractive capitalism to professional library practice fractured by alienation, diremption, and dispossession. A critique of the exploitation of ethics of fear and hope is offered, along with a method for identifying these as they appear in crisis narratives. The essay concludes with a recommendation to pursue an ethics of unity, predicated on promoting flourishing through professional mutualism, dedication to direct action, and a focus on sustainability.

Keywords: crisis narratives · ethics · mutualism · sustainability

RÉSUMÉ

Les récits de crise sont des histoires destinées à persuader que l'on existe dans un état d'urgence. Sous le capitalisme extractif, les récits de crise délimitent le comportement éthique en réponse à la crise. Une fois fixées, ces éthiques de crise favorisent la conformité des pratiques de travail pour éviter la catastrophe. Céder les moyens d'auto-définir les priorités, les valeurs et l'identité de la profession de bibliothécaire universitaire crée une main-d'œuvre plus malléable. Cet essai utilise des méthodes critiques et philosophiques pour appliquer les leçons apprises des territoire dévastés par le capitalisme extractif à la pratique professionnelle de la bibliothèque fracturée par l'aliénation, la disjonction et la dépossession. Une critique de l'exploitation de l'éthique de la peur et de l'espoir est proposée, ainsi qu'une méthode pour les identifier telles qu'elles apparaissent dans les récits de crise. L'essai se termine par une recommandation de poursuivre une éthique de l'unité, fondée sur la promotion de l'épanouissement par le mutualisme professionnel, le dévouement à l'action directe et l'accent mis sur la durabilité.

Mots-clés : durabilité · éthique · mutualisme · récits de crise

ACADEMIC librarianship is in a state of crisis, but whose crisis and to what end? These are the fundamental questions John Buschman asks in his 2003 book *Dismantling the Public Sphere* (3). Buschman reviews the long series of crises in librarianship that coincide with the rise of neoliberal efforts to privatize and extract value from anything that functions as a shared commons, perpetually setting librarianship in a defensive stance (7). In the face on ongoing attempts to reduce libraries' value to the transactional and to define which kinds of transactions are worthwhile, Buschman closes this work by emphasizing the need for any robust defense of librarianship to be sustainable (181). In the almost two decades since the publication of that work and its clear call for an alternative and sustainable means for valuing the library, the economy has continued to become "the centerpiece of society and politics" and economic rationality now dominates the decision making process as to which values librarians should emphasize (Buschman 2020, 157). The key question the current essay poses is, given the extent to which economic valuation of academic library services has taken hold, has the moment for a philosophical or discursive response to crisis culture passed? If so, what is the alternative to a discursive engagement? To answer these questions, the author applies critical and philosophical methods to insights gained from environmental justice, environmental virtue ethics, and anarchistic social ecology for guidance.

Each of these sources of insight point to an action-oriented, non-discursive response. The first framework, environmental justice, is a discipline where environmental abuses are cases for determining the limits of distributive justice (Wenz 1988, 5). While much of the literature on environmental justice focuses on remediating the maldistribution of goods, environmental politics researcher David Schlosberg (2009) reports that another idea is gaining recognition, "how those goods are transformed into the flourishing of individuals and communities" (4). In other words, the distribution of goods is not the ultimate justice issue, rather it is the ability, performed individually and collectively, to choose and be able to achieve fulfilling lives. Virtue ethics, the next framework, is an approach to developing a virtuous character with traits oriented towards flourishing. Seeing flourishing both as a social justice issue and as a personal moral issue creates a bridge between collective action and individual professional decision making. Environmental virtue ethics is a form of virtue ethics concerned with understanding character traits in relationship with the environment (Sandler 2013, sec. 1). Some of these traits are virtuous, more likely to lead to flourishing relationships, and some are vicious, less likely to lead to flourishing. From an environmental perspective, flourishing cannot be a solely personal activity. Instead, it is something negotiated between the person of good

character and a deeply interconnected ecology, constituted by beings who also pursue their own flourishing.

Radical interdependence is at the heart of the final framework in this essay, anarchistic social ecology. Anarchism, according to anthropologist and activist David Graeber (2009), is not "fundamentally a project of analysis. It is more of a moral project" where the output is an "ethical discourse about revolutionary practice" (211). The vehicle for anarchistic discourse is direct action, the ethos that actions are the appropriate response to oppression, rather than discourse. Direct action does not equate violent action, just an active rather than passive response. Once one knows what is right, it becomes immoral to choose not to act. In political anarchy, people are said to exist in a state of mutual dependence and responsibility. This mutualism promotes acting voluntarily to aid one another, ultimately for the benefit of all. Anarchistic social ecology extends that fundamental mutualism beyond humans and to all living things and to the systems which make life possible. When taken together these otherwise disparate frameworks provide a lens of unity through which to view and critique crisis narratives.

Classically, a crisis was considered a pivotal moment where one would have to act to avoid an immediate calamity or tipping point (Heslop and Ormerod 2020, 149). Increasingly, crises describe heightened states of concern about something that one is compelled to act on, but that may be ongoing or even happening at some point in the future. Catastrophes are real and it is important to use planning to mitigate and avoid them. However, fear that a catastrophe may happen can be used to manipulate those who are concerned. A crisis narrative is such an attempt. It is a story with explanatory aim, implied underlying moral or social issues, and an explicit solution. Consider the example of a so-called homelessness crisis, where the rising threat is fear of violent crime committed by substance abusers and the solution is criminalizing and harassing unhoused people. Repeat a story often enough and people will come to believe it. The ability to frame the nature of the crisis, set the stakes, and identify the moral or personal failings of those involved in perpetuating the crisis gives an advantage in controlling the response to the issue of concern. The crisis narrative serves as a pre-emptive instrument of creative destruction, a concept attributed to Karl Marx and Joseph Schumpeter by Elliott (1980), where the current system must be destroyed in order for new and exploitable ways of labouring to emerge (46). In another crisis narrative example, the nature of a given aspect of academic libraries service is failing, and the way to save it is to follow the same trend that every other peer institution is following. To do otherwise is to be resistant to innovation and risk getting left behind. Skill sets and managerial approaches must also adapt to accommodate this standard for innovation. In this way the rich ecology of approaches

to providing services and adapting and exploring new solutions are reduced to the equivalent of a monoculture. It may produce greater yields in the moment but is brittle in the face of actual catastrophes.

Crisis narratives are not created as good faith arguments but are intentional means of disruption and exploitation. Solely engaging discursively with these narratives is not effective, because there is no way to compromise with a tool. I believe that academic librarians can move beyond reacting to a never-ending cycle of fears and hopes, but this will only be possible after accepting that, as with the disruption to global climate, the catastrophe in academic librarianship has already happened and there is no going back. The tasks now are to decide that continuance is worth it, and to find the resolve to carry on. These tasks are shared in kind by climate activists, virtue ethicists, and anarchists, and lessons can be learned from their hard-won insights.

Academic Librarianship and Dispossession

In her 2015 book *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing explores how people can find niches in territories otherwise exhausted by capitalistic exploitation. She details the way capitalism changes our relationship with the environment by describing three kinds of nature. What she calls first nature is marked by a balanced ecological order. Things grow, reproduce, and die, but in all phases draw from and return to their environment. In that state, people thrive and diminish, create habitats, and use creativity to adapt their environments. These adaptations do not remove significant fractions of resources from the point of original use. This is not a romanticized view of people's relationship with the environment. Instead, first nature is not too far from the Marxist idea of people being immediate producers, relying on the land for the means of production, but getting to determine for themselves what and how to produce (Katz 1993, 369).

Second nature occurs when the natural world, including humans in a state of first nature, is disrupted by extractive capitalism (Tsing 2015, vii). Extractive capitalism is a socioeconomic philosophy that stakes a claim for the total domination of first nature and guides collective behaviour towards maximizing gains taken from nature. In combining these two functions, extractive capitalism normalizes achieving maximum profits in the least amount of time. Concern over the long-term viability of a habitat or the people and other living things who belong to that land is antithetical. Second nature is effectively the ruins of first nature after capitalism has extracted all available value from a place and its people and has abandoned those spaces. It is my position that academic libraries and institutions of higher education are deep

in a state of second nature, having embraced the values of extractive capitalism. This implies willingly participating in the active disruption of long-term viability for the sake of providing resources and services that make the most elementary and measurable contributions to the financial bottom line. This process of self-deconstruction is unsustainable and will only be fruitful if higher education remains profitable. The problem is that all bubbles pop. A common good, like clear air, potable water, or an educated democratic populace, can collapse. A collapse happens in an environment when through unfettered competition the rational self-interests of individuals lead to the over exploitation of a resource (Rankin, Bargum, and Kokko 2007, 647). If the apparent acceleration of the rate of extraction in global markets is any indication (Hassan 2011, 389), commons collapse in the education space, the end of viability of current means of providing services, will come sooner than expected and without forewarning.

Returning to *Mushroom at the End of the World*, the central proposition of Tsing's (2015) book is that a third nature exists. Life that survives the extraction phase and remains on ruined land finds ways to adapt to that post-extracted condition. This adaptation occurs according to traditional evolutionary means, as physical changes in plants, animals, and fungi, but can be seen in complex human behaviour as well. Life after extractive capitalism is different than life before or during capitalism. It is possible in all but the worst ruin (131).

What would a third nature for academic librarianship look like? Could librarians come to thrive in it, and if so, what would the profession become? If we are in the middle of a collapse, it is important to make decisions to help adapt in the transition to academic third nature. If the collapse has happened, the task is to find new, unexpected places for professional values to flourish. Operating in the same rhetorical space as Roy Scranton's (2015) *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*, this pivot away from prevention and towards acceptance in the face of collapse raises the stakes and creates an environment where more radical solutions may be tolerable. The difference between the pivot described here and a crisis narrative is that there is no proscribed solution possible. Each librarian in every library will have to carve out their own niche, and it is only through many different solutions, shared for mutual benefit, that resilience is possible.

Ruined landscapes happen deliberately, over time. They result from decisions that selectively benefit the few with the means to manipulate whole territories. These decisions may be the result of acts of direct power. When, in service of capital, the state privatizes land previously held in common and leases access to it, or when colonizer powers extend their footprint to territories, this is direct power. Ruined landscapes also result from hegemonic power and the shaping of consensus about

what is normal and good. If one has the authority to define what it means to be a good, contributing librarian, anyone who rejects that definition rejects the good. To reject the notion of a hegemonic good, one must reject the underlying authority. This is difficult to do alone. Those who thrive in a first nature, whether humans or animals, are the first obstacles that need to be removed when transforming nature into abstract value. This removal severs inhabitants' connection to their previous livelihood, their autonomy, ways of making sense of the world, and sometimes of the land itself (Tsing 2015, 133). Nichols (2020) details how Karl Marx defined this targeted process of disconnection between a person, their land, and the established niche they use to produce a livelihood as *dispossession* (55). Since dispossession is an essential first step before the wholesale extraction of value from land may take place, dispossession of academic librarians from traditional ways of valuing their collections, the services they provide, the benefits provided to their institutions, and ultimately themselves as professionals is an essential step before establishing a system of valuation driven by return on investment.

Feeling cut off from prior ways of determining worth is called *alienation* or *estrangement* (Musto 2010, 79). Alienation is an internalized state and represents a shift not just in behaviour but in self-consciousness. In his book *Theft is Property!* Nichols (2020) describes alienation as "a form of personal domination whereby humans come to be controlled by institutions that are, ironically, of their own creation" (86). Another relevant idea from Marxist thought is *diremption* defined by Nichols as, "the splitting of humanity into constitutively antagonistic and hierarchically ordered categories" (86). When one feels alienated from one's ability to define professional meaning, and one is placed in competition against other labourers, it may seem absurd to feel a sense of belonging to something greater any longer. If one does belong to a group, that group is likely smaller and less influential than it could be as a result of intentional fracturing in an environment of zero-sum competition. If no one wants to be a subsistence farmer anymore, is the destruction of the grazing commons still seen as a tragedy? Is the dissolution of an academic library professionally managed and housed on a university campus a tragedy if no one wants to manage a physical collection?

Sandy Grande (2018) builds a case for the academy being an "arm of the settler state" where an ethos of the accumulation of capital is not modern neoliberal development, but rather is a constitutive outcropping of the academy's colonial and dispossessive roots (47). From this perspective, it is possible to see the academy as a place where students and employees are rewarded for finding ways to maximize their productive output, while adopting existing self-definitional categories and colonial-legacy worldviews and pursuing personal, individualist agendas that trend towards

optimal experiences. Even if learners may be exposed to progressive, anti-racist, feminist, anti-hegemonic scholarship they are doing so in institutional settings that too often exhibit praxis and infrastructures that reinforce the opposite. It is beyond the scope of this essay to form a position on whether the academy as an institution is redeemable, but it should be possible to aid those who learn and work in this setting in thinking reflectively about the role of alienation in shaping library policies and what ethics may be used to promote just and compassionate decisions.

All dispossession is violent, but the most egregious form is the colonialist act of systematic and sometimes genocidal violence meant to expand the footprint of colonial power as well as the norms and values of the settler state. This act deprives peoples of their territorial holdings, their free expression of culture, and resulting sense of identity. The removal of the capacity for livelihood pales in comparison to these injustices. Colonial dispossession is more than just removal from land or livelihood, it is the removal of categorical autonomy, specifically, the loss of autonomous self-definition. This is, collectively and individually, the capacity to choose the terms and concepts with which to define oneself and one's world (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 1). Glassman (2006) summarizes feminist discussion of another violent aspect of dispossession, namely devaluing the work of women while defining the roles and boundaries of womanhood in harmful ways (617). This is to say nothing of actual chattel slavery, where participation in alienation and diremption is not just involuntary but forcibly coerced. The emphasis on the violence committed in these examples is intended to promote the consideration of the possibility that the use of processes of alienation and diremption to deny self-definition are inherently acts of coercive violence even if those take place on smaller, institutional scales and only involve livelihood. If alienation and diremption are forms of coercive violence, what acts of resistance are appropriate in response? This is in no way a call to carry out violence, symbolic or otherwise. Instead, it is meant to motivate those who are interested in positioning the academic library to continue into third nature to consider direct and mutualistic actions to build a unitary identity, dedicated to collective flourishing above and beyond the interests of the immediate institution.

Those experiencing the degrees of dispossession described above are likely to suffer other, more information-specific, injustices as well. In addition to issues frequently considered such as the abridgement of intellectual freedom, access to information, and privacy, other information injustices may occur. For example, hermeneutical justice is the right held by persons to set their criteria for interpretive belief, and testimonial justice the right to be trusted by the same standards others are held to. Fricker (2013) contrasts these with distributed epistemic justice, the right to have equal access to "epistemic goods such as education and information" (1318). Cognitive justice is the right for people, often against the requirements created by

historical and colonial institutions, to recover systems of knowing and ordering the world's knowledge over and against those systems created to support the cognitive mindsets of settler states (Sousa Santos 2014, 237). Challenging the externally conditioned definitions of truth, honesty, and knowledge can be difficult when dispossessors actively seek to establish and promote conformity to a normative idea of the good that includes standards for evaluation, authorized ways of knowing, and the system through which education on these matters is provided. It is further made difficult when dispossessors promote docility by rewarding compliance with instituted rules, identities, and norms (Coleman 2013, 170). Most daunting of all is when these definitions are enforced by the power of the carceral state or reinforced by official and unofficial institutions of apartheid. Even if convinced that these information-centric forms of injustice are not taking place in academic libraries, the skills needed to oppose these injustices are closely related to librarians' areas of expertise. Wherever dispossession from the right to organize knowledge, interpret evidence, and resist coercive limits on truth occurs, librarians should be the first to speak up in opposition, all the more so if they see such things happening in their own institutions.

Embracing Third Nature

Both hope and fear are emotions evoked by current conditions but whose resolution is deferred to the future. We have to wait to see what happens, raising the anticipation or dread. Hopefulness is an emotional disposition that the future will be made better, sometimes in the context of human or technological progress. Fearfulness is an emotional disposition that a worse future awaits, and that harm seems certain. These dispositions are held individually but reinforced collectively by predictive and explanatory stories about the actions or inactions that will cause those futures to unfold. Do this to achieve progress. Do this to avoid obsolescence. The sharpest of these narratives are crisis narratives, stories about something that promises to disrupt the status quo in dire ways. While it may seem that a crisis narrative is one that supports dispositions of fear, it is also one that reinforces narratives of hope, as often crises are accompanied by clearly articulated solutions. For example, by remodeling the library in the same way that peer libraries are remodeling, it should be possible to stave off a given crisis of obsolescence. Believing that one is in a state of crisis compels action, and a spirit of generosity encourages one to share knowledge of that crisis with others, reinforcing it. The greater the crisis, the more radical are the potential solutions that may be considered while still being considered ethical. Johan Dahlbeck (2014) writes about the ethics of hope and fear as being "tools for governing human behaviour through the use of different morally changed images of possible

future consequences" (155) and supports this position with examples from Seneca, Spinoza, and Nietzsche. Ethics of hope promote those actions that one is right to undertake in order to bring about a better future. Ethics of fear promote those actions one is right to undertake in order to avoid dire consequences.

The core question posed at the beginning of this essay certainly seems designed to provoke the ethics of fear. If we do not adjust our ethics to act in a certain way, extractive capitalism will leave the academy and academic libraries in ruins. It may also seem like the invitation to think of ways to make it more likely for academic librarianship to persist into third nature is an ethics of hope. This is why, to avoid yet another appeal to academic librarians' already burdened consciences, I argue that it is too late to avoid the negative consequences of alienation in line with extractive capitalism, and there is nothing academic librarians can do to accurately anticipate what the landscape will look like after ruin occurs.

One desired goal of structuring an argument in this way is to provide a call to act virtuously in the present, rather than appealing to the illusion of control over the future. If one embraces the idea that control of the future is not possible and still desires to persist, it should compel one to act directly, now, in accordance with principles both professional and personal rather than to yield to a sense of nihilistic detachment. Virtue ethics teaches that even if one acts with good character with each decision, developing the virtues fully, flourishing cannot be guaranteed. Yet circumstances cannot deprive one of one's mature character, even where dispossession is used as an instrument of division and control. As Dahlbeck (2014) asks, "how does education for sustainable development work in terms of an instrument for governing the present regardless of what the future might hold in store?" (154). Rejecting crisis narrative ethics of fear and hope rejects an instrument of self-alienation, as crisis ethics make the resolution of values something that will only be known in the future. Ethics resolved in mutual support, with ongoing flourishing instead of a definite end state in mind, are portable across institutions and still aid others even in a ruined territory.

Rejecting the Crisis Narrative

The first step to rejecting crisis narratives is recognizing that an act of refusal of those narratives is possible. Academic librarians may find themselves drawn along by overwhelming tides of alienation and diremption with the institutional mechanisms that reinforce them. It is important to communicate to one another that refusing normative expectations set by extractive capitalism is attainable and that is part of a vision for practice that is fairer, more just, and more sustainable. The concept of refusal is central to anthropologist Audra Simpson's (2016) theory that power can

be recovered by saying "enough is enough" in response to dispossession (327). The crux of her theory is that those who have had their autonomy taken away through dispossession have no obligation to consent to the identity narratives and conceptual categories of their oppressors. This may take the form of universal refusal, or an absolute unwillingness to participate in the conventions of the dispossessor, even when doing so would provide immediate material gains. The academic librarian, unlike a person dispossessed from their land, has chosen to work for the academy and so may not be at liberty to commit to universal refusal while remaining employed. It may be tempting to say that the only ethical choice is to act in accord with the fullest expression of one's beliefs and resign. However, if everyone who rejects crisis narratives and dispossessing norms left the library in protest, only those who bought into them would remain.

This does not mean that refusal is out of reach as a technique of sustainable reform, only that the refusal stands against accepting a state of self-alienation. Self-alienation in this context results from the belief that all the options for the future have been defined, obviating the need for decisive action and promoting compliance. To seek out moments for rejections, librarians may begin by identifying instances where crisis narratives are being used to set the range of normative ethical responses. A start is to ask, when am I asked to not be true to my professional values, and who benefits from my compliance? One place to look for potential moments of rejection is where the solution to the crisis involves buying a product from the same interests behind the crisis narrative. Another is when the worth of one's labour is reduced to metrics of productivity that are not directly tied to aiding others.

Coercion does not have to breed collaboration. As efforts to redefine and reductively norm the duties of librarians will never cease, so too must the dedication to vigilance against such norming be ongoing. For the academic librarian who chooses the course of refusal, turning away from reductive norms relating to extractive goals, priorities, or missions of the library will be more effectively couched in terms of an acceptance of something else, for example, a different norm in the form of a professional value or ethic that considers more than just the expediencies of immediate concerns and focuses on the long-term needs of the greatest number of people possible. The environmental ethics approach featuring a search for harmonious relationships between individuals and environment provides a useful framework for doing so, without dictating individual norms.

As mentioned above, virtue ethics is a form of character ethics that is non-axiomatic, meaning that it does not attempt to determine a set of universal rules that all should follow in order to be ethical. Instead, a person is ethical if they act prudently and in line with their sense of purpose or function. The end goal of this

form of ethics is flourishing, or happiness through growth, rather than momentary satisfaction. This approach preserves autonomy while encouraging goal-oriented moral decision making. Virtue ethics is said to be environmental if the idea of flourishing is understood from the perspective that people are part of many systems, and those systems flourish best when harmoniously maintained (Hursthouse 2007). Think of this harmonious state as something akin to first nature. Unfortunately, incorporating environmental thought into professional ethics is not as easy as adding notions of harmony or balance. It instead uses the idea of sustainability to complicate how we apply value to human activities.

Sustainability is a form of justice work that emphasizes the importance of transitioning from value decisions based on a single, economic bottom line to a triple bottom line consisting of the environment, equity, and the economy. It is in particular justice work that considers the implications that future generations have just as much right to the resources of the present as those currently alive do, although the realities of climate change create the possibility that environmental exploitation will lead to conditions of intergenerational injustice long into the future. Environmental justice narratives differ as to whether the focus of justice should be people or the broader environment. Climate ethicists refer to *strong anthropocentrism*, an orientation towards nature which centres on the idea that the subjective preferences of humans is the primary or even sole factor in determining whether something has value (Norton 1984, 135). This is just another a form of alienation from nature, leading to the conclusion that the whole Earth should be redesigned to benefit humans and domesticated species we prioritize, and shaped not just to our needs, but to our preferences (Vogel 2012, 299). Instead of helping reveal the radical dependence humanity bears with respect to our ecology, strong anthropocentrism over-estimates humanity's significance in the grand scheme, sharing many of the same ethical burdens of the imperial legacies common to that worldview of being separate and uniquely special in creation. As with alienation and dispossession, strong anthropocentrism creates a worldview that rewards adherence to it. If the world exists for humanity, then humanity has the right to optimize the world for current human comfort. Those who argue that the goal of life is optimization may enjoy the fruits of a globalized extractive capitalist economy now, but do so in a way that is unsustainable, short sighted, and exploitative of humanity and the natural world in the long term. The refutation of the idea that humanity can survive without all other species in the natural world strongly parallels the refutation that a person can thrive without the support of others, and that any one library or librarian can fully reject crisis narratives on their own. Rejection requires unity, and unity requires direct action to build a mutually beneficial niche.

Ethics of Unity

So, what is the alternative to the customization of the world for mass human consumption, and the maximal extraction of value from every measurable system, including library systems? Virtue ethics posits flourishing as the measure of a good life; this is not based on momentary satisfaction but the exercise of prudence. While virtue ethics may be critiqued as an essentially individualistic form of ethics, environmental virtue ethics serves as a corrector for this tendency, extending prudence to not just the individual, but the individual in community, the individual in relationship to nature. No person, no profession, flourishes on its own, so once narratives of crisis have been rejected as the foundation for normative standards of flourishing, what may replace those is a form of professional mutualism. Russian evolutionary biologist and political theorist Peter Kropotkin (2015) and political philosopher Murray Bookchin, particularly in *The Ecology of Freedom* (1982), provide the basis for a more ecologically-minded alternative to the ethics of fear or hope. Rather than choosing to work within instruments of the same states that promote institutions founded under colonialism and which perpetuate hegemonic and direct power, or in accord with the will of the market to provide correctives, these philosophical anarchists centre an ethics of mutualism and an accompanying ethos of direct action as solutions. Practically, these approaches call for everyone who perceives an injustice to take action against it. Realizing the limitations of acting in isolation, anarchists work to build coalitions of like-minded individuals who work together to solve the perceived shortcomings in a system. This is not at all dissimilar to what a profession is meant to accomplish in defining a discipline and defending the territory of practice while creating normative boundaries. Yet somewhere along the way, as crises proliferated, individual performance and measurable indicators in response to those crises became the standard for quality. Professional service became reduced to just another metric extracted from on the way to performative expedience. Professional identity became something secondary to the fulfilment of contractual obligations. As distributed notions of the public good became untenable, so too did the power of professional identity. Anarchy is not the denial of rule by authority, it is the enthusiastic embracing of self-rule. Virtuous anarchy, turned towards mutual flourishing, is the heart of a professional ethics of unity.

Conclusion

Crisis narratives in the academy are instruments of extractive capitalism. They foster dispossession, alienation, and diremption, and use future-oriented ethics of fear and hope to remove principled resistance to the continuing transformation of the educational space into a growth industry. Extractive capitalism leaves the commons

ruined when the market value of that commons collapses. Rather than engage with the discourses on how to avoid ongoing crises, a more appropriate response is to reject ethics of hope and fear entirely by holding the position that the terrain of the academy is already ruined. This response allows academic librarians to engage in acts of refusal, decisions to rely on professional values and the desire to engage in sustainable practices instead of the terms set by crises narratives. Environmental justice, environmental virtue ethics, and anarchistic social ecology provide frameworks for constructing ethics of unity. These propagate the belief that humanity is not separate from the ecology that sustains our species, that actions are moral when they promote long-term flourishing of self and others, and that mutual aid and action are needed to create whatever kind of academic librarianship is going to continue after the ruins.

With this recognition, and with a rejection of the belief that it is possible to set the course of academic librarianship's future, the most self-affirming moral choice is to reject crisis narratives, and work in the present to build coalitions of practitioners armed with an awareness of the damage done by unchecked extractive capitalism. These coalitions would work together to reconsider the purpose of academic librarianship not in terms of service to self, institution, or even community, but in service to the unending need for harmony and intergenerational justice. The problem of academic self-alienation is that it compels one to accept the narrative, the norms, and the resulting ethics of one vision of the worth of the academic library. Working together to create an alternative means of valuing that worth, where practice leads to justice not for the future but for the present, is an essential precursor to persisting in ways that reject alienation and diremption. It is impossible to predict the future for academic librarianship, but an ethics of unity, build on mutualism, sustainability, autonomy, and the desire to flourish, is one that will benefit librarians regardless of what academic third nature winds up being. The next steps in this research are to identify and formalize what the environmental virtues are, and to establish the ground for moral reasoning using these virtues in decision making processes and policy development.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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