New labour in libraries: the post-Fordist public library

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the value of French School Regulation theory for questions of relevance to researchers and practitioners working in the field of information policy in general and public librarianship in particular.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper is divided into two parts. Part one outlines Regulation theory's twin analytic tools of Fordism and post-Fordism and its value for questions about the evolution of the public library. Part two provides an example of the approach's explanatory potential when applied to a series of public library planning documents produced by the Government of Ontario, Canada from the 1950s.

Findings – An interpretation of the evolution of the identity of the library user from patron to customer to information producer-consumer is proposed at the intersection of the neoliberal state's austerity in social spending, the ubiquity of the new information and communication technologies, and fundamental changes in libraries as sites of waged-work.

Research limitations/implications – The research facilitates the development of a political economy of the contemporary public library of potential value to the international public library community. Also, conceiving of the public library as first and foremost a site of productive work forces one to re-engage with the meaning of shifting relations between the library user and the institution on working conditions.

Originality/value – The applicability of a relatively under-utilized theoretical framework is modelled that enables one to ask new questions of relevance to the field of library and information science.

Keywords Public libraries, Library workers, Critical policy studies, Library users, Regulation theory, Canada

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Within the field of LIS, researchers and practitioners are struggling to make sense of the meaning of fundamental social change as a result of the forces of capitalism's globalisation. These include the production and diffusion of perpetually innovating information and communications technologies (ICTs), the near hegemony of the neoliberalist project, and the very real impact of these on the full range of research and professional concerns. Evidence of the impact of this change dynamic on LIS abound, from the emergence in North America of the i-school movement and the introduction of new specializations (i.e. information policy, knowledge management and health informatics, to name three), through ongoing anxiety regarding the future of the library.

As an institution of the state and creature of public policy, the public library is particularly sensitive to shifts in the wider political economy. Indeed, as public libraries in Canada, the US, the UK, Australia and Scandinavia increasingly embrace the discourse of Web 2.0 as an innovation that promises to recast and update relations

between the historic institution, its users, and its funders, serious questions arise regarding how the new information and communication technologies (ICTs) are reshaping the public library as a site of work and locus democratic practice. At the centre of this change dynamic is the transformation within public library discourses of the library patron into first a customer and more recently an information producer-consumer. The question this paper explores is: if the public library and public librarianship blossomed during the Fordist regime, how is today's public librarian being constituted within contemporary policy discourses and what questions do these findings raise for the next generation of library workers and library users?

Ultimately, the purpose of this paper is to consider the nature of contemporary labour conditions in public libraries within a reading of the public library's history as a mode of social regulation within capitalism since the mid-point of the twentieth century. To that end, a relatively under-utilized theory in LIS, namely French School Regulation theory, is used to frame this analysis of a public service that flourished under the auspices of the Keynesian welfare state, but whose future within the wake of today's neoliberal one remains an open question. As will be demonstrated in the following sections, the theoretical tenets of the regulationist approach and particularly the ways in which it balances a Marxist critique with the development of policy solutions for capitalist societies and market economies, makes it ideally suited for a field which must marry philosophical concerns to pragmatic ends in a highly competitive public sector environment.

The remainder of the paper is divided into two parts. Part one outlines the main features associated with the regulationist approach, paying particular attention to the concept of "modes of social regulation" in relation to the institute of the public library as a creature of public policy. As well, prior research within LIS that has utilized this theoretical frame is reviewed. Part two provides an example of the approach's explanatory potential when applied to a series of high level public library planning documents produced by the Government of Ontario, Canada from the 1950s. An interpretation of the evolution of the identities of the professional librarian and library user is proposed at the intersection of the neoliberal state's corporatization of public services, information capital's increasing appetite for the immaterial and voluntary labour of its consumers, and fundamental changes in the public library as a site of waged work.

Part 1 – the theory

The French Regulation School of political economy is based on the pioneering work of Michel Aglietta (2000). Aglietta is credited with having developed an approach to the study of social change within the context of capitalism's evolution over the course of the twentieth century. Based on Marx's general theory of capitalism, Aglietta's analysis of capitalist regulation in the United States is informed by the precepts of historical materialism mapped onto the inherent contradictions underpinning wage societies and which provide them with their technological dynamism. Having said that, Aglietta's approach diverges from Marxism in one significant respect. Where Marx theorized that the inherent contradictions within capitalism, namely the class tensions embedded in the wage relationship, would inevitably lead to the system's demise and replacement by socialism, Aglietta foresees no such eventuality (Aglietta, 2000, p. 396). Indeed, Aglietta is clear that the purpose of his work is to provide the analytic tools

necessary to engage society (in France but also beyond) in a political debate over how best to strengthen democracy, rekindle solidarity, and improve living conditions for all within the context of capitalism's globalisation. In the words of Aglietta, "The purpose of the political debate is to devise a means of giving expression to people's social rights so that the new growth regime can put wage societies back on the road to social progress" (Aglietta, 2000, p. 445). Aglietta's work has been further elaborated by Alain Lipietz (1987, 1992), David Harvey (1989), Bob Jessop and Ngai-Ling Sum (2006), and Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell (1992).

The Regulationist approach

Regulation School theory posits that given the inherent contradictions underlying capitalism, it requires for its survival the development of historically specific regimes of accumulation and modes of social regulation. As defined by Regulationist Alain Lipietz, a regime of accumulation "can be defined in terms of a schema of reproduction which describes how social labour is allocated over a period of time and how products are distributed ... over the same period" (Lipietz, 1987, p. 32), in other words, how capital is accumulated within a wage society. At the same time, "if a regime of accumulation is to be realized and to reproduce itself for any length of time, there must also be institutional forms, procedures and habits which either coerce or persuade private agents to conform to its schemas" (Lipietz, 1987, p. 33). Modes of social regulation do the important work of legitimating and reproducing the wage relationship through the establishment of a wide range of public institutions.

The concept of modes of social regulation originates with Gramsci's work on the dynamics of American Fordism. As such, modes of social regulation extend to all aspects of social and cultural life, which, in their organization and functioning, serve to socialize individuals to the requirements of the regime of accumulation and legitimate the social relations, which underpin that regime (Harvey, 1989, p. 126). The structural coupling (Peck and Tickell, 1992) of a regime of accumulation and mode of social regulation results in the temporary stabilization of capitalism as a system of social and economic integration.

In essence, Regulation theory asserts that the inherent contradictions within capitalism results in a history with clearly demarcated regimes or periods. Further, these periods of relative stability exist on either side of periods of social chaos as one regime becomes destabilized and the process of establishing a new or transformed regime is negotiated between the system's central social identities. There are two points worth emphasizing here:

(1) in order for capitalism to work at all, it requires the active participation of its three central social identities: the state, capital and labour; and

(2) periods of social and economic stability are dependent upon a negotiated compromise between the competing class interests of labour and capital as mediated through the state.

A note about terminology

Regulation approaches use the terms "Fordism" and "post-Fordism" as a means of distinguishing between historically specific regimes of capital accumulation and modes of social regulation. While the process of stabilizing a post-Fordist regime is still underway, the terms provide a means of comparing and contrasting shifting working

and consumption norms as a response to the crisis in Fordism dating from the mid-1970s.

The term "Fordism" is a direct reference to Henry Ford's introduction in 1914 of the automated assembly line (for the mass production of cars) combined with a five dollar, eight-hour day (which would ensure that the mass of workers could afford to buy the cars produced). Ford's innovative program with respect to the management of social relations both inside his factory's walls (work) and beyond (private consumption) was significant because it represented one of the first attempts by capital to manage the inherent contradictions of the system by establishing a connection between the central role of the worker within the two moments of capital's circuit: production and circulation. Hence, while workers needed to be habituated to the discipline of life on an assembly line, they also needed to be educated in a new set of values, which equated quality of life issues with the ability to purchase the commodities they produced. In this way, a virtuous cycle was created which resolved a number of earlier problems, not the least of which was the effective management of surplus value (Harvey, 1989, p. 126).

It was not, however, until the establishment of the Keynesian welfare state following the Second World War that Fordism, as a regime of accumulation and mode of social regulation, would become stabilized. Lipietz refers to this period as the "real golden age of capitalism" (Lipietz, 1992, p. 1). Within this new configuration, state powers were expanded to enable it to function as a countervailing force to the vagaries of the market. Some of the salient features of this regime, and which ultimately became the sources of its crises, included: the growth of large bargaining units ("big labour"), the mass production of homogenous goods coupled with mass consumption, vertical organization structures and authoritarian command, an emphasis on scientific management and the fragmentation of unskilled labour into discrete activities, the emergence of large national monopolies ("big capital"), and, the mediating influence of the welfare state ("big government"). The golden age of Fordism, according to Regulationists, was the result of a "grand compromise" between the three central social identities of capital, labour and the state. This period of prosperity lasted until the early 1970s, when, as interpreted through the Regulationist lens "the whole miraculous balance of the Fordist compromise was jeopardized" (Lipietz, 1992, p. 16).

"Post-Fordism" is an umbrella term used by Regulationists to describe the process of Fordism's transformation since the early 1970s into a new, yet to be stabilized, regime of accumulation and mode of social regulation. As a response to the crises in Fordism, the features of post-Fordism stand in sharp contrast to it. They include: information intensive economies based on the production of just-in time and customisable products for niche global markets, flexible and networked organization structures vis-à-vis highly automated systems, the internationalisation of the labour force, and a neo-liberal state.

Finally, although a detailed examination of the concept of immaterial labour is beyond the scope of this paper, a brief description of its meaning in relation to the concepts of Fordism and post-Fordism will suffice. The concept of immaterial labour is most closely associated with the autonomist Marxist tradition and theorizations about the nature of work in globalised information societies (Lazzarato and Negri, 1994). Here, the clear distinction within Fordism between the manual (material) labour performed by the automated assembly line worker, and the intellectual (immaterial)

labour of the manager, product designer, or engineer no longer exist. In today's information-based service economies, the demands on workers are increasingly intellectual and immaterial. Post-Fordist social relations of production based upon perpetually innovating ICTs, flattened organizational structures, and work teams, rely on productive social relations between workers and an increasingly technology-literate consumer to generate new information, knowledge and cultural products for capital's gain. As we shall see, the implications of these new social relations of production when combined with e-government initiatives have significant implications for all public sector workers.

Regulation theory in LIS
The value of Regulation theory's twin concepts of Fordism and post-Fordism is that they provide a framework and set of comparators with which to make connections between a regime of capital accumulation and the ideological work performed by the mode of social regulation for the purpose of achieving social and economic stability and cohesion. Further, as a conceptual framework, the mode of social regulation is particularly fruitful for questions about, and critical research into the evolution of those public institutions and professional practices that blossomed under the auspices of the Keynesian welfare state and which, at first glance, appear a far remove from contemporary class struggles in the transition to a globalised information capitalism. As a case in point: in *The Wealth of Networks* (Benkler, 2006), legal scholar Yochai Benkler's discussion of the opportunities that emerging peer-to-peer, non-market social relations of information production create for advancing liberal democratic values if they are allowed to flourish has serious implications for the functioning of state institutions, particularly those involved in the collection, organization and provision of information services.

Finally, the approach's treatment of the state's dual-role in the successful establishment and maintenance of conditions conducive to capital accumulation on the one hand, while ensuring relative civil rest among the citizenry on the other hand, is a direct invitation to public library scholars, interested in developing a political economy of the public library.

Although underutilised in the field of LIS, when Regulation theory is employed, it has proven particularly useful for critical analyses into the role of the public library as a mode of social regulation. In an article entitled, "Regulating readers: the social origins of the readers' advisor in the United States" (Luyt, 2001), Brendan Luyt employs regulation theory in a historical study of the rise and decline of readers' advisory services in American public libraries during the 1920s and 1930s. Within this context, Luyt provides discursive evidence of the concrete links between the organization and delivery of this public library service and the disciplining of the population to the requirements of an early Fordism, particularly with respect to new consumptive norms. Regulation theory was also used by Siobhan Stevenson (2005) to analyse the influence of large-scale philanthropies on the development of the American public library. The parallel concepts of Fordism and post-Fordism provided the framework for considering the influence of Andrew Carnegie and Bill Gates' philanthropies on all aspects of the library's functioning. As a result of that analysis, connections between Gates' project to bridge the digital divide *vis-à-vis* his library automation project and larger social struggles over free versus proprietary software, the expansion of

intellectual property rights, and the social and economic significance of software as the new means of production were possible. Once again, the role of the public library in legitimating conditions conducive to capital accumulation was uncovered. With regard to library practices, a recently published study considered library online public access catalogues (OPACs) and web portals as technologies of social regulation. Gloria Leckie, Lisa Givens, and Grant Campbell (Leckie *et al.*, 2008) use the concept of mode of social regulation to "disentangle and reveal the elements of the mode of social regulation that have been at work over the past 30-40 years that may account for the relative lack of change to, and persistent problems with, library OPACs" (p. 249). Consistent with the requirements of this approach, the researchers' primary concern was with developing a more critical appreciation among practitioners regarding the reality of capitalist relations on professional practices. The application of Regulation theory to the area of cataloguing and classification represents a significant development in the use of the approach by LIS scholars.

In the next section the analytic tools of Fordism and post-Fordism are used to analyse and interpret the evolution of the public library from the mid-point of the twentieth century, paying specific attention to the discursive treatment of library workers and library users within the major library planning documents produced by the Government of Ontario, Canada. Consistent with the tenets of the approach, the constitution of library workers and their clientele are contextualised within the dominant social relations of production (work) and circulation (consumption) associated with that historical period.

PART 2 – the application and findings
Sources of evidence
Between the late 1940s and 2008, the Government of Ontario, Canada produced, on average, one planning document every ten years (OLA, 1944, 1945, 1955; Wallace, 1957; St John, 1966; Bowron, 1976; OPAC, 1980; OPLSPG, 1990; SDC, 1996; Newman, 2008). Taken together, these documents form an inter-textual chain that traces the blossoming of the Fordist public library *vis-à-vis* three decades of uninterrupted public library expansion through to today's significantly diminished provincial service and transformed municipal library. While these policy documents cover all aspects of public library services at both the local and provincial levels, for the purpose of this paper, we will make our critical incision at those sections in the documents that deal specifically with labour conditions, the constitution of library workers and library users.

Overview of the public library sector in Ontario
Ontario is Canada's second largest province and covers a geographical area of more than one million square kilometres. It is also Canada's most populated province and home to 13 million people. Given the size of the province, its wealth as the site of Canada's major manufacturing, financial and service sectors, and its history as one of Canada's oldest provinces, its governance structures, specifically those defining provincial-municipal relations are easily the most complicated in country. It is worth noting that although the vast majority of public services (health, education, welfare, fire, roads, garbage collection, recreation, culture, policing) are delivered locally, issues regarding which level or levels of government (city, regional, provincial) should be

responsible for their funding and organization are ongoing sources of political struggle and negotiation. As a shared provincial-municipal service, the local public library bears the imprint of these struggles.

In 2007, 265 public library boards operated more than 1,000 service points across the province. While the majority of these library boards (84 per cent) represent communities serving populations of 15,000 or less, the six largest systems (municipalities serving over 250,000) provide services to 40 per cent of Ontarians, and one library system, the Toronto Public Library (TPL) serves 2.5 million people. Given the range of communities, ensuring that all Ontarians have access to quality library services has been the motivation behind the provincial government's involvement in the sector since the passage of *The Public Libraries Act of 1920*. However, as reflected in the planning documents that comprise this study, it was not until the postwar era and the emergence of a well-funded Keynesian welfare state that such a two-tiered project could be undertaken in earnest.

As stipulated in the *Public Libraries Act*, public library boards receive annual operating funds from both the municipality and the province. At the local level, the source of these funds is the municipal property tax of which the public library represents just one of a number of services funded through this mechanism. At the provincial level, the ministry responsible for public libraries provides funding directly through cash transfers and indirectly through the provision of services. With respect to cash transfers, these manifest in one of two ways. First, each public library in Ontario is eligible for an annual "per household grant". Second, the province creates special grant programs based on provincially set priorities and to which public libraries can apply. With regard to services, a provincial library service is charged with providing libraries with services that they would not be able to provide for themselves (because of costs) but which are considered imperative for the system to function effectively as a whole. The nature of the provincial service including its organization and administration has varied over the life of the legislation, however its function as a coordinating body for the province's libraries has remained unchanged. With the transition to state neo-liberalism, it has become apparent that the choice to cooperate in the province-wide system is dependent on the amount of money (cash, in-kind grants) that the provincial government is willing to pay to the local library board in order to offset the costs associated with its participation in the provincial system.

Findings
(A) The blossoming of the Fordist public library, 1944-1970
In the policy briefs prepared between 1944 and 1957 (OLA, 1944, 1945, 1955; Wallace, 1957), conditions in public libraries were variously described as "deplorable," (OLA, 1944, p. 31) "gravely inadequate" (OLA, 1944, p. 30), and existing at "starvation levels so much so that, in many cases, they are unable to employ trained librarians or purchase a representative supply of books" (OLA, 1945, p. 39). The provincial contribution in 1945 was a mere 0.0117 cents per capita, and a single library inspector staffed the Public Libraries Branch in the Provincial Department of Education (Wallace, 1957, p. 8). The central theme running through these reports was the desire on the part of the province to create larger units of service, avoid unnecessary duplication, and develop a rationalized means of guaranteeing all citizens equal access

to library services that met specified standards. The goal of a universal public library service was the engine that drove nearly three decades of public library expansion at both the provincial and local levels.

By 1966 and the publication of *A Survey of Libraries in the Province of Ontario* (St John, 1966), the contours of the Fordist public library were clear. The provincial contribution to local libraries had risen to 0.42 cents per capita, an increase of 40 per cent in 20 years. At the provincial level, the staff complement at the Branch had increased to thirteen including a director, a chief librarian and supervisor of adult services, a supervisor of extension services, a supervisor of children's services, an assistant to the chief librarian, and seven clerical workers. In addition to the Branch's responsibilities for policy development and enforcement, its mandate was expanded to include material intensive processing services such as interlibrary loan, the preparation and administration of travelling libraries, the development, management and circulation of a teacher's reference service and collection (with an annual circulation of 5,000 books), staff training and workshops, direct support for adult and children's services, and the publication of a professional journal, *The Ontario Library Review* (St John, 1966).

Between 1965 and 1968, the amount of provincial grants to public libraries more than doubled from $2,720,000 to $6,600,000 (Bowron, 1976, p. 17). Over this same period, the functions of the Branch continued to expand with the establishment fourteen regional cooperative library centres. Services included: the development of union catalogues of films, the circulation of specialized collections including the National Library of Canada's Multilingual Bibliographic Service, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind's talking books collections, French materials, and children's ready-made story time kits. Each regional centre ran the area's inter-loan system. Finally, training, consulting services, and creating opportunities for local library networking (hosting and funding regulation meetings) was other work performed through these offices on behalf of the province.

At the municipal level, book collections grew by 72 per cent between 1965 and 1975. Under a centennial grants program (celebrating Canada's 100th birthday), almost 40 million dollars was contributed to the building or renovation of 70 public libraries in Ontario. Offered on a cost-sharing basis with the municipality, this was "the largest construction program since the Carnegie grant era. Almost 70 public library building were renovated or constructed in Ontario on a cost-shared basis with municipalities" (Ex-Ex Libris, para 11, n.d.).

Fordist labour conditions in public libraries

Planning documents from the 1940s through to the 1970s devoted considerable attention to the issue of labour in libraries. Throughout this period, recommendations were repeatedly made for more professionals, the establishment of certification schemes and standardized systems of accreditation for all levels of library staff; increases in salaries to bring librarians in line with other service professionals (i.e. teachers), and the development of a secure pension plan, "especially since many librarians have given devoted service on low salaries during the years" (1945, pp. 43-44). Recommendations regarding the most effective means of organizing library labour also remained constant and bear the unmistakable imprint of Fordism's model

for social relations of production, as nicely captured in the following excerpt from *A Survey of Libraries in the Province of Ontario* (St John, 1966):

> In the case of public libraries, it is also unrealistic to expect that the smaller communities with a few exceptions will be able to afford trained librarians with a B.L.S. or M.L.S. Here again the answer would be a strong but small core of specialists or coordinators working out of the Regional Co-operative headquarters advising local library custodians on book selection, weeding, public relations, reference and services to various age groups and special interests in their communities (p. 132).

Thus where once the municipal public library represented a complete and autonomous service, local library services became increasingly rationalized with specific functions such as the selection and acquisition of materials (collection development), cataloguing, book processing, and in-depth reference services centralized on a regional basis. The removal of these functions from the local level ushered in a period of relative deskilling for the local service provider. No longer did she select, order and catalogue materials based on her sense of local need, instead her role was reduced to the shelving and circulation of pre-selected and processed items. When viewed through the lens of Regulation theory, this division of labour effectively reproduced those working conditions associated with industrial labour and factory work. In the final analysis, the emphasis on system-wide uniformity and standardization for everything from cataloguing to personnel and an increasing preoccupation with technology as a means of increasing operational efficiencies (St John, 1966, p. 174), the public library's role of a mode of social regulation within Fordism is clarified.

A word about Fordism's library patron

Over this same period, references to the library patron were, in comparison to the amount of space dedicated to librarians and library workers, relatively few. What references did exist were surprisingly vague, as in, "our people" (OLA, 1945, p. 41), "the people" (OLA, 1955, p. 56), and "the people of Ontario" (St John, 1966, p. 22). This treatment of the library user is particularly interesting when compared to documents produced since 1980. We shall see how an emphasis on the customer identity serves to eclipse the library worker as the main subject of those policy documents produced in 1990 and 2008. This shift in focus away from the librarian and onto library users coincides with the division of library users into increasingly fine-grained and discrete user groups. Where once the designations child, young adult, adult, and senior citizen sufficed, this list has been extended to reflect what Newman referred to as the "diverse diversity" of Ontario's population (Newman, 2008, p. 2).

(B) The crisis in Fordism, 1973

Regulationists target 1973 as the year in which the crises in Fordism as a regime of accumulation and mode of social regulation could no longer be contained. As a barometer of the times, in the 1976 library planning document, *The Ontario Public Library: Review and Reorganization* (aka as the *Bowron Report*), the author begins his report with the following assessment:

> Many economists and sociologists have argued that this concentration on maintaining economic growth has contributed to the dislocation of our society and to problems that we are now too familiar with such as alienation, inadequate housing, poverty, crime, drug abuse, pollution, urban decay, the growth of bureaucracy, high taxes and inflation (Bowron, 1976, p. 1).

And concludes:

> The challenge of the next 20 years must be to find alternative and more reliable, long-term solutions to social problems. To assist this process we need to support, as never before, the dissemination of information and the acquisition of reliable knowledge as a basic requisite to sane judgment" (Bowron, 1976).

Throughout the 1980s managing the crisis of Fordism was a hegemonic project of global proportions. President Ronald Reagan in the US and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the UK are credited with having created the blueprint for a post-Fordist regime that privileged economic considerations over social ones. In Canada, the election of Brian Mulroney and the Progressive Conservatives to office in 1984, a position they held until 1993, provided a political climate consistent with the international trend towards market liberalisation and the internationalisation of the labour force. Fiscal retrenchment at the federal level created a domino effect and as responsibilities for public services devolved downwards from federal to provincial to local government, deep programming cuts were inevitable. In Ontario, this trend was further accelerated by the election in 1995 of a Conservative government. Over its eight year tenure, Premier Mike Harris' so-called "common sense revolution" dismantled the massive bureaucratic infrastructure developed to support and legitimate a province-wide public library service since the 1950s. The following snap shot of conditions in 1976 as compared to conditions in 2010 tell this story of austerity and fundamental structural change.

In 1975, at the writing of the *Bowron Report*, provincial responsibilities for public libraries were under the Ministry of Culture and Recreation. The task of this Ministry was "to encourage responsible citizenship through the process of cultural and recreational development" (Bowron, 1976, p. 40). In addition to public libraries, the Ministry was comprised of several other departments including Heritage Conservation, Arts Support, and Sports and Fitness. The largest of these was the Multicultural Development and Public Libraries department. The Library Services Branch was one of five associated with this department. The number of staff working in the Library Services Branch in 1976 was 28. In addition to these departments and branches, the Ministry also operated six field offices employing 42 people. Finally, the Ministry funded a Provincial Library Service that was delivered through 14 Regional Cooperatives. As described previously in this paper, these regional centres provided a full range of materials handling, consulting and training services, and managed the resource sharing system (interlibrary loan service) on behalf of local public libraries. They existed at arms-length from the province and were governed by a board composed of representatives from the region's libraries.

Today, the Ministry of Culture is responsible for public libraries and employs two librarians. With the passage of a revised *Public Libraries Act* in 1989, the Provincial Library Service was restructured into the downsized Ontario Library Service (OLS) and the 14 regional cooperatives were amalgamated into one of two organizations: the Ontario Library Services-North and the Southern Ontario Library Service. As a result of these cut backs, all processing services and materials handling have disappeared as well as funding for local librarians and trustees to training events, meetings and conferences.

The absence of a strong provincial presence and concomitant funding has led to increased competition between municipalities for scarce resources, and challenged the

province's legitimacy with respect to influencing local library policies through the *Public Libraries Act*. Two key examples include the *Act's* prohibition of user fees, and the requirement that all libraries be run by a public library board. For larger libraries, "opting out" of the *Act* was a serious consideration and source of great contestation within the community 1990s. Particularly when the freedom to charge user fees would more than make up for the lost revenue provided by the provincial per household grant. In 1997, Bill 109 to amend the Public Libraries Act (enacted in 1984) was tabled which would have allowed for these fundamental changes (Crane, 1998; Bruce, 1997). In the final analysis, the Bill was not passed and no large library opted out of the current legislation, but the event highlighted the more serious tensions associated with these types of two-tiered governance relationships when money becomes scarce.

The corporatisation of public discourses and the transformation of the citizen into first a customer and, more recently, a consumer-producer can be discursively traced back to this period in Ontario public library history.

(C) From Fordism to post-Fordism, 1980-present

Strategic planning and the new customer service. In 1990, a strategic planning group comprised of a mix of public librarians, trustees, and Ministry staff undertook a two year long strategic planning process, the result of which was *One Place to Look: the Ontario Public Library Strategic Plan* (OPLSPG, 1990). From a discursive perspective, the plan centred around the goal of carving out a niche for the public library within a burgeoning information industry while simultaneously responding to the pressure to find alternative sources of revenue. One solution, repeated several times within the plan and which bears directly on labour conditions was "to adopt a service management approach to public library service" (p. 34) and "create a corporate culture that promotes the idea of service first" (OPLSPG, 1990). Citing the book *Service America: doing business in the new economy*, the concept of service was defined as a product, whose "design, development, and delivery must be planned and managed" (OPLSPG, 1990), and readers were cautioned that "[i]ncreasingly the marketplace is opting to do business with those who serve and declining involvement with those who merely supply" (OPLSPG, 1990).

The treatment of the concept of customer service as an innovation throughout the plan creates a number of discursive tensions of note. First, with respect to the previous quotation, the unqualified reference to the marketplace, as in "the marketplace is opting to do business with . . . " collides with the history of the modern public library as emblematic of the democratic public sphere. It also sidesteps the widespread contestation and debate within the field at that time with regard an encroaching commercialism (Budd, 2008; Bushman, 2003; Crowley, 2008). Similarly, the distinction made between "those who serve" and "those that *merely* supply" (emphasis added), represents a rhetorical challenge to a profession wherein a significant source of occupational expertise resides in the management of physical collections for the purpose of "supplying" mass-produced informational and cultural products to the public. This rejection of materiality, as implied by the quote, negates and otherwise renders invisible the majority of library labour. At the same time, it draws our attention to emerging tensions between the traditional Fordist organisational structure based on a hierarchical division of labour between non-professional staff performing manual/material labour, and that work that relied on intellectual/immaterial labour

and was generally reserved for professionals, including: administration, cataloguing and classification, and reference work. In the transition to a post-Fordist regime, however, automation, outsourcing, and a new emphasis on the public librarian as manager and leader, creates an opening for the devolution of those professional duties formerly associated with direct service and immaterial/intellectual labour (i.e. reference) onto less expensive staff, including, as suggested in the plan, volunteers (OPLSPG, 1990, p. 34).

Further, as a policy trope, the space within the report dedicated to the topic of customer service or occupied by the identity of the library user as customer comes at the expense of the public librarian. Indeed, when compared to other policy documents in this textual chain, the lack of references to librarians and personnel issues in general is ideologically significant. Further, when labour is mentioned, generic labels such as "library workers," "staff", and "volunteers" are used in place of the formal designation of "librarian". While illustrative of the trend within post-Fordism towards flatter, less structured social relations of production, the implications for working conditions in libraries are, none-the-less, significant.

Finally, as a piece of political discourse, this focus on the customer identity can also be interpreted as an attempt to draw attention away from the more contentious issues associated with widespread downsizing within the sector at that time. Another way in which the elimination of professional workers is discursively obscured is through the substitution of librarians with inanimate technologies (i.e. automated systems and digital information resource) as the subjects of sentences. For instance, where once the overriding concern was providing Ontario's population with access to the services of professional librarians (whether locally or at the regional level), this shifted by 1990 to "Every Ontarian will have access to *information resources* within the province through an integrated system of partnerships among all types of information providers" (OPLSPG, 1990, p. 10, emphasis added). Information resources and providers may be librarians but they may just as often be electronic databases and related services.

Third Generation Public Libraries: Visionary Thinking and Service Development in Public Libraries (to 2020) and Potential Applications in Ontario (Newman, 2008)
The final document in our inter-textual chain, and the most recent is Third Generation Public Libraries: Visionary Thinking and Service Development in Public Libraries (to 2020) and Potential Applications in Ontario, aka "The Newman Report" (Newman, 2008). Just as One Place to Look (OPLSPG, 1990) broke new discursive ground 18 years earlier, so too does Newman's reflect the extent to which market relations have penetrated the public library sector in Ontario. One significant manifestation of this shift and which bears directly on labour in libraries has been the reconstitution, yet again, of the library user/patron. In 1990, the words "customers" and "clients" were the leitmotif, here the library user as information producer-consumer is introduced. Technology and participatory media are credited with this shift: "One change has particularly transformative implications for the future of libraries: users of information and communications technologies (ICTs) have made the transition from recipients of content to creators of content in a highly democratic and social digital universe" (Newman, 2008, p. 9). Before unpacking the ideological significance of this transformation of the library user, a quick summary of the report's purpose and notable discursive aspects will help to further contextualise our discussion.

In the words of its author, "[the] report examines how visionary thinking and services could apply to Ontario's public libraries by 2020" (p. 2). To that end, Newman "identifies leading practices and services in public libraries in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Nordic countries, Singapore and Canada" (Newman, 2008). These she summarizes in the section of the report entitled "Innovative Jurisdictions, Practices and Services" (pp. 11-18). One of the central messages running through the document is the importance attributed to creating opportunities for the library user to engage with and contribute to the development, design and delivery of services. This productive participation is framed within both the virtual library and the physical library. With respect to the former, the social web is constituted as the locus of engagement (p. 41). Ann Arbor District Library's (US) use of social networking software to "make the library a kind of continuing conversation with its citizens" (p. 12) is given as a case in point, as is the growing popularity in Canada of the proprietary software, Bibliocommons™ (Newman, 2008). In both examples, the integration of user-generated content into the catalogue including tagging, book reviews, and blogs are highlighted. In terms of user participation in the design of the physical facility, Newman characterizes this as emblematic of *third generation public libraries*. Crediting Shannon Mattern's *The New Downtown Library: Designing with Communities* (Mattern, 2007) as the source of the phrase, Newman writes: "The third generation public library building is a multi-use public space. It is an anchor in community development and an icon of the community. It is the product of dialogue and users are active in its design. It does not fit a mold and it may not even 'look like' a library" (Newman, 2008, p. 7). A representative example in the document is the comment about the UK. Reading Agency's engaging youth in the design of the library, thus "[m]oving facility design out of the exclusive grip of architecture and library professionals..." (p. 13).

Post-fordist labour conditions in public libraries

The discursive treatment of library workers in general and librarians in particular differs considerably from those plans produced during the golden era of Fordism. In *Third Generation Public Libraries* (Newman, 2008), the social identity of the librarian appears three times in the report's 60 pages, and then, only peripherally (Newman, 2008, p. 13, p. 30, p. 14). Having said that, personnel issues are not completely absent. Under the heading "Capacity-building in the library sector – human resources", the need for leadership training is highlighted (Newman, 2008, p. 26), but within what context and for what end, is left unsaid. The second reference to personnel and, the most relevant for our purposes, is the picture the author paints of labour conditions since 1990. Recalling that at its peak, the provincial library service had grown from one staff person, a library inspector in 1944 (OLA, 1944, p. 34), to a staff of over two hundred working in six field offices and 14 regional cooperatives and related agencies; Newman's observation that the staff complement at the Ministry dropped by 200 per cent since the 1990s (p. 28) cannot be ignored. She situates this statistic within the context of the "sharp decline in Ontario's provincial operating grants" (p. 28) resulting in small libraries functioning at subsistence levels, and larger urban libraries struggling to keep up with the demands of increasingly diverse communities (OLA, 1944). From a discursive perspective, the placement of this information at the back of the document is evidence of its politically sensitive nature. Interestingly, the words

used to describe contemporary conditions (e.g. subsistence levels) are strikingly similar to those found in the report from 1945 (OLA, 1945, p. 39). Then, however, solutions to problems of unequal local services based on geography and population were formulated against the backdrop of an emerging Keynesian welfare state and entailed hiring teams of professionally trained staff and the requisite number of clericals to support them (OLA, 1944, p. 34; Wallace, 1957, p. 17; St John, 1966, p. 12). From the perspective of post-Fordist labour, the question becomes where did the work performed by 200 per cent more workers go over the course of the 1990s and 2000's? What kinds of changes had to occur to support such a dramatic reduction in workers? Certainly, the answers reside in a combination of increased automation, privatisation through outsourcing, and service cancellations. However, the emphasis in the document on continuing to find innovative ways to involve the library user as a productive creator of content takes on new meaning when considered at the intersection of staff reductions on one side and the increasing value of unpaid but productive immaterial labour on the other.

Post-Fordist library patron

Within *Third Generation Public Libraries*, the discursive significance attributed to the library user as productive-consumer, coupled with the near invisibility of the paid library worker – whether librarian, paraprofessional or clerk – opens onto a myriad questions of relevance to the evolution of this public institution and the professionally trained librarians working within it.

Shifting social identities and relations, attributed largely within *Third Generation Public Libraries* (Newman, 2008) to the transformative impact of the new ICTs and particularly the ubiquity and interactivity of the web, reflect what Regulationists have identified as some of the dominant features associated with post-Fordism as an emerging regime of capital accumulation. Here, the increasingly blurring line between production (work) and circulation (consumption); the appearance of the hybrid producer-consumer, and the role of the state in creating conditions that privilege the needs of capital over labour and the consumer over the citizen are highlighted. Further, the stabilization of this new regime is dependent upon the creation of complementary modes of social regulation. As described in the first section of this paper, the capitalist state plays a dual role in this regard. In addition to creating conditions conducive to capital accumulation (today, this would include market deregulation, privatisation, the repeal of legislated labour protections, and deep cuts in social spending), it must also maintain social harmony and buy-in among its citizens as workers and consumers (O'Connor, 1973, pp. 1-6). As modes of social regulation, state institutions like public libraries but also public schools and public health, to name just three, represent important sites wherein the work to legitimate new social relations can be done. Thus, just as the analytic concept of Fordism enabled us to interrogate the Ontario public library as a mode of social regulation for workers, consumers and citizens during the post-war boom years, so we would expect to find that the concept of post-Fordism allows us similar insights into the current workings of an institution, which, on the surface appears a far remove from social struggles over the new means of production.

However, when the library patron becomes reconfigured as a "creator of content in a highly democratic and social digital universe" (Newman, 2008, p. 9), and the public library entertains a future wherein "It does not fit a mold and it may not even "look

like" a library" (Newman, 2008, p. 7), deskilling and the elimination of paid library workers are legitimated. Further, the use of the word "democracy" to describe a service which elsewhere in the same document is equated with coffee shops and bookstores (Newman, 2008, p. 10), does important work towards legitimating the neoliberal state's dismantling of the public sphere as a site of democratic activity, while naturalizing market expansion into previously uncommodified areas of life. As presented in *Third Generation Public Libraries*, freedom of consumer choice, including the freedom to participate in the social Web is redefining what it means to be a citizen, a worker, and a consumer. In as much as *Third Generation Public Libraries* reproduces the social identities and social relations underpinning a new power bloc between information capital and the neoliberal state, it is attempting to construct a historically consistent future for the Ontario public library as a mode of social regulation within capitalism.

Conclusion: Regulation theory's contribution
In the previous sections, we explored the ways in which Regulation theory's parallel concepts of Fordism and post-Fordism provide an analytic framework for making explicit the connection between the functioning of the public library and the dominant social relations and technologies of production and reproduction associated with a historically specific regime of accumulation. Thus, we were able to contextualise the Fordist public library within the history of the Keynesian welfare state's role in institutionalising class inequalities within a robust social welfare system. A well-funded, well-stocked, and well-staffed municipal public library that privileged the citizen identity and promoted free access to the services of a professional librarian and a range of mass-produced cultural and informational products contributed to the overall stability of the social and economic system. Similarly, our analysis of the contemporary public library highlighted some of the more contentious issues and professional challenges associated with fundamental social change in the transition to a post-Fordist regime of accumulation. The transformation of the library user from citizen to customer to information producer-consumer against an overall reduction in the province's complement of professional librarians was highlighted as one case in point. Another is the increasing pressure towards the commercialisation of the service and the activities therein.

While the insights this theoretical approach affords with respect to appreciating the political economy of the public library as an institution of the capitalist state and mode of social regulation within Fordism and an emerging post-Fordism are interesting, they do not, in and of themselves, help us to resolve some of the more pressing issues confronting the profession, nor do they help us chart a course of action and research agenda moving forward. However, it is with respect to these more pragmatic concerns associated with public library research and practice that French School Regulation theory is so well suited. It is also what serves to distinguish it from other critical and Marxist approaches.

First, as previously mentioned, French School Regulation theory is based on Marx's general theory of capitalism, however, not for the purposes originally intended by Marx, that is the replacement of capitalism with socialism. Rather, the purpose of approach, as articulated by Aglietta (2000), is to provide the tools necessary to engage society in political debate over how best to strengthen democracy, rekindle solidarity, maintain social harmony, and improve living conditions within the context of

capitalism's globalisation. Indeed, it is for this reason that the legitimacy of the approach is the subject of some serious debate among those working on the left particularly because of the assumption that the solution to the Fordist crisis resides within the context of labour's reconciliation with rather than liberation from capital (Dyer-Witheford, 1999; Pelàez and Holloway, 1991; Sivanandan, 1989). That said, for an institution of the state, the tools provide a means of critically reflecting on professional practices as they relate to the often hidden reality of class and power relations both inside and outside the institution. They also facilitate the critical reading of professional discourses for the ways in which public librarians may be inadvertently contributing to the structuring of a post-Fordist public library service that, in many ways, contradicts the profession's historical and philosophically based commitments to the values associated with liberal democracies. Second, French School Regulation theory places a premium on social agency, particularly at the grass roots and community level. As described by Jessop and Sum:

> The RA [regulationist approaches] various schools and tendencies take extra-economic and economic institutions very seriously and also recognize the transformative role of social action. For regulationists deny that there is anything automatic about periods of stability (capitalism is not self-stabilizing) or capitalist restructuring in response to crises (capitalism is not self-healing). Social agency has key roles in both regards (Jessop and Sum, 2006, p. 1).

What if, for the sake of argument, we were to take the public library's democratic mission at face value? What new possibilities might this create in contrast to its current concern with emulating the retail experience of the big box bookstore or supporting the patron's use of proprietary software systems? How might these possibilities reinvigorate an occupational group whose core competencies are being replaced by a more general set of managerial skills (marketing, advocacy, customer service). Regulation theory provides a platform from which to articulate and work constructively towards new ends starting with conditions as they exist in the here and now.

Recognizing the extreme political and economic pressures within which public libraries operate, the purpose of this kind of research is not to caution against the adoption of potentially emancipatory technologies, but rather to lay bear those instances wherein policy discourses as well as those created by public librarians and researchers contribute to a political and economic system at odds with their values through the promotion of technical innovations in aid of economic rather than the social progress. There are alternatives (see Budd, 2008) including some FOSS social networking projects and other kinds of innovative public information initiatives of relevance to public librarians who wish to serve unequivocally, a community of citizens. The value of this approach is that it arms public librarians with a set of tools with which to engage in current policy debates with eyes wide open. As a research method, it has great potential for a wide range of LIS questions and issues.

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