Academic Libraries in the Age of Vectoralism: Resisting the New Ruling Class

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ABSTRACT: Vectoralism is a way of understanding class relationships in the twenty-first century. Moving beyond a Marxist understanding of class relationships, McKenzie Wark provides new language to understand the class of which library workers are a part, the hacker class, and the new ruling class, the vectoralist class, that is dominating the organization and flows of information. Vectoralists are those that own and control the flows of capital, information, products, thoughts, and identities. This article applies Wark's theory to library specific conversations related to information access, privacy, and data. In so doing, it seeks to answer the questions: What is vectoralism? How does vectoralism apply to librarianship and what are its implications on the discipline? I illuminate how these new power dynamics manifest, providing a lens to equip library workers with a broader vision of the systems of control that operate to outflank and absorb their agency, and conclude by exploring a framework for resistance.

Keywords: vectoralism, information access, surveillance, privacy, control, platform resistance

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Introduction

In the past decade, libraries have found that their values of patron privacy, intellectual freedom, and information access are increasingly misaligned with the goals of database vendors, technology companies, institutional administrators, and state and federal governments. Over the past couple of years, we have seen this schism between values turn into a chasm. Driven by a new political regime in the United States, technology companies have aligned themselves with the political right, forgoing previous commitments to combatting misinformation, and seeking the ability to collect more and more user data. This can certainly be seen as a neoliberal move toward de-regulation of tech companies and a shift from governments providing access to information toward private entities, but the logics that are driving class dynamics and political alignments that are impacting libraries feel increasingly difficult to clearly identify through the lens of capitalism.

Capitalism has relatively clearly defined class dynamics and roles. However, it is difficult to answer questions of class and means of production ownership in the 21st century library landscape. Are library workers part of the working class? Who owns the means of production under which library workers are toiling? What is a library worker? Who is getting rich off the labor of library workers? Where do library patrons fit into an information system that extracts value from every click, scroll, or engagement? As the political, economic, and social landscape that libraries exist in shifts dramatically, a new theory of class dynamics can help library workers to better understand the societal shifts that are everywhere undermining core library values.

In this paper, I consider the application of McKenzie Wark's theory of Vectoralism to librarianship. This theory offers a new lens for understanding class-dynamics in the 21st century and insights into understanding the logics of power, control, and wealth as they relate to library values of information access, privacy, and intellectual freedom. I draw out these applications in hopes that a new lens will equip library workers with a broader vision of the systems of control that operate to outflank and absorb their agency, and I explore a framework for resistance.

Vectoralism: A New Class Dynamic

In *Capital is Dead*, McKenzie Wark asks us to consider that capitalism might not be eternal, posing the thought experiment – what if we are no longer living under capitalism? What if the power lies elsewhere? "So the bad news is: this is not capitalism anymore, it's something worse. And the Good news is: Capital is not eternal, and even if this mode of production is worse, it is not forever."[1] Wark's stance feels like a bleak take on an Ursala K. Le Guin quote, "We live in capitalism, its power seems inescapable — but then, so did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings."[2] Wark proposes that we are in fact living in something new that has subsumed capitalism: *vectoralism*. Vectoralism is a way of understanding class relationships in the twenty-first century, that argues that the new controlling powers are those that control vectors or flows. Flows of capital, yes, but also flows of information, flows of products, even flows of thoughts and identities.

[1] McKenzie Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?* (Verso, 2019), 29.
[2] "Ursula K. Le Guin — National Book Foundation Medal: Ursula's Acceptance Speech," Ursula K. Le Guin, accessed January 22, 2025, https://www.ursulakleguin.com/nbf-medal.

Wark identifies a new ruling class: the vectoralist class. "A capitalist class owns the means of production, the means of organizing labor. A vectoralist class owns the means of organizing the means of production."[3] This ownership occurs through control over vectors of information, which includes how information is routed, stored, and computed. Vectoralists own the layers of what Benjamin Bratton would refer to as the stack, from physical servers to the information and data itself.[4]

"The dominant ruling class of our time owns and controls information."[5] For Wark, controlling a flow of information or controlling a flow of resources is to control a vector. Otherwise stated, a vector is control of "the legal and technical protocols for making otherwise abundant information scarce."[6] As information and information technology became abundant in the 21st century, the development of vectoralism as a ruling class came as an answer to the questions of how monopolies, banks, and governments could "maintain forms of class inequality, oppression, domination, and exploitation based on some-thing that in principle is now ridiculously abundant."[7] Wark gives the example of Walmart, a massive corporation that represents the shift from owning the means of production to owning the flows of logistics and information. Walmart has as many large data centers as it does physical distribution centers and exemplifies the vectoralist mode of commodification and control of information in its extractive practices, not just of surplus value from its laborers, but of surplus information (data) from its shoppers.[8]

While Nick Srnicek would disagree that we have left capitalism, his theory of platform capitalism helps illustrate what Wark refers to as the vectoralist class. For Srnicek, the ruling capitalist class driving the economy operates platforms that serve to seize ownership of the immaterial and material components that support production. Rather than owning the products themselves, platform capitalists (vectoralists), generate capital by renting out the digital infrastructure and services necessary to generate products, collecting the raw material of the new digital economy, data, at every possible extraction point. "Far from being mere owners of information, these companies are becoming owners of the infrastructure of society."[9]

Jodi Dean provides additional contrast to Wark's arguments. Dean agrees that we are presently in something that feels worse for most workers than capitalism but argues that we are in more of a neofeudal era. For Dean, "we are in a period of transition where profit, improvement, and competitive advantage no longer dictate accumulation strategies. Instead, rents, destruction, and hoarding combine with extra-economic coercion in a neofeudal social formation driven by privilege and dependence."[10] While Dean's argument directly contrasts Wark's, her analysis at times supports Wark's argument. Particularly helpful for us is an understanding of the new ruling class's drive toward hoarding information for purposes of control, rather than use of information for improvement.

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[3] Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?*, 114.
[4] Benjamin H. Bratton, *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty*, Software Studies (MIT Press, 2015).
[5] Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?*, 5.
[6] Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?*, 45.
[7] Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?*, 5–6.
[8] Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?*, 8–9.
[9] Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism* (Polity, 2017), 92.
[10] Jodi Dean, *Capital's Grave* (Verso, 2025), 6.

Writing of vectoralism, Kelsey Sucena provides examples of vectors. “This arrangement makes itself evident in everything from Amazon (with its complex networks of shipping), Disney (with its platforms and its growing catalog of intellectual properties), Social Media platforms (with their virtual monopolies of online information flows), and the financial market (moving money across spread sheets from one investment to the next).”[11] Vectors that will be familiar to librarians include academic and scientific research, popular media and news, personal information, public health information, legal information, and financial information.

If class relationships are shifting, where do academic library workers fit in? Srnicek draws on the Italian autonomism movement to clarify, “the traditional industrial working class is increasingly replaced by *knowledge workers*, or the ‘cognitariat.’”[12] Wark builds on these complexities: “Intellectual property law becomes the form of a new kind of relation of production, more abstract than its predecessors, and one that makes not land or physical plant, but rather information itself, a form of private property.”[13]

In place of the capitalist and the worker relationship produced by private ownership of the means of production, or the landlord and the farmer relationship produced by private ownership of land; private ownership of information produces a new relationship: vectoralist class and *hacker* class.[14] Wark uses the common term, hacker, in a distinct way that was originally fleshed out in *A Hacker Manifesto.*

> We produce new concepts, new perceptions, new sensations, hacked out of raw data. Whatever code we hack, be it programming language, poetic language, math or music, curves or colorings, we are the abstracters of new worlds. Whether we come to represent ourselves as researchers or authors, artists or biologists, chemists or musicians, philosophers or programmers, each of these subjectivities is but a fragment of a class still becoming, bit by bit, aware of itself as such.[15]

Hackers, also referred to as knowledge workers, are a semi-privileged class that create new information from old information. Rather than selling their labor, it is the new information that hackers must sell, or in many cases give, to the vectoralist class. “Like the farmer and the worker, the hacker does not usually end up owning the product of her efforts.”[16] The vectoralist class leverages archaic intellectual property law in order to control the production of the hacker class, which is converted “into property that can be rendered equivalent in the market.”[17] Wark’s conceptualization of the hacker clearly includes creators of new information, and building on her conception, I include consumers of information and generators of data in the hacker class. Accessing information is not a passive act; rather the act of engaging with and consuming information is transformational in itself. The vectoralist class does not just harvest data from and

[11] Kelsey Sucena, *Harvesting Data: American Hegemony and the Course of Empire*, ed. Anthony Nguyen (Alf eds, 2023), 9, https://www.rivalryprojects.com/s/Harvesting-Data_Sucena_2024.pdf.
[12] Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*, 38.
[13] Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?*, 42.
[14] Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?*, 43.
[15] McKenzie Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto* (Harvard University Press, 2004), 14, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/herr-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3300116.
[16] Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?*, 44.
[17] Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?*, 116.

seek to control content creators, but also those that access information and create data in their daily actions. As a result, we can imagine the hacker class in many forms, but most relevant to librarianship will be authors, researchers, professors, library workers, consumers of information, and generators of data.

The hacker-vectoralist class relationship begins to clarify some familiar and some new power dynamics: universities-governments, libraries-universities, teachers-universities, scholars-publishers, library workers-data base vendors, libraries-server and analytics companies, library workers-library administration and patrons-data cartels. Through my exploration and application of vectoralism to contemporary academic libraries, I hope to illuminate how these new power dynamics manifest in systems of control that envelop the work of academic library workers.

Vectoralism and Information Control

Let us take a familiar example as our point of departure: the relationships between the academic information publisher, the researcher, and the academic library. This plot is not new: a researcher gets public funding from their university and/or grants to do research that will impact the public good. The researcher spends some of their salaried time working on the research, but also gives countless, undocumented hours of their unpaid time to the research. The researcher completes the research, writes it up in an article, then submits their work to a journal where it is reviewed by two peer-reviewers who also use a combination of their publicly funded salaries and their own unpaid time to evaluate the publication submission. The work is accepted and a publication date is set. The author receives their publication agreement, in which the publisher asks that they sign away their ownership of the official publication, which they do because they need to publish to be granted tenure, promotion, and job stability. The publisher then places the article behind a paywall, charging individuals to access the journal, and working with database vendors to provide access to academic libraries through exorbitantly priced journal packages.[18] In this instance, the publisher is acting in the role of the vectoralist, while the researcher takes on the role of the hacker. The hacker creates new information, while the vectoralist seizes and controls the flows of information, capitalizing on the long-established process of academic publishing's publicly funded and freely given labor.

For Wark, vectoralist control is about controlling *flows*. This language is paralleled by Sarah Lamden: "Information is the life-blood of the internet, the substance that flows through those cables, cords, and tubes – the arteries of our digital world."[19] In her book *Data Cartels*, Lamden identifies companies that are "messing with the internet's circulatory system."[20] These companies are making information that should be public, private and information that should be private, public.

While libraries and advocates for open access are seeking ways to expand the flow of academic information, the blocking of information arteries is causing real world death. This can be seen in

[18] "Open Access," *SPARC*, n.d., accessed November 24, 2025, https://sparcopen.org/open-access/; Stephen Buranyi, "Is the Staggeringly Profitable Business of Scientific Publishing Bad for Science?," Science, *The Guardian*, June 27, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/jun/27/profitable-business-scientific-publishing-bad-for-science.
[19] Sarah Lamdan, *Data Cartels: The Companies That Control and Monopolize Our Information* (Stanford University Press, 2023), 1.
[20] Lamdan, *Data Cartels*, 2.

the recent history of the United States, where distrust in vaccination and unfounded claims about natural disasters, informed by rampant misinformation, impacted people's life and death choices. But the lack of access to academic information disproportionately impacts people in postcolonial countries. For example, scientists in Tanzania cannot afford access to the most recent research on malaria, keeping the Tanzanians at deadly risk of contracting malaria.[21] In this instance we see the vectoralists as those that are controlling access to vital academic and medical information, in relationship to the hacker class, those that would access and use this information, but do not have control over their own access: scientists, doctors, and the public.

Newer models of vectoralist control of information are captured in what Jeff Pooley and Danielle Colbert-Lewis et al. identify as surveillance publishing, and what Lai Ma identifies as the platformisation of scholarly information.[22]

> In scholarly publishing, a small number of companies with market dominance have been able to capture and use the surplus value created through the publishing lifecycle. This extraction – of academic labour, of data, of information—is then reinvested into their proprietary data analytics products, which are repackaged and sold back to universities with the promise of ranking the research output of both individual researchers and the institution as a whole. This is surveillance publishing.[23]

These surveillance/platform publishers leverage platformisation of scholarly information to stymy the moves of open access advocates to ensure that the circulation of publicly funded research is bottlenecked. Large publishers recently shifted toward a platform model, mirroring YouTube or Spotify, creating a system with two key features: "one is the datafication and the commodification of user contents (scholarly publications) and personal data, and the other is the loss of negotiating power in creating standards, values, and norms of knowledge production."[24] Platform publishers, operating as vectoralists, choke out the article submission flow to journals with diamond open access publishing models by including in their platform the tools that generate the citation metrics used for research assessments and the journals with the highest citation impacts. Assessment metrics are a new vectoralist development in platform publishing that leverage legacy journals with established reputations. If a researcher needs to publish in high impact journals to maintain their career, they are forced to sacrifice their values of information access by submitting to journals that either do not publish open access, or utilize a gold open access model that uses article publishing charges to generate revenue for the platform.

Vectoralism, Personal Data, and Privacy

As demonstrated in the move from big deal publishing packages to surveillance publishing,

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[21] Lamdan, *Data Cartels*, 16.
[22] Jeff Pooley, "Surveillance Publishing," *The Journal of Electronic Publishing* 25, no. 1 (2022): 1, https://doi.org/10.3998/jep.1874; Danielle Colbert-Lewis et al., "The Citation Economy as a Site of Extraction for Surveillance Publishing," *Canadian Journal of Academic Librarianship* 10 (December 2024): 1–22, https://doi.org/10.33137/cjal-rcbu.v10.43293; Lai Ma, "The Platformisation of Scholarly Information and How to Fight It," *LIBER Quarterly: The Journal of the Association of European Research Libraries* 33, no. 1 (2023): 1, https://doi.org/10.53377/lq.13561.
[23] Colbert-Lewis et al., "The Citation Economy as a Site of Extraction for Surveillance Publishing," 5.
[24] Ma, "The Platformisation of Scholarly Information and How to Fight It," 2.

vectoralists are shifting their mode of profit and control from simply owning information artifacts to also harvesting, compiling, and controlling personal and behavioral data. Lamdan helpfully breaks personal information into two types: information used for commercial purposes and information used for institutional purposes. Institutionally used information exerts control over different populations in society, while commercially harvested information is used to dictate control over markets. As personal information is collated and fed into algorithms for explicit and implicit control, we see core elements of human identity controlled by vectoralist logics.

Focusing on academic libraries, Lamden identifies how personal data is used for institutional purposes. She explores the ways that Reed, Elsevier, Lexis Nexis (RELX) and Thomson Reuters, companies that have transitioned from identifying as academic information providers to "risk analytics" companies, function as data cartels that collect personal information from internet and library database users to create data dossiers that are sold to government agencies, law enforcement, banks, and other interested buyers. Again, we see Lamdan using language that parallels Wark's as they both consider the ways that the new ruling classes are diverging from past capitalist practices.

> Data analytics companies capitalize on the invisible, ethereal products of our minds. Industrialists profited from mining, logging, and other trades that strip value from our land, but unlike historical extractive ventures, data isn't cut from trees or extracted from earth, it's harvested from humans. Companies like RELX and Thomson Reuters appropriate our informational labor. They siphon intellectual and social output, co-opting our artistic and scholarly work and vacuuming up the digital exhaust we release through our wearable devices and online activities.[25]

While the line between commercial driven use of personal data and larger institutional data usage is often blurry, it is helpful to continue using Lamdan's division. Data analytics companies harvest personal information with and without consent, compile it, and package it into data dossiers, and sell it to groups that use it for "risk assessment." Data cartel patrons include government agencies, law enforcement, insurance agencies, employers, and banks.[26] The risk levels that they establish based on personal information impact the largest decisions that people make about their lives by informing decisions that others make about them and limiting the decisions they can make for themselves. Based on these data dossiers banks determine whether to grant loans or credit lines, employers make hiring decisions, insurance agencies make coverage determinations, government agencies decide whether or not to provide services, and law enforcement make decisions about surveillance and policing to inform arrests, prosecutions, and deportations.[27] Wark identifies this ownership of personal information as "a whole political economy that runs on asymmetries of information as a form of control."[28]

While data analytics companies function as the vectoralist class with control over data flows, their patrons also take on a controlling role as they purchase data dossiers for implementation in

[25] Lamdan, *Data Cartels*, 6.
[26] Lamdan, *Data Cartels*, 2.
[27] Lamdan, *Data Cartels*; Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor* (St. Martin's Press, 2018).
[28] Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?*, 3.

control of society. Data dossiers are used to determine human rights, freedoms, and what people have access to. In the following section, I illuminate the connections between these data brokers and academic libraries, but first I will tease apart the ways vectoralist data practices contradict the academic library values of equity, privacy, and intellectual freedom.

As information professionals, sociologists, and critical theorists teach us, these new technologies will recreate systems of inequality long embedded in our society.[29] Virginia Eubanks draws an apt analogy to the institution of the poorhouse in the United States, showing how new digital tools draw on historic models of policing, governing, and oppressing poor people, creating a new digital poorhouse, in which personal data is weaponized against already marginalized groups, arguing, "It is mere fantasy to think that a statistical model or a ranking algorithm will magically upend culture, policies, and institutions built over centuries."[30]

Building on Ahmad Sa'di's work on the importance of surveillance to the colonial state's oppression of the colonized person, Colbert-Lewis et al. argue that "the ongoing expansion of this colonial gaze is also required to quell forms of resistance and insurgency that threaten profits sustained through extraction."[31] To this end, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and state and federal police programs use personal data and societal data to inform their policing practices. Policing through data has not led to decreases in crime but has "embedded the discriminatory policing problems […] into digital policing infrastructure."[32] Jackie Wang provides an exploration of how this manifests in the program Predictive Policing, officially known as PredPol. PredPol operates by using past crime data to predict hot spots in space and time for criminal activity, which are then more heavily policed. Predicted crime hot spot areas were used as reasonable suspicion for policing people's activities. The history of social racism in the United States, manifests as statistical racism in crime data.[33] Just as Cedric J Robinson argues that capitalism is fundamentally about extraction of social and economic value from marginalized, particularly black, people; Wang and Eubanks illustrate how vectoralism uses surveillance and police to continue this racial extraction.[34] As I will show, academic libraries are bound up in this practice that contradicts the library value of equity.

Considering privacy and intellectual freedom, Shoshan, Zuboff's *Surveillance Capitalism* helps us understand the ways in which commercial motivation remakes broader societal information in its own image. Personal information collected for commercial purposes is used by vectoralists to predict and dictate the direction of the market for the consumer.

> The world's liberal democracies now confront a tragedy of the "un-commons." Information spaces that people assume to be public are strictly ruled by private commercial interests for maximum profit. The internet as a self-regulating market has been revealed as a failed experiment. Surveillance capitalism leaves a trail of social

[29] Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (University Press, 2018); Jackie Wang, *Carceral Capitalism* (Semiotext(e), 2018); Eubanks, *Automating Inequality*.
[30] Eubanks, *Automating Inequality*, 178.
[31] Colbert-Lewis et al., "The Citation Economy as a Site of Extraction for Surveillance Publishing," 3.
[32] Lamdan, *Data Cartels*, 30.
[33] Wang, *Carceral Capitalism*, 249.
[34] Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism*, Third edition (The University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

> wreckage in its wake: the wholesale destruction of privacy, the intensification of social inequality, the poisoning of social discourse with defactualized information, the demolition of social norms and the weakening of democratic institutions.[35]

Zuboff traces the trajectory of companies like Google and Facebook as they transitioned from service providers to data extractors, or what Wark would call vectoralists. Both companies quickly realized that they could reap massive profits by first extracting user data, then by *predicting* user data. "Human data are the raw material and predictions of human behavior are the product."[36]

As personal data is harvested and commodified, the vectoralist extracts value from personal data generated in everyday activity. Wark likens this to a scene from *The Matrix*, in which Neo realizes that he is not the hacker he thought he was, instead awakening to find he is one individual in a sea of humans imprisoned in pods of goo with siphoning chords slurping energy from the back of their heads to feed the machine overlords.[37] "You make the information, but like some kind of info-prole, you don't own the information you produce or the means of realizing its value."[38] What is worse is that people may not even realize this is happening or how it is shaping their identities.

Theorizing privacy from a library instruction perspective, Sarah Hartman-Caverly and Alexandria Chisholm use a guiding philosophy on personal data and privacy: "Privacy is about respect for persons, not about protecting data."[39] While protecting personal data is a part of establishing privacy, understanding how data impacts the entire person is important to considering privacy and data. Hartman-Caverly and Chisholm consider privacy to be a value system, showing how personal data is inextricably interwoven with human identity, intellect, integrity, intimacy, and interaction/isolation. Each of what they call the Six Private I's make up an integral part of the individual, with identity as the metaphysical defining core. In vectoralist terms, each of these private I's would represent a vector of information along which vectoralists commodify and extract personal information.

Hartman-Caverly and Chisholm explore the data double, "an algorithmic construct based on analysis and modeling of an individual's personal data footprint and to which the living individual is continuously compared, held accountable, and finetuned."[40] The data double creates a digital shadow of the individual's social interactions and intimate life and health, but it transcends the role of shadow as it develops agency over the actual individual by exerting influence and control over their freedom, thoughts, and core identity. Data doubles already exist

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[35] Shoshana Zuboff, "Opinion | You Are the Object of a Secret Extraction Operation," Opinion, *The New York Times*, November 12, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/12/opinion/facebook-privacy.html.
[36] Zuboff, "Opinion | You Are the Object of a Secret Extraction Operation."
[37] Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?*, 40.
[38] Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?*, 4.
[39] Alexandria Chisholm and Sarah Hartman-Caverly, eds., *Practicing Privacy Literacy in Academic Libraries: Theories, Methods, and Cases* (Chicago: ALA, 2023).
[40] Alexandria Chisholm and Sarah Hartman-Caverly, "Privacy as Respect for Persons: Reimagining Privacy Literacy with the Six Private I's Privacy Conceptual Framework," in *Practicing Privacy Literacy in Academic Libraries : Theories, Methods, and Cases*, ed. Alexandria Chisholm and Sarah Hartman-Caverly (ALA, 2023), 7, doi:10.26207/5vvn-cw51.

across diverse platforms, but OpenAI CEO Sam Altman sees a future in which a single AI platform could serve to further record individual identities, ideating an AI reasoning model that records everything about one's life including conversations, books read, and emails received.[41] Built on privacy violations, the vectoralist class pushes beyond the destruction of intellectual freedom. Vectoralists extract and commodify personal data to create data doubles that manipulate the reality of human identity in favor of a controlled and commodified subject.

"To the vector the spoils."[42]

Academic Library Complicity with Vectoralism

Academic libraries play a distinct role in this new class dynamic, often acting as reifying agents for the power and control of the vectoralist class. Caught between the demands of the federal and state government, accrediting bodies, university administration, library administration, and publishers and database vendors, library workers are forced to concede to vectoralist values and demands. While the Association for College and Research Libraries (ACRL) frames providing information access, ensuring patron privacy, and fighting for intellectual freedom as the domain of the library, vectoralism allows us to understand that external forces now exert control over these arenas.

To better understand where the academic library worker fits in, we can use a vectoralist lens to disaggregate the power dynamics in academic libraries and better understand the motivations that are driving library functions. Acknowledging that each academic library is slightly different, a cursory power mapping exercise can help reveal the influences on library workers that make daily, boots on the ground decisions.

Library workers consist of a varied group that, in a classical Marxist sense, fall into different classes. This group includes librarians, technical specialists, library assistants, and pages. While it is important to acknowledge the differences in the material conditions across these workers, for this analysis, all library workers fall within the definition of the hacker class. In this analysis, library workers are a distinct group from library administrators, which include library managers, directors, and deans. This group is more difficult to define in terms of the hacker/vectoralist dichotomy, as they could certainly fit within the definition of the hacker, but their role within the university inherently pulls them into the logic of vectoralism.

Library workers do not report to but are answerable to, the desires and needs of teaching faculty and students on their campuses. Library workers directly, or via supervisors, report to library administrators that report to university administrators. University administrators report to the university board of trustees members and need to maintain good standing for the institution with their accrediting bodies. Academic accrediting bodies are accountable to the federal government. As we move up this power chain, the institutional values shift away from library values toward vectoralist ones. In this power mapping exercise, let us consider how the different parties

[41] Julie Bort, "Sam Altman's Goal for ChatGPT to Remember 'your Whole Life' Is Both Exciting and Disturbing," *TechCrunch*, May 15, 2025, https://techcrunch.com/2025/05/15/sam-altmans-goal-for-chatgpt-to-remember-your-whole-life-is-both-exciting-and-disturbing/.
[42] Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?*, 11.

approach academic freedom, privacy, and access to information.

In recent years we have seen federal and state governments bypassing accrediting bodies to directly intervene and exert control over universities and academic libraries. While this has no doubt had a devastating impact on academic freedom and scientific research, the blunt force approach of President Trump and state governments like Texas and Florida can be seen as a ham-fisted attempt at control that is more eloquently executed by vectoralists. Vectoralists exert control over intellectual freedom, information access, and privacy through networks of information control that are less readily visible and more difficult to directly confront.

Like under capitalism, government agencies are not the ruling class, rather they prop up and align themselves with the vectoralist class. Government agencies directly purchase data dossiers from vectoralists and actively work to expand the surveillance apparatus and thus encourage increased data collection by the vectoralist class. Government interest in data collection is passed on to accrediting bodies and university administrators. This power dynamic has led to university adoption of vectoralist logics. Higher education's embrace of data extraction via learning analytics without full ethical considerations for student privacy is one example.[43]

The will of university administrators is passed on to library administrators who sometimes have library backgrounds and other times come from backgrounds with different core values.[44] Under pressure from peers (fellow college or school administrators) and upper administration (cabinet, provost, or president) at their institutions, academic library administrators are increasingly leading libraries to engage with learning analytics.[45] Flying in the face of privacy values touted in the Library Bill of Rights and the IFLA Statement on Privacy in the Library Environment, these learning analytics capture personal demographic and sensitive student information, presenting serious concerns about algorithmic bias, reidentification, surveillance, and vectoralist control.[46]

Library workers may find themselves in the awkward position of serving students and faculty that are interested in advancing the rapid growth of vectoralism. Universities are more focused on post-graduation employment than ever, and employment with vectoralist organizations is increasingly seen as desirable by students.

It is within these complex power dynamics that the library worker is situated. Pressured by vectoralist logics on all sides, library workers must make daily decisions and work on long term projects that directly impact information access, patron privacy, and academic freedom. Ultimately, these power dynamics often lead library workers to concede to the demands of publishers, enabling the continued privatization and mass paywalling of publicly funded

[43] Kyle M. L. Jones et al., "'We're Being Tracked at All Times': Student Perspectives of Their Privacy in Relation to Learning Analytics in Higher Education," *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 71, no. 9 (2020): 1044–59, https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.24358.
[44] Starr Hoffman, "The Preparation of Academic Library Administrators," in *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (Ph.D., University of North Texas, 2012), https://www.proquest.com/docview/1437661628/abstract/994C7BAA58A34B5BPQ/1.
[45] Kyle M. L. Jones et al., "A Comprehensive Primer to Library Learning Analytics Practices, Initiatives, and Privacy Issues," *College & Research Libraries* 81, no. 3 (2020): 3, https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.81.3.570.
[46] Jones et al., "A Comprehensive Primer to Library Learning Analytics Practices, Initiatives, and Privacy Issues."

scientific information.[47] Newer models of platform and surveillance publishing illustrate how libraries are enmeshed in systems of data extraction.[48]

Despite privacy being a core value of librarianship, libraries have started to play an active role in the vectoralist collection of personal information.[49] Corporations that collect, package, and sell personal information for institutional purposes are commonly referred to as data brokers, but could be more accurately referred to using Lamdan's language: data cartels.[50] Academic libraries work closely with several of these data cartels. Thomson Reuters and Reed, Elsevier, Lexis Nexis (RELX), in addition to being database vendors, collect personal information from internet (and library database) users to create data dossiers that are sold to government agencies, law enforcement, banks, and other interested buyers like Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).[51]

The Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) has analyzed the data privacy risks of different library vendors and found that both RELX's Science Direct and SpringerLink's Springer Nature violate the library commitment to privacy as illustrated in the ALA Code of Ethics, Library Bill of Rights, and the IFLA Statement on Privacy in the Library Environment.[52] ScienceDirect and SpringerLink both use web beacons, cookies, and other web surveillance methods to record user behavior on and beyond their websites.[53] The case study of Science Direct is meaningful, as Elsevier is one of the largest database vendors for many academic libraries. Elsevier's Science Direct collects personal data such as behavioral data from its own tracking and third-party sources. This personal data can be pulled from huge data aggregators and profilers like Google, Adobe, and Cloudflare. According to the privacy policy from 2023, Science Direct could collect and disclose location data, sensitive personal information, and inference data that informs individual data profiles to third parties as well as within RELX for use in their risk assessment products.[54] While SpringerLink does not operate its own data analytics and risk assessment services, it allows external companies, including advertisers and data brokers, to collect user data to build profiles about users.[55] While SPARC was unable to definitively confirm that the personal data harvested from Science Direct is used for data brokering, their privacy policies allows for that possibility. Given that the vectoralist predictive risk assessment products arm of RELX has outstripped the academic information arm

[47] Lamdan, *Data Cartels*.
[48] Colbert-Lewis et al., "The Citation Economy as a Site of Extraction for Surveillance Publishing."
[49] American Library Association, "ALA Code of Ethics," June 29, 2021, https://www.ala.org/tools/ethics; International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, "IFLA Statement on Privacy in the Library Environment," August 14, 2015, https://www.ifla.org/publications/ifla-statement-on-privacy-in-the-library-environment/.
[50] Sarah Lamdan, *Data Cartels: The Companies That Control and Monopolize Our Information* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2023), 28.
[51] Lamdan, *Data Cartels*, 2.
[52] Becky Yoose and Nick Shockey, *Navigating Risk in Vendor Data Privacy Practices: An Analysis of Elsevier's ScienceDirect* (SPARC, 2023), https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10078610; Becky Yoose and Nick Shockey, *Navigating Risk in Vendor Data Privacy Practices: An Analysis of Springer Nature's SpringerLink* (SPARC, 2024), https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13886473.
[53] Yoose and Shockey, *Navigating Risk in Vendor Data Privacy Practices* (2023); Yoose and Shockey, *Navigating Risk in Vendor Data Privacy Practices* (2024).
[54] Yoose and Shockey, *Navigating Risk in Vendor Data Privacy Practices* (2023).
[55] Yoose and Shockey, *Navigating Risk in Vendor Data Privacy Practices* (2024).

in profitability, it stands to reason that library user data is included in their practices of collecting, packaging, and selling data.[56]

Database vendors are not the only ones embracing vectoralist logics. Universities are implementing learning analytics and other forms of data tracking for students that go against library principles of privacy and can violate the trust of students.[57] "One of the major problems with privacy in academia is that it has not always been a concern at an institutional level. It does limited good for the library to protect users if every other unit on campus is gathering and compiling data about student use of other systems on campus, such as learning management platforms."[58] While many universities have adopted learning analytics that stay focused on student learning, some universities collect and share data that goes beyond education.

> For example, Northeastern University, St. Louis University, Arizona State University, and the University of Texas at Dallas started initiatives using Amazon Echo dots, whose Alexa personal assistant can retrieve campus information, and in some cases, get personalized information from SISs. Both Amazon and these institutions gained access to student data.[59]

Academic library administrators are pressured to contribute to learning analytics efforts on campuses in order to support institutional initiatives and prove library value to university administrators, which is accompanied by encouragement from the ACRL to expand and contribute to campus wide data capture efforts.[60] Learning analytics data often contain personally identifiable information, and libraries and universities that utilize learning analytics keep this data for long periods of time without knowledge of how it needs to be secured, which increases the risk for breach of privacy through data leaks or misuse.[61] Guidance at the university level from Institutional Review Boards do not provide ethical regulations that meet the same standards of privacy laid out in library professional standards like the ALA Code of Ethics. With guidance from ACRL that encourages contributions to learning analytics efforts on campus, it is up to individual library systems to identify their own paths forward, and the research indicates that few institutions have clearly defined library-wide privacy policies that address learning analytics.[62] Universities, and in turn academic libraries, in their efforts to better retain and graduate students, adopt vectoralist values in favor of protecting student privacy.

It is crucial for students to be able to have a voice in how their personal data is collected and used in education. Instruction librarians have begun to address surveillance by teaching privacy literacy, but there are looming problems for academic libraries and privacy literacy.[63] The theory

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[56] Yoose and Shockey, *Navigating Risk in Vendor Data Privacy Practices* (2023).
[57] Jones et al., "'We're Being Tracked at All Times.'"
[58] Margaret Heller, "Building a Culture of Privacy through Collaborative Policy Development," in *Practicing Privacy Literacy in Academic Libraries : Theories, Methods, and Cases*, ed. Alexandria Chisholm and Sarah Hartman-Caverly (ALA, 2023).
[59] Jones et al., "A Comprehensive Primer to Library Learning Analytics Practices, Initiatives, and Privacy Issues," 572.
[60] Jones et al., "A Comprehensive Primer to Library Learning Analytics Practices, Initiatives, and Privacy Issues."
[61] Jones et al., "A Comprehensive Primer to Library Learning Analytics Practices, Initiatives, and Privacy Issues."
[62] Jones et al., "A Comprehensive Primer to Library Learning Analytics Practices, Initiatives, and Privacy Issues."
[63] Andrew Weiss, "Libraries, Privacy, and Surveillance Capitalism: The Looming Trouble with Academia and

of vectoralism allows us to understand how academic libraries are enlisted to actively assist the vectoralist goals of extraction and control of personal data. Library instructors promote tools that extract personal information from patrons, while at the same time teaching patrons privacy literacy, putting the onus for digital hygiene on the user. Continued partnerships with learning analytics companies and database providers that track user behavior enables the companies to implement their extractive practices. Library workers do not hold the power to make unilateral contractual decisions, and library administrators are pressured by peers and university administrators to accept data extraction as a byproduct of institutional tools. In some instances, database providers like RELX may be the only provider of content required for academic programs to be accredited.

Library privacy advocates recognize that protecting privacy will require systemic overhauls that extend beyond the walls of the library. Hartman-Caverly and Chisholm point to the work of Yong Jin Park who argues that "a four-pronged approach to privacy is necessary in order to avoid an encroaching future of totalitarian digital surveillance: privacy by design, privacy by market, privacy by law, and privacy by norm."[64] However, privacy driven by design and market would require that companies respond to demands from consumers for respect of privacy. As Park acknowledges, and as is illustrated by Zuboff, companies stand to profit by harvesting personal data and in turn using that data to control the market itself.[65]

Andrew Weiss argues that privacy by law might be achievable following the models of the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation, California's Consumer Privacy Act, and Vermont General Assembly guidance on privacy.[66] Srnicek echoes these calls in his conclusion of *Platform Capitalism*, suggesting state intervention to break up monopolies; state regulation of exploitative platforms and data collection, imposing privacy controls; and state creation of open platforms owned and operated by the people.[67] However, the time for government intervention may have passed as tech companies that rely on data extraction align themselves with the Trump administration.[68] For Mark Zuckerberg and Meta, the hope is "that Trump use the power of the U.S. government to defend Meta abroad — for instance, from the huge fines that the European Union has imposed on it for violating data privacy and antitrust rules."[69]

Academic Libraries are in an existential crisis, bound by institutional and governmental power dynamics to participate in extractive vectoralist practices, undermining library identities as their ability to adhere to core library values is eroded. Beyond the identity crisis that this presents, it

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Invasive Information Technology," in *Practicing Privacy Literacy in Academic Libraries : Theories, Methods, and Cases*, ed. Alexandria Chisholm and Sarah Hartman-Caverly (Chicago: ALA, 2023).

[64] Chisholm and Hartman-Caverly, "Privacy as Respect for Persons: Reimagining Privacy Literacy with the Six Private I's Privacy Conceptual Framework," 4.

[65] Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, First edition. (PublicAffairs, 2019).

[66] Andrew Weiss, "Libraries, Privacy, and Surveillance Capitalism: The Looming Trouble with Academia and Invasive Information Technology," in *Practicing Privacy Literacy in Academic Libraries : Theories, Methods, and Cases*, ed. Alexandria Chisholm and Sarah Hartman-Caverly (ALA, 2023), 115–16.

[67] Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*, 127–28.

[68] Joseph Cox, "Google Has Chosen a Side in Trump's Mass Deportation Effort," 404 Media, November 13, 2025, https://www.404media.co/google-has-chosen-a-side-in-trumps-mass-deportation-effort/.

[69] Zeynep Tufekci, "Zuckerberg's Macho Posturing Looks a Lot Like Cowardice," Opinion, *The New York Times*, January 15, 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/15/opinion/mark-zuckerberg-donald-trump.html.

may lead to a larger public perception issue. If they do not push back on surveillance, libraries run the risk of being seen as an extension of corporate and governmental surveillance: "If libraries become seen as another part of a state-sponsored surveillance apparatus, or an exploitative for-profit data mining endeavor, their modern reputations as open and generally inclusive organizations serving the public good will assuredly suffer."[70]

Resistance

The global technological, political, and economic landscape is rapidly evolving and shifting. The Trump administration has worked quickly to destabilize academia, scientific research, the arts, and the already precarious global information ecosystem. This destabilization is compounded by the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence capabilities and infrastructures that act as an accelerating agent for vectoralist control over intellectual property, access to personal and behavioral data, and further development of predictive technologies. The political and corporate decision making that we have seen play out over the past few years does not consistently follow the logic of capitalism and neoliberalism, but we can begin to better understand it through the logic of vectoralism: as an ongoing effort to seek control over data, information, and people at all costs.

The dichotomy of the vectoralist and the hacker class helps us understand new power dynamics and situates the library worker firmly in the hacker class. Worker resistance to capitalism has been outflanked by the development of the vectoralist class. We see this outflanking action paralleled in library workers fighting for library values of privacy, information access, and intellectual freedom but bound by powers structures that leave decision making to administrators that are actively adopting vectoralist values. To understand how library workers can proactively resist vectoralism and stand up for library values, they must understand themselves as working within the hacker class: faculty, researchers, global knowledge workers, and students. In the conclusion of her book, Wark quips "Workings of the world untie! You have a win to world!"[71] This is a humorous play on the Communist Manifesto's call to action that at first appears to have jumbled Marx and Engels's words into something meaningless. Nevertheless, let us for a moment consider what it would mean to untie the workings of the world, to untangle the vectoralist networks of control.

Extrapolation

Vectoralism, like capitalism, is failing to recognize the prevailing material conditions of the Anthropocene. Like late-stage capitalism, vectoralism driving us towards the destruction of the planet, albeit by means of different logics. While it might be argued that capitalism is unaware of its death drive, the vectoralist class is one which controls the creation and dissemination of the research that would reveal the reality of climate destruction that that awaits our world. For Wark it is imperative that the hacker class recognize this.

> Once more, there is a moment in which the scientifically trained start to ask questions about the system within which their knowledge is being exploited. Only this time it's not

[70] Weiss, "Libraries, Privacy, and Surveillance Capitalism: The Looming Trouble with Academia and Invasive Information Technology," 115.
[71] Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?*, 169.

> poison gas or nuclear weapons or DDET, it's the whole process of vectoral and commodified production and consumption that is called into question, which has become more and more abstract and less and less rational.[72]

Library workers and the hacker class must reckon with the death drive of capitalism turned vectoralism. Wark proposes two ways of embracing this – the positive form of *extrapolation* and the negative form of *inertia*. In this paper, I focus on her theory of extrapolation.

Extrapolation draws on Joseph Needham's work as a biologist and a radical political actor. Needham took an interdisciplinary view of the world, making connections between the social-technical and the biological-physical, which ran counter to the Royal Society and its understanding of information creation, much like library ideas of information access and scholarly communication run counter to the hegemonic information control of the vectoralist class. While extrapolation represents the positive, inertia represents the negative. "Extrapolation opens exciting possibilities for thinking and acting collaboratively to build another civilization, here in the ruins of this one. Inertia is a sobering reminder of how hard that is going to be."[73]

Extrapolation provides a way of organizing across the hacker class. However, libraries and library workers exist within institutions that are bound by the demands of faculty, publishers, accrediting bodies, and the state. Not all of those that fit into the hacker class will see the value in resisting vectoralism. Building a future that values privacy, intellectual freedom, and access to information will require imagination, the very same imagination that is being stripped away by vectoralist efforts at control via data doubles and surveillance capitalism.[74] Ruha Benjamin helps us see the value in imagination and building toward collective imaginaries that feel inaccessible in the moment. "An *imaginary* refers to collective projections of a desirable and feasible future. I find myself invoking imaginaries when I want to cast a critical light on the imposition of a dominant imagination that presents itself as appealing and universal."[75]

In lieu of proposing organizing actions, Wark points to a framework that the hacker class can use to incorporate extrapolation and build toward the future: comradely production of knowledge, centering and liberating knowledge of the oppressed, subverting technology to reveal reality, and an alliance between producers of difference.

In the following sections I take cues from Benjamin and explore possible manifestations of Wark's framework for future building that I hope will inspire library worker and hacker imagination. Library workers cannot build the future alone, but they have the tools and discipline to help the hacker class imagine something different.

Comradely Production of Knowledge

Wark draws on Andrey Platanov to point toward a way of thinking that uses extrapolation to

[72] Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?*, 120–21.
[73] Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?*, 17.
[74] Chisholm and Hartman-Caverly, "Privacy as Respect for Persons: Reimagining Privacy Literacy with the Six Private I's Privacy Conceptual Framework"; Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*.
[75] Ruha Benjamin, *Imagination: A Manifesto* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2024), 1.

build "a more collaborative and comradely production of knowledge."[76] This notion is illustrated by Platanov's work *Chevengur* which tells the story of the Soviet Union, from the perspective of orphans rather than that of the proletariat. This exemplifies knowledge production that transcends classic knowledge authority constructions and focuses on unifying consumers and creators of information. Through this vision for the hacker class, library workers can begin to identify with the global body of information consumers, library patrons, and people whose data is being harvested.

The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) provides one example of working toward comradely production of knowledge. The declaration rejects the surveillance publisher driven status quo, highlighting the deficiencies in Journal Impact Factor, and calls for the elimination of journal-based metrics, assessment of research on its own merits, and exploration of new indicators of significance and impact.[77] DORA makes specific recommendations for funding agencies, institutions, publishers, organizations that supply metrics, and researchers. Despite the inclusion of researchers, these recommendations are primarily targeted at vectoralists. This represents demands being made by information producers and consumers on vectoralists and can serve as a model for library workers to collaborate across the hacker class to resist the onslaught of increased surveillance and information control from publishers, database vendors, and data brokers.

Outside of academic literature, the Prison Library Support Network (PLSN) provides another comradely knowledge production model that library workers can follow. PLSN is a collective that works to meet the information needs of incarcerated people. Driven by abolitionist values that center the needs of incarcerated people, the organization works with volunteers to answer reference questions from people inside prisons.[78] While many volunteers and coordinators in the collective are also library workers, there is no formal library experience required for participation.[79] This provides a model for extrapolation, illustrating how library workers can collaborate across the hacker class.

Working with PLSN, letter answerers seek to enable the production of knowledge for incarcerated people by taking into consideration the restrictions on information access that the service's patrons have and determining what specific pieces of information will be most helpful. While this does mean providing material access to information, it also means considering what resources will be impactful in a different information landscape and producing answers that will be effective in that space. PLSN volunteers are forced to work within the restrictive parameters of prison mailroom policies, providing a model for hackers to think about producing knowledge within the vectoralist landscape, while building toward a different future. PLSN organizers make this explicit: "This isn't just about access to books or information—it's about giving people the tools to advocate for themselves and build better futures."[80]

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[76] Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?*, 151.
[77] Declaration on Research Assessment, "Read the Declaration," *DORA*, n.d., accessed November 21, 2025, https://sfdora.org/read/.
[78] Prison Library Support Network, "About PLSN," Tumblr, PLSN, accessed November 21, 2025, https://plsn-nyc.tumblr.com/about.
[79] Prison Library Support Network, "Get Involved," Tumblr, PLSN, September 2024, https://plsn-nyc.tumblr.com/participate.
[80] Claire Kelley, "Prison Library Support Network Volunteers Meet Incarcerated Information Needs with Grassroots

Centering and Liberating Knowledge of the Oppressed

Another component of Wark's framework is "centering and liberating knowledge of the oppressed." Wark points to Angela Davis's work on Black women blues singers in thinking about information creation and access. In the blues, Davis sees a form of knowledge and art production that is by and for the oppressed.[81] Wark argues that centering these forms of knowledge is significant and making them more accessible provides a path for hackers to resist vectoralist control.

Academic library workers that have been practicing critical information literacy join colleagues from across disciplines in practicing critical pedagogy, consistently pointing to Brazilian philosopher of education Paulo Freire as a model for centering the knowledge of the oppressed in the library classroom.[82] Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* lays out a model for education that seeks to educate by unveiling oppression, committing to transforming that reality, and working directly with the oppressed toward an explicit goal of permanent liberation.[83] In working directly with the oppressed, Freire sought to center their perspectives as the ones that could identify the needs and means for organizing. Critical pedagogy practitioners inside and outside of academic libraries can incorporate Freire's strategies in the classroom and in community education about privacy, surveillance, and information access.

Zine collections provide another model for centering the knowledge of the oppressed. Zines have historically been a method of communication by and for people living on the margins. These alternative publications were significant for sharing information within a variety of marginalized and oppressed communities from queer communities, to feminist movements, to BIPOC counter-storytelling. In each of these instances, zines provided a mechanism for sharing information that was not included in popular media, academic literature, or government narratives.[84]

Coastal Lines Press represents a present-day publishing initiative using zines to center and liberate the voices of the oppressed. The press provides a platform for people from and in Gaza to share their perspectives and stories. In a presentation to zine librarians, at the Zine Librarians unConference 2025, three zine creators shared how they view zines as a method for disseminating their perspectives on the oppression happening in Gaza and around the world.[85] Zines are themselves a marginal format for information sharing and dissemination and rarely, if ever, influence people beyond their intended communities. While this is somewhat by design,

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Reference by Mail Service," *Library Journal*, n.d., accessed November 11, 2025, https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/prison-library-support-network-volunteers-meet-incarcerated-information-needs-with-grassroots-reference-by-mail-service.

[81] Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?*, 152.

[82] Eamon Tewell, "A Decade of Critical Information Literacy: A Review of the Literature," *Communications in Information Literacy* 9, no. 1 (2015), https://doi.org/10.15760/comminfolit.2015.9.1.174; Eamon Tewell, "Two Decades of Critical Information Literacy: A Review and Analysis of the Literature," *Information Research an International Electronic Journal* 30, no. CoLIS (2025): 443–60, https://doi.org/10.47989/ir30CoLIS52267.

[83] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary Edition, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2000).

[84] Branden Wayne Joseph, *Copy Machine Manifestos: Artists Who Make Zines*, with Brooklyn Museum (Phaidon Press Limited, 2023).

[85] Coastal Lines Press and Boukarim, "Highlights from ZLUC 2025," September 23, 2025, https://www.coastallinespress.com/p/highlights-from-zluc-2025.

zine library collections lend legitimacy to zines as sources for research. These collections in turn encourage students and library patrons to create their own zines and take up the radical form of communication for themselves.[86] Zines inherently have the capacity to resist vectoralist forms of control, providing mechanisms for self-expression, thought, and creativity outside of surveillance platforms that would otherwise not just define the format of self-expression, but seek to censor and control the thoughts of creators and consumers.

Subverting Technology and Alliances Between Producers of Difference

Wark's framework for resistance is wrapped up with two frames: subverting technology to reveal reality and alliances between producers of difference. While all the frames are interconnected, these two pair together particularly well.

Wark illustrates technology subversion using the example of Italian writer and film director Pier Paolo Pasolini who presciently gestured toward surveillance capitalism. Pasolini saw the new technological developments of the sixties as creating what he called neo-capitalism, which "mass produces subjects in much the same way as it mass produces objects."[87] Despite his scathing critiques of television, he continued to work with the new technologies of subject production as a filmmaker, actively seeking to subvert the technology to reveal reality – making it clear to the viewer that the technology was functioning as a tool of control. Like Pasolini, library workers and the hacker class can find ways to engage with current technologies that reveal reality without creating new subjects (or vectors) to be mined or controlled by the new ruling class.

Drawing on the work of Dutch artist and writer Asger Jorn, Wark explores the value of producing difference, instead of the sameness produced by commodification. Jorn's work sought to reveal "not those who fill the form with content, but those who change those forms and produce difference itself."[88] Like the hacker class that creates new content from the old, Jorn saw art as a means for transforming the essence of a thing. For Wark, the hacker class and artists must enter into a horizontal class relationship.

I opened this paper with reference to an Ursala K. Le Guin quote. The quote often appears without the sentence that followed: "Resistance and change often begin in art."[89] In concluding my overview of potential paths toward resistance, I encourage library workers to follow Wark's call for extrapolation, and look outside of librarianship to artists.

Ben Grosser, an interdisciplinary artist and theorist, evaluates how software and social media platforms shape human behavior.[90] Grosser's art creates difference by subverting technology to manipulate its core function and essence by exploring forms of *platform resistance*. Grosser's platform resistance consists of four key components: software recomposition, data obfuscation,

[86] Evan Bobrow, "The Role of Academic Libraries in the Shifting Landscape of Zines," *College & Research Libraries* 86, no. 2 (2025): 204, https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.86.2.204.
[87] Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?*, 156–57.
[88] Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?*, 159.
[89] Ursula K. Le Guin, "Ursula K. Le Guin — National Book Foundation Medal."
[90] Ben Grosser, "About Ben Grosser," Ben Grosser, accessed December 13, 2023, https://bengrosser.com/about/.

interface reduction, and radical reimagination.[91] Most practically relevant to resisting vectoralism in academic libraries will be Grosser's thinking behind software recomposition and data obfuscation.

As an example of software recomposition, Grosser has created plugins for different social media platforms called demetricators, which serve to hide metrics on social media. This plugin removes the numerical metrics designed to keep users engaging. Users can still see that a post has received interactions or comments, but not how many interactions or comments, allowing users to focus on who interacted with a post or what was said in a comment, without being driven by what Grosser identifies as the "desire for more," which is intentionally nurtured by social media platforms.[92]

The demetricator introduces interesting questions when the principle is applied to resisting vectoralist control over surveillance publishing. What would it mean to move away from a system of scholarship and research that is driven by metrics? How could researchers and librarians benefit from intentionally engaging with what is being said and who is in conversation with one another, without being distracted or motivated by the number of citations or weight assigned to specific research journals?

Grosser developed his idea of data obfuscation in response to Facebook creating reactions as a mechanism for users to interact with posts, which allowed for Facebook to not only begin to collect data on the emotional reactions of its users, but to begin to manipulate their emotions and engagements.[93] Grosser created the plugin "Go Rando" for Facebook that randomizes reactions to posts, which intentionally obfuscates the data collected by the platform, but also forces conversations between users about how Facebook is collecting data on emotional responses of its users.

While data obfuscation may have some interesting applications for resistance to surveillance publishing, this practice is more practical for resisting societal surveillance and control by the state or corporate entities. Wark points to a similar line of thinking, posed by Eduard Glissant's conception of opacity. Wark argues that for most marginalized people, but specifically trans people, visibility can be a bad thing. Over visibility makes people targets not only for violence but also for capitalist marketing and vectoralist control. Wark sums up her thinking on this while making a case for data obfuscation: "the less the fascists know about what we actually do, the better."[94]

Grosser's conceptions of data obfuscation and software recomposition offer avenues for radical disengagement from metrics and surveillance, ways of reimagining human connection and re-

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[91] *Ben Grosser: Less Metrics, More Rando - Techniques of Resistance in a Platform World*, directed by Aksioma, with Ben Grosser, 2022, 40:58, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_vO9_7pxyI.
[92] *Ben Grosser*, sc. 5:15.
[93] Vindu Goel, "Facebook Tinkers With Users' Emotions in News Feed Experiment, Stirring Outcry," Technology, *The New York Times*, June 30, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/30/technology/facebook-tinkers-with-users-emotions-in-news-feed-experiment-stirring-outcry.html.
[94] McKenzie Wark et al., "Technology as Gender and Other Embodied Phenomenologies," Weird Economies, May 27, 2022, https://weirdeconomies.com/contributions/technology-as-gender-and-other-embodied-phenomenologies-interview-with-mckenzie-wark.

engineering the connective tissue of research and information creation.

These examples of comradely production of knowledge, centering and liberating knowledge of the oppressed, subverting technology, and creating alliances between producers of difference provide models from both inside and outside of libraries that library workers can draw on. These strategies can effectively create spaces within academia and librarianship that are free from vectoralist control, but an expansion of these spaces will be vital. Vectoralist logics seduce those that have the power to control the direction of higher education and academic libraries. Library workers must draw on examples of resistance in order to see new ways of organizing with the broader hacker class. By actively building coalitions of resistance against publishing monopolies, mass surveillance, and data harvesting, library workers might direct us toward a better future, a future that values and protects intellectual freedom, privacy, and information access.

Conclusion

Analyzing recent developments in information access and control, privacy and surveillance, and library relationships with patrons and vendors through the new class lens provided by Wark's theory of vectoralism offers a way of making sense of the current information landscape. Library workers have long been frustrated by the exorbitant rates charged for big-deal packages by database vendors, and alongside researchers have put forth concerted efforts to promote Open Access. In response, companies are transitioning their models towards a more wholistic platform of surveillance and control within academic publishing that aligns with vectoralist aims of ownership and control of every component of the information network.

These same companies, which libraries have primarily thought of as publishers and providers of information, have begun to shift their focus to risk analytics services that hinge on collection of personal data to create data dossiers that are used as mechanisms of vectoralist control. Paralleling these data cartels, Amazon, Meta, Alphabet, and other market drivers are using data harvesting and predictive technology to drive the market along vectoralist logics toward continued data extraction and commercial control. As privacy literacy scholars have shown, this erosion of privacy allows vectoralists to exert control over core components of our individual identities.

Academic library workers find themselves bound by existing systems that actively reify the power structures, allowing for vectoralist control over information access and continued extractive data practices. Understanding the logics of vectoralism allows library workers to imagine pathways for resistance. By way of extrapolation, library workers can work with the hacker class to divest from and obfuscate the data of vectoralist economies of surveillance and information access; and envision ways of recomposing our information infrastructures to prioritize human integrity, connection, and actual information content over data extraction, surveillance, and control.

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