

The Hyperlibrarian Linked: Dyer's Adventures in the Future of Libraries

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Envisioning the Radical Embedded Librarian

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Zeynep Tufekci begins and ends her book *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* with a striking [Zapatista](#) saying: "Preguntando caminamos," or "we walk while asking questions." The author learned of this phrase during time spent with the Zapatistas, an indigenous group of rebels in the southernmost state of Mexico, and she hears it echoed quite by accident years later when speaking to a Spanish activist who was a part of the [Indignados Movement](#) in Madrid.

In the library, where tradition often reigns, we don't walk while asking questions. We sit while waiting for patrons to ask *us* questions.



Sitting and waiting for patrons to ask us questions can take a while!

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Librarians as Learners

This, of course, is not an entirely fair accusation- as we are learning about even just in this class, [libraries are innovating in incredible ways around the world](#). But we have all heard the pushback when it comes to change in the library world, whether from coworkers or bosses or entire institutions, and this is precisely what Library 2.0 reacts to. As David Weinberger reminds us in [The Hyperlinked Organization](#): “Your organization is becoming hyperlinked. Whether you like it or not. It’s bottom-up; it’s unstoppable.” What would it look like for us, then, to take the plunge and stop simply dipping our toes in the water? To not just use twitter for advertisement about an upcoming LEGO club, but to learn from the activists who often rely on social media as a more dynamic and responsive library than our brick and mortar branches?

Tufekci, herself present at [the 2013 Gezi Park protests](#) and chronicler of many antiauthoritarian political uprisings around the world, traces the link between such movements and the integration of social media, what she calls “networked protests.” Many of us have likely participated in a protest in the last few months. Even in my sleepy county in the San Joaquin Valley of California, a small yet dedicated faction has erupted in support of the [Black Lives Matter movement](#). The central town of Kern, Bakersfield, saw [protests lasting multiple days](#), and smaller mountain towns nearby [represented in their towns, too](#). Much like the hyperlinked organization, this movement is grassroots and unstoppable. Through the power of social media, Tufekci tells us, we can now organize at lightning-speed.

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Photograph taken by me on one of my evening neighborhood walks.

Looking Ahead, Holding What's Behind

But she also warns that the use of social media for organizing can cause what she calls a “tactical freeze,” in which movements are unable to pivot to enact lasting social change beyond showing up for a protest. This can often happen when movements are young and born of the moment. As a counter case study to modern, networked protests, Tufekci offers the Montgomery Bus Boycotts and the 1963 March on Washington. These efforts took years of planning and internal struggles that forged a united front and strong tactical decisions. (It is worth pointing out, and Tufekci does, that these internal struggles were kept internal likely in large part due to the lack of social media, which necessitates transparency for better or worse.)

Tufekci's book, published in 2017, touches on Black Lives Matter but begs a followup given today's reality in the wake of recent protests against police violence. She refers to the movement as “young,” but with “great narrative capacity” that “has changed the public conversation” (Tufekci, p.209). She published [“Do Protests Even Work?” in June of this year in the Atlantic](#), and the informative, short read not only looks optimistically at the future with Black Lives Matter protests and strategies in the foreground, but touches on and summarizes many key points in her book as well.

In response to Tufekci's worries about young, networked movements reaching stalemates, journalist Jane Hu argues we have reached "The Second Act of Social Media Activism." Activists, she says, are now more aware of limitations and can more deftly navigate the uses of social media in raising public consciousness. Black Lives Matter has itself pivoted from attempts to co-opt the movement, such as the misguided #8cantwait campaign as well as the #BlackoutTuesday faux pas that overloaded feeds with black pictures and misused the #blacklivesmatter hashtag which was meant for information and updates. Not only is the movement itself learning, educating and pivoting, but the greater public is proving teachable in these critical moments.

The Library is Leaving the Station

So where is the library in all of this? Why does this matter to our futures as librarians, and the future of libraries itself?

Because protesters around the globe, radically imagining a better future for the world and bravely showing up to make that future a reality, are creating their own libraries. Libraries "are among the first structures constructed by protesters and are subsequently defended with enthusiasm" (Tufekci, p. 87). If we don't get out there, it's not that libraries will go away. It's that libraries will go on *without us*.



"YOU are OBSOLETE!" -Twilight Zone episode, "The Obsolete Man"

Librarians: Roaming & Radical, or Out & Obsolete?

The main branch of my county library system closed early, the first day of protests in Bakersfield this past June. But it was not to join the protesters, armfuls of book donations in hand asking "how can we help?" (*preguntando caminamos*, walking, we ask questions). It was so they could avoid the protest entirely.

The world will not wait for us to wait for them to ask their questions. We must walk alongside, and ask of them what it is they need. The crowd is moving, and growing, and changing life as we know it. It's past time for librarians and libraries as an institution to join the ranks before they pass us by.

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Posted by [Ariel Dyer](#) in [Context Book Report](#)

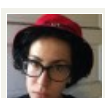
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5 thoughts on “Envisioning the Radical Embedded Librarian”



[deanau](#)

September 7, 2020 at 9:30 pm (Edit)

 **@dyerariel** Hello Ariel,

I enjoyed reading your powerful post. Thank you for including the Zapatista quote. It resonates so clearly with the point you make about libraries being left behind. You tie in the hyperlinked organization with Tufekci's book and bring it back to how our field is can and should be apart of important movements. Really nice job.

-Deana

Reply

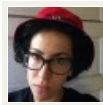


Ariel Dyer

September 8, 2020 at 9:15 pm (Edit)

@deanau Thank you so much for your kind words! I've always seen just the very existence of libraries as pretty radical in theory, but they can often get caught up in bureaucratic red tape that makes them less than radical in practice. I admit I have fallen prey to the burnout mentality that clouds my vision of what libraries can actually be. Glad to be a part of this class and remind myself that the red tape isn't the end of the conversation!

Reply



deanau

September 8, 2020 at 10:12 pm (Edit)

@dyerariel I totally agree with you, libraries are radical spaces at their core but do need that extra push to engage radically with their communities. I can also loose sight of potential sometimes. I think one to the most exciting thing about this course is the overall sparks and bursts of inspiration we're connecting with. We can take what were learning out there into our communities and workplaces and include other people in the process. We're also building our network of colleagues, too virtually which is super hyperlinked. We're not out here alone 😊 Also, I totally agree with **@kayzdaze2020** you blog post exemplifies all that blogging can be! Stoked to be connecting with you this semester.

Reply

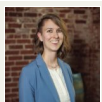


Kay Wolverton Ito

September 8, 2020 at 7:51 pm (Edit)

What **@deanau** said. This is excellent work, **@dyerariel**. It's what blogging is supposed to be. You give readers an idea of what Tufekci's book is about, you explain its relevance to librarianship, and bring in other voices such as the Jane Hu article. I don't have time to read Tufekci's book right now, but I did read Hu's article, helping me better understand the significance of Twitter and Tear Gas. I admit I'm not a fan/user of Twitter, but your post gives me a better appreciation for and understanding of this medium. Thanks for such a thoughtful post, including the fitting and engaging images.

Reply



Ariel Dyer

September 8, 2020 at 9:12 pm (Edit)

Hi **@kayzdaze2020**! Thank you so much for reading. I'm glad you had a chance to read Hu's article! I'm not a huge lover of nonfiction books and prefer nonfiction articles, so it was a nice supplement and follow-up to my reading of the book. And for those like me, the articles sum up really nicely some of the main points of the book as well as look beyond to the future. I wasn't a user of twitter either until this pandemic hit! I'm finding it to be a breath of fresh air from instagram and Facebook, actually. Such

a streamlined way to communicate with anyone, anywhere, any time.

Thanks again for reading and commenting, and I look forward to having more conversation with you in this class and reading your posts!

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