

Open Access and the Humanities: Contexts, Controversies and the Future

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A book proposal for Cambridge University Press

Summary

This book presents the background to and current debates surrounding Open Access as they pertain to the humanities. *Open Access and the Humanities* is written as an introduction to the issues for busy humanities scholars who need to know the practical implications for their work and the current state of open access in research, economic and political terms.

Description

Scholarly communication, like many fields of publishing, has gone through a period of intense change in light of the internet. The invention of the non-rivalrous commodity form that comes with the internet has created new opportunities for scholars and teachers in higher education. The most called-for change, however, by activists on both the left and right of the political spectrum and also by international government mandates is an end to the subscription basis as the sole model for access to research: open access. Indeed, the promise of a levelled playing field of instantaneous access to the latest scholarly research, combined with the ability to communicate globally, promises exciting new methods and potential for research and scholarship. Conversely, however, there are challenges for the existing scholarly communication system and those working within it: how can enterprises be financially sustained if they do not have a commodity object to sell? How can we balance the demands for openness – and in particular, re-usability through open licenses – against the need for integrity in the scholarly record?

Furthermore, the greatest successes of the Open Access movement to-date have taken place within the sciences where the tipping point was all but reached in 2012. In the humanities, however, there has been a greater degree of scepticism as to the cross-applicability of the models deployed in scientific publishing and the argument continues to rage.

This book addresses these problems head-on and details the background to open access publishing more broadly in historical terms before sequentially evaluating the economic models, social strategies and areas of contention within the humanities subjects themselves. This will cover the basics of OA terminology, including “gold” and “green” routes to open access; Article Processing Charge models, but also emerging library-consortia options; the monograph ecosystem; prestige cycles and international assessment paradigms; alterations to peer review; and technological innovations.

Key Features

1. This book will present a timely and much-needed evaluation of the current state of open access in the humanities, resulting in a clear reference volume but also a critical appraisal.
2. *Open Access and the Humanities* will fairly represent all sides of the debate but will take a committed stance that is broadly in favour of gold open access with certain economic caveats. It will draw attention to emerging economic models that show promise, including Freemium setups and *Knowledge Unlatched*'s pilot programme.
3. This book will draw on the ongoing unique experience of the authors in establishing an international non-profit mega-journal and monograph platform, the *Open Library of the Humanities*, giving not only a solid theoretical backdrop but also practical experience.

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Chapter-by-Chapter Synopsis

Overview of Structure

After an envisaged invited preface by a leading name in the field (suggestions above, all of whom are known to us), the book begins with a historical background and a review of existing material dealing with open access and also those centred on the humanities. This is followed by a section that examines the cross-applicability of scientific publishing paradigms. The third chapter looks at issues of economics and prestige before the fourth pursues the intense arguments for and against open licensing in the humanities. The fifth chapter examines the nature of monographic works and their suitability for open access publishing economics with several case studies. The final chapter, before a concluding glossary, looks at technological innovations for the humanities that are possible in the light of open access. This structure presents a logical and sequential progression through the major issues but also allows for each chapter to be read in relative isolation, thus lending a reference quality to the work.

1. Preface

2. Why Open Access?

Keywords: *introduction, open access, two cultures, humanities, sciences*

In this first chapter I give a clear background to open access, addressing the questions: 1.) what is open access?; 2.) what is the history of the movement?; 3.) what are the differences between the sciences and humanities in the realm of publishing and does it change how we view OA? To appeal to humanities scholars, this section will draw not only upon recognised figures in the OA landscape, such as Peter Suber, Kathleen Fitzpatrick and Gary Hall, but will also look more broadly at the cultural history of the humanities and critiques of the university, including CP Snow and Bill Readings.

This chapter begins by giving a background to the function of publishing and I propose to use the recent formulation of Michael Bhaskar as a basis for this thinking: publishing is not about “making public” – which is now, in Clay Shirky’s famous formulation, as easy as pressing a button –, nor is it about copyright or a myriad of other aspects. Publishing is instead concerned with the conjoined functions of filtering, framing and amplification (Bhaskar 2013, pp.103–136). In this way, I argue for the continuing need for “publishers”, but also signpost the ways in which their function is different (or less veiled) in a digital (and open) environment.

After this initial foray, I then move to document the background to the Open Access movement.¹ Charting a narrative that begins with Richard Stallman’s formulation of CopyLeft and the GNU GPL I plot the subsequent rise of Creative Commons licenses and the development of a “hacker ethos” that encourages unlimited distribution and re-use. Drawing on Peter Suber (Suber 2012, pp.10–15), I then demonstrate how scholarly research, at least in certain economic formulations, sits well with a hacker ethos: scholars supported by a university salary are able to disseminate their work without expecting remuneration and thus can give it away. While I will draw attention to the increasingly precarious labour conditions in the academy that create problems for this way of thinking, with reference to Andrew McGettigan, I will also begin to signal the potential utopianism

¹In line with convention, except in chapter headings, we use “open access” to refer to the lowering of permission and price barriers to scholarly research and the capitalised “Open Access” to refer to the movement calling for its implementation.

of open access in an era of austerity (McGettigan 2013).

Finally, I set out a “balance sheet” for open access, considering various arguments for and against, including, but not limited to: general access to research; justifications for the “impact” of the humanities; the dangers of mis-attribution and re-use; and the threat to the existing scholarly communication system (is this another great university gamble?)

3. Digital Challenges: Prestige, Economics, The Humanities

Keywords: *prestige, business models, humanities, sciences, two cultures*

This chapter examines the “economics” of publishing and open access in two interrelated senses. Firstly, in terms of academic prestige, which is itself an economy of scarcity, and secondly in terms of financial models.

This chapter begins by offering a critical analysis of the mechanisms by which academic prestige is accumulated, detailing the backdrop to current peer-review practices. Examining the transition to the digital in terms of “page budgets” and “paper-centrism” (Hall 2008), I aim to historicize and relativize understandings of prestige so that this concept may be put under critique. This initial analysis of prestige will encompass not only, then, the necessity for valid proxy-measures in publishing, an aspect that is traditionally indicated by either journal name or publisher brand, but also the ways in which national-level research assessment exercises, such as the UK's REF and Australia's ERA, contribute to a reinforcement of these norms. Prestige, I here argue, is an indispensable, although problematic, part of academia and, therefore, academic publishing. As much as proxy measures may be disparaged, to aim for a metric-free system of value is utopian, in the naïve sense, and, as long as this remains the case, academic readers will require the framing, amplification and filtering functions of publishing. This is not to say that those functions will necessarily remain in the same form, as I address in chapter six, but any transition to an open access model cannot simply attempt to dispense with proxy-measures for value.

In the second portion of this chapter, building on the initial remarks in chapter one, I examine the economic situation, in worldwide terms, for the funding of scholarship and explain why open access is uniquely suited to this form of cultural production. While centring on notions of non-rivalrous commodity exchange facilitating unrivalled distribution potential, I dispel the myth that academic publishing is a labour-free (and cost-free) process, instead detailing the processes of peer-review facilitation, typesetting (including XML formatting), copyediting, proofreading, digital preservation, organizational membership (COPE, COUNTER etc.) and marketing. From this, I deduce that scholars with university positions are eminently well-placed to give their work away but still require a vast supporting infrastructure to ensure that their work is professionally handled and presented, discoverable and preserved.

Following this point, the final portion of the second section of this chapter sets out the way in which the costs to libraries of purchasing all necessary research has vastly outstripped inflation over the past twenty-five years. While this cost is lower in absolute – but not relative (Bosch & Henderson 2013) – terms in the humanities, I argue that, if left unchecked, the sustainability of research budgets will only be achieved, under the current system, by a widening of the gap between institutions and the re-focusing of several elite institutions into research while others regress to teaching-only academies. In contrast to this, I argue that open access, certainly through the green

route, could be a way of ensuring that communities of haves- and have-nots do not emerge in the humanities research ecosystem, thereby ensuring the continued legacy of documents such as the Robbins Report; if universities do not pay for access to research, but instead according to their output, then a different field emerges. In order to reach this conclusion, I will analyse the current system of financial payment for research and the way in which it intersects with the above notions of prestige but also look at the capacity for various savings in the practice of publishing, including those from technology.

The final section of this chapter will detail the funding differences for the humanities and propose that the Article Processing Charge model for gold open access, potentially even at the lowest levels offered by SAGE Open and Ubiquity Press, may not be appropriate in these disciplines. I instead, here, however, examine several different proposed schemes that could present an alternative. This ranges from Knowledge Unlatched's collective-purchasing model for open access monographs, through to the membership schemes emerging in several new initiatives, such as arXiv, and also encompassing the Library Partnership Subsidy (LPS) model that I have devised for the *Open Library of Humanities*, in which a consortium of libraries collectively contribute a large number of small affordable individual yearly payments.

This chapter, then, not only performs an important role in the book project by examining whether the economics of open access are viable after a transition phase, but will also attempt to appeal to humanities scholars by reaching beyond the (often dry) boundaries of academic self-analysis and instead broaching broader cultural questions of value, the interrelation of commercial and academic interests, and impartiality of the gatekeeper.

4. Open Licensing

Keywords: *Creative Commons, Free Culture movement, copyright, re-use*

In this chapter I deal with one of the most contentious aspects of open access policies for humanities scholars: the removal of permission barriers to work (See, for instance, Mandler 2013). I begin, once more, with a reminder of the origin of the hacker ethos that spawned open licensing in the free and open culture movements and their histories in the software world with particular emphasis on the development of the GNU Public License (GPL) by Richard Stallman. I also here detail the background to current publishing arrangements in the humanities with a specific focus on copyright transfer agreements and show that, in many cases, Creative Commons licenses offer a viable alternative with numerous benefits to the scholarly community. This outline will include a detailed breakdown of the various Creative Commons licenses, their use to-date (including case precedents for enforcement) and the potential for alternative licenses.

Noting that fears around open licensing have been extensively voiced by several high-profile figures, most notably the Editors of History Journals group, in the second part of this chapter I give fair voice to the widespread concerns about Creative Commons licensing in the humanities, and primarily the “attribution” license, split across four axes: plagiarism, unfavourable re-use, problems for image inclusion and commercial appropriation. While airing these views, I simultaneously do not hide the fact that I am broadly in favour of Creative Commons licensing of research. Drawing on Martin's experience as an editor for the Jisc Guide to Creative Commons, I argue here that plagiarism is an issue of enforcement, rather than one of legality in the CC licenses. I also argue that

unfavourable use is not restricted to CC licenses and that commercial re-appropriation can be taken as a sign of interest in the work of the humanities, rather than evidence of exploitation, alongside other arguments around the nature of higher education as already-commercial. I do, however, acknowledge a uniquely problematic area in artistic disciplines, such as art history, where it will be extremely difficult to reproduce copyrighted images within an online-only, openly-licensed framework. To this end, I give a brief detour into the world of Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAMs) to ascertain how this ecosystem feeds into, and off, academia.

The final section of this chapter takes a positive stance and demonstrates the potential for the humanities if we licence our works under Creative Commons provisions. Looking at the ways in which, under more permissive licensing, the scholarly record can be opened for full-text analysis, I lay out digital humanities schemes that would benefit from greater rights to re-use. I also caution against approaches that tend to isolate humanities research from the digital sphere of re-use, as though it were, itself, not a canon worthy of analysis. Indeed, if we are to fully “dare to know ourselves”, in a combined Kantian post-Enlightenment and Delphic phrasing, a meta-study of disciplinary practices must be open for consideration; an aspect facilitated by digital methodologies taking advantage of open licensing.

5. Monographs

Keywords: *books, monographs, economics*

This chapter addresses the great deal of concern raised over the viability of monographs under an open access model. I begin by assessing the qualitatively different degree of publisher labour that is invested in the production of an academic monograph against a journal article. From this I note that, for monographs, publisher experience continues to hold value for scholars in the humanities. While digital platforms such as Open Journal Systems have enabled academics to successfully run their own independent journals, I argue that the unique experience that publishers have built over centuries in book production cannot be cast aside so easily, even if the Public Knowledge Project's Open Monograph Systems has also just been released. I aim to question why this continues to be the case in the twenty-first century amid a rapidly shifting publishing climate.

The second section of this chapter details the concrete projects that currently exist to evaluate the potential of open access monographs. This will include the OAPEN-UK project, the efforts by MIT, Open Book Publishers, Knowledge Unlatched and others in this field (including new startups such as Amherst) and will also detail the *Open Library of Humanities*' publisher partnership approach to monographs. I will also look at policy bodies who are investigating this, most notably HEFCE who have specifically convened a reference panel to discuss the economic models and problems of open access monographs.

Finally, I conclude with broader observations on the financial models that can make monographs work under an open access mode.

6. Innovations

Keywords: *peer review, curation, overlay journals*

I begin this chapter by noting in the strongest terms that nothing about open access compels a change in peer-review practice. Regardless of this, I also believe that the shift in dissemination allows us to rethink the ways in which material enters the academy.

This chapter firstly addresses new models of peer review under a digital system as they might apply in the humanities. Drawing on my writing for the British Academy Policy Series on this matter, I appraise peer-to-peer review systems, but also articulate the problem of non-explicit review criteria and examine whether PLOS' model of "technical soundness" might have a place in the humanities ecosystem. This system, which becomes possible due to the eradication of print-scarcity economics in a digital environment, could allow for the publication of work that does not accord with currently dominant academic trends.

Finally, I think about how technological innovation could help with the social problems of prestige that I addressed earlier in the book. Describing the *Open Library of the Humanities*' overlay journal system, I show a model through which prestige could be accumulated through social curation mechanisms that fulfil a similar role to current editorial provisions. This overlay journal system allows leading academics to confer prestige through their editorial inclusion of pre-reviewed material. This integration of a mega-journal with an overlay system has never been done before and, as well as holding many pragmatic advantages when combined with print-on-demand, provides valuable insights into many areas of research practice and prestige formation.

7. *Glossary of Terms*

Peer review suggestions

Any of the following would be excellent reviewers of this proposal:

REVIEWERS HERE

Word count and delivery date

I anticipate the manuscript to run to approximately 60,000 words and to be ready between January 2015 – August 2015.

Competition and Market

Suber, Peter, *Open Access*, MIT Press Essential Knowledge Series (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2012)

This book, very much the pioneer in its field, is (of course) essential reading. That said, our take, specifically framed for the humanities, will speak more directly to scholars in the humanities, who have developed within different historical paradigms to their scientific counterparts.

Fitzpatrick, Kathleen, *Planned Obsolescence: Publishing, Technology, and the Future of the Academy* (New York: New York University Press, 2011)

Fitzpatrick's book is, once more, excellent, but it is not specifically about open access. Rather, Fitzpatrick's broader thoughts on mutations in scholarly communication practice form a touchstone upon which our book builds.

Hall, Gary, *Digitize This Book!: The Politics of New Media, or Why We Need Open Access Now* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008)

Hall's book, a work of stunning erudition, aims to negotiate a middle course between the theoretical backdrop to, and pragmatic adoption of, open access. Since the publication of *Digitize This Book!*, however, the open access climate has significantly shifted and we bring our own concrete experiences of forming a major international open access publication venue with prominent and well-supported committee structures to a fresh and concise re-imagination of the field.

There is a broad international audience for the book. As mandates come into force in the UK, Europe and for federally funded research in the States, this work will be of interest to institutions, librarians, humanists and funders.

Although there are more general books on open access available, these generally avoid the humanities as a distinct disciplinary group, which has led to the view that open access cannot work in the humanities. By specifically targeting this group, at a time when more humanities academics are becoming involved, we will be able to capture a market for which there is currently no substitute publication.

Authors

Dr. Martin Paul Eve is a lecturer in English at the University of Lincoln, specialising in contemporary American fiction, primarily the works of Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo and David Foster Wallace. Martin's first monograph, *Pynchon and Philosophy* will be released in March 2014 with Palgrave Macmillan, while his second book, *Metafiction After the Millennium*, is currently under preparation. Martin edits the open access journal of Pynchon scholarship, *Orbit*. In addition, Martin is well-known for his work on open access, appearing before the UK House of Commons Select Committee BIS Inquiry into Open Access, writing for the British Academic Policy Series on the topic, being a steering-group member of the OAPEN-UK project, the Jisc National Monograph Strategy Group, the SCONUL Strategy Group on Academic Content and Communications, the Open Knowledge Foundation's Open Access Steering Group and the HEFCE Open Access Monographs Expert Reference Panel and founding the *Open Library of Humanities*. Martin is also a Microsoft Certified Professional in C# and the .NET Framework.

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