

‘Liquid Theory’

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Researchers in the humanities have developed very different professional cultures and intellectual practices to those in the scientific, technical and medical fields (STMs) who have dominated the discussion around Open Access (OA) so far. What I’m going to do in my part of this presentation is:

- i. look at some of these differences;
- ii. point to a few of the challenges the OA movement is likely to face as it increasingly impacts on the humanities, and as the humanities in turn impact on it;
- iii. explore some of the longer-term implications of these challenges for our ideas of the book, scholarly writing and publishing, peer review, the academic journal and indeed the academic author.

Monographs

One major difference between the STMs and the humanities is the greater emphasis the latter place on books. To date, OA has been championed most

extensively in the sciences. This has meant that the movement toward OA has been concentrated on the most valued mode of publication in *that* field: the peer-reviewed journal article. In the humanities, however – although there are of course differences between disciplines - it's monographs published by respected international presses that tend to be the most prestigious. As OA is taken up in the humanities it is therefore likely be accompanied by an increased emphasis on the OA publication *of monographs*.

Nor is it the case that the authors of these monographs are unlikely to consent to publishing OA. In marked contrast to those of academic journal articles, book authors have been presented within debates around OA as always seeking royalties or fees in exchange for their writings, rather than being willing to give them away OA. This is another reason the OA movement, to date, has not focused too much on the self-archiving of books.ⁱ

Yet in the UK academic titles in the humanities often only achieve sales of somewhere between 200 and 600 copies. So very few book authors actually have much in the way of royalties to lose. Like 'royalty-free authors' of journal articles, they too are for the most part writing for impact.ⁱⁱ

Added to this are:

- a. what's been called the 'crisis in scholarly publishing', as many publishers move away from producing monographs and even edited collections of new research, and focus on readers, introductions and reference works instead;
- b. the associated shift to publishing books in hard-back only – which cost £50/\$99 a copy, and which very few people except institutional libraries and the author's parents are likely to buy;
- c. short prints runs;

- d. the closing of independent book stores due to competition from the likes of Amazon at one end of the market and the large supermarkets at the other;
- e. and the fact that the major high street book chains are increasingly reluctant to stock academic titles – as are the large supermarket chains. Indeed, as one UK publishing director has written, whereas in the 1990s it was the large chain bookshops ‘that set the tone for the trade, now the supermarket’s do’.ⁱⁱⁱ

All of which means OA has the potential to be extremely attractive to the so-called for-profit authors of books in the humanities, as they too stand to gain from the increase in potential readers and exposure ‘giving away’ their work OA can bring.

New Forms of Writing

Another important difference between the STMs and the humanities is that scholars in the latter are more likely to see themselves as writers, and to view their texts, not just as vehicles for the expression of their ideas, but as pieces of writing in themselves. In other words, the writing itself really matters here - it’s not just a neutral means of communicating research. As the movement toward the OA publication of the research literature impacts on the humanities, we will therefore see an increased interest in exploring new kinds of writing online, many of which may raise difficult questions for conventional ways of maintaining academic authority and professional legitimacy, including peer review.

Peer Review

Many advocates of OA in the STMs are self-confessed conservatives when it comes to peer-review.^{iv} This is partly strategic. It's a way of combating one of the main arguments levelled against OA by publisher trade associations and lobbyists: that if governments adopt OA policies it will undermine peer-review.^v And many in the humanities set great store by peer-review, too. Others, however, are inclined to view such conservatism as the attempt by a professional group to maintain a certain identity and authority 'in the face of an extremely dynamic, unsettling, and powerful reorganization... of society.'^{vi} After all, if electronically reproduced texts *are* positioned as being beyond the reassuring control of the traditional systems of peer-review, they would appear, in Stevan Harnad's words, as unreliable, their 'quality uncontrolled, unfiltered, un-sign-posted, unknown, unaccountable'.^{vii} As such they would create a sense of anxiety among the profession. Is this one of the reasons perhaps OA advocates are so obsessed with peer-review? Is their insistence on defending it in article after article, email posting after email posting, an attempt to cope with this anxiety over their identity and authority?

One significant way in which the humanities have the potential to impact on OA, then, is through their very openness to the challenge that is presented to academic authority and professional legitimacy by digital modes of reproduction. This is not just a matter of exploring less traditional forms of peer-review:

- [the kind of open peer-review the journal *Nature* recently experimented with;]
- [the system of post-publication peer-to-peer-review Kathleen Fitzpatrick of the Institute for the Future of the Book has championed;]
- or the model provided by *Digg*, the news site where the community of readers themselves donate news stories they have found on the web, and other readers then vote on them, the story which receives the most votes being put on the front page.

It also involves a certain readiness to embrace and performatively assume the kind of paradoxes and ambivalences in academic authority that lie at the heart of much of the OA community's defence of peer review to date.

For instance, the reliance of certain flavours of OA on established peer-reviewed journals of 'known quality' to provide accreditation with regards to the contents of e-print archives, means that a lot of OA academic writing is restricted to that which can be reproduced – at least potentially – in hard copy form.^{viii} But what happens if and when academics write texts that are 'born digital', and which are therefore perhaps not necessarily recognisable as texts in the ink-on-paper sense?

A very obvious and rather tame example already being explored within the OA community is weblogs.^{ix} Yet for all their popularity, it remains unclear as to exactly how scholarly blogs *are* to be evaluated and assessed. Should academics who publish their research in the form of blogs expect to have such work taken into account when it comes to hiring, promotion, and being included in e-print repositories in the same way as those who publish in refereed journals do? Or should such writing be dismissed as less serious and legitimate because it is difficult to certify by the established peer review processes? In which case do we need to develop new forms of quality control capable of giving credibility and authority to academic blogging?

The Future of the Academic Journal

None of which is to suggest that any such shift away from purely papercentric modes of certification is necessarily going to signal the end of the academic

journal, nor of peer review - both of which continue to be used to provide accreditation with regards to the 'green' and 'golden' roads to OA, as Sigi says. But in the longer-term it will involve us in devising new mechanisms for the maintenance of 'quality control' that do not approach digitally reproduced research as if it were more or less a prosthetic extension of print. Instead, standards and criteria will need to be developed which are capable of responding to the specificity of texts that *are* 'born digital'.

What's more, this applies not just to blogs but to all those new forms of scholarly writing and publishing which may eventually come to sit alongside or even replace the conventional journal and book formats: those currently associated with podcasts, wikis, p2p file-sharing, IPTV, social networks such as YouTube and Facebook, virtual environments like Second Life and so on.

The End of the Author?

Some people have asked whether such changes will eventually bring about the end of the author? I doubt it. The concept of author is too tied up with ideas intrinsic to liberal democracy, to modernity, and to late capitalism: the subject, individual, human and so on. A lot of other things will therefore have to change as well before we witness the end of the author.

But we will witness increasing attempts to experiment with ideas of academic authorship. We are already seeing something of this kind in the shape of those texts co-authored – or 'crowdsourced', as its sometimes called - by large groups of often anonymous people using free content and open editing principles. Wikipedia is the most well-known example of such 'we-media', but in a more academic

context there are projects such as *Connexions* (cnx.org), which is part of the Open Education movement. *Connexions* is using Free/Open Source software and open content and open editing to produce textbooks for teaching and other Open Educational Resources such as course notes. ‘Connexions is globally accessible to anyone to not only read and use [their] materials, but also take them, make them [their] own, and contribute them back to the repository.’^x

Other examples include:

a. the mash-up the artist Mark Amerika has produced for the forthcoming ‘Pirate Philosophy’ issue of the *Culture Machine* journal I edit. Called ‘Source Material Everywhere’, this remixes the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead with the talk-poetry of avant-garde artist David Antin to investigate the idea of the artist as digital persona and as ‘postproduction medium’.

b. and a project I’m working on at the moment for the same ‘Pirate Philosophy’ issue. This came about as a result of requests for Clare Birchall and I to produce a follow up to our *New Cultural Studies* book, consisting of a Reader which gathers together important texts by some of the theorists discussed in that volume. It seemed to us that to just turn the idea into some sort of brand or fixed and stable concept would be to very much miss the point of what we were trying to achieve with that book. So, rather than produce *New Cultural Studies II: More New Cultural Studies*, we decided to experiment with putting together a ‘liquid book’. What we’re doing is gathering together texts by the theorists discussed in the first volume, together with some by those we’d include if we *were* to produce a second volume: people such as Bernard Latour, Isobel Stengler, Bernard Stiegler, and Jean-Luc Nancy. Rather than publish this as a print-on-paper book, however, we’re

going to be publishing it on-line as the *New Cultural Studies Liquid Reader*. We wanted to experiment with publishing a book this way for a number of reasons:

a. it allows us to include more than just book chapters and journal articles, as is normally the case with Readers. We're also able to include whole books. And not just that, but short extracts from books, too, as well as pages, snippets, references, annotations, links, tags, even podcasts and YouTube clips.

b. it enables us to creatively explore the more general movement toward publishing academic work online, what with the open access movement, the shift in the UK toward REF (Research Excellence Framework)/bibliometrics, Google Book Search (most of *New Cultural Studies* is already available to read online for free via Google), and digital book readers such as Amazon's Kindle. All of which means that the standard print-on-paper reader may soon be in decline anyway, only to be increasingly supplemented if not entirely replaced by the more fluid versions online publishing makes possible.^{xi}

c. but the chief reason we wanted to experiment with publishing it in this way is because we can make it, not just open access, but open content and open editing, too. So our *New Cultural Studies Reader* is not just going to be free to read. Once we have provided an initial version, we'll be making this 'book' open for readers to continually modify, customise, remix, reuse, reversion, reformat and reinvent it however they like. It'll be like a constantly up-dated iPod playlist, only for academic texts rather than music tracks.^{xii} By producing it in an open, collaborative, co-operative fashion like this, using a swarm of collaborators distributed around the world in disparate locations – we're hoping this 'liquid book' will raise all sorts of interesting questions for ideas of academic authorship,

fair use, quality control, accreditation, peer-review, copyright, Intellectual Property, and content creation.

Piracy

At the very least, I'm hoping such experiments with academic authorship may encourage certain elements within the OA community to be a little bolder and more inventive when it comes to issues around Intellectual Property. Of course, distinguishing OA from digital piracy has been another way of providing it with an aura of professional legitimacy.^{xiii} And I want to stress that this attitude is not restricted to those associated with either OA or the STMs. Even among the most radical of IP critics in the humanities, there has been a definite reluctance to associate academic online publishing with anything that smacks of 'internet piracy' or that might result in one being on the receiving end of a 'cease and desist' notice from a copyright holder.

A recent article by MacKenzie Wark provides a case in point. Writing in a journal issue devoted to the regulation and privatization of intellectual property, Wark addresses the contradiction involved in his having written a book on hacking which he then published with an established press who refused to budge on the issue of copyright and allow him to distribute it as part of the digital gift economy. Wark's solution was to a. live with the contradiction to a certain extent and b. to carry with him to speaking events a flash drive where those who wanted a post-print copy of *The Hacker Manifesto* could get one from him personally.^{xiv} Still, it does not resolve the problem Wark identifies of how to meet an author's desire to have their work respected, distributed to and read by as many readers as possible – the kind

of thing publishing with a traditional press such as Harvard can provide - while at the same time partaking in the digital gift economy.

Nor does the OA movement necessarily offer an unproblematic solution to Wark's problem. For there is a difference in OA between publishing in journals and in books. Indeed, 'where exclusive copyright... has been transferred by the author to a publisher' in toto – for example, 'in a "work for hire"', where the author has been paid (or will be paid royalties) in exchange for the text', as is often the case in book publishing – it may well be that the author is not legally allowed to self-archive it OA at all. This is because, although the 'text is still the author's "intellectual property", ...the exclusive right to sell or give away copies of it has been transferred to the publisher'.^{xv}

So what can an author such as Wark do if their publisher's policy, licence or copyright agreement does not allow them to make their book available OA? There are a number of options:

1. They could decide that they will only publish with an OA publisher – such as those Sigi mentioned: University of California Press, MIT, OAPEN or (in the future) OHP – and not sign such contracts;
2. You could refuse to sign any contract that gives your publisher exclusive copyright, and publish only with a publisher that will publish on a non-exclusive basis. This is what Harvard University are insisting its staff do.
[Check this]
3. They could just ask. Many publishers will allow authors to modify their copyright transfer agreement forms in advance of publication to permit the self-

archiving of the published text (not least because after a certain date sales often drop and they have no real sale value).

4. Perhaps the most sensible strategy of all, however, is that advocated by the Budapest Open Access Initiative. This is “‘don't-ask/don't-tell’”. Instead, ‘simply self-archive your’ text, the ‘preprint as well as your postprint, and wait to see whether the publisher ever requests removal’.^{xvi}

If enough people do this, it’s going to be no easier for publishers to stop it than it has been for the music industry. Obviously, we at OHP are hoping things won’t go that far. But even if publishers *do* respond to such ventures by actively trying to prevent the OA publication of books, there is a case to be made for academics cutting out the middle-men and women and taking the means of production into their own hands and publishing their work for, and by, themselves. After all, academics often don’t get paid, either substantially or directly, for a lot of the writing, editorial work or refereeing that goes into the production of scholarly texts, publishers getting this work for free. And already quite a few people in the humanities have developed a positive attitude toward so-called ‘internet piracy’. In his recent book *Information Please*, Mark Poster even looks to a future in which peer-to-peer networks make possible a ‘new regime of culture’ in which copyright laws have been changed and media and publishing corporations have either disappeared or completely transformed themselves.^{xvii} So it’s not hard to imagine an organisation such as *Culture Machine* developing a decentred means of publishing books based on a p2p system. It could be run on a collaborative basis by networked cells of people working in disparate locations to both create and publish texts that can then be reproduced extremely rapidly and cheaply millions of times using Torrent systems.

To encourage experimentation of this kind, a version of the text I'm giving here will itself be published in the next edition of *Culture Machine* – however it will only be available there for a limited period: 2 months. At that point it will be placed on a 'pirate' p2p network and the original deleted from the *Culture Machine* site. As soon as someone downloads the p2p version, I'll destroy my original posted file. There will then no longer be an 'original' or 'master' copy of this text in the conventional sense. Instead, it will exist only to the extent that it is part of a 'pirate network' and is stolen or 'pirated'. From that time on, all copies of this text will be 'pirate' copies.

Conclusion

I want to end by stressing that the challenges to academic authority and professional legitimacy I'm describing here in relation to changing ideas of scholarly writing, peer review, authorship, intellectual property and so forth should not be interpreted negatively. *Texts and authors have always been unreliable*. It's worth remembering that up until the middle of the eighteenth century the book was an extremely unstable object, with Shakespeare's first folio including more than six hundred typefaces, along with numerous discrepancies regarding its spelling, punctuation, divisions and page configurations. As a result, readers had to make *critical* decisions regarding particular manuscripts, their identity, dependability and trustworthiness, and about what a book is and what it means to be an author, a reader, a publisher.^{xviii} Since then, the development and spread of the concept of the author, along with mass printing techniques, uniform, standard, multiple-copy editions, copyright, established publishing houses and so forth has meant that texts have taken on the appearance of being much more 'fixed'. Consequently, we are

no longer asked to form judgements about a text's authority and legitimacy. Such decisions are seen as having in effect *already been made*. They have thus been repressed, ignored, or just taken for granted and forgotten. From a humanities point of view, however, the digital mode of reproduction, with its loosening of much of the stability, permanence and 'fixity' of texts, promises to place us in a position where we are *again* called on to actively respond and *make* such judgements and decisions. In this respect, one could argue that the shift to online open access publishing offers us *a chance* to raise precisely the kind of responsible questions regarding the authority and legitimacy of scholarly writing, authorship, peer review and intellectual property, that we really should have been asking all along.

Endnotes

ⁱ ‘Books... are not, and never will be, author give-aways’. Stevan Harnad, 'For Whom the Gate Tolls? How and Why to Free the Refereed Research Literature Online Through Author/Institution Self-Archiving, Now', 2001.

<http://www.ecs.soton.ac.uk/~harnad/Tp/resolution.htm>. Accessed 31 July, 2003.

ⁱⁱ A 2007 study for the Author’s Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS) by the Centre for Intellectual Property Policy and Management at the University of Bournemouth, found that the average author in the UK earns one third less than the national average wage, that ‘typical earnings of a British professional writer aged 25-34 are only £5,000 per annum’, and that ‘only 20% of writers earn all their income from writing’. Centre for Intellectual Property Policy and Management at the University of Bournemouth. 2007. ‘Counting the Cost of a Writing Career’.

http://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/newsandevents/News/march07/counting_the_cost_of_a_writing_career.html. Accessed 12 March, 2007.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mark Booth, ‘The Book is Dead. Long Live Facebook, *The Independent on Sunday*, 13 January, 2008: 42/43, 42.

^{iv} Stevan Harnad, 'The Invisible Hand of Peer Review', *Exploit Interactive*, 5 April, 2000.

<http://www.exploit-lib.org/issue5/peer-review/>

<http://www.cogsci.soton.ac.uk/~harnad/nature2.html>

<http://www.princeton.edu/~harnad/nature2.html>.

^v See Peter Suber, ‘Will Open Access Undermine Peer Review?’, *SPARC Open Access Newsletter*, Issue #113, 2 September, 2007. <http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/newsletter/09-02-07.htm>.

^{vi} Samuel Weber, *Institution and Interpretation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) 27.

^{vii} Harnad, *ibid*.

^{viii} Harnad, *ibid*. What’s more, this is the case regardless of whether this happens directly, by means of the sort of peer-review service that is provided by an actual *paper* journal, or indirectly, via that of an online-only journal 'of known quality'. For although the medium of the latter may be digital, according to what is a quite traditional paradox of authority, its quality control procedure (and hence the online journal itself) is necessarily dependent for its legitimacy on a system of peer-review that has its 'origins' in the paper world, and which is in turn dependent on that world for its own authority and legitimacy. For more, see my *Digitize This Book!* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

^{ix} See, for example, Peter Suber’s ‘Open Access News’

<http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/fosblog.html>; and Stevan Harnad’s ‘Open Access Archivangelism’ <http://openaccess.eprints.org/>.

^x As of January 2008, Connexions was ‘averaging over 552,000 unique visitors from 194 countries’ per month. (<http://cnx.org/aboutus/faq>; accessed 08.01.2008.)

^{xi} At least one publisher has already experimented with tailoring textbooks to meet the requirements of specific lecturers and courses:

In 2003, Liz Sproat, director of Pearson Education, became the first European publisher to offer academics the chance to create their own. They may decide to use an existing textbook amplified by a chapter or two from elsewhere to plug a gap in coverage Or they may opt for something more elaborate, incorporating their own material, sections from several Pearson books, case studies and third-party input from sources such as journal articles, although usually nothing from the publications of direct competitors.

The resulting book can have the name of the course and academic on the cover as well as bespoke image and university branding if required.

(Matthew Reisz, 'Familiar Text, New Chapter', *Times Higher Education*, 20 March, 2008, pp.36-39, p.39.)

^{xii} We've derived our use of the term 'liquid' in the main from Kevin Kelly. Kelly writes about how:

[PP] once digitized, books can be unravelled into single pages or be reduced further, into snippets of a page. These snippets will be remixed into reordered books and virtual bookshelves. Just as the music audience now juggles and reorders songs into new albums (or playlists', as they are called in iTunes), the universal library will encourage the creation of virtual 'bookshelves' — a collection of texts, some as short as a paragraph, others as long as entire books, that form a library shelf's worth of specialized information. And as with music playlists, once created, these 'bookshelves' will be published and swapped in the public commons...

(Kevin Kelly, 'Scan This Book!', *The New York Times*, 14 May, 2006; available at

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/14/magazine/14publishing.html?ex=1305259200en=c07443d368771bb8ei=5090>)

We are aware, however, that 'liquid' is an increasingly popular term these days. Bauman writes about 'liquid modernity' and 'liquid love' and so on (see Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (London, Polity, 2000); *Liquid Love* (London: Polity, 2003).), and I have colleagues who are working on 'liquid education' (Maggie Savin-Badin, 'Second Life PBL', Serious Games Institute Seminar, 15th November, Coventry University, 2007.) To be honest, we would not want to subscribe to the nostalgia of Bauman's work evident in the idea that we have moved from a form of modernity characterised by gradual change and more fixed and solid structures, to a more liquid form characterised by uncertainty and rapidity of change. For us, we see our use of this 'liquid theory' here more in terms of trying to create an event of the kind Sigi referred to – although there's also an issue here of how any such event can relate to others, in terms of a hegemonic politics, or other forms of social or political organisation); or at least of trying to break down the established structures and conventions of scholarly publishing, so that more responsible (ethical and political) decisions can be taken and new, different structures and conventions put in their place. In this respect there is, in the ambiguity, flexibility, riskiness, uncertainty and contestable boundaries Bauman associates with liquid modernity, something we might want to draw on.

^{xiii} 'It is a mistake to regard OA as Napster for science. For copyrighted works, OA is always voluntary, even if it is one of the conditions of a voluntary contract, such as an employment or funding contract. There is no vigilante OA, no infringing, expropriating, or piratical OA'. Peter Suber, 'Open Access Overview', 2006. <http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/overview.htm>.

^{xiv} McKenzie Wark, 'Copyright, Copyleft, Copygift', *Open: Cahier on Art and the public Domain* (Nai Publishers: SKOR) No.12, 2007.

^{xv} Budapest Open Access Initiative. 2008. 'Is Self-Archiving Legal?', *Self-Archiving FAQ*. <http://www.eprints.org/openaccess/self-faq/#self-archiving-legal>. Accessed 15.03.2008.

^{xvi} *ibid.*

^{xvii} Mark Poster, *Information Please: Culture and Politics in the Age of Digital Machines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) 204.

^{xviii} Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) 31-2.

A different but related version of this history of knowledge, print culture, science and the book – one perhaps even more relevant to the OA movement, given its domination by the STMs - could run:

- From the initial instability of knowledge and texts – where scholars had to address them critically, identifying the errors and mistakes etc.
- To Tycho’s fixing of these using print and the book
- To modern science, Barnard Latour placing Tycho at the origins of modern science
- The OA movement’s emphasis on traditional forms of peer-review.
- And finally to the threat to all this that is posed by digital culture – and the OA communities staunch defence against this while at the same time advocating many of the benefits of the digital reproduction of scholarship and research.

However, Adrian Johns, again in *The Nature of the Book*, is able to show how, contrary to the story Latour tells about the origins of modern science, Tycho’s texts were never fixed at all. We can thus see that, although it may have taken on the *appearance* of being much more ‘fixed’, science has only ever taken on the *appearance* of being fixed, too. (After Sigi’s ‘mathematical argument’, this could perhaps be called the ‘scientific argument’.)