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Abstract

This article explores a moment of opportunity to imagine a new humanities scholarship based on radical openness, beyond the level of access to scholarly content that the open access movement has so far championed, to a culture of transformation that can actively include the public(s) beyond the community of scholars. The possibilities for enhancing scholarly and research practices are intriguing, but even greater may be the generative opportunity to engage audiences beyond the scholarly community – particularly online, where the humanities connects to broader cultural currents.

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A “DH moment” for scholarly publishing?

The digital moment that currently confronts the world of publishing does so on a number of different axes, just as digital media intersects with the humanities in myriad ways. Perhaps foremost among these is the promise of innovation and revolutionary new capacity, and as the Digital Humanities movement embraces and rationalizes itself with such terms, we might expect digital publishing to be full of energy and enthusiasm. But at the same time we witness the disruption of traditional economics and thus the business models, institutional capital, and sustainability that have underpinned scholarly publishing for decades. In both the humanities and publishing we note a set of identity crises tied to materialities, competencies, and older scarcity-based value models. As the humanities re-imagine themselves, digital media begins to change the very ways we conceive our practices, rather than merely re-mediating old practices. By contrast, publishing has engaged with digital media in a mostly *evolutionary* manner, where digital allows us to do what have traditionally done, but faster, better, cheaper. The most visible dynamic has been in the output and *reach* of journal publishing, especially with the rise of open access publishing and the promise – and reality – of public, non-academic usage of journal materials (Alperin, 2015; Willinsky, 2005).

But as significant as such changes have been, in many ways scholarly communication shows a conservative character, highly resistant to structural change. In contrast to a wholesale revolution in how public entertainment and news media have become structured over the span of a generation, most of us think of scholarly communications in roughly the same way we might have done 50 years ago – in terms of journals and especially monograph publishing. Much of scholarly publishing is still associated with the static and stable representation of research findings and summary reporting of research. The structure of the peer-review process has reflected and reinforced this model (Fitzpatrick, 2011), filtering scholarly output into its most stable and reified forms. Curiously, the more fluid “epitextual” (Genette, 1997) part of scholarly discourse – that is, ongoing commentary and reaction – remains largely unrepresented and certainly unarchived. Our primary systems of scholarly communication tend to privilege and preserve only our most punctual, formalized utterances, which then must stand in for the entirety of the discourse. It is as though we are resigned to writing letters from far-flung outposts, unable to speak with one another directly or in real time, except occasionally and in four-minute bursts. Surely digital media offers more to scholarly communications.

A ONE-WAY PUBLICATION MODEL, 50 YEARS INTO THE DIGITAL ERA?

In 1972, Alan C. Kay, a researcher at the then brand new Xerox Palo Alto Research Center, delivered a short paper outlining the features of a device he called the Dynabook – which he later characterized as “personal dynamic media” for the digital age (Kay, 1972; Kay & Goldberg, 1976). Kay, who was later hailed as the father of personal computing, offered a vision of sweeping breadth: the Dynabook would be a small, portable digital device, connected with others via wireless networking, and would serve as a person’s general-purpose media device for the computing age. It would not only be capable of displaying text and images, it would more fundamentally be a dynamic simulation software tool kit. Like a book in that it would provide access

to general content, it was quite unlike a published book in that it would be a *writing and authoring* medium, a generative tool kit rather than just an appliance for media consumption. Indeed, the dynamic media on a Dynabook would not be downloaded and viewed; rather, it was to be designed and created by its users, individually or collaboratively. Kay's larger vision suggested that, attendant with the rise and ubiquity of small, personal, dynamic media devices would come a revolution in literacy, rhetoric, and the very structure of knowledge comparable to the revolution that attended the rise of print in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Kay, 1996). Kay's vision saw us, armed with our wireless dynamic media tool kits, developing and collaboratively producing dynamic models of the world around us.

A good deal of Kay's vision of the future of digital media is now commonplace. Wireless personal media devices are indeed ubiquitous, as is the digital network that connects us all. We have software capable of running dynamic and interactive simulations of considerable sophistication. But we do very little of this in practice. Rather, we continue to write and publish static prose descriptions, and in publishing, we prepare them for posterity.

Alan Kay sought to identify and nurture the kinds of literacy that were native to a new kind of medium. What then are the equivalents for scholarship and scholarly publishing?

WHAT IS AGILE SCHOLARSHIP?

In recent years, a growing discourse in trade and technical publishing has addressed the possibility of "agile publishing" (e.g., Armstrong, 2010; Maxwell & Fraser, 2011; Raccah, 2012; Thomas & Hunt, 2010). Drawing on the principles of the agile method in software development, agile publishing follows an iterative model in which material is made available quickly – a "minimum viable product" – with audience feedback directing further development and refinement. The motto of agile development might be to "release early and release often," allowing review, commentary, and context to drive further releases, be they new editions or subsequent material.

This is very different than the traditional model of publishing, which is to strive for perfection and completeness before releasing any product. Traditional publishing follows a logic set by print and the economies of running printing presses. As the production of a monograph or issue of a journal requires gearing up a substantial amount of expensive machinery, with significant investments in physical plant and raw materials (e.g., paper), not to mention inventory management and fulfillment, the financial risk of such a venture is addressed in part by striving for products capable of not only succeeding in a crowded market (since, even for very specialized journals, library acquisition budgets are finite), but also carrying the cultural capital required to secure future investment by trading on brand prestige, production values, and advertising. Fundamentally, the economics of print publishing *require* that only limited numbers of things can be published. A natural-seeming meritocracy results, resulting in a stable feedback loop of prestige and reinvestment.

But today, with ubiquitous networked digital media, the cost of making things public approaches zero, research and writing costs notwithstanding. The risk proposition for

publishing online is radically different than for publishing in print. The ability to publish everything is limited only by time and willingness. Furthermore, the crowdedness or competitiveness of the market has fundamentally changed as well: the primary arena of competition today is for an audience's limited attention. What appears to best address our attention is *relevance* (McGonigal, 2008; O'Leary, 2013). How does any particular resource relate to my task at hand, how does it relate to the rest of the things I'm paying attention to, and how does any one resource connect to everything else?

The Web, to a large extent, is made up of open, structured formats that invite or even depend upon interconnection and interlinkage. As British writer and artist James Bridle has pointed out, the Web today is not so much composed of individual works, but becomes an intertextual network spanning traditional authorial boundaries – an emerging literature whose “conclusions are not located exclusively within the work, but are distributed across the network” (Bridle, 2012). Google and other search engines have demonstrated that the discoverability of content in a superabundant universe relies heavily on the interlinkedness of that content, not just as a graph of links between content but, more importantly, of readers' use and *traversal* of content. Google itself orients its search results primarily based on how other people have oriented links *to* resources, and to a significant extent how those links are traversed over time. The more inbound links a resource collects over time, the more relevant something is likely to be to a reader.

The basic implication of this model of publishing is that readers *ongoingly* define the relevance of any online resource. Relevance is not, in this model, defined once and for all by publication in a prestigious journal or by a university press. Relevance is a dynamic that is actively part of the ongoing discourse, both scholarly and more broadly. What happens downstream is critical to the positioning and context of published material, well beyond its initial qualities. The further implication of a Web-based publishing model is that the relevance, and thus importance, of published material can be *constructively addressed* by maximizing its interactive potential – making it more easily linkable, shareable, portable, commentable, convertible, and transformable. Indeed, the opportunity is for publications to *invite* transformational uses by scholars and other readers.

The very idea of the “monograph” – or indeed the “article” (a term whose etymology reveals a similarly indivisible nature) – can begin to appear fragile, or at least at odds with the network paradigm. And yet, these are the forms upon which scholarship is based, if not defined. If not monographs and articles, then what? What would a “monograph-like object” look like in a natively digital – or agile – mode?

At a minimum, such a form would need to be substantial, representing some significant amount of work. It also needs to be original, or at least present something new, even if that is only a novel arrangement of pre-existing items. It needs to be rigorous, of a recognized discipline, for otherwise how would anyone judge its worth? Perhaps its rigour is guaranteed in the traditional way, in its claim to having been reviewed by people who in turn represent a disciplinary point of view. It also must be accessible, at the very least by members of the community of people for whom it purports to have

value – although the scope of that community is interestingly open to debate. And it needs to be durable: lasting in time, part of the record, archival, and citable. So far, none of these characteristics breaks with existing scholarly practice; we have not yet gone far from the existing scholarly publishing model.

More radically, a natively digital scholarly work probably needs to be *social* in ways that traditional forms were not. Scholarly discourse can move faster now; so the conversations that make up scholarly discourse do not merely comprise the utterances that are individual articles and books, but rather operate *within and around* these works. So a scholarly work ideally invites engagement and participation (see Fister, 2015). Perhaps it gathers and maintains its own commentary, as in the CommentPress model that Kathleen Fitzpatrick championed. Of course, this raises fresh challenges: as a work gathers commentary and review over time, does it need to respond? Does a work that has been revised in response to commentary demand subsequent review? What happens to a work that has undergone peer review if it grows or changes post-review? What about the commentary itself – does that need to be reviewed? And at what point?

Beyond commentary, can a scholarly work be remixed, or combined generatively with other work? Can it be taken apart, reassembled? Where do the boundaries of the work reside, vis-à-vis review, commentary, and other forms of scholarly epitext? How will we inscribe the relationship between scholarly contributions and the discourse that contextualizes them? This has been relatively unproblematic in the traditional model because of decades of relative stability in which publication has served not only to provide access to scholarship, but also to clearly establish individual works within larger discourses. But when we move to a webby model of scholarly communication, where scholarship is polyvalent, polyvocal, and polysemous, will “monographs” need to become “polygraphs”? (And will we subject junior scholars to polygraph tests?) More seriously, the challenge for scholarly communication is to re-inscribe the relation between works, publications, and discourse more broadly.

What are we doing when we publish?

Most of us define publishing in terms of access: to publish means to make something public. Indeed, the printing revolution in early modern Europe made it possible for ideas and works to be copied and made available to thousands of people. Without printing, a manuscript was simply inaccessible to anyone not fortunate to be in physical possession of the original work (or one of very few handmade copies). This sense of accessibility is widely held to be essential to the development of modern science and scholarship.

But in the age of the Web, it is trivially easy to make things accessible worldwide. As a result, our simple access-based definition of publishing loses a great deal of its value. Helpfully, a more useful conceptual framing is provided by Portland-based publisher Matthew Stadler. Stadler focuses on “publication,” defining it thus:

Publication is not the production of books but the production of a public for whom those books have meaning. There is no pre-existing public. The public is created through deliberate, willful acts: the circulation of texts, discussions and

gatherings in physical space, and the maintenance of a related digital commons. These construct a common space of conversation, a public space, which beckons a public into being. This is publication in its fullest sense. (Stadler, 2010)

Publication is not making things available to a pre-existing public; it is the very *constitution* or *gathering* of that public. Stadler was not talking specifically about scholarly communication, but his framing fits admirably: scholarly publication creates scholarly discourse, creates the very disciplinary frameworks that allow us to judge rigour and worth in scholarship. But it is important to parse out just how scholarly publication does this. The constitution of scholarly discourse does not, I would suggest, inhere in the rigid gatekeeping of A-list journals, in which value is ensured by high rejection rates. Rather, a scholarly discourse must *already exist* to even make this kind of prestige gatekeeping possible. Therefore scholarly publication has to be seen more broadly: in a universe of journals and monographs, in conferences and gatherings, and even to some extent in the playing out of collegial and academic process in departments, programs, and their committees. These all provide the contexts in which scholarly work is circulated, in which scholars encounter and engage and pay attention to one another. The forms of publication define the audience and shape their engagement, which raises the next question: Who is the public that is constituted by scholarly publication?

WHO IS SCHOLARLY PUBLICATION FOR?

In the Master of Publishing program at Simon Fraser University, we teach our students to attend to “rhetorical situation” (Bitzer, 1968) when considering editorial questions. What is the rhetorical situation of most scholarly work? of a journal article? a blog post? a monograph? a prototype?

There is a cynical answer that is familiar to us all: the rhetorical situation is defined by our imagined peer reviewers who will determine whether or not we get published. David N. Wright (2014) noted, “Even more plainly, first readers – that is, peer reviewers – are often the only audience taken into account in the production of scholarly work.” The cynical perspective further holds that “nobody actually reads journal articles,” save for one or two grad students compiling their lit reviews.

But in our better selves, we hopefully imagine a greater public for our work. In the INKE community, we certainly carry an imagined audience of hundreds of interesting and interested scholars. As I write this article, I have a particular audience, and a meeting, and even a journal venue in mind, and the belief that a number of you will actually attend to what I write. I hope communities like this one are not at all rare across the disciplines.

Is there a *larger* public possible for scholarly discourse? This is indeed the hope of the Public Knowledge Project (PKP), constituted to “improve the quality and reach of scholarly publishing.” The goals of the public science movement more broadly seek wider engagement and indeed participation in scientific inquiry, across both natural and social sciences. Various universities even boast “public humanities” initiatives, though to my mind this begs the question: how can humanities be anything less than public? The answer to my question, however, is clear enough in the light of Matthew

Stadler's framing of publication: What public is actually gathered in scholarly communication? What is the rhetorical situation? Are these commonly construed too narrowly? Whose gate are we keeping, exactly?

WHAT IS "OPEN" ABOUT OPEN ACCESS?

David Wiley, one of the leading thinkers of the Open Educational Resources movement, wrote recently of what he calls the "5 Rs" of open content: the rights to *Retain, Revise, Reuse, Remix, and Redistribute* (Wiley, 2014). Wiley's open content manifesto puts the spotlight on what openness really implies in a digital environment. His five-part schema describes an ethic that has – implicitly or otherwise – served the Web and the free software movement extremely well over the past two decades. It is also an ethic that describes much of academic freedom as we have understood it for a much longer period. But Wiley's agenda is not celebratory; rather it is provocative, in that it points out where so many of our supposedly "open" systems are not fully open. Access itself is not sufficient. Wiley notes the wealth of technical, legal, and social systems (practices, norms) that actively constrain the uses and future value of supposedly "open" content. Wiley's appeal asks us to put the emphasis on the readers, users, audiences, and *publics* that we generate and sustain with the work that we produce. It is a cultural argument that asks us to consider the future and to resist foreclosing on future possibilities.

Education, publishing, and scholarship are all *cultures of transformation*: at their highest levels, they seek to have a transformative effect on the world. Schooling was the earliest success story: young people exposed – more or less in real time – to the structured wisdom of their forebears made for a stronger, more capable society over generations. Publishing took that to the next level: the circulation of texts across society meant that ideas were far more durable and inquiry could be much richer and more varied (Latour, 1987). What we know as scholarship today is a fabulously rich environment in which people and texts intermingle in a community of structured inquiry. Given this, the opportunity presented by digital media is awesome. The strength of the Digital Humanities movement today is testament to academics' recognition of this. In this light, the Open Web is a *gift* to the cultures of knowledge and inquiry. The Open Web's character as recombinant, agile, iterative, and participatory makes it one of the most important things that has ever happened to scholarship. But we do not fully appreciate it yet; the Web's promise has yet to be fully reflected in scholarly practices (see especially Campbell, 2009).

In what is possibly the most intriguing article on online publishing of the past decade, networked learning specialist Mike Caulfield (2014) makes a case for "federated" publishing technology as a means of better balancing personal reflection, persuasion, and consensus. Caulfield's argument rests entirely on the virtues of an Open Web and the ethic of publishing openly not just finished products, but the processes and reflections that led to those ends. Drawing on anecdotes from the history of science, Caulfield observes:

You don't know who can benefit from your information, [and] the modern solution to that is to not even try to guess. Unless there is a compelling reason you should always publish it as openly as possible ...

This is the lesson I think most of you already know. But I think we often stop there, with openness. And I don't think that's enough.

We need to look more deeply into this because this is THE problem of our century. (2014, part 1, paras. 25 and 27-28)

Caulfield's proposed solution is framed as a hypothesis about creating a "spontaneous order engine that can move from the fragmented to the unified" (part 4, para. 12). This is not a science-fiction idea; the academy is and has always been such an engine. But the Open Web provides a potential matrix for this on a much vaster, and faster, scale, if we can somehow embrace it as such in our practices.

WHAT NEW PUBLICS CAN SCHOLARSHIP EFFECT?

At the Digital Humanities Summer Institute 2014, at the University of Victoria, BC, Aimee Morrison delivered a keynote talk, "DH as Fan Practice," that positioned scholarly research practices as a *reading genre*, in which the difference between scholarly kinds of reading and popular or mass market reading is but a matter of degree (pun only partially intended). The implication in Morrison's talk was that fan behaviours, from fanfic to compilation and collections, are opportunities to bridge or blur genres. "DH practices involve fannish behaviour," said Morrison (2014), as part of an argument against the old notion of disinterested research.

The generative possibilities raised by this talk are vast. Morrison speaks to a vision of scholarship that can actively include the public(s) beyond the immediate community of scholars and disciplinary peers. Moreover, this vision also suggests broadening the community of scholarship itself, and in doing so broadening the potential relevance of humanities scholarship. Imagine engaging audiences *beyond* the scholarly community – particularly online, where the humanities connect to broader cultural currents. What would such a move mean in light of the so-called crisis in the humanities?

This is the opportunity that presents itself today, at this moment in time. The scholarly work done in the DH community, and particularly in the INKE community, is already aligned with the virtues of openness and ongoing engagement. Let us not stop with only our *research* practices online, leaving the publication function to an older model.

Rather, let us explore the possibilities in broadening the scope of what we understand by "publication" to embrace iterative development, design for ongoing commentary and discourse, and allow for the potential of unanticipated reuse and remix downstream. The embrace of the Open Web and its native agile approach opens up a space in which, rather than specifying outcomes and audiences in static terms, we allow for ongoing interpretation and intervention, where we allow our work, our ideas, our prototypes and models, to live and evolve ongoingly, past our own imagining of their value. What kind of scholarly discourse will we see when the outputs of our work become not only accessible, but truly open: reviewable, revisable, reusable, remixable, by an unanticipated audience? This is the larger promise of truly open scholarship.

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