

The Methodologies of Open Social Scholarship

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Methodologies of Understanding and Enacting Open Scholarship

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Résumé de l'article

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METHOD

The Methodologies of Open Social Scholarship

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Implicit in the notion of understanding and enacting open social scholarship is that there is something broken with the current model of scholarly communication. This introduction outlines issues in the current models of academic publication while the essays explore potential futures in the academic publishing industry.

Keywords: open social scholarship; academic publishing; INKE

In 2017, the Implementing New Knowledge Environments (INKE) team gathered in Victoria, British Columbia for a two-day conference, 'Understanding and Enacting Open Scholarship.' INKE is involved at local and national levels in the creation of policies and methodologies to support networked open social scholarship. The members of INKE, located at institutions around the world, operate a sort of networked skunkworks for scholarly communication by testing new methodologies in the scholarly communication lifecycle, including—but not limited to—open peer-review, networked collaboration, and open-access journal publication ('Future Directions' 2018; Siemens and Arbuckle 2015). The annual gathering of INKE members provides a forum for participants to discuss their projects, experiments, and pedagogies in order to understand how new approaches to scholarly communication might be practiced in the future. By enacting new methodologies in their own work, INKE members have an opportunity to see if theoretical methodologies function in actual practice in order to share it with a larger audience. This issue on open scholarship provides methodological reports based on the work undertaken by INKE members in 2016/2017.

Implicit in the notion of understanding and enacting open social scholarship is that there is something broken with the current model of scholarly communication. Today, the scholarly publication industry is easily exploitable by for-profit companies that are accountable to shareholders rather than knowledge producers. Major academic publishers now boast 36% profit margins, a figure higher than any of the major technology companies, including Apple and Google (Buranyi 2017), and much of that profit comes from the free labor of university employees who write, edit, and peer-review articles and books as part of their service to the profession. Because article aggregators like Elsevier control some of the most prestigious journals in the world, they can package and sell academic labor back to universities at rates that create massive profit margins. If the research being published is funded through national grants or being purchased through publicly funded university libraries, one might reasonably argue that the public purse is helping fund private gains.

There is a question as to why academics continue to participate in a system that so clearly puts them and their institutions at a disadvantage in the information publication lifecycle. Although the web has radically changed the way people communicate and publish their work over the past twenty years, academic models of publication have remained in the previous century. The models of academic tenure and promotion, which drives the scholarly communication cycle, still favor 'print' monographs and articles. The more prestigious the print venue of publication, the better it is for one's tenure and promotion file. Publishing in elite journals can make or break a career, and publishers know this. Thus, new faculty are forced to play the game of free labor that academic for-profit publishing demands in order to secure their own livelihoods. In short, faculty are caught in a vicious circle: even if tenure-track academics want to support different publishing models, such as open-access publishing, there is no guarantee that their colleagues will consider an open-access venue prestigious enough for merit. This dynamic is particularly true of younger faculty members who are attempting to get tenure. It is simply too risky to publish one's work outside of the traditional venues.

One reason why senior faculty members tend to be more outspoken about the benefits of open-access publication is that they can afford to take the necessary risks to publish in those venues. It is a paradox that in order to support open access, scholars have to navigate an outdated tenure system entrenched in for-profit models of scholarly communication in order to attain the credibility needed to challenge that for-profit model in support of open access.

Libraries are caught in the cycle as well. As the center of research and information curation on campus, a university library makes millions of dollars of purchases a year, buying journal articles in packages from publishers that provide different tiers of access to journal titles based on fees. These fees continue to rise year by year, just as library budgets become more and more squeezed. Library leaders know that their costs are expanding in unsustainable ways and that the fees they pay for content, which their own researchers produce for free, are driving information providers into the red.

The Scholarly Communications Librarian has become an important colleague in the university as someone who can help faculty and students navigate the dark waters of modern publishing and encourage them to consider open options in producing their work. But even open access is now being monetized by publishers who offer 'tiered' systems of access based on how much a content creator is willing to pay—which can often be thousands of dollars an article (for content that was created and peer-reviewed without cost to the content provider). This model is, of course, unsustainable, and it further threatens to take advantage of publicly funded research. Libraries are beginning to fight back. For example, on December 31, 2018, the University of California Libraries let its Elsevier subscription expire due to how the publisher defines 'open' (Hiltzik 2018).

The Canadian Association of Research Libraries has released a 'Scholarly Communications Roadmap' that encourages university libraries 'to undertake to stimulate positive change towards an open, sustainable, effective and innovative scholarly communication system' (Brin 2017). The Association of Research Libraries notes that:

Open scholarship, which encompasses open access, open data, open educational resources, and all other forms of openness in the scholarly and research environment, is changing how knowledge is created and shared. For research libraries, open scholarship offers opportunities for campus collaborations and new service roles ('Open Scholarship' n.d.).

A large portion of a library's work is raising awareness among content creators about sustainable, open options for publication as well as about how our current systems of promotion may be exacerbating the current publication crisis. Forward-looking libraries have even started their own open-access journals, including the one in which you read this article, in which article processing charges (APCs) are reasonable. In the United States, Open Humanities Press has flourished with the support of universities and libraries ('Partners' 2006).

Some publishers are beginning to take meaningful steps to address inequality in access to information and rising costs as well. Johns Hopkins University Press launched MUSE OPEN this year 'to ensure that Open Access (OA) monographs are visible, discoverable, and potentially transformative in a highly diversified platform environment' ('MUSEOpen' 2018). The initiative is supported by the press and large funding bodies like the Andrew Mellon Foundation and will need steady uptake from the research community to succeed. In 1982, Robert Darnton published the now famous 'Communications Circuit' that attempted to illustrate how a textual work moved from its conception to the reader through a network of editors, publishers, printers, and sellers (Darnton 1982) in the pre-web world. The rapid change of technology, especially through web delivery, has radically changed this circuit in a short amount of time, which has created new opportunities for collaboration among authors, journals, libraries, publishers, and funding bodies. Initiatives like *KULA* and MUSE Open are important developments in this type of collaboration.

The INKE team is also at the forefront of asking what is possible in new ways of thinking about scholarship and publishing. Although the team consists of members from various professions and departments, the essays gathered here are from researchers (faculty members and students) who explore how Networked Open Social Scholarship and Communication can be understood and acted upon. There are quite a few terms at play here that require definition.

Networked: The web has radically changed not only how scholars communicate with one another but also how they communicate with a larger, non-university public as well. Members of the INKE community have a long-standing, international network of collaboration that allow them to do the work they do. Networked environments also allow them to share their work with one another and with the greater public beyond the

scope of traditional publishing models. Moreover, networked environments allow communities to share data as well, so rather than just reading an 'end product,' community members can play with the data produced in the production of knowledge as well.

Open: The knowledge produced by researchers—especially work made possible by public funds—should be made freely accessible to anyone, anywhere.

Social: The story of the lone genius working in an ivory tower, if ever true, is certainly not true now. Resources like Wikipedia and Wikidata show that many people working together and sharing the responsibility for knowledge production can generate world-class resources. Traditional hierarchies, including academic/non-academic, professor/student inhibit rather than further knowledge production. 'Social' also suggests that academics have responsibilities 'to the communities about which and to which it speaks' (McGregor 2017).

Communication: The web has fundamentally changed the way in which content can be produced and disseminated, and collaborative forms of communication should be considered scholarship along with traditional forms like the academic essay or monograph.

The following essays are arguments for different kinds of methodologies in the scholarly communication lifecycle and provide models for how scholarship might be made and disseminated in the future. In 'Modelling Networked Open Social Scholarship Within the INKE Community,' Alyssa Arbuckle and John Maxwell outline how INKE has put into practice methods to produce open social scholarship especially in terms of transparency within the communication circuit. In 'Foundations for On-Campus Open Social Scholarship Activities,'

Randa El Khatib, Alyssa Arbuckle, and Ray Siemens show how the Electronic Textual Cultures Lab at the University of Victoria has created opportunities for larger public participation in the production of scholarly resources. They challenge outright the logic of traditional publishing models and call for wider participation that internet resources facilitate. This essay provides important intellectual foundations for the question of 'why open social scholarship,' as well as its intellectual origins. In 'The Sociable Textual Archive: Laying the Groundwork for Linked Bibliographic Entities,' Brent Nelson looks at the developments around linked data and argues that we need to be thinking about describing our archives not only in terms necessary for the present moment, but also in anticipation of how linked data might unlock unforeseen relationships among archival objects in the future 'sociable' archive. Rebecca Wilson and Jon Saklofske combine game theory and pedagogy to show how open, web-based software like Twine provides ways of critiquing and thinking about new modes of publishing in 'Playful Lenses: Using Twine to Facilitate Open Social Scholarship through Game-based Inquiry, Research and Scholarly Communication.' In 'Artistic Research Creation for Publicly Engaged Scholarship,' Jon Bath argues that scholars need to prioritize the 'public first' when developing 'communication plans' to convey their work. Using the Post-Digital Book Arts project as an example, Bath provides examples of successful ways that researchers have harnessed new technologies to reach audiences beyond the academy. We end with Lynne Siemens' 'Developing an Open Social Scholarship Collaboration: Lessons from INKE.' Siemens' work studies the dynamics of lab-based inquiry, which is fairly new to the humanities though long practiced in the sciences. She argues that special attention needs to be paid in the training of humanities scholars encountering collaborative knowledge environments for the first time so they can learn from other disciplines already acclimatized to collaboration.

Models of scholarly communication will continue to change, and we seem to be in the middle of a massive restructuring in how we produce, disseminated, receive, and preserve knowledge. These essays provide a small window into the methodologies developed by INKE as it has grown and continues to grow into a more open and sociable future. Most importantly, they provide models for what a future that is more equitable, accessible, and open might look like. If the scholarly communication cycle is broken, here are some ways we might put it back together.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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