No-fee OA Journals in the Humanities, Three Case Studies: A Presentation by Open Humanities Press

Berlin 5 Open Access Conference: From Practice to Impact: Consequences of Knowledge Dissemination, 19-21 September, Padua 2007

Sigi Jottkandt

1. Introduction: Recent Problems on the 'Gold Road' to OA

I'd like to begin by giving a brief rundown of some recent events in OA publishing that are contributing to the wider academic community's ongoing perception that OA publishing has an 'unsustainable business model', and that OA journals are less desirable or trustworthy publishing venues than their commercial counterparts:

- As commercial publishers have begun to experiment with various forms of open access, a number of problems have arisen that have been documented by Peter Murray Rust. In his blogged review of access policies of different commercial publishers, he found numerous occasions where the open access option was misleadingly labeled, unnecessarily difficult to find, or not truly OA.[1] Such lack of transparency by the commercial publishers, whether intentional or not, contributes to the still largely negative perception of 'OA publishing' in the wider scholarly community as representing a form of publishing that has yet to be proven.

- Lobbying by publishers is starting to negatively impact whatever success OA was beginning to have on policy at governmental levels. Governments seem to have bought the publisher line that 'more research on the business model is necessary'. Publisher-sponsored initiatives like PRISM are doing their best to convey the idea that OA will destroy peer review. Embargoes are contributing to the impression that serious, 'cutting edge' work is not published in OA venues, or at least is not published there first.

- But perhaps most devastating for the perception of the viability of OA publishing was the recent decision by the Yale libraries to stop supporting BioMed Central because of the escalating costs of BioMed Central membership. According to the Yale libraries press release (August 2007), the cost of their support has increased from around $4,000 in 2005 to close to $30,000 in June 2007. This seems to bear out the commercial publishers' claims that OA is unsustainable without large grants, and that academic publishing is therefore best left to the established players with their proven capitalist business model of toll access.

The Gold Road seems to be hitting something of a road-block, suggesting that we may well do better by focusing our efforts on the Green Road like Stevan Harnad recommends. Self-archiving could be an immediately attainable way of achieving full

---

1   Peter Murray Rust, <http://wwmm.ch.cam.ac.uk/blogs/murrayrust/?m=200707> [accessed August 5, 2007].

open access if academics could only be persuaded through one means or another to deposit their work in institutional or disciplinary repositories.

2. Different Publishing Cultures of the Sciences and Humanities

However, while the Green Road makes perfect sense as a way of moving things forward in the sciences, it is not (yet) a viable option in the humanities for two main reasons:.

- There is still a deep suspicion of online resources in many humanities fields, despite the benefits the internet has brought to us in the form of the 'Digital Humanities', e.g. the digitization of primary sources, the development of new collaborative research tools such as NINES, the Media Commons experiments with the future of the book, etc.

- Humanities disciplines have certain established bibliographic conventions that are slow to change. Many still only recognize the publisher version of an article as the 'official publication of record' and do not yet accept pre- or post-prints as acceptable citation alternatives.

So since at this point humanities scholarship is still heavily dependent on the practice of professional publication, I believe that open access efforts in the humanities need to be chiefly focused on the Gold Road, at least in the immediate term. This certainly does not preclude us from advocating changes in our culture(s) of citation, which I am happy to see is also gradually becoming more responsive to online research practices - the Modern Language Association, for e.g. is now indexing 'scholarly websites' for inclusion in its bibliography. It has also established a set of conventions for citing from websites. There is clearly a growing receptivity to the new opportunities presented by the internet among humanities scholars, but this has yet to be translated into the widespread adoption and advocacy of open access that we find occurring in the sciences.

3. More Publishing Differences

Still, it's apparent that the model of the Gold Road as it has been paved by OA publishers in the sciences is not appropriate for the humanities. This is because of key differences in our publishing cultures. The business model currently employed by the most high-profile open access publishers in the sciences such as BioMed Central and PLoS - author-side fees - will not succeed in the humanities because

- first and foremost, humanities scholars simply do not have access to the same amounts of research funding as scientists

- humanities scholars are in any event profoundly suspicious of paying for publication as it smacks of vanity publishing. Although this varies among disciplines and among language groups, in general, the most prestigious publishers in humanities disciplines are those that do not ask for subventions.

4. Case Studies of No-fee journals in the Humanities

Although OA publishing in the humanities has yet to reach the level of acceptance and adoption it has achieved in the sciences, there are many remarkable success stories of Open Access journals in the humanities. In the time that remains, I'd like to present case studies of three journals in philosophy, cultural studies and Lacanian psychoanalysis as examples of how professional open access publishing can be achieved without author-fees or indeed without any substantial funding whatsoever. These three journals are edited by the founders of Open Humanities Press, a new open access publishing initiative that Gary Hall, David Ottina and I, with several others, founded in 2006. As it will become clear from these case studies, OA journal publishing in the humanities is largely a labor of love performed by the editors. But I would also point out that this largely volunteer effort is the norm rather than the exception in humanities publishing, in both OA and non-OA sectors.

5. Culture Machine

I'll begin with *Culture Machine*, one of the very earliest OA journals in the humanities which is about to celebrate its 10th anniversary next year. Founded by Gary Hall, David Boothroyd and Steve Green, *Culture Machine* started up with a departmental grant of 600 pounds.

Culture Machine is hosted on a non-institutional server that is paid for directly by the editors who in this way keep the journal independent. If the editors move jobs, as Gary has just done, the journal automatically comes with them.

Culture Machine is fully OA (i.e. no subscription fees). It also has no author-fees, and no 'page charges', thus it gets no monetary income from any source. Its sole financial outgoing, on the other hand, is the internet hosting (+/- 100 pounds per year).

How does it manage to be 'sustainable'? The copy-editing and proof-reading is performed for free by the general editors, or by the special editors of special issues. Following usual academic practices, peer review is also performed for free (a point that seems to need to be emphasized at this moment in time). These practices are typical of humanities publishing, where editing and peer reviewing is considered a 'service to the profession'. Some journal editors receive reduction in teaching loads from their departments in return for this work, others have a small budget for graduate assistants to help with the clerical work, while still others (like the editors of *Culture Machine*) do it without any form of direct compensation at all.

6. Cosmos and History

Cosmos and History is a journal of Anglo and Continental Philosophy edited by Aaron Gare and Paul Ashton. It is 2 years old, publishes twice a year, and again is not formally affiliated with any one institution.

The journal's start-up costs were around $100AUD, paid for by one of the editors to cover hosting. *Cosmos and History* uses free, open source software (Open Journal Systems), and its graphic design was provided for free by a member of the editorial team. Like *Culture Machine*, *Cosmos and History* has no author-fees or page charges.

Again, its sole financial outgoing is internet hosting, which is paid for by one of the editors (+/- 50USD per year).

7. S: Journal of the JvE Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique

S is a journal I co-founded earlier this year with Dominiek Hoens. The first issue is scheduled for Spring 2008 and like *Cosmos and History* we plan to publish twice a year. Our start-up budget from the Jan van Eyck Academy was around 2000 euros to cover programmer costs, technical assistance throughout the launch and hosting.

S is fully OA, it has no author-fees or page charges. The graphic design was provided for free and we are using open source software (OJS). The editing and proof-reading will be covered by my research stipend at JvE. We have a small budget for translations but essentially our main financial outgoing is again the running cost of internet hosting (140 euros a year), which the JvE is committed to paying for a minimum of 5 years.

8. No-Fee publishing the norm in the humanities

There is a tendency among OA skeptics to talk ironically about 'mythical' pots of money from which funding is supposed to come in order to support the 'Gold Road'. But these case studies demonstrate that sustainable no-fee journal publishing is not only possible but is in fact is the norm in many fields of the humanities, and not just in the OA sector. Uncompensated financially for the most part, humanities editors and editorial board members receive their compensation in alternative forms such as promotion, job security, better job offers and more general visibility and credibility - or 'impact' - within their fields. It is no secret that the humanities have never had a culture of being adequately financially compensated for what we do - we are used to giving our work away for free, so the humanities are a natural fit with the philosophy and politics of OA.

9. More Immediately Pressing Problems Facing OA in the Humanities

So if funding doesn't seem to be the main barrier to OA publishing in the humanities, why is it not being adopted by us in greater numbers given the well-documented 'crisis in scholarly publishing' we are currently facing? I and my colleagues from Open Humanities Press believe that the chief reason that OA has yet to be embraced by our academic communities is because it is not associated with the traditional markers or 'signifiers' of quality that play such an important role in determining where we decide to publish.

Because, as we have seen, they are typically put together on a shoe-string budget by editors who often have only limited technical experience, OA journals in the humanities frequently suffer from:

- Poor usability

- Poor graphic and production standards

- Lack of awareness of journal's existence (disaggregation)

- A failure to adopt open standards

- A failure to be picked up by 'prestige'-endowing indexes

- Instability or impermanence of journal content

- Lack of affiliation with a recognized and respected 'press' that oversees these issues

9. Open Humanities Press

Open Humanities Press is a grassroots initiative by academics, librarians and technologists who formed an open access publishing 'press' to try to spearhead the adoption of OA in the humanities by directly addressing these basic issues that are affecting OA's credibility in the eyes of our peers. Conceived in its initial phase as a not-for-profit, open access journal consortium modeled along the lines of PLoS, OHP aims to raise open access publishing efforts in certain areas of the humanities to the levels of professionalism our peers expect from publications they associate with academic 'quality.'

OHP's editorial oversight group is currently in the process of identifying open access journals in its targeted areas (critical theory, continental philosophy, history of ideas) that meet the editorial and open access criteria we have established over the past couple of months. Once they have been vetted and approved, these journals will become eligible for graphic design, usability and production assistance aimed at professionalizing their presence on the internet and building trust in the editorial reliability and quality of their content.

At the same time, we will be working with OHP's member journals to ensure they meet open standards. This will permit greater discovery of the journal's content by internet search engines, professional indexing services and meta-data harvesters. In addition, OHP will be working towards guaranteeing the preservation of OA journal content by providing OHP member journals with a stable home base, evergreen URLs and permanent archiving through a LOCKSS project.

We're intending OHP as a tangible demonstration to our still generally skeptical colleagues in the humanities that there is no reason why OA publishing cannot have the same professional standards as print. We aim to show that OA is not only academically credible but is in fact being actively advanced by leading figures in our fields, as evidenced by our editorial advisory board. Our hope is that OHP will contribute to OA rapidly becoming standard practice for scholarly publishing in the humanities.