Free/Libre Scholarship: Open Humanities Press

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I'd like to begin with a couple of anecdotes. In the spring of 2005, one of our colleagues in the English department of Ghent University, Belgium, received an email from Ali Hamada at the University of Mosul. Ali was writing to Gert Buelens, who was president of the Henry James Society at the time, to request copies of some recent articles he needed for the MA he was writing on James. The University of Mosul library holdings on English literature stop around the 1970s, he told Gert. Since I had only fairly recently finished my own dissertation on James, Gert shared the request with me and I was more than happy to photocopy what Ali had asked for, including a few more I thought he might find useful, and we bundled these up into a large parcel to be sent priority mail from Belgium to Iraq. By this point of course the Baghdad airport had already long been closed to international flights and I had no idea whether postal services were still reliably operating in Mosul. At the time I couldn't help feeling there was something completely Jamesian about sending a bundle of literary critical articles on Henry James into the heart of a raging war-zone. Incredibly, though, the parcel apparently arrived safely because we received a heartfelt email of thanks several weeks later.

The second anecdote concerns a small but well-regarded European journal that recently lost its funding from a university foundation because of low circulation figures. The journal's editorial board conscientiously considered a number of different options, including publishing open access, but chose in the end to go with a small Dutch academic publisher who agreed to take it on if the society could guarantee it a profit. The scholarly society accordingly nearly doubled its membership fees and the journal continues to be published in print, although I'm not sure if its circulation has increased much beyond what the university foundation deemed too low to be eligible for continued funding. The editor explained the decision saying that, even though he personally might have preferred an online solution, the general perception as canvassed among his readers was that the internet is not currently a suitable publication medium for scholarly journals such as theirs.

Barbara Cohen has very kindly invited us here to talk about the open access (or OA) movement and about a new publishing initiative, Open Humanities Press, that Gary and I, along with Barbara and a number of others, are working on together to try to encourage the adoption of OA in the humanities. [slide - What is Open Access?] Open access, as many of you will know, means putting peer-reviewed scholarly literature online, making it free of most copyright and licensing restrictions so as to remove the main barriers to serious research. This is a movement that has made remarkable strides in the Science, Technical and Medical (or STM) fields over the past 5

or so years, and it is demonstrating pretty convincingly that OA offers a viable solution to the current crisis in scholarly publishing that is hitting all of us very hard, particularly in the humanities.

At this point, the technical infrastructure has long been in place, a large number of institutional and disciplinary repositories have been established worldwide, professional online publishing tools such as Open Journal Systems are freely available to any journal editor, free or nearly free hosting solutions have been set up by and for academics such as Scholarly Exchange and, according to a number of studies the majority of readers, humanities disciplines included, already prefer electronic copies of articles.[1] We have to ask ourselves, what is creating our peers' perception that the internet is "not currently a suitable publication medium" for serious scholarship in the humanities, and this continues despite the existence of numerous excellent online journals, both toll-access and open access, in many of our fields?

Before I go on to suggest some possible answers, perhaps I should say a little more about the open access movement more generally. As I mentioned, OA was pioneered by the STM communities who very quickly recognized how the internet could have an enormously positive impact on the way scholarly communications are conducted. [slide - Budapest Declaration] The term "Open Access" itself was coined by the group who wrote the original Budapest declaration in 2002, which included Peter Suber, Stevan Harnad, and Jean-Claude Guédon. As Peter Suber tells it in an interview with Richard Poynder, the phrase was in part intended to signal Open Access's affinity with the Free/Libre Open Source Software movement (FLOSS) which has been responsible for the development of all kinds of software, including the hugely successful Linux operating system.[2] The Open Source community continues to astonish many commentators who marvel at its integrity, longevity and tangible demonstration that large numbers of people are willing to volunteer their time and energy for efforts they consider socially beneficial and personally worthwhile.

Open Access can refer either to archiving or to publishing. [slide - Green Road] Very briefly, since I'm sure this is all very familiar to you, archiving is when authors post copies of their work online, either in a repository or on a personal or institutional website. These are typically articles that have been accepted for publication, in which case they can be either pre- or postprints, that is, either the author's version prior to peer review, or the revised text incorporating the reviewers' suggestions. But archives can also hypothetically carry all sorts of other materials as well, something that Gary Hall has talked about in the past, including unpublished work, works in progress, data sets, notes, potentially even personal reminders informing us that we have forgotten our umbrella. Furthermore, archives themselves may be *institutional* repositories that contain only the work of previous and current faculty of the hosting institution. Or they may be *discipline*-specific repositories, like the archive CSeARCH that Gary and Steve Green opened in 2006 for cultural studies and related materials, which is open to anyone for any kind of deposit.[3]

1 Open Journal Systems <http://pkp.sfu.ca/?q=ojs>; Scholarly Exchange
<http://www.scholarlyexchange.org/>; See for example Kevin Guthrie and Roger C. Schonfe, "What Do Faculty Think of Electronic Resources? Findings from the 2003 Academic Research Resources Study" Kevin Guthrie and Roger C. Schonfel <CNI_Guthrie_What.ppt>.
2 Richard Poynder, "The Basement Interviews: Peter Suber," 31
<http://poynder.blogspot.com/2007/10/basement-interviews-peter-suber.html> [accessed 20 March, 2008]
3 <http://www.culturemachine.net/csearch>

[Slide: Gold Road - OAPEN] Open Access publishing, on the other hand, means publishing peer-reviewed scholarship online under an open access license. Open Access licenses such as those developed by Creative Commons permit differing degrees of use and reuse, but on the whole they tend in favor of Peter Suber's definition I gave before, that is, "free of *most* copyright and licensing restrictions." Open Access publishing does not in any way preclude print copies of the same text from being put up for sale as well, and this is a publishing model that a number of university presses are beginning to explore for monographs, among them UCP, MIT Press and the new consortium of European university and academic presses OAPEN.[4]

[Slide - Surfaces] It is in journals, however, that OA publishing has been around the longest. One of the very first OA journals in critical theory was *Surfaces* founded by Jean-Claude Guédon at the University of Montreal. *Surfaces* was publishing essays by Jacques Derrida, Sam Weber, Wlad Godzich, Rachel Bowlby, and Hillis Miller back in the very early 90s. The journal's first issue appeared in 1991. [Slide - PMC] Another early visionary case is *Postmodern Culture* which, appearing in the same year, is impressively still going, regularly publishing three issues a year. Its inaugural issue included contributions by bell hooks, Andrew Ross and Kathy Acker among others. Although published now by Johns Hopkins UP and part of the toll-access consortium Project MUSE, PMC nevertheless struck a fascinating deal that enables the editors to still offer a free current version and the journal back-issues in a text-only archive.

If I try now to put these early OA journals into some kind of personal context, I think back to my own first computer, an Apple Mac Classic I bought in 1991, with its tiny little black and white screen and "radical" innovation, the internal hard drive. It just amazes me how far-sighted and transformational in their thinking the *Surfaces* and *PMC* editors and editorial boards really were. So it's a great honor to now be working with Jean-Claude on the Steering Group of Open Humanities Press, along with Gary Hall who, as co-founding editor of the journal *Culture Machine* will be celebrating 10 years of continuous open access publication next year.

Given the existence of these and many other outstanding open access journals in humanities disciplines, it is difficult to understand and reconcile oneself with the idea that the internet is still largely perceived by many of our peers as an unsuitable publication medium for serious humanities research. I'm not sure if this perception would be surprising to you or not. To me, it's a bit mind-boggling to hear comments like those made by the editor of the European journal I mentioned before. But this attitude does still seem to be fairly widespread. I've just heard of a study being conducted by Humboldt University in Germany, for example, that is investigating and hoping to disprove the assumption that OA journals contain material of "minor quality."[5]

This negative perception of online scholarship does not seem to be confined to just Europeans. The 2007 University of California survey on Faculty Attitudes and Behaviors Regarding Scholarly Communication, discovered that many UC scholars are still distrustful of the internet as a professional publishing medium. Among other things, the survey reports that "many respondents voiced concerns that new forms of scholarly communication, such as open-access journals or repositories, might produce a

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4 http://www.oapen.com/
5 http://yoowe.ibi.hu-berlin.de/survey/index.php?sid=39175&token=35111927&lang

flood of low-quality output." And yet the same UC survey also found that "The Arts and Humanities [. . .] may be the most fertile disciplines for University-sponsored initiatives in scholarly communication."

What all of this suggests to me is that if we can find ways to reassure scholars that open access publishing is a suitable medium for high-quality output, the Arts and Humanities disciplines would be uniquely positioned not only to spearhead solutions to the current crisis in scholarly publishing but also to effect deep and transformative changes in the ways we think about scholarship in general.

[Slide - Open Humanities Press]

Founded in late 2006 by OA journal editors, librarians and technologists, the Open Humanities Press was born from the idea that high-quality open access content needs to be presented to readers in forms that they recognize as indicating quality. For as long as open access content is delivered on poorly designed, unprofessional-looking websites, lacking established citation ability and permanent archiving, an OA journal is unlikely to gain the respect of colleagues who, for whatever reason, are already predisposed against internet publishing. [Slide- PLoS] Here we looked to one of the most successful open access initiatives in the STM fields, the Public Library of Science (PLoS) for confirmation. As you no doubt know, PLoS is an open access journal publisher founded by Patrick Brown, Michael Eisen and Harold Varmus, which launched in 2003 with the peer-reviewed journal *PLoS Biology*. PLoS now publishes 7 journals, and has quickly developed a reputation as one of the best science publishers, alongside *Science* and *Nature*. A large part of PLoS's success is the involvement of some the most highly-regarded scientists in its fields, including a number of Nobel prize winners who rapidly gave the initiative a mainstream academic credibility. But I also think it does not hurt that the PLoS open access journals are beautifully designed, are consistently navigable, and convey an aura of reliability and quality.

[Slide - OHP Board] As a humanities initiative, OHP of course cannot hope to attract the kind of funding that PLoS has been able to command. But at the level of academic credibility, OHP is easily comparable. OHP's board is made up of many of the most well-respected, leading figures of literary and cultural studies and continental philosophy as can you see. [OHP Board slide]. This has incidentally confirmed one of the other key findings from the UC faculty survey, namely, that it is senior figures from our disciplines who are the most open to and willing to promote innovation in scholarly communication.

[Slide - OHP goals]

OHP's five goals are to advocate OA in the humanities, foster community, promote intellectual diversity, improve the experience of academic publishing and ultimately to explore new forms of scholarly collaboration. As a Steering Group, we felt that the most effective way of achieving these goals, that is, the most efficient way to change people's attitudes and behavior towards internet publishing, is not to ask them to change at all. People do not easily change established patterns of behavior, therefore to be successful technology must adapt to them. In the online publishing space, this would mean that mainstream OA journals, that is, OA journals that are online for reasons other than the inherent theoretical interest of the digital medium itself, should ideally be indistinguishable from their print counterparts, or at least indistinguishable from the electronic copies of these print journals that our colleagues are increasingly

demanding. In this last respect, toll-access publishers are in fact helping to spread OA as people are becoming used to seeing largely only the electronic version of the flagship print journals they read and publish in. Thanks to Project MUSE and JSTOR, it is becoming a sign of a journal's serious academic standing if it offers electronic delivery.

[Slide - OHP Journals] In our vision, then, the sole difference between OA and non-OA peer-reviewed journals would simply be that people will not have to go through the process of logging into their university library's server to read the OA journal, assuming of course they have access to one. For those who don't, OHP's journals will enable people to read least some of the relevant contemporary research. OHP's strategy is thus to use an existing model from humanities publishing, the one that our colleagues understand best, namely, a publishing house or "press." We felt that this was still the most powerful metaphor we could employ to gain the trust of our communities, especially that of colleagues who have no interest in digital media per se.

I might note that the term "open access publishing" itself is still unfortunately an object of widespread misunderstanding among colleagues in literary studies, many of whom seem to believe it implies a sort of open free-for-all of publishing, which is certainly not what it designates. In addition to educating people that open access publishing refers to *peer-reviewed* scholarship, the second biggest challenge for OA in the humanities is to overcome the idea that internet publishing is only for scholars who are already working in digital media. It was natural that online publishing would first be adopted by people who theorize and think about the new media, but this has also had the side-effect of creating a sort of digital media ghetto that I'm sure is contributing the perception that the internet is not a suitable medium for serious scholarship in other fields.

This perception is certainly changing, and we have initiatives like the Voice of the Shuttle, Romanticism on the Web, Romantic Circles, to name just a few, to thank for this. But there is obviously still more to do, and one of the things that might surprise a lot of our colleagues is just how many really good journals there are in their fields that are being published online for free. On the whole, these journals tend to be new, and thus not yet very well known, but the majority of them are simply very good peer-reviewed publications in a variety of different fields, possessing outstanding international editorial boards that for largely financial and distribution reasons — and of course in some cases political reasons — happen to be online. We thought that if we could bring certain carefully chosen instances of these journals together beneath a coherent editorial policy, endorsed by a board of leading scholars, we could raise not only these journals' individual profiles among our research communities, but also contribute to a greater acceptance of open access publishing in all fields. OHP thus invites a rotating group of scholars from its editorial advisory board to twice a year assess open access journals in critical and cultural theory whose editors have put them forward as candidates for possible inclusion. Among other things, OHP's Editorial Oversight Group considers a journal's editorial standards, its fit with OHP's intellectual mission, and its potential to become a leading publication in its field. OHP's inclusion policies are transparent and posted on the OHP website for anyone to read.

However, in addition to this external certification which is intended to inform readers about a journal's academic standing, OHP is taking a leaf from PLoS's book by ensuring that all OHP journals meet professional standards of design, usability and

production. For consciously or not, these factors inevitably enter into people's judgments of academic quality, and yet with today's web publishing tools, good design and professional looking production are no longer very difficult to achieve. In confirmation of this, a growing number of commercial presses such as Palgrave and Ashgate are inviting or in some cases requiring authors to provide "camera-ready" versions of their manuscripts to help reduce costs and speed up production. A certain technological literacy is becoming a necessary part of our education, and this, too, cannot help but assist in the spread of OA.

I'd like to close by talking a little bit about one area of the humanities that has eagerly embraced internet technologies, namely the Digital Humanities. There are a great number of rich and exciting initiatives that come under this rubric, many of which are reinvigorating how we conduct research and teaching. Among these are the new collaboration tools that are being developed including various "social scholarship" initiatives and fascinating re-theorizations of the future of the book, the much-needed digitization of historical archives — not to mention the interactive multimediated teaching environments that we're all, willingly or not, having to become habituated to. All of these initiatives are expanding and radically changing our traditional understandings of the genres of the essay, the monograph and the classroom.

What we at OHP would like to see more explicitly foregrounded in the discussion around the Digital Humanities, however, is something that strikes me and other members of the Steering Group as absolutely fundamental: the need to make the scholarly materials these tools are created for freely and openly accessible. I'll go out on a limb here and say that without free and open access to these materials, the majority of the innovations of the Digital Humanities will remain purely aesthetic. This is to say, the Digital Humanities will have built a tremendously fascinating instrumentarium but the internet's genuinely transformational promise will have been missed, largely as a result of our failure to understand the full implications of the digital medium itself.

[Slide - Open Access Advantage] Let me explain this by revisiting a number of the arguments that have been advanced in support of open access. The first, let's call it the "pragmatic" argument, appeals to people's self-interest by pointing out how OA increases one's professional standing. This assertion is supported by striking figures illustrating how open access boosts the number of citations of one's work, as seen for example, in these graphs from a study titled a "Ten-Year Cross-Disciplinary Comparison of the Growth of Open Access and How it Increases Research Citation Impact."[6] Known as the "Open Access Advantage," this argument is prevalent in the sciences at present. It is also starting to catch on a little in our disciplines, but I think it should be treated with some caution because the humanities are not well served by the quantification methods or "bibliometrics" that the argument implicitly endorses.

[Slide - Access Principle] A second case, one much better attuned to humanities disciplines, is what we could call the democratic or perhaps even the "moral" argument for open access. This states that, as authors, we have an implicit responsibility to make sure that our work reaches as wide an audience as possible. John Willinsky calls this the "Access Principle" in his book of the same name, stating "that a commitment to the value and quality of research carries with it a responsibility to extend the circulation of

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6   http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/12906/

this work as far as possible, and ideally to all who are interested in it and all who might profit by it."[7]

Willinsky's argument is powerful and intriguing insofar as it highlights a certain relation of responsibility we hold towards our own work, almost a moral responsibility towards our words that continues even after we have released them to others through publication. The "access principle" is a principle that I'd love to see gain wide currency in humanities departments, particularly because of the way it throws the problem of access back onto us, as authors, rather than conceiving it as a problem affecting other people. For this was incidentally another of the findings of the UC Faculty survey, which reported that "Faculty tend to see scholarly communication problems as affecting others, but not themselves." The "access principle" turns this on its head, transforming access into a problem that affects those who are in the best position to do something about it — authors. However, our newfound sense of responsibility must also be matched with appropriate venues in which to publish, otherwise it remains merely theoretical.

So let me put forward a third argument for open access, specifically directed towards the Digital Humanities this time. The new research tools I mentioned such as the ground-breaking experiments in text-mining and collection, the visualization opportunities that are transforming textual interpretation, the reconfigurations of the interrelations between author, reader and text that the digital technologies are enabling — for as long as the primary and secondary materials that these tools operate on remain locked away in walled gardens, the Digital Humanities will fail to fulfill the real promise of innovation contained in the digital medium. The internet is a mathematical medium, and it is a mathematical argument that I want to make. It's a question of what are known as "network effects."

[Slide - Network Effects] Network effects is the term economists use to describe the accelerated rate of growth in the "value" of a network in accordance with the number of people who use it. Initially established by Robert Metcalfe in the context of Ethernet card technology, this principle has since been applied to social networks and become known as "Reed's Law" after David P. Reed of MIT Media Lab who stated that "the utility of large networks, particularly social networks, can scale exponentially with the size of the network."

Reed's Law: $2^N - N - 1$

Essentially what this states is that the number of *sub-groups* formed *inside* a given network grows far more rapidly than the number of participants in the network itself. There are two ways that a network can grow internally in this way: the first is through an increase in the number of pair combinations within the network — this is the growth Metcalfe's Law reflects. The example Wikipedia gives to explain it is the fax machine: a fax machine is useless unless more than one person owns one. Accordingly, the value of a fax machine increases in proportion to the number of people who possess one. However, fax machines can only speak to another fax machine on a one-to-one basis, forming possible *pair* combinations within the network.

7 John Willinsky, *The Access Principle : The Case for Open Access to Research and Scholarship* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2006) xii.

Under Reed's Law, we take a step further and open up relations *within* a network's sub-groups. Here you no longer have one participant speaking to another on a one-to-one basis like the fax machine, but open up all the possible combinations of relations *among* participants, who may interact individually one-to-one, but also with groups, and groups within groups etc. In this way a "network effect" is generated whose implications, says Reed, are "profound."

The contemporary philosopher who has put the most sustained effort into theorizing what these profound implications might be is Alain Badiou, author among other things of *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds* and very kind and generous member of OHP's advisory board. Badiou rigorously thinks the "absolute hazard" permeating any network or system — or, in his terms, 'situation' — that successfully overcomes the limit of its own internal organizing law in the manner of Cantor's power set axiom — which is also incidentally the mathematical basis for Reed's Law: the power set of x (or the internal subgroups or "proper subsets" of a network) is greater than x. As Cantor's contemporaries rapidly discovered, once you grant this power set axiom, very strange things begin to happen mathematically. You get infinities of different sizes, for example, and new and impossibly large orders of cardinality, the pursuit of which has constituted one of the most fertile areas of modern set theory.

Briefly now, for Badiou, genuine innovation or "novelty" has a mathematical foundation insofar as it represents the "irruption of inconsistency" into situations that have been structured in accordance with the Cantorian axiom. Such an irruption of inconsistency is what Badiou names an "event," rare aleatory occurrences that function mathematically like limit ordinals, opening up new orders of transfinite infinities. Rather than being confined solely to discoveries of the strange and uncanny creatures that are continually being spawned in modern mathematics from Cantor's limitation principle, however, Badiou asserts that such mathematically generated "events" take place in other fields of human experience as well. Politics, art, science (or mathematics) and love are the four areas or "conditions" in which true novelty can occur insofar as each of these conditions employs a representational logic based on the power set axiom.

So I'd like to pass things over to Gary now with this closing suggestion that as a *power set* or network of networks, the internet intrinsically contains what Badiou calls "evental sites" — sites that harbor the potential for genuine innovation or "events," to emerge. However to be able to take advantage of the internet's potential for such "network effects" each of the separate parts or subsets within it requires the freedom to interact with any other part or subset in *any* combination without being constricted by barriers such as access.

"Mathematics," says Badiou, is "always richer in remarkable determinations than any empirical determination." I'm going to now ask Gary talk about some of the riches that open access to scholarly materials has already produced and speculate on what other "remarkable determinations" the mathematics of open access might yet bring.