Embracing Messiness

Janneke Adema
(Coventry University)

Session 6: The Mess that Open Access has become

The Post-Digital Scholar Conference. Publishing between Open Access, Piracy and Public Spheres

12.11. – 14.11.2014
Lüneburg, Germany
Angela McRobbie

“Cultural Studies was always messy”

Angela McRobbie, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* (Routledge, 2003), 47.
Open access will not make publishing sustainable

Different business models for journal articles and books:

http://oad.simmons.edu/oadwiki/OA_journal_business_models
What is a sustainable model?

- Does it depend on a single model being sustainable or on making the entire model of scholarly publishing sustainable?
- Does it mean commercially viable, making a profit or breaking-even?
- Does it mean sustainability in the short or long-run?
- And sustainable for who exactly? For scholars and their institutions? For governments and the tax payer? For stakeholders in the (commercial) publishing model as it is currently set up?
- Does it mean self-sustainable or sustainable with a certain amount of funding (i.e. the current model relies heavily on the free labour of scholars, funded by our tax money).
- Sustainable for journal articles or for books too?
- For both the sciences and the humanities?
Open access is not a model

But many of us have our doubts, not so much about the relationship between internal democracy and external imperialism (a story as old as ancient Athens and revolutionary France), as about the meaning of the idea of “model” applied to democracy, or the idea that having been once invented, a democratic model can be characterized by immutable institutional forms. The task then would be only to generalize it and bring it to its perfection.

Yet it is important not to see the presence of such differences and conflicts within the open access movement in purely negative terms – the way they are often perceived by those working in the liberal tradition, with its ‘rationalist belief in the availability of a universal consensus based on reason’ (Mouffe, 2005) (This emphasis on the ‘universal’ is also apparent in fantasies of having not just universal open access, but one single, fully integrated and indexed global archive). In fact if, as we have seen, one of the impulses behind open access is to make knowledge and research – and with it society – more open and democratic, it can be argued that the existence of such dissensus will help achieve this ambition. After all, and as we know from another political philosopher, Chantal Mouffe, far from placing democracy at risk, a certain degree of conflict and antagonism actually constitutes the very possibility of democracy’ (Mouffe, 2005).

Open access is not a solution to a specific problem
Stepping back to take in the big picture, we would be hard pressed, having spent six years networking extensively in the academic publishing and OA communities, even to articulate what problem is OA trying to accomplish. Ask a librarian, and you will be told that OA is meant to address the serial cost crisis (the rising cost of journal subscriptions and the impact this has on their capacity to fulfil the other missions of academic libraries). Ask a researcher, and you will be told that OA will allow more researchers to read their articles, leading to more citations and – ultimately – to better dissemination of knowledge. Ask an economist, and you will be told that OA will allow small and medium sized companies which do not have access to the latest research to do so, furthering the growth of the economy and job creation. Ask some activists, and you will be told that OA is meant to deflate the margins of capitalist exploitation of public spending. Ask an activist from emerging countries: you will be told that OA is meant to allow researchers and doctors in poor countries to have access to leading research. This lack of clarity on which problem OA is trying to solve, in turn, means that it is difficult to achieve any of these goals.

Claudio Aspesi and Helen Luong, Reed Elsevier: Goodbye to Berlin - The Fading Threat of Open Access (Upgrade to Market-Perform) (Bernstein Research, September 24, 2014) 10.
“The threat posed by OA seems to recede. OA policies have proved right, so far, the critics who argued that they would not threaten the status of subscription publishers. The hybrid model deployed by subscription publishers to meet the requirements of the UK government is not threatening in any visible way the subscription model of the journals; the rate of adoption of deposit policies for US federal agencies, and the embargo period of 12 months also protect the position of subscription publishers.”

“OA funding may in fact be adding to the profits of STM. It remains to be seen whether the publishers can provide evidence that they are not double dipping (i.e. pocketing Author Publication Charges (APCs) for OA publishing without lowering their subscription revenues). Absolute verification may prove in fact impossible anyway, but the publishers seem to use practices which leave wiggle room to keep at least some of the money.”

Claudio Aspesi and Helen Luong, Reed Elsevier: Goodbye to Berlin - The Fading Threat of Open Access (Upgrade to Market-Perform) (Bernstein Research, September 24, 2014) 1.
Radical Open Access

- Experimenting with the form of our publications, with remix and reuse
- Disrupting our print-based scholarly practices (peer review, copyright, authorship, piracy etc.)
- Critiquing the increasing commercialisation of academic publishing
- Engaging with affirmative alternatives to the existing publishing model
- Shifting the discourse from a focus on business models to a focus on values, ethics and process
- Critically exploring openness and the implementation of open access