

DIY Revolution:

A Manifesto for Open Access Publishing in the Humanities

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Given the amount of ink that has been spilled on the subject, we are undoubtedly living through something of a crisis in scholarly communication (Birkerts 1994, Bolter 2001, Flusser 1989, Hayles 2002, Meadow 1998, Striplas 2009). The standard model of academic publishing—a model that was initially developed in the wake of Gutenberg's technological innovation and that has been institutionalized and normalized over the last 600 years—vested considerable power in the hands of few middle men. At one time, these publishers and presses were essential and indispensable for the publication and distribution of learning. Print was expensive technology and the production of printed material, labor intensive. It required specialized equipment and physical distribution networks comprised of many complex components. But the rules of the game have changed. New technologies—digital media, computer networks, and mobile devices—not only challenge the print paradigm but allow for alternative modes of content creation, distribution, and access.

Responses to this crisis have taken two forms—which Slavoj Žižek, in a kind of clever remix of Thomas Kuhn, calls “Ptolemization” and “Copernican revolution.”

When a discipline is in crisis, attempts are made to change or supplement its theses within the terms of its basic framework—a procedure one might call “Ptolemization” (since when data poured in which clashed with Ptolemy's earth-centered astronomy, his partisans introduced additional complications to account for the anomalies). But the true “Copernican” revolution takes place when, instead of just adding complications and changing minor premises, the basic framework itself undergoes a transformation (Žižek 2008, vii).

On the one hand, there has been considerable efforts to Ptolemize the situation—forcing the Internet, the World Wide Web and the wide array of digital devices to behave like print. These efforts—undertaken by many of the established publishers and presses but also supported by major players in the IT industry like Apple, Amazon, and Google—introduce new ways to control information and regulate access to knowledge. These forces of Ptolemization are undeniably powerful and successful. They are not only well funded but have several hundred years of seemingly unquestioned precedent and tradition behind them. And to make matters worse their continued success is often supported by us—our practices, our disciplines, and our institutions.

The traditional print journal, in other words, has not been seen for what it is—a technological convenience and contrivance that was, at least for a period of time, useful and expedient for knowledge production and distribution. Instead, we have come to fetishize print. That is, we support and invest value in the technological apparatus over and against the goals and objectives of scholarly communication, which is what this technology was supposed to have facilitated in the first place. We continue to support, contribute to and patronize journals that broker information for cash, endeavor to limit use by way of restrictive copyright stipulations, and limit access to content by warehousing knowledge behind password protected firewalls. And what is perhaps worse, we continue to impose this expectation on our colleagues through tenure and promotion regulations that validate this tradition, its assumptions, and its practices. Ptolemization, then, certainly works but it has considerable costs; it is expensive, inefficient, and ultimately unjustifiable.

On the other hand, we can allow for and release Copernican revolution. That is, rather than Ptolemizing print technology and culture by retrofitting existing models and structures so that the previous paradigm continues to operate, we can work to reconfigure the entire system. Instead of twisting, contorting, and restricting the Internet so that it operates as some kind of digital emulation of the printing press, we can recognize the truly revolutionary potential of this technological innovation—direct peer-to-peer distribution and access to information that operates without the established and increasingly expensive intermediaries and gatekeepers. Understood in this fashion, open access publishing can be positioned as a kind of revolutionary transformation.

It not only reconfigures the basic structure of scholarly communication but deposes powerful authority figures and puts everything on the line. This is obviously an enticing opportunity but there are several challenges that go along with it.

My own involvement in this effort began in the summer of 2007, when I co-found, along with my colleague Paul Taylor from the University of Leeds, an open access journal in the humanities called the International Journal of Žižek Studies (IJŽS). As indicated by its title, the journal is dedicated to critical engagements with the work of Slovenian philosopher and cultural critic Slavoj Žižek. From the beginning we wanted the journal to be "open" from the content presented on the screen, through the code that generated it, to the operating system running on the server. This was not, I want to emphasize, just a gimmick; it was necessary for the subject matter of the project. Žižek, as one of the leading political thinkers of the 21st century has been very critical of the supposed and often unquestioned global success of capitalism and has endeavored to articulate alternatives to the status quo by rethinking the Marxian legacy and its revolutionary potential. Although Žižek himself is not a very tech-savvy individual, much of what he has written connects up and shares affinities with the open source and open access movements. Consequently, to deliver a journal dedicated to this thinking in any other format would be to risk contradicting in form what would be provided in content.

For this reason, the journal's publication platform is an open source content management system—Open Journal Systems (OJS), which is written in php, freely distributed as open source software, and run on a linux web server. In addition to this commitment to open source software, the journal is also open access. Content published in IJŽS is distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License and contributing authors retain all legal rights over their intellectual property. Likewise, access to journal content is available to anyone, anywhere and maybe used for research, teaching, and other non-commercial endeavors without restriction or payment of any kind.

Promoting this level of unimpeded access immediately leads to and involves our second main initiative—globalization. Because of Žižek's international stature and popularity, we were aware that any journal interested in critical approaches to examining his thinking and writings would need to accommodate a global audience.

The Internet was obviously the most efficient delivery mechanism for this kind of effort, but that did not address the complications of linguistic difference. For this reason the journal, from the very beginning, was dedicated to internationalization not only in its distribution format but also in content. We took the word "international" in our title very seriously and incorporated a number of feature and initiatives to ensure truly global content, reach, and support. The basic OJS installation, for example, includes native support for English, Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, and Turkish. And there are many more language modules available from the OJS community. This feature allows users of the journal to select the language of the user interface—effectively making the platform speak their language.

We also publish translations of leading articles by leveraging the knowledge and experience of our diverse user base, effectively crowd sourcing this effort. And we actively seek, accept, and publish content in languages other than English. To accommodate this, we have assembled an international editorial board and support staff that is able to manage and deal with this wide variety of languages. This structure ensures rigorous peer review and publication, irrespective of the original language of submission. This effort has been remarkably successful, beyond what we could ever have anticipated. From the beginning, we attracted quality work from accomplished scholars across the globe. We now publish 4 issues per year, averaging a dozen or so articles per issue. We have produced dedicated issues in Italian, Polish, Spanish, French, and Korean. We have over 8,500 registered users and citations average 2.2 citations per article per year, which is respectable for a new journal in the humanities. Despite these successes, however, the open access model that we have developed and support, does have some significant challenges, and I want to highlight four of them.

The first has to do with our rather unconventional business model. Under the current publication system, content producers—like you and I—research and write original articles, which we then turn over to commercial publishers by assigning them the copyright to the work. The publisher, in turn, charges users—individuals as well as institutions like university libraries—a rather substantial subscription fee for accessing the published content, which is provided either in “old school” paper form or online by

way of proprietary web access. In this transaction, however, only the publisher is directly compensated. The authors, the journal editors, and the peer reviewers typically receive no direct payment for their efforts. In effect, we give away our labor.

Open Access journals directly and deliberately challenge this approach. But not all open access strategies are created equal. On the one hand, there have been considerable efforts by the established publishers to capitalize on the open access movement by Ptolemizing the situation. These journals, like Sage Open or SpringerOpen, simply shift the burden of payment from the consumer to the producer without significantly affecting the operations or revenue stream of those in the middle—the publisher. The operative assumption driving this reconfiguration is that scholars often produce original research under publicly funded grants and it is these grants and research institutions, like universities, that should provide payment for publication. And many institutions now have established funds to support faculty in these efforts. Although this approach has worked well with publically funded research in the sciences and many of the professional fields, it would be difficult if not impossible for humanists, social scientists, and artists to come up with the article processing fee (\$500-\$1000 US) routinely charged by these established publishers. And to complicate matters, the researchers who stand to lose the most in this pay-to-play situation are unfortunately junior tenure-track faculty, adjuncts, and grad students—those individuals who most need to publish in order to establish their scholarly credentials but have the least in terms of available resources.

Consequently, a more radical approach to open access publishing can be found in both the open source software movement and the music industry, where users and content producers have operated in excess of middle men. In this alternative DIY (or do it yourself) model, content is not brokered for cash payment. Publications are open, freely distributed, and shared without restriction. Compensation for producing and publishing such content is situated elsewhere and provided by other means. This is the model we adopted at IJŽS and it is the model that we believe has the best chance of fulfilling the objectives of scholarly communication—making original research available to everyone across the globe without restriction or prejudice.

Second, and directly following from this first point, there is the issue of quality and credibility of research. We have, for better or worse, often associated the quality of scholarly communication with brand names, like Taylor and Francis, Sage, Blackwell, Springer, etc. These corporations have, like any brand name product, come to represent not just the means of publication but a credible mark of quality and achievement. One of the on-going challenges to the DIY open access movement is to establish quality measures and assurances that are able to be disengaged from corporate identity and brand name publishers. This requires, as we have discovered, a number of coordinated endeavors:

- Practicing rigorous and transparent peer review on the part of open access journals. It is the peer-review process and not the corporate brand that is the best assurance of quality.
- A commitment to and explicit statements supporting what we can call "media agnosticism" in tenure and promotion and university personnel documents. That is, we need explicit policy that recognizes the contribution of scholarly research irrespective of the medium of distribution.
- Review and accreditation by Open Access organizations like Open Humanities Press.
- Explicit support for participation in open access initiatives within the discipline and the institution by leading senior faculty and administrators.

Third, if DIY open access publishing is to be successful in the long term and not just a fashionable gimmick, we need to build new alliances and partnerships. We need to recognize that the now deposed middle men also brokered many of our professional relationships. They effectively connected scholars to each other, authors to audiences, academics to libraries and archives, and researchers to traditions of disciplinary knowledge. When you cut out the middle man, you also risk losing these important points of contact. Consequently, we need to learn what the music industry discovered over a decade ago—we need to rethink and reconfigure the terms of these

relationships, building networks of exchange that can operate in excess of the traditional journal publisher and commercial press.

Toward this end, we can and should leverage all the opportunities made available to us by social media, like Facebook and Twitter. These web 2.0 applications provides scholars, students, and other interested parties with a place to congregate, share ideas with one another, and make professional and personal connections. Although this kind of direct user involvement would often not be considered appropriate content for an academic journal, it is a crucial aspect of scholarly interaction, connecting like-minded people to each other for the purpose of on-going collaboration, conversation, and coordination. Despite the fact that some individuals see Facebook and other social networking applications as more noise than useful signal, we need to recognize the importance of these kinds of noisy interactions as crucial to establishing and maintaining a vibrant and engaged community. The academic journal has always been a form of social media, and the online nature of an open access journal is able to leverage this opportunity in a way that was unthinkable in the era of print.

Finally, in order to capitalize fully on its revolutionary potential, online open access journals need to do more than emulate their print predecessors. Clearly online, digital journals can do what the dead-tree print publications have done for centuries, and they can arguably do so more efficiently and effectively. But that would be just evolutionary progress; it is not yet revolutionary. Instead, open access online journals need to think beyond and in excess of the print paradigm. Toward this end, IJŽS has published not only traditional academic articles in text form but also recorded lectures in audio and video format, pod-casts, photographic slide shows, and interactive web-based scholarship that employs the full range and capabilities of this converged medium.

Print is, we must recognize, just one technological method for the communication of scholarly information, but there is no reason research and learning should be limited to this one particular medium. And it is, we believe, incumbent on the online open access journals to push the envelope on what defines scholarly work, forcing us, if I may be permitted to rework a famous line from Jacques Derrida, to think outside and beyond the printed text.

Let me conclude, then, by recalling another quotation from Žižek, this one from *The Plague of the Fantasies*, concerning technological innovation.

One should adopt a “conservative” attitude, like that of Chaplin vis-à-vis sound in cinema. Chaplin was far more than usually aware of the traumatic impact of the voice as a foreign intruder on our perception of cinema. In the same way, today's process of transition allows us to perceive what we are losing and what we are gaining—this perception will become impossible the moment we fully embrace, and feel fully at home in, the new technologies (Žižek, 1997, 130).

We definitely occupy a unique position—an historic time of transition from one technological system to another. But we are *in medias res*—in the middle of things. Print technology has not yet completely been displaced by the new technologies, and digital media are not quite at the point of completely taking over the show. In response to this transformation, I have advocated Copernican revolution in opposition to Ptolemization. At the same time, however, we should, as Žižek suggests following the example of Charlie Chaplin, take a conservative attitude to new media. Not conservative in terms of preserving the past—of Ptolemizing print media and culture. But conservative as it is described here—that is, not rushing headlong into a full embrace but learning to appreciate what is at stake, what could be lost in the process, and what new opportunities are to be gained. The DIY revolution in academic publishing, therefore, should not be understood and situated as a violent overthrow of the previous regime. It is instead an “occupy movement” that squats in the restricted structures of scholarly publication in order to invent and innovate the future.

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