

Open Scholarship in the Humanities: An OA Author Intervention

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Abstract: In dialogue with Marcel Knöchelmann's (2019) call for a discourse of openness for the humanities, this article employs an autoethnographic narrative informed by cultural and sociological theory to explore the experience of publishing an open access (OA) book. Drawing on Miranda Fricker's (2007) work on epistemic injustice, this account aims to help bridge epistemic gaps, as junior scholars are not often recognized as sources of knowledge in publishing debates. Utilizing both classic cultural theory and feminist new materialism, I reflect on the structures that have constituted me materially and relationally as a scholar and have shaped my first OA book as an intervention in the field. I agree with Knöchelmann that the predefined discourse of open science has limited utility for humanities researchers but disagree that practice and experimentation should not be part of a new discourse of openness for the humanities. Instead, I follow Janneke Adema (2021) in arguing for the book and its production practices as discursive statements and interventions in practice. I argue that, as one such intervention, arts and humanities researchers must reject outdated notions of academic prestige and actively and deliberately participate in a transformation of academic publishing in which OA is the norm to ensure that old forms of exclusion and inequity are not simply replaced with new ones. I further argue that legacy publishing strategies no longer reward early career researchers (ECRs) and that the visibility and reach of OA and the ability to work with a scholar-led publisher are more beneficial to academics than the "prestige" of traditional publishers. Academics, as readers, authors, and human beings in the humanities, must also bear some of the risk of this necessary transition to an ethical, sustainable open access landscape for books.

Keywords: open access, humanities, early career researchers, epistemic injustice, feminist new materialism

Introduction: Discourse, Testimony, and Intervention

Autoethnography is a reflexive practice wherein the researcher locates themselves as a cultural being—a person shaped by cultural, socioeconomic, and institutional factors and power relations—in a process of negotiation with individual agency (Ellis 2004; Ellis et al. 2011). We account for ourselves as subjects, as human people enmeshed in a variety of social and cultural relations, rather than perform a pretense of objective observation. In fan studies, where I specialize, this practice is very well established. Henry Jenkins, who wrote the foundational *Textual Poachers* (1992), coined the term “aca-fan” for an academic who is also a fan of what they study and hence a reflexive object of their own investigation. Matt Hills (2007) argues that researchers should take a reflexive approach to our own aesthetic judgments and their implications in our constructions of self-identity, recognizing our affiliation with certain ideologies and rejection of others. I therefore utilize an autoethnographic lens reflecting on my own experience in publishing my first born–open access book. Miranda Fricker’s (2007) concept of epistemic injustices provides a framework for understanding why such sociologically informed testimonial accounts matter: If early career and non-privileged scholars’ voices are systematically devalued in publishing debates, then autoethnographic interventions serve to redress that epistemic gap. By narrating, publishing, and attending to lived experience as a legitimate form of evidence, we both expose structural exclusions and model alternative discursive practices. This sort of publication is particularly urgent because precarious and non-privileged scholars are more likely to be, as Fricker puts it, “hermeneutically marginalized” (2007, 153), lacking equal access to the tools of meaning-making that allow us to understand and account for our experiences as scholars, a situation compounded by the testimonial injustice that affords less credibility to their voices (159).

Following a feminist new materialist perspective, the scholar and their work are both enmeshed in and constituted by the material relations and realities of academia, yet, as beings constantly engaged in shaping that material reality, scholars are also responsible for the acts (/cuts/interventions) enacted by those relations. If we wish to transform academic publishing, narratives such as this one are required to understand our shift away from the traditional perspectives on publishing that academics have been trained to accept. For sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1993, 1996), an individual’s participation in culture is a matter of strategic decision-making, often subconscious, to which we are inclined by our “habitus”: the class-structured social contexts in which we are raised and function.¹ Particularly pertinent to discussion of an academic career in the

1. Reed-Danahay writes that while Bourdieu would probably have rejected the term “autoethnography,” his idea of “reflexive sociology” is actually very resonant with it: “He used the notion of reflexivity to refer to social science writing that does not

humanities, Bourdieu argues that as an individual demonstrates appreciation of the “right” texts (books, music, some kinds of film), which upbringing and social position equip us to interpret, we gain cultural capital and so bolster our position in relation to other social agents within particular fields. We learn our habitus, our literal and metaphorical place, in childhood, conditioned by family and reinforced by education. Often subconsciously, we take up the cultural positions that we have learned to perceive as possible and beneficial at any given moment on our life trajectories.

In a 2019 article titled “Open Science in the Humanities, or: Open Humanities?” Marcel Knöchelmann contends that the broad fields of the arts and humanities need their own discourse of open scholarship, rather than merely importing concepts from open science. These concepts are often ill-fitting and sometimes claim to speak for scholarship as a whole. I do agree with Knöchelmann that, while humanities and sciences are not absolute divisions, “talking about *open science in the humanities* is [fairly] incoherent.” As a scholar of media and cultural studies, I have frequently been confused by discussions, meetings, and notices purporting to be about “open science,” assuming them not to be aimed at researchers like me, before learning that the topic under discussion included all academic subjects. I am also in agreement with Knöchelmann’s loose delineation of the practices and norms that help separate the “humanities” from the “sciences” (to an extent) and his acknowledgment that we therefore need particular ways of talking about the openness of these practices: “reliance on long-form publications (primarily the monograph), qualitative arguments, slower, editorially-heavy publishing processes, recursivity of its discourses, critique, and qualitative embedding of references. Moreover, the humanities live on a culture of debate, with the analysis and dialectic of interpretative understanding at its core.” “Perspectivity” (as opposed to objectivity) is also a key feature. Where I disagree with Knöchelmann, however, is on our conception of discourse. Knöchelmann writes that his understanding of discourse “does not refer to a Foucauldian conception of discourse that includes practices, but comes closer to the early Habermasian tradition that posits as discourses a rational exchange of communicative action.” He asserts, “the members of a discourse community may have worked on practical implementations, thus, conversions of knowledge into practices or experimentation to induce practical knowledge. That these practices are concerned with the knowledge in action that may be part of a discourse does not constitute that these practices are themselves components of that discourse.”

Knöchelmann does acknowledge and go on to discuss practical interventions, such as open peer review and licensing, but he feels that without meta-commentary explicitly

privilege the individualism of the author (which he felt was the misguided standard approach of autobiography) but, rather, reflects an awareness of the researcher’s positioning in various social fields and social spaces, as well as a broader critique of the ways in which social science constructs its objects” (2017, 147).

connecting these experiments within a coherent framework called “open humanities,” they lose utility, remaining fragmented. He writes, “only by means of textual reporting do the experiences of implementing practices or applying knowledge feed back into discourses” (2019). I agree that meta-commentary and discussion that frame experimentation *within* an open humanities discourse can be useful, particularly for the connection of various practices and reflections; the special issue of the *Journal of Electronic Publishing* in which this article appears may be taken as a contribution of this sort. But I disagree that practice is not discourse. Why wouldn’t discourse include practices, particularly a discourse ultimately focused on intervention and change? If discourses are composed of statements, practical acts can certainly constitute “statements” in this sense. Robert Young once glossed the Foucauldian conception of a statement as an “incision into a discursive field” (Young 2001, 402; cf. Foucault 1989, 28). Consider Foucault’s purpose to “show that to speak is to do something [. . .] to add a statement to a pre-existing series of statements is to perform a complicated and costly gesture” enacting “transformations in a practice, perhaps also in neighbouring practices, and in their common articulation” (1989, 209). This aligns with feminist new materialist modes of thought, which sees humans as actors engaged in a process of material becoming, whose physical and discursive statements enact reality into being (see Adema 2021; Barad 2007; see also Coole and Frost 2010). Is this not a more useful way to think about a discourse of open humanities than limiting it to meta-commentary, which is, in effect, what Knöchelmann does? Much of the open humanities discourse that is in play is quite literally this kind of interventionist transformation in practice. For example, the Experimental Publishing Group of the Copim project both piloted new forms of open access books and provided commentary and reporting on the tools, platforms, techniques, interactions, and relations that comprise the material of this open humanities discourse (see especially Adema 2021; Adema et al. 2021). If these innovations are—and *see themselves as*—practical interventions with transformative aims, it makes little sense to exclude them from the conception of discourse.

In this article, I use “discourse” to include physical and semiotic practices. I also apply a key passage from Adema, which builds on Karen Barad’s idea of action-statements as “agential cuts,” to the publishing journey: “these cuts are enacted by the larger material arrangement of which we are a part, but we are still accountable for the cuts that are made, for the inclusions and exclusions that are woven, for the relationalities and forms of emergence that are established, and—in the words of Haraway—for the specific *world building* that we as scholars do” (Adema 2021, 20). An agential cut is a statement in the Foucauldian sense. It is typically understood as a process of division—of discursively dividing and defining one “thing” as opposed to another “thing” within a network of relations. In this sense, all statements are a contingent act of division and definition, of inclusion and exclusion, of drawing boundaries in one place rather than

another. Barad states that the agential cut provides “a contingent resolution of the ontological inseparability within the phenomenon hence the conditions for [. . .] description” (2007, 348). But I will adapt the term slightly to “agential intervention” here, as I think this better reflects the range of transformations in a specific field—academic publishing—that I am arguing for. As scholars, we take up positions and make choices that are structured by the material realities we live in—they are “enacted by the larger material arrangement of which we are a part”—and yet the agential interventions we make in (or more accurately, that emerge from our relations throughout) our publishing journeys shape the discourse of open humanities and so reform those very material realities themselves. In what follows, I use “agential intervention” to describe acts—both practical and semiotic—that participate in and reshape open research and publishing structures. Such interventions may include choices around data management, choice of publisher, modes of peer review, strategies for data openness, and deliberately enacted modes of relating to our fellow scholars.

This contribution to the discourse of open humanities thus reflects on the agential interventions and material arrangements shaping the process of publishing my first born-OA monograph. With their long-form, discursive format and space for extended argument, monographs are critical to the humanities (Crossick 2016; Taylor 2019) and thus have the potential to act as powerful interventions in an open humanities discourse. I consider the collaborative process of publication and material reality of that book *and also* the meta-commentary in this article as agential interventions in discourse. I reflect on the material realities that shaped the researcher (myself), on my relations with the publisher of choice, on the openness of the data and process of finding it, and on the material existence of the OA book. In reality, all these elements and relations are entangled, but they will be addressed somewhat sequentially, for ease of reading, before a summary of what these experiences mean for and contribute to the discourse of open humanities in which authors have potential to engage with transformative change.

There is, of course, a reflexive tension in staging this theoretical disagreement within a conventional journal article. To contest Knöchelmann’s (2019) claim that practices are excluded from discourse, I am engaging in reason-giving and public argument. This irony is not a contradiction but an enactment of what Jürgen Habermas might call ethical discourse: testimony and reason intertwined. I therefore see *both* the practice of creating and publishing my first OA book and this rationalizing meta-commentary as statement-contributions to a discourse of open humanities that accounts for both practice and theory.

The above theoretical clarification is necessary because this article does not only offer personal reflection but also aims to show how lived experience of OA book publishing of a precarious scholar working with a small, ethical publisher can itself constitute a discursive intervention in open humanities. Without making this link, the

testimonial risks being misread as merely personal rather than as a form of ethical and political critique and an attempt to address the epistemic gaps that structurally omit or discredit the testimony and experience of precarious, mid- and early career scholars who are critical stakeholders in the changing field of academic publishing.

Part One: Context and Habitus

In 2023, the main UK funding body, UKRI, mandated that as of January 1, 2024, monographs arising from funded work must be open access within 12 months of publication. The paradoxical situation this creates (needing grants for the job post but needing the job post for grants) will be familiar to many academics in the humanities. Nonetheless, while many UK academics are considering the prospect of OA monograph publication seriously for the first time after the UKRI announcement, I had already in 2023 decided to publish my third monograph open access and to work with a new, experimental, and innovative publisher called *mediastudies.press*, leaving behind the security and cachet of the established presses that published my first two books. To my current colleagues, it may be surprising to learn that (1) my academic career began in the uber-traditional environment of the University of Cambridge and (2) as a new graduate, I was fairly well invested in ideas of prestige and exclusivity when it came to publishing choices. Though I would not have recognized these terms if put to me, I had certainly absorbed an in-practice understanding of how they *work(ed)* in the field of academic publishing and academia in general. In feminist new materialist terms, the material-discursive and economic relations that constituted me as a student and then scholar powerfully structured me to engage in reproducing the academic pathways associated with success and prestige. To follow Bourdieu, my habitus strongly inclined me to this: My father was an immigrant and my mother was born into poverty, out of which grammar school granted her social mobility. Both my parents were extremely invested in the importance of a “traditional” and “proper” education, indeed in prestige, though they may not have recognized the term as applicable to their ideas. Ironically, born with some inherent tendency to nonviolent non-cooperation and extreme skepticism of authority, I didn’t attend as many high school classes as I could possibly get away with, using the time to read instead. Yet this habit somehow resulted in an interested sixth form tutor telling me I should absolutely apply to read English at Cambridge, which I did.

As an undergraduate, I was increasingly dissatisfied with the narrow range of forms, styles, and mediums the academy defined as “literature” (though this is changing, even at Cambridge, if slowly). I spent most of my free time reading and writing fanfiction (fanfic), so I knew perfectly well that traditional markers of prestige (from price to

publishing house) were nonsensical at best and sexist, classist, and institutionally racist at worst. Prestige is a marker of received tradition and historical authorial privilege, not of objective excellence. There was terrible fanfic, certainly—and there was fanfic that stood up against “the canon” as readily as anything else I was reading in terms of traditional markers of quality for literary fiction. I conducted my master’s research on the history of copyright, still under the rubric of “English,” but this was largely a strategy to allow me to write about fanfic and other forms of experimental writing in a way I perceived as acceptable to the academy. It was during this process that I realized scholarship on fandom existed, so when it came time to apply for my PhD, I abandoned the familiar safety and reassuring academic kudos of “English” degrees for the newer field of media and cultural studies. Retrospectively, it feels as though my academic career happened by accident—that I made it up as I went along—but autoethnographically and sociologically speaking, it clearly represents a push and pull between the traditional markers of prestige, academia’s default tendency to reproduce its own norms and structures and inculcate scholars into received ways of working (Adema 2013), and some internal draw towards the experimental (digital) texts and free and open distribution I increasingly encountered, combined with suspicion of hierarchy. My “intra-actions” (Barad 2007) with the digital technologies and practices that fanfic now relies on inflected the conditioning of my traditional education.² That said, when I finished my PhD and my supervisors and examiners suggested I turn it into my first monograph, I knew nothing about open scholarship, or open publication. I had no idea that “free to read” books even existed outside of a library and assumed the library always paid. So I pitched the manuscript to the first publisher I found with “University” in the name and a fan studies series on their commission list, because I had absorbed an understanding that academic books equaled university publishers, or maybe, in the humanities, Routledge.

Bourdieu is not consistent regarding how much agency he designates individuals in their position-taking strategies. For example, sometimes he writes that position-taking within fields happens “quasi-mechanically—that is, almost independently of the agents’ consciousness and wills—from the relationships between positions, [so that] they take relatively invariant forms [. . .] amounting to little more than a *parti pris* of refusal, difference, rupture” (1993, 59). On the next page, he suggests it is possible to create a new position, though he is unclear as to how (60). But the very ability to create a position is also said to be a product of *habitus* (1996, 265; 1993, 71, 133). This is old theory, and yet the contradiction (or vacillation) in Bourdieu is interestingly harmonious with some feminist new materialist thought, in which humans are simultaneously

2. “Intra-action” is Barad’s (2007) preferred term to “interaction,” to stress the fluid and contingent relationship between assemblages continuously acting relationally upon each other, rather than finished or complete elements.

acting in, creative of, and acted upon by the assemblage of relations that constitute us as subjects. The lens through which one perceives potential positions is produced by the habitus and field position an agent currently occupies (Bourdieu 1993, 64–65, 137; 1996, 265). For example, my move into cultural studies was enabled by my traditional education in English, but I also held a very limited perspective on what kind of publisher was an option. I thus adapted my PhD thesis into *Fanfiction and the Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Cultural Texts* (2017), published by Amsterdam University Press. When the book came out, however, I was startled to see that the hard copy cost over £70. Thanks to my extremely privileged access to wealthy, well-stocked university libraries, I had managed to *publish* an academic book with less than zero awareness of how much an academic book usually costs. Then I forgot about it. After all, it was only university libraries who were *buying* the book, and it wasn't as though I was expecting royalties.

I was, however, expecting a job. This was forthcoming, though a piecemeal fixed-term contract, an employment pattern that has continued into the present day. Almost everyone in my academic cohort of PhD students has found themselves in the same position. This is not for lack of talent or of a “prestigious” name on our PhDs. For what it's worth, the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Culture is routinely ranked in the UK's top five or 10 in the QS rankings and by *The Times*, and, of course, Cardiff is a Russell Group member.³ I state this not because I think these lists, reputations, and ranks are objective measures, but to highlight my participation in the implicit contract PhD students are taught in the United Kingdom: that if we attend the right institutions and prolifically publish with the right publishers, permanent posts will be forthcoming, allowing us time, space, and security to pursue meaningful, in-depth scholarship free from the pressure of always chasing the next piecemeal contract (Knöchelmann 2024). But they won't be—not because candidates are declining in quality, but because the posts no longer exist, and where they do, they are rapidly falling to redundancies. According to the University and College Union (2025), around 65% of UK staff on research contracts are on fixed-term contracts, and women, disabled staff, and people of color are disproportionately affected.

When it came time to publish my second book, I was still uneducated regarding both open access and the fact that the implicit contract of academic publishing has collapsed. I therefore chose a university publisher with a fan studies series for *Emo: How Fans Defined a Subculture* (2020), though this time I was relieved that a more affordable paperback edition was offered. Again, my actions “quasi-mechanically” (Bourdieu 1993, 59) reproduced the norms of the academy and the structures within which

3. The Russell Group is a set of 24 universities in the United Kingdom that, rightly or wrongly, hold a reputation for the highest quality, particularly of research.

I operated, seeking the cultural capital earned by publishing with a recognized name and within a series devoted to fan scholarship. But I had, by now, begun to wonder who was actually reading my work and taken to checking Google Scholar for citations. Then something unexpected happened. In a short space of time, the citations for *Fanfiction and the Author* picked up rapidly. Google Books now puts it at 160 citations, whereas *Emo* (which is a better book) remains at 31. As it turned out, my first book had been made open access by Knowledge Unlatched, a process I knew nothing about and a decision I played no part in.⁴ Of course, the publishers were entirely within their rights to do so: I signed over the copyright at the time of publication. Still, it was rather jarring to realize this had happened without my input or knowledge and attests to the relative ignorance most academics operate in regarding academic publishing, even as our publishing choices consolidate and reproduce received ways of working. We do not produce books: Books are produced at the intersections of the relations that structure us.

Most academics are unaware of how publishing decisions shape access, readership, and citations, yet these decisions deeply affect the career choices that open to us. Fricke (2007) might call this lack of understanding a hermeneutic injustice, as many less advantaged scholars lack the conceptual tools and terms to name and share their experience of the publishing process. Knowing what I know now about open access, I believe there are fundamental problems with the workings of Knowledge Unlatched, but back then it seemed merely a fortunate chance that had made my book available to so many more people.⁵ At the same time, I felt slightly uneasy: The received notion, inculcated by the market, that a product available “for free” is less valuable than one with a price plagues academia at a near-subconscious level (see O’Hanlon et al. 2020; Tmava 2023). I later came to learn that some academics associate open access erroneously with predatory or vanity publishing (Scott et al. 2023; Lenahan 2024) and assume that authors or institutions have paid fees for the book or chapter to be published, which is not necessarily the case.

In 2020, the pandemic ended my post at the time rather abruptly. My department was making redundancies, and the decline in student enrollment expedited the process. Technically, I took voluntary redundancy, but the writing was on the wall, so to speak, and in any case, I needed to move. It’s hard to remember when anything happened that year, all our familiar landmarks canceled or rearranged, but at some point, I came across a job posting for a research position for the Copim (Community-Led Infrastructures for Open Access Books) project. I could research—I knew about books and libraries—I

4. Knowledge Unlatched is a collective model wherein libraries collaborate to fund OA editions of previously published books.

5. Knowledge Unlatched was acquired by the corporate publisher Wiley in 2021 (see Copim 2021). It has since been acquired again by the non-profit Annual Reviews, so its future direction may be more in tune with the founders’ original intentions, but in any case, there are arguably more sustainable and effective ways to build capacity for OA books than models making individual titles available on a case-by-case basis.

knew what open access was, sort of, and critically, the job could be done from anywhere. To my surprise, I got an interview. That is how I first learned about the different types of open access (Gold, Green, etc.), the inequity of pay-to-publish models (Pooley 2020; Raju and Claassen 2022; Deville 2023), the Berlin Declarations, and Plan S. I made a sticker chart and kept it behind my computer screen as I interviewed. In retrospect, I was still fairly ignorant about open access when I got the job, but I learned—fast. So began the series of relations from which my third book arose.

Work Package 2 of the Copim project, which I initially joined, was dedicated to the design, creation, and launch of the Open Book Collective (OBC), which is now a UK-registered charity. Via a collective funding model, wherein library and institutional members subscribe to support individual or packages of small and medium OA book publishers as well as the infrastructure and service providers that enable the production and dissemination of OA books, the OBC enables these book publishers to move away from book processing charges (BPCs) towards what is sometimes called a Diamond model of OA publishing, where no fees are charged to authors or readers. This sounds utopian—and perhaps it is. Project lead Joe Deville has often commented that depending on BPCs, which privilege funded academics on permanent contracts in wealthy institutions in the Global North and consolidate the hegemony of a handful of Anglocentric publishers, represents a failure of imagination (e.g., in Deville 2023). A reliance on BPCs fails to imagine how academic publishing and academia in general could be different: more equitable, more diverse, more sustainable. But it works. Or it *could* work, with sufficient institutional buy-in and support. Through my work researching the OA landscape, collaborating with librarians and small, scholar-led publishers, I came to be theoretically convinced of the necessity of our work. The academic landscape is monopolized by publishing giants whose aims are primarily financial, by received ways of working that re-entrench inequalities, and by prestige economies that depend on limiting access to knowledge production (prestige, after all, is a function of scarcity).

As I noted, my traditional education in English ironically consolidated my natural skepticism towards the systems that grant prestige, to names as much as to books, and my continuing work in fan studies, with its alternative systems of cultural production and free distribution of fanwork has only reinforced this. Prestige works to consolidate wealth and power, and even as more funders mandate open access for books and international treatises espouse the value of free access to information, the OA landscape is increasingly bought out by for-profit enterprises (see Copim 2021). BPCs can easily reach the tens of thousands. The OBC thus functions both as an intervention in the discourse of open access in academic publishing, aiming to disrupt the automatic association of legacy publishers with higher cultural capital, and as an avenue of choice for academic authors committed to a transformation in the field of academic publishing,

offering fee-free publishing choices to academics at every stage of their career. If we are to change the field, we as scholars must critically assess and reflect upon the material relations which have shaped us, but first, we need to consciously realize they exist and make them legible to ourselves and each other. Adema calls this “critical praxis,” an “awareness of and the reflection on how our ideas and ideologies become embodied in our practices, making it possible to start to transform them” (2021, 26). Without such interventions, academia reproduces itself, and academic publishing reproduces the same hierarchies, the same exclusions, the same subjects, and ultimately the same books. Books are fundamental to the humanities, so *doing books differently* is critical to the construction of an open humanities discourse. If we are not to replace “paying to read” with the equally exclusive and inequitable “paying to publish” formula as standard, we need to consciously constitute the relations (to publishers, to organizations, to each other) that allow for agential interventions, including via publisher choice.

Part Two: Choosing a New Way of Publishing

At the same time as I was engaged in work with the OBC, I was also writing a book. It was clear that I could hardly pitch it to a commercial publishing giant, or even to a closed access university press. Even if I hadn't been convinced of the ethical imperative and citation advantage of OA publishing, I couldn't exactly go into my next library-focused conference and attempt to persuade institutions to join the OBC with a closed access book at the top of my CV. Moreover, they probably wouldn't want it. After two books in reasonably “respectable” fan studies subfields, I had an unshakable idea for a rather more outré subject—that is, that I should write the first book about the fandoms attached to serial killers, who have been rendered by the media industries as celebrities (in the modern sense, of known-ness, not accomplishment) since at least the latter part of the 20th century. I have been an enthusiastic consumer of (varyingly prestigious) true crime media on and off for most of my life. Like many people, my interest was reinvigorated by the boom in true crime podcasting that followed in the wake of the massively successful investigative journalism podcast *Serial*, which launched in 2014. At the same time, I had always been vaguely aware that self-professed fans of serial killers and mass shooters existed, the pathologized “Bad Other” of the broader true crime community. The more content I consumed, and the more I reflected on the processes of production and consumption related to true crime, the less convinced I became that “respectable” true crime fandom was cleanly separable from the specter of this pathologized form of fandom, and the more interested I became in what self-declared fans of serial killers were actually doing with media. I chose serial killers as a case study specifically because of the well-documented process of celebrification of some such highly

mediated individuals. While I became convinced as I worked that nothing I was saying was particularly shocking or controversial—or at least, that it wouldn't be, once people followed my argument—I was equally aware that a book on serial killer fandom was something of an . . . untraditional pitch.

The relation between an academic and a publisher fundamentally structures and conditions the possibility of a book. Of course, there are multiple relations involved here—the academic and her field, the academic and her job role, the academic and her degree of economic security, to name but three, but the author-publisher relation produces clear potential for agential intervention. At that time, there weren't any OBC member publishers with a specialty in new media studies, but I'd recently been in conversation with a new, innovative scholar-led publisher from Pennsylvania called *mediastudies.press*. Launched in 2019, they had so far published primarily open readers in media studies and public domain works as high-quality reissues with online OA and low-cost paperback editions. *mediastudies.press* did not and does not have the cultural capital of a Big Name publisher. But it seemed to me they were more likely to be interested in my untraditional project, demonstrating how prestige/reproduction systems of publishing actively work to stultify academic fields, as academics are conditioned to opt for safer research subjects that slot neatly into predefined series and genres. Reproducing the tried-and-true prestige route had not rewarded me with job security anyway. The old position-taking strategies don't work anymore: They might gain us cultural capital (or they might not), but cultural capital doesn't pay the bills. So, I reflected, I had nothing to lose by an act of critical praxis. Perhaps in Bourdieu's terms I was creating a new position for myself, enabled (or unenabled?) by the field position I already occupied within academia. My relations with the OBC and the people who make up both the collective and the broader Copim community were certainly generating factors in this agential intervention.

I wrote to Jefferson Pooley, the director of *mediastudies.press*, with whom I was slightly acquainted. Jeff is a professor of media and communication who became a publisher. His profile page at Muhlenberg College read, "I teach courses that encourage students to reflect on what it means to live in a media-saturated society." My plan was to take a series of theoretical frames drawn from fan studies and apply them experimentally to the phenomenon of serial killer fandom historically and presently, concluding with an argument about the not-exceptional nature of killer fandom—to posit that, in my final research chapter on digital play, such fans are operating at the edges of a discourse already defined by the mainstream media industries rather than opposing them. Although I'd hoped that a publisher in Jeff's position might be more receptive to such an idea than a publisher not headed by a media scholar, I was unprepared for the enthusiasm with which my tentative pitch was met. Jeff truly understood my perspective and was extremely eager to send a proposal chapter out to external reviewers.

Open-identity peer review, in which authors and reviewers are known to each other, is gaining some popularity as an OA publishing practice, though it is not yet a norm (Adema et al. 2021). In some instances, this is an iterative practice, where reviewers and authors can comment simultaneously and openly on shared drafts. PubPub offers this affordance (see Kalir and Garcia 2021; Kiesewetter 2026). mediastudies.press gives authors the option of utilizing open peer review, but I didn't take it. I hadn't thought about the implications of open peer review. Like many academics, I can be plagued by shyness and imposter syndrome when it comes to my written work, so I found some comfort in the traditional (if sometimes fictional) masquerade of anonymity, at least until my contract was signed. I have since had an experience that makes me more inclined to think that open peer review is the more responsible practice and more likely to produce transformative scholarship. Fiona Godlee writes that anonymous reviewers essentially hold "power without responsibility" (2000). Judgments can lack transparency, and it could be argued that the decision of whether to publish rests too much on the subjective opinion of two or three scholars who may have their own biases, prejudices, and agendas (see Visconti 2025). Some time ago, I submitted an article to a highly "prestigious" journal that practices blind peer review. I disclosed with some trepidation that I have a visual processing disorder that affects my perception of the placement of signs and objects and asked forbearance for any typos or misplaced punctuation.⁶ One reviewer was complimentary of my scholarship. The other essentially implied that if I couldn't be bothered to fix typos, I shouldn't be an academic and that I was wasting their time. They also told me to use a referencing software, which is not accessible to me. There was some part of me that understood the absurdity of all this (discrimination *law* aside). It reminded me of borderline-failing PE as a county-level swimmer, because being unable to judge trajectory, I cannot catch a ball. I didn't care about failing PE, but when it comes to one's *personal writing*, it is admittedly fairly devastating, the very opposite of the "ethics of care" endorsed by publishers like those who are members of the Radical Open Access Collective and OBC (Adema and Moore 2017; Moore 2019; Adema 2021). If the fundamental justification for humanities scholarship holds water—that it teaches us, in the broadest sense, what it means to be both human and humane—then a discourse of open humanities must include such an ethics of care as these scholars and publishers formulate, including reconstruction of the way we treat each other throughout the process, the ways we include and exclude scholars, and the way we treat each other's work

6. The technical term for it is "object blindness," though it isn't related to eyesight. It affects the ability to process different visual elements in a single scene and how they relate to each other. But should we even be *asking* for forbearance for a disability? Does this not further the narrative that people with disabilities are welcome in academia "under sufferance," for as long and as far as we do not cause *too much* inconvenience? Sometimes I'm not a very good activist.

(cf. Joy 2020).⁷ The exclusions that academic publishing reproduces by default are not based on improving the quality of scholarship. They are based on maintaining prestige, which depends on exclusivity and the necessary exclusion of a wide range of voices and potential contributors. Choosing open-identity peer review will, at least, strip this process bare so that academics and editors are in a better position to assess and then change the effects of the process both on our scholarship and on ourselves.

Signature of the book contract did not require a BPC. Though the Open Book Collective doesn't demand that publishers eschew BPCs completely, it is a condition of membership that publishers commit to minimizing and moving away from this inequitable and unfair practice. I did have access to a small fund from my employment at Lancaster University that we were able to assist the publisher with, but this was only arranged after the publication contract had been signed. I had no particular complaints about the production processes I'd been through with traditional university presses, nor did I know or understand much about them. I turned over the manuscript, responded to the editors, and then the manuscript sort of vanished into the black box of the production process until it emerged as a book, demonstrating again the hermeneutic marginalization of the junior scholar. No relation from which agential intervention might emerge was established with me, and I did not attempt to establish one. It is only the experience of doing a book differently that enabled me to realize this in retrospect. By the time *Killer Fandom* entered production—and mediastudies.press became an OBC publisher member, triangulating the relations between myself, the press, and the organization that is now assisting them to continue their work—I was invited to be involved in the processes of typesetting, proofreading, and editing via the PubPub software and constant sharing of information such as tables. I didn't take full advantage of this, because again, I sometimes struggle with visual and tabular information. Perhaps there should be technologies that make it more accessible, like automatic high contrast color-coding of columns and lines or browser add-ons that highlight annotated text. Opening the production process to more scholars would certainly constitute and give rise to agential intervention. PubPub also includes the affordance for an author page, to which I have access, that tracks monthly and all-time engagement with the book on various outlets including OAPEN, Project Muse, and the paperback edition. A product of my habitus, I remain sentimentally attached to hard copies of books. Academics in the arts and humanities like books: We like to collect books, to hold books, and frankly my academic ego is apparently fragile enough that I still need a hard copy to prove to myself that I really am an author.

7. An ethics of care might also relate to nonhuman actors, such as technological and environmental. For fuller discussion, see Adema and Moore 2017; Moore 2019; Adema 2021.

The relation of a scholar-led OA publisher to an author, then, can produce an agential intervention shaping an OA discourse for humanities, in my case triangulated by both our relations to the Open Book Collective. If authors wish to act in the transformation to an equitable landscape of OA publishing, we need to make some choices that entail some risk. Prestige publishing strategies are failing: The implicit contract that the right publishing names lead to job security and positions that allow us time and space for meaningful in-depth research is broken. Selecting a new and innovative OA publisher may feel like a high-risk strategy, but given that BPC-free, high-quality, transparent OA publishers that practice an ethics of care already exist and are available to us, I would ask fellow academics to consider what it is that they are actually wagering. It is not “the quality of the book”—the OBC, for example, has rigorous quality and production demands. It is not “the publisher that will get me a permanent job”—this doesn’t work anymore. It is not the hard copy—these are provided. Lucy Barnes writes that the idea of prestige “has the capacity to overwhelm continued critical engagement,” as it “sets the conditions of its own value. A press might have a record of past distinction, but is it continuing to maintain that record in the present—or has it, by virtue of the prestigious reputation it has acquired, created the conditions for its activities to be seen as the best or only proper way of proceeding?” (Barnes 2020). Continued reliance on so-called prestige “deadens innovation” and “limits the choice of authors and the accessibility of research.” Barnes suggests replacing the notion of prestige with the quality of *soundness*, a term borrowed from Moore et al. (2017), wherein academics should ask ourselves such questions as, “How is research chosen for publication by the press? What are its editorial and production standards? How does it engage with new developments in book production? How widely are its works disseminated, and is its business model sustained by hefty charges levied on authors or readers?” (Barnes 2020).

In choosing an OA publisher, in establishing a relationship with them, and in collaboratively working towards the production of an OA book, we thus intervene creatively in an OA discourse for the humanities. Knöchelmann (2019) is correct to note the importance of the editing process to the humanities, but perhaps we should more properly call it the author-editor-book relation. *Killer Fandom* is produced at the intersection of the relations that have shaped me as a scholar, fan studies, the Open Book Collective, and the small, scholar-led publisher mediastudies.press in their particular specialism and operations. Because the implicit contract within prestige strategies is broken, academics should consider what it is we give up when we choose a legacy publisher simply because we think it will look better on a CV: collaborative participation in the publishing process? £12,000 in BPCs? Or more collectively, are we giving up the opportunity to participate in reshaping a publishing system that is less alienating, less metric-driven, and more conducive to the actual advancement of scholarship? The answer might be yes or no to any of the above, but as it stands, too

many scholars are barely aware of the calculation, because we operate according to the habitus in which we are trained. Early career and precarious scholars particularly are hermeneutically marginalized here, lacking language and concepts to fully understand our publishing choices and experiences. And what is it we imagine we are gaining by pursuing legacy strategies? If the answer is “access to a permanent post,” there are more publications and fewer posts every year, and supposedly permanent posts are made redundant with depressing regularity. Is it literally the *name*? In 2025, this demands the question: Why?

Part Three: The OA Book

I will now reflect on the book itself, both at the level of content and in terms of its existence and relations in the world so far. *Killer Fandom* is an experiment on many levels. In addition to the engagement with new publishing processes that I have described above, the content of the book follows the methods of a case study. In each research chapter, I adapt some traditional methods and frameworks from fan studies and apply them to new data sourced from the internet, to see what they do or don't tell us about the phenomena of self-professed serial killer fandom and its implications for the broader media industries. This work and the following account of the work as performed are not merely descriptive but discursive. In both the doing and the narrating of how the data was gathered, anonymized, and contextualized, the testimony of “how I did this” doubles as a rational intervention into what counts as evidence in an open humanities discourse. Here, too, Fricker's (2007) notion of testimonial injustice is relevant. Too often, junior or marginalized scholars' accounts of methodological choices are often discounted as “merely personal,” but narrating them openly is itself a corrective to epistemic gaps in dominant publishing discourse.

Data handling and the openness of data is one area where the discourse of open humanities needs development. We cannot simply transport the principles of open science, such as publicly sharing datasets, into the humanities wholesale. In my field of fan studies, data are produced through the relations between the academic, the fans, the source texts, and the socioeconomic conditions under which each operates. Academics are often in a more privileged and more secure position than the fans they study—at least, this was the case when the field was established and fandom was a relatively pathologized activity. Then, ethnographers were entering fairly closed communities and kept such information private for the protection of their subjects. When fanfiction was primarily published in zines, its authors used to fear accusations of copyright infringement. When Camille Bacon-Smith was researching *Enterprising Women* (1991), many fans held reasonable fears that their reading and writing about imagined LGBTQ+

relationships could have significant personal and economic repercussions if their names were linked to it. Even in the 2000s, when major television franchises such as *Supernatural* were featuring fans and fanfiction metatextually in their plotlines, some fans felt exposed and disturbed to see fan activities portrayed and indeed parodied in the public arena (Gray 2010). A discourse of open humanities therefore needs an understanding of data and openness that is contextual, responsible, and reflexive.

The data I used for *Killer Fandom* were compiled by systematic internet searches. Ethical guidance on quoting and attributing user-generated content (UGC) from internet fora is, to say the least, complex. In quoting from Reddit in two previous articles in different journals, for example, I had one editor appear mystified as to why one would delete pseudonymous usernames and another ask me to change the actual quotations to protect privacy. I did not do this, as it would defeat the point of a discourse analysis; I did anonymize them. Legally speaking, an academic researcher is generally safe to quote content from sites such as Reddit, YouTube, or Tumblr by username, whether or not the site claims the property, due to fair use/fair dealing affordances in copyright law that allow replication of portions of text for purposes of analysis and commentary. But beyond the sphere of law, the practice of quotation can be ripe for cultural misunderstanding and even appropriation, as Darcy Cullen and Allan Bell (2018) note regarding Indigenous cultures: “questions of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP) of intellectual property and cultural materials are key considerations for Indigenous communities, who since the time of contact with settler populations have seen their cultural content stolen, misappropriated, and misrepresented.” In the context of online research, we see a different but parallel issue—that is, users may be writing or creating in fora that are technically and legally open but are doing so with an “expectation of privacy.” The Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) writes that the rise of UGC and social network media “markedly increased challenges to protecting privacy [. . .] especially younger people were sharing more and more information online in what amounted to public or quasi-public fora. [. . .] But they often nonetheless *expected* that these exchanges were somehow private—either individually private or in some form of group privacy” (franzke et al. 2020, 7; emphasis in original).

There is no academic agreement on how far such expectations, where they exist, ought to be respected. Decisions can only be made and justified in context. In the case of *Killer Fandom*, I have ultimately veered more towards the open presentation of both my findings and the filter/search processes I followed to arrive at them, but I have not shared the files in which I compiled the data. My reasons for this are manifold:

1. The data are generally either anonymous or impossible to link to a living subject by default, such as attributed to a username that is simply an emoji.

2. Much of the data were transient, fleeting, and deleted from the internet without archiving before the book was even published. In this case, I had no choice but to attribute it to a deleted user or fora.
3. The “expectation of privacy” was not necessarily applicable. In fact, sometimes the reverse was evident; for example, in tagging a TikTok “fyp” (For You Page), users were clearly bidding for *publicity* of their content, aiming to make it appear on as many feeds as possible by gaming the site’s algorithm.
4. Where it *could* be argued that an expectation of privacy existed, there was again no way to link texts to a living subject. I do not see providing evidence and location that a text exists as compromising the privacy of its pseudonymous/anonymous creator, who could feasibly be anyone with internet access.

Moreover, the AoIR ethical guidance has since its early formulations drawn a distinction between “authors” and “subjects” under study. In the case of *Killer Fandom*, most (though not all) of the data would be classified as “authored”: that is to say, pieces of fanfiction, videos, TikToks, and so on, rather than exhibitions of subjectivity that may require a greater expectation of privacy. Most of the data are intended to be interpreted, to be misinterpreted, or to rebuff interpretation (see esp. chap. 5) rather than to make statements about the subjectivity of its creator (sometimes the paratexts actually spell this out). By detailing these contextual judgments, I aim to show that humanities data practices cannot simply import open science norms. Instead, situated testimonies of practice are required to build criteria for what counts as “open” in our fields. This is another example of what I call an *agential intervention*: a situated, accountable act arising from a set of relations between scholar, text, and field, whose participation in publishing and methodological standards affects their future shape.

At the level of process, I felt I could do no fairer than to relate my search processes—such as by site, hashtag, time period—and what was excluded: “‘Serial killers: fandom’ and ‘serial killers—fandom’ are both functional tags on AO3 (meaning that users have applied these as tags using a freeform system), though they have not been marked as common. I searched using both these tags, then excluded stories that were explicitly based on fictional portrayals and franchises. I noted the number of hits, comments, and kudos, as well the completion status, on each story and listed the results” (Fathallah 2023).⁸ The PubPub technology also allowed for some of what Knöchelmann (2019) called qualitative embedding of reference, both via links and via images themselves. What I did not do, however, was store and share the full datasets, such as documents full of copy and pasted images from constantly changing blogs, or extended sets of

8. AO3 is a large searchable fanfiction archive for a huge variety of fandoms.

comments from posts from the same creator. There are certainly humanities projects in which this sort of approach would be appropriate, but this was not one. Considering that many of these materials were rearranged, locked, or deleted from the internet in short timeframes, this sort of documentation would be too far from the reasonable expectations of the content creators.

Where findings have been deleted and purged from the internet, as happened with the Reddit community r/hybristophilia, I am in effect asking the reader to trust that I haven't fabricated findings in a way that probably wouldn't be acceptable in open science. The Internet Archive provides evidence that such a subreddit existed but hasn't captured most of the deleted content. Many former subscribers, though not all, also deleted their usernames, and in quoting I followed their lead: Those who had chosen to delete their handle were referred to as "deleted user"; those who retained it were cited. In sum, my practices of searching and citation owe something to a discourse of open science and something to the unique considerations of humanities researchers in a digital context. Context matters here: In the balance between evidencing replicable research and respecting material and privacy, there will be many studies that must tip more towards concealed practices, such as studies that link identifiable living humans to UGC or studies that deal with the materials of communities whose labor has historically been exploited by colonizing cultures. Perhaps the most "open" part of this element of discourse should be a sort of meta-openness, or openness about our degree of open practice, with justification and explanation of how we have come to such choices. Both the practice and description of this meta-openness, as applied to data, could constitute agential interventions in a discourse of open humanities, emerging from the relations between the researcher, other human subjects, and a variety of media texts.

Killer Fandom was published in November 2023, which is to say that it became openly and freely available to anyone with an internet connection, anywhere in the world. The response has ranged from overwhelmingly exciting to hilariously offensive and bizarre. On one hand, the book has led to an invitation to keynote a panel at the Fan Studies Network North America, alongside scholars I would never in a million years have placed myself, to an interview/book talk on the academic podcast *New Books Network*, and to the formation of a network with other scholars who share an interest in true crime and fan studies to take this work further. *Killer Fandom* has been used in two teaching syllabi that I know of, and I have been invited to contribute to both—all measures of what academia calls "esteem," reach, and visibility, which are arguably more to the collegiate and iterative purposes of scholarship than a publisher name or "citation count." The act of writing about these responses here is also part of the intervention: In recounting how audiences (academic and public) have engaged with my OA book, I am both testifying to lived scholarly experience and producing shareable reasons for considering open access a transformative practice. On the other hand, the book has received

a handful of extremely odd comments/public reviews by those who have apparently mistaken analysis of a cultural phenomenon that exists for a whole-hearted endorsement of it⁹ or, conversely, objected to my work on account of my apparently being a “tenderqueer [*sic*] libfem.”¹⁰ If we open our work beyond the lists of scholars who share our baseline assumptions, this sort of thing is inevitable, but then again, there is no cure for willful misreading, whether from inside the academy or without it. Nor is there anything to stop either fellow scholars or general readers who have only read the title from misjudging our work. It would surely be the worst kind of elitism to imagine that only fellow scholars are qualified to interpret our analysis of the cultural materials produced from outside the academy.

In some ways, *Killer Fandom* is still quite a traditional academic monograph, considering some of the experiments in hybridity and multimodality that are currently possible.¹¹ Even when OA books retain traditional formats, their availability, readership, and reception constitute discursive interventions. Publishing choices are not just pragmatic; they actively reshape what “counts” as scholarship. The book is, however, available on PubPub, which affords the ability for readers to comment on the work as they read. As of yet, no one has done this, though the book has apparently been accessed 3,347 times on the PubPub site as of this writing. This is not unusual. Despite the increasing number of tools allowing for online annotation, as R. Lyle Skains (2020) writes, “public discourse on the face of digital texts has not been a resoundingly successful venture,” due perhaps to “fears about being ‘scooped,’ about blowback, about domineering commenters, and lack of time” (949). Commenting on and annotating books is a labor- and time-intensive venture. If academics are not being culturally and materially rewarded for doing so, it is unlikely to become a common practice. If it were, it would surely advance the discourse of open humanities as a reflexive, iterative practice, with new statement-interventions emerging constantly from the relations between scholars and texts, but scholars are operating under material conditions that mean they work overtime just to fulfill the tasks for which they *are* monetarily rewarded. We cannot ask ourselves or each other to do everything differently from inside the very structures we are trying to transform. The scooping hypothesis is both persuasive and disappointing. Academic cultures and systems of reward do not reflect the communal, iterative, discursive, and never-finished nature of knowledge production, harkening back to Romantic ideas of individual authorship

9. By which logic, one supposes, a media studies scholar is an odd target: Surely the sociologists and psychologists of *actual crime* should be, at the very least, on some sort of watch list.

10. I don’t know what this means, but I feel like it was supposed to be an insult. I would in fact consider myself far more socialist than liberal, though I do not in fact discuss my economic leanings in the book.

11. See, for example, The Living Books About Life project from Open Humanities Press at <https://www.livingbooksaboutlife.org>.

and unique inspiration/genius. We know this isn't true—we know that the humanities are, as Knöchelmann (2019) has said, recursive by nature—but we are trained to behave as though it is true and to guard our “unique” ideas until we can publish them in official, citable formats. Scholarship is the poorer for this, and yet we cannot blame individual academics for it. What is needed is reform in recognition systems by universities, funders, and other scholars. Officially, the UK's Research Excellence Framework (REF) judges outputs solely on their own merit, regardless of the name of the publisher.¹² But REF is operated and instituted by humans, and humans are inclined to subconscious judgments, to reverting to received ways of working, and—let us not underestimate—to gatekeeping. Prestige being a function of scarcity, distribution depletes it. This is yet another reason we ought to do away with the concept of prestige as a measure of quality scholarship (which definitely does *not* deplete with distribution and probably grows with it; see Moore et al. 2017).

My primary hope for the open access book I have written—or more accurately, that has emerged from my relations with the publisher, OBC, a large set of online data, my institutions of employment, digital technology, and the field of fan studies—is connected to the formation of the new academic network. As Adema puts it, “Instead of seeing the monograph as a fixed object, I present it here as an elaborate set of scholarly practices, structures of knowledge production, and discursive formations [. . .] in a complex interplay of relations, the scholarly book helps to shape the various formats, debates, and actants that are involved in the processes of knowledge creation” (2021, 2). By virtue of the keynote invitation and securing a small amount of funding with which I launched this network via a workshop, one could see *Killer Fandom* not as an end but a starting point, not for something only I will do, but for a collective effort by academics in fan studies, new media, and related communication fields. I have already made new acquaintances in the related fields of folklore and journalism. The network has provisionally named itself “Making Meaning of True Crime: Fans, Audiences, Producers,” and our first aim is to host a conference from which an edited collection and/or journal special issue will arise. Ultimately, this is what books “are”: not things, but interventions that emerge from assemblages and reform into new ones. In keeping with the formation of a new “scholarly poethics” (Adema 2021) that can reimagine and reform our publishing systems, we as academic authors must now form the relations that will generate interventions to shape the open humanities discourse we wish to work in.

12. The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the UK system of research assessment for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Block grant funding is allocated to institutions based on its results.

Conclusion

Perhaps a discourse of open humanities can only ever be envisaged as a network, where statements (including books) don't constitute ends or edges, but rather starbursts, from which new knowledge and understanding spring. If the implicit contract of prestige publishing is already broken, then the real question for scholars is what we are wagering when we continue to reproduce prestige-oriented strategies. This wager is not only personal but collective, as we must ask what kind of scholarly ecosystem we want to sustain. Knöchelmann writes that in the context of the neoliberal metrification of the academy, "aspiring scholars are persuaded by the formal rationalistic logic that suggests a plannable future" (2024, 15). But in the era of precarity as the norm, such calculations are misguided at best. The hermeneutically marginalized, precarious, and/or early career scholar operates in alienated condition, wherein we publish "for the sake of counting and formal representation, not of purposeful scholarly communication" (17). Knöchelmann is primarily concerned here with the pressure to publish a lot, but my early absorbed experience (which at the time I did not recognize as an alienated condition) was more in line with what he calls the "elitist version" (18) of the "publish or perish" logic: If you publish in the "right places" (preferably a lot), you win. You win the professorship. But you don't, because there are more qualified scholars, more of the so-called right publications, and fewer of the professorships every year. So we might as well return to the original reason we presumably wanted to publish in the first place—because we cared about our fields and felt we had something original and innovative to contribute to them—and work collectively to re-create scholarly publishing as a healthier ecosystem both for cultures of knowledge production and for the humans that work within them.

This accords with both the Foucauldian perspective of a discourse as composed of material and discursive statements, which are a form of action, and the feminist new materialist idea of humans as acting in and acted upon by an assemblage of relations, out of which emerge new realities. Knöchelmann's (2019) conception of a discourse that excludes material action is insufficient to realize this concept, or to bring such a discourse of open humanities into existence. We do need a discourse particular to open humanities, but not one limited to meta-commentary. This vision of an active, connected, agentially generated open humanities discourse is also concordant with—or connected to—some Copim colleagues' vision of an open infrastructure ecosystem as a mangrove forest, wherein infrastructure organizations "would themselves be represented as mangrove trees, so branches would interweave with other branches, forming an overarching canopy of data exchange. Those smaller tendrils and branches reaching back to the ground then could also signify each individual stakeholder's rootedness in a larger collective and that collective's underlying set of values—values that guide and nourish the whole ecosystem" (Steiner et al. 2024). If we think of our outputs as trees, closely intertwined and growing together with other trees, each individual tree may

become less distinct (read: prestigious), but the overall ecosystem of knowledge production is richer and healthier. The problem is that current systems of academic reward are not set up to recognize and acknowledge this, and we as academics work inside them. But as I have said in several places, the implicit contract they *are* set up to acknowledge *is broken anyway*.

If we as academics fail to think beyond the habitus/structures in which we are conditioned and persist in the old prestige-oriented strategies, we will continue to get what we're getting now: Big Name publishers on our CVs, limited readership for incredibly expensive books, and no guarantee of job security regardless. Consciously or subconsciously, we will limit our research topics to accepted ways of working that fit into prescribed series and categories and exclude and penalize the valuable work of scholars beyond wealthy Anglocentric institutions in the Global North, depleting our whole forest. We will miss out on new connections with scholars in adjacent fields, losing the potential for collaboration and innovation across both. If we choose to be part of the change to an equitable landscape for diverse OA books, initiatives such as the Open Book Collective (OBC) are ready to enable us. Moreover, if we choose to establish relations with OA, ethical, values-based OA publishers, our libraries and institutions are more likely to support them through models such as the OBC. This article's contribution, then, is not only to argue for open access in the humanities but also to demonstrate that both testimonial autoethnography and the lived experience of publishing an OA book can function as discursive interventions. By making visible the material, institutional, and affective conditions under which publishing choices are made, such testimony extends theoretical debates into lived scholarly practice. Now we need universities and funders to deliver on their promises that research outputs will be judged on their own merits, not the names of their publishers; to leave behind outdated notions of prestige with its loads of classism, ableism, and racism; and to meet us halfway in bearing the risks of transition to a better way of academic publishing, for everyone.

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Open Peer Review Reports

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