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Living Books

Experiments in the Posthumanities

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The title-level DOI for this work is:

[doi:10.7551/mitpress/11297.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/11297.001.0001)

3 The Commodification of the Book and Its Discursive Formation

The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut.

—Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*¹

The book as a perceived object of material and discursive unity comes about partly through unitary notions such as the work and the oeuvre, both of which emerge out of the close bond between the book and the author.² In the previous chapter, I explored the discourse surrounding authorship: how it developed within book history and was taken up in theories of poststructuralism and in practices ranging from hypertext to the digital humanities and remix studies. As I showed there, this discourse has been shaped and sustained by essentialist and liberal-humanist notions such as (possessive) individualism, authority, and originality. These notions are, as became clear, hard to critique or recut in a sustained way (both theoretically and practically). This has to do partly with the close intra-action between the author-subject and the book-object. In their essentialist humanist uptake and performance, both can be seen to provide bindings and fixtures for scholarly communication (connected through notions such as the work and the ownership of a work). On the other hand, both the author-subject and the book-object can potentially be performed differently: through forms of antiauthorship and posthumanist authorship (critique) in the case of the author, for example, but also, as I will show in both this and the next chapter, through forms of open, experimental, and relational publishing in the case of the book-object. But due to their entangled state, this means that each alternative performance has consequences for both the book *and* the author.

Although authorship has played an important role in the formation of the book as an object, the commodification of the monograph has developed

alongside a more complex and interwoven system of scholarly communication and publishing. Over the centuries, the system of material production that has surrounded the scholarly book—which includes its production, distribution, and consumption and involves a variety of actors and practices—has played an essential role in the creation of the book-object and in how the monograph as a specific form of scholarly communication has developed and how it has been perceived and used. It is this book-object that has again performed a range of roles in the system of material production from which it coemerged. Not only has it functioned as a specific medium or a technological format through which research is communicated, but it has also served as a marketable commodity (i.e., for the publishing industry) and as an object of symbolic value exchange (i.e., for tenure and promotion in the context of the academic profession).

The history of print can be seen to privilege a vision of the book as a fixed object of communication; a discrete medial entity that, when well preserved, can have certain cultural effects. Here, in what can be seen as a naturalizing tendency in media history writing, print is often opposed to the presumed fluidity of orality and the mutability of handwritten texts.³ This dualist discourse surrounding the physical materiality of the book and its inherent fixity, stability, and authority, as opposed to more fluid and liquid perceptions, will be explored and critiqued in depth in chapter 5. In this and the next chapter, on the other hand, I will investigate how an aggregate of technological, economical, and institutional factors and structures, and the tensions among them, stimulated the development of the book into both a product and a value-laden object of knowledge exchange within academia. At the same time, I will show how the material features of the book-object, in intra-action with these factors and structures, were involved in bringing about our modern system of scholarly communication.

This chapter focuses in particular on the historical development of the scholarly book as a commodity and as an object of symbolic value exchange within publishing and academia. It explores—and at specific points intervenes in and reframes—the specific ways in which *the discourse* on book history has narrated and shaped this history, which has culminated in a communication system and a book-object that is no longer seen as sustainable and which runs the risk of becoming obsolete before long, if it has not done so already.⁴ Chapter 4 then outlines how we can critique and potentially start to change these cultures and systems of material and technological production

surrounding scholarly communication in such a way that it allows for alternative, critical, more relational and experimental forms of research.

Rethinking and deconstructing the object-formation and commodification of the book and of scholarship, both in academia and as part of our publishing system, will be a useful first step to start imagining alternative forms of research. Nonetheless, we can't ignore the fact that the book is and needs to be a scholarly object at some point in time and thus cannot only be processual and never ending, for a number of reasons. One of the reasons it will therefore be useful to rethink this object-formation is that doing so will enable us to emphasize what *other incisions and cuts* are possible that might critique certain excessive forms of the ongoing commercialization and capitalization of scholarship, such as the increasing need for measurement and audit criteria and for marketable and innovative research. Although the scholarly book functions within an integrally connected scholarly, technological, and economic context, this does not mean that we do not have a hand in constructing these realms differently, to intervene in the cultures of knowledge production in both publishing *and* academia. This is what I want to begin to do here by means of a *threefold, interdependent strategy* of rethinking and re-envisioning (1) the discourse surrounding the commodification of the scholarly book (which is the focus of this chapter); (2) the modes and relations of academic knowledge production; and (3) our own performances of, and material-discursive practices relating to, the book as a marketable object (both of which will be discussed in chapter 4).

The Discursive Formation of the Book as a Knowledge Object

With the coming of print (or even earlier, with the coming of writing), one can claim that the book turned into an object, a standardized product that can be duplicated over and over again to securely communicate and preserve thoughts. Even more, it can be argued that with the coming of the printing press, and especially with the advent of industrial mechanization and printing processes in the nineteenth century, the book turned into a mass-market commodity. Due to declining production costs, the book could be produced and sold to an ever-growing audience of potential consumers. New forms of material production thus accompanied this book-object, part of which became the blossoming (early) capitalist enterprise of the international book trade.

Similarly, and simultaneously, a system of scholarly communication and publishing arose as part of these new forms of print communication in Europe, with specific roles and power structures. It was a system that from the beginning was integrally connected with, and almost indistinguishable from, the developments and interests of the commercial book trade. This system for the production, distribution, and consumption of scholarly research (which can be seen as continuously in progress) consisted of practices and tactics of standardization, attribution, reviewing, selection, and quality establishment, as well as trust and reputation building.⁵ Eventually this developed into what we presently perceive as the “modern” system of formal scholarly communication.⁶ This gradually developing system can be said to have been partly responsible for turning the book, both materially and conceptually, into a *knowledge object* playing specific roles and functions within the scholarly communication and publishing systems and influencing future scholarly journal and book forms.

An analysis of the book historical discourse will help explain how this development in which publications turned into integral, trustworthy, authorized documents, unlikely to change, has been narrated and how, in a related manner, a set of functions and roles developed involving academics, publishers, and librarians, among others, all with a great stake in the system of securing the book as a stable and solid knowledge object and a commodity. At the same time, the specific materiality of the printed book is seen to have helped shape our scholarly communication system; some have even said that “historically, the school and the university have been the institutional expressions of the book”⁷

This chapter looks at some of the particular position-takings that were formulated within the book historical discourse in relation to the *commodification of the book* within publishing and academia.⁸ It outlines how these specific position-takings can actually be seen to have contributed to the emergence of the idea of the book as object and commodity. At the same time, it examines how an intervening in and a *reframing* of this discourse at certain specific points could potentially start to disturb simplified notions of the book as object and the binaries that have structured its discursive formation.

To provide an example, in battling the increasing commercialization of scholarship and publishing, it will not do much good to see scholarship as solely or most of all a cultural endeavor, in a conservative and reactive

stance against market forces.⁹ And all the more so because, as Bill Readings has argued, to uphold the idea of culture and the university's cultural value as a kind of antidote against commercialism has in many ways become useless, due to the way culture has now become dereferentialized (without a specific set of referents—i.e., things or ideas to refer to).¹⁰ In this respect, Stefan Collini has pointed out that we are still defining our cultural values concerning the ideal of university education based on an ahistorical context, one that was always already contingent and differential from the start.¹¹ It will therefore likewise not be particularly useful, in this specific context, to blame commercial publishers and their profit-driven interests for the impoverishment of formal scholarly publishing, while at the same time seeing scholarship and research as an endeavor that is, or has been, led solely by cultural values and motives.¹² Making a distinction between publishing as a commercial undertaking and scholarship as a purely cultural endeavor (which John Thompson is close to doing, as I show in this chapter) does not do justice to the fact that scholarly research and communication has always been a commercial enterprise, too, and has been intrinsically connected with and heavily involved in trade publishing from its inception. These kinds of simplified, black-and-white analyses are counterproductive when it comes to developing a sustained critique of some of the excesses and problems underlying the current highly interconnected publishing and scholarly systems and the way they function. Building on this position, I want to make the argument that academia and publishing are not characterized by separate, conflicting field logics; instead, a publishing function (or any other alternative system of material production surrounding scholarly communication) should be seen as an integral aspect of scholarship and of knowledge formation.¹³ What is more, change in scholarly communication, publishing, or even the university and, with that, our scholarly practices can only come about if we take into consideration the entangled nature of scholarship and the diverse concerns that continue to shape it.

For this reason, this chapter focuses on the genealogy of the material production of the book as a struggled over disciplining regime, involving both knowledge and bodies of knowledge across a plurality of frontiers of object formation, including technological, economical, and cultural-institutional aspects, and taking into consideration the book as both object and discourse. This chapter reframes this discourse at specific points by highlighting (some of) the binary oppositions underlying it (between technology

and culture, scholarship and publishing, commerce and the public good, openness and closedness) and proposes this as a first step in both targeting this object formation and formulating alternative conceptualizations.¹⁴

The following sections outline the development of our modern system of scholarly communication. The first section starts by exploring the initial stages of book objectification as narrated within the discourse on book history. It shows how historically, *historiography*, or specific narratives and representations related to print's origins and essential properties, has been used extensively as part of power and priority struggles—for example, between the stationers and the Royal Society in the UK—over who was to regulate the book-object through the material regime of trust that was being established around it. Here the history of the book was framed in such a way to better fulfill the various stakeholders' goals. This included the creation of binary representations; for example, print was seen as serving democratic scholarly ideals and the public good on the one hand, and market-based values, property rights, and political interests on the other. However, this was not a simple struggle between publishers and scholarly institutions or economic interests and scholarship; instead, politics, trust, propriety, and print were integrally connected within a print-disciplining regime and as part of property relations. These binary representations were highly performative, entwined as they were with power plays and politics, creating the future of print while setting up its modes of material production at the same time. In a similar vein, the genealogy of peer review points out that this was not simply a system devised and controlled by scholars to determine the quality of publications, but that it developed as a system of control and censorship, supporting economic interests and prestige. It was these struggles between stakeholders and the historical constructions that have arisen out of them (e.g., peer review) that enabled the rise of our modern system of scholarly communication.

The ensuing section then focuses on the rise of the university press as an institution that epitomizes the entanglement of university extension work and the forces of the publishing economy, pushing it to increasingly develop into a break-even operation. It examines how the mission of the press has been narrated within the discourse on book history before showing how a *repositioning* of this discourse can be beneficial with regard to battling the ongoing commodification of the book. As such, I offer a different frame for how to analyze the relationship between publishing and

academia, or the press and the university. Through an engagement with the work of John Thompson, the argument is made here that it can be highly problematic to perceive academia and publishing as different fields, the one operating via a cultural logic and the other via a commercial logic; instead, this section highlights how they both operate according to a similar neo-liberal market-driven logic rather than via opposed field logics. In doing so, it emphasizes the direct connection between the university's marketization and the crisis in publishing brought on by ongoing commodification, metrification, and managerialization.

The final section of this chapter looks at the development of open access publishing, which has been narrated as both a strategy against the commodification and objectification of scholarship and the book-object and as one strengthening it, being increasingly co-opted by commercial players, neoliberal rhetoric, and funder-driven mandates and models. It engages with the work of Nate Tkacz, who argues that the neoliberal tendencies within openness can be traced back and connected to its genealogy in the works of Hayek and Popper and an open-closed dichotomy. Instead, I propose an alternative genealogy for openness here—based on how it is integrally connected with practices of secrecy—which is put forward as a way to envision openness as a potential critique of the marketization of knowledge. I argue that openness has the potential to question these established closures as it inherently developed as part of an antagonistic system.

The Development of a Modern System of Scholarly Communication

When starting to analyze a history or genealogy of the cultural and material production of the monograph, the lack of a general historical overview is immediately apparent. Where the rise and development of the scholarly journal as a specific format has been reasonably well documented, resources on the development of scholarly book publishing are rather scattered, tending to be divided over individual press and publishing house histories that focus on regional or national developments (mostly concentrating on the UK and the US) or on a specific historical period.¹⁵ Scholarly book histories are often discussed and mixed up with general book publishing histories and with studies on the history of print or print culture.¹⁶ Either that or they are mentioned alongside textbook, trade publishing, and journal publishing, often without any focus being placed on their specific characteristics and

development.¹⁷ And in those cases in which a regional or periodic history is available, it is mostly historical facts that are provided, not a thorough analysis of the system and relations of material production surrounding the book.¹⁸ Based on a selection of the secondary resources that are available, I have sketched the following short history of the discursive formation of our material system of knowledge production and how it developed in dynamic relationship with the monograph.

Print Technology

Within book historical narratives, a lot of emphasis has been placed on the influence of print technology upon both the rise of the modern scholarly communication system and the rise of the book as a scholarly object and a mass commodity. But was it print that started this development? Ong, for example, states that it was the objectifying movement of writing that turned words into signs and time into fragments.¹⁹ Nonetheless, he argues at the same time that it was print that truly objectified words as things, to the extent that words were now made out of preexisting mechanical units (types). Print “embedded the word itself deeply in the manufacturing process and made it into a kind of commodity.”²⁰ It was with print that we entered what McLuhan called the “first great consumer age,” while Febvre and Martin declared the introduction of printing “a stage on the road to our present society of mass consumption and of standardisation.”²¹ Eisenstein also emphasizes that it was the advent of print that enabled the mechanical reproduction of books and transformed the conditions under which texts were produced, disseminated, and consumed. Initially, she states, it was not the product that changed (in the age of incunabula); it was that this product was reproduced in larger quantities than was ever possible before.²² The organization of printed book production also introduced new roles and functions, she points out, and with that the whole system around book production took on a different scale. By the same token, however, one could argue that the medieval production of manuscripts by scribes in scriptoria was already a highly commercial business. The market value of hand-copied books also remained high for a long time after the invention of the printing press.²³ Nonetheless, as Ong stresses, manuscript production was producer-oriented, while print was highly consumer-oriented.²⁴ The use of abbreviations in manuscripts, for instance, was designed to help the producer of the work, not to improve the ease of reading. Texts were

also often bound in one book cover in the Middle Ages, making it hard to ascertain the number of texts included in one manuscript. Eisenstein points out therefore that it was print that influenced the coming of the book as an object containing a single work.²⁵

Eisenstein further outlines how the printing press was incremental in promoting one of the main values of science: that of making knowledge public.²⁶ Print enabled feedback and secured old and new records. Once research observations could be duplicated in printed books, they became available to readers who could check them and feed corrections back with new observations that could then be incorporated into new editions again.²⁷ Print, Eisenstein states, was a publicizing machine: it stimulated the circulation of what was previously private information as a public good, promoting the move away from a system of guild secrecy and toward one of publication, which in turn led to more cooperative science. Print, she stresses, thus served both the motives of altruism and self-advancement that came to be so important in modern science.²⁸

The Commercial Book Trade

In addition to paying attention to the role played by technology and the materiality of the printed book, book historians have also focused on the influence the commercial book trade had on the development of our modern system of scholarly communication. As Eisenstein emphasizes, for example, one of the effects of the modernization and rationalization of the new commercial book trade was that it influenced the rise of an *esprit de système* in academia.²⁹ The newly established international book trade promoted an ethos that became associated with the community of men of letters, she states: "tolerant yet not secular, genuinely pious yet opposed to fanaticism."³⁰ Besides being commercial enterprises, print shops were also cultural centers, serving as the focal point of scientific development. Eisenstein thus argues that the rise of the republic of letters must be seen to have gone hand in hand with the development of the printed book trade.³¹ Febvre and Martin similarly point out that from its earliest days printing existed as an industry, in which the scholarly book was a piece of merchandise from which to make a profit and earn a living, even for scholars.³² For example, as part of the growing market economy around books, printers used new publicizing techniques such as blurbs to sell their books. Individual achievement was heightened in these processes, based on a market mechanism that followed

the practical need to advertise products and bring trade to shops. Likewise, Eisenstein argues that it was “the industry which encouraged publishers to advertise authors and authors to advertise themselves.”³³ The rise of scholarly authorship and the growing prestige of the inventor are also connected to new forms of intellectual property rights that were introduced in the book trade to prevent piracy.

The system of material production set up around print and scholarship is thus seen as having played an important role in shaping the emerging scientific communication system. Johns, building on Steven Shapin’s identification of trust as a key element in the making of knowledge, focuses specifically on how this system of material production established notions of credibility and trust.³⁴ He argues that it was not fixity as brought about by print technology but trust in a textual work that was able to turn a book into both a commercial trade and scholarly object. This included constructing trust in the book’s integrity, quality, and authority. Johns is therefore mainly interested in how the system of book production, distribution, and consumption was constructed and how it functioned, as well as in the shifting roles that were played by printers/publishers (stationers), booksellers, scholars, and the government or monarch, together with the various institutions that grew out of these groups, such as the Stationers’ Company and the Royal Society in England.

Chartier similarly emphasizes the importance of studying material practices with respect to book production and consumption, but, unlike Johns, he directly connects this back to the book as a specific technological affordance. For Chartier, then, a text is integrally connected to its physical support, where meaning gets constructed through the form in which a text reaches its readers. Publishing decisions and the constraints of print production are constituted within this form, he argues.³⁵ Chartier is thus interested in the controls that were exercised over printed matter as part of its production process, from exterior moral or religious censorship or forms of patronage to constraining interior mechanisms within the book itself. Print established a market, which came, Chartier shows, with certain rules and conventions for those players that made a monetary gain from this new commercial system.³⁶ What kind of struggles over the construction of the scholarly book and its history took place between these various constituencies? What was the influence of these discursive struggles on the establishment of trust and the creation of the modern system of scholarly communication?

As I made clear previously, Johns points out that it was first and foremost the stationers or publishers, and to a lesser extent booksellers, who were responsible for constructing a trustworthy realm of knowledge, by articulating conventions related to propriety.³⁷ Through the publishers' agency, following their interests and practices, printed materials and the knowledge embodied within them came into being. The social character of the printing house hereby influenced its products: who had access to the printing house, what were they allowed to do, and under what conditions. What kinds of books were printed and who got to decide what could be printed? Not unlike the present situation of academic book publishing, Johns points out that these decisions were often based on economics, where the priorities of the book trade came first, a state of affairs that did not always benefit academic authors nor the emerging system of scientific scholarship. Many scholarly works were expensive to produce (often requiring special typefaces in the cases of mathematics and astronomy, for instance, as well as elaborate graphs and images), and they suffered from a small market plagued by piracy.³⁸ This made learned titles unsustainable to produce in situations in which stationers were reluctant to publish them unless they could be guaranteed to sell. Capital was needed to print a title, Febvre and Martin explain, and thus only those books that satisfied a demand were actually produced at a competitive price.³⁹ Powerful patronage from public authorities such as bishops or the state was often needed in these situations, as well as capital injections through loans, to provide just one example. As such, in the early days of the press, the main factor in its rapid development was the interest influential men and institutions had in making texts accessible.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, marketable products still came first, Johns explains. Work on scholarly books was often delayed while printers concentrated on more immediately profitable material, such as pamphlets and ephemera, which were produced in the same space as folio volumes. These were what printers relied on for their economic sustenance, meaning that, as Johns explains, profitable pamphlets came before scientific books.⁴¹

Printers, Johns explains, were seen to personally vouch for the propriety of their products through their character, which was determined among other things by their respect of copy (meaning no piracy). Attempts to regulate the book trade against piracy and impropriety thus stressed the model of a stable, domestic household. This household image of propriety, comparable with today's emphasis on branding, played an important

role in reading strategies too. According to Johns, a reader judged a book based on practices and pragmatics, which included looking at the name of the stationer or publisher on a book's title page to determine reliable content.⁴² The craft community (including booksellers) worked to sustain good character for the book trade as a whole.⁴³ In this process, Johns argues, politics, propriety, and print were integrally connected: trust could become possible because of a print-disciplining regime. In England, the Stationers' Company established a propriety culture, as Johns calls it, which was essential in the establishment of the book as a trade and scholarly object. The connection between the market and the emerging scholarly communication system becomes even clearer if we take into account that property and propriety used to mean the same. As Johns states: "offenses against the property enshrined by convention in the register were seen simultaneously as offenses against proper conduct."⁴⁴ The Stationers' Company established a registry system for published books to counter piracy and to strengthen the representation of its business as a respectable and moral art.⁴⁵ In reality, this meant it had a monopoly over the publishing industry for setting and enforcing regulations. Where concerns of the state mattered heavily when it came to the book trade, in the representation of the stationer, licensing and propriety were both seen as integral not only to the concerns of the stationers, but to those of the state. In this sense, the company, Johns claims, "constituted the conditions of existence for printed knowledge itself."⁴⁶

The Academies and the Journal System

What role did the emerging scholarly societies play in this development? How can they be connected to the systems of material production that were set up around scholarly books? In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, new ideas were initially communicated by means of written correspondences.⁴⁷ Gradually, with the aid of official scientific academies, the increase in correspondences led to their standardization in journals or periodicals, which, as Kronick points out, enabled these conversations to take place in a more open setting. At the same time, the increase in the number of scholarly books being published led to the creation of book reviews. These developments mark the start of the first journals, such as *Philosophical Transactions*, which dealt with new ideas, and the *Journal des Sçavans*, which primarily served as a medium for book reviewing.⁴⁸

In England, as Johns has extensively recounted, it was the Royal Society, chartered in 1662 as a learned society of scholars, that tried to set up an order for the communication of scholarly research that was tailored more to the needs of academia. It did this by, among other actions, aggressive intervention in the realm of print.⁴⁹ The society has become famous for its publishing enterprises, which include—as mentioned earlier—the first scientific journal, the *Philosophical Transactions*, along with Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*. As Johns points out, however, these were the outcome of long processes of establishing conventions based on experiments within the society. As with the stationers, new concepts of authorship, publication, and reading were enacted in conditions of civil trust, ensuring that productions would not be reprinted, translated, or pirated without consent.⁵⁰ The Royal Society thus, Johns explains, attempted to “contain, and even redefine, the powers of print” in direct opposition to the order set up by the Stationers' Company.⁵¹ Experimental natural philosophers, in cooperation with the society, created new forms of sociability and new genres of writing, such as the experimental paper, the journal, the book review, the editor, and the experimental author. Within these confines, an openness and readiness to communicate was essential to promote the common good, Johns states. Virtual forms of witnessing were developed through detailed forms of scientific reporting. This civil domain of print was based on the society's own system of internal registration (or licensing) and external publication.⁵² Together, the protocols established around these systems are seen to constitute the emerging communication system in the experimental community.

Henry Oldenburg, secretary of the Royal Society, first developed an extensive system of external publication by setting up a network of correspondents across Europe, connecting the society to the broader world of learned men. It was this network that formed the basis of the *Philosophical Transactions*.⁵³ The latter extended the society's register into the “public” realm of print as a new strategy to secure authorship within the scholarly community of natural philosophers, creating forms of international property, Johns explains.⁵⁴ Johns also narrates how the society proposed a radical solution to the problem of discredit, making it an expressly *political* problem by suggesting direct royal intervention in the civility of printing: the Stationers' Company, together with the “print-disciplining regime” it had set up, should be replaced by a system of crown-appointed patentees,

with printers to be employed as servants to the society and the crown. The Stationers' Company regulated property via its register, which, seen as a threat to the power of the king, was ultimately challenged by this new royal patenting system that promised to replace the stationers' power with that of the monarch. In this new system, property and the right to copy came to be embedded in law, Johns explains. In this way, powerful intertwined representations of printing and politics (and power and knowledge) were constructed, representing, as Johns emphasizes, a revolutionary reconstruction of the cultural politics of print.⁵⁵

This reconstruction also had a historiographical element: in order to determine what the future of print should be (i.e., if it should be based on a registration or on a patenting system), a battle was fought over the historical origins of print, via a reconstruction of the historical origins of the press itself. The licensers from the Royal Society argued that print should return to its pure status as an "Art" that it had enjoyed before being incorporated, owned and regulated by the mercenary interests of the stationers as a "Mechanick Trade."⁵⁶ They claimed that the printing craft was the personal property of the monarch, whereas the stationers pointed out that it had always been a "common" trade. This example shows how the essential properties of print were disputed and how participants in the debate actually created print itself. As Johns states, "Practitioners of the press . . . made creative use of their own histories to delineate cultural proprieties for themselves and their craft."⁵⁷

In the end, printing would become part of court service and would rest on the civility of this system. The register mechanism became the defining element of experimental propriety within the society and the *Philosophical Transactions* its symbol abroad.⁵⁸ It is important to emphasize, however, as both Johns and Jean-Claude Guédon have done, that the emergence of this scholarly journal system had little to do with democratic scholarly ideas (in the tradition of Merton—something that is also visible in Kronick, for instance) and the public good, but with issues of copyright, with priority claims, and with royal hierarchies. As Guédon remarks in this respect: "The design of a scientific periodical, far from primarily aiming at disseminating knowledge, really seeks to reinforce property rights over ideas; intellectual property and authors were not legal concepts designed to protect writers—they were invented for the printers' or Stationers' benefits."⁵⁹ The limitation of the stationers' property rights in favor of the Royal Society as

a scholarly institution should thus not be seen as a form of promoting the public good and scholarship *in opposition* against economic interests. It was most of all a political conflict between the crown and the stationers, where the crown wanted to reassert its authority via the institution of the Royal Society and the law. In this respect, developments such as copyright should be seen, as Guédon has argued, as specific historical constructions that arise out of a moment of equilibrium between conflicting interests and parties. And just like the system of scholarly communication, this equilibrium is not stable or solid, but keeps on evolving.

To provide another example, the peer-review system did not initially appear as an integral part of science and scholarship. As Mario Biagioli has emphasized, peer review, or *refereeing*, was a specific seventeenth-century development tied to the emergence of the new institutions of the academies. These state-sponsored institutions were granted the privilege to publish their own works. Up until then, censorship systems had been controlled by religious authorities and licensing by the printers/stationers. The genealogy of peer review thus suggests that it developed within the logic of royal censorship, not as something protecting the interests of the broader scholarly community. Peer review was about establishing unacceptable claims (censorship), not about establishing good claims (quality), Biagioli points out.⁶⁰ As he puts it: “So while peer review is now cast as a sign of the hard-won independence of science from socio-political interests, it actually developed as the result of royal privileges attributed to very few academies to become part and parcel of the book licensing and censorship systems.”⁶¹ The academies needed to control print in order to sustain themselves and their protection by the royal patron. There were also strong economic interests involved. In addition to controlling publications, the academies needed to promote them in order to build their prestige and recognition to foster continued state support. This was the beginning of a cultural market, Biagioli remarks, where “publications . . . became a credit-carrying object, and these ‘academic banknotes’ needed to be printed, not only censored.”⁶² So although it started as an early modern disciplinary technique akin to book censorship, as Biagioli shows, peer review developed in the eighteenth century into an in-house disciplinary technique, and then it began to function as a producer of academic value. In the end, it no longer depended on a center of authority but was internalized, changing from external disciplining (state censors) to internal review (academic reviewers). It thus

functioned as a Foucauldian disciplining technique, repressing and producing knowledge at the same time.⁶³

Seeing the academies as promoting and enabling cultural and scholarly values and the public good in opposition to the economic and political interests of the state and the stationers can thus be considered a misrepresentation. This view ignores the priority struggles the academies, the state, and the stationers were involved in as part of the entanglement of political, economic, and technological factors, which enabled the rise of the modern system of scholarly communication. As Guédon rightly claims: “In short, a good deal of irony presides over the emergence of scholarly publishing: all the democratic justifications that generally accompany our contemporary discussions of copyright seem to have been the result of reasons best forgotten, almost unmentionable. The history of scientific publishing either displays Hegel’s cunning of history at its best, or it reveals how good institutions are at covering their own tracks with lofty pronouncements!”⁶⁴

University Press Publishing

In addition to the development of the academies, universities increasingly started to set up presses of their own to communicate their scholarly findings.⁶⁵ In Europe, Oxford University Press (1478) and Cambridge University Press (1521) were both founded shortly after the coming of print. Their early development was anything but stable, however, as it was only in the sixteenth century that some form of continuous publishing production was established for both presses. They were integral parts of their universities but also depended on commercial activities, such as bible publishing, to survive. This monopoly on bible publishing, which was disputed in its early days by the Stationers’ Company, supplied sufficient funding to support publishing in other, less profitable areas. American university presses were established in the late 1800s, as part of the rise of the American university itself, modeled on the German research universities. With the rise of the first universities, the need for a university press to accompany the university mission was strongly felt. In the case of Johns Hopkins Press (1878), for instance, it was the university president who strongly believed in the need for a press. As Thompson notes: “The American university presses were set up with the aim of advancing and disseminating knowledge by publishing high quality scholarly work; they were generally seen as an integral part of

the function of the university."⁶⁶ After Hopkins, 1891 saw the coming of the University of Chicago Press and 1869 of Cornell University Press, followed by the presses of the University of California and Columbia University in 1893.⁶⁷ The University of California's press grew out of the interest of the institution's librarian in creating series of scholarly monographs to exchange with similar series issued from other universities. These presses arrived at a time when higher education in the US was still in its early stages, operating on a very small scale. From the rise of the university presses onward, this gradually started to change at a steadily faster pace.⁶⁸

In the US, commercial publishing was already well developed by the time university presses came about. The main mission of the presses was to publish the kind of research that could not find a commercial outlet: specialized scholarly research. Again, Hawes states the importance here of university support, where "the American presses have depended essentially on funds from university appropriations and from varieties of benefactors, rather than from religious publishing, to help support the dissemination of scholarly research." This includes their tax-exempt status in the US.⁶⁹ It took the first presses some time to establish themselves (in a process that comprised a lot of failing and reviving) before a new wave arrived in 1905, with the formation of Princeton University Press. Alumni also played an important role in this movement by providing monetary funds in support of the presses.⁷⁰ Eleven more universities founded presses by the end of the 1920s, and another twelve did so in the 1930s.⁷¹ Hawes emphasizes the individual, organic development of these presses, as related to the specific university and people that ran the press. Eventually, in 1946 the Association of American University Presses (AAUP) was founded—a trade organization for scholarly publishers—stipulating membership qualifications in 1949.⁷²

What this short overview of the development of the university press focused especially on the US shows is how the publishing function was seen as directly related to the university's mission, which resulted in a relationship in which university funding to support the press was essential to the functioning of the institution. As Hawes argued: "Just as relatively high costs and narrow markets typify the publishing economics of scholarly books, subsidy support plays a fundamental role in the publishing economics of a university press."⁷³

The Monograph Crisis

As Hawes and others have pointed out, the ability to publish specialized, experimental work is not a sustainable enterprise. University presses were brought into life exactly for this reason, as nonprofit institutions publishing the kinds of works that were not commercially viable. The objective of university press publishing could therefore be seen as a form of university extension work.⁷⁴ This means they depend on forms of outside support and subsidies that lend them an advantage over commercial publishers, enabling university presses to support books that are not viable by their nature because they have a small potential market.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, after the gradual if moderate development of academic publishing in the United States up to the first half of the twentieth century, the 1950s and 1960s saw an extended growth as a direct result of the expansion of universities worldwide following the Second World War. Other factors involved in this expansion were the baby boom, the GI bill, the influx of women in academia, economic advancement, and educational investments as part of the Cold War. This rise in student numbers and universities led to increased funds and investments in libraries, which in turn created a demand for more content. By 1967, there were sixty university presses affiliated with universities in the US and Canada, and by 1970 there were thirty smaller presses active outside the AAUP. In the UK, seven university presses were active in 1970: Cambridge, Oxford, Liverpool, Manchester, Edinburgh, Leicester, and Athlone Press of the University of London.⁷⁶

This growth-boom ended rather abruptly at the beginning of the 1970s, followed by the economic recession of the 1980s, which marked the beginning of what we now know as the *serials* and *monograph crises*.⁷⁷ Greco has analyzed a large collection of sources, based mainly on research papers from the 1960s to the 1990s from the *Journal of Scholarly Publishing*, that first talk about a crisis in scholarly communication at the beginning of the 1970s, extending into the present. He narrates how the rise of commercial scholarly publishing at that time was luring commercially interesting scholars away from university presses, making it even harder for the latter to sustain themselves.⁷⁸ In their description of the start of the crisis, Harvey et al. note that universities were facing severe budget cuts at these times, which mostly meant their presses were the first areas of their activity to be cut, in the form of declining university subsidies. Library budgets were also cut, while publishing (warehousing, distribution, etc.) costs went up. This led

to a situation in which presses were—and still are—forced to change the books they publish, to the detriment of specialized scholarly monographs in the humanities.⁷⁹

The serials and monograph crises only became more pronounced in the 1980s and 1990s. In this period, the focus of the debate on the crisis in academic publishing shifted to the impact it was having on the tenure review process and on the future of early career scholars. This period also saw the growing penetration of commercial market forces into university press practices. Academic publishing was increasingly forced to adhere to a business ideology.⁸⁰ According to Thompson, a “new climate of financial accountability” arose for university presses around this time, which strengthened their uncertainty toward the nature and purpose of a university press. To a growing degree, they were expected to break even and to reduce their dependence on their institutions.⁸¹ In a sense, the perceived mission of the university press was breached in this situation. One of the results of this development was a greater throughput model, where publishers had to publish more and more titles in order to attain the same level of revenue. The growth in titles over the years did not necessarily mean the presses were doing well, however: they may have been publishing more titles, but they were making less profit per title.⁸² Besides, as Hall has argued, the increase in titles didn’t necessarily mean more new research was being published, as many scholarly books were “merely repeating and repackaging old ideas and material,” with publishers focusing on more marketable overview publications, such as readers and introductions targeted at students.⁸³

As noted earlier, this decline of university press publishing was at the same time affected by the immense growth of commercial scholarly publishing. Since the 1970s, the book publishing industry as a whole has been the focus of intensive merger and acquisitions activity, leading to a situation in which international conglomerates now rule the business. Thompson saw these developments coming about most clearly in the growth of title output (also in book publishing, where, as part of the commodification of the sector, both paperbacks and hardbacks were increasingly published); the concentration of corporate power; the transformation of the retail sectors; the globalization of markets and publishing firms; and the influence of new technologies.⁸⁴ This progressively corporate concentration of scholarly publishing can, as Larivière et al. note, be illustrated most clearly if we look

at journals. As they show, based on forty-five million documents indexed in the Web of Science over the period from 1973 to 2013, more than 50 percent of all papers published in 2013 were published by just five publishers. In the social sciences and humanities in particular, there has been a dramatic increase in concentration since 1973:

Between 1973 and 1990, the five most prolific publishers combined accounted for less than 10% of the published output of the domain, with their share slightly increasing over the period. By the mid-1990s, their share grew to collectively account for 15% of papers. However, since then, this share has increased to more than 51%, meaning that, in 2013, the majority of SSH papers are published by journals that belong to five commercial publishers. Specifically, in 2013, Elsevier accounts for 16.4% of all SSH papers (4.4 fold increase since 1990), Taylor & Francis for 12.4% (16 fold increase), Wiley-Blackwell for 12.1% (3.8 fold increase), Springer for 7.1% (21.3 fold increase), and Sage Publications for 6.4% (4 fold increase).⁸⁵

As John Willinsky argues, mergers with smaller publishers also led to a growth in subscription prices.⁸⁶ The excessive use of commercial branding, developed as a technique to cope with information overload, created a form of core science (i.e., citation index hierarchy), as well as core journals and reputable publishers. This creation of hierarchy out of branding has again made it easier to make a profit out of publishing, by creating an inelastic market; it has also made it easier to distinguish so-perceived excellent from mediocre scholars and researchers.⁸⁷

Journal publishing thus turned into a very lucrative business, affecting the system of scholarly communication directly. As Thompson points out, this “rise of powerful corporate players in the fields of STM publishing and journal publishing has squeezed the budgets of university libraries with dire consequences for academic publishers.”⁸⁸ Furthermore, university presses have increasingly been forced into commercial trade and textbook publishing to survive, while they are faced with strong competition from the conglomerates. This development led to the establishment of new publishing strategies for university presses, including more paperbacks, more textbooks, and a bigger focus on disciplines and subjects that sell: strategies that were seen as being inevitable if they wanted to survive. This again emphasizes how the logic of the market has increasingly become entangled with the perceived mission of presses to do university extension work. But beyond the commercialization and consolidation of the scholarly

publishing market, universities have played an important role in this development, too, as the next section outlines.

The Neoliberal University and the Marketization of Academia

The serials and subsequent monograph crises continued to be a topic of hot debate from the 1990s on, particularly where it concerned the function and future of the university press and its relationship to the university, something that would have direct consequences for the further development of monograph publishing. Critics such as Lindsay Waters have continuously pointed out the risks that come with the continued commercialization of university presses: “Academic books are not a sustainable or profitable business. The idea then that university presses should turn into profit centers and strengthen the university’s budget is ludicrous.”⁸⁹ Waters emphasizes the role played by the market in this development, pointing out that there is a direct connection between the university’s marketization and the crisis in publishing. Where the universities were increasingly focused on growth in productivity—that is, more publications—this meant, in Waters words, “the draining of all publications of any significance other than as a number.” As with journal articles, this meant books increasingly turned into “objects to quantify.”⁹⁰ Here there are larger problems that need to be addressed, connected to issues of accountability in university systems, the managerial/bureaucratic revolution, and forms of what Waters calls *cognitive rationality*.⁹¹ This turn toward an increasingly economic rationality in both academia and publishing took place after WWII, a period when “the university was made over on the model of the American corporation.”⁹² We can see here similarities with Reading’s argument on how the natural cultural mission that determined the university logic in the past has been declining and has been replaced by the idea of the “University of Excellence.”⁹³ From a connection to the nation state, producing and sustaining an idea of national culture, the university has become a transnational bureaucratic company following the logic of the discourse of excellence and accountability: a “relatively autonomous consumer-oriented corporation.”⁹⁴ Consumerism replaces nationalism here, where increasingly culture no longer seems to matter as a foundational *idea* for the institution.⁹⁵ The emerging issue of the demand for publications was one of the factors, in addition to a more widespread social shift generated by neoliberalism’s

reliance on managerial and consultancy techniques, that has led to the emergence of an audit culture within universities. Here quality is no longer assessed, but credentialing happens by counting up publications (what Waters refers to as *Fordist production*), with the effect that decisions about tenure or promotion have been increasingly outsourced to the presses.⁹⁶ The corporatization of the university, as well as the administrative revolution and the search for excellence, thus all play an important role in the commercialization of publishing, as well as in the development of the serials and monograph crises.⁹⁷

It is important to emphasize the role the corporatization of the university played in this development, as this lays some of the responsibility for these developments on a shift in academia as a whole to marketization, as well as on our own institutions embracing this market logic, and ultimately on ourselves as scholars within these institutions. Should we as scholars reassess our own role in this development? Are there ways in which we can create an alternative to the University of Excellence? Would this not involve, notwithstanding the abstract and often ungraspable nature of these market forces, that we start to change our own scholarly practices in response to and in reaction to them? I will come back to say more about this in the next chapter, but here I want to argue—as I already made clear in my introduction to this chapter—that it can be highly problematic to perceive academia and publishing as different fields, the one operating via a cultural logic and the other via an economic logic. Here the publishing function is perceived as a separate entity, something outside the university that is outsourced and othered, instead of envisioning it as a function that could and should be (and has been!) an integral part of the development of the university. The commercialization of scholarly publishing is deeply entangled with the waning of the humanities, and the increasing lack of subsidies for these fields is hitting both its disciplines and not-for-profit, book-focused university presses hard. The developments in scholarly publishing are directly connected to both the commercialization and globalization of the book publishing business, but what is equally significant is that they are integrally related to the neoliberal marketization and managerialization of the university.⁹⁸

Nonetheless, there are other views. Sociologist John Thompson, for instance, based on his specific adaptation of Bourdieu's field theory, makes a clear distinction between different publishing fields and the so-called social

fields to which they are related, such as that of higher education (which in Thompson's vision includes the world of university libraries).⁹⁹ Although he emphasizes that these fields are connected and have developed together, in his application of field theory, Thompson has a tendency to cleave the publishing function from the social field of the university. According to him, they are shaped by different interests and logics: "These fields are not the same, they have different social and institutional characteristics, but they are locked together through multiple forms of interdependency."¹⁰⁰ For Thompson, then, there is a distinction between higher education or the university, which is preoccupied with cultural capital and scholarly esteem, and the publishing field, which deals with commerce and the market—and these conflicting field logics give rise to tension, misunderstanding, and conflict.¹⁰¹ What he tends to undervalue is the fact that this tension is already part of the university system and has been from its inception. Likewise, this tension has been part of a publishing system in which cultural values and struggles have always played an important role—as illustrated earlier by the power play between the stationers and the Royal Society, for example.¹⁰² Here I would like to argue that the publishing field and the social field of the university—as Thompson distinguishes them—are not so much governed by separate (cultural and commercial) logics. Indeed, it is the logic of commerce, or the growing monopoly that economic values have in our neoliberal institutions, that is turning both the university and the university press more and more into commercial businesses. Academia as a whole, in which I include the publishing function, is structured by connected and clashing economic, cultural, technological, and political logics, rather than by logics subdivided into publishing and social fields that are then seen as conflicting with each other. Publishing, or the publishing function, is not to be solely blamed in this respect for the increasing commercialization. The root cause of this problem should be located in the larger struggle for the future of the university, where at the moment it seems commercial interests are winning.

In what ways are these functions then entangled? How do developments in (book) publishing relate to developments within universities? In addition to the examples already mentioned previously, another connection can be found in the hyperspecialization in scholarship—increasingly countered now by the need for inter- and transdisciplinary studies. This urge to specialize within academia is connected to the demand to produce ever

more research to increase one's *research impact* (which, as Collini points out, chiefly refers to economic, medical, and policy impact), based on research that at the same time needs to be original and new.¹⁰³ This kind of highly specialized scholarship is, however, increasingly hard to market by university presses that are supposed to break even or make a profit on their endeavors.¹⁰⁴ Another related problem is the creation of ever more PhD students, as well as academics on zero hours and temporary contracts, who are to a growing degree working as cheap labor and replacing contracted, full-time staff.¹⁰⁵ PhD students interested in an academic career are also, following the accountability logic of the university, expected to publish their dissertations, which are again supposed to contain highly original and new research, in order to apply for increasingly fewer full-time positions. All this while "at the same time . . . the market for the scholarly book has collapsed," making it harder for these early career researchers to attain tenure positions in their fields.¹⁰⁶

Thompson argues that it has been the clash between different logics that has created a situation in which the "field of academic publishing and the field of the academy are being propelled in opposite directions."¹⁰⁷ Instead, I think it is more accurate to see this as a result of the internal contradictions structuring neoliberal marketization, where both the publishers' need to be more selective when deciding what to publish according to market needs and the demand on scholars to publish more for research impact are based on principles of market competition. Credential inflation means that there are increasingly fewer positions available for scholars, which leads to a stronger selection based on more and better publications, just as more publications and less market demand means more selection and increased competition for publishers.

Openness Contested

Due to the rise of economic ideologies and market forces in both academia and scholarly book publishing over the last few decades, the monograph as a specific publishing and communication format has thus increasingly developed according to market demands. Many scholars feel that access to specialized research, especially in the humanities, has diminished due to shrinking library budgets on the one hand and more trade-focused scholarly presses and publishers on the other. In the struggle for the future of the

book and the university, access to scholarship has thus become an increasingly important issue, one that is standing at the base of various new digital knowledge practices. Open access publishing can be seen as one of the most important recent developments in digital scholarly publishing, one that targets this issue directly. David Prosser, the director of Research Libraries UK (RLUK), even goes so far as to call it “the next information revolution,” and globally governments and research funders are increasingly making headway with mandating open access for publicly funded research.¹⁰⁸ Open access has also been important for book publishing and, more specifically, for the struggle over the future of the book. In this final section, I therefore want to take a closer look at the relationship between open access and scholarly book publishing, and the motives behind the latter’s interest in and uptake of open access. As part of this, I will examine in the next chapter some of the forms a politics of the book based on openness might take.

To examine such a politics of the book, I want to first look at some of the critiques that have been put forward with respect to the concept of openness, and open politics more specifically. Where initially the open access and open source movements were heralded by progressive thinkers as part of a critique of the commodification of knowledge, openness is seen increasingly as a concept and practice that connects well with neoliberal needs and rhetoric, and that can be related to ideas of transparency and efficiency promoted by business and government.¹⁰⁹ From an initially subversive idea, one can argue that open access, partly related to its growing accessibility and wider general uptake, is increasingly co-opted by capitalist ideology (of which the Finch report, which I will discuss in the next chapter, is ample evidence) and as a result is turning, in some respects at least, into yet another business model for commercial publishers to reap a profit from.¹¹⁰

What, then, were the main reasons behind the uptake of open access, especially in scholarly book publishing? How was it envisioned as a potential strategy against excessive forms of commercial publishing and academic capitalism? Open access literature has been defined as “digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions.”¹¹¹ The open access movement grew out of an initiative established by academic researchers, librarians, managers, and administrators, who argued that the established publishing system was no longer able or willing to fulfill their communication needs, even though opportunities were now increasingly

offered by new digital distribution formats and mechanisms to make research more widely accessible.¹¹² The movement can be seen as a direct reaction against the ongoing commercialization of research and of the publishing industry, coupled to a felt need to make research more widely accessible in a faster and more efficient way. From the early 1990s on, open access was initiated and developed within the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, where it focused mainly on the author self-archiving research works in central, subject- or institution-based repositories (green open access). These can be works that have been submitted for peer review (preprints) or that are final peer-reviewed versions (postprints). The other main and complementary route to open access focused on the publishing of research works in open access journals, books, or other types of literature (gold open access).¹¹³ In the humanities and social sciences (HSS), the fields in which books have tended to be the preferred communication medium, open access caught on later than in the STEM fields. This was due, among other reasons, to the slow rise of book digitization and of e-book uptake by scholars; the focus on green open access within the STEM fields, targeting the high costs of subscriptions to journals in these fields (journals in HSS are generally cheaper); the specific difficulty with copyright and licensing agreements for books; and the expenses involved in publishing books in comparison with articles (i.e., they have different publishing and business models).¹¹⁴

Open access also filled another void in the HSS, where it was perceived as the answer to the monograph crisis. As described previously, scholarly monograph publishing is seen to be facing a crisis, in which its already feeble sustainability is being endangered by declining book sales.¹¹⁵ Partly in response to this perceived monograph crisis, these developments have seen the rise of a number of scholarly, library, and/or university press initiatives that are experimenting more directly with making monographs available on an open access basis. These initiatives include scholar-led presses such as Open Humanities Press, Éditions science et bien commun (ÉSBC), African Minds, and punctum books, plus new university presses, such as ANU Press (originally ANU E Press), UCL Press, Goldsmiths Press, and Firenze University Press.¹¹⁶ They also include presses established by or working with libraries, such as Athabasca University's AU Press and Göttingen University Press; cooperatives of university presses, such as (in its original instantiation) the OAPEN project and Open Edition in Europe and Lever Press in

the US; commercial presses such as Bloomsbury Academic and Ubiquity Press in the UK; and crowdfunding platforms and consortial library partnerships such as Unglue.it, Knowledge Unlatched, and (more recently) COPIM (Community-led Open Publication Infrastructures for Monographs).¹¹⁷ As Sigi Jöttkandt and Gary Hall argue with respect to the decision to set up Open Humanities Press in relation to the monograph crisis:

Such a situation not only affects the careers and, potentially, the choice of research areas of individuals. It also impacts the humanities itself—both because a lot of excellent work is unable to find appropriate publication outlets and also because decisions concerning the production, publication, dissemination and promotion of humanities research are being made less and less by universities and academics on intellectual grounds, and more and more by scholarly and commercial presses on economic grounds. When ground-breaking research that develops new insights is rejected in favor of more marketable introductions and readers, it is clear that academia as a whole becomes “intellectually impoverished.”¹¹⁸

However, as is already indicated by the variety of initiatives listed previously and the diversity of their backgrounds, the motivations behind the development of open access archiving and publishing are extremely diverse. They include the desire to increase accessibility to specialized humanities research by making it online and openly available (to enable increased readership and to promote the impact of scholarly research, next to enabling heightened accessibility to research to those who can't access subscription content); to publish or disseminate research in an open way in order to take social responsibility and to enhance a democratic public sphere as a means of stimulating a liberal democracy that thrives on an informed public; to argue for the importance of sharing research results in a more immediate and direct way; and to offer an alternative to, and to stand up against, the large, established, profit-led, commercial publishing houses that have come to dominate the field in order to liberate ideas and thinkers from market constraints and to be able to publish specialist scholarship that lacks a clear commercial market.

However, these liberal-democratic motives for open access exist side by side, not just with more radical and critical motives, but also with the neoliberal rhetoric of the knowledge economy. In the latter, open access is seen as supporting a competitive economy by making the flow of information more flexible, efficient, transparent, and cost-effective and by making research more accessible to more people. This will stimulate industry to capitalize on academic knowledge, encouraging global competition.¹¹⁹

As Hall has argued in *Digitize This Book!*, in which he gives a very detailed and comprehensive overview of the differing but often also overlapping motivations that exist concerning open access and openness, there is nothing intrinsically political or democratic about open access. Motives that focus on democratic principles often go hand in hand with neoliberal arguments concerning the benefits of open access for the knowledge economy.¹²⁰ A politics of the book in relation to open access publishing is thus not predefined, nor is it my intention to argue that it should be. Openness in many ways can be seen as what Laclau calls a *floating signifier*, a concept without a fixed meaning and one that is easily adopted by different political ideologies.¹²¹ As I will point out, it is this very *openness* and lack of fixity of the concept that gives it its power, but it also brings with it a risk of uncertainty about its (future) adoption. However, for some scholars it is exactly this openness of open access or of the concept of openness that is problematic.

To present another context to this debate and to open up and argue for an alternative future for the already diverse and contingent idea of openness, I want to critically engage here with the work of media scholar Nathaniel Tkacz. In his work, Tkacz pinpoints what he considers to be some of the inconsistencies in the concept of openness and open politics and how from its very inception it can be connected to neoliberal thought. He achieves this both by going back to the “father of open thought,” Karl Popper, and by analyzing the influence of open software cultures on current open movements. Tkacz’s analysis can be seen as an illustrative example of the kind of thinking that criticizes the liberatory tendencies and idealism present in many openness advocacies and that sees openness as related to neoliberalism—a way of thinking that is no less fueled by the recent uptake of open access by certain governments, research funders, and commercial publishers.

Tkacz’s assessment of openness is based on what he sees as “a critical flaw in how openness functions in relation to politics.”¹²² To explore how openness has come to proliferate as a political concept, becoming “a master category of political thought,” Tkacz provides a detailed reading of the work of Popper on openness and the open society, while further tracing its recent genealogy through the politics and political economy of software and network cultures.¹²³ His critique focuses mainly on how openness and open politics, both in Popper and in contemporary incarnations of open

politics, serves as an inscrutable political ideal, merely opposed to its empty binary, the closed society, or closed politics, which is a politics based on centralized governance (critiqued by neoliberalists such as Friedrich Hayek) and/or unchallengeable truths (such as Popper argues one can find in the politics of fascism and communism). Yet this binary open-closed cannot be upheld in Popper's thought, Tkacz argues, because closure is inherent in his notion of openness. Based on the philosophy of Popper, *open* as a concept is reactionary (where it merely states what it is *not*—i.e., *not closed*); it has no (true or positive) meaning—which would close it off—and cannot “build a lasting affirmative dimension.”¹²⁴ Tkacz further argues that if there are positive qualities to openness, they exist at the level of reality (of real practices) and are therefore subject to continual transformation, which he sees as paradoxical: How can something that is already open then become more open, when this means that it thus must have not been open before? For Tkacz, then, clearly, “openness . . . implies antagonism, or what the language of openness would describe as closures.”¹²⁵

The issue, Tkacz states, is that these closures get obscured in current incarnations of open politics, which, he argues, have been highly influenced by the thinking of both Popper and Hayek. How then has this concept and the “empty ideal” of openness reemerged in politics, and how has it has been repoliticized based on its connections with software cultures? Tkacz describes the recent proliferation of openness in open movements “largely as a reaction to a set of undesirable developments, beginning with the realm of closed systems and intellectual property and its ‘closed source.’”¹²⁶ He shows how openness has been translated into new domains, such as open access, in entities such as Wikipedia and Google, and in a variety of government initiatives, as a practical application of open-source politics. His examination leads Tkacz to conclude that “the same rhetoric [of openness] is deployed by what are otherwise very different groups or organizations.”¹²⁷ Openness shows certain consistencies throughout these cultures, such as in “its couplings with transparency, collaboration, competition and participation, and its close ties with various enactments of liberalism,” which can also be seen to underpin our current neoliberal governmentality.¹²⁸ This mobilization of openness in the politics of both “activist and marginal network cultures,” as well as in more mainstream organizations, urges Tkacz to coin a critique of the open, arguing that there are some crucial problems with the concept and that it has a poverty that “makes it

unsuitable for political description.”¹²⁹ For example, the way openness is used in a forward-looking and almost prophetic way in many open movements (toward “more openness”) has made simultaneous closures invisible, Tkacz argues, which mainly has to do with the lack of critique of the open in these movements. There has been little reflection on the concept of openness, he states, especially with respect to this situation of “how seemingly radically different groups can all claim it as their own.” From this, Tkacz concludes that “openness, it seems, is beyond disagreement and beyond scrutiny,” and, elsewhere, that its “meaning is so overwhelmingly positive it seems impossible to question, let alone critique.”¹³⁰

In response to Tkacz’s analysis that openness is “beyond disagreement” and “impossible to question,” I would like to argue that an extensive critique of openness does exist (including his own work on the topic) and has been formulated, also from within open movements.¹³¹ In addition to that, I would like to offer an alternative to Tkacz’s genealogy of openness—and of open access and open politics—one that is closely connected to the history of the book and of scholarly knowledge production, as discussed previously. I want to do so to offer a supplement to his genealogy of openness based on the thought of Popper and the politics of software and network cultures, but also in an attempt to offer a genealogy that does not rely so strongly on the open-closed binary. For the genealogy of openness that Tkacz traces is a very specific one; one that relates to what Hall has called “the liberal, democratizing approach” to openness.¹³² An alternative genealogy that tries to reassess the open-closed binary and that can be traced back to the early developments of scholarly publishing, influencing current incarnations of open access, might therefore be beneficial here. It might be so not only with regard to rethinking some of the problems Tkacz describes relating to the concept of openness, but also for casting a more favorable, affirmative light on the potential of openness.

Tkacz’s problem with the concept of openness relates mostly to how openness has been developed and used by Popper, I would claim (notwithstanding the influence this has had on the political reincarnation of openness). It isn’t the concept itself, in all its uses—as Tkacz describes it—that has crucial problems, but the specific concept of openness developed and used by Popper. It is this concept that is based on a binary between open and closed; and that has been further developed through the thought of Hayek and network and software cultures, following a forward-looking

(neo)liberal/democratic approach to openness. In this respect, Tkacz has traced the genealogy of a *specific approach* to openness, one that makes it easy to connect openness to neoliberalism and capitalist democracies, as well as to a teleological conception of openness as a form of looking forward, focused on being more open (in the sense of being less closed).¹³³

However, I would like to draw attention to other forms and cultures of openness that do not abide so strictly to this binary, but rather envision openness and closure as enmeshed, similarly to the argument Tkacz makes when he states that openness inevitably includes closures. Tkacz regards these closures in openness as something inherent in openness, but then—following the binary conception of openness in the thought of Popper—decides to see this as problematic and paradoxical for the concept of openness, instead of developing this further and envisioning it as a potential core strength of ideas of the open and open politics, as I want to do here. As he states: “Closure remains an inherent part of the open; it is what openness must continually respond to and work against—a continual threat amongst the ranks.”¹³⁴ However, building further on what Tkacz states about openness implying antagonisms, I would argue that these antagonisms, these closures, are exactly what we need (and have always had) *as part of* an open politics, and what give it its strength.

I would thus like to propose a genealogy of openness in which openness is integrally connected to and entangled with a different “antagonist”—namely, secrecy. Interestingly, in this genealogy, openness as a concept is directly related to the historical development of systems and discourses of knowledge production and communication. Scholarly research on openness in scientific communication can be seen to be far more ambivalent and contextual in its coverage of the concept of openness than Popper is, for instance.¹³⁵ The emphasis I am placing here on the sheer variety that makes up the schools of thought on openness and open access also serves to counter the vision that open access is intrinsically connected to neoliberalist discourses and practices, and enables me to argue instead that it can, at least potentially, be used as a powerful critique of these systems. By offering both a contrasting and a supplementary genealogy of openness, I would like to shed a more positive light on the potential of openness, both as a concept and as a practice and politics, to critique the ongoing marketization of knowledge. This alternative and complimentary genealogy of openness also forges a stronger connection between the development

of scholarly communication and the specific, contextual politics of open access and open access publishing, where it sees openness and secrecy/closure not as binaries but as integrally enmeshed.

A Genealogy of Openness and Secrecy

In her book *Openness, Secrecy, Authorship* (2001), historian Pamela Long provides a genealogy of openness that is closely connected to the development of specific *cultures of knowledge* and the way these have categorized and conceptualized knowledge. Long shows how openness advanced in connection to ideas and practices of secrecy, authorship, and property rights, and alongside the establishment of print and the printed scholarly book in the West (although her exploration of openness, secrecy, authorship, and the technical arts stretches back to developments in antiquity). She also looks at the influence and development of craft and practice-based or mechanical knowledge, alongside traditions of theoretical knowledge, and their mutual influence and interaction with respect to the construction of the discourse surrounding knowledge over the centuries, including its relationship to openness and secrecy. For example, where initially in antiquity Aristotelian science made strict divisions between *têchne* (material and technical production), *praxis* (action), and *episteme* (theoretical knowledge), Long argues that it was the direct links and closer interaction between the *mechanical arts* (craft knowledge), *political power*, and *learned traditions* (theoretical knowledge) that led to the development of empirical and experimental scientific methodologies in the seventeenth century, including an expansion of scientific authorship into practices of “openly purveyed treatises.”¹³⁶

As Long explains, it was the new alliance between *praxis* and *têchne*—that is, between those in power and in the technical or mechanical arts—that enabled authorship in these fields to expand in an effort to legitimate and promote those in political power. New city-based rulers wanted to emphasize their legitimacy, and did so through, among other things, grand urban redesigns and other construction projects. Following on from this, books on the mechanical arts became a worthy subject from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries on, when many of these volumes emerged from a patronage system, produced to enhance the status of the patron. At the same time, however, they also served to enhance the status of mechanical and craft knowledge, for one important aspect of openness as it developed

in relation to knowledge production was, as Long states, the accurate or proper crediting of authorship. In the mechanical arts, this led to the validation of practice in an environment in which priority and novelty became of growing value.¹³⁷ Therefore, as Long makes clear, “open display of technological practices and of practitioners-authors developed in tandem with the growing value of novelty and priority,” as forms of open authorship were used to establish priority.¹³⁸ These practices led to, as Long explains, “the development of an arena of discursive practice in which the productive value of certain technical arts (inherent in their ability to produce fabricated and constructed objects) was augmented by their status as knowledge-based disciplines.”¹³⁹ It was this improved cultural status for the mechanical fields and for new forms of open authorship that significantly influenced the culture of knowledge. Long claims that it was these forms of open authorship that developed in the technical and mechanical arts that were highly influential when it came to “seventeenth-century struggles to validate new experimental methodologies”—of which open authorship was one—in the scientific fields and realms of theoretical knowledge.¹⁴⁰

However, and this is where her argument becomes particularly important in this context, Long also argues that these new, open traditions of authorship developed *at the same time* that neoplatonic secrecy and magic and esoteric knowledge saw a rise in popularity.¹⁴¹ Part of the complexity of early modern science was exactly the coexistence of “diverse values of transmission, including both openness and secrecy, as well as evolving attitudes of ownership and priority.”¹⁴² Long clearly complicates the opposition between openness and secrecy here, as well as the identification of science with openness. As she states: “Until recently openness was taken to be characteristic of science, and there was very little reflection concerning whether scientific practices were actually open and, if they were, what that openness meant.”¹⁴³ We can locate this association of science with openness in scholars such as Robert Merton and Derek de Solla Price, who argue that *science* is intrinsically open (to communicate findings, the scientific norm of communism is seen as essential), whereas *technology* is regarded as intrinsically secret (to sell material, trademarked objects).¹⁴⁴ But as Long argues, recent historical research into the development of early modern natural philosophy shows a far more complex and contextual picture, where Vermeir and Margócsy write that “the opposition between secretive technology and open science has been qualified, nuanced and contextualized.”¹⁴⁵

Openness is thus intricate and (historically) enmeshed with secrecy, and integrally connected to issues of priority and patronage, where it functions in a complicated network of alliances, mixed up with authorship in relationships of power and secrecy. This is something supported by historian Paul David, who argues that a functionalist search for the origin of open science can know a historicist bias, in which we take our current conception of open science for granted. A more contextualized historical search for origins shows a very different and messier picture, one caught up in systems of power and rival political patronage.¹⁴⁶

Long gives neither a positive nor a negative definition of openness, but she connects it to secrecy directly when she argues that openness is relative and contingent upon the degree of freedom given to information when we disseminate it, as it also involves assumptions on the nature and extent of the audience for whom that information is intended.¹⁴⁷ Historian Koen Vermeir has similarly pointed out that “openness and secrecy are often interlocked, impossible to take apart” and that they “might even reinforce each other.” As such, he argues, “they should be understood as positive (instead of privative) categories that do not necessarily stand in opposition to each other.”¹⁴⁸ Similar to Long, Vermeir thus make a plea to pay more attention to the specific genealogies and contexts in which the values and the practices of openness and secrecy have operated. Whereas normally they are seen as negations of each other, it might be more useful to see them as gradational categories that need to be judged according to their specific historicity; openness now means something different than it did in the seventeenth century, for instance. We might also consider positive notions of openness and secrecy (as in the positive notion of freedom) by looking at the intentionality behind openness: How or in what way is the circulation or dissemination of scholarship positively promoted? For example, Vermeir emphasizes that something can be open but at the same time undiscoverable in a sea of information overload, which can make for new forms of secrecy.¹⁴⁹ Openness and secrecy also don’t always exclude each other—in the publication of a coded text, for instance. Furthermore, whether we see something as open or secret also depends on the perceiver’s viewpoint.

What this short overview of an alternative genealogy of openness shows is that as part of the history of our cultures of knowledge and scholarly authorship and the development of our modern systems of scholarly communication and publishing (including its technological advances),

openness as a concept and practice has always been integrally interwoven with notions of secrecy. At the same time, following Vermeir and Long, I want to put forward that it is essential to take this genealogy into account if we want to study and understand the development of the open access movement—particularly as a specific incarnation of open politics and of the commodification of knowledge. The particular context in which the open access movement arose, related to developments in (digital) technology, the existing cultures of knowledge, and unfavorable economic and material conditions, requires us to acknowledge the influence this long-standing tradition of open scholarship has had on its values and underlying motivations. At the same time, it is important to study this ideal of open science and the assumption that knowledge needs to be shared by efficient forms of dissemination and consumption as part of a historical development in which, in practice, openness and secrecy codeveloped in changing conditions of power, patronage, economic interest, and technological development.¹⁵⁰

