Op Ed- Epistemology-Power, Control, and the Quest for Open Infrastructure

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Op Ed — Epistemology

Power, Control, and the Quest for Open Infrastructure

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It's not news that many librarians see the future of scholarly communication as a fight between the forces of good and evil. Some examples from this week's mail:

A data services librarian asks, "I'm curious if anyone has any concerns around who ultimately owns **Digital Science** (and **Dimensions** and **FigShare** and **Symplectic** and **Springer**)? ... I have some feelings when I see lines connecting to publishing entities, but maybe that's unfounded." (Not warm and fuzzy feelings, I'm guessing.) A research data manager replies, "Me, I have concerns! I definitely have concerns — **DigSci/FigShare/Symplectic/Dimensions** all go back to **McGraw Hill**, so...yeah. So often commercial publishers are motivated by maximizing immediate share holder value, which is rarely in line with the values of academics/scholars/researchers, and is such a source of friction."¹

Pretty one-dimensional, but not as hostile as this post from **Eric Elmore** (UTSA Electronic Resources Coordinator). "Librarians are interested in getting the most content and value for our dwindling budgets in an ethical manner. Not an easy or simple task. Publishers, on the other hand, are concerned with extracting every penny, ruble, shekel, pence, yuan, yen, and/or ounce of blood they can from anyone who wants to use the content they 'publish'. ... It's Capitalism 101. Once you understand the frame of mind of someone who works for a publisher, of course they think libraries are leveraging a free resource such as SciHub. Because that's exactly what they would do if they were in the libraries' position. When the only objective is the endless acquisition of money silly little things like whether or not a resource is legal or ethical no longer have relevance."²

"Once you understand the frame of mind of someone who works for a publisher," **Elmore's** condescension is breathtaking.

Fortunately, even among those who share the Manichean view of things, most stop short of claiming that every person who works for a publishing company considers legal and ethical considerations to be irrelevant. **Mike Roy** of **Middlebury College** also sees publishers and librarians working in opposition, but in much less inflammatory language:

"The fight (and yes, it is a fight) over Open Access is about reclaiming control

over a system that is now largely controlled by corporate interests. Those who have power rarely hand that power over without a fight."³ He makes a crucial point here. The fight over Open Access isn't really about Open Access. It hasn't been for a very long time. It's a fight over control.

It's been obvious for years that the Big Five have fully embraced Open Access. And the version they embrace — immediate access to the version of record on the publisher's site — is much closer to the iconic OA ideals enshrined in the BBB declarations than the various green versions championed by many OA partisans (embargoed access to an author's manuscript version buried in an institutional repository). The disputes aren't about whether to make articles open, they're about who gets to set the terms. The pure of heart librarians are absolutists. **Roy** says, "A number of people have described the challenge as one of needing to organize and to act collectively in order to reclaim control and ownership over this system." Shared control isn't an option.

Last December, **Roy** and a couple of his colleagues published a blog post in which they discussed their efforts to "map the infrastructure required to support digital scholarly communications."⁴ They identify three "uncomfortable truths." One, there are two sets of actors working in this space. There are several of the big commercial companies on the one hand, and on the other "a ragtag band of actors: open source projects of various sizes and capacities." The conflict is "a bit like the rebel alliance versus the empire and the death star." Good guys and bad guys.

Second, the bad guy companies are well-resourced and the ragtag good guys are not. And third, there is very little transparency, so it's impossible to see where investments are being made by either group. It's this last truth that they hope to confront by setting up a mechanism for identifying what "the community" is currently spending on open infrastructure projects. They argue that better data and more transparency are essential in order to leverage whatever resources the academic community can muster and make sound investments in developing open infrastructure that can compete with the death star... erm, the big commercial companies.

But data and transparency are still insufficient. Figuring out where to make investments, and then making those investments happen, requires more, "...an organizational and governance structure that is trusted by the community. Such an organization does not exist today. We need to start to [sic] thinking about how to create it."

The results of some of that thinking were revealed in May with the launch of **Invest in Open Infrastructure**.⁵ **IOI** isn't quite an organization. It's billed as a global collaboration among a number of highly motivated organizations and individuals with a shared belief in the importance of open infrastructure for scholarly communication. The centerpiece of their effort, the fulcrum on which they hope to leverage their data and transparency, is The Framework. "To move [Open Infrastructure] forward, it is time to create a strategic, global body — The Framework — with a mandate to facilitate and shepherd a shared strategy and agenda across international stakeholders."

The **IOI** concept statement describes The Why, The Issue, The Vision, The Mission, The Framework.⁶ It is silent on The How, which is the crux of the issue. And which leads us back to The Who and how dogmatic **IOI** is going to be about power and control.

One of the ironies missed by the commercial-organizations-bad folks is how many of the successful collaborative efforts in developing shared infrastructure have been publisher-led. **ORCID**, **CrossRef**, **CHORUS** — they all got off the ground because people in publishing recognized that they could contribute their expertise to a shared effort that would result in a public good. I suppose everyone involved wasn't pure of heart, but they knew how to get things done.

What people like **Elmore** miss every time they bitch about the misalignment of goals and values between publishers and academics is that every one of us operates out of a multiplicity of motivations in almost everything that we do. People talk about "mission-driven" and "maximizing revenue" as if they're mutually exclusive. Yet every organization that has a mission needs to have a sound financial structure and a company that

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derives revenue from delivering a service can't succeed if its services aren't aligned with its customers' missions.

I suppose it's human nature to try to whittle the complexities of human behavior down to simplicities of good and evil. But that's not how people really operate. Scientists might be driven by the desire to make world-changing discoveries while also having financially rewarding careers and winning prizes and being admired by their peers. An actor or musician might be determined to use their art to change how people think about their own lives, and still want to make lots of money and become famous. People in publishing can be passionately committed to using their resources to promote the public good, while at the same time working to maximize shareholder value. We're all a mix of idealism and venality, trying every day to live up to our best impulses while making up for how badly we failed the day before.

Mike Roy is certainly right when he says that those with power rarely hand over that power without a fight. But it needn't be all or nothing. The leadership of the **Society for Scholarly Publishing** includes librarians and publishers on their board. **CHORUS** recently announced the formation of an Academic

Advisory Working Group (AAWG), with the avowed aim of increasing "the involvement of academic institutions in CHORUS' development."⁷ In 2006, when I went to my first STM⁸ meeting in Frankfurt, it was apparent that many people in publishing would have welcomed the involvement of librarians in figuring out how to take advantage of the new technologies in advancing scientific communication. But librarians didn't step up. With **SPARC** as the dominant public voice of academic librarianship, they adopted an adversarial stance. No cooperation with the forces of darkness. Power and control.

Dan Whaley, CEO of **Hypothesis**, is on the **IOI** steering committee and I was encouraged by his interview in the *Scholarly Kitchen*.⁹ He's dedicated to open infrastructure, but he's not dogmatic about who he's willing to play with. **Hypothesis**, his organization, has a solid track record of working with partners of all stripes. But **Whaley** is just one of the twenty-one member steering committee and some of the rhetoric on the **IOI** website implies that the commercial outfits currently operating in this space won't be welcome. Getting twenty-one passionate people to agree on anything is difficult. There are some hardcore anti-commercial folks in this group. What will be the points of friction and what will people be willing to compromise on?

I want the **IOI** folks to succeed. I want to see them build something real. It's important.

Even if you don't fall for the simplistic canard that the people running commercial companies and the people running libraries can't possibly have shared values and work together, you should welcome more experimentation and diversity and transparency in developing scholarly communication infrastructure. But there are big challenges. There's a twenty-one person steering committee made up of passionate individuals with strong opinions. They haven't figured out a governance mechanism yet, and they're going to have to make some tough decisions. They have high ideals, but it'll take more than those ideals to build something that makes a difference.

I've worked on many different projects with librarians and publishers over decades. I know that there are many people, working for many different types of organizations, who have knowledge and skills and passion and resources to contribute to such an effort. If the purists insist that the commercial outfits or the people who work in them can't participate, **IOI** will certainly run aground. Believing you're on the right side of history isn't enough. Building a wall of righteousness around open infrastructure is no substitute for some sound business sense. The people on the steering committee are going to have to decide who they're willing to listen to and work with in order to succeed. Or if the most important thing is fighting for power and control. 🌱

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to the institution. Taking the example of **Lean Library**: it enables the librarian to deliver seamless remote access, saving faculty and students precious time. It also enables them to get out clear messaging about the libraries role in bringing resources to patrons thus raising the profile of the library. And it can help the end user find alternative routes to access the resources that they are looking for, automating interlibrary loan, or suggesting OA materials where relevant.

ATG: *From your experience are these non-content offerings changing the dynamic among librarians, publishers, and scholars? Do these more sophisticated products call for changes and adjustments in the current relationship among stakeholders? In short, are they changing the traditional business model? If so, how?*

KP: I think the main change is that technology makes the stakeholders more connected and gives the publisher and library more visibility on the types of content that faculty and

researchers are using. It can better inform collection development and make it more targeted and responsive to patrons' needs. The library and publisher may also become more seamlessly integrated into the natural workflow of the patron. For instance, rather than expecting the student or researcher to sign into the library website, technology enables the library to get relevant content instantaneously, as delivered via **Lean Library**.

Our **Lean Library** product is a good example of a technology solution that gets content into the researchers' workflow. It not only supports remote access, but also enables access to content directly via the web browser that the researcher uses, giving them smooth access to library content.

An example of technology enabling changing business models is **Adam Matthew's Quartex** platform. It constitutes a service to libraries, enabling them to easily display their special collections — without technical knowledge or recourse to IT teams — and make available to academics, researchers, and the public — material that previously may not have been accessible or easily searchable.

KS: I echo **Karen's** point about increased connectivity. What's also new and exciting for us is how these developments have encouraged us to develop a content-agnostic approach in some of our offerings. **Talis Aspire**, **Talis Elevate**, **Lean Library** and **Quartex** are all about software solutions that demonstrably make the best use of the content that students or scholars require from their libraries regardless of publisher, served up to them as readers wherever they are. But these tools are able to go beyond offering content to providing an experience of the task, be it learning or research, which can increase patron success.

ATG: *It also strikes us that such offerings provide opportunities for libraries and publishers to broaden their impact on the scholarly community. Are you seeing evidence of that broadening impact? If so, how are scholars reacting to this increased role for librarians and publishers?*

KS: We are certainly seeing evidence of opportunities to broaden library impact, be it through higher levels of engagement with materials, new ways of enabling engagement, or better ability to access data and analyze the use of resources. For instance, **Talis Elevate** shows how student anxiety around class engagement with scholarly material can be mitigated through anonymization of class comments, and how faculty members can position their course organization in ways that are responsive to student engagement. **Talis's** Insight conferences tend to be filled with different institutional case studies on the impact of the product on wider university strategies and in particular on the teaching and learning provision (most videos of these sessions are freely available on the **Talis** website: <https://talis.com/>).

KP: It's too soon to assess the complete impact of these new technologies on scholarship. While **Talis** has years of experience that give a clear picture of their impact, for **Lean Library** it is early days, but we are seeing real-

ly good usage where the product is embedded. At **UKSG** this year, **Tim O'Neill** (Electronic Resources Co-Ordinator at the **University of Manchester**) gave a presentation showing the impact of **Lean Library** on usage at his institution with clear evidence that **Lean Library** is saving academics time as they get to the relevant materials for their research.

ATG: *Can you both look into your crystal balls and give us your forecast as to how you see the market for learning resources evolving in the next few years? Where do you see libraries fitting into that market? How about the individual scholar?*

KP: I see the library as resilient and evolving in a fast-changing higher education environment and would predict that librarians will remain the information experts responsible for enabling scholars and students access to relevant materials. I think collection development will remain important and technology will grow in importance: to support administration of the library, support efficient collection development, and contribute to the higher ed strategies in relation to both research and teaching.

KS: I see libraries engaging more actively with reliable technology in ways that enable learning resources to add even more value, and also with new models and content types, including open educational resources. I feel we're seeing libraries taking a stronger role in student learning and student academic success, especially as technology enables a more connected experience across faculty, students and librarians. With these developments, I expect individual scholars to have a better experience finding trusted content and recognizing the role of their libraries in enabling that.

ATG: *We've been asking some serious and important questions, but we'd like to end on a lighter note. We were wondering how you like to unwind and relax? What fun things do you do when you can get away from the office and find some down time?*

KP: I have two addictive hobbies that I love to follow when I have time. First, I love watching contemporary dance; I have a local theatre, Sadlers Wells, which shows the best contemporary dance in London. My next visit will be for a dance performance which combines Flamenco and Jazz! It should be interesting.

My other love is football (or soccer as you call it in the U.S.). I am a season ticket holder at Arsenal (a top football team in England). I love following the team's performance, the stadium is spectacular and it's great just sitting out in the fresh air watching the drama of a match. Right now I'm enjoying watching the women's world cup and I'm looking forward to the football league starting up again in August!

KS: My hobby is swimming; I've always enjoyed the sensation of being in the water, it makes me feel free. I've been challenging myself to improve my stroke technique recently, and even signed up for a few lessons a month ago — and my tumble turn seems to be on the up! 🐬

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