



Rebels with a Cause? Supporting Library- and Academic-led Open Access Publishing

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Abstract

The authors, who all have experience with academic publishing, outline the landscape of new university and academic-led open access publishing, before discussing four interrelated sets of challenges which are often referred when questioning the viability of such publishing ventures. They are: (1) professionalism, (2) scale, (3) quality, and (4) discoverability & dissemination. The authors provide examples of how, albeit differing in size, form and ambition, these new presses are not just adhering to conventional publishing norms but often innovating in order to surpass them.

Key Words: Open Access publishing; Library publishing; Academic-led publishing

1. Introduction

Scholarly book publishing stands at a crossroads. Look one way, and observe a path that is broader and more well-trodden, characterised by the continuation of an entrenched publishing system, in which a small number of large commercial publishers are seen by a majority of academics as leading arbiters of quality of reputation, often selling books at a price often only affordable by wealthier academic libraries, and placing similar barriers to access to these same books' digital incarnations. Look the other way, towards a narrower path that is gradually starting to emerge from the surrounding context, and see a heterogeneous collection of publishing operations, many of whom are making their work available for free via open access, in which markers of reputation and prestige are built not through techniques of market dominance and the invocation of tradition, but by a broad scholarly community, including academics, universities and libraries.

This image broadly represents the state of book publishing in the contemporary academy as we see it, as well as two of its possible futures. This is, of course, a simplification. There are many examples of publishing operations that weave in and out of the pathways that we invoke here as a binary. Nonetheless, our aim is to contribute to the work of strengthening the routes that lead towards a more rich, diverse and open world of scholarly communication.

We are broadly hopeful that this more diverse world can come to pass. There have been some key shifts recently in the terrain of open access book publishing. One shift relates to the attitude of major funding bodies. Currently, open access for monographs is mandated by only a few funders (see Ferwerda, Pinter, & Stern, 2017), such as the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Wellcome Trust in the UK (although this is a charitable foundation rather than a state funded institution). However, it is a rapidly evolving landscape. For example, in 2018 there were two major announcements concerning an open access mandate for monographs. In the UK, Research England (formerly HEFCE) announced its intention to consult on a policy change

regarding open access books, while in France, Frederique Vidal, the French Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation announced France's National Plan for Open Science at the LIBER conference (Vidal, 2018). This indicates an increasing commitment to open access for scholarly books across Europe. Furthermore, the recently published report on the *Visibility of Open Access Monographs in a European Context* (Neylon, Montgomery, Ozaygen, Saunders, & Pinter, 2018) shows a growing commitment on a European level via collaborative efforts such as the EU-funded OPERAS project. The project is aimed at scholar- and library-led publishing actors and encourages collaborative development of relevant standards and services for open access books in the region. And perhaps most significantly, now we have Plan S. It is an ambitious plan that was initiated and launched on September 4, 2018, by the cOAlition S, a consortium involving more than a dozen national research funders (Science Europe, 2019), charities including the Wellcome Trust and the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, and supported by the European Commission and the European Research Council. Although the primary focus is on journal publishing, monographs are explicitly acknowledged as a challenge for open access to address, while suggesting that more time will be needed for this format to transition to open access. As things stand, the stated aim of cOAlition S is to "issue a statement on Plan S principles as they apply to monographs and book chapters, together with related implementation guidance" by 2021 (cOAlition S, 2019a, p. 2). Within the context of Plan S, it is most likely that open access books will in one way or the other be mandated at some future point, at least by the funders involved in this coalition.

These developments, however, exist within a landscape of open access scholarly book publishing that is already changing largely independently of support from national funders. A combination of the increasing role of the digital in academic life and the rise of the open access movement has seen a resurgence of the university press and university or library-led scholarly publishing – sometimes referred to as 'New University Presses' (NUPs) – as well as the emergence of independent, academic-led publishers (ALPs). These have variously harnessed digital infrastructures and the ethical and practical injunctions of open access to allow them to publish a diverse range of scholarly works, including both journals and books, as well as a range of other less conventional formats of scholarly output.

Some of these developments have been captured in recent reports that have highlighted the growth of new innovative publishing operations in Europe.

In the UK, Jisc's *Changing publishing ecologies landscape* study (Adema & Stone, 2017) showed a discernible increase in new publishing initiatives and academic-led presses in recent years. As highlighted above, many of these new scholarly communication models are closely linked to university libraries, and almost all are committed to open access journal and/or book publishing. The *Knowledge Exchange landscape study on open access and monographs* (Ferwerda et al., 2017), which compared and contrasted funding regimes for open access books across eight European countries, concluded that there was reason to be at least cautiously optimistic about the future of open access monographs.

Despite these positive developments, those working in this field, including the authors of this paper, are often confronted by concerns about the lack of professionalism and quality of open access book publishing. These concerns are sometimes expressed by academics, sometimes by those working in publishing or in funding agencies, and, less often, by librarians. It is also common for such views to be articulated more explicitly. This includes at events addressing the practice of publishing, for example in some of the discussions at the second University Press Redux Conference, held in February 2018, and at Open Access Monographs: An Event for Learned Societies and Subject Associations hosted by the Universities UK Open Access monograph working group and the Arts and Humanities Alliance (AHA) in September 2018. Or in reports produced by major disciplinary bodies, as in a 2018 position paper by the British Academy, which states that:

A further risk that needs to be taken into account is the equivalent in the domain of book publishing of the proliferation of new online journals with lower standards of peer review and editing that attended the move to OA for articles. It would be unfortunate if OA for books came to be associated even to a small degree with a new form of vanity publishing (British Academy, 2018).

Furthermore, the *Academic books and their futures* report, produced at the end of a two year project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council expresses concerns about the fact that many of the newer academic publishers are still relatively small scale startups with a low staff count, producing only a small number of journal and monograph publications. A particularly contentious assertion is that "at present, [these publishers] have more in common with the world of self-publishing than with the more established presses" (Jubb, 2017, p. 44).

This article challenges such perceptions. In doing so, its predominant focus is on new models for open access book publishing that are academic- or library-led, and are thus distinct from commercial publishing, including commercial university presses. We define library-led NUPs as a “set of activities led by college and university libraries to support the creation, dissemination, and curation of scholarly, creative, and/or educational works” (Lippincott, 2016). We also understand ALPs, in line with Janneke Adema (Adema in Stone, 2017a), as those that are “set-up and run by academics.”

In making a positive case for these presses, we do not wish to suggest that they have solved all the problems of publishing without access to the considerable resources of large commercial publishers. Our aim, rather, is to collate and assemble evidence of the multiple ways in which this new wave of open access publishers are seriously and often highly successfully developing the platforms, procedures, and forms of expertise required to publish consistently high quality, field changing work, as well as to indicate where emerging work in this direction is being pursued.

To do so, the authors, all of whom have direct experience with academic publishing, outline four interrelated sets of challenges, which are often referred to those by questioning the viability of new university and academic-led publishing ventures. They are: (1) professionalism, (2) scale, (3) quality, and (4) discoverability and dissemination. We provide examples of how, albeit differing in size, form and ambition, these new presses are not just mirroring conventional standards and practices in seeking to address these challenges, but are often developing innovative publishing practices that raise questions about long standing publishing norms. Although the focus is on book publishing, given that many of these challenges are very similar to those faced in journal publishing, we also draw on experiences/data with journals where relevant, while also highlighting key points of difference.

Finally, it is worth noting that we do not directly address what is a key challenge for many NUPs and ALPs, which is securing sustainable funding, although this issue sits in the background of various other challenges we cover. We see an immense variety of funding models, with revenue coming from sources including direct sales, book processing charges (BPCs), subscriptions, institutional funding, and grant funding (although not all publishers draw on all models; many are, for instance, opposed to relying on BPCs). We do not dwell on the challenge of funding open access book publishing for

two reasons. First, this issue has been comprehensively examined elsewhere (e.g. Adema & Stone, 2017; Ferwerda et al., 2017). Second, our primary aim is to address the challenges that these presses experience, or are perceived to experience, over and above their particular funding situation.

2. First Challenge: Professionalism

Given the recent surge of newly established publishers with a renewed interest in open access and non-profit publishing models, it is perhaps unsurprising to see a backlash from the publishing establishment. One form this has taken are allegations that these newer publishers either lack the professionalism or resources to deliver high-quality digital publications; a noteworthy example of this is a blog post on Scholarly Kitchen (Esposito, 2015). Indeed, such critical scrutiny could be considered a healthy reaction, contributing to ensuring that published outputs contribute to developments in the field of publishing rather than any form of regression.

However, there have been recent developments that can be seen as pushing back against such charges. For example, The Library Publishing Coalition announced the first library publishing curriculum modules in 2018. Co-written by library publishers and representatives from the Association of University Presses (AUP), the curriculum is explicitly aimed at supporting the further professional development of library publishers (Schlosser, 2018). Furthermore, in 2018, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) announced a new Library Publishing Special Interest Group, which held its inaugural workshop in 2019 (IFLA, 2019).

Publishers of books contribute to the process of disseminating academic findings by providing services for editing, typesetting, formats for both print and online publishing, distribution and promotion of the content. Authors and readers expect these services to be performed with professionalism and that the publisher will be expert in providing the tools and technique used to produce a book that is affordable, aesthetically pleasing and easy for readers to find and read. Other characteristics of a reliable publisher are accountability and ethical responsibility as well as having competent staff to guide authors through the process. Critics of academic- or library-led publishing have voiced their doubt and questioned whether small organisations can become as reliable. Advocates for these forms of publishing, on the other

hand, claim that such publishing services could serve the author community better as they are often more closely integrated with the university and more in tune with the needs of authors and their working terms. Publishing houses hosted by university libraries are increasing, and librarians as a profession have a variety of skill sets that are valuable when planning an organisation for disseminating scholarly works (see also comments on professional development from the LPC initiative mentioned above). Indeed, many library-led presses are managed by staff with publishing backgrounds (e.g. Westminster, Huddersfield and UCL presses in the UK, Uopen Journals at Utrecht University in the Netherlands and Stockholm University Press in Sweden).

Library engagement in the changing landscape of access to scholarly material also plays a role in developing skills such as licensing management, discovery and dissemination, publishing analytics, leadership, digital information expertise and service integration (Ayriss & Ignat, 2018; Skinner, Lippincott, Speer, & Walters, 2014). For ALPs, meanwhile, operating collaboratively, as with the ScholarLed consortium,¹ which at the time of writing counts six small-sized presses all led by academics, including one of the authors of this paper, offers the potential to develop collectively shared forms of expertise.

We would like to argue that the academic- and library-led publishers can in many cases provide the same reliable services as traditional publishers by using skill sets that are already represented in the academic organisations. Indeed, in the long run, they could create more sustainable workflows and reliable service than traditional market-driven publishers who may not be as inclined without a considerable return on investment.

2.1. Contracts and Licensing

Contracts to regulate the relationships between authors and publishers are at the core of publishing, as the terms of the contract stipulate the nature of the service provided to the author and how the end product can be used and disseminated. Many ALPs have developed sets of shared legal resources, which are adapted for their particular purposes, as for example with ScholarLed members. For library-led publishers, this can easily be a task for collection management teams. Libraries have long been negotiating and agreeing on licenses with publishers and other vendors, managing patron licences where applicable. Professional advice is thus available within the package

of services that libraries provide for researchers anyway. While the extent of legal expertise available to academic-led or library-led publishers varies considerably, in many cases they are able to provide levels of support broadly comparable to their commercial cousins.

2.2. Workflow and Infrastructure

Publishing a book is not simply about moving a text along an assembly line from its point of entry to an exit point where it is published online and/or in print. The increasingly intricate range of processes involved in book publishing may explain why many authors only trust their content to be managed by traditional publishers. However, a large and complex publisher organisation is likely to also be rather expensive, a critique often voiced by funding organisations and other academic stakeholders. For academic-led or library publishers this is an area where there are many opportunities to build sustainable and professional workflows through collaboration (Taylor & Jensen, 2018). Other organisations such as OAPEN² in the Netherlands and OpenEdition³ in France have also contributed to facilitating book workflows by providing platforms for global distribution of digital books and metadata structures that work with other information management systems. Furthermore, there are presses that outsource certain parts of the publishing process elements through a variety of publishing services such as the Ubiquity Partner Network (Ubiquity Press, 2019), Open Library of Humanities' Janeway platform (Eve, 2018), or Vega (2019), the last of which is a collaboration between American university presses. Some also work with external companies: Mattering Press, for example, has partnered with Tetragon Publishing, which offers typesetting and book design services to small publishers. Such models are tried and testing in commercial publishing, with many major publishers outsourcing their technical workflows to specialised services companies. In the UK, Jisc has developed a dynamic purchasing service (DPS) to assist NUPs with the procurement of publishing services that support workflows from participating suppliers (Milloy, 2018).

2.3. Professionalism via Links with Libraries

The relation between publishers and researchers is also at the heart of academic publishing. A particular strength for many NUPs, therefore, is their

ability to profit from the ability of librarians to build relationships with researchers at every stage of their career. Librarians often help researchers in the writing process, especially early career researchers via writing skills workshops, 'shut-up and write' sessions and support for student publishing (Stone, Jensen & Beech, 2016; Taylor & Jensen, 2018). The rise of NUPs represents a considerable opportunity to extend this ethos to publishing.

It should be noted that many well-established university presses in the United States report directly to their respective university libraries (Gibbons, 2018; Watkinson, 2014). So it is not surprising to see this model being adopted in the UK and the rest of Europe. However, this does not necessarily mean these are initiatives wholly led by libraries. In the UK, for example, although many NUPs report to their library, the vast majority are academic-led via a steering group or editorial board. Often these groups are chaired by a pro-vice-chancellor for research or equivalent position (UCL, 2019; University of Huddersfield, n.d.).

2.4. Business Models and Sustainability

Academic- and library-led presses may not always seek to make a profit or surplus. However, they are often required to operate as a sustainable organisation with or without an attached 'business model'. Many presses have been set up with an institutional subsidy covering the initial years of operation. In order to continue, presses are often required to produce a business plan, not only to consolidate their position and acquire stability within the university, but also to gain trust from stakeholders in the publishing process. A transparent funding model for the publishing operation is a crucial factor as it sends messages about professionalism and trustworthiness. The need for a clear financial structure for the press was also noted by Stone (2017b) in a study about the formative years of the University of Huddersfield Press: "*[t]he lack of a formal business model for the Press has had an effect on sustainability, scalability and funding.*" Ensuring a sustainable governance model for academic- and library-led presses that is clear not only within the organisation but also to other stakeholders such as authors, editors and research funders would, therefore, be recommended. One example of such a structure is Open Library of Humanities, which is funded by a consortium of libraries on an international scale (Open Library of Humanities, n.d.).

3. Second Challenge: Scale

One of the major trends in the commercial academic publishing industry in recent years has been consolidation, with independent journals and publishers being absorbed into the operations of a few large multinational operations. The effects have been particularly extreme in journal publishing. One study showed that five large commercial publishers accounted for over half of all papers published in a year (Larivière, Haustein, & Mongeon, 2015). Although a greater diversity of publishers still exists within commercial book publishing (Fyfe et al., 2017; Tanner, 2016), similar practices can be observed, with the relentless expansion of the reach of a few large players, often via acquisitions and takeovers, with their associated activities of closure, centralisation and proprietary rights management.

By their very existence, the increasing number of open access ALPs and NUPs challenge these logics of relentless growth and scalar expansion. These new publishers tend not just to operate at a much smaller scale than traditional publishers, but often seem to remain content to do so.

However, in assessing the merits and demerits of open access book publishing we suggest that a focus on scale alone may obscure at least two ways in which new open access publishers are transforming academic publishing not *in spite* of their small scale but *because of* it. These relate, first, to the increasing tendency for open access publishers to work not in isolation from one another but collaboratively, a tendency we can refer to, following Adema (2018), as *scaling small* and, second, to the way in which operating at a smaller scale does not decrease but increase the possibility of innovating with publishing practices.

3.1. Collaboration

Operating as a small publisher often means being dependent to a significant extent on volunteer labour, and often without access to many of the systems and forms of expertise – whether for example relating to production, distribution, marketing – that which legacy publishers have built up over the years. In response, such publishers have started to collaborate.

A number of the publishers referenced in this article are, for instance, part of and contributors to the Radical Open Access collective.⁴ One of its stated goals

is to build what it refers to as ‘horizontal alliances’. It does so in part by acting as a repository for tools and forms of expertise that can be shared across the open access publishing community. Another prominent example is represented by ScholarLed (2019). Its explicit aim is to focus the attention of the open access community on the need to open up not just academic content, but the infrastructures of publishing. There are also initiatives such as HIRMEOS (High Integration of Research Monographs in the European Open Science infrastructure), which involve partnerships between ALPs and a number of European universities with the aim of improving existing already existing publishing platforms and repositories used in the distribution of open access monographs. As Bilder, Lin and Neylon (2015) argue, “[e]verything we have gained by opening content and data will be under threat if we allow the enclosure of scholarly infrastructures.” This is a particularly pressing issue in the context of large commercial entities taking over important community-built platforms for open research (e.g. Elsevier’s takeovers of bepress and SSRN; see also Bosman and Kramer (2016)).

Such instances of collaboration can be seen as a rejection of the logics of competition and enclosure that characterise commercial publishing. They also promise the possibility of generating the economies of scale necessary to develop the required infrastructure to be successful in the landscape of contemporary publishing, while allowing small publishers to retain their unique identities and forms of engagement with the academic and non-academic communities they serve. In this sense, collaboration represents a hopeful future for academic- and library-led publishing.

3.2. Innovation

While operating over a large scale can be highly profitable, there is a tendency for large commercial organisations to do little to challenge the norms (and indeed the politics) of publishing. Presses that operate on a smaller scale, however, have the key advantage of organisational flexibility. In particular, partly as they are less constrained by forms of organisational path dependence and lock-in (e.g. Sydow, Schreyögg, & Koch, 2009) than most commercial publishers, publishers have shown themselves far more ready to innovate.

A key area of innovation concerns the form and content of books. For example, one of punctum books’ *raison d’être* is promoting “the work that

everybody wants to do but isn't allowed to do" (Adema & Stone, 2017, p. 45). A key motivation for many new open access scholarly publishers is, like punctum, to disrupt conventional understandings of what is allowable when it comes to the content and form of book.

Open Humanities Press' *Liquid Books* series is another example. It experiments with repurposing existing open access content which is then remixed and recombined with new texts in books. These books remain open and editable, which is a feature that has been exploited by a number of other open access books from library- and scholar-led publishers (Cross [Open Book Publishers], 2019).

The potential of digital publishing has also been used to host embedded music in books (e.g. Hobson [Open Book Publishers], 2019), embedded audio in other languages (Tham [Open Book Publishers], 2019). Goldsmiths Press is looking to expand its repertoire to include the publication of apps (Goldsmiths Press, London, 2019), and one of punctum's imprints, Hyperrhiz Electric, focuses explicitly on publishing "long-form scholarly projects built partially or wholly in online format: electric objects that cannot be printed" (punctum books, n.d.).

We can also observe two further dimensions of innovation that characterises the work of such new publishers. The first is around the work of managing and demonstrating the *quality* of the published work. The second is around the backend mechanics of publishing that are so central to the *discoverability and dissemination* of contemporary scholarly books. Given that these issues are often invoked as key challenges for open access book publishing in their own right, we will address how new publishers have innovated in response in the two sections that follow.

4. Third Challenge: Quality

Questions around quality in relation to new formats have been repeatedly posed over the course of many years. It is likely that often this is connected to a tendency to resist change. For example, Stone (2017b) notes that the attitudes of many authors to open access mirror the attitudes of authors to e-resources in the 1990s (Budd & Connaway, 1997; Speier, Palmer, Wren, & Hahn, 1999), which identified that faculty held a "prevalent belief that electronic journals

were lower quality than print journals” (McClanahan, Wu, Tenopir, & King, 2010, p. 210). In the UK, similar assumptions about quality, seemingly rooted in the same resistance to change, were also expressed with specific reference to open access monographs in the evidence submitted to the *Consultation on open access in the post-2014 Research Excellence Framework* (HEFCE, 2013).

Quality is, of course, a complex attribute, one that performs a variety of discursive functions and varies in how it is used partly according to the user’s particular point of departure. Nonetheless, in what follows we first outline the nature of the challenges open access publishers confront when attempting to achieve credibility and trust, before going on to explore two ways in which such publishers are actively questioning the conventional ways in which quality is understood.

4.1. Credibility and Trust

Sitting in the background of many critiques of – or, less explicitly, concerns about – open access publishing are the continuing echoes of discussions around so-called ‘predatory’ and ‘vanity’ publishing that have accompanied the rise of open access publishing. Issues with predatory publishing have attracted particular attention ever since former librarian Jeffrey Beall created his blacklist in 2008, which included some obvious examples of dubious publishers and journals. Although he ceased compiling the list in early 2017, attaching the term ‘predatory’ to a publisher and/or journal is still a common practice.

Predatory publishing is a highly problematic term. Given many of the publishers on Beall’s list were located in the Global South, and given the terms in which many of these journals and practices were discussed amongst sections of the scholarly community, the use of the term to reinforce a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate publishing practices has been argued to “disguise a racist subtext that reproduces the coloniality of power/knowledge” (Bell, 2017; Bell, Claassen, Nyahodza, Raju, & Stetka, 2018; Nwagwu, 2016; Truth, 2012). Further, as Smith suggests, there is a tendency to use the term in a highly general way that “hides the difference between practices that really are ‘ruthlessly exploitative’ and those that may well grow out of mere inexperience or lack of competence” (Smith, 2017, p. 4). It is also worth drawing attention to the growing commercial industry invested in the

act of drawing the line between what is respectively counted as a legitimate and illegitimate publisher in ways that are not always wholly transparent (e.g. Cabells, 2017).

It should be mentioned that the majority of so-called predatory publishing centres on journal publishing, possibly because of the more commonly accepted practice within journal publishing of levying a fee – an Article Processing Charge (APC) – to make a text open access. Such accusations have, however, also been directed towards publishers of academic books (e.g. Collins, 2010), and versions of Beall’s list updated by others include publishers who claim to be doing open access publishing (Anonymous, 2019). Such organisations often sell printed books (and in particular publish theses) with little if any quality control and usually without further editorial input. In addition, there may be additional publishing costs involved and the author can lose the rights to their work.

A related charge is that open access publishing, opens the door to ‘vanity publishing,’ in which an author will pay a fee to a publisher simply in order to see their work published, with the publisher playing little in the way of a quality control function. This could involve so-called predatory publishers. But as we have already seen in the British Academy positioning paper, there is a concern that the more widely recognised open access publishers could become associated with the practice too.

It is certainly the case that establishing the credibility of, and trust in, open access publishers can be difficult given the dominance that large publishing houses and their brands have over both academic book production and economies of academic prestige. In book publishing, there are also no comparable metrics to the Journal Impact Factor, which, along with other similar indicators, is often used to assess quality in journal publishing, even as it tends to reinforce the status quo rather than challenging it.

New university and academic-led open access book publishers seek to push back against such perceptions in different ways. Many seek to generate trust and credibility by seeking institutionally authorised indicators of quality. This includes, for instance, becoming a member of the Committee on Publication Ethics⁵ and/or the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA, 2019), and registering monographs in the Directory of Open Access Books.⁶ Or they leverage ‘transparency’ as a core value – the OAPEN project, for example,

which launched its platform in 2010, mandates its members to be transparent about their editorial processes (OAPEN, n.d.). In this respect, there are echoes of the ‘Tempe Principles’ agreed almost 20 years ago by a number of US universities, university libraries, and university presses (Association of American University Presses, 2016; Association of Research Libraries, 2000).

In addition, very much unlike the publishers with which NUPs and ALPs can be negatively compared, all the publishers mentioned in this study are – like most commercial publishers – highly selective in what they publish, with publishing decisions combining an initial ‘desk’ assessment followed by external peer review as key parts of their quality management processes. For example, Stockholm University Press rejects more than 40% of incoming proposals. Mattering Press estimates its proposal rejection rate to be around 50%, climbing to over 60% for Open Book Publishers and punctum books (these figures exclude proposals that are obviously inappropriate).⁷ Although comparable information is generally not made publicly available by commercial publishers, Cambridge University Press recently revealed a very similar rejection rate of around two-thirds (Weinberg, 2015).

Such practices aim to gain credibility and trust by either seeking external validation or mirroring the practices used by more established commercial publishers. However, this only represents one dimension of how NUPs and ALPs have engaged with issues of quality in scholarly publishing. As we will proceed to address in the next section, such publishers have also sought to question assumptions around quality, rather than just emulating existing publishing norms.

4.2. Quality in Question

Despite the implicit demand from some of those not working in open access publishing to mirror commercial standards, it is not always clear that such standards are in practice as high as is often assumed. Questions have been raised about issues in commercial scholarly publishing including the quality of production process (Adin, 2017; Kara, 2019) and the rigour of peer review (Anonymous Academic, 2015).

At the same time, with respect to peer review, questions have been raised about whether double blind peer review – the dominant peer reviewing

model – continues to be the best way of ensuring academic quality. There is increasing evidence that peer review, including supposedly blind peer review, can favour authors according to their personal characteristics, for instance around gender or the characteristics of their institution (Helmer, Schottdorf, Neef, & Battaglia, 2017; Walker et al., 2015). Related to this, there have been calls to ensure a greater diversity of peer reviewers, given the overwhelming dominance of reviewers from the Global North (De Wit, Altbach, & Leask, 2018). More broadly, many academics report feeling overwhelmed by the volume of peer review requests they receive, even if some research suggests one cause may be inequalities in who is asked to be a reviewer, and some disciplines being affected more than others (Djupe, Smith, & Sokhey, 2017; Kovanis, Porcher, Ravaud, & Trinquart, 2016).

For some of these reasons, some NLPs and ALPs have been experimenting with peer review. This includes optional open peer reviewing practices (Mattering Press; Media Commons Press, punctum books) and forms of ‘collaborative review’ involving ongoing dialogue with in-house editors (e.g. electric.press; Mattering Press; see Adema & Stone, 2017, p. 59–60), as well as experiments with distributed ‘crowd’ post-publication peer review (Mattering Press, Open Book Publishers, UCL Press). As a group, these publishers are not wholly novel in undertaking such experiments – Palgrave, for instance, has trialled using open peer review with some of its books, and indeed confirmed its potentially increased fairness and transparency (Newton, 2014). It is demonstrably the case, however, that NLPs and ALPs have shown themselves far more ready to innovate with and embrace such unconventional peer review procedures.

Finally, some such publishers have also shown themselves to be interested in challenging conventional ways in which quality is understood. This includes asking writers and readers to direct their attention not just to what is published, but *how* (Barnes [Open Book Publishers], 2018a) and suggesting that questions of quality need to be considered alongside the exact “forms of relation” that quality management procedures give rise to (Deville, 2019 [Mattering Press]).

5. Fourth Challenge: Discoverability and Dissemination

There is a perception that, because they are both digital and readily shareable, open access texts are inherently discoverable. In some respects,

however, discovery and dissemination remains the most significant ongoing challenge for open access book publishing. The challenge has three main overlapping components: (1) dissemination via digital platforms and book sellers; (2) dissemination via libraries; (3) metadata. We will address each in turn.

5.1. Dissemination via Digital Platforms and Book Sellers

When attempting to disseminate texts to readers via digital platforms and book sellers, open access book publishers face a range of challenges. For instance, Google Books – the dominant online portal for book readers – makes it difficult for small organisations to have their books accessed via its database. Distributing ebooks via sites like Amazon (however uncomfortable many publishers would be about doing so) is also challenging, given it is a site designed to sell texts rather than making them freely available. Smaller publishers may also not have access to the expertise necessary to ensure search engine optimization (SEO) for their books. And finally, few NUPs and ALPs have the resources to nurture close relationships with large academic book stores, in the way that some commercial publishers do.

There are a number of ways in which NUPs and ALPs have responded to such issues. Some, like Open Book Publishers, have managed to have their books featured on Google Books. Many have successfully met the selection criteria in order to have their books listed in DOAB, which makes open access content discoverable through the library web scale discovery systems. Although lacking the marketing muscle of the larger commercial presses, a distinct advantage they hold is a much closer and direct relationship with the communities they represent. Presses like punctum, Goldsmiths Press and Stockholm University Press have gained in particular from their active presence on social media (Wennström, Schubert, Stone, & Sondervan, 2019). There are also possibilities for building on the marketing skills that librarians have developed in recent years, given that such activities are now commonplace in libraries (Brewerton, 2003). And finally, despite the barriers they confront, it remains the case that open access books are far more readily readable and shareable than books stored on the closed infrastructures of most commercial presses.

5.2. Dissemination via Libraries

The contemporary academic book industry is, however, largely built not on direct engagement with readers but on distribution via libraries. Commercial publishers have well-established routes for getting their books into libraries, both in terms of the packages they offer and the access they have to the infrastructures and supply chains used by libraries to purchase content. Libraries tend to use approved library suppliers, which do not usually list open access monographs. If they do, they often favour the copy available for purchase and not the free version. As Adema and Stone (2017) document, such issues are repeated sources of frustration for library- and academic-led publishing initiatives.

In part, these challenges are being addressed by NUPs and ALPs improving their management of metadata, as explored shortly. A parallel route has been to explore the potential of new collaborations, both between publishers and between publishers and libraries. An example is a 2018 workshop that brought together experts from the library- and academic-led publishing initiatives, book suppliers and distributors, metadata suppliers, libraries and other experts in open access publishing for the first time. In addressing the problem statement “OA publishers have difficulty accessing the channels that library acquisition departments use to buy print and e-book content” (Stone, 2018), the group examined not just the role of technical barriers but also how misunderstandings and cultural norms were exacerbating the challenges publishers were facing. This included recognising the need to more clearly map the library supply chain in order for all parties to understand their location within it, the costs involved, and where precisely further support is required. It also became clear how deeply cultural acquisition processes are and that changes are needed within libraries when, for example, confronting the apparent contradiction of ‘acquiring’ zero cost monographs (Ball & Stone, 2019; Ball, Stone & Thompson, 2019; Thompson & Stone, 2019).

Such collaborative ambitions are increasing becoming realised. Building on Open Book Publishers’ successes in at least partially integrating their texts into library catalogues, members of ScholarLed are currently working on a major project funded by Research England – Community-led Open Publishing Infrastructures for Monographs (COPIM) – part of which is

designed to develop a new, collectively developed library consortial funding model for open access book publishing (Research England, 2019).

5.3. Metadata

The final piece of this ever-changing jigsaw is metadata, although it should be noted that this is also an issue for many traditional publishers and is not necessarily an open access issue. At a European level, a report on the visibility of metadata to the OPERAS project stated that “[t]he metadata held and managed by OPERAS partners is inconsistent and variable in quality. Collecting and aggregating data from multiple OPERAS partners was a challenge due to inconsistency in bibliographic metadata processes and formats” (Neylon et al., 2018).

Adema and Stone (2017) recommended that best practices in metadata are established, given the varying levels of maturity of metadata quality at NUPs and ALPs. It is hoped that any future work will build upon that of the Jisc/OAPEN metadata model for open access books, which was “[d]eveloped in consultation with research funders, academics and institutional staff and OA monograph publishers, the model recommends a provisional list of metadata for OA book publishers and other stakeholders” (Snijder, 2016, p. 1). The idea of a minimum metadata requirement was also put forward as part of the technical infrastructure discussion at the Knowledge Exchange workshop on open access and monographs in November 2018 (Adema, 2019).

However, collaborations between publishers and libraries can contribute to improving the quality of open access metadata processes. For example, as noted by Susan Gibbons, University Librarian and Deputy Provost at Yale University, the library performs the metadata creation function for Yale University Press (Gibbons, 2018).

There are also examples of publisher innovation when it comes to the role of metadata in publishing. The ScholarLed consortium is challenging the notion that metadata is solely about self-interested optimisation of discovery by an individual publisher. It is doing so by developing a shared metadata platform that will allow the creation of a catalogue containing book across different

ScholarLed members, as well as potentially in future cross-recommendations of books between members' sites (Barnes, 2018b).

6. Conclusion

Our description of the practices of NUPs and ALPs reveals a world of open access scholarly publishing that is making highly diverse contributions to dealing with the various challenges associated with performing professionalism, operating at a small scale, managing quality, and disseminating academic books and making them discoverable. In many cases, this work does not simply replicate existing practices in commercial publishing but goes beyond it, and in the process is forging new alliances between publishers, scholars, libraries, universities, and many other entities and organisations. Meanwhile, we have shown how many of the skill sets required to produce innovation in publishing, including new sustainable publishing models, are already in existence in these smaller open access publishing initiatives.

This work comes at a time of significant potential change in monograph publishing, as we have seen with both Plan S and new country-specific Open Access mandates. Indeed, in the UK the HEFCE announcement of the intention of the four UK funding bodies to move towards an open access policy for long-form publications, and to mandate open access book publishing for the Research Excellence Framework exercise in 2027, caused widespread consternation and fallout in the academic community. Confusion about the new landscape is one of the reasons behind the panel session we organised at the 2018 LIBER conference (Deville, Sondervan, Stone, & Wennström, 2018), which in turn laid the foundations for this article.

Plan S and other similar initiatives should be a rallying cry for open access presses to start preparing. This includes ensuring such plans fit with the publishing cultures of particular disciplines. For instance, a timely and important statement signed by over forty publishers in the humanities and social sciences worldwide, written in response to cOAlition S' consultation on the implementation guidelines of Plan S, argued that it was "not appropriate" for humanities and the social sciences, and might in fact impede existing initiatives. The statement concludes that there is an "urgent need for transparent

dialogue between all parties—funders, associations, libraries, journal editors, individual academics, publishers” (PlanSinHSS, 2019). We would like to add library- and academic-led presses to this list.

As we have suggested, these organisations, in their often politely and sometimes more assertively rebellious ways, have already changed the face of academic book publishing as we know it. Now is the moment for these rebels to act – to collaborate, to experiment, to consolidate. It is also the moment for their work to be taken seriously and to be supported. The future of open access book publishing is open as perhaps never before. This presents both opportunities and risks for scholarly publishing. This article, we hope, has given a sense of what exactly is at stake.

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Declaration of Interests

Joe Deville is a co-founder and editor at Mattering Press, and a member of the ScholarLed consortium. Jeroen Sondervan is publishing consultant at Uopen Journals. LIBER Quarterly is published in the Uopen Journals programme. Graham Stone is the former manager of the University of Huddersfield Press and represents Jisc as a member of the OPERAS core group. Sofie Wennström is Managing Editor for books and journals at Stockholm University Press and is Chair of the LIBER Open Access Working Group and represents Stockholm University Library in the OPERAS partner project.

All authors declare that there are no further competing interests.

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Notes

¹ <https://scholarled.org/>.

² <http://oopen.org/home>.

³ <https://books.openedition.org/?lang=en>.

⁴ <http://radicaloa.disruptivemedia.org.uk/>.

⁵ <https://publicationethics.org/>.

⁶ <https://www.doabooks.org/>.

⁷ Figures obtained via correspondence with the three presses.