Towards a New Political Economy: Open Humanities Press and the Open Access Monograph
‘We don’t have funding, we don’t charge subscriptions, and we don’t have author-pays – we just have friends!’

Open Humanities Press
www.openhumanitiespress.org
‘Between 1986 and 2005, the prices for institutional subscriptions to journals rose 302 percent... Faced with this disparity, libraries have had to adjust the proportions of their acquisitions budgets...they used to spend about half of their funds on serials and half on monographs. By 2000 many libraries were spending three quarters of their budget on serials. Some had nearly stopped buying monographs altogether’

Robert Darnton
‘The Library: Three Jeremiads’ (2010)
OHP’s Editorial Board includes

Alain Badiou, Chair of Philosophy at the École Normale Supérieure
Jonathan Culler, Chair, Romance Studies, Cornell University
Donna Haraway, Professor of the History of Consciousness and Feminist Studies, UC Santa Cruz
Antonio Negri, Université de Vincennes (Paris-VIII)
Gayatri Spivak, Avalon Foundation Professor in the Humanities, Columbia University
Peter Suber, Berkman Fellow, Harvard University and Research Professor of Philosophy, Earlham College
Stephen Greenblatt, Cogan University Professor of the Humanities, Harvard University
• **New Metaphysics** – eds Bruno Latour and Graham Harman

• **Unidentified Theoretical Objects** – ed. Wlad Godzich

• **Critical Climate Change** – eds Tom Cohen and Claire Colebrook

• **Global Conversations** – ed. Ngugi wa Thiong'o

• **Liquid Books** – eds Gary Hall and Clare Birchall
OHP: forthcoming titles include

- IAN BOGOST - ALIEN PHENOMENOLOGY
- LEVI BRYANT - THE DEMOCRACY OF OBJECTS
- JOSEPH NECHVATAL - IMMERSION INTO NOISE
- JOHN CARLOS ROWE - THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF THE NEW AMERICAN STUDIES
‘Cornell’s Signale series (two titles scheduled for late 2010), University of California’s Flashpoint series (two titles), Penn State University’s Romance Studies series (nine titles), and my own UM digital-culture books (13 titles)....

Athabasca University Press list almost 50 titles in print and online for free on their Web site. Australian National University E Press produced more than 200 titles in six years, online for free and for sale in a variety of formats. OAPEN ... believe “the time is ripe to bring the successes of scientific Open Access publishing to the humanities and social sciences,” but to date their worthy efforts have focused on research and recommendations rather than actual book production.’

Maria Bonn,
‘Free Exchange of Ideas: Experimenting with the Open Access Monograph’ (2010)
Overview of OA Book Publishers

In this inventory you can find publishers that have adopted or are experimenting with Open Access business models for monographs. This list also provides information about publishing and business models that are currently in use by publishers (OA policy or model). For more information about these and other potential business models for Open Access monographs please take a look at John Willinsky's article on Monograph Funding (2008) and/or at the information collected in the OASIS sourcebook on Open Access.

This page will be updated regularly. Please inform us about other examples and send your comments to Janneke Adema [j.adema@aup.nl].

Commercial Publishers
Bloomsbury Academic (About; OA policy or model)
O'Reilly's (About; OA policy or model)
Polimetrica books (About; OA policy or model)
Re.press (About; OA policy or model)

University Presses
Amsterdam University Press (About; OA policy or model)
ANU E Press (About; OA policy or model)
Firenze University Press (About; OA policy or model)
Manchester University Press (About; OA policy or model)
Museum Tusculanum Press (About; OA policy or model)
Presses Universitaires de Lyon (About; OA policy or model)
The MIT Press (About; OA policy or model)
Rice University Press (About; OA policy or model)
Yale University Press (About; OA policy or model)

Presses established by or working with Libraries
Athabasca University Press (About; OA policy or model)
Internet-First University Press (About; OA policy or model)
Göttingen University Press (About; OA policy or model)
Leiden University Press (About; OA policy or model)
Newfound Press (About; OA Policy or model)
Ohio State University Press (About; OA policy or model)
Pennsylvania State University Press (About; OA policy or model)
Sydney University Press (About; OA policy or model)
The University of Michigan Press (About; OA policy or model)
The University of Pittsburgh Press (About; OA policy or model)
University of California Press (About; OA policy or model)
‘What we'd love to see is [the OHP] model take off more widely. From the academics' viewpoint, it doesn't really require that much in the way of substantial change: scholars already research, write, edit and peer review original scholarly content. Peer publishing initiatives such as OHP represent tremendous opportunities for the library community as well, although again, as [OHP & SPOs] Shana Kimball points out… it doesn’t necessarily mean significant changes in how libraries do things either. It’s more a matter of re-jigging some existing services.’

Sigi Jöttkandt
‘Open Humanities Press’ (2009)
open access monograph publishers include

- Amsterdam University Press
- ANU E Press - Australian National University
- AU Press - Athabasca University
- Bloomsbury Academic
- DigitalCultureBooks - University of Michigan Press and the Scholarly Publishing Office of Michigan’s University Library
- Firenze University Press
- Flashpoints series - University of California Press
- Manchester University Press
- MediaCommons Press
- Monash University Publishing
- National Academies Press
- Newfound Press - University of Tennessee Libraries
- Open Book Publishers
- Open Humanities Press
- re.press
- Romance Studies series - Penn State University
- Signale – Cornell University
The Partners

Amsterdam University Press, Netherlands
Web: www.aup.nl

Leiden University Press, Netherlands
Web: www.lup.nl

Göttingen University Press, Germany
Web: www.univerlag.uni-goettingen.de

Museum Tusculanum Press, Denmark
Web: www.mtp.dk

Manchester University Press, United Kingdom
Web: www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk

Presses Universitaires de Lyon, France
Web: presses.univ-lyon2.fr/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=1

Firenze University Press, Italy
Web: www.fupress.com

University of Amsterdam
Web: www.uva.nl

Leiden University
Web: www.leidenuni.nl
My invitation stressed I should ‘focus on practical… ideas on Open Access that can be realized, not on theoretical thinking’. That’s not too easy for me, as I’m a theorist by profession – albeit one involved in a number of what some people would call ‘practical’ projects. But I’m going to try my best for you.

I thought I’d begin with one very practical idea that is being realised: that represented by Open Humanities Press, an international open access publishing collective in critical and cultural theory, established by Sigi Jottkandt, David Ottina, Paul Ashton and myself.
As we know, open access in the humanities continues to be dogged by the perception that online publication is somehow less credible than print, and lacks rigorous standards of quality control. This often leads to both OA journals and book presses being regarded as less trustworthy and desirable places to publish; and as too professionally risky, for early career scholars especially. It’s precisely this perception of open access that Open Humanities Press has been set up to counter.

OHP was launched in May 2008 by an international group of scholars, librarians and publishers, very much in response to the ‘vicious circle’, as Robert Darnton calls it, whereby:

the escalation in the price of periodicals forces libraries to cut back on their purchase of monographs; the drop in the demand for monographs makes university presses reduce their publication of them; and the difficulty in getting them published creates barriers to careers...

In the first instance OHP consisted of a collective of already-existing open access journals in philosophy, cultural studies, literary criticism and political theory. While these journals are of high quality, many had a problem generating a high level of prestige: because they’re online journals rather than print; and
because - although at least two are over 10 years old now - most are relatively new; and as Peter Suber points out, ‘new journals can be excellent from birth, but even the best cannot be prestigious from birth’.ii The idea of OHP was to bring them together under a single umbrella, and raise their profile and level of prestige in the eyes of academics and administrators by way of a meta-refereeing process. To this end OHP has an Editorial Board that includes Alain Badiou, Steven Greenblatt, Bruno Latour and Gayatri Spivak, and an Editorial Oversight Group consisting of a rotating body of 13 scholars drawn from the Editorial Board, which we use to assess our titles according to a set of policies relating to publication standards, technical standards and intellectual fit with OHP’s mission. As Sigi Jottkandt stresses, the press operates as an unpaid collective, ‘where editors support one another and share knowledge and skills, very much like an open source software community. And in fact, one of the things that makes a peer publishing initiative like OHP possible is precisely open source software, such as the Public Knowledge Project’s suite of open source publishing tools.’iii

The plan when we started was to spend the first few years establishing a reputation for OHP with its journals, before proceeding to tackle the more difficult problem of publishing book-length material open access.iv

Things have developed much faster than we anticipated, however. As soon as OHP launched, a lot of people got in touch asking us when we were going to
publish books open access. So in 2009 we established an OHP monograph project, run in collaboration with the University of Michigan Library’s Scholarly Publishing Office, UC-Irvine, UCLA Library, and the Public Knowledge Project headed by John Willinsky at Stanford University. The idea is to move forward: both open access publishing in the humanities; and the open access publishing of monographs. And we’ve launched our monograph project with 5 high-profile book series, as you can see.

The way the monograph project works is like this: scholars come together ‘around areas of interest through a book series and perform the editorial oversight, manuscript selection and development for that series.’ The resulting books are then run through the University of Michigan's Scholarly Publishing Office’s suite of services, and made freely available full text open access online, as HTML and nearly all of them PDF too. We’re also offering POD and eventually e-pub books. SPO is subsidizing the production and distribution costs and providing its services in kind, in keeping with its mission to provide an array of sustainable publishing solutions to the scholarly community. We’re looking to use print sales to cover (primarily SPOs) production costs, pay author royalties and to subsidize the costs of other OHP titles. So it’s this partnership with SPO that enables us to afford to publish OA books, without author-pays/publishing fees or external funding; and to maintain high production standards in the process. ‘SPO has infrastructure, scale, and experience; OHP
draws together self-organizing editorial teams of senior scholars in various fields of the humanities to provide the editorial functions and peer-review. vii

Is this going to enable us to develop an economic model for the long-term open access publication of research in the humanities? To be honest, we don’t know. But then OHP is not unusual in that respect. As Maria Bonn wrote in 2010:

Even those most active in the OA monograph efforts… must concede that our arguments at present are informed mostly by speculation or ideology. Experimentation in open book publishing has been very limited and is still so new as to have generated few results that can be replicated or refuted. viii

I raise this point, not as a criticism of any such efforts. If we’re going to address the issue of long term economic sustainability, then as Bonn emphasizes, it’s important to learn from the different monograph experiments… taking place’, and ‘embark upon more of them’. ix Nor do I think the inability of any one such experiment, as yet, to definitively resolve this issue, means doing so is ultimately an impossible task. I don’t think there’ll be a magic-bullet, one-size-fits-all answer anyway. But I do wonder if we haven’t been looking for some of our answers in the wrong place.
So far most of our attention has been on those willing and able to experiment with different economic models of publishing open access monographs - as if we’re all hoping a press somewhere can come up with a solution to the problems of academic publishing that will protect the rest of the scholarly community from the need to change how it function. But I wonder if, in the long run, it isn’t going to require more of a community effort than that, one that will involve the way researchers, authors, libraries institutions and funding agencies operate, too?

For example, the new, alternative publishing model OHP is pioneering, is one where there’s no profit for anyone, since as a scholar-led publisher, our main source of funding comes indirectly via institutions paying our salaries; and, as I say, we’re using the proceeds from POD sales to cover production costs and subsidize the production of other OHP titles. (So we’re selling POD books, but not charging for the service of publishing books OA.)

Despite this, what we’re experiencing is that some authors – not all, but some, a small number - still insist on viewing us as more or less a ‘classical’ press, only one run by volunteer scholars working to service poor humanities academics by publishing their work OA. For these authors, the traditional author/publisher relation appears to be still very much in place. They’re attracted to all the advantages of the new publishing model that’s offered by OHP: such as a
relatively short turn-around time between submission of their final manuscript and its being made freely available online; and the fact OHP is able to make decisions about what to publish, less on the basis of a text’s potential value as a commodity, and more on the basis of its quality as a piece of scholarship. And thus that we can publish books which, in the current economic climate, classical print-on-paper-only publishers might regard as being too difficult, advanced, specialized, radical or avant-garde to take on - because they wouldn’t be able to make a profit or even cover their costs on them.

But these authors also want to continue to have a quite traditional relationship with us as their publisher, and keep trying to treat us accordingly: arguing, to take just one example – and this is just one example - that more of the proceeds from POD sales should go to them in the form of royalties, and less to us/the community to subsidize the publication of other titles open access.

Now in a way perhaps we shouldn’t be too surprised by this. The desire for us to operate as an ‘old school’ publisher partly arises out of a lingering fear of the taint of vanity publishing; partly, it results from of the fact that a conventional publishing relationship with a conventional publisher is the only such relationship most authors have experience of.

But we also need to take some responsibility for this double-think ourselves. For isn’t this how most of us in the OA movement make our case? Don’t we encourage colleagues to get involved by reassuring them that open access offers
most, if not all, of what the classical print-on-paper-only publishing model offers - only with all the added benefits ‘giving away’ their work for free online can bring? (It’s cheaper, faster, increases citations, brings greater readership etc.)

This is certainly how we often present OHP. Hence while OHP may be innovative in its distribution of labour, it’s ‘quite traditional in its review process, in part [as I say] to address academic humanities concerns about OA publishing and quality’. x

Now, one can understand why this strategy’s been adopted within the OA movement. And let’s be honest, we’re probably going to have to continue with it for some time yet if open access is to keep on growing. But with the question of economic sustainability in mind, won’t we have to revise this strategy at some point, and open ourselves to the possibility that, if we do want to ‘find a financial model... appropriate to scholarly humanities monographs’, as the OAPEN website puts it, we can’t necessarily expect the rest of our publishing model to remain largely the same as in the toll-access, print-on-paper-only world.

In saying this, I want to emphasize that I’m not referring to the quality of our production, editing, peer review, design, marketing and promotion. If we decide to, we can maintain classical professional standards in all these respects since, as my OHP colleague David Ottina has pointed out, ‘many of the tasks
associated with presses… are rooted in workflows that arose from the
materiality of the press itself. Now that every academic has all of the tools for
each of these tasks sitting on their desk, those workflows have become
vestigial. xi

But certainly one thing we may have to consider, if the open access publication
of humanities monographs is going to expand and be economically sustainable
over the longer term, is changing the relationship between presses and the rest
of the academic community. I’m not sure the bulk of the responsibility for
achieving such sustainability can be handed over primarily to those presses that
are willing to experiment with different economic models for publishing
monographs. As well as increasing the number of presses that are exploring
ways of making it possible for book authors in the humanities to publish open
access, xii might we not also need to experiment with developing a new kind of
academic culture and economy. An economy based less on competition,
possession, academic celebrity, and ideas of knowledge as something to be
owned, commodified and exchanged as the property of individuals; and more on
openness, generosity and hospitality. Where authors, librarians and publishers
are all seen as being part of the same community, working together to produce
and share knowledge and research:
• with libraries, for example, providing sustainable publishing solutions to the scholarly community, or at least their own university’s staff. (Even just getting together to agree to catalogue OA monographs and purchase the POD versions would be a start);

• with authors waiving more of their royalties to subsidize the not-for-profit publication of other open access titles;

• with academics – rather than providing free labour for toll access journals and publishers who don’t allow authors to self-archive copies of their work online, or who charge high annual subscription charges – using this time to instead become actively involved in the process of selecting, developing, editing and publishing OA monographs;

• and institutions support their researchers to publisher OA – not just by subsidizing the cost of doing so, but by not disadvantaging authors who publish OA books when it comes to hiring and promotion and so on.

The problem is, of course, as anyone who has any experience of initiating online projects quickly learns, it’s not enough to operate on an ‘if we build it they will come’ basis. One has to either create such a community, perhaps through promotion and advertising; or make use of an already existing community.
At one end of the spectrum, some of those involved with OHP have suggested our contracts should feature a tick box, where authors can explicitly state they would like their royalties to be used to support the publication of other OHP monographs. At the other end, it’s been suggested OHP write a manifesto, making it clear we’re in the process of developing a new model of scholarly publishing, consisting of a cooperative community of publishers, authors, scholars and librarians all working together to share knowledge and research, asking authors to work with us on this basis.

However, is there a community for the new kind of academic culture and economy we’re pushing toward here that can be either created or tapped into – especially given that a large part of what currently seems to attract authors to open access is the fact that the rest of the conventional publishing model and relationship does indeed remain in place? Wouldn’t a project such as OHP have to act to try to 'performatively' transform and so 'create' the very 'culture' and ‘community’ in which such a project could - at some point in the future perhaps - be eventually understood and participated in? And do so ‘without any guarantees’ that this would happen? That’s the kind of practical problem OHP is currently exploring.

In the end, what we can see is that the long-term sustainability of a project such as OHP perhaps depends on a community that does not exist – at least not yet. Rather than being spoken to, represented or addressed, they’re a community that
has to be created or invented. What we might think of, not so much in terms of Giorgio Agamben’s ‘coming community’ or what, following Jacques Derrida we might call the community to come, but as what I’d term the missing community.

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Darnton writes:

In 1974 the average cost of a subscription to a journal was $54.86. In 2009 it came to $2,031 for a US title and $4,753 for a non-US title, an increase greater than ten times that of inflation. Between 1986 and 2005, the prices for institutional subscriptions to journals rose 302 percent, while the consumer price index went up by 68 percent. Faced with this disparity, libraries have had to adjust the proportions of their acquisitions budgets. As a rule, they used to spend about half of their funds on serials and half on monographs. By 2000 many libraries were spending three quarters of their budget on serials. Some had nearly stopped buying monographs altogether or had eliminated them in certain fields.

… university presses… could count on research libraries purchasing about eight hundred copies of any new monograph. By 2000 that figure had fallen to three or four hundred, often less, and not enough in most cases to cover production costs….

In 2009, Elsevier, the giant publisher of scholarly journals based in the Netherlands, made a $1.1 billion profit in its publishing division, yet 2009 was a disastrous year for library budgets. Harvard’s seventy-three libraries cut their expenditures by more than 10 percent, and other libraries suffered even greater reductions, but the journal publishers were not impressed. Many of them raised their prices by 5 percent and sometimes more. This year, the publishers of the several *Nature* journals announced that they were increasing the cost of subscriptions for libraries in the University of California by 400 percent. Profit margins of journal publishers in the fields of science, technology, and medicine recently ran to 30–40 percent; yet those publishers add very little value to the research process, and most of the research is ultimately funded by American taxpayers through the National Institutes of Health and other organizations.


http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/newsletter/10-02-09.htm.
Difficult, because one of the main models of funding open-access in the sciences, author-side fees, is not easily transferable: either to book publishing or to the humanities. Authors in the humanities are not used to paying to have their work published – even if it’s a matter of just covering the cost of its production and processing and calling these ‘publication’ or ‘processing’ fees. They associate doing so with vanity publishing.

Sage, with Sage Open, billed as the ‘first major open-access title to be launched outside the sciences’, is now testing this model in relation to journal articles, charging authors $195 to process each article in its first year of operation, rising to $695 in its second year. Wiley-Blackwell is about to do something similar with Wiley Open Access, a new publishing program of open access journals. However, it’s going to be interesting to see if this works since humanities authors are also less likely to obtain the research grants needed to cover the cost of publishing author-pays. Most humanities research is funded out of the salaries paid to academics – so there’s not necessarily a project grant out of which such fees can be taken. And those in the humanities who do receive funds often receive them from multiple agencies. As Mary Waltham notes, this means ‘attributing a piece of research to a funding agency and using research money from that source plainly has complexities’ (Mary Waltham, cited in Paul Jump, ‘Slow Train Coming’, Times Higher Education, 27 January, 2011, p.20). That the humanities receive only a fraction of the amount of government funding STEM does only compounds the problem. As does the fact that higher rejection rates in the humanities, as compared to STEM, means any grants would have to be significantly larger. And that’s just to publish journal articles. Publishing books author-pays would be more expensive still.


Cornell’s Signale series (two titles scheduled for late 2010), University of California’s Flashpoint series (two titles), Penn State University’s Romance Studies series (nine titles), and my own UM digital-culture books (13 titles) are all interesting, but limited examples of such efforts. Athabasca University Press list almost 50 titles in print and online for free on their Web site. Australian National University E Press produced more than 200 titles in six years, online for free and for sale in a variety of formats.
… an international OA publishing collective in critical and cultural theory. OHP organizes its volunteer editors around series. The editors recruit titles for their series and shepherd them through the review and development process. Manuscripts will be handed off to SPO for electronic and print production and delivery. The enterprise aims to create new venues for publication in cultural theory and to legitimize online publishing in the humanities.

It is quite innovative in its approach to distributing the labor of monograph production and its position on access, but has chosen to be quite traditional in its review process, in part to address academic humanities concerns about OA publishing and quality.


David Ottina, private email correspondence, 21 August, 2010.

With regard to what she terms ‘the crudest form of interest in OA book publishing.. the “let’s save some money” variety, vesting hope that free distribution, accompanied by sale of books printed only at time of purchase will radically lower costs’, Maria Bonn notes how ‘publishers are quick to point out that if current acquisitions and production standards remain intact, such changes would only result in about 25 to 30 percent up front savings. (Administrators are equally quick to respond that 25 percent sounds pretty good.’ (Maria Bonn, ‘Free Exchange of Ideas: Experimenting with the Open Access Monograph’, *College and Research Libraries News*, vol. 71 no. 8, September, 2010: pp. 436-439: http://crln.acrl.org/content/71/8/436.full)