Reclaiming Power in the Academy: The Axis of Equity and Academic Freedom

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Equity and Academic Freedom are Propagated or Suppressed through the same Mechanism:
Power

Michel de Certeau

The Practice of Everyday Life, 1980
Walking in the City
Institutions Vs. Individuals

**Strategies**
- Producers
- Has “proper” place (not restricted by time)
- Works according to laws, rules, conventions
- Designer

**Tactics**
- Consumers (but not passive)
- Appropriation as a new kind of production
- Without defined place
- Opportunistic/Subversive
- User
Tactics Vs. Strategies

Academic publishing is the infrastructure of the academy

And academic publishing features structures such as:

Rules
Norms/Expectations
Procedures
Incentives
Hierarchies

To what extent does the academy itself own or control these structures?
If academic publishing shapes the infrastructure that bears the signature of our values, what are those values that are currently legible?

- Corporatism
- Academic Freedom?
- Neoliberalism
- Assessment
- Productivity
- Neoliberalism
- Profit
- Equity?
Publisher industry tension/pressure on academic research landscapes:

- A “publish or perish” mindset and increasing demands for higher productivity
- An inflated value of Impact Factor
- Publishing options/paths that are reinforced from one “generation” to the next
- Economic sustainability for publishers is over-valued; economic sustainability for academics is undervalued
- Constricting research qualifications in T&P
- Neo-liberalization of the academy → The culture of assessment
  - Metrics, market, managers, morale
Getting back to values.
Academic freedom and equity:

**Academic Freedom** (*Britannica*): the freedom [...] to teach, study, and pursue knowledge and research without unreasonable interference or restriction from law, institutional regulations, or public pressure.

➔ How would this value be applied to an individual walking in de Certeau’s city?

**Equity** (*M-W*): justice according to natural law or right; *specifically*: freedom from bias or favoritism

➔ How would this value be applied to an individual walking in de Certeau’s city?
False tension between values:

Under existing structures

Equity  Academic Freedom
The natural state of affairs:

Equity

Academic Freedom
Open Access is not a value, it is a kind of access.
Open Access has sometimes reinforced inequity and been reappropriated by the scholarly publishing industry...

Open-access charges ‘create new inequalities’ in publishing

RACING TO THE CROSSROADS OF SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATION AND DEMOCRACY: BUT WHO ARE WE LEAVING BEHIND?

The open access movement at a crossroad: Are the big publishers and academic social media taking over?

The academic, economic and societal impacts of Open Access: an evidence-based review
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4837983/
Actions should follow values, not the other way around
Strategies for reclaiming power in the academy.

1. Reject business model agnosticism and take back control over scholarly publishing
Business model agnosticism:

A way of achieving a goal through multiple channels, so that the business model does not ostensibly matter as long as the business goal is achieved.
We cannot be business model agnostic, as several prominent open access figures and statements have proposed.

“There is no need to favor one of these solutions over the others for all disciplines or nations, and no need to stop looking for other, creative alternatives.” - Budapest Open Access Initiative Statement

“Even though journal prices have risen four times faster than inflation since the mid-1980's, the purpose of OA is not to punish or undermine expensive journals, but to provide an accessible alternative...Promoting OA does not require the boycott of any kind of literature, any kind of journal, or any kind of publisher. Promoting OA need not cause publisher setbacks, and publisher setbacks need not advance OA. To focus on undermining non-OA journals and publishers is to mistake the goal.” - Peter Suber, Open Access Overview
What would an autonomous, values-based infrastructure look like?

This isn’t that revolutionary. We already have examples of organizations and publishers that exhibit at least some of these characteristics.

- Community-based
- Sustainable
- Non-Profit
- Mission/Value driven
- Academy governed
- Transparent & Open
Strategies for reclaiming power in the academy.

2. Assert our public responsibility
The natural state of affairs:

Equity

The Public Good

Academic Freedom
“Ultimately, then, academic freedom is a right of the people, not a privilege of a few; [. . .] It is the people at large who have a right to learn what scholars may succeed in finding out if they are left free and secure from reprobation. It is the people at large who have a right to the cultural and material benefits that may flow from the teaching and the inquiries of scholars who have nothing to fear when they make honest mistakes.”

-Malchup, F. (1955) “On some misconceptions concerning academic freedom,”
Thank you
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View slides later at:

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