

LET US NOW STAND UP FOR BASTARDS

*The Importance of Illegitimate Publics**

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[What might be] the possibility of liberating oneself from a cycle of disengaged production motivated by a craving for legitimising praise? Paradoxically, I looked toward a mutual admiration society—to that ecstatic reciprocal attention-paying of lovers—as an alternative model for understanding how and why intellectuals might freely collaborate.

~ Frances Stark, *Structures that fit my opening and other parts considered in the whole* (2006)

In her essay “Pixel Dust: Illusions of Innovation in Scholarly Publishing,” published in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* last January, Johanna Drucker cautioned against what she calls “the hyped myths of digital publishing.”¹ Drucker, who has described herself as both an

* This essay was developed out of two talks that I presented, both in Washington, DC, and I wish to thank Heidi Dowding for inviting me to give the first of those, “The Open Library of Babel,” in March 2014 at Dumbarton Oaks Research Library as part of the National Digital Stewardship Residency Enrichment Series. I also want to thank Jonathan Hsy for inviting me to George Washington University to give a talk, “Down with Authority: The Importance of Illegitimacy,” in January 2015 as part of a symposium, “Disrupting DH,” that he organized under the auspices of GWU’s Digital Humanities Institute (<http://gwdhi.org/gwdh15/>). I want to also thank Dolsy Smith, Humanities Librarian at Gelman Library, GWU, for the very warm and inspiring introduction he presented on my behalf at the “Disrupting DH” symposium. The title of this essay is inspired by Edmund’s soliloquy in Act I, Scene 2 of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, when Edmund, plotting against his brother Edgar, the ‘legitimate’ heir to their father, the Earl of Gloucester, says, “Fine word, ‘legitimate’!— / Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed / And my invention thrive, / Edmund the base / Shall top th’ legitimate. I grow, I prosper. / Now, gods, stand up for bastards!”

1 Johanna Drucker, “Pixel Dust: Illusions of Innovation in Scholarly Publishing,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 16 January 2014: <http://lareviewofbooks.org/essay/pixel-dust-illusions-innovation-scholarly-publishing>. Unless otherwise noted, all citations of Drucker are from this LARB essay.

“aesthete” and “token humanist” within the digital humanities and information sciences² (where she has played important roles, both at the University of Virginia and, more recently, at UCLA), believes there are many “prevailing misconceptions” relative to digital scholarship, such as—

- that it is “cheap, permanent yet somehow immaterial, and that it is done by machines”;
- that “everything” is digitized and that everything digital is available;
- that it participates in all sorts of “fantasies about crowdsourced, participatory knowledge generation that would essentially de-professionalize knowledge production”;
- that it operates with a “business model in which publishing thrives without a revenue stream”;
- and that it provides multi-modal platforms for dissemination and reading that go far beyond the supposed flat “linearity” of the print book.

Drucker is concerned about these “hyped myths” (her phrase), in part because they arise, along with the digital humanities itself (write large as a field that cuts across multiple institutions), at a time of crisis in academic publishing, described by Drucker as a situation in which university presses are shrinking, not expanding, their lists; libraries are being crippled by rising and exorbitant journal subscription rates; sales of monographs have dropped dramatically; and the production of PhDs has not abated, while at the same time the outlets for the dissemination of their work has dramatically narrowed. And what Drucker is most at pains in her essay to demonstrate is that, in the face of this publishing crisis “we can’t rely on a purely technological salvation, building houses on the shifting sands of innovative digital platforms.”

I actually think Drucker, whom I deeply admire and who is herself a significant innovator within and theorist of the digital humanities, raises some important concerns in her essay, with which I am mainly in

² See Johanna Drucker, “SpecLab’s Experiment: The Humanist, the Library, and the Digital Future of Cultural Materials and Their Interpretation,” lecture delivered for the Scholarly Communication Lecture Series, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, 9 April 2010: <http://youtu.be/RgsyWKgmaSA>.

agreement—for example, that digital scholarship is not cheaper, easier to produce, nor even necessarily more accessible than traditional print scholarship. Indeed, born-digital scholarship can be extremely expensive, especially in terms of the technical expertise and software+hardware required, and it also often necessitates long-term funding strategies that are overly reliant on private foundational support. Further, open-access publishing initiatives, such as those initiated in the UK after the Finch Report, and also by the University of California’s Office of Scholarly Communication,³ do indeed bring with them serious funding perils: if all academic work is to be made fully available with no fees imposed upon readers and users, then the financial burden falls more squarely upon institutions of higher learning and governments at the exact moment that funding for higher education, and especially for more speculative forms of research, is shrinking and under siege.⁴ A troubling recent development in this regard is revealed in the (revised) “White Paper” released by University of California Press on 30 April 2014, “The Future of the Humanities in the Digital Age at UC Press.” This “White Paper” was developed as an outcome

3 See the Research Council UK’s 2012 “Policy on Open Access and Guidance,” as well as a link to the “National Working Group on Expanding Access to Published Research Findings” (a.k.a. the ‘Finch Group Report’), here: <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/research/openaccess/policy/>. See the Open Access Policy adopted by the University of California and ratified by the UC Academic Senate in 2013 here: <http://osc.universityofcalifornia.edu/open-access-policy/>. For the ways in which the “open source” movement does not always spell “public good,” and even poses a danger to a truly public commons, see Christopher Newfield, “Corporate Open Source: Intellectual Property and the Struggle Over Value,” *Radical Philosophy* 181 (Sep/Oct 2013): <http://www.radicalphilosophy.com/commentary/corporate-open-source>.

4 There are too many examples to count of the University, and especially the humanities, under siege, but for a recent example from the state of Wisconsin, see Richard Grusin, “Meet the Regents, Wisconsin, or Welcome to Our New University System Overlords,” *Ragman’s Circles* [weblog], 5 February 2015: <https://ragmancircles.wordpress.com/2015/02/05/meet-the-regents-wisconsin-or-welcome-to-our-new-university-system-overlords/>. For important reports on what is happening within the University of California system (the canary in the coalmine, if ever there were one, for higher education in the US), Michael Meranze and Christopher Newfield’s weblog *Remaking the University* is always indispensable: <http://utotherescue.blogspot.com/>. Finally, see also Christopher Newfield, *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011) and Andrew McGettigan, *The Great University Gamble: Money, Markets and the Future of Higher Education* (London: Pluto Press, 2013).

of a two-day workshop that involved “an interdisciplinary group of fifteen faculty across the UC system, four senior staff from the UC Press, and three representatives from the library community.” The “White Paper” proposes that the “perennial problem of monograph publishing” (meaning, that it is both required for tenure and promotion at most institutions while it is also not economically sustainable) be addressed by creating “a new Open Access model which would make [monographs] ... freely available in digital form, with the costs of publication shared between the different stakeholders (the Press, the author/department, and libraries).”⁵ In other words, a severe (and, importantly, new) financial burden would be imposed upon authors and their departments—and where do their monies come from, anyway? Is it not the same stream of revenue (legislative appropriations, for example) that ostensibly funds the UC Press? This feels economically tautological in the extreme, not to mention that it places faculty authors under the strain of having to compete with other faculty authors for already-limited resources, and perhaps will even unwittingly cause a situation where authors situated in departments and colleges with higher enrollments (and thus more tuition income) and more generous endowments will have an unfair advantage over authors working in more esoteric (yet still highly valuable) fields that do not attract as many students, and/or who reside in more economically-disadvantaged institutions. Not to mention that if you are a scholar who is not attached to an institution at all, you are in a somewhat precarious position if you had any notion of UC Press (or other presses adopting this model) publishing your book. Ultimately, what this really signals, in my mind, is that state legislatures and the public universities funded by them are somewhat turning their back on their responsibility to disseminate research findings, which should be a matter of great public concern (and outrage). Surely there is a better “business model” for academic publishing that neither lapses into “author-department” pay schemes nor merely hands over all of its existing funds for research development to commercial presses that have no concern for the university other than the profits to be derived therefrom?

It is thus also worrisome, in this vein, that large sums of money are already being set aside (such as by the UK Research Councils, in the wake of the recommendations of the Finch Report, as noted above) to pay

5 The UC Press “White Paper” can be accessed here: [https://www.dropbox.com/s/8fjaxhzvte3ltkk/HumWorkshop REV_draft_whitepaper_043014.pdf](https://www.dropbox.com/s/8fjaxhzvte3ltkk/HumWorkshop_REV_draft_whitepaper_043014.pdf).

commercial and university presses to publish open-access monographs, edited volumes, and journals at exorbitant rates that are based on exceedingly bloated “business-as-usual” pricing structures.⁶ And what this means is that, even though publishers such as Palgrave Macmillan are willing to work with universities and research councils in order to make the scholarly archive more fully open and accessible, they are only willing to do so at very high prices—prices that, understandably, represent what they need to make in order to survive, and yet that also reflect the increasingly untenable overheads they carry into the bargain, and this at a time when the editorial quality of their publications is actually on a downturn, and has been for quite some time. For example, publishers such as Palgrave, Oxford University Press, Springer, Nature Publishing Group, Fordham University Press, Duke University Press, Taylor & Francis, and a host of other supposedly “gold-standard” academic presses have been outsourcing most of their editorial work (proofreading, copy-editing, typesetting, illustration and design, HTML and XML coding, etc.) to companies such as Newgen KnowledgeWorks (<http://www.newgen.co/>), which has offices in India, the US, and the UK, and is growing at a rapid rate, with lots of proliferating spin-off and copycat companies.⁷ Although Newgen describes itself as

6 And as a result of these bloated pricing arrangements, universities are increasingly finding that they can no longer afford journal subscriptions. See, for example, Harvard University’s 2012 “Faculty Advisory Council Memorandum on Journal Pricing,” where it is stated that, “[m]any large journal publishers have made the scholarly communication environment fiscally unsustainable and academically restrictive” (<http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k77982&tabgroupid=icb.tabgroup143448>). Further, reflecting in 2004 on a battle between Reed Elsevier and the University of California library system over the pricing of science journal subscription packages, Daniel Greenstein, Associate Vice-Provost and University Librarian for the University of California system, writes that “the business model of commercial publishing, which once served the academy’s information needs, now threatens fundamentally to undermine and pervert the course of research and teaching. Put bluntly, the model is economically unsustainable for us. If business as usual continues, it will deny scholars both access to the information they need and the ability to distribute their work to the worldwide audience it deserves”: “Not so Quiet on a Western Front,” *Nature.com*, Web Focus: Access to the Literature [web supplement feature], 28 May 2004: <http://www.nature.com/nature/focus/accessdebate/23.html>.

7 For more on Palgrave’s open access programs, see Palgrave Open here: <http://www.palgrave.com//page/about-us-palgrave-open-faqs/>. For more of my own thoughts on this state of affairs relative to government funding of for-profit open-access initiatives, see Eileen A. Joy, “A Time for Radical Hope: Freedom, Responsibility, Publishing, and Building

having been established to “cater to the pre-press publishing needs of books and journals publishers in the UK, US, and Europe,” it is clear that their current ambition is essentially to take over all aspects of the pre- (and maybe even post-) press publishing processes, with services now also including “digital archiving, data conversion, electronic publishing, and large-scale ePUB conversion services.” I wouldn’t care if they did all of these things well, but as the editor of a Palgrave journal, *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies*, whose proofing and copy-editing is handled by Newgen with some oversight by Palgrave, I can categorically assert that their care for the editorial quality of our journal does not even come close to the care it would receive from dedicated copy-editors whose experience and expertise would not only hew closely to the journal’s subject matter, but whose efforts would not be compromised by also having to edit hundred of other journals, all with different style guidelines, in sweatshop-like conditions.

Finally, with Drucker, I believe that print technologies actually are more impervious to the ravages of time than digital technologies. Yes, I also know about LOCKSS (Lots of Copies Keep Stuff Safe),⁸ an open-source, library-led digital preservation system: I believe that this is the same strategy, along with piracy, employed by the Ptolemaic dynasty in ancient Egypt, and it’s the reason why today we are thankfully and miraculously able to read Homer and Aeschylus and Sophocles and so on,⁹ and using a platform called a “manuscript” or a “book” that doesn’t require electricity, software, or hardware to be legible. The book is its own best all-in-one platform, and

New Publics,” *Chiasma: A Site for Thought* 1 (April 2014): 10–23; <http://chiasmaasiteforthought.com/issue-1/>.

8 See LOCKSS: Lots of Copies Keep Stuff Safe, based at Stanford University Libraries, here: <http://www.lockss.org/>.

9 On the subject of the ancient Ptolemy empire’s grandiose ambitions (and even crimes) as librarians, see Luciano Canfora, *The Vanished Library: A Wonder of the Ancient World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), and on the history of the library, and the books and other readerly artifacts contained therein, relative to their continual entropy and destruction, as well as their endless re-bootings, see Nicholson Baker, *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper* (New York: Random House, 2001) and Matthew Battles, *Library: An Unquiet History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003). For an intriguing online collaborative digital humanities project, based at Harvard University, that seeks to trace the “evolution and the resulting multiformity of the textual tradition, reflected in the many surviving texts of Homer,” see The Homer Multitext: <http://www.homermultitext.org/>

that is one of the reasons why we still buy and read them,¹⁰ whereas, at the same time, you will have to search far and wide to find someone to develop your 35mm celluloid film or the machine that will still read and play your cassette tapes, your zip-discs, your CDs, your DVDs, and so on (and yes, *some* “old” media, such as LP vinyl records, are witnessing a comeback, and there are good reasons for that).¹¹ For the most part, so-called “hard” media and the devices for “playing” and storing those are disappearing. Welcome to the Cloud: you live in it now, you don’t own any piece of its ephemeral Unreal-estate, your “stuff” no longer really belongs to you (you’re just leasing it). And if Benjamin Bratton is right, cloud computing promises a future of delaminated and partially private, partially inhuman accelerationist, semi-privatized polities operating in de-sovereigned territories that will take over the core functions of state powers in order to provide dividends to an elite technologized minority: welcome to Cloud Feudalism.¹² For better or worse (probably worse), it is the future-to-come, and you have probably already uploaded a prototype of yourself there.

But that feudalism is not really my concern here. Nor are Drucker’s cautions about the supposed hype surrounding the digital humanities and their ability, or supposed lack thereof, to save publishing. Her cautions are worth considering even while at the same time we move forward with new (and truly helpful) digital platforms for scholarly publishing. At punctum books, we are concerned to continue lavishing attention on the printed book as a cultural arts artifact with certain sensually phenomenological presencing and time-traveling powers, while we also want to make as many of our publications as possible available in open-access, digital form and also in special web-based environments with navigational structures that are not merely analogues nor surrogates for the print-based medium. And this is because we are pluralists who believe that a “biodiversity” of

10 Sales of print books are currently outpacing sales of e-books. See Claire Fallon, “Print Books Outsold EBooks in First Half of 2014,” *The Huffington Post*, 6 October 2014: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/06/ebooks-print-books-outsold_n_5940654.html.

11 Punctum Records (<http://punctumrecords.com>), an “imprint” of punctum books, similar to the books’ division continuing to invest in the printed book while also exploring and cultivating digital platforms for dissemination, is similarly investing in media such as vinyl and cassette tape, while also releasing materials in digital form.

12 See Benjamin Bratton, “The Black Stack,” *e-flux* 53 (March 2014): <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-black-stack/>.

intellectual matter and media are critical to the cultivation and fostering of the most lively and vibrant public commons possible. We believe further, that such ‘biodiversity’ is critical to liberty and democracy, or to what Ivan Illich once memorably advocated for as “the protection, the maximum use, and the enjoyment of the one resource that is almost equally distributed among all people: personal energy under personal control.”¹³ Drucker herself, after all, wants to call our attention to the “mirages” of the digital humanities in order to help us better steer ourselves towards the more “usefully innovative” digital publishing initiatives, such as (in her view) the Digital Public Library of America, launched at Harvard, “a fully public, completely integrated online library with access,” in Drucker’s words “to the highest quality of ongoing knowledge production.”

And this brings me to what really gave me pause and serious unease in Drucker’s essay—her emphasis throughout on the ideas:

1. that “crowdsourced, participatory knowledge generation [...] would essentially de-professionalize knowledge production”;
2. that the Academy-proper “provides a gold standard of scholarship” that is valuable precisely because that scholarship “filters” downward and “stimulate[s] thought in virtually every field of human endeavor”;
3. that “[h]ard, serious, life-long dedication to scholarship, the actual professional work of experts in a field,” should “remain at the center of knowledge production”;
4. and, finally, that the humanities should be careful not to risk its “cultural authority in the process of becoming digital.”

It is to this idea of “cultural authority” that I now want to turn, and I want to say something like: cultural Authority is the last thing the humanities needs right now if it truly wants to innovate in the brightest

13 Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), qtd. in Mark Seem, “Introduction,” in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Schizophrenia and Capitalism*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), xxiv.

sense of the word—from the Latin *innovare*, to renew, to restore, to change—in a fashion that does not mean trashing the past nor smashing all of the tools seen as supposedly hopelessly outdated and outmoded, but instead means harnessing all of the energies of the tools and platforms (old, new, and futural) at our disposal in order to create the most richly tapestried and noisy public commons. Because, contra Drucker, I do not want a trickle-down knowledge economy that comes from the University mountaintops down to the streets—at least, not in the humanities. In order for the public commons to be more open, more diverse, and hopefully more rowdily democratic, the University itself has to be more open to the ideas and voices of its supposed non-, para-, and anti-institutional Others. It is precisely at the moment that we believe that the humanities has, or should have, cultural Authority, that we should revolt. We should also attend better to one of the questions implicit in the term and practice of “open” in “open-access” that is rarely attended to: who has access to the modes of being published, and who doesn’t? Open-Access (OA) should not just mean publications that are open to users and readers, with no impediments such as pay- and firewalls; it should also mean that the services necessary for the production of public-ation (understood as the formation of publics and counter-publics “seeded” by new works, however they may be “delivered”—more on which below) should be accessible to all. Fully open to authors and open to readers. This point is rarely discussed as if it matters when publishers and academics gather to discuss the future of publishing in a digital world, occasions on which they often appear intent on figuring out ways to continue, in changing times, to maintain the “legitimacy” and “prestige” of their exclusive (and exclusionary) Establishments.

We might remind ourselves that English studies were partly founded in the living rooms and salons of rogue amateurs such as Frederick Furnivall and his compatriot para-academics, who founded, among many other ventures, the Early English Text Society in 1864.¹⁴ When James A.H. Murray was working on what would become the Oxford English Dictionary, he had to do so in a tin shed in his backyard in Oxford, which tin shed was sunk into the ground several feet so that it would not obscure the view of the Oxford don who lived next door, about which situation Murray

14 On this point, see David Matthews, *The Making of Middle English, 1765–1910* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

himself wrote that “no trace of such a place of real work shall be seen by fastidious and otiose Oxford.”¹⁵ Because his Edinburgh degree was not recognized by Oxford and he was also a Dissenting Congregationalist, he was not initially allowed access to the Common Rooms or even to Bodleian Library, until Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol College, prevailed upon Oxford to grant Murray an Honorary M.A.¹⁶ It is worth mentioning as well that Murray was grossly under-compensated and always in debt, and that the University hounded him fairly mercilessly for always falling behind schedule on the Dictionary, so much so that he was often on the verge of a nervous breakdown and in ill health.¹⁷ Murray was eventually knighted in 1908, multiple honorary doctorates were ultimately conferred upon him, and he was also feted in a parade in London where he walked alongside Thomas Hardy, so ... take that, you Oxford bastards. And indeed, cadging from Edmund in *King Lear*, might now be the time (again) to stand up for bastards, and for bastard thought—i.e., the thoughts, and the work (such as Murray’s and Furnivall’s), that the Academy does not (initially) want to claim as its supposedly “rightful” progeny? I definitively answer: yes. There is no way to move knowledge forward without this “standing up.” The more difficult question is how to refashion the academic press such that it actually provides safe harbor and nourishment for such refugees.

And let me be clear here that when I reference the term “innovation” (as I do above) as a practice of restorative change and renewal that would be opposed to the stances and further entrenchment of academic Authority, I am careful to distinguish innovation as a practice that does not sign on to the ways in which that term is used within corporations, such as Microsoft, whose new CEO, Satya Nadella, wrote a letter to Microsoft employees this past July, after laying off 18,000 of those employees, in which he precisely opposed innovation to tradition (“our industry does not respect tradition—it only respects innovation”) as a survival strategy for staying ahead of the pack in our supposed “mobile-first and cloud-first world.”¹⁸ Whereas for me, innovation within publishing implies change, yes, but this is a change

15 Katherine Maud Elisabeth Murray, *Caught in the Web of Words: James A.H. Murray and the Oxford English Dictionary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 248.

16 *Ibid.*, 248.

17 *Ibid.*, 256.

18 Satya Nadella, “Bold Ambition & Our Core,” *Microsoft.com*, 10 July 2014: <http://news.microsoft.com/ceo/bold-ambition/index.html>.

that clears the way for the new while also reclaiming the ground of certain valuable historical structures (such as the Library, the Scriptorium, the Studio, the Salon, the Seminar, the Lab, the Hermitage, the School, and so on) that have been covered over and deformed by an increasingly powerful techno-managerial class of administrators that wants to run the University as if it were a business.¹⁹ So, yes, Johanna Drucker, we should be wary about the ways in which some persons and groups, even within the University, tout their “innovations,” but I also say, “down with [your] cultural authority” and “up with the people.” Academic publishing is definitely facing a crisis, but please let us recall, too, that wherever intellectuals gather to discuss and disseminate ideas, they are always under threat and always have been; which is to say, do you want your hemlock hot or cold? So what we need right now, in my view, are more distributive collectives of someones, nomadic para-institutions, or “outstitutions,”²⁰ who would take responsibility for securing the freedom for the greatest number of persons possible who want to participate in intellectual-cultural life. And a publisher would be a person, or a group, or a multiplicity, who desires to be held hostage for securing this freedom.

Let’s distinguish, then, as Paul Boshears has urged, between “publishing”—“making stuff knowable”—and “publication” as “public-making,” which is a “process . . . the process of saturating,”²¹ of instantiating and also drenching with writings many publics. Publication would thus be focused on creating tools and platforms and holding areas (some call these books, journals, zines, serials, weblogs, podcasts, databases, editions, etc.), around which certain communities might coalesce and be sustained. More than just “publics,” these spaces would be “counter-

19 On this state of affairs, Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), never ceases to be instructive.

20 I borrow the term “outstitution” from Jamie Allen, who deploys (invents?) that term in order to describe “grassroots and DIY teaching and learning movements that really don’t care about, or for, the way that universities decide (or don’t decide) to share and impart knowledge,” such as The Public School New York (<http://thepublicschool.org/nyc>): Editors of *continent. & Speculations*, “Discussion Before an Encounter,” *continent. 2.2* (2012): 145 [136–147].

21 Paul Boshears, in Editors of *continent. & Speculations*, “Discussion Before an Encounter,” 147. See also Paul Boshears, “Open Access Publishing as a Para-Academic Proposition: Besides OA as Labor Relation,” *tripleC 11.2* (2013): 614–619, and Paul Boshears, “Para-Academic Publishing as Public-Making,” in *The Para-Academic Handbook: A Toolkit for Making-Learning-Creating Acting*, eds. Alex Waldrop and Deborah Withers (Bristol, UK: HammerOn Press, 2014), 175–188.

publics,” in the sense given to them by Michael Warner as “spaces of circulation in which it is hoped that the poesis of scene making will be transformative, not merely replicative.”²² And a “press” would be that which, following the word’s Old French etymology, serves as the imprinting device, but also as the pressing “crush” of the crowd into the commons. The university—and the presses associated with it—will hopefully continue to serve as one important site for the cultivation of thought and cultural studies more broadly, but increasingly their spaces are so striated by so many checkpoints, watchtowers, and administrative procedures, that truly radical modes of publishing are difficult to pursue and develop. One has to do only a brief survey of all of the new academic publishing initiatives cropping up everywhere—partly due to, on the one hand, a genuine enthusiasm for digital and open-access and post-monograph publishing modes, and on the other hand, the fears and anxieties that coalesce around such new directions, and on yet another (third) hand, the almost anxious hyper-reaction to governmental and university mandates that would dictate open-access publishing as compulsory—and one will see that a concern for certain forms of what I will call elite and bureaucratic-managerial academic oversight still exist (with few exceptions).²³ And this sort of concern, in my mind, is not conducive to opening up the important question of what ‘counts’ as ‘scholarship,’ such that we might begin to build new avenues of access for novel (and counter-institutional) modes of thought and writing.

Whether traditional old-school or forward-leaning progressive in its publishing methods, the Academy always seeks its own imprimatur as a sign of so-called legitimacy. And it always talks in the language of austerity and false choices (like, “monographs only for tenure!” or more recently,

22 Michael Warner, “Publics, and Counterpublics,” *Public Culture* 14.1 (2002): 88 [49–90].

23 See, for example, the final conference report of Jisc Collections and OAPEN on “Open Access Monographs in the Humanities and Social Sciences,” a conference that was held at The British Library in July 2013 to explore the ways in which the publication of monographs would intersect with new digital publishing platforms, and where one of the overall conclusions was that the humanities and social sciences will still rely to a certain extent on monographs as a significant ‘output’ of their research dissemination while those monographs will also need to be delivered in a variety of open-access platforms if they are to have any sort of wide impact and also be sustainable over the long term. That all makes sense, but there was also a lot of hand-wringing during the conference over how to continue to ensure that these open-access monographs would continue to build and confer “prestige” and “authority”: <https://www.jisc-collections.ac.uk/Reports/oabooksreport/>.

“screw monographs; it’s all just one huge digital mega-journal from now on and everyone can aggregate their own books and cataloguing systems using Mendeley!”). What we need now are illegitimate publishers willing to build shelters for illegitimate publics, which is to say, public-ations, ones that would be hell-bent on pressing a rowdy and unruly crowd of ideas into the ventilating system of this place we call the University-at-large—an Academy of Thought (and also, thought-practices) that would not be bound by the specific geographic co-ordinates of specific schools and colleges, but which insists, nevertheless, on playing the shadow-demon-parasite-prod-supplement to the University-proper (its para-mour/more). What we need now is an excess of counter-thought, an excess of modes and forms of counter-public-ation. There is no epistemic rigour worth guarding here; there is no good reason to put a limit to thought within the setting of the Academy of Thought: one must admit the mad, the chimeric, the deviant, the teratological, the wayward, the crooked, the lost, the invalid, and so on. Here be monsters in the Academy of Thought.

In my view, the time is propitious for reinventing (innovating) the Academy as a site that would oppose the current situation of overly professionalized performance, with “performance” here cadged from business management discourses, where it is often invoked as the “key to increasing corporate productivity by eliciting individual commitment and competitiveness between employees”—a situation in which, in the university at least, we may believe “we are the avant-garde but we are also the job-slaves.”²⁴ With Jan Verwoert, I would rather dream and enact a University and an Academy of Thought where we would practice (and protect) “another logic of agency, an ethos, which could help us defy the social pressure to perform and eschew the promise of the regimented options of consumption.” And this would also mean “claiming the imagination and the aesthetic experience as a field of collective agency where workable forms of resistance can be devised,” and also “interrupt[ing] the brute assertiveness of the I Can through the performance of an I Can’t in the key of I Can.”²⁵ Most importantly, we have to begin with the caveat that we are existentially

²⁴ Jan Verwoert, *Exhaustion and Exuberance: Ways to Defy the Pressure to Perform*, pamphlet for the exhibition “Art Sheffield 08: Yes, No and Other Options” (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Contemporary Art Forum, 2008), 90.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 91–92, 94.

obligated to others, and that publishing—as a vital mode of disseminating research findings, and thus also of “seeding” publics and counter-publics—is a form of care whose economic limits could never be set in advance, and which requires, instead, what Verwoert calls a “community committed to the politics of dedication,” a sort of “mutual admiration society.”²⁶ The idea would not be to accumulate capital as a publisher, but instead to focus on the expenditure of everything we have already accumulated and will accumulate (talents as well as money) in order to lovingly build and foster the reparative hospice wards of the convalescent and increasingly inoperative communities of the para-academic precariat—those who are the most vulnerable, both within and without the University proper, and who are literally “convalescent,” meaning those who are recovering, who are recuperating, who are always getting better while also always being unwell, and who choose to “recuperate” together, which itself means “to take back”—to take back ourselves to ourselves, to take back our humanities, our university, and our commons, and to have some room, finally, to *conspire*, which is to say, to “breathe together.” Or, as Verwoert puts it,

if, living under the pressure to perform, we begin to see that a state of exhaustion is a horizon of collective experience, could we then understand this experience as the point of departure for the formation of a particular sort of solidarity? A solidarity that would not lay the foundations for the assertion of a potent operative community, but which would, on the contrary, lead us to acknowledge that the one thing we share — exhaustion — makes us an inoperative community [. . .]. A community, however, that can still act, not because it is entitled to do so by the institutions of power, but by virtue of an unconditional, exuberant politics of dedication.²⁷

punctum books was founded, partly following the lead of Michel Foucault in his Preface to Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus*,²⁸ as an exercise and experiment in convivial and not-sad militancy of open thought, in refusing allegiance to the old categories of the Negative, and to publication itself as an art of living, an ascesis of freedom. Like the

²⁶ Ibid., 102.

²⁷ Ibid., 110.

²⁸ Michel Foucault, “Preface,” in Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, xv–xvi.

practitioners of Hakim Bey’s *amour fou*, we strive to be “illegal,” “saturating” ourselves with our own aesthetic, engaging in publishing ventures that would fill themselves “to the borders” with “the trajectories of [their] own gestures,” and never tilting at fates fit for “commissars & shopkeepers.”²⁹ One of the things we have lost sight of in the University, and especially in our publishing practices, is the importance of play—now is the time, again cadging from Hakim Bey, to “share the mischievous destiny” of runaways, “to meet only as wild children might, locking gazes across a dinner table while adults gibber from behind their masks.”³⁰ Without non-utilitarian play, and without the right to flail, flounder, and fail while playing, we risk the frigid stasis of the status quo, of always being trapped in what has already been said (the literal definition of “fate,” from the Latin *fatum*, “that which has already been spoken”), what has already been played out. How did we get here? How did the creative arts get so thoroughly de-cathected from the liberal arts? How will we give birth to heretic-misfit love-child thoughts without unbridled play (which is to say, experimentation—how does one maintain one’s cultural “authority” while also playing the fool-who-experiments?).³¹ Publishing, then, and public-ation, as the site where fools do indeed rush in, taking more seriously the phrase, “field of play.”

punctum has grown, and continues to grow, through a vast network of talented persons dedicated to radically independent publishing ventures that would not be beholden to any specific university nor to any commercial academic interests. It is dedicated to fostering the broadest possible range of open-access print- and e-based platforms for the sustenance of what we are calling a “whimsical para-humanities assemblage”—an assemblage, moreover, that refuses to relinquish any possible form of public-ation: the

29 Hakim Bey, “Amour Fou,” in Hakim Bey, *T.A.ζ: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1991); http://hermetic.com/bey/taz_cont.html.

30 Bey, “Wild Children,” in *T.A.ζ*.

31 On the importance of artful play to the humanities as well as to well-being, see L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, “Living Chaucer,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 33 (2011): 41–64, where she writes that, “Playing and pretending are crucial to the becomings of living creatures, to adaptation and behavioral flexibility; [...] it is transformative and transforming. We can neither thrive nor survive without it” (57). See also Aranye Fradenburg, “Frontline: The Liberal Arts of Psychoanalysis,” *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry* 39.4 (Winter 2011): 589–609, and L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Staying Alive: A Survival Manual for the Liberal Arts*, ed. Eileen A. Joy (Brooklyn: punctum books, 2013).

making of cultural-intellectual stealth publics that would seep in and out of institutional and non-institutional spaces, hopefully blurring the boundaries between Inside and Outside, an ultimate fog machine. And we are also intent on resuscitating what we are calling postmedieval and pastmodern forms of publication (from breviary and commentary and *florilegium* to telegram and liner notes and inter-office memo, from the *Book of Hours* to the cassette mixtape).³² Public-ation, then, also as salvage operation, the re-purposing of discarded objects, discarded forms, and discarded genres as a means for maximizing the possibilities for thinking. Forms matter. The forms of thinking (in the plural) matter. Again, it is a commitment to excess, and a refusal of all austerity measures. Neither is punctum books interested in the maintenance of specific genres or disciplines (is it literary theory? poetry? philosophy? art history? memoir? sociology? cybernetics? speculative fiction? code? who can tell?), and thus we take seriously Derrida's belief in a university "without condition," where we maintain that it is the humanities' singular purpose to protect the right of anyone to publish anything, or as Derrida himself put it, the "principal right to say everything, whether it be under the heading of fiction and the experimentation of knowledge, and the right to say it publicly, to publish it."³³ And thus, again, I cannot disagree vigorously enough with Drucker that the humanities, in its publishing practices, should protect itself against losing its so-called "cultural authority." If anything, it should welcome the storming of its aery ramparts by whole hosts of its supposedly extramural paramours.

As the authors of the "Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics" aver, there may be no possible stemming of the tide of neoliberal capital's narrow-minded "imaginary" and hyper-accelerated technologized infrastructure; therefore, might the task now be how to hijack and "re-purpose" this infrastructure to different ends and unleash new, more capacious imaginaries?³⁴ In this scenario, there is room for an aesthetic

32 See, for example, punctum books + records' joint project, *Minóy*, which comprises printed book, open-access e-book, cassette, and CD: <http://punctumbooks.com/titles/minoy/>.

33 Jacques Derrida, "The Future of the Profession or the University without Condition (thanks to the 'Humanities,' what *could take place tomorrow*)," in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tom Cohen (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 26 [24–57].

34 See Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, "#ACCELERATE: Manifesto for an Accel-

avant-garde that, in McKenzie Wark’s words, will “have to reimagine possible spaces for alter-modernities [...] . Just as the Situationists imagined a space of play in the interstitial spaces of the policing of the city via the *dérive*, so too we now have to imagine and experiment with emerging gaps and cracks in the gamespace that the commodity economy has become.”³⁵ This is not just a leftist-activist situation with regard to capitalism, it is also an academic situation, with regard to the techno-managerial culture of the University, and thus I ask that we replace the idea of the humanities as some sort of guarded (and self-regarding) reservoir of cultural Authority, whose ideas trickle down into society, with the idea that the humanities—especially in its role as a disseminator of knowledge and builder of knowledge forms and platforms—be reconceptualized as a site for the care and curatorship of knowledge and of all persons wishing to contribute to a public commons that must be shared by and accessible to all. The Humanities, and the University more largely, and also the Library, as sites of care: to care for ourselves, to care for each other, and to take care of the public commons, not in order to maintain its borders and authority, filtering what is allowed in and what is allowed out and to whom, but rather, in order to fashion this shared (and always precarious, always vulnerable, always convalescent) commons as a house of hospitality, an invitation to all, to the friends and the strangers, those with papers and those without papers.³⁶

As Derrida reminds us, in Plato’s philosophy it “is often the Foreigner (*xenos*) who questions. He carries and puts the [intolerable] question,” and

erationist Politics,” May 2013: <http://accelerationism.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/williams-and-srniec.pdf>. See also McKenzie Wark’s response, “#Celerity: A Critique of the Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics,” May 2013: <http://speculativeheresy.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/wark-mckenzie-celerity.pdf>.

35 Wark, “#Celerity,” 2.4. See also, on the possibilities of tactical-poetic interventions into the networks, McKenzie Wark, *Telesthesia: Communication, Culture and Class* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity, 2012).

36 My interest in care is partly inspired by Michel Foucault who, in his later writings, was concerned with “care of the self,” and how certain practices of ascesis (including “thought on thought”) might open the self to certain individual freedoms and the invention of “a manner of being that is still improbable.” See Michel Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life” and “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom,” in *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961-1984*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), 308–312, 432–449. See also Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005).

thus he is the very “someone who basically has to account for [the very] possibility of sophistry.”³⁷ The “paternal authority of the logos” is always ready to “disarm” the Foreigner, who nevertheless prevails as an important figure of Thought’s (difficult) natality. To welcome this *xenos*, this Foreigner, invites danger (the guest as enemy, the host as hostage) as well as a way forward, a way out of Authority, out of our settled (overly-professionalized) selves, toward the wilder shores of vagabond (and free) thought.

The publisher as host and hostage, and also as the persons, or collective of persons, who are willing to devote their lives and service to converting as many illegitimate ideas as possible into objects of beauty, erudition, and legibility. It is hoped that these new (teratological) works would provoke us to rethink everything we thought we knew and to let go, finally, of our Authority, while still insisting on Care (which is a gentle form of co-management). So let us take care.

³⁷ Jacques Derrida, *On Hospitality*, trans. Anne Dufourmantelle (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 5.