

# OPEN ACCESS PUBLICATION: SOME NOTES ON VISIBILITY AND MAKING PUBLIC

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**Abstract:** The paper analyses the recent policy relating to open access publication as a requirement of funding councils and future research excellence assessments. This is considered in the context of the way in which the university and the researcher have been reconfigured by and for the knowledge economy. Open access is explored in relation to both the opening up of the university and its constituent functions and the way in which new technologies and social media are constitutive of the researcher to explore how practices of visibility and transparency operate in modes of governing and self-governing. The principle of making research accessible to the public through open access publication opens the question of how the public is understood in this relationship. Drawing on the work of Bruno Latour a distinction is drawn between publication as making visible and publication as making public.

**Keywords:** open access publication, the public, publication

## Introduction

Concern over university reform, both within academia and the general public, tends to focus on privatisation, marketization, and the positioning of students as consumers. There is at the same time, however, an ongoing concern with the elitism of universities and their need to widen participation, and to be more student-centred, and more transparent and accountable for the public funds they receive.

In recent years, open access publication has moved from a marginal but growing mode of publishing, more commonly found in the sciences, to a focus of governmental policy at national and international levels. The OECD, the European Commission, and many national governments now promote the use of open access publication and have made it a requirement of publicly funded research.

In light of concerns over privatisation and of elitism, open access has many supporters. The debate in the UK, however, where the national research councils require academics they fund to publish their work in open access, thus making it available to the 'general tax-paying public' (RCUK, 2013, p. 1), has been largely influenced by the findings of the UK's National Working Group on Expanding Access to Published Research Findings (the 'Finch Group') report<sup>1</sup>, which stated a preference for gold open access. Subsequently, academics concerned about the move to open access publication have often focussed on the cost of publication. While the politics and economics of paid-for open access publication is an important focus, the concern here is slightly different. This paper does not seek to weigh up the pros and cons of the gold and green routes to open access publishing. Nor does it seek to propose a third option. The aim, in part, is to take the academic discussion of open access beyond the dichotomies of gold and green, open and closed, public and private, and the concern with the practical requirements of the UK research councils' and European Commission's publication policies. The approach taken here focuses not particularly on the normative language of policy and what is expected of the researcher and the university, but on the particular notion of the public that is used, and effected, by such policy, and by related practices and material devices.

The analysis of open access publication here forms part of a larger project on the changing role of and notion of 'the university' and the figure of the researcher constituted in current policy and practice. Changing practices of reading, writing, and publication form important foci for this project. The university is undergoing a period of considerable reform, perhaps to the extent that it might be possible to argue that 'the university' no longer exists. That is, the university in its modern, institutional, progress-oriented form, no longer exists. What now exists has been described in various ways in policy and in academic analysis: 'entrepreneurial', 'virtual', 'networked', 'the multiversity', 'in ruins'. The project thus far has sought to understand these changes, the form the university currently takes, to provide some form of critique, broadly speaking, that effects a form of resistance to certain aspects of these changes, but to do so in such a way that scores well against the various measures of performance measurement and management according to which the research and the university are understood today.

The approach taken here does not offer a normative account of what the university or the researcher should be. Nor does it provide a critique from

a particular perspective that reveals a truth about the current configuration. The approach here instead draws on recent social-material approaches developed in the social sciences and humanities. This permits material things into the account so that, for example, the technological devices that we use every day are not given merely an incidental role in the account, in which they contribute to a particular narrative, but neither are they given so central a role that a technological determinist account is produced. As Matthias Decuypere puts it, as this approach ‘rejects a dualist bifurcation in which subjects are endowed with activity and creativity on the one hand and objects with passivity and rigidity on the other, the possibility of considering objects as non-humans that are also able to act emerges (Latour, 1991/1993; Law, 2004)’ (Decuypere et al., 2012, p. 7).

In educational studies, socio-material approaches are probably most closely associated with Actor-Network Theory, deriving from the work of Bruno Latour (see e.g. Fenwick and Edwards, 2010). I will not provide a literature review of the ways in which this approach has been adopted in education. The approach taken here does not take a ‘theory’ and apply it to an educational setting or policy. Rather, a socio-material approach is set out here - in relation to issues raised regarding open access publication – on the basis of its potential to itself be educational. The particular issue that is taken up regarding open access publication here is that of ‘making public’. This notion has a particular tenor in the work of Latour and others developing this approach that enables a rethinking of what we do today when we publish and what we are asked to do when we are asked to make work available to the public in open access.

### **Making public as an educational approach to things**

Given the changes in the relation between the individual and the state in recent decades and the privatisations that are changing institutions and spaces previously assumed to be public, it seems necessary today to rethink what we mean by these terms. Material approaches can challenge the distinction according to which politics exists only in the public domain and not in the private spheres of home and work by enabling an analysis not only of the role of devices in constituting the public or the political but how the devices themselves become political. The further need to explore the notion of the public lies in the governmental concern with the public in the form of, for example, public engagement, participation, citizens-as-researchers, and of course open access publication:

When governments and powerful non-governmental organizations adopt an explicitly participatory agenda, a generic commitment to the principle of 'public engagement' no longer suffices. 'Ready-made' concepts of public engagement need probing... (Marres and Lezaun, 2011, p. 497)

The approach taken here adopts a notion of the public not as pre-existing theoretical construct but as an assemblage to be permanently re-configured. The term assemblage here refers to something like a gathering but is also used specifically as an alternative to the network notion of Actor Network Theory, as suggested by Decuyper et al. (2012). The term network complicates the picture by often being used as or assumed to be both form and metaphor (ibid., p. 9). In ANT it refers rather to 'a method for being aware that each agent taken into account has to be re-presented as an agent, not as something or someone that makes no difference at all' (ibid., p. 9). So, the public here refers not to a sense of community settling down in agreement and consensus, but to a gathering based on shared concern, constituted in associations. On Latour's account, making public refers to gathering a public around matters of concern. This is distinct from addressing a public already assumed to exist with our expertise on matters of fact. To gather around a matter of concern, for Latour, is to gather around what divides us. He draws on Heidegger's use of *Ding* to suggest *Dingpolitik* as a more realistic politics today than *Realpolitik*. *Ding*, he writes, refers to an archaic assembly, 'the issue that brings people together because it divides them' (Latour, 2005, p. 22-23). Thus, in this approach, it is not only the notion of the public, of *what* is being studied, that is displaced, but also *how*, and *in the name of what*, it is studied.

A concern with matters of fact implies the application of existing knowledge, of expertise, to a problem. The study of universities tends towards this: we know what universities *should* look like, so we can critique them on that basis; or we have a set of theories that explain what is happening now, which we can apply. The university - its public and its practices, the materials and actions that constitute it - seems quite undisturbed by these accounts, however, though they do contribute to the measurable performance of those institutions and individuals. We write that the university is undergoing dramatic shifts, but we also assume to already know how and why. Matters of concern are distinct as they are not yet rendered knowable by expertise. Approaches deriving from ANT put the 'academic expert' out of position by not wanting to claim any expert position...

not wanting to be the highly competent scholar who can browbeat the layman with bare matters of fact( Callon, Lascoumes and Barthe, 1999/2009; Latour, 1999/2004)' (Decuyper et al., 2012, p. 7). The approach taken here seeks not to apply a theory or particular critique to explain the university, to conceptualise it, but rather to explore it in a way that is, in itself, educational. That is, it is our thinking that is put to the test. Distinguishing a philosophy of education deriving from the ascetic tradition, Jan Masschelein writes:

In this tradition, the work of philosophy is in the first place a work on the self – that is, *putting oneself to 'the test of contemporary reality'*, implying an enlightenment not of others but of oneself – however, of oneself not as subject of knowledge but as subject of action. Putting oneself to the test is, therefore, an exercise in the context of self-education... [T]his exercise...has to be conceived not as a private matter but as a *public gesture* or a way to make things public and as a condition for a truth-telling that is in the first place illuminating, inviting, cutting, inspiring. (Masschelein, 2011, p. 356)

But in this concern with the self, the self is displaced. It is not central to the enquiry. It is not about me, not directly; it is not a narrative or autobiographical account. In order for it to be educative – for me, for a public – requires that I am exposed to the matter at hand, that my thinking is put to the test of the reality I am faced with. The question then is not what should the university look like, but what is distinct about the university? What practices make a university a distinct kind of institution? Student (or customer) satisfaction, for example, is a central concern for universities, but it is also central to most businesses and thus is not particular to the university. ( see Masschelein and Simons (2012) on the lecture as distinct practice of the university). And how do current practices constitute the university and the researcher in a particular way? What university is produced?

In this discussion of open access as a way of considering the university and the researcher today I will touch on three main areas:

The Shape of the University – institution > research environment

Technologies of Performance – devices such as Vitae, profiles, competition and comparability

Publication as Visibility

So, the move to open access publication here is not understood in traditional political public/private terms, where this opening up is seen as testament to the rightful place of the university as a public institution. Instead, this tension

between the privatising, individualising, economising tendencies of the knowledge society and the practices constitutive of the university and the researcher today and the making public, or publicising, of their outputs are explored. A distinction will be drawn between making public, drawing on the work of Bruno Latour, and making visible, seen in terms of a mode of governmentality in which visibility and transparency are important aspects.

### **The shape of the university**

The university has undergone a shift in recent years from being an institution to being a learning environment or, part of, a research environment (cf. Simons and Masschelein, 2008). The change in the configuration of the university from its modern form has of course brought about changes in the working practices within the university but also requires a shift in how we make sense of it.

Reference to education has been replaced by ubiquitous reference to learning, and political and social problems have been translated into personal learning problems (ibid.). The governmentalisation of learning in the name of the knowledge economy has re-shaped the university and its practices.

In recent years, the position of the university as an institution with the combined functions of public service, teaching, and research has shifted. Each of these aspects is now subject to its own measures of performance, and the university's services are now provided in a variety of learning environments, with physical locations in more than one country, virtual provision, and private consultancy. The market has expanded and each aspect of the work of the university is subject to competition. Its value must be proven in the face of other organisations that can fulfil the same function(s) more cost effectively, more quickly, with a greater degree of innovation, e.g. commercial research laboratories, for-profit providers. The mission of the university today is to be excellent and world-class in all its outputs, which means achieving high levels of student satisfaction, high levels of graduate employability, and producing research and innovation that can be put to use through commercial application or the improvement of policy and practice (Hodgson, 2012a). It operates in the marketplace of the knowledge society (in Europe, 'the Innovation Union'), in which common languages and practices of performance measurement and management seek to ensure optimal transparency, compatibility, comparability, and competition (Hodgson, 2012b).

The move not only to promote open access publication but also to require it, as a measurable aspect of the researcher's and the university's performance,<sup>2</sup> can be seen as consistent with the mode of late neoliberalism to which the governance of the university is subject. The university works not in the name of the progress of the nation state but of excellence, productivity, and value (cf. Readings, 1996). It is subject to the concerns of policy makers and businesses who require the knowledge it produces to be put to particular purposes, to solve particular problems, here and now. The university must also be proactive in identifying these problems and recasting them in productive terms for which responsibility can be taken.

The focus on changing the model of publication from the payment of subscriptions by libraries or individuals to the payment of Author Processing Charges (APCs) by authors or their funders, has led some to suggest that one way forward is for universities, or learned societies, to take publishing in-house, to do away with the large publishing company altogether, and to become a publisher oneself. This move, which can be seen already, is illustrative of a further aspect of the changed research environment. Like the university and the 'disassembling' (Barber et al., 2013) of its research-teaching-consultancy service aspects, the publisher is now positioned as a service provider rather than as an essential aspect of a hierarchical, or gatekeeper-governed, system. The publisher too, it seems, must restate its purpose and the value of the services it provides and rationalise these.<sup>3</sup> And universities will now need to decide which compliant publishing model offers the best value for money.

## Technologies of performance

The current mode of governance entails an individualisation of the academic in the figure of 'the researcher', whose work is economised, as seen in the exchange value assumed in the rendering of academic publications as outputs and in the ways in which she is responsible for her professional sustainability, e.g. building a research profile, generating research income, publishing in high-ranking journals to generate maximum impact, forming productive collaborations. Giving free and open access to these outputs occurs, then, in the context of a privatizing or domesticating of the academic as a 'researcher' (cf. Hodgson and Standish, 2007). For example, she is subject to standardising measures of performance and required to produce research outputs that have impact - not

only academic but also social, cultural or economic benefit - and are perhaps commercialisable.

In the opening up of the academy according to the rationality of the learning society or knowledge economy, and the economisation of its constituent functions, the university is concerned with its transparency and the visibility of its outputs. The performance of the university and of the researcher has been concerned with research impact, knowledge transfer, developing collaboration, the wider economic, social, and cultural value of their outputs, and the promotion of these markers of excellence. Sharing, of a sort, then has been an increasing feature of the way in which we talk about the value of research and what research excellence is. Open access publishing adds a further dimension to this. New technologies have not only enabled these practices to be implemented as part of the everyday practices of the administration of the university, but also add further dimensions of performance measurement and management: in addition to transparency and visibility, we are now also concerned with discoverability.

As part of the optimisation of the assets of the university as a research environment and of herself as an individual, the academic is responsible for herself as a 'researcher': with establishing a research profile, seeking external funds to cover the cost of her research and ideally her salary too, producing outputs that (until now at least) are published in high-ranking journals, seeking collaborative, interdisciplinary partnerships, and teaching in a way that optimises student satisfaction and learning outcomes. And often, she is to achieve these things without a tenured position (The researcher, as with any role today, is not a rung on a career ladder that one reaches following a particular academic qualification and before promotion to a higher rung, but a particular accumulation of skills and competencies that are needed now and that she wishes to put to use now in this way).

### **Publication as visibility**

The concern with the public role of the university here is not based on the assumption that it has an inherently public role but rather with what 'public' means when the university's outputs (as publications are called) are made open and accessible to the public.



The rationale for policies that require those in receipt of public funds to make their outputs freely accessible reflects the idea that learning is vital to the sustainability and growth of the knowledge economy. For example, the UK Research Council's (RCUK) policy refers to the 'significant social and economic benefits' that free and open access to research brings (RCUK, 2013, p. 1). This belief has been central to the discourse of the learning society, or knowledge economy, globally (see for example the OECD or European Commission policies) and its shaping of current modes of governing and self-governing has been termed the 'governmentalisation of learning' (Simons and Masschelein, 2008).

The placing of research into a university research repository (the green route), which most universities provide or are developing, is required by research councils (now) and HEFCE (in the future). It not only makes research freely available to the public, it also makes research visible and is a form of making the university transparent or accountable. It enacts a level of visibility and discoverability for the university, the researcher, and their outputs, and thus contributes to measurable performance indicators. For example, alongside, 'public good' and 'Compliance with funder and REF requirements', The University of Leeds' publication policy lists 'increased visibility of publications' and 'raised profile for authors, funders, and university' as benefits of open access.<sup>4 5</sup> The visibility and resulting measurable discoverability and citation rates are one illustration of the way in which the move towards open access contributes to a particular mode of governance and self-governance of the university and the researcher.

Discoverability of the researcher and the research, and its re-useability, are now means of achieving visibility, transparency, and impact. The possibilities of this technology, and in particular the measures or metrics it can supply, are changing the ways in which information is accessed and valued. Impact and visibility measured for example in downloads and citations are now also determined by discoverability and shareability (measured in downloads, citations, hits, likes, shares and comments). At a recent roundtable on implementing the Finch report, a number of contributors referred to the preference for post-publication review in the open access publishing market, citing e.g. PLOSOne.<sup>6</sup> That is, the traditional model of experts peer reviewing prior to publication is shifting to a model whereby quality and value are measured by the post-publication response to it, measured in terms of downloads, citation, positive comments (on the article itself online), sharing, and re-use. Some also noted the need to move

away from the judgment of quality in terms of where the article is published. The hallmark of expertise assumed from publishing one's work in a particular place is no longer assumed, at least not outside academia (A survey was quoted at the same roundtable that showed that the prestige of the journal, and not whether it was open access, was more likely to determine where academics published).

These shifts and new practices are made possible by new technologies and thus in order to understand the constitution of the university and the researcher these must be present as agents in the account. The individual researcher's public profile(s), or her network, and the way in which technology operates in the production and sharing of this is illustrative of, and instrumental in, impact and sharing as two particular aspects of the discourse of research. Each researcher will, usually, be visible on their institution's website, on the pages of their department or perhaps their research group. It will give information on their teaching, their research interests, and often provide a list of publications, perhaps with links. There might be links to the websites of specific projects they are working on. It may also carry a link to their personal website or blog, or to their personal profile hosted on another website, such as academia.edu or LinkedIn. You might also find their twitter handle. Each of these aspects ensures that the researcher is discoverable, and defines her in terms of a network of sites, institutions, topics, others (cf. Law and Hassard, 1999; Latour et al., 2012). Today, when looking for knowledge or expertise the first point of contact may be more likely to be Google than the university library catalogue, even if that is the link the searcher clicks on in the end. It becomes essential then, that one is visible, easily discoverable, by this means.

The account of the researcher here does not seek to treat these online profiles and the network(s) that these represent as an additional level of reality to be studied separately but rather, following Latour et al., constitutive of one level of reality and, as they write, 'quickly modifying the very definition of what individuals are' (p. 3). The ways in which technology and the data it produces operate in our everyday lives and the rendering of all aspects of our lives and work as subject to the same indicators of success and quality places things on one level.

## Conclusion

To publish in open access is to make research freely available to the public. This mode of publication is referred to as 'compliant' publishing, as it is that which complies with funder's current and anticipated open access policy. The move to this mode of publication is driven by modes of governance and self-governance to which visibility is a vital component, as discussed in the previous sections. Research is rendered measurable as outputs and in terms of economic and social benefit. The public is served, then, not only through these economic and social benefits but also by the transparency this provides. The public to whom the research is accessible is conceived as an audience and also as an additional benefit, a measure of added value of the work of the university and the researcher. The public, then, are already assumed to exist. Compliant open access publishing, then, is understood here as publishing as making visible. As discussed earlier, however, such a notion of the public frames matters in a particular way that perhaps closes them off from inquiry.

Publication as making visible is distinguished here, then, from publication as making public, in the sense elaborated above. It could be argued, in the context of the output-oriented research environment, that collaborations of individual researchers are often formed on the basis of agreement, for the production of output on matters of fact (e.g. policy-oriented research). But, of course, often they are not. And the purpose here is not to suggest that all research is driven blindly by the demands of the mode of governance in which it operates. The distinction between publication as making visible and publication and making public is not intended to mark a choice. What we do might be and can be both.

The context of this recasting also shifts what is meant by public and private. Arguably, to analyse the changes in these terms is to keep in place a mode of thinking about the state, the university, and the individual that does not reflect how they operate and that in itself maintains these conceptual distinctions. Today, we are governed and govern ourselves not in terms of public and private, but, I suggest, in terms of privacy and transparency or visibility.<sup>7</sup> Performance measurement and management as a mode of accountability requires that the university is accountable, that is transparent, in its practices and its outputs. The same rationality applies to traditionally 'public' institutions such as government, schools, the health service: transparency is the way in which agents/organisations are accountable to stakeholders (the public, shareholders, other interested par-

ties e.g. other agents/organisations seeking best practice). Privacy refers to that which we choose not to show (or which perhaps we do not acknowledge as it has not yet been operationalised and quantified) or for which legal protections exist.

In seeking to analyse the 'research environment' and the researcher here, the analysis started from the position that the very language in which we talk about what we do describes and inscribes practices that are different from the university as institution populated by students and academics. The terms according to which we analyse the new configuration of agents - people, policy, technology, places, spaces, things – is also necessarily shifted. What the university, the academic, and the public are now has no clear, inherent definition: the things we look at 'no longer have the clarity, transparency, obviousness of matters of fact; they are not made of clearly delineated discrete objects' with clear boundaries, such as the university as institution, or clear status and responsibilities, e.g. to the state or to human progress (Latour, 2005, p. 23). Seeing the university and the publisher as representing the public and the private respectively, for example, is not an accurate view. The binary positions of open access vs publisher profits, fair vs unfair, overlooks the fact that both sides are seeking to provide outputs in the name of the same measures: institutional and researcher profile, impact, citations, discoverability, and justification of purpose and value.

There is perhaps an ambiguity to the account. Open access is seemingly subject to critique here in ways that might seem to undermine what is, generally, in principle, a good thing. The rationality of governing and self-governing in which academic publication exists, and which constitutes the research environment and the researcher are, however, undergoing shifts that require us to respond philosophically and theoretically to the realities they present. This paper is an attempt to understand the policy shift towards open access publication in terms of a particular mode of governmentality, in which research and the researcher are cast in particular roles. The analysis here intends to indicate that the research environment is a particular configuration of practices and technologies, and the researcher a particular mode of subjectivation, that do not map straightforwardly on to the institution of the university and the figure of the academic or scholar. There are further aspects distinctive of the work of the researcher that mark a further shift from these more archaic figures: how, for example, does the shift to the electronic, public sharing of research change the way in which we understand academic writing? How does it change how we read? And how does the shift away from peer review to electronic forms of post-publication feedback shift

the status or understanding of expertise? The notion of publication as making public itself challenges the assumption of expertise, of the academic as addressing a public of those who do not know on matters of fact. The academic, or researcher, is repositioned by the concern that she can no longer assume that she knows the answer, or even the terms in which to phrase the question.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.researchinfonet.org/publish/finch/>

<sup>2</sup> HEFCE are currently consulting on plans to make open access publication part of the evaluation of research excellence in future.

<sup>3</sup> This repositioning is evident in the investment in and development of new technologies and related service providers by existing publishers, e.g. in June 2014 John Wiley & Sons acquired the scientific software company SimBioSys. In the press release Wiley is not described as a publisher but as 'a provider of knowledge and knowledge-enabled solutions that improve outcomes in research, professional practice, and education' (<http://njbmagazine.com/njb-news-now/john-wiley-sons-inc-acquires-simbiosys/>; last accessed 5<sup>th</sup> August 2014).

<sup>4</sup> <http://library.leeds.ac.uk/open-access>

<sup>5</sup> In debates on open access, the traditional publisher is often seen as the barrier to such moves. They represent the high costs to university libraries, the paywall that prevents access, the profiting from work undertaken and outputs produced from public funds (see e.g. Shieber, 2013; Wickham and Vincent, 2013). The move towards open access has turned attention on to the publishers as central to an outmoded, unjust, and unsustainable publishing model in which academics provide content and product for which publishers earn large profits. The UK's National Working Group on Expanding Access to Published Research Findings (the 'Finch Group') report sought a way forward that did not damage publishers, and most now offer open access publishing options, for a fee. Some open access advocates argue, though, that this is a mis-step: making traditional journals into hybrid journals slows the pace of progress to a fully open access world and cements the place of publishers as profiting from academics' work (see Shieber, 2013, pp. 35-36).

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.plosone.org/>

<sup>7</sup> This distinction is not, however, satisfactory since what is private – not shared, redacted – is visible as being such.

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