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Mattering  
Press

# The Commons and Care

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## Introduction

Several projects within the Radical Open Access Collective (including Mattering Press, Goldsmiths Press, the PPJ, and Capacious) frame the work they do around open access publishing as a form of care. Here publishing is understood as a complex, multi-agential, relational practice. In various ways, these projects are concerned with considering how to attend more closely to some of the key participants in the publishing process and the practical responsibilities this might entail. This is in marked opposition to those neoliberal variants of open access publishing that focus more on individual authorial brands and measurable quantifiable outputs. In challenging such models, publishers have sought to open up and render explicit the politics of scholarly communication. This has been by, for example, developing an ethos in which people are paid fairly for their labour, in particular those without a direct stake in the published works themselves, acknowledging and otherwise making explicit their contributions, and redirecting volunteer efforts away from commercial profit-driven entities in favour of supporting more progressive not-for-profit forms of publishing. Through these and other means, care is used as a way for open access publishers to both reflect on their own work and begin to counter the calculative logics that

permeate academic publishing. A key promise that animates these endeavours is the potential for developing publishing practices that enrich not just the careers of individual scholars but also scholarly communities. The hope is that it might be possible to build new and more horizontal alliances between authors, reviewers, publishers, readers, and the usually invisible body skilled professionals and volunteers on which so many experiments in open access publishing depend. In this pamphlet, Joe Deville, an editor at Mattering Press, opens up these questions by exploring the potential for open access publishing to rethink their relationships with universities and how the recent wave of industrial action at many UK universities might provide some valuable lessons. This includes questioning the forms of care for scholars and scholarship many universities currently offer and the opportunities and dangers this presents for scholar-led publishing initiatives. In the pamphlet's second piece, Samuel Moore complicates our understanding of the scholarly commons by focusing on the relationships and struggles inherent in practices of 'commoning'. Rather than thinking of the commons as a resource or form of governance, he argues that it is better conceived as a relational process, grounded in forms of care, that is positioned towards a shared, common(s) horizon. In the final paper, Tahani Nadim, a long time friend of Mattering Press, explores an ethics of care through the realm of the personal, focusing on the role relations of friendship play within scholarly production, and how they lie at the heart of the press. She stresses the importance of taking time for ethical deliberations, for the crafting of affective bonds, constructed and modulated through the publishing process and most importantly through books as affiliative objects.

**Samuel Moore & Mattering Press**

## Open Access Publishing and the Future of the University

Joe Deville

Might now be the moment to more carefully reconsider the relationships between the university and academic publishing, and academic book publishing in particular?

As one of the editors of the scholar-led open access book publisher Mattering Press, this is a question that I have been thinking about for some time. The following essay begins to formulate some answers and, in doing so, explores how some of the issues involve have been thrown into sharper relief by the recent wave of industrial action that hit large numbers of universities in the UK in early 2018.<sup>1</sup>

### The instrumentalisation of scholarship

I will come onto discuss publishing shortly, but first a quick primer on the strikes and some of the issues they brought to the surface. In terms of their stated objectives – to challenge the major reductions to the pensions of university staff – the success of the strikes remains to be seen. At the time of writing, the industrial action is suspended pending a new valuation of the pension scheme agreed jointly between the union and universities, a process which many of those that participated in the strikes are sceptical about.

Nonetheless as has been widely observed, the strikes have, at least for some, been something of a watershed in how staff, and perhaps particularly academic staff, consider their relationships to universities and to each other. Of the many hashtags that became associated with the strike on Twitter, #WeAreTheUniversity was one of the most prominent. It spoke to the increasing sense of alienation from their own institutions that many academics (in the UK, but I'm quite sure elsewhere too) feel. This is a result of a complex mix of pressures, but prominent amongst these is what Clive Barnett, writing on the strike, has referred to as 'the increasingly toxic mess of top-down, vicious, paternalist, patronising management systems that has come to characterise university life' (Barnett 2018). It would be hard to find an academic working in UK higher education who has not at some point been frustrated by these management systems, and especially the multiple and sometimes contradictory 'orders of worth' (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006 [1991]) they have instituted, used to measure academics' performance, and in particular their scholarly output. The most significant driver of this is the demand imposed by government agencies on universities to periodically demonstrate the quality of their research as part of the six-yearly Research Excellence Framework (REF) audit exercise. This, however, does not excuse the enthusiasm with which various components of university bureaucracy have embraced the metricisation of scholarly production. Particularly egregious, at least in my view, is the widely criticised<sup>2</sup> practice employed by some faculties of using externally compiled journal lists to measure academic quality.

These attempt to provide an apparently ‘objective’ measure of the quality of outputs published within a particular field and are often becoming tied to promotions criteria and other performance incentives.<sup>3</sup>

The increasing reliance on such lists, alongside a variety of other ways in which attempts are being made to instrumentalise academic knowledge production, poses a threat to a variety of forms of scholarship. This extends most obviously to journals: publications that are either excluded from or poorly ranked within such lists are likely to suffer if the grip of such logics becomes tighter. Within this, open access journals are particularly threatened: in the game of the metric-driven measurement of academic value, it is certainly possible, perhaps likely, that the least institutionalised and least resourced journals will struggle. But there are threats too to unconventional book publishing practices, of which open access initiatives are perhaps most prominent. If in some faculties publishing books is already a risky enough endeavour, why, many colleagues will ask, should they compound the issue by moving beyond commercial book publishers, at least in part given the reputational risks this might entail?

The various issues that have arisen around the instrumentalisation of scholarship are of course not new. Like many scholar-led open access initiatives, Mattering Press was set up in part in response to such issues, even as they are a hazard to its existence. Our strong sense was that in the face of such instrumentalisation new forms of care were needed both in book publishing and in scholarship more widely, including in our field of interest: Science and Technology Studies.

### **Multiple axes of care work**

In this sense, some of our conversations as a press resonate with some of the discussions promoted by the strikes. The latter were in part prompted by the seeming utter absence of care exhibited by the body representing universities – Universities UK (UUK) – both in the period leading up to the industrial action and as it continued to unfold. As Felicity Callard, a scholar whose

contributions on social media to discussions around the strike have been particularly influential, observed in a Twitter thread:

I would say that relations of care [and] trust are envisaged as underpinning the bonds of a university community (across staff, students – [and] those organisations representing universities)[.] In the last few weeks, those relations of care [and] trust have experienced profound (some might say potentially irreparable) damage, as UUK as an organisation has shown itself as an unworthy object of trust, [and] – for many of us – derelict in its duties of care (Callard 2018).

One of the effects of the strikes were to render both visible and more visibly precarious the relations of care on which so many of the activities of university life utterly depend. At Mattering Press we have long been conscious of the fragility of some of these relations and the role that the various activities associated with scholarly knowledge production might play in either nurturing or damaging them.

At the same time, the strike highlighted issues that, while present in our discussions, have at times been at the margins: the potential for even the most well-intentioned practices of scholarly care to come into conflict with other forms of care work. Take, for instance, this extract from Vikki Turbine’s diary, in her analysis of the relationship between the strikes and care co-authored with Sarah Burton:

the strike made me realise that I was doing more conscious care work in my paid work – for students, colleagues, than I did for myself and my family. I was sick of them getting scraps of my frazzled time. I was sick – literally – and exhausted. The strike made me want to check back into my life (Extract from Vikki Turbine’s diary, in Burton and Turbine 2018).

For Turbine, as for many others I suspect, the strike brought home some of the ways in which the care that so many of us have for our profession, our students, our universities, is a resource that can become all too readily exploited.

From the perspective of open access publishing practices, one response to such issues might therefore be to more seriously consider the multiple axes of care work into which its activities are inserted. For the Mattering Press editorial collective, this issue has arisen in part in internal discussions about our involvement in the press and its implications for our own self-care: none of us take any form of payment for our editorial work and have to balance this work against a variety of other responsibilities, both professional and personal. One of the things we have been doing in recent months is to

look to ways to further delegate work outwards to others, even if this means increasing our production costs, while making sure not to affect the quality of the service we offer to authors. We have also been conscious that a particular model of peer review that we were keen to selectively instantiate – involving ongoing collaborative dialogue between a peer reviewer and an author – has the potential to exacerbate rather than ameliorate the well-known problems with the system of peer review, including the fact that many reviewers feel overwhelmed by their peer review responsibilities (e.g. Ware 2008). With that in mind, this year we trialled a different model of peer review for one of our books, still designed to provide authors with richer forms of support than they might usually receive but involving the collaborative peer review of a text by a community of reviewers on a dedicated platform rather than relying on one or two reviewers to do this work. Our plan in the coming months is to assess this process, both from the perspective of authors and reviewers.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Shifting the relations between open access and the university**

The capacity for any one publisher to solve what are to a large extent systemic issues are, however, inevitably limited. It may therefore be that scholar-led publishers, including open access publishers, need to take some lessons from those that participated in the strikes by seeking to subtly shift the relationships they have with universities.

One route is to seek direct university support, and as part of that to make a strong case for the role of publishing as once again an activity that benefits university involvement. In this respect it has in recent years been encouraging to see a group of new, scholar-led and open access publishers emerge as a result of the direct support of their universities. In the UK, the Goldsmiths Press, Westminster University Press, and UCL Press have led the way. Elsewhere we can also see a number of other open access ventures that are prospering thanks to direct university support, for example Heidelberg University Publishing in Germany and the highly influential *Limn*, operating somewhere between a magazine and journal, which has received support

from three different US universities. Some of these have done so while at simultaneously challenging the politics of publishing: Goldsmith Press, led by Sarah Kember, has provided a particularly strong lead, attending closely to the constituency of its authors, as well as to how academic prestige is institutionalised, with reviewers being asked to comment on not just a book's content, but also its citation practices (some of the complexities of which have been explored by Sara Ahmed (2013) and Lisa Blackman (2016)).

When it comes to demonstrating what can be achieved by a university that recognises the benefit of supporting open access publishing, UCL Press provides a particularly striking example. At an early stage, and somewhat remarkably, senior management recognised the benefit that could flow towards the university from being associated with a well-supported and sustainably resourced publishing venture. The press has developed its own platform, published a range of works connected to members of staff at the university, and is even providing the opportunity for students to pitch ideas for publications. The result is a publisher that now has almost 100 books for sale and to download for free, and dozens more in the pipeline, having only launched three years ago. UCL management seem to have recognised, unprompted, that supporting a publishing venture is not just valuable for its members of staff and the wider academic community, but also that this support has the potential to add reputational benefits. Congratulatory pieces such as this evidence that in their own small way. But there are far more valuable rewards on offer. These range from readers more clearly drawing an association between an institution and its brightest scholars, to the generalised goodwill that might flow from academics towards those universities supportive of open access publishing ventures, for all the reasons sketched above.

There are other ways in which the relations between universities and scholar-led and open access publishing might be shifted. This might involve closer collaborations between university libraries and open access publishers, with the latter nonetheless maintaining their independence – the ongoing collaborations between Punctum Books, led by Eileen Joy, and UC Santa Barbara (UCSB) library here stand as an exemplar, assisted in this case by the considerable energy and enthusiasm of UCSB subject librarian Sherri Barnes. In my own department at Lancaster University, informal discussions have begun as to whether it might be possible to find ways of building contributions to publishing initiatives into workload models. And as scholars and publishers we can and should continue to push universities, in part by convincing them of the benefits of doing so, into other diverse forms of support: for instance, supporting discussions amongst open access scholars, as the Centre for Postdigital Cultures at Coventry University has done with the 2018 Radical Open Access conference and as with other university-supported events Mattering Press has been involved in.<sup>5</sup>

## A practical politics of hope

These diverse and emergent possibilities and collaborations provide grounds for some hope, hope that might just be worth grasping amidst the prevailing despair about the state of higher education. It is the hope for a different future, one in which universities recognise that the worth of the work its staff extends beyond what they produce to how it is produced, and where universities more clearly see themselves as institutions that can play a role in redefining both in creative and supportive ways. Here I will end by turning to Sarah Kember, whose thinking on these issues has gone far deeper than most. In her inaugural lecture (Kember 2016) she reflects on the productive but nonetheless continually ambivalent institutionalisation of Goldsmiths Press: as both scholarly writers and academic publishers we need, she suggests, to recognise that "we can get out of the instrumental and the institutional something that is alive and kicking, something that is experimental". The injunction I would make to universities is to recognise what benefits might flow in their direction, from publisher to university, for those institutions with the ambition and foresight to take the leap into supporting these kinds of experimental, creative and necessarily uncertain endeavours.

The French root of the verb "to publish" refers to the act of "making public". At Mattering Press, as scholars versed in the traditions of Science and Technology Studies, we have long recognised that publishing is at once an endeavour of telling and making. For much of its history, academics and universities have specialised in the first of these, in the art of telling what is known. In my view, it is time for more universities, and indeed more academics, to become involved in the second, in the very practical politics of how precisely academic knowledge is made and cared for.

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<sup>1</sup> The strikes affected 61 universities, many of whose staff – both academic and in a variety of other roles – are enrolled in the USS (Universities Superannuation Scheme) pension scheme. Union members in two universities involved in this scheme did not vote in sufficient numbers to be legally able to take part in the industrial action. A number of other universities use a different pension scheme and hence were not involved in the strikes.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance in relation to the increasingly ubiquitous use of the Association of Business Schools (ABS) list in management schools Willmott (2011), Hussain (2015), and Tourish and Willmott (2015).

<sup>3</sup> At Lancaster, for instance, in the last academic year (2016–2017), a £12,000 reward ‘pot’ was divided by all individuals who published an article in a 4\* journal, as ranked by the ABS list.

<sup>4</sup> The book in question is *The Ethnographic Case* (2017) edited by Emily Yates-Doerr and Christine Labuski. The platform can be seen and interacted with here: <https://processing.matteringpress.org/>

<sup>5</sup> Notably both the ‘Open Futures’ and the ‘New Platforms for Open Access Book Distribution’ projects which have been supported by the Institute for Social Futures at Lancaster University. The press has also received various other forms of support from the University of Bayreuth, the Centre for Invention and Social Process at Goldsmiths, University of London, and from the Centre for Mobilities Research, Lancaster University.

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## The 'Care-full' Commons: Open Access and the Care of Commoning

Samuel  
Moore

'The commons' is a term routinely employed by advocates of open access publishing to describe the ideal scholarly publishing ecosystem, one comprised entirely of freely available journal articles, books, data and code. Usually undefined, advocates invoke the commons as a good-in-itself, governed by the scholarly community and publicly accessible to all. The term itself is not associated with an identifiable politico-economic ideology, nor

does it entail any particular form of organisation or practice. Without further justification, the term 'commons' has little meaning beyond referring to the various degrees of community control and/or accessibility associated with certain resources.

This paper will illustrate some of the uses (and abuses) of the commons in scholarly publishing, aiming to highlight both the ambiguity of the term and some of the drawbacks of treating the commons as fixed and static entity focused on the production and management of shared resources, as many do. While it certainly relates to resources and their governance, I want to reposition the commons – or 'commoning' specifically – as a practice of cultivating and caring for the relationships that exist *around* the production of shared resources. In reorienting the commons in this way, I will show how an attitude of commoning extends beyond the commons site itself and into the relationships present in other forms of organisation also. This allows us to reposition the commons towards a shared, emancipatory horizon while maintaining the need for a plurality of commons-based practices in publishing and beyond. A progressive and emancipatory commons, I argue, is therefore a space of 'care-full commoning'.

### The use and abuse of the commons

Many uses of the term *commons* in scholarly communications are themselves ill-defined and intend to evoke a kind of participatory, inclusive or freely accessible resource. This lack of definition may be due to the popularity of the term and its deployment in the media to describe generic 'shared resources', everything from Facebook (Gapper 2017) to Bicycle Rental schemes (Rushe 2017). Here, 'the commons' refers to resources created through purely capitalist modes of organisation that either result in freely accessible services (Facebook) or utilise public space (dockless bikes). The tragedy of each one, the authors argue, is that they are exploitable by 'bad actors' such as vandals or fascists, what the Financial Times journalist terms 'polluters of common resources' (Gapper 2017). In neither case are the companies being described as commons actually governed by the users of their service, but rather it is their perceived accessibility that leads to their exploitation. There are numerous examples of uncritical and unspecific uses of 'commons' like this that position the commons as a resource that has a publicly-accessible dimension to it, irrespective of its governance structures or the interactions and relationships it fosters.

A similar usage of commons terminology is on display in scholarly communications too. Digital Commons is the name given to Bepress's flagship suite of repository and journal-hosting software. Bepress is a for-profit company, recently acquired by Elsevier, that sells publishing products to universities. There is nothing about the Digital Commons service that entails collective governance of its infrastructures or common ownership of its outputs. As part of the shareholder-managed conglomerate Elsevier, Bepress is one component in a proprietary walled garden of services designed to lock-in users and monetise their analytics and interaction data (Schonfeld 2017). The 'commons' in Digital Commons simply refers to a portfolio of publishing products in which many (but by no means all) of the publications on the platform are publicly accessible at no charge.

The vague and ill-defined nature of the commons allows corporations to utilise commons terminology to imply that a resource is under the control of a scholarly community rather than the company itself. This trick is only achievable because of the association between the commons and open access resources, which are interchangeable in much of the discourse on open access. In this regard, Bepress can assert their products as promoting a progressive ecosystem of freely accessible resources, even while they profit off the labour of those who produce them. But the commons is not just a resource, as Carlo Vercellone explains, but a mode of production whose basis can be identified in the 'self-management of the organisation of labour and in the non-appropriability of the main tools of production' (Vercellone n.d.). Focusing on the resource itself, rather than how it is produced and maintained according to democratic self-management, is likely to permit this kind of corporate capture.

#### **The commons is not (just) a resource**

The commons is not a freely accessible resource, then, but a way of producing and managing shared resources. This was the word's original medieval meaning as used to refer to a particular form of English land. The historian Katrina Navickas explains that land commons in England and Wales were always privately owned, but that local residents (commoners) were granted certain rights of use and access by the lord of the manor (Navickas 2018). This meant that the commons were neither commonly owned nor even *publicly* accessible, but instead were only available to local commoners for grazing cattle, collecting fuel, wood etc. The commons did not originally entail any form of open, public access to a resource but simply refers to the collective management of certain private lands.

The conflation of open access publishing with the commons is likely based on the association of open access with open-source software and free culture. The early web played host to an array of DIY, participatory cultures of production that resulted in free digital outputs. Consequently, freely available

digital resources have acquired a mythical association with participatory and commons-based forms of production, even if their forms of production are firmly embedded in capitalism. One such example of this is the Creative Commons (CC) organisation and their suite of copyright licenses for making research freely available in accordance with conditions on reuse and modifiability.

Creative Commons produces literature (e.g., Stacey and Pearson 2017) framing CC-licensed outputs as alternatives to private- or state-owned creative/scholarly works, claiming that 'the commons sees resources as common goods, providing a common wealth extending beyond state boundaries, to be passed on in undiminished or enhanced form to future generations' (ibid). References to the 'values and norms' of commoning enhance this rhetoric and affirm CC's commitment to a new way of operating beyond market and state. Yet, despite its name and ostensible commitment to commons ideals, Creative Commons merely reflects ordinary intellectual property norms and relations. CC licenses simply designate how a proprietary work can be used; it does not confer ownership of a work to a collective or abandon the idea of private ownership of digital works altogether, nor does it entail that the means of production themselves are in common ownership. Instead, Creative Commons reinforces a private and individualist understanding of intellectual property, and the social hierarchies this entails, especially the association of published scholarship with private property that can be used as a currency for individual career progression within the university.

Creative Commons' position on intellectual property is reflective of their broader commitment to liberal individualism and private property relations. Lawrence Lessig, one of the organisation's founders, writes in his book on free culture that: '[the] free culture I defend in this book is a balance between anarchy and control. A free culture, like a free market, is filled with property. It is filled with rules of property and contract that get enforced by the state.' (Lessig 2004, xvi). Lessig sees Creative Commons as a set of resources

operating within a capitalist economy that rely on free culture to enhance and improve the business prospects of those who share. This individualism is not only reflected in the attribution requirement for CC-licensed works, which positions the work as sole property of its creator, but it is also noticeable in much of Creative Commons' framing of the benefits of CC-licensing to the *creators*, for example: 'the fact that the name of the creator follows a CC-licensed work makes the licenses an important means to develop a reputation or, in corporate speak, a brand' (Stacey and Pearson 2017). Creative Commons therefore utilises both the language of progressive politics mixed with the business-friendly hallmarks of branding and innovation.

Despite its influence in scholarly publishing, Creative Commons' understanding of the 'commons' lacks any real meaning as a commons. Not only is CC-licensed work not common property, unlike movements that reject copyright in favour of the public domain, common- or non-ownership, it also says nothing about the ways in which the creative work was brought into being: the labour involved, the profits taken and the governance of such efforts. In order to represent a truly scholar-owned commons, the governance and/or ownership of the publication processes themselves have to at least be taken into account, not just the accessibility of digital resources.

Discussing the commons more generally, Massimo De Angelis writes: 'The problematising of commons within a project of emancipation thus must not simply *rely on lists of isolated objects* [emphasis added], but must open up to the internal relations among the components of these lists and the respective commoning' (De Angelis 2017, 67). When describing something as a commons, then, one should not just refer to the resource itself but look instead to the structures around how it is produced, reproduced and organised. This is why, as De Angelis and Stavrides highlight, a holistic understanding of the commons includes an appreciation of not just the resource (or 'pooled resources'), but its users ('the commoners') and the relationships and practices

involved in its maintenance and access ('commoning') (De Angelis and Stavrides 2010). Definitions of the commons as a resource are limited because they fail to take into account the informal practices and social relations involved between commoners. From the perspective of an emancipatory commons struggle, I will argue, it is more important to focus on commons praxis than the resource itself.

### The commons as a practice

The commons is not just a series of 'isolated objects' but refers to the social praxis involved within and across different forms of commons organisation. It is therefore a practice focused on the relationships involved in various forms of production, rather than exclusively (or even primarily) on the resource itself. For some commons theorists such as Elinor Ostrom it is the formalised governance practices that determine these relationships. Ostrom's Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) Framework is one way of determining how a particular common resource is created, managed and maintained (Hess and Ostrom 2007). This framework relies on extrapolating the best rules of maintenance and access from the resource in question, presupposing a rational, consensus-building approach to the commons.

However, Ostrom's approach to commons governance is liberal and exclusionary, treating subjects in a political vacuum rather than embedded in a particular situation and entangled in a number of different relationships and projects with asymmetrical power structures. Patrick Bresnihan argues the liberal approach to commoning fails to appreciate this attachment or 'entangled subjectivity' and instead treats participants in a commons as 'calculating, liberal (human) subject[s] separated from a world of other liberal subjects and discrete, measurable (non-human) resources' (Bresnihan 2016, 7). A similar point is made by Fred Saunders who argues that the conception of a 'rational resource user' in the commons fails to adequately account for a 'meaningful consideration of local norms, values and interests in commons projects' (Saunders 2014).

Indeed, any such 'neutral' approach to a commons, especially one that is agnostic (and therefore tacitly favourable) towards commercial organisations, will strive to homogenise local conditions that favour the business over the commoners. Tom Slee makes a similar point regarding software design for improving urban commons, such as those created and implemented by the Code for America organisation, that: 'seek to force the uniqueness of individual cities into standardised frameworks in order to build software that works across many cities. The very idea of a one-size-fits-all solution to bottom-up city innovation is flawed, because every application that is successfully implemented in a large number of cities erodes the uniqueness that makes the city distinct' (Slee 2016, 157). Large, all-encompassing commons that aim for a consensual interoperability will therefore nullify the nuanced local arrangements in favour of simple *solutions* that benefit those with most power and capital.

The commons, then, is best positioned as a struggle that recognises the micro-political situations of each commons and the need for experimentation into alternatives and ways of resistance. A more historical perspective of the agricultural commons as the centre of medieval English life reveals that it has always been such a struggle. Silvia Federici illustrates how, contrary to naïve historical understandings that portray feudal society as harmonious, the medieval village was a 'theater of daily warfare' (Federici 2004, 26). Lords would try to limit peasant access to common land through litigation, taxation and demands that peasants carry out certain 'labour services' on the lord's land (ibid). Jean Birrell describes how in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries lords were continually litigating against commoners for using more of the commons than laws permitted, despite that 'the erosion of pastures and woodland inevitably reduced the area in which they could be exercised, while the number of commoners increased' (Birrell 1987, 23).

So, the commons was always a struggle for particular communities to reclaim access to the land and resources traditionally managed as part of their way of life. We can

extend this idea of the struggle to an understanding of the commons today, particularly in the face of privatisation of scholarly publishing, higher education and societal commons more generally. In trying to reframe open access publishing as a form of commons, it is necessary to appreciate that commoning is a *practice* that can operate outside of a self-defined commons site and within areas dominated by capital (and that emancipatory practices of commoning may be absent from self-described commons projects, as I have shown with Creative Commons). We see glimpses of the commons through various practices of commoning in already existing open access projects that may be latent and thus requiring drawing out and joining up.

### Radical Open Access and care-full commoning

We can thus reconceive of radical open access publishing as a commons not because of the resources that radical open access publishers make available, nor even because they are governed according to any particular rules or not-for-profit philosophy, but because the presses are involved in various forms of commoning – which is to say informal practices of care, resilience and shared enterprise within and across various institutional arrangements positioned towards a shared horizon of reclaiming the common. Care in this sense is relational rather than end-directed: it is a *situated* practice.

Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher define care as 'everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair "our world" so that we can live in it as well as possible' (Tronto 1993, 103). 'Our world' is key here. Commoning is not prescriptive but requires us to respond to the situations of commoners rather than assuming everyone needs the same level of attention. From the perspective of publishing, this means departing from a cookie-cutter approach to open access that sets a limit on what is covered within a publishing service and what is not, much like common commercial forms of open access based on article-processing charges.

Perhaps most importantly, care as commoning exists outside of self-defined 'commons' sites. Massimo De Angelis illustrates how commoning can manifest as forms of resistance inside factories, schools and other institutions dominated by capital (De Angelis and Stavrides 2010). We can point to the practices of teach-outs and mutual reliance on display during this year's UCU strikes as an example commoning in the service of reclaiming higher education as a common good. Similarly, projects within the Radical Open Access Collective promote a form of commoning based on collaboration and support for each other's projects, despite not necessarily identifying as a 'commons' itself. Thinking about commoning as care in this way moves away from the idea of a self-defined commons resource and towards acts of care that operate horizontally across a range of institutions. I would like to argue that the struggles for radical open access and commons-based higher education are themselves inseparable from collective forms of resistance and action towards an emancipatory but ever-evolving horizon. The commons is therefore a situated practice of care positioned towards a commons horizon.

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## Friends with Books

Tahani  
Nadim



In December 2016 I found myself in Vienna's main public library (*Hauptbücherei*) with my friend B.B. looking through volumes of poetry in order to find a fitting poem to read at my mother's funeral. The library was busy. All the seating around us was taken up by people, mostly teenagers and young couples as I remember, reading, quietly chatting or listening to whatever their earphones carried. Intermittently, B.B. and I would get up and disappear for a while into open shelves before returning with armfuls of books (hardbacks, paperbacks, quartos, folios) to read and share and sometimes read out aloud to each other. It was mournful, tender, at times quite funny and it showed not only how books and friends can matter together but also how this mattering is intricately and intimately bound up with public space and the politics of (open) access.

Anyone can enter the *Hauptbücherei*, a public building, without a library pass or other form of identification. Orientation amidst the thousands and thousands of volumes arranged in open shelves is challenging but there are trained librarians at hand to offer directions and answer queries about 20th century female Russian poets and broken copy machines. Some of the books we picked up wouldn't have been available 60, 70 years ago as the Austrofascist (1934-38) and Nazi (1938-45) governments had purged the library of books deemed subversive, undesirable, harmful or "un-German".<sup>1</sup> Yet, large absences remain as the poetry section contains virtually no works from outside of Europe and North America. This is certainly also a consequence of the marginality of poetry, the difficulty of its translation and the fragile, impossible economy this entails. But foremost it points to the continued inequities in knowledge production between centre and peripheries that find expression in and further what Piron et al. call *epistemic alienation* (Piron, Regulus, and Dibounje Madiba 2016; Piron et al. 2017; Hervé Mboa Nkoudou 2016). Referring to the systemic exclusion and invisibility of knowledge produced in and for locales outside of the global North, they argue that such alienation is accelerated and intensified through practices of open access that do not engage with the situatedness of openness and accessibility.

How quickly an intimate moment involving books can unravel both historical and current geopolitics! But then again, given the rapacious colonisation of our knowledge and information landscapes by big publishers, a refusal to accept the normative distribution of agency between private and public spaces might be the prudent thing to do (e.g. Posada and Chen 2017). The effects of profit-driven, extraction-oriented scholarly publishing are already corrupting how we relate to one another and our institutions (see Joe Deville's contribution to this pamphlet), which suggests that it is through the realm of the personal that we can articulate and enact a different kind of politics. This is a lesson we are familiar with from feminist and indigenous activism and critiques, which have drawn strength and potent analytics from intimate moments of sharing, listening and caring for each other. It is also a central feature of what has become known as the *ethics of care*, which describe a feminist project of developing new ethical positions from relationships of care (e.g. Held 2006). An ethics of care thus values emotion, family and friendship as instructive domains for observing and scrutinising moral relations, including arrangements that exceed these domains, such as medical practice, political life or, indeed, scholarly publishing. Mattering Press is explicitly committed to practising an ethics of care, inspired by Virginia Held's feminism and the relational empiricism of scholars like Helen Verran and Annemarie Mol. For Mattering Press this means caring for authors, books, readers, reviewers as well as all the other, less obvious forms of labour that go into open access (OA) book production and publishing and the socio-economic relations it (often reluctantly) enters and/or engenders, such as those with Amazon.

I want to reflect more closely on the ethics of care in OA publishing by returning to the matter of friendship, something that is rarely examined in discussions on scholarly production yet runs deeply through the fibre of academia, its structures, thoughts and footnotes. It is also at the heart of Mattering Press, which is run by friends and relies on friends such as Ed Akerboom and Will Roscoe (web design), Alex Billington (typesetting) and Delaina Haslam & Jennifer Tomomitsu

(copy-editing). This, I suspect, makes publishing both easier and harder to do. It suggests that everyone involved does so with care, lest one wants to hurt or lose a friend. Yet neither care nor friendship can be easily apprehended—let alone scrutinised and evaluated—something which ethical theory necessitates. And the question remains, how can such an ethics of care, drawn from interpersonal relations of friendship, also work towards articulating and encompassing the situatedness of openness and accessibility. This question is particularly relevant to me as a scholar placed within an imperial institution (a natural history museum) that plays a leading role in current realisations of 'openness', not the least through its participation in the European Commission's Open Science Policy Platform.

One way of thinking about friendship in this context is to examine how the objects that populate the publishing process mediate and modulate relationships. Books are of course brilliant *affiliative objects* (Lucy Suchman's nice term) that, for example in the form of gifts, can strengthen and diversify existing bonds and even create new ones. I remember sharing copies of Venedikt Yerofeyev's *Moscow-Petushki* (impossible to get in an English translation these days) and John Kennedy Toole's *Confederacy of Dunces* with my mother and how we were still exchanging references long after we've read them. But it is the less tangible objects that circulate through the publishing process that similarly have the potential to make relations more or less caring. These include the forms by which we give and receive feedback, such as peer-review systems. Such systems can be notoriously noxious as they obfuscate power differentials and have just not been designed to further meaningful and sustainable relationships. Experimenting with different processes and thus building tools which have such considerations literally built-in, is a critical step to integrate an ethics of care.

This brings me to my second point, which has to do with time or rather, the apportioning of time. Making books and friends take time. I moved to Berlin (via Vienna and London) in 2013 and I'm still in the process of making friends while scrambling

for moments to share with friends I made elsewhere or that have left this city. Again, this is partially a question of technology. I could use social media to stay connected, but this type of connection is inimical to relations of care. Simone Weil put it best when she wrote that:

It is a fault to wish to be understood before we have made ourselves clear to ourselves. It is to seek pleasures in friendship and pleasures which are not deserved. (...) You would sell your soul for friendship (Weil 1952, 59).

Weil points to the labours (directed inwards and outwards) that go into friendship, which are also constitutive of relations of care. And like friendship, care can be a virtue when the labours of giving (and receiving) care are aligned with affective bonds, that is, the attachment to the well-being of others (Kittay 2011). Kittay, in a brilliant text on the ethics of care and mental disabilities, notes that such labour can be done without affective bonds but it will not be good care as it denies 'the open responsiveness to another' (Kittay 2011, 52). I think this also speaks to the need of taking time for ethical deliberations, involving reason as well as 'empathy, emotional responsiveness and perceptual attentiveness' to understand the complexities of the situations that scholarly knowledge production presents us with (2011, 53).

'But how?!', we might collectively cry while being chased by deadlines and live ones. What currently somewhat works for me and lets me write this text rather than prepare a polished presentation for tomorrow's colloquium, is saying "no" to tasks of which I know they won't be dropped in someone else's equally busy but perhaps less precarious lap. I imagine that Mattering Press must decline many submissions with a heavy heart. Another strategy I have started to employ involves documenting some of the things I do that cannot be captured by conventional categories of 'scholarly output' or engagement. Granted, this takes time and rendering accountable the micro-practices through which we enact relations of care might run the risk of making them (too) interesting to neoliberal audit regimes (Star and Strauss

1999). For now, however, these records help me to make myself clear to myself, to paraphrase Weil. And they and the relations they speak of are thus ingested into the institutional ecology which might, at some point, come to value them and not insist exclusively on ISI-listed outputs.

In conclusion, I want to suggest that openness needs to be cared for and, following Kittay, accompanied by a meaningful investment in accessibility for present and distant others. An ethics of care in this context translates into an ethics of inclusion and this always entails difficult decisions—if they are indeed easy we might be doing something wrong. Derrida wrote about the politics of friendship saying that it's important to 'recognize the major marks of a tension within it, perhaps even ruptures, and, in any case, scansions' (Derrida 2005, 234). 'Scansion', which refers to marking the stress or rhythm of a poem, is a nice term here as it lets us think about the *soundness* of friendship as well as its inscrutable and evocative qualities, such as all the stuff that needn't be said just because you know each other inside out. This is also the risky bit. Things left unsaid can become unspeakable. Therefore it is vitally important, for friendship, care and OA, to continually question our limits of openness.

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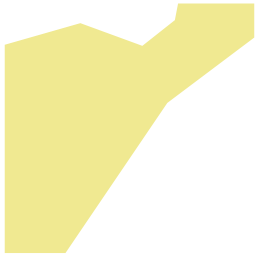
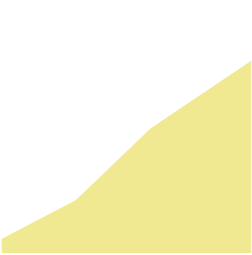
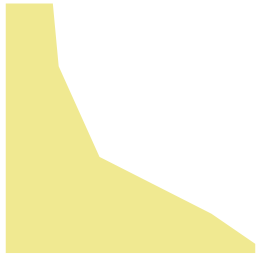
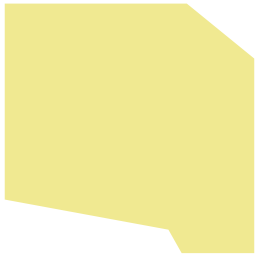
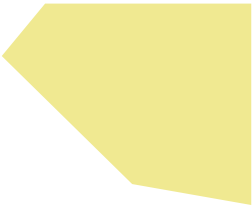
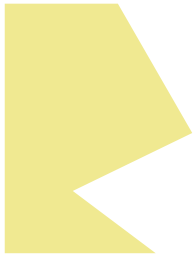
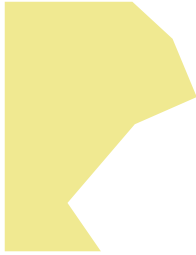
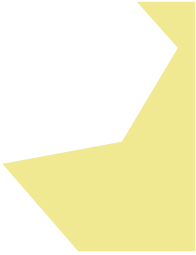
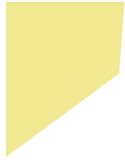


<sup>1</sup> In fact, fiction and poetry in public libraries in Vienna had been severely diminished from the early 1940s onwards as the Nazis pushed for public education on the basis of non-fiction compliant with Fascist ideology. Library users could only check out one book of fiction per visit.

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The  
Commons  
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Care