

# JLSC

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## **Book Review**

### **Reassembling Scholarly Communications: Histories, Infrastructures, and Global Politics of Open Access**

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## BOOK REVIEW

*Reassembling Scholarly Communications: Histories, Infrastructures, and Global Politics of Open Access*

Edited by Martin Paul Eve and Jonathan Gray

2020 | The MIT Press: Cambridge, MA | 472 pages, softcover | ISBN-13: 9780262536240 | \$30 print | ISBN electronic 9780262363723 | Free (Open Access)

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In the nearly 20 years since the publication of the three declarations on open access (OA) (Bethesda, Budapest, and Berlin), many digital and economic developments have altered the landscape of open scholarly publishing. *Reassembling Scholarly Communications: Histories, Infrastructures, and Global Politics of Open Access*, a 25-chapter collection edited by Martin Paul Eve and Jonathan Gray, explores questions raised by these changes with a focus on how the intersection of technologies and traditions surrounding publishing and OA are informed by the past and may project into the future.

The book is divided into six parts: colonial influences; epistemologies; publics and politics; archives and preservation; infrastructures and platforms; and global communities. The editors have chosen well in assembling dozens of scholars and practitioners from both the Global South and Global North in this useful volume aimed at those who study and practice OA scholarship. Each of the chapters succeeds in advancing the conversation regarding either the historical dimensions or future directions of a particular facet of open scholarship. The collection seeks to provide a range of perspectives across current research and inform practice but is not introductory and those new to the conversation may do well to first read an overview of OA scholarly communication.<sup>1</sup>

As with many developments in digital technology, the earliest rhetoric around digital, OA scholarship was largely, even overly, optimistic. Many of the assumptions underpinning OA disruption posited inevitably greater freedom and openness in scholarly communication.

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<sup>1</sup> For a useful overview on the basics of open-access scholarship see Suber, Peter. *Open Access*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press., 2012.



The volume opens with four chapters that complicate this narrative and offer a deeply insightful critique of the promise of OA scholarship, specifically as it relates to post-colonial societies. In Chapter 1, the author draws from Jacques Derrida's scholarship on Plato's *Pharmacy* to explore the ways that OA implementation can be a sort of *pharmakon* ("poison remedy") by fostering healthy scholarly flourishing in some regions while acting to noxious effect in the African context. The theme of OA systems and the perpetuation of inequality are expanded upon in the second chapter while the final two chapters of the first section, drawing from current best practices, offer suggestions for a more just and inclusive future.

The second and third sections are especially valuable in their provision of a historical and philosophical context for the ways that scholars, especially in the Global North, have thought about knowledge creation and how these understandings have informed the digital and open development of scholarly communication. Section two begins with an exploration of the history and purpose ("encouragement of learning") behind the Statute of Anne in 1710 and offers a compelling vision for how the evolution of intellectual property law can positively inform contemporary calls for legal reform of copyright. The remaining chapters of the second section offer such riches as an historical investigation of peer review, an examination of the theoretical consequences of the *An Inquiry into the Modes of Existence (AIME)* project, and a case-study of the *Making and Knowing Project* at Columbia University. Section three opens with an historical examination of the first scientific journal—*The Philosophical Transactions*—and offers a compelling case that those who wish to promote open access scholarship have solid historical warrant. The remainder of section three features two chapters of analysis, past and present respectively, on public libraries in the United States with a concluding chapter situating the growth in openness of social and scholarly systems inside a broader move toward neoliberal governmental policies around higher education.

The digital and OA developments of the last 20 years have created powerful disruptions in the ways that archives and special collections have worked to preserve and make accessible their collections. Section four of the volume sets out to address these changes in the context of archives and preservation. The section begins with an examination of the benefits of incorporating Afrofuturist assertions into digital cultural heritage and OA platform design. The second chapter calls for deeper understanding of the ways in which the biases and oppressions of society have become recreated in the preservation and dissemination of knowledge, particularly in archival collections. The third chapter of the section encourages the humanities to free scholarly career dependency on print scholarship to create space for the flowering of the digital humanities, and the growth of data sharing and OA scholarship. Section four closes with a plea that archives consider issues of privacy and context before making archival documents openly accessible. While section four makes for a provocative and insightful contribution to the volume, the unique issues at stake in the context of ar-

chival collections and open access may be best explored in a separate and more expansive treatment.

Critical to the growth and evolution of OA scholarship are the platforms and infrastructures used to disseminate scholarly research outputs. The penultimate section of the book offers a much-needed contribution to this conversation through an exploration of the issues around the platforms, technologies, and methods underpinning the contemporary open scholarship landscape. The final section of the book explores issues of communality in open scholarship with intriguing examples of how scholarly and learned societies might offer solutions to many of the concerns raised in the previous chapters.

*Reassembling Scholarly Communications* succeeds in offering a useful and provocative set of perspectives and portals into some of the most pressing concerns in open access scholarly communication. The volume includes a helpful glossary and an impressive bibliography and is available both in print and as a set of open access PDFs through the publisher's website (at <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/11885.001.0001>).

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Joshua M. Avery is the Group Leader for the Teaching and Outreach Group at Buswell Memorial Library, Wheaton College (IL). He studied at the University of Cincinnati, Miami University, and the University at Albany, State University of New York. His interests as a researcher include issues of open access, human computer interaction (HCI), religion and information, and folksonomy.