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As I've intimated in other talks that I've been giving recently, when speculating about the “future of X or Y”, I think it's important for us to countenance the potential reasons why things are as they stand at present. I think we always need to consider, at these moments, that the future is radically, at the root, constrained by the past, by the accidents of history that shape the present. Thinking about the future of the book in this way is valuable as a thought experiment – alongside giving us a better context in which to appreciate our own culture – because it allows us to exile arguments from tradition and to think instead of what could be, rather than “what is”. Let us think of this, extending Foucault's phrasing relating to the present, as a history of the future.

The particular stance that I'm bringing to today's discussion links in with the earlier panel on Open Access. In addition to my role as a lecturer in English at the University of Lincoln, I am also the founder of a new OA megajournal initiative, the *Open Library of the Humanities* – website plug: we're at <https://www.openlibhums.org>. More importantly than those aspects, though, for thinking about the future of the book, I am a member of the steering group for JISC's OAPEN-UK project. This project is an initiative that aims to measure, in an agile way, and to the degree possible while policy shifts beneath its feet, the impact that making humanities monographs available in a gold Open Access format has on sales statistics. There is no concrete data available from the project yet, but I think that its very existence flags up the first history-of-the-future point that I want to raise: the question of economics.

**[SLIDE]**

We are entering an uncertain time for scholarly publishing economics, especially in the humanities. Open Access comes with financial challenges, mostly due to the transition phase wherein there is a potential triple-dip for research funds (we pay for research, we pay for subscriptions and we pay for gold OA). On the monograph side of things, the first efforts in the UK sector for humanities monographs – and discounting books about Open Access, such as Peter Suber's efforts with MIT Press or Kathleen Fitzpatrick's *Planned Obsolescence* – have come out

with a figure of £11,000 as an Article Processing Charge, which is with Palgrave Macmillan. Let us say that one has a book of 110,000 words. It does not take a mathematics degree to work out that the cost being proposed here is 10p per word, which certainly hones the mind. I mention this cost, though, because there has been, predictably, a massive backlash against gold Open Access in the humanities, for historical economic reasons. Although I am one of the less sympathetic voices to knee-jerk reactions to Open Access – mostly because, for reasons that I'll come to shortly, I think there are problems with the economy of prestige that operates in the journal model – there are fundamental differences in the funding models between the arts and the sciences, although this can be boiled down to one single difference, really: most humanities research is unfunded, or funded by the institution. Indeed, if funders such as the AHRC are asked to budget in an extra £11,000 for a monograph, I can accurately predict the future of the book: as limited as the dwindling number of grants the organisation will be able to make.

The history of this dystopian future – for I continue to believe that the research monograph holds value, where we are really talking about a monographic piece of work that extends an argument over a broader space, rather than a collection of disparate articles simply bound within a codex form – can easily be traced to a combination of 1.) the fetish for the material object and the privileged spheres and mechanisms of production that there operate; and 2.) the prestige economy.

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As this part of my presentation is, then, now starting to deal with two economic histories, I'll deal with the former point first so that I'm still firmly in the realm of economy as it relates to finance, rather than other circulations of the material or immaterial that could be called an economy of prestige. Kathleen Fitzpatrick succinctly points out in *Planned Obsolescence* that the very source of bookishness may lie with the fact that pages are bound, it is with binders that the notion of a “book” lies: “the formal properties of the book that have the greatest impact on our reading experience are derived not from print, but rather from the codex” (Fitzpatrick 91–92). The argument

by Peter Stallybrass that Fitzpatrick relays here is one wherein authors do not write “books”, we write “texts”. Conversely, printers do not print books, they print pages. The “book” is formed at the conjunction of prestige conveyed in peer-reviewed texts, with those pages printed on a formerly industrial, but now, an on-demand, scale, and with those pages being bound and distributed under the authority of an International Standard Book Number (ISBN).

Even if we change the notion of a book to an e-book, this “bookishness” factor disappears; all we are left with are visual metaphors for “pages” – the false bounding of the PDF, for example, that attempts to replicate the aspects of random access that we prize in the codex, while simultaneously keeping the indexical awareness that we need in order not to feel lost in a hypertext, (Fitzpatrick 97–98) remains, nonetheless, a non-digital-native form that still imagines its own printing and binding. In any case, regardless of what we regard as the quiddity of the book, the barriers to access for the technical production of a book is now substantially lower. Might we ask, also, though, in relation to the more recent historical process, whether the labour involved in the production is also commensurably lower?

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The alterations brought about through the injection technology are usefully framed through Marx's writing on technology. As Nick Dyer-Witford frames it, Marx cannot be reduced to a single stance on this front and instead makes several types of contradictory remark that broadly inform most of our current thinking on the role that technology has to play in capitalist economies: “scientific socialism, which sees techno-science as a central agent in a dialectical drama culminating in the inevitable defeat of capital; neo-Luddism, which focuses on technology as instrument of capitalist domination; and post-Fordist perspectives, which often look to the possibility of a technologically mediated reconciliation between labor and capital” (Dyer-Witford 38–39). I mention this, before moving back out to a more practical examination pertaining to technology and the book, because it is easy to see how different stances within the Open Access

movement sit within such frameworks. Academic OA evangelists are the first camp, who are proposing technological solutions to economic and social problems. I won't name any names, but I do know a few neo-Luddites who fall into the second camp and just wish things to return to the way they've "always" been. Finally, though, the final camp are those who suspect that OA and technological solutions might be the halfway house, promising reconciliation, but always with the sceptical spectre of "neoliberalism" hovering.

**[SLIDE]**

In any case, what actually happens with technology and books? The largest costs that publishers have cited (in informal correspondence/conversation) to me, are: 1.) organising peer review; 2.) typesetting, especially expensive XML-first processes; and 3.) production and distribution. Let us consider the implications of each of these matters with regard to technology.

The first of these matters – organizing review – is calculated on a ratio basis. Positing an acceptance ratio of 1 in 20 (ie. The publisher receives 20 submissions for which they have to organise review and they publish only 1 of those manuscripts), the publisher organizes 21 reviews, the costs for which must be recouped through the revenue generated by 1 book. Note well that I'm not factoring in any idea of profit here for the sake of simplified argument. Now, the costs of organizing review have fallen dramatically in many areas in light of technology. Firstly, in terms of delegated structures for journals, it is most often unpaid, or lowly-paid, academic editors who arrange this and, certainly in all humanities journals I've heard of, reviewers are unpaid. The internet allows this communication system to be effectively organized over a widespread geographical distance. The difference for monographs is that reviewers (unpaid, remember) have no desire to review a 110,000 word piece on a screen and I sympathize with them. There are, then, still material shipping and organizational costs involved in organizing review – especially considering that most presses have an internal review policy first.

The second, though, not so much; typesetting. Following on from my remarks just now on

the degree of unpaid labour that academics, beyond the author, put into a text, there are certainly technological solutions here that reduce publisher labour. Yes, traditional transcription into what is known as an XML-first typesetting system is clunky and time consuming. That said, though, if more of this technological task were put back onto authors (say, the insistence on certain styles being applied to each paragraph of a book), the process can be largely automated. If we're talking about a move to article processing charges and seeing publisher activities as “services” for which we pay, then, by that logic, there should be “levels of service”; those who can do more of the work themselves should pay less, just as I can paint my own house, or pay somebody to do it.

Finally, for this section, production and distribution. Nonrivalrous commodity exchange facilitated by the internet and the world wide web (which are not synonymous terms) makes the distribution costs of digital-only items extremely low, even if not zero. The point at which, though, additional costs could filter in here is in the publisher argument that free and open to access (ie. wide availability) doesn't equal wide-dissemination; they argue that there can be advertising costs involved in distribution so that people know about a book and that these have tangible costs. Certainly, I can think of free channels (much like a CFP list) that could serve to far better advertise a new book to academics if it was available for free; surely the main point of these adverts is because they need to sell, whereas academics traditionally find works through a catalogue/index search via library discoverability tools.

To conclude this section on the material economic changes through technology to our histories that affect the future, it is worth saying that all of the aspects I've highlighted here pit a scientific socialism, where technology will allow the utopian free-flow of ideas, against a loss of publishing jobs through diminished paid labour. This is an ethical problem that has to be addressed, for especially in the humanities, how human can we consider ourselves to be if the aim of liberating our ideas comes at the expense of setting “the workers free from their means of subsistence”, as Marx wryly puts it (Marx 566). Of course, the argument can be made for competition between

university jobs and academic jobs (“if our budget goes to publishers, why are their jobs more valued than ours?”), but tracing this causality is difficult and, although I feel some affinity with it, the competitive logic is also dangerous.

Let me now turn, though, towards a different area that has to be considered, one that could still be considered to be an economic history of the future, but one which is an economy of academic capital, tracing the flow of validation and hierarchy in the scholarly publishing ecosystem. This is important because, in the tripartite conjunction of author, binder and printer for the printed book's bookishness, even if all materiality is removed, the authorial material stands because of its reviewed nature.

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The nature of the review in humanities books as opposed to articles is substantially different. While external review of a book manuscript fulfils almost exactly the same function as in a journal – although, understandably a far more involved and lengthy process than that for an article – the role of the internal review for the monograph is curiously positioned between an economic decision to publish (which, interestingly, could be removed by the introduction of APCs, except that, in Palgrave's case they aren't asking if somebody wants to go OA before the review for reasons of impartiality) and a disciplining style that ensures that the book “looks like other books”, couched in the rhetoric of editorial experience. That second point sounds very cynical – it isn't meant to be, but is rather just supposed to be a consciousness-raising thought experiment, so let me come back to it.

The first of these points is, again, a material factor that is drastically altered when adjusting the economics of scholarly communications through open access. At present and in recent history, the monograph proposal document (prospectus, whatever you want to call it – and although this also varies by publisher), wherein we are requested to estimate the potential audience, reach and market competition for our works, remains the primary point at which we are confronted with the economic

realities of our choices of publication destination. There is something distasteful to think that one's esoteric, unquantifiable, niche research topic would be rejected on the basis of lack of economic merit, but this is the case and it pervades all scholarly publishing, not just the monograph, through the notion of importance.

The second of these internal review points, when thinking about what the future of the book will have to contend with, though, is perhaps more interesting. Publishers compete with each other on an economy of reputation. This works because hiring, firing and promotion are often done on the basis of a nominal interest in publisher brand. For instance, if a department is hiring a specialist in an area for which they are understaffed, they often will not be well-enough appraised of the area to make the call themselves on the quality of the work and will so rely on a shorthand – ie. A reputable press – to make the call, alongside external advice. One of the simultaneous functions of external review, though, is for an experienced editor to make a judgement on the amount of effort that the book will take, on the part of the publisher liaising with the author, to make it a readable project. I'd like to suggest, though, that part of what this means is to evaluate how far the text sits from the norms that are expected for a scholarly monograph. Applying the benefit of experience, after all, is a phrase that means trusting to a perhaps false mode of induction that “good books in the past have looked like this, and so work that doesn't look like this in the future cannot be good”, which seems a somewhat tenuous chain of logic (and excuse my Humean skepticism).

Because academic time wasted seems to be the leading marker of prestige damage, monographic presses may tend towards conservatism in a competitive economic environment so that they provide what they know that their customers want. It is left, then, to new experimental presses to forge new styles, which can then give them their own reputation, such as that forged by Zer0 Books in recent days. New OA monograph presses, such as the impressive Open Monograph Press, run by Gary Hall, are put in a difficult position. They are new and so do not already carry the weight needed to radically experiment with form, but are also forward-thinking in their approach to



the economics. Discipline and publish seems an adequate phrase for how conservatism and radicalism have to sit side-by-side in re-thinking the monograph for a reconfigured open access future.

I'd also like to voice a counter-argument against myself here, though – which can sound like a straw-man technique, but I assure you it's just rather that I haven't fully made up my mind.

**[SLIDE]** Most authors of humanities research monographs *like* having this editorial intervention, even if it is, to some degree, a pre-disciplining strategy. Indeed, this editorial assistance – for it is true that having somebody experienced to tell you the aspects that, in one's immanence, it is easy to overlook in a monograph-sized work – is a unique selling point for monograph publishers (with apologies for the business speak). The perceived value that publishers add, then, in the historical creation of the monograph is much greater than in the journal form. In journals, it is commonly accepted that reviewer feedback can vary from being incredibly harsh to unbelievably helpful, but that editorial intervention is usually nil. Conversely, in the publication of a monograph, it is expected that external reviewer feedback will be supplemented by internal expert guidance – there is clearly more work visible.

Which brings us back full-circle to economies and work/labour, which has been the underlying theme that I've addressed today. For £11,000, at a rate of £100/day, a salary of £35k, there's a theoretical 110 days of labour there. Now, obviously much goes on overheads – offices, travel, marketing, legal retainers etc. – but, clearly, there is quite a gap in that £11,000 to the “service” that's being provided and I think that this will be pretty clear in the brave new world where authors are exposed to these costs rather than assuming that the library will absorb them and that it isn't our problem.

What shall we do? The problem with speculating on the future is that it becomes determinate. This is the especial risk of some kind of history of the future approach. Certainly, I believe that our futures are constrained by our pasts, but I do not think we are without any agency

here. We need to decide upon the value of those editorial services. University Presses are drastically underfunded as it stands and, unless we intervene, in the near future, some will be deemed utterly infeasible. Journal articles, seriously and conversely, don't have these overheads in their labour. We need to effect a rapid transition to a model whereby subscription savings brought in by the technological transformations are used to save the future of the book object, whatever form, codex or electronic, that may take. We need to decide whether the monographic entity, whether that be a series of peer-reviewed pages that are then bound, or a more nebulous, unspecified-in-form text that spans 100,000 words, is something that we value and, if so, what it is that publishers add to the process that produces the entity that we recognise as a "book". We simultaneously need to confront the neoliberal (so far as that term has a meaning: I mean, rooted in efficiency, quantification and a false market logic of transparency) language ethics of "efficiency" with regards to publishers (not to speak of academics) in an economy where everybody must work, but where there isn't enough work and ensure that the shift to the future of the book doesn't merely introduce technology as an antagonist to labour wherein a precarious existence from a freelance service industry is the outcome, so that we may have books. The genie is out of the bottle and we can't pretend that past forms of labour continue to be needed. Indeed, ignoring the internet and technological transformations in order to falsely increase labour time and distribution cost cannot work. But a balance has to be found and I'm not sure what it is. We must also decide whether the discipling aspects of publishers' editorial practice continues to be desirable, or whether there is scope for a decoupling of expected form and normalisation, from the economic labour that is presently involved in that activity. **[SLIDE]**

I haven't, here, told you about the future of the book, only posed rather some difficult questions that we face in the transformations of that mode of communication. I'll now hand over to another speaker because, ultimately, it's a "we" that have to make these decisions, not any "I", but now is the time to be thinking if you want to be included in that active group.