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The Art of Publishing Open Access

Open access (OA) has become an integral part of the discussion on contemporary publishing in academia.[1] The advantages are obvious and well researched. However, it has become increasingly clear in recent times that OA can also have disadvantages and that the high expectations placed on OA have not been fulfilled, or only partially so. We hear of *predatory journals*, *paper mills*, and even systematic fraud[2], which, if not caused by OA, is at least facilitated by it. It is becoming apparent that the existing monopoly or oligopoly structures in the publishing industry, which are particularly prevalent in STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics), have by no means been eliminated by OA, but continue to exist, with the result that there is already talk of a new journal crisis.[3] The shift to low-cost digital forms of publication also seems to have contributed to a multiplication of article production in recent years, to such an extent that existing quality assurance procedures are seriously jeopardised and peer review is unable to keep pace with the growth in the number of articles[4]. With the triumph of AI, a new player is entering the field, which is likely to further fuel unbridled production in the future. The appearance of articles that identify AI as the author[5] is likely to remain the exception for the time being, but it can be assumed that AI is used regularly and that there are already numerous articles that have been written by AI either alone or with minimal contribution from human authors. The training of the underlying LLMs has ultimately also become possible on the basis of articles available on the internet or as OA: OA as reading material for machines.

The role of open access in the sense of freely available online content is ambiguous at this point, but ultimately consistent, because the publication of articles in open access follows the logic of the digital world, which not only offers the possibility of reading literature largely unhindered by restrictions of place and time, but also of reading this literature by machines and, in a further stage of development, generating it largely independently. This is where the real paradigm shift lies, which is obscured rather than illuminated by the term ‘Open Access’. For it is by no means only a matter of creating OA for readers, but of understanding research articles as objects of machine readability or generation. From this perspective, an article falls more into the category of "data" than "document".[6] And it is no coincidence that FAIRness is increasingly being demanded for literature, too, [7] which means nothing more than optimising the resource for algorithmic access. It is relatively easy to describe what a FAIR digital publication looks like. It starts with the specification of standardised metadata, continues with the coding of structural elements (e.g. in JATS or TEI format, see below) and ends with suitable aggregations (*collections as data*, St. Barbara Statement[8]). But before embarking on the FAIR "datafication" of a publication (FAIR Principles = Findable, Accessible, In-

teroperable, Reusable), in view of the dramatic developments, it is important to ask what one actually wants to achieve with such algorithmic enhancement. Ultimately, the main aim will be to optimise TDM, NLP or AI, on the assumption that this will also make it possible to improve research. Thus, even in the mythical beginnings of the digital humanities, Father Buza's *Index Thomisticus* (the clergyman fits well into the narrative), it was already recognised that data and algorithms broaden the horizons of research and allow us to ask questions that could not be asked using traditional methods, or, to get to the point, that save us from the flood of publications: "How Not to Read a Million Books?", as Unsworth[9] prophetically put it at the time from today's perspective. That is indeed what has happened, but perhaps not in the way the community once expected.

For the approach of *distant viewing* formulated by Moretti[10] is increasingly becoming a dystopia of a machine room largely removed from scientific activity and understanding, which places both reading and writing entirely in the hands of an AI that, as popular literature has long anticipated, will mean that mankind is doomed if the AI machines are not handled with care and properly educated.[11]

OA as a vehicle for ruin or abuse is a new and unfamiliar perspective. It seems that OA as a form of digital publication has brought problems inherent in the scientific publication system to light. The initial ideas and expectations that OA would offer freer and fairer access to literature and the opportunity to publish openly have not been lost, but their effectiveness must be questioned in light of recent developments. The Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI), which is still authoritative, reflects these high expectations:

> *Removing access barriers to this literature will accelerate research, enrich education, share the learning of the rich with the poor and the poor with the rich, make this literature as useful as it can be, and lay the foundation for uniting humanity in a common intellectual conversation and quest for knowledge.*[12]

Taking stock of the developments today is sobering. OA has only partially fulfilled these expectations. Research has only been accelerated in individual disciplines, as self-archiving is prohibited by publishers or publishing institutions in many disciplines and the sensible principle of *publish first, filter later[13]* that could have been a solution to a couple of problems has not been widely adopted. Similarly, expectations for the establishment of a global network of repositories have not been met[14], even though e.g. arXive[15] and Zenodo[16] perform some of these functions. Scholarly education is being enriched, but the demands on data literacy have grown immensely in view of the countless digital resources on the internet, some of which are of questionable quality.

Furthermore, it is doubtful whether other Third World countries have gained equal access to research publications, with inaccessibility shifting from reading to publishing and the visibility of their own research remaining low despite e.g. SciELO[17] due to a lack of indexing in relevant databases.[18]

The reasons for these increasingly problematic developments lie primarily in the fact that publishing, whether OA or not, has an inherent ambivalence. On the one hand, it serves to inform researchers about research, but on the other hand, it also serves to enhance the reputation of researchers and the institutions where they are employed.[19] The requirements for

conveying information efficiently are different from those for establishing reputation or prestige. At the same time, both aspects are intertwined through the element of attention. High attention leads to high reputation and, conversely, high reputation leads to high attention. Controlling attention plays an important role for research from both perspectives[20]; it serves as a filter for a plethora of publications, but also as a necessary selection process with regard to the quality of the respective contribution and the associated reputation of the researcher(s). Publishers take advantage of this connection: "Reputation seems to be the commodity that drives researchers to select a certain journal, and publishers set their APC fee accordingly".[21] It is obvious that with the global increase in the number of publications (see above) – from 2016 to 2022, it has risen by around 47%[22] – the pressure on selection mechanisms is also increasing, because the number of scientists who read research articles has probably hardly increased worldwide, so that with an increased volume of publications, either the number of publications that can be read in relation to the total volume decreases relatively, or techniques or procedures must be developed that allow scientists to keep track of their field or the topics that they are interested in. For example, *systematic reviews* are used, which filter according to strict quality criteria and consolidate research results, or general retrieval or AI techniques are used, whereby the type and quality of the data basis is crucial. Traditionally, specialist bibliographies are also used, which provide an overview of the essential publications in a particular field, such as the International Bibliography of Art[23] in art history.

However, intellectual and manual processes are particularly time-consuming and are reaching their limits in view of the exploding number of publications, so that, if no change occurs, it must be assumed that an overview of current literature production can only be achieved with AI. AI is part of the problem and part of the solution, as will become apparent later. At any rate, it is obvious that if the same number of researchers are producing an ever-increasing number of publications, this has little or nothing to do with increased research activity. The logic of reputation acquisition forces researchers to divide their contributions into as many small publications as possible (*salami slicing*), which increases citation frequencies but adds no value to research. On the contrary, fragmentation makes it more difficult to find relevant information. One could also argue that, if one follows this logic, the information value of a publication decreases in favour of its reputation value.

The logic is simple: a researcher who divides a topic into five articles has a longer publication list and, perhaps more importantly from a reputation perspective, another researcher working on the topic must cite five articles instead of one, which is reflected in the common citation-based metrics as reputation value (impact factor, etc.). This does not mean that bibliometrics in general or the impact factor in particular are bad in themselves, they are simply being misused[24] or counteracted by the publication or citation behaviour of scientists. This process of *multa, sed non multum* is fueled by fraudulent actors such as *paper mills*, which often use AI to bring largely worthless (low-information) articles onto the market.

If we take a closer look at these events, we cannot but conclude that the publication problems of the present day, be it the new journal crisis or fraudulent activities, are rooted in the reputation system of science, which is primarily sustained by

publications. The information function can largely be disregarded here, because the problems mentioned would not exist if the sole purpose of a publication were to provide information about research matters. As a thought experiment, imagine a publication system in which all contributions appear anonymously. *Paper mills* and *predatory journals* would immediately be deprived of their raison d'être, without this being detrimental to the dissemination of information. The choice of journals would also be subject to different criteria, such as whether the article can be found by Google or AI. Much would also change for the oligopolistic publishers, as the transfer of information, unlike the transfer of reputation, shifts the focus of attention away from the author towards the text. The author's interest in publishing in certain journals with a supposedly high impact factor would be low, as there would be no personal disadvantage to publishing elsewhere. Of course, citation analyses would remain in place as a function of directing attention and selection, but contributions rather than authors would be weighted metrically. Under this assumption, there would be little interest in dividing the topic up using *salami slicing*, because it would disperse attention rather than concentrate it. Of course, this is only a thought experiment, because if all texts were actually anonymised, a significant incentive to publish at all would be lost, and with it a potentially important driver of innovative research.

Nevertheless, these considerations make it clear why the *author pays* or *article processing charges* (APC) model has been so successful for commercial publishers and why OA has strayed so far from the original ideas of the BOAI. The mechanisms that tie reputation to publications act like drugs that are hardly possible to break free from. Other approaches, such as in mathematics, to acquire reputation through criteria such as scientific prizes[25], or other metrics such as altmetrics[26], which seek to determine reputation through a broader approach to scientific communication, have only limited effectiveness.[27].

What solutions are available in view of the current impasse? That scientists suddenly abandon the journals they have traditionally used to build their reputations or acquire scientific status in the respective community is unlikely, as painful experiences in the past have shown.

The system is well-established and appears to function smoothly. Appeals to change the situation largely go unheard. The obvious evidence of abuse of the system by large publishers is understood and criticised, but usually has no consequences for one's own actions. For example, economists have a very narrow reputation system that is linked to a few journals. The fact that is accompanied by the formation of a monopoly and the disappearance of the "market", something that should be immediately understandable to the discipline, is largely ignored. And accordingly, it is not surprising that even the price pressure exerted on scientists has only a limited effect. Research by Khoo[28] shows that price plays only a minor role in the choice of a journal: "*These findings suggest that authors are not sensitive to price in a way that can control APC hyperinflation*." Authors are willing to spend a lot of money on their own reputation, but switching to cheaper options is rarely an option. Ultimately, the problem must be understood in its social context. Peer pressure prevails. Those who do not follow the existing publication regime of their community are ostracised

and forfeit their prospects of academic recognition. Exceptions, such as established researchers who no longer "need" to publish in certain journals, prove the rule. The stifling effects vary from subject to subject or even cut right through subjects. We are dealing here with a system that, according to economist Milton Friedman, will probably only change when a crisis occurs: "*Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change*".[29]

As long as the crisis is not perceived and "felt" as such, there will be no or only marginal changes. Past experience allows no other conclusions. For a long time, the crisis in the publishing market was not noticeable to scientists. Libraries and other central institutions have paid the price. National projects such as DEAL in Germany[30] and other countries have also followed the principle of making the costs as invisible as possible to individual academics: "Authors will not be invoiced by the publishers".[31] Institutions are to pay, not the end user. The relevant publishing industry now also consistently follows this principle. After unsuccessful experiments in the early 2000s to sell electronic books to end users who were not willing to pay the high prices, the publishing industry changed tack and sold e-books only to intermediaries such as libraries.[32] It is significant that in the DEAL context, the publishing industry only spoke up when individual institutions began to charge end users[33], as this undermines a well-established business model.

In view of this, it should be clear that alternative models will at least have a difficult time. Diamond Open Access is currently considered the most important:

> *"Diamond Open Access refers to a scholarly publication model in which journals and platforms do not charge fees to either authors or readers. Diamond Open Access journals represent community-driven, academic-led and -owned publishing initiatives. Serving a fine-grained variety of generally small-scale, multilingual, and multicultural scholarly communities, these journals and platforms embody the concept of bibliodiversity. For all these reasons, Diamond Open Access journals and platforms are equitable by nature and design."*[34]

The existence of this model alone will not be enough to bring about comprehensive change in the publication system, but it is a necessary condition, and the realisation that we have strayed from the path laid out by the Budapest Declaration and that a return to this beginning and its goals is necessary for a new start is an important first step: "Technically, the diamond and green models are the only ones that are compliant with the original Budapest OAI definition".[35] However, in addition to the affirmation that only Diamond and Green are "true" OA, concrete offers must also be made. In the past, those in academia who were willing to make the switch often failed because research infrastructures were unable to offer them comparable alternatives. This has changed thanks to European and national funding policies.[36] However, in addition to the prerequisites for alternative structures, it must also be demonstrated that deviating, so to speak, publication behaviour is visibly successful in crisis conditions and is adopted by high-status actors. Declarations alone and appeals to reason (see above) will not bring about a breakthrough, even if they represent important framework conditions for justifying the change.

The tone is high, with keywords such as "equity, knowledge as a public good, community-driven, diversity, transitioning to diamond, research assessment and recog-

nition, multilevel cooperation."[37] In this case, crisis means above all that not only the conditions for reception and publication are deteriorating dramatically, but also that the means of financing publications are no longer sufficient, for which the evidence is currently raising: "They concluded that 'the amount of money currently available in the system of scholarly communication is probably not sufficient for the sustainable financing of publishing fees'. This assertion contrasts sharply with the conclusion of a subsequent report by the Max Planck Society (Schimmer et al., 2015), which stated exactly the opposite". [38]

Above all, this means that the key players, the authors, are directly affected, so that in the worst case scenario they will no longer be able to afford to publish. The pressure is increasing as scientific infrastructures are becoming less and less able to cover the costs. In the past, they have mostly financed the publication of researchers through OA funds or other grants, usually administered by libraries, as research infrastructures also have an interest in the publication of their scientists and derive reputation from their reputation. However, cost increases coupled with lower budgets often entail that costs are being passed on to scientists, thus exacerbating the sense of crisis which may well have positive effects in terms of systemic change, but – otherwise talk of a crisis would be pointless – also means that scientists and research institutions are faced with massive problems in terms of gaining reputation. In the competition for funding and prestige, they risk falling behind in terms of relevant impact factors and university rankings. If publications are no longer affordable, the injustices of the system will become even more apparent, and publications in high-impact journals will only be affordable for institutions or scientists who have access to sufficient financial resources. The former journal crisis, which restricted access to literature, is now turning into a publication crisis and thus has far more serious implications for science than before, because publication opportunities are being restricted, not on the basis of the quality of a contribution, but on the basis of sufficient financial resources, a process that will sooner or later destroy the scientific system, as it may exclude important research from the publication system.

However, the crisis is not only economic in nature. Science is threatened from two directions. On the one hand, the explosion in the number of publications is smashing the existing quality assurance systems, and on the other hand, the triumph of AI is calling into question the role of the author as an authority for assigning reputation. If the development of AI proceeds at the pace we experience right now it will be almost impossible to maintain the system of author-based reputation assignment. Essentially, generative AI will lead to another form of anonymisation, because we will be confronted with a situation in the foreseeable future in which there are no longer any clear authors, because a claim to authorship in the traditional sense can no longer be validly proven. In the best case scenario, authors will then be people who formulate prompts and vouch for what the AI has generated. The latter will of course no longer apply if the AI itself acts as the author. In this case, there will no longer be any direct human responsibility for what is written. Here, too, the crisis offers opportunities, because the use of AI does not automatically mean that the publication system will collapse. However, as in the economic field, this

requires a fundamental change in publication behaviour and the elimination of the conditions that characterise today's publication landscape and have led to the current undesirable developments.

When searching for a solution, it makes sense to return to the starting point of these developments. OA is not the decisive factor in itself, but rather digital technology and the internet, from which OA has emerged as the best form of publication. It is digital technology and the internet that have radically changed the conditions of distribution: Texts and data can be distributed largely free of charge via the internet, rendering previous paper-based distribution methods obsolete. The need for a complex (commercial) distribution system, which publishers have taken on in the past, no longer applies. Today, anyone, even technical novices, can conveniently and easily distribute their contributions by posting them online. The possibilities are numerous and easily accessible. In the scholarly segment, for example, the Zenodo repository hosted by CERN (see above) is particularly popular. In addition, almost all universities and non-university research institutions also have repositories or a publication infrastructure, so there is no shortage of options. In the last couple of years, the technical conditions for the production and distribution of publications have much improved and are now on a par with commercial offerings. OJS and Janeway are efficient platforms that support the publication process. New, digitally oriented concepts that have broken free from the constraints of the print era are available and can be implemented on the basis of well-established formats such as XML or RDF. With JATS or TEI, there are standards that have the potential to fully exploit digital publications and are increasingly becoming commonplace in view of an XML-based workflow.[39] Concepts such as knowledge graphs expand the functions of publications[40] by viewing publications not only as resources for reading, but also as data (*publications as data, see above*). Peer review could take place separately from the primary publication (preprint) in the form of overlay journals. The alternative solutions are already in place, both technically and conceptually. In conjunction with a datafication process, the internet has long since become the decisive publication medium and, to put it positively, offers decisive added value over traditional printed forms of scientific communication. Publishers no longer have a function in this system if they base their business model on the sale of publications, but they do have a function if they see themselves as service providers in the production of publications. A publication model that follows the logic of the internet and digital technology makes published content immediately available online for general reuse, typically under a CC BY or CC BY-SA licence. Other licences are not OA in the strict sense.[41] Important for the dissemination of information is indexing and findability in relevant, specialist search engines, as well as long-term preservation in public archives. In order to counter the crises of the economy, mass publishing and AI-based publishing, the scientific communities themselves must take action. It is in their hands to change the system. In art history, for example, this has been partially successful in Germany. Arthistoricum.net has broken the economic vicious circle by bringing together a critical mass of art history publications and removing them from the constraints of the conventional market. This is *an* encouraging *proof of concept* that demonstrates that such a change of direction is possible. With the Diamond Open Access model and related European initiatives (DIAMAS, CRAFT-

OA, etc.), the European Diamond Capacity Hub (EDCH)[42] and national hubs such as SeDOA[43] in Germany, there is hope for change and that mechanisms can be established in this way that solve not only the economic problems of the current publishing system, but also the problems resulting from misguided reputation structures and misused metrics. For "when a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure" (Charles Goodhart). The elimination of APCs, for example, makes the business model of *predatory journals* practically impossible. Financing journals instead of articles would reduce the incentive for publishers to publish more than necessary. *Salami slicing* would become unattractive for them. The clever use of AI could make it easier to assess whether contributions are truly new or merely replicate what is already known. If the quality problem of AI can be reliably addressed, overview and summary literature would hardly be necessary anymore and could relieve the publication market. Ultimately, different, free metrics operated by the community itself would be needed[44] to operate objective databases that are not geared towards commercial products. The fact that Scopus, which is owned by Elsevier, evaluates Elsevier journals, for example, contradicts all criteria for independent evaluation, no matter how accurate it is. It would also be important for scientific institutions themselves to rethink their quality measurement procedures and reduce the influence of metrics that are detrimental to science. The fact that the ranking of a journal tends to determine quality rather than the content of an article is one of the main reasons why the quality of scientific research is declining.[45] Scientific institutions themselves should rethink their quality measurement procedures and reduce the influence of this kind of metric. It becomes absurd when it turns out that a high impact factor is even indicative of poor research.[46]

Unlike in the early days, the art of OA publishing today no longer consists solely of publishing articles under free licences, but above all in the general enforcement of the principles of openness, as formulated in particular in the Diamond Open Access movement. This is not just about new publication procedures, but an attempt to correct undesirable developments in scientific publishing and to help the spirit of open access, as expressed in the Budapest Declaration, to achieve a breakthrough. The path to this goal is thorny and fraught with pitfalls. Perhaps it will not be possible without an intensification of the crisis and the resulting hardships, but the evidence of undesirable developments is so clear that there is hope that, with persistent effort on the part of science and scientific infrastructure, change is possible, even if it will take years and must be worked on gradually from discipline to discipline. Art history is already well on its way.

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Abstract

Since the publication of the Budapest Declaration in 2002, Open Access has established itself as an important publishing standard worldwide. Nevertheless, many of the hopes associated with the formulation of its principles at that time have not been fulfilled. On the contrary, problematic developments have emerged in some areas, which, if left unchecked, threaten the entire scholarly publishing system. This article examines the moments and factors that led to this crisis, the role Open Access has played in it, and where action is needed to ensure the success of the original idea of Open Access as expressed in the Budapest Declaration.

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