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# Ownership, Control, Access & Possession in Open Access Humanities Publishing



by Mark Turin

The theme for Open Access Week 2019 is 'Open for Whom? Equity in Open Knowledge', a topic that runs through much of my research and increasingly

shapes my teaching.

The issue of whose voices are represented—in print, online or on air—by whom and for whom, is particularly salient for under-represented and historically marginalized communities. Communities of colour and Indigenous peoples have more often found themselves to be objects of scholarly interest and academic scrutiny rather than recognized as co-creators of the research and equal partners in the publishing projects that follow. The phrase ‘Nothing About Us Without Us’—while historically associated with disability inclusion and empowerment—has greater relevance than ever, and offers us an opportunity to rethink how we share information in this digitally connected world.

For Indigenous communities in North America and beyond, the institutional momentum behind open access imperatives risks infringing (and even violating) long-held cultural protocols about who should be privy to certain forms of information and traditional

knowledge, and when and how these are to be shared. The First Nations principles of OCAP®—Ownership, Control, Access and Possession—are important standards that all of us working in cultural heritage need to study with care.

Local Contexts, an innovative initiative that supports Native, First Nations, Aboriginal, Inuit, Metis in Canada and Indigenous communities the world over in the management of their intellectual property and cultural heritage—specifically within a digital environment—has crafted a series of Traditional Knowledge licenses and labels that move the conversation beyond one-size-fits-all Creative Commons models.

Such ideas are not just ‘good to think with’; they are being operationalized by communities and scholars in highly original ways. From 2012-2017, with funding from the Virtual Museum of Canada, the Stó:lo Research and Resource Management Centre worked together with the Scowlitz First Nation.

Ursus Heritage Consulting, the Making Culture Lab at Simon Fraser University and a diverse team of archaeologists, software developers and designers to produce an extraordinary exhibit entitled 'Sq'éwlets: A Stó:lo-Coast Salish community in the Fraser River Valley'. In this multilingual and culturally-rich online space, the Stó:lo community make powerful use of customized Traditional Knowledge labels and specify that 'our community chose the labels used on this site in order to help site visitors to understand and respect our knowledge and cultural heritage.'

By locating Indigenous knowledge and voices at the center of such work and being more aware of the responsibilities that such sharing entails, scholars, technologists, library staff and publishers are asking complex and necessary questions about how open access functions when it comes to managing and disseminating sensitive cultural content.

As a case in point, my own university recently launched OpenSpace, a model



recently launched RavenSpace, a model of publishing that embraces collaboration, respects Indigenous protocols, and uses digital tools in imaginative ways to make knowledge accessible and shareable across communities and generations.’ Founded by UBC Press and developed with the participation of the University of Washington Press and partners, the first publication in the series is a beautifully rebuilt, digital edition of the award-winning *As I Remember It: Teachings (ʔəms taʔaw) from the Life of a Sliammon Elder*, the print edition of which was published just a few years before.

Advances such as these will—I hope—help to disrupt the public perception of humanities scholarship and publishing as still fundamentally single-authored, print-monograph-driven, library-based and typically uncollaborative. While open access discussions in the sciences focus mostly on journal publishing—and the financially and psychologically coercive models this can generate—the

arts, humanities and social sciences

arts, humanities and social sciences have different needs, goals and constraints when it comes to open access.

One of the most enduring challenges remains educating colleagues, some of whom remain deeply invested in traditional models of knowledge production and reproduction, and are curiously unconcerned or uninterested about what other opportunities might exist. Many have heard horror stories of rapacious and predatory commercial publishers dressed up in open access clothing, and are understandably reticent about engaging. Others express lingering concerns about the prestige and scholarly standing of open access models. Needless to say, the wider availability of a peer-reviewed publication in no way compromises its quality and academic integrity.

A fair number of scholars are still oblivious to the true costs associated with book and manuscript production. Those of us involved in open access publishing initiatives in the humanities

need to do better at explaining the complex financial realities involved in what is referred to—in the ever more scrutinized and neoliberal operating environment of Canadian universities—as ‘knowledge mobilization’.

Open access is not free: there are ongoing costs associated with all aspects of the endeavor. And as the examples I’ve outlined here illustrate, there is also no reason why open access needs to be all or nothing. Guided by the values and intellectual goals of the communities with whom we have the privilege of working, scholars in the humanities and social sciences are better positioned than ever to create respectful partnerships and build adaptive platforms that help to collect, protect and connect cultural knowledge in ways that are more responsible, ethical and sustainable.

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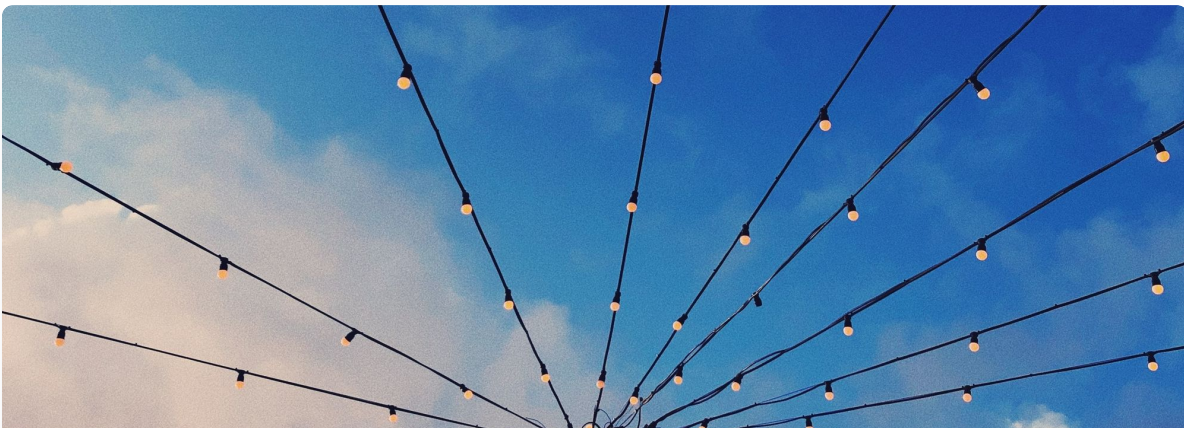
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