Publishing and Mediatization – an Exploratory Workshop

Summary by James Meese

On the 21st of June 2017, Martin Fredriksson and Bodil Axelsson at Linköping University brought together a multinational group of academics to talk about the future of academic communication. The day opened with a keynote from Gary Hall (Coventry University) who articulated a vision of radical publishing that could operate in a post-literate world before a series of senior academics offered their own views on this issue, which in a way collectively stood as a diverse series of responses to Gary's original provocation.

David Rowe (Western Sydney University) considered the ethical questions around publication that were raised by Gary, linking these conversations to the broader funding environment and the increased focus on research impact that has spread from the United Kingdom. He noted that The Conversation (a website that publishes research in a consumer-friendly format) may be indirectly affecting broader labor issues in the media industry. While publishing these articles may provide some greater awareness around our research, we were essentially providing labor for free, which previously may have been provide by paid journalists. Collectively, the issues raised by David and Gary surfaced set of ethical questions regarding what sort of publications academics engage in and broader structural factors influencing our practices.

Eva Hemmungs Wirtén (Tema Q, LiU) introduced her recently funded 2016 ERC Advanced Investigator Grant for the project "Patents as Scientific Information, 1895-2020," (PASSIM). The project approaches patents as documents and examines the mixed economy surrounding the processes of scientific discovery. Eva provided a brief explanation of the patenting process, which sees patented inventions and processes required to be subject to public disclosure in order to gain protection. In doing so, she offered an analogous narrative about academic knowledge that highlighted tensions between the knowledge that is

protected and the knowledge that is circulated and the extent to which broader publics can access and actually use academic knowledge in an era of costly journal subscriptions.

James Arvanitakis (Western Sydney University) continued this discussion by considering the question of academic and public exclusion through the lens of piracy. He explored the increasing cost of textbooks for students, the potential of viewing piracy as a generative force that supported education as well as the extent to which our own publication practices are exclusionary and lock out the public through particular forms of discourse or discussion. He ended with a provocation: What would (or does) an academic form of piracy look like?

Finally, Jesper Olsson discussed the development of Media Labs at Linköping University and considered how academics could use new formats and experiences to communicate academic knowledge. This raised a potential tension between funding bodies and narratives of impacts and metrics and more creative outlets but had the potential to open academic horizons and suggest a range of forms, vessels and experiences through which academic knowledge could be retained and shared. As Gary Hall mentioned throughout, "there was no easy way of doing this", but the workshop stood as an impetus to start thinking through these difficult questions.

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