

Openness AND THE Intellectual Commons

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‘Openness’ is one of the central contested values of modern liberal society and falls under different political descriptions. In this chapter I employ ‘openness’ to signal and introduce a new spatialization, interconnectivity, mobility, personalization and globalization of learning and education.

The dimensions of openness and ‘open education’ (Peters & Britez, 2008) found a beginning in education with the concept of The Open University as it developed in the United Kingdom (UK) during the 1960s. The concept of openness considered in the light of the new ‘technologies of openness’ of Web 2.0 promises to promote interactivity and encourage participation and collaboration and help to establish new forms of the intellectual commons now increasingly based on models of open source, open access, open archives and open education. Where the former is based on the logic of centralized industrial mass media characterized by a broadcast one-to-many mode, the latter is based upon a radically decentralized, ‘many-to-many’ mode of interactivity. To exemplify the progress and possibilities of this second possibility we might examine Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s (MIT’s) OpenCourseWare and Harvard’s open access initiative to publicly post its faculty’s papers online. The real and immediate possibilities of a form of openness that combines the benefits of these first two forms provides a means to investigate the political economy of openness as it reconfigures higher education in the knowledge economy of the 21st century.

The underlying argument of this editorial focuses upon the ways in which new forms of technological-enabled openness, especially emergent social media that utilizes social networking, blogs, wikis and user-created content and media, provide new models of openness for a conception of the intellectual commons based on peer production, which is a radically decentralized, genuinely interactive and collaborative form of knowledge sharing that can usefully serve as the basis of 'knowledge cultures' (Peters & Besley, 2006; Peters & Roberts, 2011). The first concept of openness was based on social democratic principles that emphasized inclusiveness and equality of opportunity. The mechanism of this notion of openness followed that of industrial broadcast mass media, which was designed to reach a large audience on a one-to-many logic. The second form of openness is based on what might be called principles of liberal political economy, particularly intellectual property and freedom of information. This second iteration of openness employs new peer-to-peer architectures and technologies that are part of the ideology of Web 2.0 and given expression in ways that emphasize the ethic of participation ('participatory media'), collaboration and file-sharing characterizing the rise of social media.

This new form of openness provides the basis for a new social media model of the university that embraces the social democratic articles of the original Open University and provides the means to recover and enhance the historical mission of the university in the 21st century (Peters, 2006). It also provides mechanisms for jettisoning the dominant neoliberal managerialist ideology and returning to a fully socialized view of knowledge and knowledge sharing that has its roots in Enlightenment thinking about science and its new practices in commons-based peer production. At the same time, however, I recognize that any re-theorization of the university must move beyond the limitations of even this form that—despite its logic of openness—often coheres around exclusive institutions such as MIT and Harvard and is correspondingly reliant on factors of exclusivity, including intellectual property and the privileging of 'expertise.' Consequently, the development of openness as it relates to the university must move from the social democratic model of the first concept, and the liberal political economy model of the second, to a new version of openness based on the 'intellectual commons.' Only through such a development might this new institutional possibility achieve its potential as a locus of true social and intellectual inclusion and social and economic creativity.

With Web 2.0, there is a deep transformation occurring wherein the Web has become a truly participatory media; instead of going on the Web to read static content, we can more easily create and share our own ideas and creations. The rise of what has been alternately referred to as consumer- or user-generated media (content) has been hailed as being truly groundbreaking in nature. Blogging and social networking with the facility of user-generated content has created revolutionary new social media that characterize Web 2.0 as the newest phase of the Internet.

New interactive technologies and peer-to-peer architectures have democratized writing and imaging and, thereby, creativity itself, enabling anyone with computer access to become creators of their own digital content. Writers and video makers as 'content creators' are causing a fundamental shift from the age of information to the age of interaction and recreating themselves in the process. Sometimes this contrast is given in terms of a distinction between 'industrial media,' 'broadcast' or 'mass' media, which is highly centralized, hierarchical and vertical based on one-to-many logic, versus social media, which is decentralized (without a central server), nonhierarchical or peer governed and horizontal based on many-to-many interaction.

Forms of industrial mass media, including books, newspapers, radio, television, film and video broadcast media, were designed to reach large audiences within the industrializing nation-state. The major disadvantage of this media form is the criticism of manipulation, bias and ideology that comes with a one-to-many dissemination, its commodification of information and its corporate method of production and distribution (Thompson, 1995). Mass media communication is a one-way transmission model where the audience is reduced to a passive consumer of programmed information which is suited to mass audiences. Both industrial and social media provide the scalable means for reaching global audiences. The means of production for industrial media are typically owned privately or by the state and require specialized technical expertise to produce and payment to access. Social media, by contrast, is based on the Internet as platform and tend to be available free or at little cost, requiring little or no technical operating knowledge. There are also profound differences in production and consumption processes, in the immediacy of the two types of media and in the levels and means of participation and reception.

Even so it is not a question of straightforward replacement. Many of the industrial media are rapidly adopting aspects of social media to develop more interactive capacity. CNN, for instance, has introduced its blogs with viewer participation and interaction and encourages viewers to follow stories on Twitter and Facebook. This means that new media will not simply replace old media but rather will learn to interact with it in a complex relationship Bolter and Grusin (2001) called 'remediation' and Henry Jenkins (2006) called 'convergence culture.' Jenkins (2006) argued that convergence culture is not primarily a technological revolution but is more a cultural shift, dependent on the active participation of the consumers working in a social dynamic. Douglas Kellner and George Kim (2009) theorized YouTube as the cutting edge of information and communications technology (ICT) and characterized it as a dialogical learning community and for learning-by-doing, learning as communication, learning through reflection on the environment, learning as self-fulfillment and empowerment and learning for agency and social change.

The socially networked universe has changed the material conditions for the formation, circulation and utilization of knowledge. ‘Learning’ has been transformed from its formal mode under the industrial economy, structured through class, gender and age to an informal and ubiquitous mode of learning ‘anywhere, anytime’ in the information and media-based economy. Increasingly, the emphasis falls on the ‘learning economy,’ improving learning systems and networks, and the acquisition of new media literacies. These mega-trends signal changes in both the production and consumption of symbolic goods and their situated contexts of use. The new media logics accent the ‘learner’s’ *coproduction* and the active production of meaning in a variety of networked public and private spaces, where knowledge and learning emerge as new principles of social stratification, social mobility and identity formation.

New media technologies not only diminish the effect of distance but they also thereby conflate the local and the global, the private and the public, ‘work’ and ‘home.’ They spatialize knowledge systems. Digitalization of learning systems increases the speed, circulation and exchange of knowledge highlighting the importance of digital representations of all symbolic and cultural resources, digital cultural archives, and new literacies and models of text management, distribution and generation. At the same time, the radical concordances of image, text and sound and the development of global information/knowledge infrastructures have created new learning opportunities while encouraging the emergence of a global media network linked with a global communications network together with the emergence of global Euro-American consumer culture and the rise of global edutainment media conglomerates. In the media economy the political economy of ownership becomes central; who owns and designs learning systems becomes a question of paramount political and philosophical significance.

New models of flexible learning nest within new technologies that are part of wider historical emerging technocapitalist systems that promote greater interconnectivity and encompass all of its different modes characterizing communication, from the telegraph (city-to-city), the media (one-to-many), the telephone (one-on-one), the Internet (one-to-one, one-to-all, all-to-one, all-to-all, many-to-many, etc.), the World Wide Web (collective by content but connective by access) and the mobile/cell phone (all the interconnectivity modes afforded by the Web and Internet, plus a body-to-body connection). At the same time, these new affordances seem to provide new opportunities for learning that reflect old social democratic goals concerning equality, access and emancipation that made education central to both liberal and socialist ideals.

Well before the emergence of the Internet and the phenomenon of social networking appeared in the mid-1990s, the model of the ‘open university’ in the UK was established as technology-based distance education in the 1960s.

The Open University was founded on the idea that communications technology could extend advanced-degree learning to those people who, for a variety of reasons, could not easily attend campus universities. The Open University really began in 1923 when the educationalist J. C. Stobart, while working for the infant BBC, wrote a memo suggesting that the new communications and broadcast media could develop a ‘wireless university.’ By the early 1960s many different ideas were being proposed, including a ‘teleuniversity’ that would broadcast lectures, as well as provide correspondence texts and organizing campus visits to local universities. Yet The Open University was not merely an institution that followed from the development of technical mechanisms of openness. From the start the idea of the ‘open university’ was conceived, in social democratic terms, as a response to the problem of exclusion. Michael Young (Baron Young of Dartington, 1915–2002), the sociologist, activist and politician, who first coined the term and helped found The Open University, wrote the 1945 manifesto for the Labor Party under Clement Attlee and devoted himself to social reform of institutions based on their greater democratization and giving the people a stronger role in their governance.

A Labor Party study group under the chairmanship of Lord Taylor presented a report in March 1963 concerning the continuing exclusion from higher education of the lower income groups, proposing a ‘University of the Air’ as an experiment for adult education. The Open University was established in Milton Keynes in September 1969 with Professor Walter Perry as its first vice chancellor. It took its first cohort of students in 1970, which began foundation courses in January 1971. Today The Open University has some 180,000 students in the UK (150,000 undergraduate and more than 30,000 postgraduate students), with an additional 25,000 overseas students, making it one of the largest universities in the world. Over 10,000 students attending The Open University have disabilities.

The first and second iterations of university openness have provided significant benefits to society. The social democratic character of openness promoted inclusion and opportunity for a wider range of people than who would have been traditionally enrolled in university. Knowledge exclusivity was challenged by the institutional assertion that knowledge is a public good. The second form of openness, with its confluence of freedom of information and technological affordances, further provided a freedom to use, share and improve knowledge. However, both of these forms of openness are necessarily restricted: the first by technical infrastructure limitations and the latter by resource imbalances and the exclusivity necessary to intellectual property.

The next version of openness, what I call the ‘intellectual commons,’ combines aspects of the two earlier forms to maximize their respective benefits, while reducing limitations. In this model of openness, the nation-state places education at the center of society and human rights. In this sense, it shares similarities to the

form of openness based on social democratic goals. At the same time, it also shares with the new form of openness a culture of social, ICT-driven knowledge sharing and innovation. However, the ‘intellectual commons’ differs because its ideological foundation is not social democratic, nor that of liberal political economy. Instead, it is based on what can be called ‘radical openness’ and a logic that provides the basis for protecting and expanding public education and for redesigning the public sphere. This is what I have described in terms of a concept of ‘creative labor’ that conceptually and in practice pits itself against human capital theory (Peters, 2013).³

The intellectual commons provides an alternative to the currently dominant ‘knowledge capitalism.’ Whereas knowledge capitalism focuses on the economics of knowledge, emphasizing human capital development, intellectual property regimes and efficiency and profit maximization, the intellectual commons shifts emphasis toward recognition that knowledge and its value are ultimately rooted in social relations, a kind of knowledge socialism that promotes the sociality of knowledge by providing mechanisms for a truly free exchange of ideas. Unlike knowledge capitalism, which relies on exclusivity—and thus scarcity—to drive innovation, the intellectual commons alternative recognizes that exclusivity can also greatly limit innovation possibilities. Hence, rather than relying on the market to serve as a catalyst for knowledge creation, knowledge socialism marshals the financial and administrative resources of the nation-state to advance knowledge for the public good.

Consequently, the university, as a key locus of knowledge creation, becomes the mechanism of multiple forms of innovation, not merely in areas with obviously direct economic returns (such as technoscience) but also in those areas (such as information literacy) that facilitate indirect benefits not merely beholden to concern for short-term market gains. Positioning the university in this way might seem overly idealistic, perhaps even disconnected from the tremendous financial realities facing universities, and higher education in general, in much of the world. Reactions of this sort, however, rely on the assumption that the current neoliberal model of higher education, with primacy placed on selling educational ‘products’ to ‘consumers,’ is the best remedy to diminishing funding. Furthermore, although individual economic actors maximize personal benefits through their consumption choices, these choices frequently do not correspond to broader societal needs. Free exchange of knowledge in higher education, for instance, does more than provide economic returns to individual actors and institutions. It can also maximize the place of universities in the global knowledge-based economy by collective, education-based innovation, based on radical openness and new forms of collaboration (Peters, 2013).

NOTES

1. This chapter is based on an open access editorial for the *Open Review of Educational Research* (volume 1, 2014) that itself was based on an excerpted and edited version of a chapter written with Garrett Gietzen and David Ondercin, both PhD students at the time at the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign). The chapter is called 'Knowledge Socialism: Intellectual Commons and Openness in the University' (Barnett, 2012).
2. See the Finch report, 'Accessibility, Sustainability, Excellence: How to Expand Access to Research Publications. Report of the Working Group on Expanding Access to Published Research Findings,' at <http://www.researchinfonet.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Finch-Group-report-FINAL-VERSION.pdf>; the UK Government's 'Government to Open Up Publicly Funded Research,' at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-to-open-up-publicly-funded-research>; the UK Research Council's (RCUK) 'Policy on Open Access and Supporting Guidance,' at <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/RCUK-prod/assets/documents/documents/RCUKOpenAccessPolicy.pdf>. See also the Research Information Network (RIN) report on these and related development at <http://www.researchinfonet.org/finch/>
3. See the YouTube presentation, 'Radical Openness: Creative Institutions, Creative Labor and the Logic of Public Organizations in Cognitive Capitalism'; keynote by Michael A. Peters (Waikato University, New Zealand) at the conference, 'Organization and the New,' at Philipps-Universität Marburg (Germany), at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZ5zb8gyAr4>

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