SEVEN

# The future of being
# a scholar

The renowned science fiction author Octavia Butler, after writing 11 novels about the future, concluded that predicting the future is difficult:

> Some of the most mistaken predictions I've seen are simply, 'In the future, we will have more and more of whatever's holding our attention right now.' If we're in a period of prosperity, then in the future, prosperity it will be. If we're in a period of recession, we're doomed to even greater distress. (Butler, 2000)

We are mindful of Butler's observation as we consider the future of being a scholar.

Imagining a future in which there is a turnover all at once from legacy to digital models of scholarship is unhelpful in thinking about the changes afoot. Indeed, thinking of legacy and digital scholarship as binary risks committing a type of 'digital dualism' (Jurgenson, 2012). Digital dualism is a habit of thinking that conceives the online and offline to be largely distinct and separate. This way of thinking perpetuates a myth of cyberspace as someplace out there, away from real life (Rey, 2012).

A common (mis)understanding created by this way of thinking is that lived experience is zero-sum: that time spent online means less spent offline (Jurgenson, 2012). Embracing this kind of dualism is to overlook the ways that the digital and the material are imbricated, the way they overlap in everyday life (Sassen, 2002; Wajcman, 2002). In the digital era, we are no longer merely consumers of media nor only producers; we have become *prosumers* – both producers and consumers at the same time (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010). So it is with scholarship.

The future of being a scholar will include using a *bricolage* of digital practices, which will continue to change. As just one example, take the way in which reading is changing. If a scholar reads a printed book to understand the argument and then goes online to search that same book for keywords, authors cited, and page numbers of a particular passage, that scholar is engaging in both legacy and digital scholarly practices. University presses and other book publishers may catch up to this scholarly hybrid use of text by offering different versions of a volume for a lower price, but that day is not yet here. It may very well be the case that once publishers catch up to this practice, scholars and readers of all kinds will have moved on to different technologies that suit their needs more fully. As another example, perhaps more commonplace, consider the card catalogs that have now been almost entirely replaced (in North American and European academic libraries, at least) by databases and search engines, shifting researchers from analog to digital practice. Today, being a scholar means having to navigate through overlapping legacy and digital models of scholarship that can seem like two different worlds. In the not-too-distant future, we will not find the digital worth remarking on, because it will be so ordinary. Such predictions have affective repercussions.

'Superstition, depression and fear play major roles in our efforts at prediction', suggests Octavia Butler about the way emotions influence our ability to imagine the future (Butler, 2000). While the Internet may trigger excited, happy feelings about the possibility of exploring new realms for some, for others, the rise of digital media technologies can signal loss, longing and affection for another time.

This confluence of emotional reactions is similar to those evoked by artist Ann Hamilton's public artwork for the San Francisco Public Library (Hamilton, 2015). When the new library opened in 1996, keyboards and computer terminals supplanted the card catalog, and Hamilton's spectacular installation uses the artifacts of the displaced system to make art. She took 50,000 individual paper cards from the catalog and, working with 200 artist collaborators, annotated each one with a quote from the book referenced on the card. Taken together, the cards make up a dramatic display at the entrance to the library that suggests 'the reverie of reading and researching'. When a friend and academic colleague of ours first encountered Hamilton's public art project, "I just wept," she says. For her, the demise of the card catalog brought a great sadness. The keyboards and screens seemed like a cold replacement for the warmth and tactile pleasure of wooden drawers and paper cards. For scholars who came of age before the Internet, like our friend, the transformation from legacy to digital practices can

feel like a loss. Yet, for the generation of scholars that come after us, wooden drawers full of paper cards don't carry this emotional valance. Instead, drawers full of cards simply seem like a terribly inefficient way to search for information. While the memories of browsing a library with wooden cases of paper cards may fill some of us with nostalgia for our own emergence as scholars, we can't let this obscure our clear vision of the changes happening to knowledge production and what this means for the future of being a scholar.

Digital media technologies make it easier to create hybrid projects across fields that are typically separate. The future of being a scholar will include more blending of academia, journalism, and documentary filmmaking, particularly around activism. Our particular experiment was to bring together scholars, activists, journalists, and documentary filmmakers around specific topics in order to focus public attention on these issues, forge new partnerships, and create new knowledge through a series of summits, podcasts, and allied open access eBooks. Digital media technologies make possible new kinds of collaborations, and the future of being a scholar will be more collaborative. It will include more collaborations between journalists and academics, such as the one that Louis Paul of *The Guardian* and Tim Newburn of the London School of Economics created with their project *Reading the Riots* (see Chapter Two). As Newburn remarked about academics, 'we have a lot to learn from journalism' (Devine et al, 2013). Yet, for scholars who want to learn the skills of contemporary journalism or documentary filmmaking, at the present time there are scant opportunities to do so.

Digital media training for academics is still missing at most institutions, and those who want to learn are mostly left on their own to become autodidacts. Our experiment was an intra-institutional partnership to offer free, open classes in digital media technologies to academics and activists. The CUNY Graduate School of Journalism had an existing set of courses designed for journalists making transition from legacy to digital, and we took those same workshops and modified them slightly to make them more relevant for the rest of academia. These proved popular with faculty and graduate students, activists, and those working in non-governmental organizations, as well as with administrative staff at the university. Academic institutions benefit from the use of digital media by faculty, graduate students, and staff. Administrative staff use digital media technologies to promote degrees, departments, and programs, and to recruit and retain students. When faculty and graduate students share their research on social media alongside their institutional affiliation, they boost the profile and reputation of the university. Forward-thinking academic institutions of

the future will find ways to offer such training for scholars, particularly if they want scholars engaged in the public sphere.

For scholars who want to have an impact beyond the academy, the scholarship of engagement is possible in new ways through digital media technologies (Boyer, 1996; Stewart, 2015a, 2015b). At the same time, the Internet makes it easier to reach wider publics, and it also makes it easier to measure reach in downloads, hits, views, and re-posts. These altmetrics influence conventional metrics of citations in peer-reviewed literature (Eysenbach, 2011; Priem et al, 2012).

The unintended consequence of Eugene Garfield's influence on the current use of flawed and controversial metrics may serve as a cautionary tale for those who are enthusiastic about the promise of metrics based on digital media to be truly alternative in any meaningful way. Our own experiment here with metrics failed, as we met with obstacles to even surveying faculty, who suspect that such measures can be used for punitive, neoliberal regimes such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the UK. If the discussion of measuring scholarly impact remains within a framework of managerialism to ensure the smooth operation of the neoliberal university, then the future of being a scholar is grim indeed.

There are other ways of conceptualizing scholarly impact. A different approach to measuring scholarly impact is to focus on social justice metrics. If scholars in the future are to take seriously Boyer's call to 'vigorously engage in the issues of the day', then we will need to change the discussion about metrics to one that focuses on inequality (Boyer, 1996). Jonathan Butler and other students at the University of Missouri issued a list of demands that included social justice metrics. These social justice metrics were things like the demand that 10% of all faculty be people of color, and that there be a 10-year plan for retaining students of color. These social justice metrics, in combination with other protest strategies, were a way for Butler and other students to hold the administration at the University of Missouri accountable for the inequality within the institution.

Using metrics to highlight injustice and hold the powerful accountable is part of a longer tradition of social justice metrics that could be traced back to Ida B. Wells-Barnett, a journalist, scholar, and activist, who was the first to compile statistics about lynching when the US government was uninterested in such data collection (Giddings, 2008). Today, Samuel Sinyangwe is leading a team of data scientists, activists, and journalists, who are using digital media technologies to map police violence at a time when the US government is not collecting these data.[1] In the future, the discussion of scholarly impact

will have to shift to social justice metrics, if we are to transform the neoliberal university.

These digital practices have a material, embodied basis as well as a political context, and these will shape the future. Being a scholar will mean confronting the inequality within higher education itself. This will depend a great deal on what the investment in faculty hiring will be and who will be included in those hires. Several things are true about the academy now: it is a white-dominated system in every sector (Supiano, 2015), there is less willingness to support higher education as a public good (Holmwood, 2011), and there are a declining number of full-time, tenure-track positions available to those with PhDs (Kendzior, 2014). This means that issues raised by the students at the University of Missouri and other campuses across the US in the fall of 2015 were not an aberration, but a harbinger of things to come. The inequality within the academy, and how this reflects the broader patterns of social inequality, will continue to be a feature of being a scholar. The future of being a scholar will, of necessity, have to encounter some constellation of these social facts. Of course, how you see that future depends entirely on where you are standing.

## Where are you standing?

'It's also true that where we stand determines what we're able to see', writes Octavia Butler about predicting the future (Butler, 2000). Where we stand affects what we see when we consider the future of scholarly practice.

For those who stand in a place from which they want to remake universities and colleges into blueberry farms or widget factories, the rise of digital technologies seems to hold the promise of remedying the 'cost disease' of the labor-intensive project of higher education. From the standpoint of administrators who want to increase 'productivity' – by which they mean increasing the number of credentialed students in the shortest possible time to degree with the fewest number of faculty – the fantasy of MOOCs as a technological solution to the crisis of underfunding in higher education is appealing.

For faculty who often stand in classrooms and who appreciate participatory pedagogy, the digital turn means a future in which opening education is possible in new ways. For students who stand at the entrance to college, they will expect to encounter digital technologies in the classroom. They will enter college already immersed in a near ubiquitous digital media environment. Being a

scholar in the classroom will mean guiding students to make critical sense of the digitally mediated environment in which we all find ourselves. From the standpoint of lifelong learners, there will be even more opportunities now to learn online. One ripple effect of the 'Year of the MOOC' is that it has renewed a wider interest in, and experimentation with, teaching in digitally networked environments. The MOOCs started by Siemens and Cormier have spawned dozens of non-corporate, faculty-driven experiments in different ways of teaching. From SMOCs to SPOCs to DOCCs to our own POOC (see Chapter Three), these scholar-designed learning environments have expanded the conversation about what it means to be a scholar in the digital era. Whether administrators, faculty, students or lifelong learners, where we stand affects what we see when we look to the future of scholarly practice.

For those who stand outside the academy, without official university affiliations, it may not seem as if there has been, or will be, much change in scholarly practice. Over the length of this project, we saw at first hand Robert Darnton's point about the iron gates with spikes protecting the university as a metaphor for the way scholarly publications are sealed behind paywalls (Darnton, 2012). This system keeps out a whole range of people who want to read academic work, from scholars in other hemispheres to students who have already graduated to the university's neighbors. Walling off knowledge like this even keeps out academic authors who have contributed their own words to those restricted journals (Tadween Editors, 2013).

Now, chrome turnstiles that require university IDs with electromagnetic strips to pass through them have replaced the iron spikes, but they are just as effective at barring outsiders from entering the academy. When we located our course in a specific neighborhood, our goal was to make a difference on our own campus, in the neighborhood and around the world – and in many ways we did that. Thousands of people from around the world participated in the course, and more importantly, people from the neighborhood connected with others in the course. The model of open access we forged with that course has become a standard against which others can measure their own degree of openness. With additional funding and an institutional commitment to continue, that neighborhood-focused course could be a permanent feature opening the university to the community. This sort of ongoing investment in the community and this endeavor would have gone a long way to address at least part of the well-deserved criticisms we heard from some in the community. However, even with a greater investment, we would still have to find a way to address the inequality

of resources between the university and the neighborhood, and the very real ways in which the university is an enclosed space. Such a project will always have to confront the politics of land use, real estate, and the physical space of the campus building at a time when elected officials, campus administrators, and campus security are at odds with neighborhood residents. Where one stands matters in how one views the enclosure of the university.

Currently, the big five commercial publishers have a cartel-like grip on the ecosystem of scholarly publishing, charging exorbitant fees that are choking library budgets and creating a serials crisis, while holding scholarly societies and associations in their grip through profit-sharing deals. Resistance to this legacy model of publishing is building. From 'declarations of independence' when entire editorial boards resign, such as those at *Lingua* did, to the formation of online and open journals such as *Cultural Anthropology*, there is a growing move toward throwing off the big five publishers and charting new paths toward open access. Where you stand in relation to the means of production of knowledge will change how you see the future of publishing.

People have always resisted this enclosure of the university and of knowledge. For one of us, the act of smuggling people into libraries was part of a commitment to the idea that access to information is a basic human right; for the other, someone asking, 'Why are you doing this work?' became a catalyst for rethinking the legacy model of scholarly publishing.

## Forward thinking: investment, engagement, and a vibrant public sphere

The future of being a scholar relies in equal measure on the changes being wrought by the forces of commercialization and the shift toward digital models of scholarship. It is a common mistake to conflate the struggle between commercialization and democratization with the transformation from legacy to digital forms of scholarly practice. Too often academics want to resist commercialization by refusing the digital. In our view, this is a misplaced refusal that reflects a misunderstanding of the forces at play. If we take at face value that the goal of colleges and universities is to promote an enlightened citizenry, then what must lie ahead must be to challenge the status quo and transform being a scholar in ways that align with the pressing needs of a democratic society (Saltmarsh and Hartley, 2011).

From where we stand, the future of being a scholar will increasingly include various forms of digitally engaged resistance to the neoliberal war on higher education. At the same time that there are powerful forces aligned against the academy, scholars have amazing new opportunities to do their work in ways that matter to wider publics. A decisive step for scholars who want to become more engaged with digital media is to own the content of their own professional identity online. For many scholars, their only digital presence is a page on a departmental website that they have no control over and could not change or update even if they wanted to do so. A 'domain of one's own' that you can manage independently of any institution is crucial (Udell, 2012). From there, other possibilities emerge.

Scholars are beginning to demand that they own their work, whether books, journal articles, or the journals themselves. Groups like the Authors Alliance[2] offer scholarly authors guidance on how to get the rights to their work back from publishers. Opening access to academic work in turn makes with collaborators across sectors, between and among scholars, activists, journalists, documentary filmmakers, and other artists. Such collaborations will play an important role in the future of being a scholar. Owning one's own work also means that it can be shared with students in the classroom.

Being a scholar in the digitally networked classroom means guiding students to new knowledge and helping them become lifelong learners. Digital technologies make opening up the process of learning easier, and it can enlist students in the creation of knowledge and in their own learning. As scholars align with students through participatory pedagogy, the shared position of faculty and students within the machinery of the academy is an inevitable topic of concern. As student debt climbs to historic levels and faculty positions are increasingly precarious, these interests find a natural alliance against the corporatization of the university, and of course, digital media technologies can amplify and grow such an alliance.

We foresee a future in which digitally networked activism about academia – both within our institutions, pushing back on efforts that expand commercialization, and outside those institutions – plays an ever-increasing role. Scholars and students will become energized to demand that elected officials fully fund this public good or risk the disappearance of scholarly life altogether.

Our experiment was possible because of the investment of a philanthropic foundation, and it offered a clear vision of what might be if there were a broader commitment to substantial investing in the public good by municipal, state, and federal governments and by

foundations. These kinds of institutions responsive to metrics, and what we can imagine is a future in which social justice metrics – like the ones the students at the University of Missouri used – will be applied to foundation boards, to college and university administrators, as well as to elected officials, to hold them accountable for persistent social inequality.

When Octavia Butler was asked to write a memorandum outlining her vision of the future, she chose to write about the importance of education in her life. 'I was poor, Black, the daughter of a shoeshine man and a maid', Butler explains. About her ambition, and society's reaction to it, she says: 'At best I was treated with gentle condescension when I said I wanted to be a writer'. She grew up to be an acclaimed author of science fiction novels and a MacArthur 'Genius Grant' award winner. She was certain about what made her achievement possible: 'Without the excellent, free public education that I was able to take advantage of, I might have found other things to do with my deferred dreams and stunted ambitions' (Butler, 2000).

The future of being a scholar will have to find a way to encourage the next Octavia Butlers, the next geniuses who will help us to imagine new worlds. Otherwise, why are we doing this work?

## Notes

1  See http://mappingpoliceviolence.org/
2  See www.authorsalliance.org