EDITED BY VIRGINIA KUHN AND ANKE FINGER

SHAPING THE DIGITAL DISSERTATION

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES

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9. Publish Less, Communicate More!

Reflecting the Potentials and Challenges of a Hybrid Self-Publishing Project

Sarah-Mai Dang

In 2014, I finished my doctorate in film studies at Freie Universität Berlin, having writen my thesis on Hollywood chick flicks—conceived through the lens of aesthetic experience, feminist film theory and genre theory. When I was looking for a way to best publish and disseminate my research, the product of more than six years' work, I was surprised to learn that finding an appropriate publisher did not necessarily go hand in hand with disseminating the work in as far-reaching a way as possible. Advice from both senior scholars, as well as colleagues who had already been through the doctoral process, was, first and foremost, to look for a publisher with an outstanding reputation within the disciplinary community. The potential reach seemed to be of secondary importance, the conditions of the publishing contract of no relevance at all.

The fact that authors in the humanities usually receive little if any monetary compensation while at the same time assigning all their rights of use exclusively to the publisher is not a significant issue for most scholars.[1] The publication itself is enough of a reward for many since

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1   The rights of use are necessary for publishers in order to carry out marketing measures and produce several versions of a book (paperback, hardcover, e-pub, open access). However, only a minority of the publishers makes use of the various promotion and distribution possibilities. For this reason, in my view, transferring the rights of use constitutes rather a disadvantage for the authors restricting them to freely disseminate their work.

it is an indication of expertise, a criterion for tenure and for research grants. Seema Rawat and Sanjay Meena (2014) even claim that 'most of the published research works are done just to improve the curriculum vitae (CV)' without actually carrying scholarship forward.[2] They argue that, in order to increase their visiblity as academics and subsequently receive further funding, researchers are forced to create 'publishable research' instead of spending time on significant research or teaching. According to Rawat and Meena, while the number of journals has increased, most publications go uncited due to the lack of appreciation or importance. Even though they speak from the perspective of medical research, their critique also applies to the humanities. The emphasis on publishing takes time away from other fundamental scholarly tasks such as developing a thorough research agenda or an innovative teaching concept—or making scholarly knowledge accessible to a broader public.

I did not know what the pressure to publish-or-perish actually meant until finishing my doctorate thesis. Before, my assumption was that scholarship is geared towards advancing and disseminating knowledge. Today, I am far more aware of the academic system's complexity, its implicit requirements and its power structures, particularly when it comes to the economy of reputation.

For the last several years, I have been exploring the academic publishing ecosystem theoretically and practically. The epistemic conditions of knowledge production in the humanities have become one of my main research areas. After first focusing on open access practices, today as a postdoctoral researcher I scrutinize open scholarship more broadly concerning the political, cultural, technological, economic and legal implications. Since finishing my doctorate I have experimented with various publishing formats and started two blogs about scholarly publishing and open science. The visible overall outcome of my exploration is oabooks.de—a hybrid self-publishing dissertation project.[3]

In this chapter, I reflect upon how the project has developed and consider both the potentials, and challenges, of a digital dissertation.

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2   Seema Rawat and Sanya Meena, 'Publish or Perish: Where are We Heading?', *Journal of Research in Medical Sciences*, 19.2 (2014), 87–89 (at 88), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3999612/

3   The website is written in German, as are my original doctorate thesis and initial blog. The newly launched Open Media Studies Blog (https://www.zfmedienwissenschaft.de/online/open-media-studies-blog) on the website of the German journal for media studies *Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft* also publishes English posts.

I outline the reasons for my decision to publish my dissertation across four different media formats. In doing so, I elaborate on the specifics of various publishing platforms while also touching upon the core question of how to define legitimate scholarship. I conclude by explaining the most significant findings of my project and what areas need further exploration.

I. One Size Does Not Fit All: Why Publish Four Different Formats?

In Germany, it is mandatory to make the dissertation accessible to the public in order to complete the doctorate. The supervisors (usually two) have to assess and authorize the manuscript before publishing. Sometimes, but not often, they demand slight changes. It is usually the doctoral candidates who decide on how much editing effort they want to invest in the official publication, which, in the humanities, is still typically a printed monograph. Some scholars 'publish' their thesis via microfiche with the university archive before they officially make it accessible as a book. This is an easy and efficient mode of 'publicaiton' because microfiche does not cost much and helps preserve their work in the long term. However, the main reason for choosing this format lies in the possibility to receive the doctoral award fairly quickly, within a couple of months after the defense. Scholars later officially publish their thesis as a printed book—sometimes after major editing, sometimes with only a little revision. The whole publishing process (finding a suitable publisher, revising the dissertation, applying for funding) can easily take up to two years or more. In Germany, it is common for authors in the humanities to pay an academic publisher for the book production, whether it is a thesis, an anthology or a traditional monograph. Due to the relatively small edition of a scholarly book and hence an estimated small profit, academic publishers calculate so-called printing allowances for the book. These can vary—between 2,500 to 7,000 euro per book (excluding editing)—depending on the status and reputation of the publisher and the author.[4]

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4   This does not include open access. For an open-access monograph in Germany, an extra fee of between 2,500 and 10,000 euro has to be paid by the author to the publishing house.

The printing allowance has to be paid by the author. If working on an externally-funded research project, the publishing costs are calculated in the project finances. Doctoral candidates, postdoctoral researchers and professors, who are regularly employed by a university, and independent scholars have to apply for third-party funding from foundations or organizations such as the *German Publisher Association* or *Verwertungsgesellschaft Wort* (*VG Wort*), the collecting society of authors, in order to pay the printing allowance. If the application is rejected, scholars have to look for a publisher who can produce the book at relatively low costs, since the printing allowance is quite a considerable amount of money for an individual to pay. For some academic publishers, who accept almost every manuscript, these printing allowances create significant income in addition to the regular sales figures. They are sometimes mockingly called 'subsidy presses' by academics outside the humanities community. However, their publishing program is by no means mediocre or poor. While some publishers follow a publishing strategy which includes a broader range of topics (and audiences), others focus rather on specific areas and target groups. A detailed comparison of the various academic publishers in Germany is beyond the scope of this chapter. In principle, in my experience, the quality of a book in terms of content as well as aesthetics and materiality does not necessarily depend on the amount an author invests financially in the publication or the reputation of a publisher.

As a research assistant at an externally-funded Collaborative Research Center of my university at the time, I would have been able to spend €5,000 on publishing. This would have allowed me to choose a well-known publisher for releasing my dissertation as a book.[5] Yet, the more I explored my options, the more I was unwilling to publish in a system that thrives on the symbolic capital of the book, the restrictions by copyright law and traditional gate-keeping structures. Since in 2014 the publishers I had contacted felt rather reluctant toward open access or any form of self-archiving and were also skeptical regarding a digital dissertation, I decided to disseminate my work myself and make the whole publishing process a research project. My goal was to find a way

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5   It is important to clarify that also in Germany academic publishers have their own
     principles that govern manuscript acceptance. While some publishers are known
     for accepting nearly every submission, others are more selective.

of publishing my thesis that meets what I consider to be three essential requirements: a) accessibility, b) broad distribution, and c) expediency for media studies. Assessing the advantages and disadvantage of already existing multimedia platforms such as Scalar (which offered some impressive possibilities, but was too complex for my needs), text-focused content management websites such as MediaCommons Press (which offered a functional framework, but was ultimately too academic for my desired goal of a broader audience) and ebooks (which provide convenient usage but involve a complicated set-up and lack of standardized file formats and thus compatibility), I realized that one size does not fit all. Therefore, and for the purpose of experiment, I published my dissertation in four different ways, each serving a specific purpose: 1) the original PDF, which emphasizes the institutional part of the doctorate, 2) a website, which speaks to a larger readership, 3) a print-on-demand book, which appeals to book lovers and fulfills standards for common dissemination and 4) a traditional book in English, which opens the discourse to an international community and meets typical professional requirements.
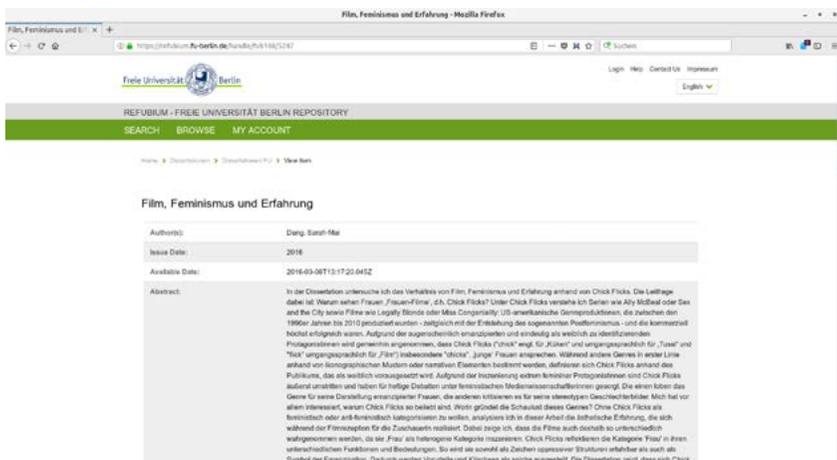
1. An Original PDF Version

Fig. 1 Screenshot of the Freie Universität Berlin repository, by Sarah-Mai Dang (2018), https://refubium.fu-berlin.de/discover?filtertype_0=mycoreId&filter_relational_operator_0=equals&filter_0=FUDISS_thesis_000000101486. CC BY 4.0.

To complete my doctorate, I deposited the original dissertation in the university's repository (see Fig. 1). An institutional repository ensures free access, quick retrieval and sustainable archiving. A PDF can easily be downloaded, marked, forwarded and stored. Scholars do not have to pay any fee for uploading. By making the official version available I also wanted to emphasize that a doctorate thesis represents a preliminary result and not a final product. It is important to remind ourselves that research is a perpetual process and that knowledge is always relative and changes over time. Sometimes this seems to be forgotten, even though one of the humanities scholars' key premises is the relative cultural and social constitution of meaning.
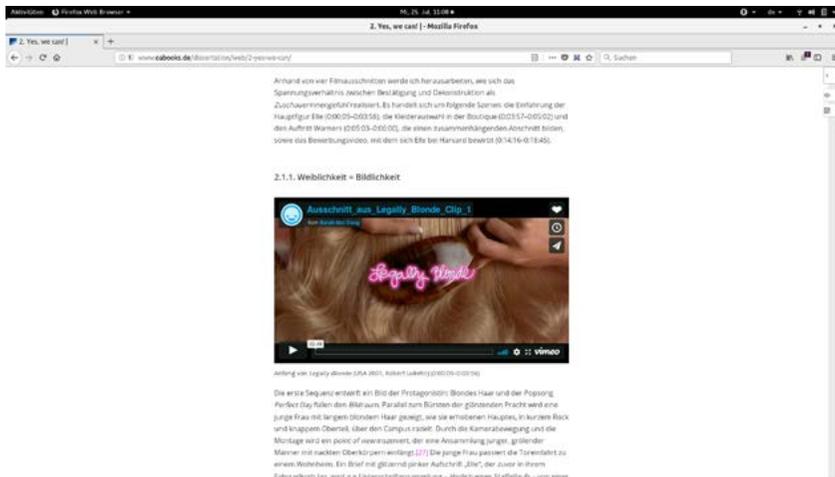
2. A User-Friendly Website

Fig. 2 Screenshot of the second chapter with an embedded film clip, by Sarah-Mai Dang (2018), http://www.oabooks.de/dissertation/web/2-yes-we-can/, CC BY 4.0.

With the help of an editor, I undertook an extensive revision of my thesis before publishing it both as a website with embedded videos and screenshots (see Fig. 2) and a print-on-demand book. The freely available software WordPress allows the author to easily include videos and other media so that the reader can immediately watch the specific film clips while studying the work. When media becomes substantial to the argument, this is very beneficial—if not indispensable—in terms of comprehensibility and transparency for all scholars who analyze

audiovisual material, especially film and media scholars. Media objects are for humanities scholars what laboratory measurements are for neuroscientists: research data—the basis of well-founded argumentation. Thus, it is important to make artifacts accessible whenever possible and copyright regulations allow it.[6]

Although the idea of film as an audiovisual language has been a preoccupation of film and media scholars for a long time, the concept of Alexandre Astruc's *caméra stylo* has not really made it into academia as a scholarly practice. Aesthetics and serious reflection still seem to be two distinct dimensions in most researchers' daily routines. Emotional engagement and affective analysis are regarded as (too) subjective and therefore not a legitimate form of scholarship. The concept of an objective, detached researcher is still prevalent in academia and hard to overcome. In my view, however, passion and reason are not incompatible. Nevertheless, due to the easy use of remix technologies and the access to an abundance of material online, more and more scholars have started experimenting with media-rich formats as a site of reflection. Exploring 'new forms of literacy', as Tara McPherson puts it, 'that include authoring and analyzing visual, aural, dynamic, and interactive media', 'multimodal scholars' approach their objects of study differently.[7] They take experience and affect in the context of scholarship seriously.

Catherine Grant, who has initiated various platforms and open-access projects to explore alternative ways of producing and sharing scholarly knowledge, is one of the first media scholars who has been recognized for their videographic essays.[8] Kevin B. Lee is also well-known in the field of audiovisual film studies, even beyond academia.[9]

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6   For example, the European Court of Justice has ruled that embedding videos is equivalent to including hyperlinks and therefore legal if the copyright holder has already made the film freely accessible online. Since an embedded video is not a copy it does not affect copyright law. See Ilja Braun et al., 'Spielregeln im Internet 1: Durchblicken im Rechte-Dschungel', *Texte 1–8 der Themenreihe zu Rechtsfragen im Netz*, 35 (2017), pp. 38–39, https://irights.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Spielregeln-im-Internet-Bd-1-2017.pdf. In my case, however, I extracted and uploaded the embedded film clips myself. This is legal because the film scenes function as quotes and not merely embellishment. Unfortunately, there is no fair use doctrine in Germany law, yet.

7   Tara McPherson, 'Introduction: Media Studies and the Digital Humanities', *Cinema Journal*, 48.2 (2009), 119–23 (at 120–21), https://doi.org/10.1353/cj.0.0077

8   See https://vimeo.com/filmstudiesff

9   See https://vimeo.com/kevinblee

Meanwhile, the *European Journal of Media Studies, NECSUS* has created an extra section for audiovisual essays;[10] the Society for Cinema and Media Studies has founded [*in*]*Transition: Journal of Videographic Film & Moving Image Studies*, which publishes video essays exclusively.[11] Scholars, usually with an activist agenda, and artistic researchers, also explore the non-linear participatory potential of interactive web documentaries. The international i-Docs Symposium was convened for the fifth time in Bristol in 2018.[12] Since 2005 the interdisciplinary *Journal of Culture and Technology in a Dynamic Vernacular, Vectors*, has published multimedia texts, which have received multiple awards.[13] The peer-reviewed works are accessible online. Also, the open-source semantic web software Scalar, the template that arose out of *Vectors*, is now widely used by scholars. These are just a few examples of the many projects that film and media studies scholars have initiated in the past years.
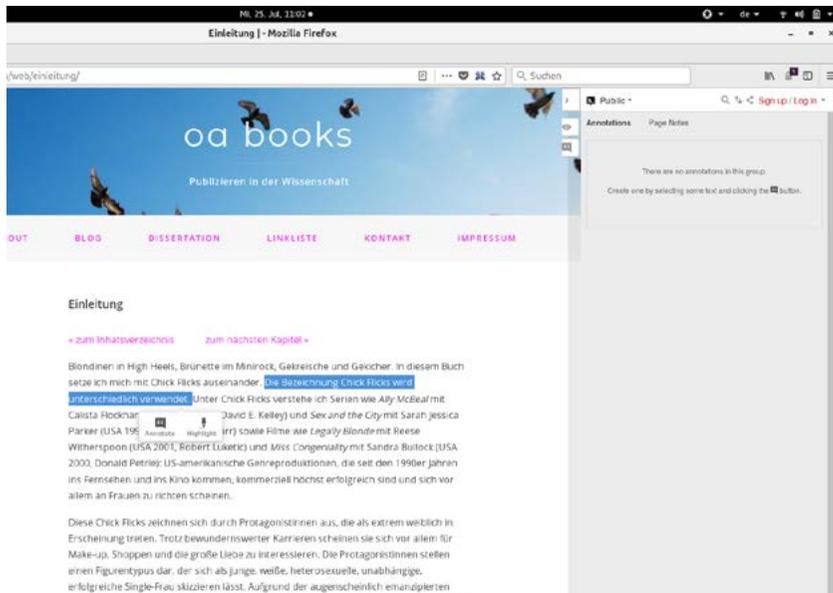
Fig. 3 The screenshot demonstrates annotating with hypothes.is, by Sarah-Mai Dang (2018), http://www.oabooks.de/dissertation/web/einleitung/, CC BY 4.0.

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10   See https://necsus-ejms.org/
11   See http://mediacommons.org/intransition/
12   See http://i-docs.org/about-interactive-documentary-idocs/i-docs-symposium/
13   See http://vectors.usc.edu/issues/index.php?issue=7

Since I started thinking about how to publish my dissertation *after* it was already written, oabooks.de provides a conventional digitized text rather than a dynamic multimodal website. Yet, in constructing the various versions, I focused on both form and content as well as on the usability of a specific medium. A website can easily be searched, copied and shared. By taking into account essential design elements such as responsivity, navigation, annotation options, typography and color scheme, I optimized the website's accessibility, usability and reach. I chose to build a responsive website which—unlike a PDF—automatically adapts to the size and display of any device and looks good on laptops, tablets and smartphones. Furthermore, I implemented a linked table of contents which directly refers to the chapters as well as footnotes which lead to additional comments. A scroll-to-top button enables the reader to immediately get back to the beginning of the page. I also used hypothes.is, a freely available annotation tool which allows for both collaborative open peer review and personal comments in a private mode (see Fig. 3). In order to provide easy access and a reader-friendly interface I set up an intuitive navigation structure and applied a typography suitable for the web and mobile applications. Of course, the text, which is vital to my project, has to be adjusted to the level of discourse as well. Being trained as well in journalism, I wrote my thesis with a broader public in mind. Similarly, I deliberately went for a vibrant look (by applying pink to the hyperlinks and uploading a non-academic related header) so that the website would not appear too 'serious'. Creating a user-friendly website required lots of consideration of the visual concept and technical aspects as well as sufficient time for designing and programming.

oabooks.de gives access to my dissertation at no cost. All that is needed is a reliable WiFi connection—which is, however, still lacking in most parts of the world.[14] As for the individual scholar, creating a website comes with annual expenses of about $150 for server costs and

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14   According to a white paper which was published by the World Economic Forum in collaboration with the Boston Consulting Group in 2016, more than half of the world's population do not use the internet due to various reasons such as hard-to-reach areas, lack of basic infrastructure, limited relevant online content, illiteracy, poverty, inequalities (*Internet for All: A Framework for Accelerating Internet Access and Adoption* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2016), p. 5, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Internet_for_All_Framework_Accelerating_Internet_Access_Adoption_report_2016.pdf).

the domain (about the costs for a few books each year), on top of the hours of labor spent on regular maintenance. To promote the idea of a digital dissertation that differs from a printed form at first I decided not to upload the revised PDF manuscript of the print-on-demand-book. Meanwhile the typeset und formatted manuscript is also available online at various humanities repositories that provide for sustainable archiving, for example the community-led media studies platform MediArXiv.[15] A DOI (digital object identifier) ensures that the digital text can be found, identified and referenced.
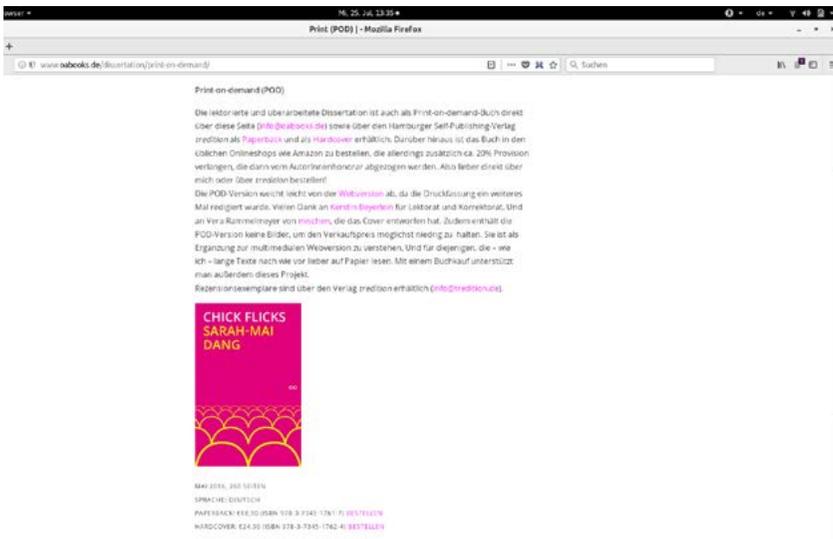
3. A Budget Print-On-Demand Book

Fig. 4 Screenshot of my website showing the POD book, by Sarah-Mai Dang (2018),
http://www.oabooks.de/dissertation/print-on-demand/, CC BY 4.0.

For various reasons, I chose to also publish the text in a more traditional way. I produced a print-on-demand (POD) book at a relatively low price (€18.90) in addition to the website. Most humanities scholars still prefer a printed version of extensive studies and even shorter articles. A hard copy is still taken to be more legitimate, despite the flaws of the current publishing ecosystem. Even though some traditional publishers

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15 See https://mediarxiv.org/

are known for printing each manuscript they can make profit with, the book remains a desirable cultural and symbolic capital in academia.

I argue that we need to seriously scrutinize whether a book is really the best form for the inherent processual nature of scholarship. In fact, what Janneke Adema and Gary Hall, among others, call a 'liquid, living' format,[16] such as collaborative wikis, can be much more beneficial. As Adema contends, 'the more "definite" or "final" a text seems (which can be due to language, length, format, style of writing, genre, design, etc.), the harder it becomes for people to engage with it'.[17]

Publications can take a long time. Due to the review process, the author's revision and the publisher's operating procedures, it can take more than two years until a monograph is finally released. In contrast to the natural sciences, research in the humanities might be of less immediate relevance but of longer-term validity. Nevertheless, preprints not only of articles but also of books can facilitate an open, collaborative discussion at a much earlier stage. In this regard, Kathleen Fitzpatrick's book *Planned Obsolescence* might be one of the most well-known examples for more process-oriented than product-oriented book projects,[18] among others such as Jason Mittell's *Complex TV* or Gary Hall's 'Open Book'.[19]

However, a traditional book with an ISBN makes research searchable and accessible through libraries. Libraries play a vital role in terms of dissemination in addition to sustainable archiving. We need to take them into account when discussing openness, accessibility and custodianship. Relatively few people have access to academic libraries though, which is why it is important to make research also freely available online.

I published both the website and the book under the Creative Commons license CC BY-SA 4.0. My work can be shared, copied and used for non-commercial and commercial use if cited properly. The

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16   'Welcome to the Culture Machine Liquid Books Series Wiki!', http://liquidbooks. pbworks.com/w/page/11135951/FrontPage

17   Janneke Adema, 'A Differential Thesis', *Open Reflections*, ed. by Janneke Adema (July 14, 2015), https://openreflections.wordpress.com/a-differential-thesis/

18   Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Planned Obsolescence: Publishing, Technology, and the Future of the Academy* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), http://mcpress.media-commons.org/plannedobsolescence/

19   Jason Mittell, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (New York: NYU Press, 2015), http://mcpress.media-commons.org/complextelevision/ and Gary Hall, 'Open Book', *Media Gifts*, http://www.garyhall.info/open-book/

dissemination must happen under the same license. Many scholars are unsure about the conditions of fair use and copyright. Above all, as authors we bear full responsibilities for our choices. It is important to seek permission to keep the rights of use and negotiate with the publishers. Instead of refraining from exploring new possibilities of digital technologies and sticking to traditional publishing procedures, we should educate ourselves in order to make responsible decisions on how to produce, share and disseminate research.

In order to keep the price of the book as low as possible I did not use any screenshots or other images. These are available online. A paperback of 260 pages costs €18.90 (with a provision of €3.70 to at least partly cover the fees for the editor and graphic designer), the hardcover costs €24.90 (with a provision of €3.10). As of 2016, for the POD production, the Hamburg-based German self-publishing house tredition[20] charged €370. This included thirty-five author copies and the handling of sales and distribution for a minimum of a year.

As with the website, aesthetics were of high relevance in the production process of the book. I wanted the book to be enjoyable not only in terms of content but also of typography and look. By choosing a more striking appearance proposed by a friend who is a designer, the book should encourage a broad audience to engage with the academic work (see Fig. 4). By evoking allusions to cinema seats, hearts and breasts through the same image, the cover references the book's content in a playful way. For me, communicating scholarly knowledge also means showing that passion is an essential factor for acquiring knowledge. The final outcome of the production looks lovely on the bookshelf and raises people's interest.

4. A Traditional Monograph in English

Last but not least, I translated and published my dissertation in English. Instead of spending €5,000 (more than a three-month salary of a part-time working doctoral student at the university) on the printing allowance mentioned above I chose to pay a translator for helping me with an English version of the thesis. With my focus on post-feminism and popular culture, it made sense to share my research with the
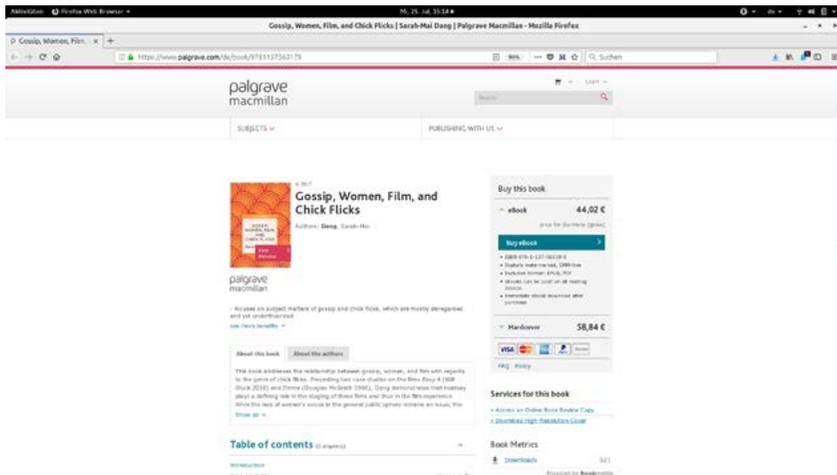
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20   See https://tredition.co.uk/

Fig. 5 Screenshot of the publisher's website offering the English translation of my thesis, by Sarah-Mai Dang (2018), https://www.palgrave.com/de/book/9781137560179, CC BY 4.0.

international community. The role of chick flicks in contemporary media reception has been intensively discussed in the Anglophone world since the late nineties—to a greater degree and for a longer time than in the German-speaking community. Publishing a peer-reviewed book with a prestigious publisher also increases academic reputation and thus hireability (see Fig. 5).

While the concept of peer review is deeply entrenched in many disciplines and academic communities, only in the past few years has peer review—meaning the official practice of an independent external assessment of a work by an authorized expert in the field—become an increasingly important matter in Germany's film and media studies community, with regard to tenure but also as a subject of discussion. To this point, it is usually the colleagues and the editors who help to increase the quality by ensuring that a thesis is based on well-reasoned arguments and supported by evidence. Nowadays, some journals do assess manuscripts via independent peer review, however, most of them do judge texts from an editor's perspective. As for monographs, peer review is still unusual in Germany. The assessment of a book manuscript is carried out by the publisher, respectively an editor of the publishing house.

In my case, several colleagues have read different parts of my dissertation at various stages before the submission. As mentioned above, my supervisors had to authorize the manuscript for publication. I undertook an extensive revision with the help of an editor. In order to enable a post-publication open peer review I implemented the annotation tool hypothes.is on the website.[21]

The English manuscript, which I wrote and edited with the help of a translator, went through a single-blind peer-review process with one anonymous external reviewer involved, followed by major editing on my part. Since the identity of the reviewer remained unknown to me, it was difficult to engage in a productive dialogue. Nevertheless, the remarks helped to clarify my points, even though I wish I could have directly communicated with the reviewer. To reflect on my experience with traditional publishers in any detail is beyond the scope of this chapter. What I can say, however, is that I have become a strong advocate for reviewing practices which allow for a direct interaction with the 'peers', whether they are authorized by the academic community or simply participating in the debates due to their genuine interests.[22]

II. Why We Do What We Do: Why Scholarly Communication Is an Imperative

The claim for more scholarly communication has led to the expectation that scholars should be able to sell their expertise to the public in an elevator pitch. Yet the duties of an academic job might already feel quite overwhelming due to increasing professional requirements, in particular raising third-party funds. While it is important to open up the university to the wider public and make research more transparent, we need to acknowledge that scholarly communication is a proper professional task that cannot be fulfilled on the side. Like research, teaching and

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21 Due to the end of service life I decided to uninstall hypothes.is in 2019. In terms of qualitative feedback, humanities scholars still feel reluctant toward publicly commenting on an article or a book. If it does not involve a popular scholar with a loyal community, comment sections of blogs and open book projects are usually left empty. A visible engagement with my digital dissertation via hypothes.is did not happen.

22 Kathleen Fitzpatrick, 'Peer Review', in *A New Companion to Digital Humanities*, ed. by Susan Schreibman, Raymond Georg Siemens and John Unsworth (Chichester: Wiley/Blackwell, 2015), pp. 439–48 (at 443–44).

publishing, communication is a fundamental task of scholarship. It is essential when presenting our work at conferences, discussing theories in the classroom—and conveying scholarship publicly. Therefore, it should be valued accordingly for the purpose of job reviews or tenure processes.

While publishing my thesis in four different formats, I have started a blog to reflect upon the project and the social, economic and cultural implications of research more generally. The blog did not come about as a conscious decision for improving scholarly communication but came rather naturally when looking for alternative ways to address a broader audience. A blog allows for a faster, more up-to-date discussion of urgent subjects. It provides a public framework for various formats such as interviews, essays, personal comments, and best-practice reports. Since January 2016, I have posted on topics such as the role of Academia.edu, Elsevier and preprints. Guest authors have also contributed to the blog.

To strengthen the reflection on scholarly practices especially in the German media studies community, in 2018, I started the scholarly interest group Open Media Studies at the German Society for Media Studies (GfM). In addition, I initiated the Open Media Studies blog[23] on the website of the German journal for media studies, *Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft*. To speak to a broader readership, the blog also appears at Hypotheses,[24] a multilingual platform for humanities and social science research blogs. Hypotheses is part of the digital publishing infrastructure, OpenEdition. Unlike with my personal blog, with the Open Media Studies blog I try to intervene as little as possible in terms of editing. The co-curated blog is supposed to serve as a collective platform for discussing any subject, position and format related to open access, open scholarship and media studies. Thus, everyone can submit a post at any time. Both my personal and the collective blog, I hope, in addition to my hybrid self-publishing project, help to open up scholarship toward more diverse formats, approaches and practices. We should value scholarship in its wide variety—own initiatives, experiments and projects—and not only as 'the result of a process certified by the usual gatekeepers'.[25] In this sense, I see my endeavor

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23   See https://www.zfmedienwissenschaft.de/online/open-media-studies-blog
24   See https://mediastudies.hypotheses.org/
25   Steven D. Krause, 'Where Do I List This on My Cv? Considering the Values of Self-published Web Sites. Version 2.0.', *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, Pedagogy*,

as a best-practice example in which theory and practice are closely intertwined. From this experience, I learned that, in order to effectively intervene in current transitions of digital scholarship, new ideas have to be implemented both from bottom up and top down. Thus, I agree with Virginia Kuhn that 'while we need precedents, no real change will occur without collective action'.[26]

III. Numbers and Stats: Considering the Impact Factor and Drawing a Conclusion

Changing well-established principles is a challenge. Due to the logics of the current academic system, the exploration of unchartered territories can quickly reach its limits. Trying out new forms and formats of publishing is much more of a risk for younger researchers than for senior ones. While doctoral candidates and postdocs might be more open to a digital dissertation, because of their own media practices and daily routines they have to comply with the standard publishing procedures in order to stand a good chance for tenure. Or so they believe. Senior researchers can only gain by experimenting with new publishing options. They have already shown that they can meet the established professional requirements. As a response to the demands made on digital scholars to document and explain their work, Kuhn rightly states, 'explicating one's work is a worthwhile endeavor, but members of review boards still have an ethical imperative to educate *themselves* about the ways in which digital technologies can contribute to rigorous and groundbreaking scholarship'.[27]

Seven years ago, as a doctoral candidate in Germany, who had just finished her thesis, I had to balance between choosing a prestigious publisher—who has built up their reputation by being a quite selective gatekeeper in a decidedly subjective manner of an editor, acting in a rather exclusive way in terms of accepting authors and manuscripts—and reaching the largest audience, by keeping my right of use and

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12.1 (2007), http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/12.1/binder.html?topoi/krause/index.html

26 Virginia Kuhn, 'Embrace and Ambivalence', *Academe*, 99.1 (2013), https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1004358

27 Ibid.

disseminating research online. These are two difficult goals to combine. Or so I thought. Meanwhile, attitudes have substantially changed towards a more flexible and open access-oriented publishing system. I do not believe that the decision for a hybrid self-publishing project has diminished my chances toward a tenure-track position—if at all calculable. On the contrary, the in-depth analysis of the publishing ecosystem has brought me the status of an expert in the field of open access in the academic community and beyond. Not only have I learned a lot about the publishing business, but I have gained valuable expertise in the application of digital tools and the limitations put in place by copyright law. One of the most significant benefits for me was that I could keep the right of use, which allowed me to experiment with various publishing forms and formats in the first place. In this regard, the results might be viewed as what, according to Adema, Marjorie Perloff has called *differential texts*, '"texts that exist in different material forms, with no single version being the definitive one"'.[28] This approach helps challenging formats taken for granted and highlights the specificities of the various settings. It also shifts the focus from traditional publishing to more diverse forms of scholarly communication.

To create a hybrid self-publishing project was not the plan from the very beginning. It is the product of an extensive two-year study of the academy and the implications of its publishing practices. It is the outcome of lots of editing, programming, designing, translating, discussing and communicating. It is the preliminary result of lots of time-consuming and painstaking work, not to mention the money I have spent on editing, designing and production fees as well as on hosting. While being in a start-up spirit when I began the project, I implemented a few donation options on the website, none of which were used, however. Yet, making money had not been my primary goal, either. Nonetheless, I do see the issue of unpaid digital labor particularly in the platform economy as highly problematic.[29] It is worth noting, however, that scholars also do

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28   Adema, 'A Differential Thesis'.
29   The issue of free labor for social networking sites of for-profit companies is also of great relevance in the scholarly community considering venture capital-funded platforms such as Academia.edu and ResearchGate. The fact that traditional publishing houses are also profit-led companies which calculate with the unpaid labor of authors, peer reviewers and editors sometimes seems to be forgotten in the discussion of the publishing ecosystem. For a broader discussion see Adema, 'Don't

not receive any financial compensation for editing tasks they perform on a regular basis to set up a manuscript for a publishing house.

In addition to the twenty-five copies I gave out to friends and colleagues for free, two dozen print-on-demand books were sold, which is close to nothing compared to sales numbers of traditional distribution channels. In Germany, academic publishers calculate with about 200–300 copies to be sold in the first two years after the release.

With respect to these numbers, it looks as if the POD project might not have been the most rewarding idea. However, when taking the overall project into account (the website, the translation and the PDF, as well as its wide-ranging effects), the picture looks rather different. The outcome of this endeavor is difficult to assess in terms of numbers, not least because the data is hard to compare. For example, I uploaded the digital version of the revised thesis in German much later, in 2019. Furthermore, since the final manuscript is published under the Creative Commons license CC BY-SA 4.0, it is difficult to track how many times the document has been shared. Also, there is no data available on the original PDF deposited in the university's repository. Moreover, I do not have any data from similar projects. Download statistics do not say anything about the involvement with the text, nor does a page view, or an impact factor. All it does is to show a basic interest in the topic. Nevertheless, the project is clearly not inconsequential. It speaks to an audience that is more diverse than the usual audience reached when publishing via gatekeepers: school teachers, open science activists, scientific journalists, etc. I have received a good deal of feedback from various people from a range of disciplines.

In terms of qualitative feedback, humanities scholars still feel reluctant toward publicly commenting on an article or a book. If it does not involve a popular scholar with a loyal community, comment sections of blogs and open book projects are usually left empty. A visible engagement with my digital dissertation via the annotation program hypothes.is I implemented has also not happened yet. Furthermore, instead of leaving public comments in text boxes, the feedback to the

Give Your Labour to Academia.edu: Use It to Strengthen the Academic Commons', in *Open Reflections*, ed. by Janneke Adema (April 7, 2016), https://openreflections. wordpress.com/2016/04/07/dont-give-your-labour-to-academia-edu-use-it-to-strengthen-the-academic-commons/

blog posts, which generate about 50 to 100 page views a year, is rather given on a personal level, face to face or via email.

In September 2019, a second hybrid open-access monograph was published with oa books, *Kommunikationsräume. Einführung in die Semiopragmatik*, a German translation of Roger Odin's well-known film-theory book *Les espaces de communication. Introduction à la sémio-pragmatique.*[30] This translation by my colleagues Guido Kirsten, Magali Trautmann, Philipp Blum and Laura Katharina Mücke is the outcome of a three-year publishing project. Like my dissertation the book is available as PDF and POD. *Kommunikationsräume* was only possible because everyone involved believed in the idea of opening up scholarship to a broader audience. Due to the lack of funding for independent publishing projects, the project was realized without financial compensation of the translators and editors. The French publisher, Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, kindly agreed to grant the translation license at no extra costs. This second book has been one of the most valuable outputs from the film and media studies community.

The initial hybrid self-publishing project was not only about disseminating my research but also constituted a way to make scholars think about their own workflows and practices. My primary goal was to raise awareness of core questions such as what is scholarship for, and how and why do we do it. I do understand if not everyone wants to invest so much time and private money into presenting their research results. Nevertheless, I encourage everyone to further reflect on how to share and disseminate knowledge by experimenting with various publishing forms and formats. Whether or not these digital formats will be acknowledged by the academic community as a legitimate form of scholarly publication, they make us rethink how we have been presenting research so far and how media—in general, not only digital media—shapes the way we work and think. Thus, instead of aiming for more publications, I suggest we take more advantage of the many possibilities opened up by digital technologies and infrastructures. In this sense, I encourage scholars to publish less and communicate more.

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30 Roger Odin, *Kommunikationsräume. Einführung in die Semiopragmatik*, trans. by Guido Kirsten, Magali Trautmann, Philipp Blum and Laura Katharina Mücke (Berlin: oa books, 2019).

Acknowledgments

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