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Stories *of* OPEN

Opening Peer Review through Narrative Inquiry

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Chapter 9

I Just Feel Like This Makes Sense to Me: Stuart's Story*

This chapter presents Stuart's interpretive narrative in whole. It is the culminating document from our conversation that underwent the storying stories process. I am hugely grateful to Stuart for sharing their entire interpretive narrative in this book, and for sharing authorship of this chapter. The fonts and formatting for this interpretive narrative match the fonts and formatting used in previous chapters.

ORIENTATION

> The day that I speak with Stuart, I'm in my new home office. I haven't yet become accustomed to my new desk or setup; we've only lived in this house for a month, and my sabbatical has just started a week prior. Stuart is the first person I'm interviewing since my sabbatical started, and my thoughts are generally preoccupied with my expectations of the coming year, unpacking the house, and my new life with my partner and their kids. The cats aren't yet comfortable in the house, so my usual feline work interruptions—inquisitive meows, a cat

* This interpretive narrative was written with Stuart Lawson.

preferring the spot on the desk in front of the computer monitor, or having my legs fall asleep from sleeping lap cat—are absent.

Stuart and I have never met. They are a doctoral student in the UK working on a dissertation regarding open access policies. Stuart is also an editor at the *Journal of Radical Librarianship*, one of the few journals in LIS that offers an open peer-review process for authors.

For Stuart it is evening. In Portland I am just beginning my day, and I'm sipping on my coffee throughout our conversation. Perhaps because of distance and a resulting lagging internet connection, there is a bit of an echo and lapse in terms of audio during our conversation. I find myself speaking more slowly than I otherwise would. To me that seems a good thing because I quickly notice that Stuart takes time to think about my questions before responding. Whatever the case, I'm still refining the art of interviewing, and because I have never before interacted with Stuart, I'm nervous. My excitement to hear their story, learn from them, and collaborate with them in order to create some meaning and gain new knowledge, leads me to, at times, interrupt Stuart. I catch myself the first time, and throughout our conversation I'm working hard to delay my responses until they've finished their thoughts. Perhaps it is because I see such parallels in our experiences—we have both been immersed in founding journals and we both have a socialist and anti-capitalist bent to our worldviews. I'm eager to hear more about Stuart's approach to open.

OUR CONVERSATION

The general first question of my interview offers Stuart an opportunity to summarize their experience. It's an opportunity for me to get a sense of them, their path to where they are now and what has formed their worldviews in terms of writing and publishing in LIS. One of the first things I notice about Stuart is that they are a bit shy and reserved. They've agreed to chat with me, a complete stranger to them. When asked why they decided to participate, they respond:

> It's interesting, I just want to encourage anyone who's actually doing kind of tons of rigorous research about openness because there's not enough of it. As you probably know, I'm doing my PhD about open access policy at the moment, and there's still so little research about so many of the really important areas, so anything to encourage more of that is… Yeah, it's interesting because I think my experience with peer review, the way I've come into it, is probably very different than most people's, and the way we do things at the journal is probably a bit different to other people as well.

As we dive in and Stuart begins to formulate and articulate their relationship with LIS publishing, it becomes clear to me that they are immersed not only in scholarship about open, but also in the open movement. Their use of jargon, distinction between kinds of OA (open access) publishing, and discussion of new publication formats such as data articles, points to how involved they are and have been in open.

> Well, I'm a reader and an editor, and pretty much all of those things you listed. I initially started, so in 2011, I started working in the library and doing a master's in information

studies. So it's the equivalent to MLIS, is that what you call it? And so that's when I first got started in libraries and thinking about open access. I guess it was a couple of years after graduating when I first actually published something myself in a journal. So that was 2014, was the first thing I published, which was actually a data article in a gold open access journal with post-publication peer review. That was my first experience of [laughs] publishing. And then about a year or so after that, we started getting started with the *Journal of Radical Librarianship* on our side. In terms of my first actual experiences of writing and reviewing, the first one came—well, actually I did attempt to write a journal article based on my master's thesis, and that got rejected from a couple of places because they said it just seemed too much like a cut-down version of the master's thesis turned into an article. But then after that it was this data article in *F1000*. That was my first experience of authoring and being reviewed.

Emily: That's kind of a radical first experience, I think, if you're publishing in F1000.

[laughs] Yeah. So that was, again, it just seemed like a very logical thing for what we were doing with that article as well. Because this was an article on a collected data set on some freedom of information requests [FOI] to universities to find out how much they were spending on journal subscriptions. We sent these FOIs to every university in the UK and had this massive data set to find out how much everyone was spending on the subscription journals. And then this was a data article about that data set.

Emily: Okay. But from then your relationship with publishing and writing has just continued, correct?

Yeah. So between—I guess because there was a few published within about a year or so of that being published. I published a few other articles as well and then started up with the *Journal of Radical Librarianship*. So what's next? I think *JLSC* was the next journal that I published with. So

> I guess that was my first experience of a more thorough [laughs] peer review where I actually had a lot of comments and we had to make a lot of the changes. I guess that's kind of the general narrative of when I got into different things.

I notice that Stuart likes to get the facts straight. They don't want to omit anything from their time line of experience, but as we all do with memory, they work to sort out the order. This manner of speaking and listening to Stuart reconstruct their memories continues throughout our conversation.

As we continue to discuss Stuart's experiences as an author, it becomes clear to me that they approach their work uniquely. Stuart is not caught up in the publish-or-perish game of academia. They are working toward their PhD because they want to, because they interested, because they are good at thinking and writing. They are, in essence, challenging the traditional narrative of the academy. (After having worked to achieve tenure at my institution, which included making some sacrifices of my publishing and writing ideals in order to placate administrative concerns regarding my scholarly agenda and publishing venues, I think Stuart's approach sounds incredibly freeing.) During review of the narrative, Stuart added, "It's also extremely low-stress, because I have no external pressure, only my own motivation (and I try to be kind to myself)."

As they describe their first experience publishing a data article in *F1000Research*, they admit, "It was a bit like an academic exercise in school."

I don't know, I guess I just treated it a bit like—because it was—because data articles, I don't know what, it was like a thousand words or something, so I just literally wrote down what we did. It was a bit like an academic exercise in school. Because I didn't have to engage with any real—there wasn't any analysis in there, it was very much just a description of the data and how we got the data. So the writing of that was, I don't know, just very straightforward.…

> *Emily: And do you think that's because it was a data article where it just kind of presented the data as it was versus doing any analysis?*

I imagine so, though I have a few times—because there's quite a few articles on *F1000* on similar open topics, and so I read a few on there and had a look at the reviewer reports, and a lot of those were actually very similar like just saying, "Oh, here's a couple of points, but it's generally fine." I don't know.

…I don't remember, I think the reason we submitted there was because I just tweeted something saying I'm going to write this up, and then the person who works *F1000* says, "Oh, you should submit here because there's no APCs [article processing charges]," well, there wasn't at the time when I submitted it there. So that's what I get. Yeah, and the fact that it was just really quick, like it comes online within a couple of days and then the reviews were—I can't remember. It was a very quick process because the review was not very rigorous at all; they were very short. They're basically just saying, "Yeah, this is fine." Tick. [laughs]… I wouldn't consider submitting there again.…

Hearing that Stuart would not again submit to *F1000Research* interests me. It has the most transparent review and publishing processes that I know of, so for someone whom I would call an open activist to not want to again participate in such a transparent process

strikes me as notable. In their experience the reviews there weren't necessarily useful.…

> Also, they're a for-profit, and now I'd only choose to publish with a not-for-profit publisher. It concerns me that all the funders who are launching journal platforms are paying *F1000* to do it, rather than contributing to a publicly funded infrastructure.

What needs to change at that journal to improve authors' and referees' experiences? Hearing this I relate to Stuart my own frustrating experiences publishing with and refereeing at *F1000Research*:

> *Emily: Yeah. I've also published with F1000… and I had an interesting review experience there as well. One of the reviewers took a really long time to get back and submit their review, and by the time I had a review from them I was two hours away from submitting my changes, so I just ignored that last reviewer's comments and just submitted my changes anyway. The article that I published there, you know, it's definitely not my best work, but it's published and it's there. And being someone who was, at the time, on the tenure track and writing about open peer review and these other systems of peer-review processes, it would make sense for me to publish in a place that had an open peer-review process. But, yeah, I've had some interesting experiences there. And then I've been a reviewer for an article on F1000Research, which I found interesting as well because I feel like some of the other reviewers, like it was a little, I feel like there was so much utopian determinism to get this article that I reviewed out of there. It's a great piece of work, but I also felt like in that process I was the lone social scientist voice and it got a little obfuscated, I guess, in that. But I don't know if any of those experiences are really just F1000 or if it's just peer review in general, you know.*

> I do wonder what it's like to be able to, because it's when—so *F1000*, other times when I've seen very, very short reports come in written by others, and it's been from—it's not been from humanities scholars, they don't give you a one-sentence review. [laughs]

Stuart doesn't explicitly call out STEM disciplines for having some bad reviewers, but to me it is implied that short reviews in STEM aren't all that useful. On the other hand, Stuart doesn't necessarily equate the length of humanities scholars' long reviews with being good either.

We move on to talk about more of Stuart's experiences as an author. I ask about Stuart's authorial identity, what the role feels like for them. Again, Stuart mentions their lack of ambition for a professorial career, but rather that they are merely interested in open and seem to be good at writing and publishing. They see their role as a researcher and writer as that of contributor, putting out things that haven't yet been written. On some level, it seems to be that Stuart sees themselves as fulfilling a necessary role in a conversation and toward the production and dissemination of knowledge.

> I don't know because I have no interest in a normal academic career, I'm not going to try and become a professor or whatever, and I've never had that intention, so I've always been doing it for my own interest primarily. And I guess I found from originally doing the master's and then trying to write some other journal articles, realizing that, "Oh, this is kind of something I can do and it's quite interesting," and, yeah, I guess it's this thing of, well, the stuff I want to read about, there's not enough interesting stuff being written, so if I do some of it then there will be. [laughs] But, yeah, I guess doing the thesis is such an all-encompassing thing. I haven't

tried to, like, I haven't written journal articles based on it yet, and I don't know if I will, just because I don't want to write the same thing twice.

In addition to their first publication at *F1000Research*, Stuart has also published articles in more traditional open access journals. They relay an interesting story about how they and their coauthors came to publish in *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication (JLSC)*.

Emily: You mentioned that your second article publication was with JLSC and that felt like a much more traditional review experience. Can you talk about that?

It was. I've published seven peer-reviewed articles, and only two of them have been more traditional, kind of 10,000-word multiauthored pieces that went through quite a rigorous intense review thing, and this was one of them. So the first one, again, it was coauthored with two other people who also happen to be, who later became editors of the journal, the *Journal of Radical Librarianship,* as well. So people I knew through that. And again, I'm pretty sure we literally started a Twitter conversation where there was one person saying, "I should write this," and the others saying, "Yeah, we'll pitch in a bit, we'll write some of that." And I don't know who initially suggested submitting it to that journal, but it just kind of made sense. The process—oh, we did first submit it to a different journal, but they rejected it without reading it because the license that we were asking for they wouldn't do. They wouldn't accept a CC-BY [Creative Commons Attribution] license.

Emily: They wouldn't even negotiate with you?

No. So it's a journal which is run by a Marxist who has very particular views about licensing, and so they were insisting

on a CC BY-NC-ND [Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-NoDerivatives] license because that's the only way to stop your labor being reappropriated by capital and later exploited.

Yeah. They were very much, "No, this is our policy. We will not change it." So after that we submitted to *JLSC*. The review process, I seem to remember we had two long reviews, they both had a lot of suggestions. One of them was very critical. Neither of them were rejecting it, but this one was saying this needs these massive changes, some of which were justified, [laughs] but again this article, I wasn't, I basically wrote one section of it, which is like twenty percent of it. I wrote this one bit, and most of the theoretical stuff in there, which was being criticized, was written by someone else, so I didn't actually do much revision at all. But the others did a lot of work on revising it.

> *Emily: So your coauthors, in the revising of it, when you said that you didn't feel like some of the revisions they asked for were justified, did they end up making all of the revisions, or did they push back on some of the suggestions?*

They pushed back. I have never accepted all those peer revisions in everything that I've published, I think, because they are so often, there's things that they have just misunderstood and their suggestion doesn't make sense for whatever reason and the editors have always just agreed with it. As long as you can kind of justify it, I find, I don't know, it's kind of roughly like 50-50 with revisions where they think, "Oh yeah, that's actually a really useful point that I can use to make it better," or I think, "No, I think you've misunderstood." Sometimes if they've misunderstood, it does mean that you just need to tweak the wording to make it clearer and that can still be valuable. I always found all editors to be pretty flexible with that as long as you can justify it.

In this story I see challenge and resistance, even to those with a similar worldview and approach toward publishing. A self-professed anti-capitalist and socialist (to say nothing of Stuart's coauthors) comes into conflict with an individual who publishes toward the same aim. I myself had this conversation about CC licenses with colleagues at *Lead Pipe*, and it was Hugh's thinking[1] that assured me that licenses with fewer restrictions would be better in the long run. In this story Stuart and their coauthors resist and stay true to the version of open that they believe in.

Our conversation continues to discuss other authoring experiences.

> *Emily: Yeah. Yeah. So you said that of all your articles, only two or so had been at traditional journals. Were they both at JLSC, or was there another journal that you were publishing with?*

> No. So it's an article I wrote for *Open Library of Humanities,* and that was the other one. That was also a coauthored one, but I was the lead author for that one. And again, I think the journal had just launched and my PhD supervisor is the person that runs *Open Library of Humanities.*… So I published with them, with *Open Library of Humanities,* and the review process was, it was interesting; it was quick. So two reviewers, one of whom signed their review, and again it was a friend [laughs]—someone that I know, of course. And the second one, I don't actually know who it was; I couldn't tell. They wouldn't say. They must have known who I was, I think. I guess I got that sense from the comments, but again because we've been very publicly pushing the preprint of the article before submitting it.… And again, that process [at *Open Library of Humanities*] was actually, I guess, fairly similar to the *JLSC* in that within a fairly short space of time we got two substantive reviews. They were a lot more, I don't know, what's the word? "Kind" is not the word, but

> they were very respectful of the work, which was good. And they suggested a bunch of changes, quite a lot of which we made. It was very quick publishing with them.

In this experience with peer review at *Open Library of Humanities*, Stuart relays the experience of opaque review as a flawed construct. Their referees could tell whose work they were reviewing. The community of open scholars, at least in Stuart's experience, is small.

Although Stuart was forthcoming with the time line of their experience and their experience relates some of the issues with blind review, I struggled to get a glimpse into their emotional experience. But as we continued to chat, it became clear that for them the emotional portion of their experience publishing isn't all-encompassing. It takes a while for Stuart to formulate their thoughts. They take the time to think, and still their response theorizes that they don't currently see this work as an emotional experience, but simply as their role as contributor to knowledge and research about open and being a player in the open movement.

> [pause] I don't know, I guess there's… [pause] I think it's different now to how it was the first couple of times when I was submitting, in the process of actually finishing and submitting something to a journal felt like a big deal. But now because everything that I write I just put online before it gets submitted anywhere else, so I feel like when I do that it's like it's out in the world at that point anyway. So just finishing a piece of writing is, again, I get a lot of satisfaction out of it. So finishing the thesis hopefully will be even more of that. But in terms of the actual formal publication bit of it is more, I don't know, I don't feel very emotionally engaged with that, it's always like, it's nice to have stuff on a nice journal's website, but I don't know, I feel like it's not the most import-

> ant thing. It's just kind of getting stuff, getting your thoughts down in a way that I'm happy with myself and putting it out in the world is more important.

Stuart views their work and their engagement as the way things should be; it's what they are meant to do. Instead of being as emotionally invested in the process as they were at the beginning, they explain, doing the work and putting it online to get it out there is more of what makes sense to them in the long run.

In my initial analysis and reflection on Stuart's response, I attributed this emotional position to their understanding of their position in the academy. They, in their approach, have liberated themselves from the emotional chains of the academic reward system. I reflected:

> ***Intellectual Response***
>
> *I'm wondering if the separation here from the emotional experience of publishing and writing is that, for Stuart, it is not part of the same reward system. They don't want to be an academic, as they said earlier. They are researching and writing this dissertation because it is interesting and fulfilling. The fact that Stuart is not participating in the traditional reward structure may afford them the ability to not have as much emotional attachment to the traditional scholarly publishing system when it comes to their own experiences.*

Upon reading my thoughts, Stuart noncommittally responded, "That may very well be true!"

In fact, there are times when Stuart comes across to me as a bit nihilistic about for-

mal peer review in general. For them, it just isn't as important as getting the work out there. When I ask if they had any hesitation about being reviewed openly at *F1000Research*, they respond as if it were a nonissue.

> I kind of don't remember about that. I assume—the stuff that I write now, there's such a small pool of reviewers and whoever's reviewing my stuff now I'm probably friends with on Twitter and they've seen me post about it [muffled] and they've seen it already.
>
> > *Emily: Right. Like the blind review is moot, it just isn't—yeah, there's no point in blinding it if they know who you are anyway.*
>
> Yeah. Exactly. They're going to know anyway.
>
> More recently I've been seeing people being wary of open review because of the power dynamics between people. I guess that's always been kind of the criticism of every form of review, whether open or closed or single-blind or double-blind or whatever, there's always—none of them get a perfect balance between the power dynamics between older and early-career researchers or with them having much more difficult times reviewing. I hear so many stories, but from every different version of review. If they're all bad, you might as well just make it open. [laughs]

Stuart's take, simply, is that closed review just doesn't make sense.

Although Stuart mentions the issue of power dynamics between early-career researchers and more established researchers in the peer-review process, I'm not fully convinced that's the only power dynamic at hand in peer review. I challenge their notion a bit, without going deeply into a discussion regarding patriarchy

or identity politics involving gender, racism, and classism. Not that this is how Stuart views it, simply as this dynamic, but it is simply not something either of us bring up in the moment. Instead, I offer the idea that perhaps open peer review can elucidate when power dynamics come into play, and that perhaps having power dynamics out in the open isn't as insidious as it is in opaque review processes.

> *Emily: Don't you think that—I mean, I guess I feel that in open peer review, at least the power dynamic is overt, and with an overt power dynamic at least there's some more accountability for that? I guess that's always been my take, and I realize that there's always going to be a power dynamic, we live with a society almost around the entire world, I think, that has power structures, and especially in academia or in professional publishing there's always going to be power, it might as well surface the problems with that power instead of hide it. I don't know, that's just kind of my take.*

Yeah, that makes sense.

> *Emily: Do you feel like people disagree with that on the power?*

Yeah. I guess it does come down to the fact that most articles are in such a niche area that it is very likely that you will know other people. If you know there are people that you're not comfortable seeing your name and reviewing your own work, then that's… the thing is, I generally do agree with you that making this stuff visible so it's clear exactly like what is going on in terms of different power dynamics. I don't know, it just feels like a more honest thing.

Stuart's response, again, solidifies their take. Open review is "more honest." It just makes sense to them.

This idea of sensemaking is evident in their approach to sharing their work. Stuart always shares their work with others, even if they are going to submit to a journal. In fact, they've posted all drafts of their dissertation to the web, making their work open and available, just to get the ideas and the contributions out there. The high value Stuart places on this becomes evident as they discuss the publication of their data articles.

Emily: So, how did those experiences compare to your experiences publishing what you're considering to be nontraditional journals?

Okay. So I've published two data articles, the *F1000,* one with *Journal of Open Humanities* later, and that that one, again, that was even kind of similar because they have a very structured template that you just write your description of the data set into. So that took no time at all. And there was a review process, which was just someone checking what we had written was what was true about the data set. It was like this kind of soundness checking the article. And so that was, again, very quick. They basically said, oh yeah, we're sending out the review and they said it's fine so we'll publish it.

So I published a couple of articles that were in more traditional journals, but they were shorter and I think they were published as opinion pieces rather than research articles. So they were peer-reviewed by two people currently. I never actually saw the reports. With the more in-depth reviews where people do properly engage with it and do analysis of it and try to suggest ways of making it better, I do find it's a valuable thing, but the amount that changes out of it is, you change maybe three percent of the text and that's as much as it ever is. And I don't know, I still feel like peer review is an important thing, but I feel like this is why I like just putting stuff out as a preprint beforehand, because this is the work really, and the review process is a kind of useful accreditation process, and if it's a conversation, that can be a useful thing,

but to me it's always been a secondary thing compared to just finishing work and putting it online.

Stuart's response got me thinking.

Intellectual Response

Here in the example of the F1000 data article, when Stuart says that there wasn't much of a conversation, is this a failing of open peer review? If viewed from my lens, where open peer review allows more robust scholarly conversations and a deepening of curiosity and knowledge, are the times when there isn't robust conversation, is that considered a failure?

So what I'm seeing here as a description of peer review with data articles is that the purpose of the peer review for these kinds of articles is simply different. It is serving a different, or perhaps just a truncated role. They are soundness checking method and the data, but not dealing with literature reviews or discussions and conclusions. Should it be called peer review? It is peers, but how can we discriminate between different purposes of peer review for different articles? Or do we even need to distinguish them? Perhaps for referees and authors we do, but if we did that would it bleed into promotion and tenure processes? Would it then be regarded as less worthy from these committees? So much about perceptions of peer review for many people is determined by their academic culture particularly related to the promotion and tenure processes.

Stuart mentions that peer review can just serve as an accreditation process, and for these data articles I agree. But I'm wondering if, as Stuart says, it's the conversation that's useful, if we need to be using formal open peer-review processes for this, or would informal processes

and open discussion/conversation on preprint servers suffice? (Certainly not for those who need to meet promotion standards at most places.) If we are looking idealistically, should we just rip up everything we know about peer review, get rid of the term, and just embrace the conversation and the contributions of individuals and collectives to our growing body of knowledge? I want to say yes. But I also fear that this is a fantasy.

Stuart has also engaged in peer review as a referee. Their experiences in refereeing have mirrored their experiences as an author. In several instances when they have formally refereed works, they personally knew the authors.

I've not been asked many times at all. I think I've been asked five times, and I've done three of them because the other two were for commercial publishers so I said no. Actually, two of them were for the same journal, *Publications*, an MDPI journal. So both of the articles that I reviewed there I have personally known who the authors are because, again, I'm asked to review such specific things that are related to exactly what I've published. It was after I published an article with them and so I went through it as an author and I reviewed two different articles since then for them. The first one of which I came through as a blinded, a closed review, just from reading the abstract I know exactly who has written this because I got to talk to them and commented on an early draft of this article.…

So this first one that I reviewed, again, it was just nice, it's obviously something that should be published. It's good, there's a few little tweaks that should be made so I would just suggest publishing with a few corrections. And again, I think—I can't remember what the other—I did see the other reviewer reports because there were three people. And the second article I reviewed for them had four different reviewers. I don't know why, but they went for four.

Emily: Did you disagree or agree with the other reports that you read?

So of that first one, I can't really remember, but the second one was very recently, it was last month, this is the one that had four different, so three other reports as well, and all of them were fairly short, fairly concise. But there was one of them that suggested, that said it needs major changes, which I disagreed with entirely. [laughs] I think I suggested none at all; it was just fine. And this one came through as a single-blind one, so I knew the names of the authors, but they didn't know the names of the reviewers. But it shows that they have picked well who they were going to pick as reviewers because I did really know that area, that very specific area [for the first one]. They just said—I find it such an interesting publication in that I think my experience as an author and a reviewer and other stuff that I read in that journal, it all seems good, it's fine, there's no problems with it, but the editorial approach is very hands-off. They just kind of—it does just seem like they get some reviewers and then pass those reports on to the author and get them to make the changes. It's not a very—I don't know, I guess just compared to how I work as an editor, which is a much more collaborative thing, it's much more of a conversation.… So it's interesting to read other people's reports of the same article because they're obviously all different.… I'm not sure why it was different this time around. Maybe they changed their policy. I don't know who the other reviewers were, but—I don't know—everyone picked up on slightly different things.

To me, Stuart's report of their experience at *Publications* is what should happen with peer review. Reviewers pick up different things, and the collective of responses enable authors to build and publish a stronger piece of work.

In this story we also see that Stuart's referee experiences allow them to reflect on their identity as a founder of and editor at *Journal of Radical Librarianship*. The story of

that journal greatly interests me, and I come to discover that it mirrors my own experience starting an open access LIS journal. When Stuart told me about it, I was so eager to hear their experience and see how it was much similar, yet still distinct from my own.

Emily: So can you tell me, so you started Journal of Radical Librarianship, why, what drove you to do that and what's the story behind it?

So initially it came out of conversations within the Radical Librarians Collective and particularly one—this is a yearly national meeting, one in London in 2014, I think. Yeah, 2014. And it was just kind of an idea of—I'm pretty sure someone else had—of "Should we do some publishing?" because no one at the time, there were so few outlets for writing, particularly kind of research about library-related topics from radical perspectives. So we just set up a journal. Initially, and then a little while later there was just a big Twitter conversation with a few people saying we could just do this right? But within a day we had a website and [laughs] a lot of people that were involved just kind of, yeah, we did it. Because of OJS software, it was, like, well, we know someone who can install that and just buy some server space and then we have a journal.… We initially tried to make the initial decisions with consensus decision-making. And we kind of did, in terms of what the policies were going to be so what the peer-review policy would be or what licenses we got, but it's just everyone who was involved in that conversation so, kind of a big Twitter chat. [muffled]… and then there were some Google Docs were set up, so maybe twenty or thirty people kind of contributing in some way. And then we set up this, what was the name of that? One of these online kind of consensus decision-making things. Loomio, that's the one.

As Stuart relates this story, it is not just their seeing a need to start a journal, but trying to use consensus decision-making and using radical collective processes that rings

true from my own experience. First, at *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, we used consensus decision-making from the beginning as we worked to establish the journal. Once we even attempted to utilize Loomio. I also wrote an article investigating consensus decision-making and its possibilities for libraries.[2] Because of this relation to Stuart's story, I'm hanging on to every word. They continued.

> Which, that kind of petered out, but in the initial week of just starting everything was just done like that, but a lot of it consisted of me starting an element of saying, "Okay, should this be the policy?" and starting to write something, and then other people would just like pitch in and changing things a bit. And then, yeah, then we had the journal. Like the structure of the journal, yeah, it's literally there are about seven people at the beginning who said, "I'll be an editor," and then we were the editors. And then about a year later I just put out a call on a mailing list, does anybody else want to be? And everyone who said, "Yes, I would like to be an editor" is being an editor. There's currently about fifteen people. But for a journal with very low output of articles, it just means that I don't have to actually do the editorial thing of managing the peer-review process for everything that gets submitted, there's just someone else who will take on responsibilities for that article. And a lot of the policies and decisions about the journal is—initially we tried to make it, because this is a very haphazard thing, Radical Librarians Collective is a loosely vaguely anarchist collective of people, there's no official ways to doing things.
>
> > *Emily: It sounds like, to me, you organized a lot of it at the time, but it was definitely a collaborative effort. Do you still feel like you're kind of a managing editor in that kind of role, or is it more anarchist than that?*
>
> Basically it's, I really wanted it to happen, so whenever someone else wasn't doing something, I was like, "I'll do it."

With that initial thing because I'd been thinking a lot about journal policies and how different journals have their policies about what and how they publish. So that's why in that initial thing we were able to do things quite quickly. So it's like, "Okay, I know there's another journal that has a good peer-review policy on their open journal system thing" and I'll just ask them if I can just copy that, and they'll say yes. And that's kind of how we started at the beginning. So most of the text that's on our website, all that stuff is probably copied from other places. And as well, since then actually the only reason I'm an editor, so I don't have a different title to the other editors, but I'm the person who, when things get submitted, it comes in to me first and then out to other people. So again, it's just because there has to be someone doing that, and if anyone else ever says they would like to do it then that would be fine. [laughs] So it's literally just like to try and keep it going.

What strikes me in this story, aside from the parallels to my own experience, is the way Stuart has formed relationships and participates in anarchist or radical communities. They use Twitter. And not just in the instance of creating the journal, but also in other examples of their writing and publishing experiences. They put ideas out there or respond to others' ideas by way of Twitter. It is seemingly immediate. Ideas are hatched and acted upon.

Emily: What was it like getting that first article that you published out in Journal of Radical Librarianship? Is there a story behind it? I mean, obviously was it something that was submitted by somebody or how did that go? And did that go through an open peer-review process as well?

No. Yeah, it's interesting, our journal policy is, it depends what everyone wants to do at the time. So I think there's only been one that's had, I think, like full open review as in

both the author and the reviewers have all known who each other were, because one of our articles was submitted and the authors said, yeah, this is such a personal one, we're in the article so much, we can't be anonymous, so we got reviewers that were fine with that. I don't think [pause]—I'm trying to think because I've only actually been the editor for one of the journals managing the review process, sorry, for one of the articles that's been published and that is an open one.

Yeah, I remember now. So that's one that's still, it's been like a year and a half because they have been revising it and then they've moved house. No, sorry, that was another one that's not been published, but it was someone that I just asked them, "Are you happy with doing it as an open review?" and they said, "Yeah, sure," and both the reviewers were as well. In a way it was kind of just a relief because it had been going for quite a while. [laughs] So it's nice just to actually get past that barrier [of publishing the first article]. And again, it was something which was a very political article that would not have been published I think in any other British library journal, they just wouldn't want it. It would have to be something different. So yeah.… I don't know, I just feel like this [open peer review] makes sense to me a lot of it. I do understand why some people are hesitant about it.

In their role as an editor and publisher, Stuart's aim is the same as with their own authorship. They just want to get ideas out into the world that aren't already there.

Emily: Okay. So you also serve in many other roles related to publishing, I mean, if you could even distinguish between them, you're also an editor, a founding editor, you've also been a referee, you're also a publisher, so could you talk about any of those roles and what that's like and how you came to them and then what those experiences have been like for you?

> I guess as an editor/publisher it's been, I guess the thing is a similar kind of thing, I guess, in that just getting stuff out in the world that I think is valuable and that people should read is a nice feeling. And with the journal, although we don't publish very much at all, it's been like two or three articles a year of peer-reviewed articles, but each one is, I know exactly how much work has gone into it and I know what the process has been like for the author, and a few of them at least I feel like this is actually quite important, they're saying something important that is not otherwise being said. I guess, I mean that's the entire point of the journal being there is that hopefully there are things that are not being said that can be said through this journal, and I think that's why I said, we've got a forthcoming special issue about race and power,[3] which, again, I'm not involved at all in the content side of that. There's some other people sort of taking care of the editorial stuff of that and the review process. But again, it's just trying to generate more conversation and more writing in these areas that I think are important and get more stuff out there is, I guess I mean that's what the journal is there for.

To me that is the heart of why we create, engage in, and perpetuate scholarly conversations. One of the ways that we do this is to start journals. Scholarly societies did this, and now more DIY approaches have the ability to do so with the ease of online publishing. This purpose is, in my view (and Stuart affirmed during narrative review, in theirs, too), in direct opposition to why proprietary publishers start journals. Certainly there is some nuance for proprietarily published journals, but the bottom line at for-profit publishers is the building of capital. Generating discourse may be something they say they want, but if that generation of discourse doesn't also generate money, they aren't interested.

Stuart's entire approach reflects this anti-capital paradigm. Stuart resists that cul-

tural narrative, the cultural and market narrative of capitalism; this resistance frames their work. Stuart always makes their work open. They publish only with OA publications. They will not review for non-OA publications. When I ask what more they do, they relate a story that captures, for me, the essence of their worldview and their engagement with open.

> I don't have a lot of stuff—I guess, talking at conferences about this stuff and trying to—it depends on what the audience values, whether [laughs] what you say is actually going to introduce anyone to new ideas. So I actually gave a talk to a bunch of early-career scientists which is just called "Against Capital."[4] [laughs] And just talking about that element of it, talking about publishing as an industry and how messed up it is. It was just really interesting to get feedback from people saying, "I've not heard people talk about it in this way. I'm just told that you have to go publish in this Elsevier journal for your career." I do find the one thing that I found interesting was, my initial interest in this was coming from a radical left-wing perspective, so I'm not interested in openness in terms of doing better science or better research and it speeds everything up, all that stuff just doesn't really interest me. Not that it's not important, but it's just not really what the thing that matters most. My interest has always been in socialism and the end of capitalism, and that has always been kind of coming at it from that angle. And again, getting people to think more critically about that process is always valuable I think.

And I press Stuart for more information about neoliberalism and anti-capitalism in higher education in the UK.

> *Emily: Do you think that, I'm not as familiar with the UK on the research paradigm for early-career researchers in the UK as I am in the United States, obviously, because my education has all been in the United States, but I do understand there are policies*

> *in the UK that are much more supportive of open access than in the United States, so would there be a separation there or do you feel like early-career researchers in the UK are more positioned to accept socialism or anti-capital or anti-oppression work versus—I don't know, I guess I'm just curious if you have any sense about that.*
>
> I'm really not sure. I don't know anyone who has been through the higher education process in the UK within the last, kind of, ten years or so at whatever stage is obviously… [pause] what was I trying to say? [pause] I just think it varies so much. Everyone is coming at it with their own perspective, and it goes back to the fact that I've had so many conversations with people where they also just don't understand the kind of anti-corporate or anti-Elsevier, like, "It's just a business making money, and it's just how the world works." And I don't know. I guess it's just people, most of academia, again, in the UK most of academia is this kind of vaguely left-centrist kind of, you know, they are sympathetic toward anti-corporate or socialist kind of ideas to some degree, but they probably don't actually want it to happen because they're [muffled].

By putting all of their work online, by publishing only OA, by serving as an editor at *Journal of Radical Librarianship*, by not caring about having an academic career and just doing what is interesting and what they are good at, Stuart challenges and resists cultural fictions of publishing and what it is to be an engaged scholar. I respect them immensely.

But I have discovered through our conversation that Stuart is not an idealist. Perhaps their experience, coupled with being a political radical in the political climate of their country and of the world, has not enabled them to be one. I ask what they think is in store for peer review in LIS, and their response

highlights politics and their distinct pragmatism.

> It's like when I first started getting involved in all this, I felt like things were changing very quickly and were about to change even more quickly and it felt kind of exciting, all these new ways of doing things, and now, like, oh, actually that was seven years ago and things are actually more or less the same now; in another ten years, fifteen years, things will probably be pretty similar. And I definitely think there used to be a lot of this kind of—what's the word? The kind of enthusiasm that you would get from a kind of tech perspective where it's just inevitable that things are getting better, inevitably we're progressing really quickly and it's just going to happen, and that's not true. Things slow down, stop, and roll back, and we're obviously politically regressing in so many ways, both of our countries. [laughs] Like all of that what's going on in the world on that kind of level I think it does affect how I see changes in other things, particularly when so much is dependent on policy whims of administrations that just change like open data. Open government data, four years ago, was way more advanced than it is now, and things go back just so quickly. So in terms of open access I can definitely see things haven't been progressing that quickly, things can just flip back-and-forth. I guess peer review, maybe it's a little different in terms of it's much more an internal cultural thing to academia, which is why it's maybe not subject to kind of the whims of policy quite so much, but it just means that because academic culture is so conservative in so many ways, that it just is going to change very slowly. Like even people signing their reviews so you know who the other person is, how much more common is that now than, say, five years ago? It's still not common at all, right? And open peer review for journals like the *F1000* model journal, I'm not seeing very many other places doing that at all, it's still not really… I don't imagine things changing quickly.

> *Emily: Okay. So if there's any change just it would be small, incremental, very slow-paced. Okay. Do you think that those—but you do think that any changes*

would be toward more open, or do you think they might kind of reverse course?

Peer review, I think leaning toward more openness, yes, is still going to, probably going to happen. And like I say, in, kind of, five or ten years I don't imagine things being very different, but, in a couple of generations' time I can imagine it's definitely possible that the whole, something could trigger it that people could stop being scared of it. But I don't know.

As I wrap up our conversation, I ask Stuart how they define open, and it all gets more interesting and more complicated to me. I myself can't define open, and Stuart's inability to define it as well further complicates how I think about it, yet elucidates it at the same time.

How do I define open?

Emily: Yeah. In terms of scholarship and writing, how do you define it?

Can I send you my thesis? [laughs] I've got a 10,000-word count to do that,[5] and then it doesn't really. No, I can't define it. I understand openness as coming from open source software. And kind of the two central things that define open source, sorry, free and open source software, are being online and the openness of the collaborative method of producing stuff. So that kind of distributed development model and that kind of openness to participation, which is obviously slightly bullshit because of how, which people can actually become open source developers is obviously coming from a very small group of people. In theory that was the original intention. Open licensing is the only kind of consistent, I think, bit of openness from that through open access, open data, open education, the only thing that remains consistent is open licensing. And again, if something has a CC-BY license,

> then it's open; obviously it's way more complicated than that. [pause] I don't know, I can't define it.

That Stuart was able to make a distinction about open's only common thread being licensing switched on a light bulb for me. This is a fact I tacitly knew, but they articulated it. Is there a hub-and-spoke kind of open? Is it a Venn diagram? And despite our previous short discussion of power, in Stuart's response I see the deep intricacies and inequities inherent in open. To open, there are cultural barriers. There are privilege and class barriers, and it comes back to who can code, and who can read the code that is openly available. Who can use and understand the systems of open publishing? What are the parallel inequities in peer review?

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As we end our conversation and as Stuart and I have corresponded during the transcript analysis process, it has become clear to me that it is a general pragmatism that defines Stuart's approach to their work. It is the way they move through the world as an engaged open advocate and activist. They resist the cultural academic norm of publish or perish, they resist capital and see their work as what makes sense in that resistance. They want to see their world and their work framed by socialism and what represents the collective good. For them, that is the way the world makes sense.

What strikes me most about talking with Stuart is that despite their belief in anti-capitalism and socialism, they do not seem at all dogmatic. They are measured, considering what

> makes sense for them. My worldview is parallel, yet I fear my own ego and dogmatism frequently come into my thinking, communication, and decision-making. From Stuart I've already learned so much, and I hope to be able to continue our conversations, especially as they move from the realm of PhD student into working in a university library. Will their attempts to resist capital in publishing continue? Will their challenge to the professorial academic norm evolve, and will they express their resistance in a new ways?

NOTES

1. Hugh Rundle, "Creative Commons, Open Access, and Hypocrisy," accessed January 13, 2021, https://www.hughrundle.net/2014/03/24/creative-commons-open-access-and-hypocrisy/.
2. Emily Ford, "Consensus Decision-Making and Its Possibilities in Libraries," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, January 25, 2012, http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2012/consensus.
3. *Journal of Radical Librarianship*, vol. 5, 2019, https://journal.radicallibrarianship.org/index.php/journal/issue/view/5.
4. Stuart Lawson, "Against Capital," July 1, 2017, http://stuartlawson.org/2017/07/against-capital.
5. Stuart Lawson, "Open Access Policy in the UK: From Neoliberalism to the Commons" (doctoral thesis, Birkbeck, University of London, 2019), http://vufind.lib.bbk.ac.uk/vufind/Record/591700.

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