The work is the death mask of its conception.

——WALTER BENJAMIN

1 Understanding Authorship and Publishing

What exactly is the point of publishing? The humanities form a cluster of disciplines – a branch of learning – that fosters understanding of what it means to be human.[1] Humanities scholars consider writing and the careful, qualitative engagement with text to be of utmost importance. Being a scholar means being in dialogue with others by engaging with the complexity of their thought and offering accounts of understanding. Publishing, one may assume, facilitates this dialogue. To publish does not mean to put information out there; to publish means to enter a discourse community with the motivation to participate and learn, to argue, disagree, and build upon disagreement. Publishing is as much about readership as it is about authorship; author and reader merge in the recursive structure of dialogue. Publishing, in this sense, is borne by the motivation to contribute to discourse and to keep the dialogue about understanding what it means to be human alive. This is one answer to the question of what the point of publishing is.

This book gives a different answer. It claims that the point of publishing is not to be a voice in a dialogue but to yield formal authorship. This answer accounts for the ways authorship fares as a shortcut for productivity, and how this shortcut impacts the dissemination of scholarship in the humanities. Underlying this is a subtle shift of the means and ends of publishing. Publishing could be thought of as in the outline above. The motivation to publish is bound to the end of contributing to discourse; it grows out of dialogue and the intention to be a voice in it. Recognition of the work of

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[1] This ideal of scholarship in the humanities is both polarising and unifying. It is the indelible origin of humanities scholarship to be concerned with the *Menschengeschlecht* (German: humankind) (Dilthey, [1910] 1970: 89). See also newer outlines of it, such as Habermas (1971: 140–86), Garland (2012: 301), and Thomä (2019: 101).

a scholar is equally bound to this. There is no shortcut for this recognition; it requires engagement with dialogue. Authorship may fare as a reference, but it cannot assume the point of recognition itself. Readers might vouch for the quality of a voice, but only in the specific context of its engagement. This is an ideal of authorship that has probably never been fully realised.

At the opposite of such an ideal, authorship fares not as a reference but as the actual point of recognition. The formal reference of authorship translates to an assumed productivity. Many such formal references – for instance, accumulated on a curriculum vitae – mean that the scholar is highly productive. Scholars are seen to be leaders in their areas if these formalities account for specific publishing brands. They are likely to be skilled if their authorship references point to a wide range of specialist areas. In an academic setting that favours marketable output, such a list of formal authorship references is worth more than anything. Scholars who have such a list are visible and productive, and the institutions they work at can benefit from this visibility and productivity. It is not the scholarship but the fact of it being out there and the way it is externalised that count. Publishing becomes a means to showcase visibility and productivity. The motivation to publish is bound to this end; dialogue and the intention to be a voice in it become secondary.

This shift of means and ends is visible in the publishing practices of scholars today. Of course, by claiming that authorship is a shortcut for productivity, I do not claim that – along this gamut of means and ends – we have reached the extreme point where publishing is *only* a means to showcase visibility and productivity. The individual scholar in the humanities is still motivated by the desire to know, to contribute original accounts of understanding to an ongoing dialogue, and to engage with the complexity of the thought of others. No publication is empty. Thinking and writing precede publishing, and each publication is likely to find at least some kind of readership. It might receive a few citations even, which allows us to assume that it is included in some kind of dialogue. Each text exists in a tradition and is likely to feed into the discourse of teaching.

And yet, by claiming that authorship is a shortcut for productivity, I *do* wish to highlight that we have reached the extreme where publishing is *dominantly* a means to showcase visibility and productivity. This domination is the result of a governance of scholarship that wishes to market the

modern university as a site of the production of world-leading output. This site needs to be efficiently managed; there are simply too many applications to sort through, grants to apply for, review deadlines to meet, and opportunities to make scholarly merit visible. As a research manager – or a scholar involved in the organisation of more than their own scholarly endeavours – it seems only intuitive to claim that efficiency is a necessity. It might be lamented: how else can scholars respond to the masses of publications, applications, and reviews? One may say: information is everywhere, and you need to rationalise it in order to master it. However, this intuition seems to counter the basic tenets of the humanities. Their principles of hermeneutics and historicity posit that subjective, qualitative engagement is required to make a qualitative judgement.

Surely, I can ask others to make a judgement for me; we might call it peer review. A publication's formal mark of having been judged – peer reviewed – allows for efficient measurement of a kind. But it precedes dialogue. It is a judgement that contributes to the formality of authorship without being able to tell us something about the afterlife of the work *in* dialogue. This afterlife cannot be efficiently measured, and more and more publications exacerbate this difficulty. Masses of publications disguise the individual contribution, and they require self-referential work in terms of initial, formal statements of judgement. This need to handle masses of publications – the mass of publications itself – is a symptom of the problem, rather than part of a solution. This efficiency based on formal authorship manifests quite particular terms of a competition.

Competition, Growth, and Efficiency

These terms can hardly take account of the subtler manifestations of scholarship. The chaos and complexity of notes, of teaching, of conceptional text, of elusive dialogues are hard to assess efficiently. Unpublished manuscripts require reading. Teaching is difficult to objectify, even by means of standardised evaluations. Does the best teacher performance really yield the best – the most educative, scholarly profitable, or culturally desirable – education? What is the value of critical, engaging teaching if the marketable names of

institution – enhanced by Research Excellence Framework (REF) ratings and one-dimensional rankings – overshadow all else?

In the pursuit to be determined the most productive scholar – productive in terms of both innovation and output of ideas and truths – competition is crowded and fierce such that heuristic efficiency is required. The merito-cratic notion of widening participation – which claims that anyone is allowed to compete so long as they perform well in the terms prescribed – further increases competition, which again enforces the requirement of efficiency.

These mutually reinforcing mechanisms of competition and efficient management have reached an extreme in the sense of a self-referential *growth/trust spiral*. As there are more and more aspiring scholars, dis-courses get more crowded. Competitive funding regimes and career developments based on quantities of output further incentivise increasing numbers of publications. For instance, across epistemic genres, 'the output of philosophical publications has by far surpassed the increase of members of the profession' (Rescher, 2019: 750; translation by the author). Even in the smallest definition of one's philosophical area, there are too many new publications today (Marquard, 2020b). In this, 'academic philosophy shares with other disciplines . . . the huge increase in the number of submissions to journals in the past few decades' (Crane, 2018: n.p.). Schneijderberg et al. (2022: 21) identify 'a crowding-out effect of tradi-tional publication cultures by a publication culture valorized in natural sciences', with fewer books and ever more articles, especially in the English language, being published in Germany. This overproduction pertains to journals more than to monographs, but the problem continues into the long form. That said, the *monograph crisis* is not a crisis in terms of materiality. The monograph is still highly valued. Nevertheless, 'more titles are published [in the arts and humanities in the UK] than even the most assiduous scholar could hope to read' (Jubb, 2017: 5). This is a crisis in terms of a mismatch of supply and demand, as the development of numbers shows (Thompson, 2005: 93–8). Monographs have become so differentiated that each copy is of interest to only a few hundred scholars, if at all. As a result of this overproduction, scholars seem to have less and less time to read in depth (Baveye, 2014).

This turns into a need for trusted sources. Scholars – conducting all sorts of evaluations of publications, promotions, and grants – hardly find the time to engage qualitatively in dialogue with the scholarship in evaluation. They require heuristics instead: output timelines, topic scopes, publishing brands, co-authorships, editorship, and so on; all those instances of information that make the formality of authorship start mattering more and more. Their defining characteristics become more differentiated and, again, more crowded, which sets forth another layer of growth.

The law of motion is that growth of output allows for growth of publishing venues that then requires enforced stratification of these venues. In turn, scholars can rely on a trusted set of formal characteristics for their daily scholarship and evaluation practices. This stratification enforces mechanisms of visibility and mass publication that trigger further demand to publish: to stay visible and to signpost productivity in the different formal dimensions.

The REF only reinforces this spiral, albeit its formally benign outline. The REF *could* be seen as a mechanism that inhibits crude growth; after all, it claims to value quality above quantity. It is also said to perform on peer review, and the qualitative assessment of peers might be seen as an original scholarly activity. In all these respects, we might assume that the REF works against such a spiral and the excess of external research management. The reality paints a different picture, however. It is best summarised by the following formula: the REF does not review past discourse as it was shaped from within; rather, discourse is shaped from without to be reviewed by a future REF.

The REF is the epitome of using communication to measure and market productivity. Publications – the original means enabling discourse – become means enabling authorship. The REF thus reinforces governance of competition for a type of output that increasingly affects not only aspiring – young – scholars but individuals across career levels in the UK. A scholar has to be *REFable* – indicating to departmental management their value to the department's future outcome in the REF. The REF does not even reward or interact with the individual scholar; they have to contribute their work to the productivity of the institution. They become replaceable since it is their output – a commodity in a market of exchangeable ideas – that counts, not the specificity of their thought, their

engagement with dialogue, or the students this dialogue attracts. Such specificity is reserved to an elite at a few elite institutions. For them, it is a competition of qualitative differentiation, of developing a strong intellectual programme that serves as a foundation for future monographs or smaller output. Great performance in the REF seems predictable for these happy few. The rest – the large majority – have to compete in terms of unspecific scholarship. They have to gain the credit of *REFability* not for the REF itself but because the institutions require the REF's material and symbolic reward to attract further staff and students. The REF thrives on rated output, not on ideas.

This makes REFability a function of the dubious sphere of the *job market*. This job market is the everyday idiom of the struggle for recognition that works in terms of formal requirements. It suggests that the most valuable is the scholar that is the most productive in terms of formal output; you have to produce new output to become REFable.

Publish or Perish

A prominent name for the experienced pressure that this struggle exerts is *publish or perish*. It claims that either you publish or you perish. You may not clinically pass away, but if you do not publish, your scholarly career collapses. Of course, having published by no means implies that you do not perish. But if you aspire to a career in academia, you have to publish, and the more, the better. This, in short, is an illustration of contemporary academia's iron cage.

Publish or perish has become known far beyond the confines of academia. It comes as no surprise, then, that a variety of articles in popular media implement the theme in wider discourses in the English-speaking world (Aitkenhead, 2013; Colquhoun, 2011; Kristof, 2014) and in Germany (Könneker, 2018; Pörksen, 2015). However, publish or perish is far from being coherent. Not only is it referred to by different names but it also appears as an abstract imperative, as the most prevalent principle of a productivity and management regime in institutionalised academia, or as the current culture of scholarly communication in general. Publish or perish may be used as a referent to an age (Rosa, 2010: 55), an aphorism (Rond and Miller, 2005), a climate (Relman, 1977), a culture (van

Dalen and Henkens, 2012), a doctrine (Moosa, 2018: vii), a *Fluch* (German: curse; Könneker, 2018), a *Grundgesetz* (German: constitution; Barth, 2019: 13), an ideology (Vannini, 2006), a mantra (Guraya et al., 2016), a phenomenon (Miller et al., 2011), a slogan (Hexter, 1969), a syndrome (Colpaert, 2012), or a system (Lee, 2014).

If an individual wishes to be a scholar, they have to submit their scholarship to the terms of this competition. These terms dictate that what 'matters in academia are publications' (Harvie, 2000: 115). In classic sociological terms, we may think of the transcendence of commodification to explain this. A publication comprising scholarship in text appears to be a trivial thing. Its authorship is a name reference in discourse, placing it within a tradition. It has a use value in the communication of scholarship: by being published, text is made visible to an audience that aspires to engage with that scholarship. 'But, as soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent' (Marx, [1867] 1906: 82). The publication – stepping forward to compete formally – no longer just communicates scholarship. It assumes the commodity form and is in competition with all other commodities on terms of marketability in institutional accumulation, on terms of comparability in a job market, and no longer merely on terms of use in discourse. The dissemination of ideas from author to reader and the potential competition of ideas *after* dissemination are substituted by the competition of ways of dissemination and the fact of dissemination in the first place. Its value is the referenced formal authorship. Such authorship as a commodity form means a predominance of the symbolic over the material, a 'mystical character' (Marx, [1867] 1906: 82) that does not originate in use value. The exchange value of authorship as a commodity form dominates over the use value of scholarship in discourse.

We might, polemically, claim: how else is scholarship to be communicated? How can others engage with a scholar's thinking if that scholar does not publish? An answer could be: by means of teaching, by oral dialogue, by sharing informal text. But this can be neither marketed nor efficiently counted. The once normative ideal of the unity of teaching and scholarship as conceived by Humboldt – his conception of *Bildung* – is replaced by preference for the new – the ideology of innovation – in which output needs

to be countable and marketable as individual instances.[2] Originality becomes meaningless where it is seen not within its contextuality but as information as suggestive advertisement. The intrinsic complexity of dialogue – in teaching, in conversation, and in the contextuality of text – is to be resolved in the abstracting, formal instances of information that can be accounted for efficiently. This ideology results in a 'mad run rush for more publications' (Rosa, 2010: 55) in which every formal representation of something new is worth more than the capacity of advancement of rational discourse or the development of intellectual competence and daring. The abstract production of marketable output replaces the substance of a contribution, that is, produced formal authorship replaces the communicating text: the 'desire to produce knowledge, to share ideas, and to make an important contribution, is just one impetus for academics to publish. It may, however, no longer be the primary one' (Hyland, 2015: 6). As more intrinsic scholarly motives vanish, this is lamented as the *perversion of authorship* (Barth, 2019: 13). This perversion is an increasing disbalance of formality and substance.

Historically, the university and its clusters of disciplines are often characterised by a variety of dichotomies: idiosyncratic versus nomothetic, understanding versus explaining, historical-hermeneutical methods emphasising the subject versus exacting methods of objectification, qualitative versus quantitative paradigms, and so on. These terms are significant for respective cultures, carrying symbolic patterns that guide actions and signify worldviews. They are also often positioned to symbolise the opposition of the humanities and the sciences. In this role, they are overly generalising, trying to encompass a range of disciplinary practices that are hard to unify. Still, they offer an approach to understanding: a starting point for further, more specific enquiry.

For characterising the contemporary university in this sense, one particular dichotomy may be that of the comparable, formal output that signifies new information versus idiosyncratic, qualitatively complex, and intrinsically non-formal scholarship. The wording already indicates the difficulty of referring to this dichotomy. Nevertheless, it seems essential for answering the question of what the point of publishing is. It helps us to understand the

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[2] In fact, the 'Czech Republic and [the] UK show the lowest percentage of institutions balancing teaching and research' (Bruni et al., 2020: 1132).

constitution of publishing practices in the humanities. This dichotomy is the new public management (NPM) notion of valuing measurable output above substance.[3] It is research versus teaching – the production of something new versus the passing on of that which is known. That which is new needs to be signified in the form of authorship. Publishing, in this understanding, is a means to turn scholarship – its idiosyncrasy, complexity, and requirement of qualitative engagement – into publications that yield formal authorship. It is driven by a competition that emphasises the auditing of individuals in their production of this – definite, marketable, and efficiently measurable – output. Against an ideal understanding of publishing as a means of communication, the empirical reality of publishing needs to be seen as a distancing of both the scholar subject and the intrinsic communicative purpose of text.

How can the grounds for this and its praxis be understood? How can the ambiguity in the categorical publish or perish be explained? How does the Weberian dichotomy of substantive and formal rationality help? How can the impact of the REF on publishing practices be understood? This book provides answers to such questions by outlining what it means to publish and how this meaning is distanced from an intrinsic motivation of contributing to scholarly discourse. It picks up the many concerns voiced in academia. These are, foremost, articulated in the day-to-day conduct, in the life-worlds of both early-career and senior scholars who wish to focus on an intellectual agenda, but have to respond to the alienating governance principles of competition on formal output.

Methods and Empirical Data

This book is an empirically grounded critique of publishing practices. I investigated these practices during several empirical studies, the results of two of which are published for the first time in this book. They enable readers to comprehend publishing practices in their institutional context,

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[3] In short, NPM refers to the governance principles of public institutions that are ambiguously characterised by 'free market rhetoric and intensive managerial control practices', as discussed by Lorenz (2012: 600); see also Bacevic (2019: 101) and Münch (2011: 96–121).

how scholars perceive those practices, and what challenges there may be. This book is decidedly short. I focus on the scholar as an author. This focus serves two purposes: it provides researchers and policymakers with a concise introduction to what authorship and publishing in the humanities mean today; and it creates a starting point for future research that integrates and looks at particular aspects of authorship and publishing more comprehensively, particularly their materialist impact. Therefore, this is not a book about technical aspects of writing or publishing. It is also not a book about publishers, or about bibliometric quantifications of authorship. It is a book that puts forward a contextual understanding of publishing practices to explain the empirical situation of authors in the humanities.

The empirical data of this book are based on two studies: a quantitative survey conducted in 2018 and a set of qualitative interviews carried out in 2019/20.[4] Both of these studies take place within a case study frame that employs scholars in Germany and the UK as subjects that actualise the practices in question. The two countries are comparable in terms of size and scholarly institutionalisation. However, they are unique in particular characteristics: German academia is governed by a tremendously conservative career system, while the UK has a rather progressive but strongly hierarchised career system; Germany shows efforts to manage excellence nationwide, but only a few institutions are addressed by this management of excellence and it has little impact on publication practices in general, while the UK's efforts to manage excellence seem all-encompassing and are intricately intertwined with publications; German humanities scholars, who are very much culturally bound to a (Humboldtian) traditionalism and thus find the new governance practices and demands to internationalise something of a shock, are generally dismissive of having to use the English language and publish in non-traditional English journals, while UK scholars, who have never been strongly bound to Humboldt and are (by discursive default) rooted in academia's lingua franca, English,

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