Writing for open access

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My reasons for choosing to publish open access articles stem from a basic premise: because my work is publicly funded I feel that it should be available, in its published form, to anyone without charge. My interest in open access also stems from what I perceive to be fundamentally problematic aspects of what, for contrast, I will call academia's standard publishing model. At the risk of oversimplification, the standard model entails the author(s) of a given article signing over copyright to a given publisher who then subsequently sells access to that article via journal subscriptions. Journals do provide fundamental services (e.g., editing, typesetting, page layout, dissemination, marketing) and those services do have costs. But large portions of those costs are ultimately borne by public money. Journal editors, if they receive any monetary compensation at all, are typically salaried academics and so in Canada and the UK (and elsewhere, even in the more privatized US) are paid with public funds. None of the costs related to data acquisition, fieldwork, time for research, data analysis, or writing are typically borne by publishers. Peer-review is also typically cost-free for the publisher. As well, a large share—it is difficult to know exactly how much—of the actual manuscript production (analysis, writing, editing, image production and formatting) is done by the author(s). Under these conditions, I find it fundamentally wrong that a private entity encloses the research results (and the substantial exchange economies (Elden 2008) publishing them relies on) made possible by public funds (Kirby 2011).

Now having said all this, the situation of open access publishing versus the standard model is rather more complicated in practice and a variety of issues must be carefully considered. For example, the documented practices of so-called predatory open access journals and their outright fraud (both financial and intellectual) demonstrates a need for caution when considering open access publishing (Bohannon 2013; O'Loughlin et al. 2014). Choosing a license appropriate for one's work means learning to navigate the contract language of copyright demanded by a given journal, but also the language of Creative Commons Attribution. With regard to the latter (and in keeping with my basic premise about publicly funded research), I have chosen a Creative Commons license that permits use and distribution of my work provided that work is attributed properly and the distribution is non-commercial (see Creative Commons 2014). Open access changes the accessibility of published research relative to the standard model. It may, for example, very positively effect the impact my work has by making it much more widely available in and beyond the academic world. Certainly, this is a positive development for my work, but it does raise important questions about equity. For example, if my work is made more widely available through open access than that of another author who is unable or unwilling to pay the fee for open access publication, is that an equitable development?

Open access publishing facilitates the building of a package of works that speak to a variety

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of audiences, both within and beyond academia. For me this process emerged more organically than in a planned or strategic way. My open access publication at *Area* (Lepawsky and Mather 2011a) happened to be the first such publication for that journal. That happenstance coincided with an editor's invitation to create a blog post for *Geography Directions* in the form of a video abstract (Lepawsky and Mather 2011b). The video abstract struck me as a very exciting way to present my work in another format and, potentially at least, to quite different audiences. Thinking about creative ways to present the video abstract in combination with the open access article then pushed me to think in new ways about how to make my work public beyond 'the article'. Whereas before I might have seen publication of an article as the ultimate goal, now I see it as part of a constellation of modes for making my work more publicly available and accessible.

I have been very fortunate to be able to take advantage of the fee based model of open access publishing because my research has been generously funded, again with public money. These costs amount to about $USD 3,000 per article for the Wiley-Blackwell journals I have chosen to publish in. Obtaining funding for these costs was a matter of writing them in as budget items in funding applications. In my case, I knew that the particular funding agency I was applying to was considering requiring all research funded by it to be published open access, but that the organization had not yet made this official policy. The policy landscape around publicly funded research and open access publication is changing rapidly (Government of Canada 2012; Government of Canada 2013). The Research Councils UK now requires Council funded research to be published open access (Research Councils UK 2014). As a consequence of rapidly evolving policies on open access it behoves us to get grounded in open access issues both in general and in our specific institutional situations.

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