

# The Radical Open Access Collective: building alliances for a progressive, scholar-led commons



*The Radical Open Access Collective launched its new website earlier this week. Open access has always been about more than just improving access to research, and **Janneke Adema** and **Samuel A. Moore** here highlight what the Radical OA Collective can offer. A focus on experimentation with new forms of publishing and authorship; the promotion of traditionally underrepresented cultures, languages, and publics; and an understanding of publishing as a relational practice, highlighting and caring for the relationships involved throughout the process, all form part of the Radical OA Collective's underlying philosophy.*

This week saw the launch of a [new website](#) for the Radical Open Access Collective, a vibrant community of presses, journals, publishing projects, and organisations all invested in not-for-profit and scholar-led forms of academic publishing. The members of this collective showcase the wide variety of alternative forms and models of open access publishing currently experimented with, mainly in the humanities and social sciences. This in a context where, although open access is now finally gaining ground, the spirit of experimentation that originally fuelled this movement is being progressively sidelined by a growing reliance on and implementation of specific, market-driven open access publishing models (particularly those connected to exorbitant article and book processing charges); models which do not necessarily suit, support or sustain open access publishing in the humanities and social sciences, but which do serve commercial stakeholders' interests and the current publishing status quo.

The Radical OA Collective reminds us that experimentation with new forms of publishing remains essential, and that open access has always been about more than just improving access to research. As a movement open access has also focused on exploring and promoting not-for-profit, institutional and academic-led publishing alternatives, for example. This is to provide a counterpoint to the commercial legacy system and the vast profits it extracts from our scholarly research and communication interactions. This system has posed specific risks to specialised book publishing in the humanities, to the publication of books by early-career researchers, and to the dissemination of research from those working in the global south or writing in languages other than English; all of which, although essential to sustaining the scholarly conversation, often lack a direct market appeal. To counter this the Radical OA Collective highlights the importance of making publishing more diverse, equitable, and open to change, where it wants to ensure that new and underrepresented cultures of knowledge are able to have a voice. Members of the collective therefore work together to champion the variety of alternative models for scholarly communication that currently exist, and the collective is keen to build alliances with other initiatives interested in building a collaborative and non-competitive publishing ecosystem; one which supports a progressive and multi-polar knowledge commons.



During open access week, we'd like to highlight three examples of what radical open access, and the Radical OA Collective specifically, brings to open access.

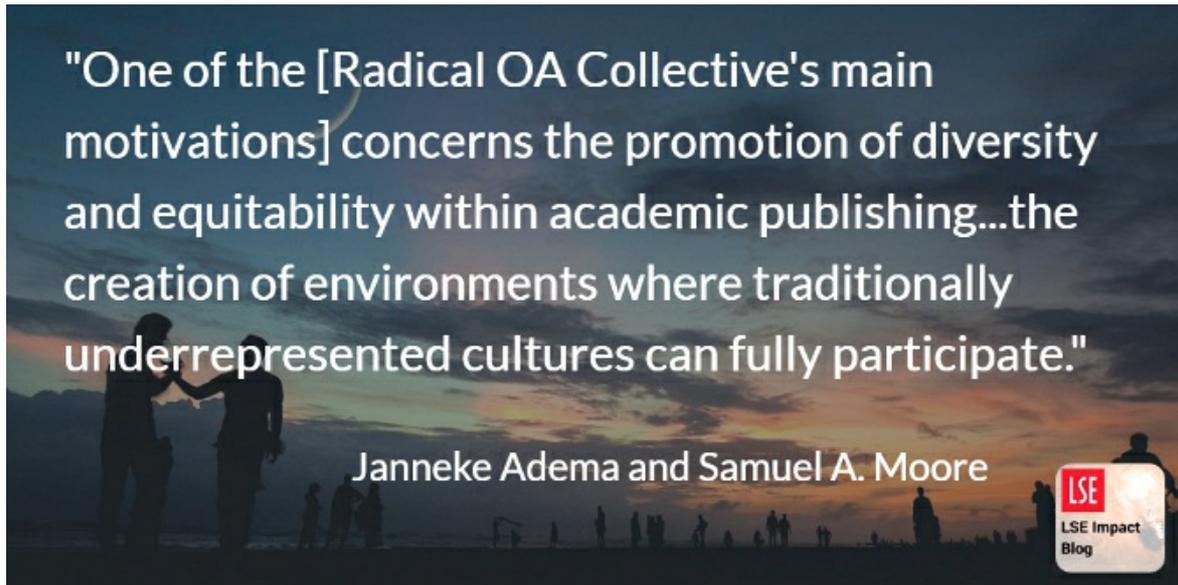
## 1. A focus on experimentation

Members of the collective do not shy away from asking difficult questions about what publishing is and, with that, what it can become. Many initiatives within the collective see their publishing projects as an extension of their own critical work and a way to explore different modes of publishing, often deterred by our (still very paper-centric) established publishing forms and practices. As such they have been keen to experiment with publication forms, models, processes, relations, and agencies, cutting through the stabilisations within scholarly publishing—from the fixed book to the single author—that, often uncritically, have become disciplinary norms. This open-ended critical experimenting has become a guiding principle for many initiatives to explore the potentially more politically and ethically progressive possibilities made possible by technological developments and digital tools; to investigate how these might impact on the ways in which research will be conducted, disseminated and consumed in the future. As an ongoing critical process, experimenting can therefore be seen as a form of intervention into the object-formation and increasing marketisation of publishing and academia.

Many of the projects involved in the collective see open access as essential to enabling these new forms of (digital) experimentation. This may be through communal authoring and editing of wiki books (see Open Humanities Press' [Living Books about Life](#) series); anonymous or collective authorship (in the case of an [Uncertain Commons](#), for example); or multimodal or digital-only publications, publishing platforms and software (including ground-breaking initiatives such as [Vectors](#) and [Scalar](#), but also newer projects, such as [electric press](#) and [Textshop Experiments](#)) next to projects that want to focus on what openness means for images and visual forms of communication (i.e. [Photomediations Machine](#)) for example. But alongside experiments such as these we also want to highlight projects that aim to cut across both disciplinary boundaries and distinctions between practice and theory (for example [Goldsmiths Press](#), which also focuses on publishing literary and artistic works), as well as scholarly communities that are experimenting with the creation of new communities and social networks to share research and establish cross-disciplinary alliances (from [MediaCommons Press](#), to [The BABEL Working Group](#) and [Humanities Commons](#)).

## 2. Underrepresented cultures

One of the main motivations underlying the Radical OA Collective concerns the promotion of diversity and equitability within academic publishing, and this entails the creation of environments where traditionally underrepresented cultures can fully participate. This includes presses and alliances that promote publishing and collaboration in specific regions; for example [CLACSO](#), which brings together hundreds of research centres and graduate schools in the social sciences and humanities, predominantly in Latin American countries, or [African Minds](#), which, next to publishing works from African academics or organisations, has conducted [in depth research](#) on the state of the university press in Africa. Members also promote publishing in different languages; see, for example, [Éditions Science et Bien Commun](#), a Quebec-based press publishing research by and for francophone countries in the Global South, or [meson press](#), which (next to books in English) is keen to publish and translate media theory books in German.



There is also a focus on providing opportunities to early-career researchers to publish, and not only to publish but to help them directly with the publishing process and familiarise themselves with it. [Mattering Press](#), which originates from a peer-support group of early-career researchers, in particular wants to stimulate those at the beginning of their academic careers, as do publications such as [Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry](#), dedicated to the publication of writings and creative works by degree-seeking students. [punctum books](#) is well-known for providing space for the publication of works of so-called “para-academic” theorists and practitioners, often independent or precariously employed researchers or those in so-called “alt-ac” positions. These projects and the collective as a whole are dedicated to opening up scholarship to publics that are new or currently underserved, including those writing on niche topics or conducting experimental research for which the commercial publishing market doesn’t always provide a space.

### 3. Ethics of care

One of the things for which the Radical OA Collective stands out is its members’ focus on the ethics and politics of publishing. For example, many initiatives foreground an ethics of care, as part of which publishing is understood as a *relational* practice, highlighting and caring for the relationships involved throughout the publishing process, from authors, editors and reviewers to typesetters, copy-editors, indexers and beyond. This involves, amongst others, paying, rewarding or otherwise acknowledging people fairly for their labour wherever possible, while ensuring that the efforts of volunteers are not exploited or overly relied upon. Well aware of the high amounts of volunteer labour that academic-led initiatives depend on, the collective has made this one of its focal points, writing about and discussing the diverse forms of labour academic publishing relies upon, arguing for it to be valued more in various ways (that are not necessarily monetary). A focus on labour issues is all the more important in a predominantly commercial publishing environment, given the large amounts of academic volunteer labour (from peer reviewing to editing, to liking and bookmarking and building relationships in exchange for usage data in SSRNs) that is needed to sustain it and maintain the exorbitant profits its stakeholders have come to expect.

The Radical OA Collective therefore seeks to redirect this volunteer labour where possible towards more progressive forms of publishing, for example by shifting it away from commercial profit-driven publishers and gifting it to developing not-for-profit open access projects instead. Related to this is a commitment to taking time and care with regard to the published object itself, something that is often lacking in profit-oriented modes of publishing. But perhaps most important, as Eileen Joy of punctum books [writes](#), is for the collective to care for “ourselves and each other” in the face of marketised cultures of higher education that require researchers to work long hours and think of themselves as “brands”:

“This would be to think of Community, or the Collective, as a sort of ‘mutual admiration society’, but also as a Convalescent Ward, in which ‘taking care’ (of ourselves and each other) would be more important than ‘performing’ according to so-called ‘professional’ standards and protocols.”

Next to bringing together this community of people eager to change publishing, to make it better and more just, the collective wants to support other academics eager to set up their own presses and projects, or those disillusioned with the commercial solutions currently on offer. We share advice and offer support from those within the community who have already gained experience with publishing in this manner and are willing to help others in a horizontal and non-competitive manner. We have started to formalise this through the creation of an [information portal](#) with links to resources on funding opportunities for open access books, open-source publishing tools, guidelines on editing standards, ethical publishing and diversity in publishing, and OA literature useful to not-for-profit publishing endeavours. We want to turn this into a toolkit for not-for-profit publishers in the future (and this will be of use not only to academic-led presses, but hopefully also to university presses, and library-run and society publishers, for example). We have also set up a [directory](#) of academic-led presses, to help legitimise this form of publishing as a “model” and make scholars aware that there are publishing alternatives out there.

*If you run a not-for-profit OA publishing initiative or are interested in starting your own scholar-led publishing project, we encourage you to join the [Radical OA mailing list](#) and help us further build this supportive and inclusive publishing environment.*

*Note: This article gives the views of the authors, and not the position of the LSE Impact Blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [comments policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.*

## About the authors

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