

On the Empyre list Sean Cubitt posted the following response to my (blog) posting, two days ago:

Hey geert

All good, though we might differ on specific cases (!)

Your resolutions 2, 3, 4 and 7

2. Renaissance of theory, radical texts that appeal to young people and help them to dream again

3. Dismantling the academic exclusion machine

4. Overcoming media genres and expertise prisons

7. Opening channels for collective imagination

all sit together. The problems are two: one how to ensure quality, and two how to gather distribution. The academy already uses citation metrics as a quality indicator: the number of quotations by others shows the importance of the piece. Tho open to abuse, the system works well for sciences, not too badly in medicine (where it tends to be normative, eg the largest citation counts are for the most-funded areas of research), poor in social science and humanities where the range of specialisms is too broad and diverse.

Citation counting is an enumerated form of folksonomy. Alternatives like linking blogs are a) too personal/idiosyncratic and b) can be disappointing if you follow links to 'a blog like this' and hit a bad entry (where 'bad' = not what I was looking for). Journals and book publishers can claim they are better at securing quality through peer review.

At the same time we all know journals that started with a project, went refereed, and became just another journal. Open access journals are a step in the right direction for distribution: DOAJ and, among others, the Open Humanities Press initiatives are steps in the right direction. But the economics is based on the unpaid labour of referees pus the expensive skilled labour of preparing texts for publication.

The simplest way to avoid refereeing is to publish yourself: most of us do, at least some of the time. On the other hand, don't know about you but I'm my own worst editor. Besides the vanity press stigma, there's also the problem

of individualism. What you call for is a socialised production.

New open access journals come into being regularly: some like first Monday and Telepolis have been here since the Web started and even before. But how can we distinguish the old pals act from a community of like-minded people sharing a vision for the development of a socialised theoretical meme? They're either a community of some kind, or they're a political party, and in both cases there is going to be an inside to the system.

It's still worth fighting to keep open channels inside the established media: they cannot be abandoned to the people who already have near-monopoly. At the same time, this kind of tactical activity is only part of the larger issue of multi-networking the specialist activities of thinkers and makers. There are times when you need to discuss openly in a shared language, and times when you need to argue technical points in jargon (because it is condensed and quick) *before* you go public. What we need are multiple specialist forums, each of which take sit as a mission to circulate to other such forums the fruits of their labours in terms the rest of us can understand. Oddly enough, the scientists are good at this, and the social sciences are mainly poor, while humanities are completely self-absorbed.

It's a big challenge: how to democratise not just knowledge but the process of creating ideas, and to do that without becoming unpaid labour for the knowledge industries, or falling for ownership models of the product of thinking.

Tricksy

sean