**Why Are We Not Boycotting Academia.edu?**

Coventry University

Tuesday 8th December 2015

3:00-6:00pm

Ellen Terry Building room ET130

With:

Janneke Adema – Chair (Coventry University, UK)

Pascal Aventurier (INRA, France)

Kathleen Fitzpatrick (MLA/Coventry University, US)

Gary Hall (Coventry University, UK)

David Parry (Saint Joseph’s University, US)

Organised by *The* *Centre for Disruptive Media*: [www.disruptivemedia.org](http://www.disruptivemedia.org)

Registration: <http://why-are-we-not-boycotting-academia-edu.eventbrite.co.uk>

With over 36 million visitors each month, the San Francisco-based platform-capitalist company Academia.edu is hugely popular with researchers. Its founder and CEO Richard Price maintains it is the ‘[largest social-publishing network for scientists](http://fortune.com/2015/05/08/scientists-social-study/)’, and ‘[larger than all its competitors put together](http://fortune.com/2015/05/08/scientists-social-study/)’. Yet posting on Academia.edu is far from being ethically and politically equivalent to using an institutional open access repository, which is how it is often understood by academics.

Academia.edu’s financial rationale rests on the ability of the venture-capital-funded professional entrepreneurs who run it to monetize the data flows generated by researchers. Academia.edu can thus be seen to have a parasitical relationship to a public education system from which state funding is steadily being withdrawn. Its business model depends on academics largely educated and researching in the latter system, labouring for Academia.edu for free to help build its privately-owned for-profit platform by providing the aggregated input, data and attention value.

To date over 15,000 researchers have taken a stand against the publisher Elsevier by adding their name to the list on the [Cost of Knowledge](http://thecostofknowledge.com/) website demanding they change how they operate. Just recently 6 editors and 31 editorial-board members of one of Elsevier's journals, *Lingua*, went so far as to resign, leading to calls for a boycott and for support for *Glossa*, the open access journal they plan to start instead. By contrast, the business practices of Academia.edu have gone largely uncontested.

This is all the more surprising given that when Elsevier bought the academic social network Mendeley in 2013 (it was [suggested](http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/when-the-rebel-alliance-sells-out) at the time that Elsevier was mainly interested in acquiring Mendeley’s user data), many academics deleted their profiles out of protest. Yet generating revenue from the exploitation of user data is exactly the business model underlying academic social networks such as Academia.edu.

This event will address the following questions:

* Why have researchers been so ready to campaign against for-profit academic publishers such as Elsevier, Springer, Wiley-Blackwell, and Taylor & Francis/Informa, but not against for-profit platforms such as Academia.edu ResearchGate and Google Scholar?
* Should academics refrain from providing free labour for these publishing companies too?
* Are there non-profit alternatives to such commercial platforms academics should support instead?
* Could they take inspiration from the editors of *Lingua*(now *Glossa*) and start their own scholar-owned and controlled platform cooperatives for the sharing of research?
* Or are such ‘technologies of the self’ or ‘political technologies of individuals’, as we might call them following Michel Foucault, merely part of a wider process by which academics are being transformed into connected individuals who endeavour to generate social, public and professional value by acting as microentrepreneurs of their own selves and lives?

**About the speakers**

Janneke Adema is Research Fellow in Digital Media at Coventry University. She has published in numerous peer-reviewed journals and edited books including *New Formations; New Media & Society*; *The International Journal of Cultural Studies*; *New Review of Academic Librarianship*; *LOGOS: The Journal of the World Book Community;* and *Krisis: Journal for Contemporary Philosophy*. She blogs at Open Reflections: <http://www.openreflections.org/>

Pascal Aventurier has been leading the Regional Scientific Information Team at the French National Institute for Agricultural Research’s (INRA, France) PACA Centre since 2002. He is also co-leader of the scientific information technology group. His focus is on research data, linked open data, open science, knowledge management and controlled vocabularies, as well as researching digital and social tool practices. His team is also exploring the evolution of social networks for academic use. His recent piece on ‘Academic Social Networks: Challenges and Opportunities’, is available here: <http://www.unica-network.eu/sites/default/files/Academic_Social_Networks_Challenges_opportunities.pdf>

Kathleen Fitzpatrick is Director of Scholarly Communication at the MLA, and visiting professor at Coventry University. The author of [*Planned Obsolescence*](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0814727883/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=plannedobsole-20&linkCode=as2&camp=217145&creative=399373&creativeASIN=0814727883) (2011) she is also co-founder of the digital scholarly network [MediaCommons](http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/). Her recent piece on Academia.edu, ‘Academia. Not Edu’, is available here: <http://www.plannedobsolescence.net/academia-not-edu/>.

Gary Hall is Professor of Media and Performing Arts, Coventry University, UK, and co-founder of Open Humanities Press. His new monograph, *Pirate Philosophy*, is forthcoming from MIT Press in early 2016. His recent piece on Academia.edu, ‘What Does Academia.edu’s Success Mean for Open Access?’, is available here: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2015/10/22/does-academia-edu-mean-open-access-is-becoming-irrelevant/>

David Parry joined Saint Joseph's University in the Fall of 2013. His work focuses on understanding the complex social and cultural transformations brought about by the development of the digital network. He is particularly interested in understanding how the internet transforms political power and democracy. He also researches and is an advocate for Open Access Research. His work can be found at [www.outsidethetext.com](http://www.outsidethetext.com/).