Keynote Abstract: Sarah Kember

Thursday 9 January

Automation, acceleration, communication (or why publishing still matters)

In recent years, a number of media, communication and cultural studies scholars have become actively involved in publishing. This talk will examine why by foregrounding publishing as remediation, as a key site for the contestation of scholarly communication and the future of the academy and as a largely uncontested locus of current investments in automation and acceleration.

As more academics move into DIY or scholar-led publishing, publishers, funders, librarians and other interested parties have, for some time, been redesigning scholarship according the values of efficiency, transparency and compliance and towards the goal of automating knowledge production. The quest for automation has become the teleology of the digital in publishing. Its scope is total, encompassing all of scholarly communication understood as “open science”. Its timescale is accelerating through the rapid imposition of open access policies and mandates such as Plan S.

The commonsense appeal of open access as a means of making publicly funded research freely and immediately accessible to the public and other researchers masks the transfer of costs to authors and their institutions, the subsidizing of research for the private sector, the imposition of STEM models onto AHSS and the dominance of neoliberal and cyberlibertarian ideologies including the somewhat disingenuous claim that knowledge, like information, wants to be (can be) free.

Reducing publishing to the challenges and opportunities of open access has largely precluded radical alternatives that might realign publishing and politics and enable
scholarly communications to be reevaluated in relation to technological change. Against the current tendency to conduct landscape studies of new open access publishers and the lip service paid to ensuring a sustainable ecology of scholarly communications, this talk will offer a new ecological economics of publishing and a range of interventions in scholarly communications that are rooted in our field.