

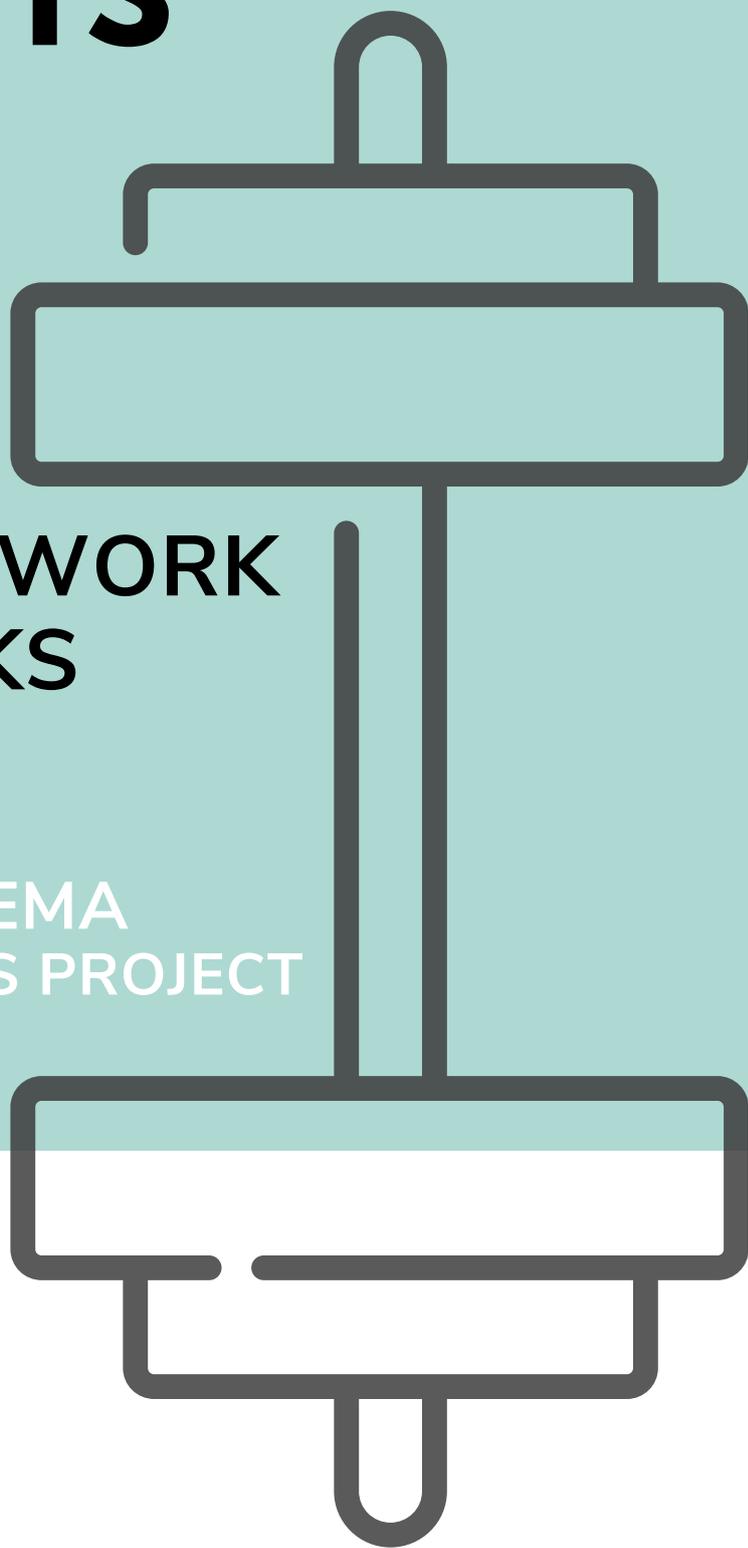
# OA BOOKS WORKOUTS

## SCHOLARS AT WORK WITH OA BOOKS

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AN INTERVIEW  
WITH JANNEKE ADEMA  
ON THE LIVING BOOKS PROJECT

**The Open  
Access  
Books  
Network**



# JANNEKE ADEMA



JANNEKE ADEMA IS AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR IN DIGITAL MEDIA AT THE CENTRE FOR POSTDIGITAL CULTURES AT COVENTRY UNIVERSITY. IN HER RESEARCH, SHE EXPLORES THE FUTURE OF SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATIONS AND EXPERIMENTAL FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION, WHERE HER WORK INCORPORATES PROCESSUAL AND PERFORMATIVE PUBLISHING, RADICAL OPEN ACCESS, SCHOLARLY POETHICS, MEDIA STUDIES, BOOK HISTORY, CULTURAL STUDIES, AND CRITICAL THEORY. YOU CAN FOLLOW HER RESEARCH, AS IT DEVELOPS, ON [OPENREFLECTIONS.WORDPRESS.COM](https://openreflections.wordpress.com).

## Living Books

In this book, Janneke Adema proposes that we reimagine the scholarly book as a living and collaborative project—not as linear, bound, and fixed, but as fluid, remixed, and liquid, a space for experimentation. She presents a series of cutting-edge experiments in arts and humanities book publishing, showcasing the radical new forms that book-based scholarly work might take in the digital age. The writing and publication process of the book is a reflection of what Janneke advocates for in Living Books itself. An open, iterative process where there is no such thing as a final product, but a constant adjustment and revision of previous versions.

# 1

## Looking back at the Living Books project, can you give examples of the kinds of open practices that have been applied?

Several open practices have either informed Living Books or have been applied as part of its research and publishing process, these include:

1) **Open access publishing:** Living Books has developed openly—initially to support my PhD thesis work—on the Open Reflections blog, and these blogposts have subsequently been published (and in some cases adapted and remixed) in openly available papers and articles and most recently in a reworked long-form format—as a book

published by the MIT Press. This latest version is also available in open access, licensed for reuse, which allowed the creation of [a PubPub version](#), which can be further updated and commented upon.

2) **Versioning:** the PubPub iteration of Living Books allows different ‘releases,’ or versioning, i.e., the updating, rewriting, or modifying of published academic material. Versioning has been an underlying method during the development of Living Books, where I published versions of my research-in-development on different platforms (from blogging and annotation platforms to wikis), preferring, as I highlight in Living Books, ‘those (...) that favor experimentation, openness, interaction, multimodality, and interdisciplinarity’



further updated and commented upon. Versioning can also question individual humanist authorship, where I used it to highlight the inherent collaborative nature of Living Books: several earlier versions were co-authored or remixed, commented upon and annotated, and further shaped by the platforms they were published on, where newer versions again incorporated or reworked this feedback.

**3) Remix:** when I started my research for Living Books I was inspired by the burgeoning remix studies community and some of the research for the book has also directly been remixed with other research, for example as part of Mark Amerika's [remixthebook](#) project. But I also engaged with remix theories and practices to question the role played by individual humanist authorship in academia and to explore how we can make 'different cuts' into our research and publishing processes.

**4) Open-source platforms:** I used various open source platforms and software to conduct and publish my research, including Wordpress blogging software, several wikis, the CommentPress annotation plugin, Zotero for my references, and most recently PubPub to further version and update Living Books.

## 2 Why is openness important to you and this project? What did it enable you to do?

Openness enabled me first of all to connect to other scholars, research projects, and communities in the fields of media and cultural studies, book studies, and Digital Humanities, those involved in thinking through and creating alternative futures for the book and publishing. The [Open Reflections](#) blog, powered by RSS and its commenting function, allowed me to connect to this network of scholars experimenting with open media to publish their research and ideas in development, people such as Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Ted Striphas, and Gary Hall. Secondly, publishing openly allowed me to connect to the open access movement and for me the Living Books project formed its own small-scale intervention into the established closed access and print-based practices that continue to dominate scholarship in the humanities. I have always imagined it as part of this collective project set-out to challenge the hegemony of commercial publishers and to explore open, not-for-profit, and scholar-led publishing options (and my research for Living Books has always intersected with the research I did for projects such as [OAPEN](#) and [DOAB](#), and my connections to publishing communities such as [Open Humanities Press](#) and later the [Radical Open Access Collective](#)).



Thirdly, openness and especially open platforms, enabled me to publish and share my research more directly, from first ideas in draft form, to papers and reports from conferences etc. This also enabled more direct feedback, which could then be incorporated into new versions or drafts, while simultaneously remaining visible on previous versions, to showcase the research's development and co-creation. Finally, open platforms and software allowed me to experiment with different material formats to publish my research in beyond fixed print and PDF forms, to experiment with openness, remix, and liquidity, and to explore their potential as forms and practices of critique and resistance to the object formation of the book.

## 3

### **Has the Living Books project changed your understanding of open scholarship? Also in view of specific developments (and needs) in the humanities?**

I would say that it maybe has not so much changed as strengthened my understanding of certain elements of open scholarship. First of all, that open scholarship or open access is not one thing, or not something with a pre-defined politics, but that it functions as, as I describe in Living Books, a 'floating signifier,' a concept without a fixed meaning that is easily adopted by

different political ideologies. You can see this in how open access has increasingly been co-opted by commercial publishers as just another business model, which is why in Living Books, and as part of my related activist publishing practices, I have explored theories and practices of radical open access, which are critical of openness in its neoliberal guises, but still try to engage with it in an affirmative way. Secondly, I think Living Books has again made clear to me how important it is to perceive openness beyond questions of access (or gratis openness) only, and as something that allows us to experiment with new forms for research, with remix, reuse, and adaptations (libre openness), with multimodal and processual publishing, with open data and semantic and networked scholarship. Open scholarship is crucial to support these developments and experiments. Finally, the development of Living Books has made visible to me once more that openness or open tools, technologies, and platforms on their own do not lead to more interaction around research, they only provide opportunities to support this. In the early days of blogging it was perhaps easier to connect to communities without too much extra effort, but now that we are saturated with (academic) social media and other online engagements, this kind of interaction needs to be sought more directly, or needs to be incentivised, especially where it concerns interactions with single-authored scholarship. This is why a focus on collaborative research and co-



reaction, also within the humanities, remains so important, which is what Living Books and many of the publishing projects it describes and connects to have always tried to argue for.

## **4 Since you were trying to do something new and experimental with this project, did you have to convince anybody (maybe yourself!) that it could work? How did you do this?**

Living Books as a project has in retrospect been a constant process of negotiations, compromise, and (maybe especially in relation to myself) a lowering of expectations. But within these constraints there have still been various opportunities to do interesting and valuable experimental and activist work, as part of or directly connected to Living Books. Negotiations with my institution revolved around doing my thesis in an open and experimental way, but I was lucky to have a supportive supervisory team, which helped navigate regulations. For assessment purposes (e.g., the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the UK) there has been a lot of pressure from within the university to publish with certain publishers and in a certain way (i.e., a printed single-authored monograph). To navigate this I had to do a lot of 'double load' work, publishing experimental work alongside more

traditional publications (for example, I submitted a practice-based research portfolio of various experimental publishing projects connected to Living Books for my REF submission, which meant hugely more work than a standard submission). I also had to lower my expectations and compromise as part of the formal publishing process; initially I had a different experimental book project in mind, more collaborative and versioned, which I had to drop after I couldn't find a publisher to take it on. The MIT press was always open to an open access edition, but I had to find funding to support this. When after lots of searching it became clear funding wasn't readily available, the publisher turned out to be very supportive in pledging support for an open version anyway (as it was also exploring alternative funding models for open access books at that point in time) and eventually applied for and received funding from the Urbanowski Memorial Fund. I negotiated a license that allowed reuse (CC BY-NC) which enabled the creation of the PubPub version of *Living Books*. Working with the Knowledge Futures Group team on this version was a real pleasure and they and my editor at the MIT Press were open to this version being (at this point still subtly) different from the print book: incorporating more images and hyperlinks and textual changes to reflect the new publishing platform. For this version, I am hoping to invite some more conversations in the margins of the text, for example I have just done an interview collaboration with



Erzsébet Tóth-Czifra for the [DARIAH Open blog](#), which takes place entirely in comments on the [Introduction](#).

## LINKS

[Living Books on PubPub](#)

[Living Books on MITPress Direct](#)

[Living Books in print](#)

Paperback

\$35.00 X

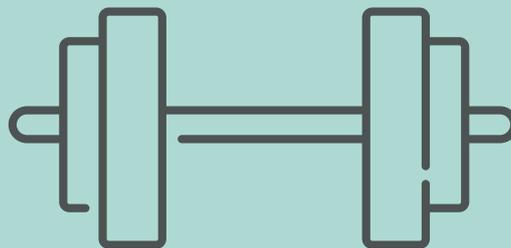
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Janneke Adema's personal website: <https://openreflections.wordpress.com/>

## OA BOOKS WORKOUTS



This interview is one of the outputs of the online series OA Books Workouts: Scholars at Work, a project of the Open Access Books Network. The aim of the series is to share good practices regarding the writing, production, and technicalities of publishing an open access book.

The Open Access Books Network is an open network for anyone interested in open access books, whether as a researcher, a publisher, a librarian, a student, an infrastructure provider, or a reader. It is free to join and open to all.

**For more info, look at: <https://hcommons.org/groups/open-access-books-network/>**

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Janneke Adema, Jeroen Sondervan and the Open Access Books Network

