In this paper we explore contemporary business models in academic publishing in relation to digitisation and open access. Drawing on literature in actor-network theory, we understand business models as performative – as market devices that, amongst other things, translate the discourses of open access and digitisation and allow for their economic calculation. Based on our empirical research, we note three broad configurations of business models prevalent in publishing today which articulate digitisation and open access. The first is a classic model organised around the ‘work’ of scholarly authors. In this closed access model the publisher is thoroughly and personally embedded in scholarly communities, classic formats and content understood as works are produced, and open access is hardly implemented at all. A second model emerges where publishers focus on ‘content’, where this content is remixed and reused, open access is one financing option, and formats are only adapted insofar as they make economic sense. A third model is where open access publishing revolves around ‘data’, where form and content of publication is largely irrelevant but publishers control the data flows involved in the reproduction of the sciences. All of these models translate logics associated with digitisation and adapt business models associated with the digital economy. They also, in different ways, involve open access, mostly however as a financial option. We conclude the paper with a discussion of the politics of these business models as well as the inherent reduction of the politics of open access when the latter is made calculative in these business models.

Armin Beverungen is the Junior Director of the Digital Cultures Research Lab at Leuphana University Lüneburg, Germany (cdc.leuphana.de/dcrl). He holds a PhD from the University of Leicester and was previously a PostDoc Researcher at the Hybrid Publishing Lab at Leuphana and a Senior Lecturer at the University of the West of England, UK. He is a member of the editorial collective of ephemera, and an editor of MayFly Books.

Helge Peters holds a BA in Communications in Social and Economic Contexts from the Berlin University of the Arts and an MA (dist.) in Media and Communications from Goldsmiths College, University of London. His research interests lie at the intersection of media/cultural studies and science studies. Currently he is investigating the performativity of business models in Open Access publishing as part of the Hybrid Publishing Lab at Leuphana University, Lüneburg (cdc.leuphana.de/structure/hybrid-publishing-lab).