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DISRUPTING ACADEMIC PUBLISHING: QUESTIONS OF ACCESS IN A DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

DISRUPTING ACADEMIC PUBLISHING: QUESTIONS OF ACCESS IN A DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract: How can a journal of media practice ever hope to be disruptive if it remains behind a paywall? Who has access to the disruption, and how might it be disseminated? It seems all this disruption would be, is a sidestep, a small gap for one issue, within this outdated and dying practice of large-publisher supported academic journals. There is a palpable tension between production of knowledge-media and the traditional academic journal media distribution system itself. This tension rises from the disruption of knowledge's own goal through the distribution system: limiting the distribution of knowledge meant for free dissemination. By situating the academic journal publishing model within the understanding of un(der)paid labour (or sometimes as pay-to-play) and against the embedded ethic of knowledge-media and its transmission, particularly digital transmission, this paper pushes forward a discussion of scholarly publishing from questions of politics and economics, information labour, access, and alienation. In the end, the digital transforms not only the ability to disrupt standard publishing practices but instead it has already disrupted and continues to break these practices open for consideration and transformation.[1]

Keywords:
>>>>>>>>>>>>>>**Open Access**>>>>>>>>>>>>>>
Media Archaeology>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>
>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>> **Publishing** >>>>>>>>>
>>>>>>>>>**Digital Media**>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>

[1]
This piece, written on a Wordpress installation, is fluid and editable. The hypothes.is feedback provides a level of intersectional identity for the pieces written. The potential of discussion, of publicness, of openness to reform, as well as the speed at which this can happen, are all facets of this still emerging manner of media(tion).

Forcing academics to pay money to read the work of their colleagues? Scanning entire libraries but only allowing the folks at Google to read them? Providing scientific articles to those at elite universities in the First World, but not to children in the Global South? It's outrageous and unacceptable.

- Aaron Swartz, **Guerilla Open Access Manifesto,** 2008. **1**

INTRODUCTION

Since the invention of the printing press the push to control the distribution of the copy has continuously evolved. The Anglo-American tradition of 'copyright' itself simplifies what is often more complicated, as it symbolises only the right to copy (and therefore to distribute), not the rights of the author. From the Statute of Anne (1709) in Great Britain to the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) and Copyright Term Extension Acts (CTEA) of 1998 in the United States, controlling the rights to copy and distribute has been an ongoing evolution of limitations and restrictions to ensure the rights of those who hold the copyright. The DMCA and CTEA are now over eighteen years old, and were committed to United States law in the earliest stages of the development of both the Internet and of the digital media distribution platforms that since became ubiquitous.

There exists a limited set of valued 'media practices' within current and historical academic settings. The bulk of these media practices reside, broadly, within journal publications, with value placed by peers and tenure review committees on impact factor and citation count. All of this, of course, exists within a pre-digital Gutenbergian paradigm, valuing the ink-printed sheet over the digital. Journal publishing is not just a media practice, but simultaneously a production of media and a product of a larger system of value construction. This larger media system of journal publishing assigns value and orders based on both the actual reach of academically produced knowledge (citation count), as well as the prestige of the publication within the field (impact factor).

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I would like to note that the term 'ink-printed' is used here instead of 'physical' because digital documents, despite their imperceptible physical constitution, remain physical. The often-heard argument that digital artefacts are 'immaterial' is flawed, and defending the notion that paper is 'physical' and that digital is not, is doubly so. There are numerous places to take this argument, whether with Kittler's 'There is no Software' (1995) or simply by recognising that bits and bytes are made of matter, and take up physical space next to having (atomic) weight. They are all physical material, and all have material effects.

The valuation of the ink-printed page over the digital works against the logic or the over-arching goal and underpinning 'value' of academic knowledge – information's value lies within its accessibility, circulation, and incorporation into and dissemination of new information. For these reasons, the digital is more suitable to dissemination than the ink-printed page.[2] By analysing the print-based academic journal publishing model within discourses surrounding un(der)paid labour in publishing, the impact of commercial publishing subscription fees on library and institutional budget shortfalls, as well as its impact on the diversity of knowledge and its overall accessibility, this article will explore journal publishing as a media practice and trace the disruptions within this media practice that have become apparent through digital media systems.

To begin however, I will briefly outline a *mode of inquiry* with regard to these disruptions, highlighting a cybernetic-archaeological framing of how the often unsaid, and unseen consequences of the production of knowledge has been rippling through the publishing industry. The various aspects of how the publishing industry works must be analysed from the perspective of users, creators, distributors, and repositories. Each of their experiences and understandings helps shape our understanding of this crisis, of this disruption, which the digital has encouraged within publishing. The openness of

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This piece focuses on the tradition of academic 'journal' publishing as it continues to 'count' more for academic labour than most other academic activities. This does not mean it should count more or that there are not numerous alternatives to journal publishing, but instead this focus serves to pick apart this particular media practice and to illustrate what can be said about this tradition in a time of radical digital transformation. It is my opinion that journal publishing remains valuable for knowledge production and dissemination, and will remain so alongside other forms of knowledge production; however, it will not survive unchecked and undisrupted.

interaction and the quickness of exchange that the digital facilitates, has changed our notion of information and what it is to be published, whether we wish it to or not.[3]

FRAMING A DISRUPTION

ARCHAEOLOGY, INTERFACE, AND CYBERNETICS OF DIGITAL MEDIA DISTRIBUTION PLATFORMS

Let us 'excavate' some of the aspects of print publishing, and the power dynamics between publishers, librarians, and academics, that have emerged in practices of knowledge production. Understanding power structures here requires a twofold approach: a more 'traditional' Marxist approach considering the economics of production and labour, and how these practices re-inscribe traditional models of power and authority. However, beginning by thinking beyond traditional economic structures and exploring the how systems and processes inform each other, communicate, distribute, and interact, will help to map out the complex dynamic of digital technologies and how they are reshaping knowledge distribution. This will help consider not only current and historical power dynamics within the field of publishing, but also (as a full history remains beyond the scope of this piece) how some of these current dynamics have come to emerge.

Considering journal publishing as a media practice allows for us to not only think of the medium of the journal article itself, but also how that medium is constructed both as an object and as a site of meaning. Friedrich Kittler's rethinking of the Foucauldian 'archaeological' practices is helpful in this context to frame exactly how digital media distribution has come to reconfigure academic publishing so thoroughly. Kittler's take on Foucault's investigation begins with the McLuhanesque and ominous 'media determine our situation,' (1999, xxxix) but winds up re-thinking and investigating media practices like 'time axis manipulation' (Ibid, 35) on the phonograph, rather than Foucault's focus on discursive practices. So instead of thinking about the rules which govern language, the focus turns to what the media(tions) practice themselves, and what they do or are capable of doing. For example, the contrast between the distribution, the accessibility, the storage, and the replicability of digital and print media help to define what the 'rules' are of this media – how it circulates, what it demands, and what its potentials are.

Jussi Parikka reminds us that 'archaeology is always, implicitly or explicitly, about the present: what is our present moment in its objects, discourses and practices, and how did it become to be perceived as reality' (2012, 10), and because 'power becomes hardwired to technology' (Ibid, 82), it is important to inquire about this power, particularly where it concerns digital media platforms, whose power configurations are often less straightforward than publishing practices such as physical printing and distribution due to their relative newness, changing technologies, and distribution of components (such as servers that replicate all over the world).

Alexander Galloway, in *The Interface Effect*, argues that computerised systems, particularly as they relate to digital media platforms, contain 'an ethic'. These computer systems and platforms 'do' things and are representative of that ethic. Galloway refers to the computer's 'interface effect' here as 'a process or active threshold mediating two states' (2013, 23), neither an object nor a creator of objects. This interface is 'simply' a medium. As with most things ethical (that contain an ethic at least), these platforms are, however, not 'simple'– digital media distribution platforms do a variety of things (often all at once), which makes them rather complex. In publishing, an environment that seeks to control replication and distribution, digital media are particularly prevalent. Digital media represent a particular ethic here regarding the replication and distribution

of information, especially when digital media offer individuals agency and ability to accomplish these tasks with little difficulty.

Whether or not we actively consider these computerised, mediated, systems, they affect the user, not only by allowing the user to utilise the messages circulated through the systems but also that the interaction with the system informs the user about potential uses through the amount of difficulty or friction involved with those possibilities. A user who learns to copy and mail a digital file through a computerised system learns about more than that discrete system – they understand now about other systems, how systems interact, and the potential for all other computerised systems.

An archaeology of digital media publishing systems, then, can offer us a re-orientation of how to think about the distribution of information in a way that forefronts the influences of modern digital media systems. It provides us with a way to take account of the interface of these digital media systems, and the influence it asserts on publishing practices, and how certain expectations and practices (such as copying and mailing files) related to this interface have become normalised. However, this archaeology does not offer the entire picture, as there is always an 'interaction' between the user and the interface, a communicative exchange that links the user and the computerised (media) system. Uncovering the effects of the digital media systems is the first step, but understanding how these effects circulate and inter-act with users helps to illustrate not only the power behind the medium, but also how that power circulates and transforms its users (and itself). Instead of thinking about the communicative exchange between interface and user as a one-way message, it is better here to think of it as system of cybernetic feedback, one that interacts with the user and transforms their experience. As Donna Haraway notes, 'we are [already] cyborgs' (1991), and these digital interface systems are but one part in an array of feedback loops that determine the subjectivity of the user, each of them acting upon the user, redefining what is known to be possible.

Klaus Krippendorf's 'Second-Order Cybernetics of Otherness' (1996) helps refine the conceptualisation of power circulation within the digital medium. Krippendorf's conceptualisation of communication that 'I and You as well as the particular relation between them evolve in processes of mutual adjustment' (Ibid, 319), offers up an interesting framework when considering the interface of digital distribution and publishing. The publisher and author relationship changes significantly with the introduction of new interface relations, disrupting previous relations between publisher and author, and require 'mutual adjustment' as the user/author's roles are redefined in light of digital media interface interaction.

Analysing the cybernetic subject through this investigation of media distribution, will help us understand better how current cultural production gets to be digitally mediated and with that provides us with better insight into the potential futures that are hidden within these architectures of power.

POWER AND LABOUR

With this digital-media backdrop, as explained previously, some of the traditional power within the publishing industry, such as the ownership of a physical printing press, can be framed in relation to the disruptive cybernetic power of digital media systems. This backdrop will help to complicating a discussion of more traditional power concerns in a way that foregrounds the role of digital media in the disruption of academic publishing.

From underpaid graduate student labour in teaching and research, to low wages in adjunct teaching and administrative assistance, academia suffers from a variety of pay inequality issues – despite remaining the designated space for critiquing

labour relations. The labour issues surrounding academic publishing, and academic journal publishing in particular (although these issues also transfer to other types of publications), are numerous and multifaceted, but largely fall underneath questions of accessibility and unpaid labour.

ACCESSIBILITY

Access to information means more than just storage and retrieval; it also means the rights to transfer that information into an accessible medium. From creating a PDF and printing to paper to allowing software to be read aloud, big institutional and commercial presses have made numerous attempts to limit access to information that has already been paid for. All these efforts towards improving the accessibility of information have seen a series of uphill battles, often marked by lawsuits challenging use-cases.

In an important lawsuit in 2011, SAGE Publications joined Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press to file for damages against Georgia State University, claiming that their e-reserves and faculty 'Web sites' violated copyright and exceeded fair use for hosting and distributing copyrighted class materials for students. This case helped to define the scope of the doctrine of fair use from Section 107 of the Copyright Act, by establishing that the four factor decision on whether a use counts as 'fair' (i.e. purpose and character, nature of copyrighted work, amount and substantiality of the portion taken, and the effect of the use on the market) is not weighted evenly across all four factors. The case further questioned the licensing of digital reproductions, as many of the copyright claims were for works that were digitised by the faculty members because no commercial digital option was available. **In the end,** the ruling was mixed, as Georgia State was found to have not provided adequate fair use guidelines for their professors, yet on the other hand, it was ruled that the plaintiffs did not suffer market damage from the digital copies being available at Georgia State. What might have been a simple case of the distribution of already-licensed (the libraries owned the books and journals) materials, ended up being mixed up in long law case arguing over a nominal set of digitised documents (only five were found to infringe on copyright) distributed to students to read for classes.

While a battle waged over digital 'copies' in the United States, Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, and Taylor and Francis Group teamed up **against Delhi University** in late 2012 over a small print shop on campus making photocopied course packets. Under Indian law, students and academics have the right to photocopy excerpts, but the presses argued that these packets were being produced for profit and were therefore not subject to the fair use exemption. This devastated many students who could not afford their textbooks otherwise. The print shop was restrained from selling copies until 2016 **when a high court ruled** that the provision for photocopying extended to this practice due to India's socioeconomic context as it provided a benefit to education. Numerous cases in the United States have been won by copyright holders (see **_Basic Books v. Kinko's Graphics_** in 1991 and **_Princeton University Press v. Michigan Document Services_** in 1996) against course-packet creators, therefore this judgment in India represents a fascinating turn towards social benefit, despite continued battles with publishers.

To provide one further example of publishers limiting access to information that has already been paid for, it is evident that publishers' rights were given the overhand against granting transformative access to the blind. Of the first **20 countries** to sign the **Marrakesh Treaty** to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled, none were home to the top five publishers: Elsevier, Springer, Wiley-Blackwell, Taylor & Francis, or Sage. **Through lobbyists**, publishers rallied against this treaty, with the **US standing alone in opposition** to it until **October 3rd, 2013** (the United States and Zimbabwe were the

56th and 57th countries to eventually sign the treaty). Copyright exemptions (even for accessibility) remain huge business for publishers, as accessibility and transformation of material can generate potential revenue streams for publishers. The refusal to allow access to these basic rights to interact with documents (i.e. to scan them, to translate them, to read them) becomes even harder to understand when taking into consideration the construction and constitution of these academic publications. A consideration of social benefit (the Statute of Anne was subtitled 'An Act for the Encouragement of Learning') was fundamental to the creation of copyright law, but this tension between private profit and the societal good remains a battleground, whether regarding space and digital distribution, the economics of education, or provisions for the blind.

UNPAID LABOUR

It is expected as part of an academic's position within an university that they continuously publish, be that in journals, in collections, or in the form of monographs. Eliding for a moment the differences in expectations for publication or workload that an academic author must undertake as part of his academic position, in addition to this authorship, the basic understanding is that academic authors are already 'paid' by their institutions to author journal articles. This labour, of course, is then 'paid' for directly through an academic's salary, but it is also seen as a form of investment, i.e. as future pay, as it counts toward job retention (tenure or otherwise). However, the value of this labour and how much it 'counts' (which of course depends on the institution and the review committee) is often linked to particular journals (often owned by particular companies) that forged a sense of value (for these review committees) over the years. With few exceptions, a journal that is traditionally printed (often along with a digital version) is valued much higher than journals that are digital-only (for example, the top ten journals in Communication all still produce print copies), and journals published through large organisations are valued more than those run by smaller publishers. While not all publishers are necessarily interested in making huge profits, many of them still hold tight to tradition. They often eschew more radical publishing models like online-only, open access, or hybrid funding, while more agile groups (often newer journals that adopt these models from inception) often remain shunned by academics, due in part to the involvement of convoluted tenure ranking processes.

This might have made sense ten or twenty years ago, but the percentage of PhD recipients with a postdoc or job commitment has been shrinking for at least ten years, and does not seem to be stopping (Jaschik 2016). The academic job market is more competitive than ever, so job prospects are often expected (or feel pressured) to have published in a variety of places, either as a graduate student or while working as a full-time instructor or at teaching institution (or often the case, as an adjunct) where publication is not part of an academic's official workload (but is still expected for advancement) to illustrate continued productivity. This puts undue stress and burden on young academics, often seeing the 'publish or perish' model as 'even if you publish, you may perish' (academically speaking). Publishers exploit this insane race, but are not wholly to blame, as this drive remains symptomatic of a larger crisis in academia. As jobs become increasingly scarce, more and more academics are pressured into publishing, even when research is not part of their current career expectations. This includes the unpaid authoring of articles for journals owned by large publishing conglomerates—all as part of the competition to earn (or keep) an academic job.

To add insult to injury, both the editors of a journal as well as its reviewers are not often, if at all, compensated for their participation in the journal publication process. This unpaid labour might make more sense if these articles were paid for by academic institutions, distributed for free, and reviewed by the community of academics. If information made freely available following such an institutionally supported and community backed model, then this would potentially form a viable model to

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counterpose giant publishers such as Elsevier who **post record profits** on the backs of academic labour and dwindling library budgets, especially in an opaque marketplace that seeks to obfuscate costs.

One might argue that these more 'traditional' publishing houses add a significant amount of value to a publication, as they supposedly spend a good amount of time on editing, formatting, and distributing information (especially so on paper form). However, an ongoing complaint from academics is that publishers increasingly do not perform these valued tasks anymore. Editing and formatting are often outsourced to the

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authors (for example, Taylor & Francis offers '**Basic English Language Editing**' for $361 USD), and in the age of social media, self-promotion and marketing is expected of all academics, regardless of publication. Elsevier, one of the largest publishing companies in the world posted generated a revenue of $25 billion in 2015, while increasingly outsourcing editing and formatting.

As with the accessibility issues, there is an underlying logic behind the operations of these commercial publishers: event though the digital medium has brought the cost of distribution of articles down significantly—though not its production costs—commercial publishers are charging ever higher subscription costs to libraries and as a consequence are increasing the profits that they make; these publishing giants are inhibiting the power of the publishing medium (to disseminate and distribute), particularly the digital, in order to extract maximum revenue.

ALIENATION AND THE SERIAL CRISIS

Within a digital environment the cost of publishing and distribution has dropped dramatically (not to zero, but much closer than ever before). The costs of a print-based academic publication is based on a variety of things that, as mentioned above, have often been pushed over to the academic author in a digital context: editing, typesetting, marketing, etcetera. Server and platform maintenance costs might factor into this, but server space is plentiful and relatively inexpensive—in comparison to the production costs that come with a print publication—especially when centralised for larger agencies (and when we would look at the potential of an community and institutionally supported open access model, could, one imagine, get covered by the academic institution or by the institution's own systems). Numerous journals have adopted a 'digital only' publishing model, and almost every journal that still produces hard copies distributes digitally as well.

This is not to say that everything should be gratis, it is merely to indicate that rethinking the distribution and publication model includes understanding how many aspects of the publishing system have already started to shift significantly. For example, universities already indirectly foot the bill for a variety of publishing services, when academic authors and editors provide editorial, review, marketing, and typesetting labour: this is often counted as part of 'the academic service' scholars perform in addition to the research they conduct. Professional typesetting and editing are

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important and valuable services, but **many universities and granting institutions** already provide funds to help cover Article Processing Charges (APCs). In the end, journal publishing remains (mostly) publicly funded at every step of the way, from authoring, to editing, to distribution.

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Some **colleges** and **universities** have **committed** to open access publishing because they already recognise that paying twice for research (once to support the academic author, and again to lease it back from the publisher) seems ill advised, opting to spend parts of their budgets on open access in the hope to create a network of knowledge dissemination. This, however, has not stopped many giants of publishing from continuing to inhibit knowledge dissemination, despite the obvious 'ethic' of these publishing, particularly digital, technologies: to distribute and disseminate knowledge.

The concerns over the academic publishing go beyond just distribution and dissemination however, as authors are often unable to retain rights to their own works. Publishers of academic labour **often even require authors to give up their own copyright to publish their work.** Authors who in most cases do not receive any payment for their journal publishing work (as it remains part of the 'deal' of academic labour) are not only expected to produce this knowledge, but also to give up their rights to it (including the rights to share it). On top of this, the institution (which paid the salary of the author to produce the works) is then requested to, essentially, rent the rights back from the publisher in the form of subscription fees, often bundled with numerous other journals for **tens of thousands of dollars a year.**

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This coupled with chronic cost inflation of Elsevier journals have caused numerous protests in various forms, with **thousands of academics vowing to eschew Elsevier's journals.** However, this disavowing often comes at a cost to those whose reputations (and therefore livelihoods) are linked to publishing in a small set of 'prestigious' journals, such as the ones Elsevier published. The privileged few who can afford to eschew Elsevier either do not need them anymore (e.g.: they have already gained tenure and can afford to publish elsewhere), or probably never needed them in the first place (e.g.: the top-tier journals in their field are not published by Elsevier). In fact, some of Elsevier's journals are so important to the tenure process that 38% of those who pledged to boycott Elsevier abandoned their 'won't publish in an Elsevier outlet' commitment (Heyman et al. 2016).

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Despite all the controversy, Elsevier remains more profitable than ever (and continues to be for the foreseeable future). In an inadvertently appropriately named article **'Can't Disrupt This,'** Communication Professor Jason Schmitt outlines some of the concerns that have clouded Elsevier's business model, despite this model remaining more profitable than Apple's. The core concern over the business model for Elsevier (and many other journal publishers) comes down to the fact that royalty structures for academic publishing are murky compared to commercial models - academics do not write for profit, but for exposure and reputation, essentially writing for other academics on tenure committees making decisions about their careers. Journal publishing recognises this and takes advantage of this situation, and those publishers operating the highest rated journals can strong-arm authors into signing over their copyrights (with the implicit argument that the authors are not making any revenue on their research anyway). Institutions that wish to access this research then have to pay to access them, but rather than purchasing the digital copy once, they pay huge sums of money to lease large 'bundles' of journals, even if many of those journals within the bundle on offer are not wanted. The bundling model allows Elsevier and others to charge large fees for groups of journals that contain high impact journals alongside unwanted journals. These bundles often contain journals that are unwanted or unneeded, but are impossible to parcel out and add to the cost of the package. To top all of this off, Elsevier and many similar commercial companies, hide their pricing through both hidden rubrics and contracts that prevent libraries from discussing their cost, making this system not only exploitative but also incredibly opaque.

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Elsevier not only denies authors their right to their own copies, but has also helped to instigate serious financial difficulties in academic libraries due to its bundling practices, costing libraries (ever increasing) amounts of money. Numerous libraries have projected budget shortfalls due to the increasing cost in subscription rates. With a nod to the cause and the frequency of these shortfalls, this situation has collectively been dubbed the **'Serial Crisis'** as library budgets have become **overrun by these increasing costs,** generating pleas for additional open access policies throughout academia. So profound is this 'crisis' that one of the most well-funded universities in the world, Harvard University, has stated that it **can not continue to afford publisher's prices.** With a $35.7

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billion endowment, Harvard University can afford whatever they wish, so this statement should be clearly positioned a larger pushback against parasitic publishing practices.

26 27 28 This has caused **Harvard, Princeton,** and **others** to adopt an open access policy, where authors are encouraged to publish in journals that do not charge access fees to works. Not all institutions are privileged enough to support this model, but, evidenced by Harvard and Princeton's policies, it may only be time before other institutions will make this shift in order to survive.

This pushback seems to have already disrupted Elsevier. Maybe not financially (at least at first), but in the way that Elsevier has had to adapt. Practices continue to adapt and Elsevier has pushed towards different profit models, such as publishing based on article processing charges (APCs), 'vertical integration' (Elsevier owns more than journals), and even 'open access' formats that either require large open access fees or are created and folded quickly after publishing only a few volumes (ostensibly for public relations purposes to highlight their commitment to open access). It seems Elsevier have seen the proverbial writing on the (digital) wall, or have felt the Nietzschean echoes of a dying god, although they may soon realise that it was they who have ushered in the demise of these traditional systems.

THE OPEN ACCESS ALTERNATIVE?

For journal publishing, there is another option in addition to the commercial print-based model I have just described, and, as evidenced by Harvard and Princeton, it is not only a viable one but also increasingly more valued by academic institutions for tenure and promotion. Rather than battling commercial publishers that continue their relentless profit-oriented copyright restrictions, the publishing equation seems to have been re-thought from the outside to see if it, in its current form, still makes sense. The current consensus seems to be that yes, journal publishing remains valuable as a form of academic labour, but not at the current cost.

Open access journals have been around since the early 1990s. There are even full

29 open access publishers now. **Open Humanities Press,** for example, hosts both journals and publishes books. They have found a way to both produce print books and ensure author rights for open access books. Since the Fall of 2006, my own journal project,

30 **communication +1,** has published five volumes with tens of thousands of article downloads without charging a penny to either the author or the readers. There are numerous other journals that follow a similar model, many of which can be found in the

31 **Directory of Open Access Journals,** all of them rigorously peer reviewed and free to whomever wishes to access them.

The open access policies adopted by institutions not only force authors to seek out more 'open' options for publication, but they also help to increase the value proposition that potentially frightens authors away from open access journals. Policy from major research universities has helped to leverage some momentum built for open access publishing, but it also creates additional opportunity for predatory publishers to find authors are expected to 'publish or perish' in a new and confusing system. This is particularly problematic when considering there are so many different types of open access.

Peter Suber, in *Open Access* (2012) differentiates between 'green' (self-archiving) and 'gold' (journals with open access policies) open access. Others have come afterwards and updated this distinction, referring to open access journals with APCs and other fees as 'gold' and those without fees as 'platinum' (Beall 2015). This distinction underlines some potentially 'exploitative practices' (Ibid) from numerous corporate publishers that have begun to offer open access alternatives for their journals in exchange for an article processing charges, fees which can be as high as $5000 USD in top-tier

32 journals, for example **the Elsevier Journal *Cell Reports.*** Even Taylor & Francis has

an **extensive OA publishing policy**, charging $2950 USD (not including tax, and, as it states on their website, this amount 'does vary') for their 'Open Select' journals. Furthering confusion, APCs and reader-side fees can be combined as well. For example, The (closed access) **American Journal of Science** charges readers not only to view its articles online, it also charges its authors editorial fees as well as a '$100 per printed page' fee (although institutions paying these charges 'will be entitled to 100 free reprints without covers'). In general, these fees aren't anything new, as many publishers have traditionally passed costs on to authors, but opaque policies designed to generate profits from free (for the journal) labour through multiple sets of fees, seems problematic at best.

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These opaque practices have been booming in the UK as part of an overall shift towards open access. Lawson et al. (2016) traced and extensively diagrammed institutional income, subscription payments, and APCs, to unravel the mystery within the 'black box' of UK scholarly communication finances. They found that the open access landscape is convoluted, un-transparent, and generally unintelligible to all but those who study this professionally, calling for more transparency in general whilst recognising that their exhaustive data set continues to lack information that could help shed additional light on this complex situation. As the push towards open access across the world continues, the concerns the convoluted financial structure of UK publishing brings up will continue to persist, unless more transparency is demanded.

Although many publishers now allow 'green' open access 'publishing' through self-archiving services, how to comply with this remains less than clear to many authors in a variety of ways. This type of self-archiving can be done officially through an institutional repository, like UMass' **Scholarworks** (which also hosts open access journals), but more than often is also done unofficially (and does not count as 'green' open access) through a personal website, or through spaces like Academia.edu, which have become increasingly popular given the expectation of self-promotion many academics now face. Academia.edu in particular has capitalised on these self-promotion expectations, monetising academic labour by selling premium access to data that they gather through their 'social media'-inspired platform (see Duffey and Pooley 2017). Although **Taylor & Francis** and **Sage** now offer green self-archiving options, not all publishers have caught up to this practice and many still actively discriminate against self-archiving in repositories. For example, many journals only allow access to the 'pre-print' or the 'post-print' article, where the final 'publisher's version' remains the one that is required for citation purposes.

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Some have taken a more aggressive 'guerrilla approach' to this academic-labour-hosting initiative, and met with serious legal action. Aaron Swartz, author of the *Guerrilla Open Access Manifesto*, was put under federal investigation for automating the downloading of (many) articles from JSTOR with a python script (Quinn 2013). Alexandra Elbakyan, who created Sci-Hub due to frustrations with scientific article access for research, is 'at risk of financial ruin, extradition, and imprisonment because of a lawsuit launched by Elsevier' (Bohnnanon 2016). Another one of these initiatives, the website 'aaaarg. org' began as a way for academics to share their work in order for it to be read and discussed, as many academics did not have or could not afford access to the materials that they needed to conduct their research. The name used to be an acronym for the *Artists, Architects, and Activists Reading Group*, but the founder is no longer wedded to that, as 'the name more resembles a cry of frustration at this point: aaaaargh!' (Basile 2016). The website faced numerous DMCA takedown notices and has had to move a variety of times (aaaarg.org, grr.aaaarg.org, and aaaarg.fail are just a few of its previous incarnations) and had to transform its practices to continue its work. Basile notes the impetus that drives the work of aaaarg.org and others like it:

I only wish that we would frame our thinking in terms of how we could transform our

economy to better serve accessibility, rather than how we can shutter our commons to better serve our economy.... We don't have to live in a world where our economic and academic interests are in direct contradiction. If public funds spent on education and research could pay for non-profit open access publishing rather than padding the bottom line of major corporations, a platform like AAARG wouldn't need to exist, or would play an uncontroversial role collecting and organising open access work (Ibid).

This begs the question: What if there was another way, a way that took into account the 'new found abilities' of digital tools and their hyper-connectivity and which harnessed our 'free labour' in such a way that it would give back, honouring the term 'service' that is so often used to describe a significant portion of academic labour? How can we transform this economy of labour into something that better serves accessibility, and better serves the economy of information?

Feminist legal scholars Craig et al. (2012) recognise these issues, noting that the cost of this traditional system of publishing labour is more than just monetary, and affects relation and access to the labour for others participating in the economy of information. Made possible through digital technologies, open access is marked as a challenge to traditional journal publishing, but only insofar as it offers the ability to change 'the way in which we access, engage with, and participate in the creation' of academic labour (Ibid, 2).

In the light of confusing open access policies, high (and complex) fee structures, and other obfuscating practices, it might require a bit more work to establish exactly what 'open' could and should mean. Instead of 'solutions to a specific problem' (considering open access as a business model that 'fixes' publishing) we might take Janneke Adema's conceptualisation of open access as 'an ongoing processual and critical engagement in the publishing system' (2014). In this context, I believe open access can still address the ongoing concerns of access, engagement, and participation in academic publishing.

CONCLUSION

INFORMATION WANTS TO BE FREE?

The phrase 'information wants to be free' has become so ubiquitous now that its origins perhaps matter less than the various forms that the phrase has taken and how it has created a space for discussion about intellectual property. Originally attributed to the 'Whole Earth Catalog' founder Stewart Brand, Brand apparently told Steve Wozniak (the co-founder of Apple) that 'on the one hand information wants to be expensive, because it's so valuable... On the other hand, information wants to be free, because the cost of getting it out is getting lower and lower all the time' (Clarke 2016). Richard Stallman, the creator of EMACS and GNU (one of the major parts of what is commonly referred to as 'Linux'), as well as a crusader for 'freedom of information,' turned Brand's relatively simple statement into one that framed an ethic. Numerous others have joined Stallman, including Harvard Law Professor Lawrence Lessig (who, among other things, helped to found **Creative Commons**), in redefining 'free' in terms of 'freedom' to copy, to distribute, and to re-work or remix in their own ways (see Stallman et al. 2002.).

Of course, Brand was not wrong about information's 'wants.' The tension between freedom and expense is palpable when it comes to the economic pulls of information value. Stallman and others seem to have been onto something when they said that the 'free' in 'information wants to be free' means 'freedom' not just free in the sense of no-cost, gratis. Their reasoning is sound – the cost of information is lowering, and the productive benefits that arise from information sharing and from the agency to use this information (especially in the world of computer coding), creates a much more productive and fruitful environment for everyone. What neither

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of these conceptualizations of information have taken into account however, is the transformative effect the information medium has had on the consciousness of the author-subject (and, as evidenced by Stallman and Lessig, the activist-subject as well). The consciousness of the author-subject, activist-subject, and general user of these systems now expects that sharing information should be simple, straightforward, and 'free.'

Returning to the power of media determination, Friedrich Kittler's translator, Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, in his introduction to *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter,* elaborates a bit more on Kittler's conceptualization of this power:

> If media do indeed 'determine our situation,' then they no doubt also determine, and hence configure, our intellectual operations. One could easily re-appropriate Derrida's much-deferred pronouncement [there is no outside of the text] and suggest that the fundamental premise of media discourse analysis is [there is no outside of media] (1999, XX).

Kittler notes that media 'are [at] the end of theory because in practice they were already there to begin with' (Ibid), insisting that the subject's 'intellectual operations' have already been configured, even before considerations of economics or productivity come into play. In essence, 'information wants to be free' because the medium that holds information (in the whatever-form of writing) continues to influence the users that its basic operations of dissemination, distribution, ingestion, and re-configuration remain intact and easy to perform. This is especially notable in academic authorship where, as mentioned above, the royalty model for the author depends on 'impact' rather than revenue generation, flipping the academic publishing model to recognise that information is only valuable if it is circulated widely and freely. Without freedom of information, academic conversations wither, and knowledge production suffers. Academic labour relies on the ability for knowledge, particularly academic knowledge, to remain freely accessible so that it can become and remain part of the academic conversation.

DISRUPTING OPENNESS

In academic publishing, 'open' does not have to mean 'gratis' but it does need to refer to some sort of 'freedom'. There are spaces and requirements for a variety of forms of publishing, but clarity about the rights and practices that accompany these multiple forms, remains key. The term 'open' should therefore reflect openness to transmission and distribution, as well as an openness to difference and to how different forms of publishing function, enabling different types of information access and interaction. None of this can be accomplished without open practices.

As fully academic (or otherwise), volunteer-driven, platinum open access journals become more prevalent, I expect that the economics of commercial publishers, as well as new models based around the selling of academic data, remain subject to rigorous questioning. Even commercial publishers offering high-fee APC 'open' options might not ascribe to the specific open practices that open access platinum journals adopt, for example.

True openness requires transparency of rights as well as of fees. Journals cannot truly reflect openness until authors understand precisely what the fees they hand over in exchange for publication pay for (other than the 'privilege' of publishing in that journal). Adopting a set of 'open practices' that encourage transparency helps to address the complex questions surrounding access, reducing opacity, and creating a more just system for all involved to produce and circulate knowledge.
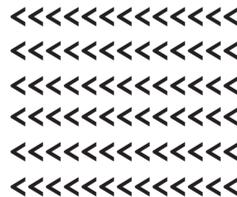
As we come full circle again to reflect on the effect the 'disruptive' practice of digital distribution platforms (and the corresponding rise of open access publishing opportunities) has had on academic publishing, it becomes evident that this

development was not the primary location of disruption in publishing. If McLuhan was right, and 'the content of a new medium is always that of an old medium' (1994, 8), than we might have to spend more time thinking through the 'disrupting' medium of the printed word, or even the written word, as an medium that encourages (or even demands) distribution and dissemination through its interaction with the user. Each of these mediums, from written, to print, to digital words, all seek to distribute copies of information more readily and more rapidly, increasing replicability and ease of distribution. The disruption of the power of the medium (of, in McLuhan's terms, the medium's 'message') can instead be identified in the practices of publishers who seek to control and limit the dissemination of the copy, not those who which to disseminate it as widely. Disrupting academic publishing, it seems, has a dual meaning here, where it can both refers to disrupting the institution and corporatised system of academic publishing, and to, more primarily, institutional power disrupting the flow of information. The medium, in this respect, continues to compel through continued interface, encouraging more information circulation.

Whether it is a disruption of institutional power or (simply) a facet of author-subjectivity in this digital age, it remains to be seen how this development plays out. If Elsevier's updated business practices, the complex financial structure of UK academic publishing, or Academia.edu's profit model of data exploitation in exchange for information access are a clue to this unforeseen future, it becomes clear that 'open' must move beyond 'gratis' in order to represent more radical forms of freedom and transparency. Only then can these practices be seen to truly disrupt academic publishing and only then, can information be free(d).

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