ON THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ACADEMIC PUBLISHING

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Stylized constellation of main actors in the field of academic publishing. From S Puehringer, J Rath, and T Griesebner (2021) "The political economy of academic publishing" *PLOS one*
My argument, in short

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Universities/Libraries</th>
<th>Researchers/Authors</th>
<th>Publishing Companies</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>our interests align...</td>
<td>but acting on these</td>
<td>Their interests are not ours.</td>
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<td>shared interests will</td>
<td>strategy,</td>
<td></td>
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<td>require strategy,</td>
<td>coordination,</td>
<td></td>
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<td>concerted change</td>
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THE ACADEMIC PUBLISHING MODEL IS BROKEN

- Scholars contribute their research papers and labor time to journals freely, yet their universities must pay (via libraries) for access to the same work.
- Result A: for-profit publishing firms make incredible profits (‘monopoly rent’ on intellectual property)
  - = the commercialization of public assets for private benefit
- Result B: public resources are used to advance research/knowledge, but the results are not generally accessible to the public
  - this [B] is the problem that Open Access (OA) aims to solve
- Result C: the largest for-profit publishing firms — motivated by their need to extract future profits — compete to expand their monopoly share of journals & publishing platforms
  - By 2016, half of all academic papers were published in journals owned by the 5 largest publishing companies (Lariviere et al. 2015)
  - these companies are competing over new rent-seeking opportunities involving algorithm-driven prediction (surveillance)
By contributing the products of our labor (as authors and editors) to a journal published by Elsevier, such as *Geoforum*, we are not only enhancing their profits. Article by article, we are deepening our collective dependence upon monopoly while enhancing surveillance of our lives and work. In effect, by freely donating our scholarship to the largest publishers, we are contributing to building a novel “form of ‘surveillance capitalism’ in the higher education sector” (Chan 2019). - Wainwright and Bervejillo (2021)
RECENT ACCESS DEALS: WHAT THEY DO WELL

• Scholars at BIG10 / BTAA universities can now publish their work Open Access in thousands of journals (thank you!)
• Publishing OA in these journals raises the profile of research by BIG10 / BTAA scholars
**RECENT ACCESS DEALS: WHAT THEY DON’T DO**

- These deals do not change the fundamental problem: inequality in the ownership and control of (for-profit) journals
- They do not stop the contribution of free labor to privately-owned firms—nor the private accumulation of value produced with public assets
- Needed: a medium-term strategy so that these deals do not entrench the status quo, but rather serve as a bridge to better—OA, publicly-owned, not-for-profit—academic publishing arrangements

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**MAKING THE CASE FOR NEW, PUBLICLY-OWNED, OA, LIBRARY MANAGED JOURNALS**

It would make sense for universities to redirect their resources to publishing research directly. Even if the current business model were maintained, with high-profit rates and free labour in production, taking academic publishing in-house would provide universities with an additional income stream, which should be welcome in the current climate of economic hardship and austerity. If a proportion of university library budgets, which is currently given over to buying in high-price journals, was given over to publishing some of those journals at a reasonable price, this would not only return control over the production, circulation and exchange of academic knowledge to academics, but would recirculate the profits from academic labour back into the universities.
