Householding. A feminist ecological economics of publishing

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Scholarly publishing is under siege. In the Global North, and specifically in the UK, it is increasingly threatened by the alignment of technocratic, neoliberal government policy – specifically around open access[i] and commercial entities striking Faustian bargains with research institutions concerned about compliance, cost and competition. At stake is the very soul of scholarly knowledge, its integrity, uniqueness and authority.[ii]

Unregulated corporate power has enabled the big five publishers[iii] to increase their market dominance, firstly by double-dipping, or charging both traditional subscription fees for journals and article processing charges for open access; secondly, through lucrative transformative agreements[iv] that fold article processing charges into even higher subscription payments and thirdly, by diversifying into data analytics and extracting huge profits from the data generated by the uses of research which in itself, is reduced to becoming yet more online, untrustworthy, apparently free content.[v] In this dystopian scenario, we are witnessing the emergence of a social media business model for scholarly communication, and the next phase in the capitalisation of knowledge.

Open access policy applies to the public, or Higher Education sector only, not to the private sector. Open access has been defined as making publicly funded research free to use and available for reuse, all in the name of the public good. But on closer inspection, it is not that straightforward. Commercial licenses are preferred or mandated and it is hard to disagree with digital humanities scholar David Berry (2017) who regards open access as a means of obtaining 'greater public subsidy for the private sector's use of university research outputs' without any reciprocal financial contribution.[vi] Where, as the sociologist John Holmwood long ago pointed out 'the language of

openness is powerful and persuasive' (2013: 2), it effectively masks its opposite and has operated as both a smokescreen and accelerant for commercial consolidation and enclosure in scholarly publishing. Radical vertical integration has enabled Elsevier, for example, to encompass the entire research lifecycle from idea to employment via funding, review, access and evaluation.

The problem addressed in this article is the feasibility of opening out from open access towards a non-technocratic, post-neoliberal publishing ecology in which compliance, efficiency, transparency and competition give way to values such as integrity, justice, care and cooperation. With little sign of adequate public investment in infrastructure (national or not-for-profit publishing platforms; linked institutional repositories), especially in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS) in the UK, what are the prospects for grassroots, DIY initiatives that promote institutional or scholar-led publishing? Can small-scale publishing, not driven by growth or profit, scale up collectively to the massive technological incursion of a few commercial enterprises? [vii] In addition, what can the conjunction of intersectional feminism and ecological economics contribute to the preservation of public knowledge and the naturecultural environments that co-constitute it?

A central concept of feminist and ecological economics is householding, a form of care-taking more oriented to mutual flourishing than growth. Householding is antagonistic to mastery, extraction and exploitation. Applied to the ecology of scholarly knowledge, householding builds on the existing mission of scholar-led and especially university press publishing, and could form the basis of a politics and praxis of publishing after progress.

Platformisation, vertical integration and open access accelerationism

Contemporary academic publishing is subject to a process of platformisation understood as the transfer of cultural and other activities to digital platforms and the transformation of goods, such as books and journals, into services. What Nick Srnicek calls 'lean' platforms seek to 'reduce their ownership of assets to a minimum and to profit by reducing costs as much as possible' (2017: 49). A lean publishing platform does not own books or journals. Its primary assets are software and data analytics services. Lean platform publishing is 'hyper-outsourced', with universities and so-called 'legacy' publishers providing the workers, fixed capital, maintenance costs and training: 'all that remains is a bare extractive minimum –

control over the platform that enables a monopoly rent to be gained' (76).

In the UK, Open Research Central (ORC) once looked set to become the platform of platforms, funnelling output from companies such as F1000 Research Ltd., as well as from Wellcome Open Research. At the time of writing, ORC is not functioning as a publishing platform but as an indexing and open access advocacy service. Itself a not-for-profit organisation, ORC is now funded by the Wellcome Trust, and by F1000 which provides the programme director, website and index. Once an independent company, F1000 was bought by Taylor & Francis, one of the big five, in 2020.

The publishing process at F1000, as with other platforms, removes the publisher as middle man, along with any conventional curatorial or editorial practice. Publishing is presented as being author-led, or a direct transaction between authors and self-selected reviewers. Authors upload preprints for immediate publication and await post-publication peer review. The criteria for selection and scrutiny is generic and the bar is arguably low. According to their website, 'article submissions to F1000 Research undergo a rapid initial check by the in-house editorial team before being published with the status 'Awaiting Peer Review'. There is no Editor (or Editor-in-Chief) to make a decision on whether to accept or reject the article, or to oversee the peer review process'. The team ensures that the article is in scope and adheres to a set of policies including originality (the article has not been published before) and competing interests (authors must include a competing interests statement). F1000 require that material for publication 'sets out to be fair and accurate; clearly differentiates between fact and opinion; is obtained by legitimate and ethical means; is evidence-based and shall be promptly corrected (where appropriate) or withdrawn if it is subsequently found to be dangerous, inaccurate or misleading'.[viii]

Fulfilling Plan S criteria for full and immediate open access,[ix] and in line with an increased emphasis on author-led (as opposed to publisher-led) publishing, the F1000 platform model is designed for Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) fields and STEM temporalities (the need to share research openly, widely and rapidly, especially in the medical and life sciences) but has not been refitted for AHSS where the research process takes longer and tends to be less urgent, where data is not extractable from discourse and is often still presented in the form of print books. Nevertheless, the ambition for this and other platforms is to extend beyond the medical and life sciences to all of research, currently captured in the concept of open science.

Open science platforms may or may not be open source, and open source is not just about making code publicly available. It is also predicated on establishing communities for coding, writing, testing, discussing and providing feedback, and raises questions about community governance and the extent to which technological infrastructures are themselves open or competitive, commons oriented or a means of establishing a monopoly. Srnicek (2016) raises similar questions in his work on platform capitalism, arguing that platforms 'position themselves as intermediaries' (43) between users and present themselves as merely 'the ground upon which their activities occur' (44). As a result, they gain privileged access to surveil and record such activities, and benefit from network effects: 'the more numerous the users who use a platform, the more valuable that platform becomes for everyone else' (45). Platforms have a tendency toward monopolisation.

Apart from Amazon, Knowledge Unlatched is a case in point. A platform for linking university libraries and open access publishers, Knowledge Unlatched changed from being a non-profit to a for-profit company seeking exclusive contracts with publishers. This would enable it, as Rupert Gatti (2018) of Open Book Publishers (OBP) argues, 'to monopolise and dominate an industry'.[x] ScholarLed, a consortium of open access publishers including OBP echoes Gatti's concerns and also highlights Knowledge Unlatched's move 'into what increasingly looks like OA platform capitalism and rent-seeking, whereby those businesses, such as Facebook and Google, that are claiming to be "neutral arbiters and spaces of informational exchange" are, in fact, "siphoning value from socio-cultural activity," and "rather than producing new value," they "simply coordinate virtual properties and charge for their use."'[xi] Knowledge Unlatched stands accused of 'openwrapping' and 'open washing' or of monetising services and infrastructure around open access content.

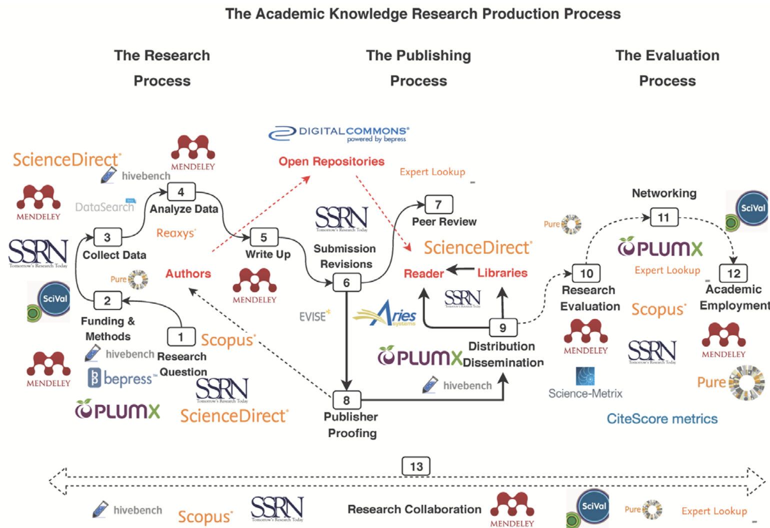
The major irony of open access policy, designed to knock down subscription paywalls and break up the giants of commercial journal publishing, is that it not only feeds the giants but facilitates existing and emerging platform monopolies.[xii] Here it is worth noting that open access is not the solution to a pre-existing problem – namely profiteering from publicly funded research. Rather, it is a solution that has created its own problem – more profiteering from publicly funded research and research infrastructure. The tech industry works this way, through solutionism. Having offered open access as a solution to the ills of scholarly publishing, it is now offering solutions to some of the problems caused by open access, including discoverability and

digital preservation. What is notable by its absence is any proposed solution to the problem of cumulative corporate power.

Platforms are extractive, outsourcing their workers to universities and to the publishers that produce research content. They also have material effects on the work itself, helping to effect a movement upstream in the research cycle whereby knowledge is redesigned, pre-fitted for a systematised, platform-based, competitive, metrics-driven knowledge economy. Far from their claim to neutrality as mere intermediaries, platforms are changing researcher behaviour and shaping research itself by enabling a process of radical vertical integration.

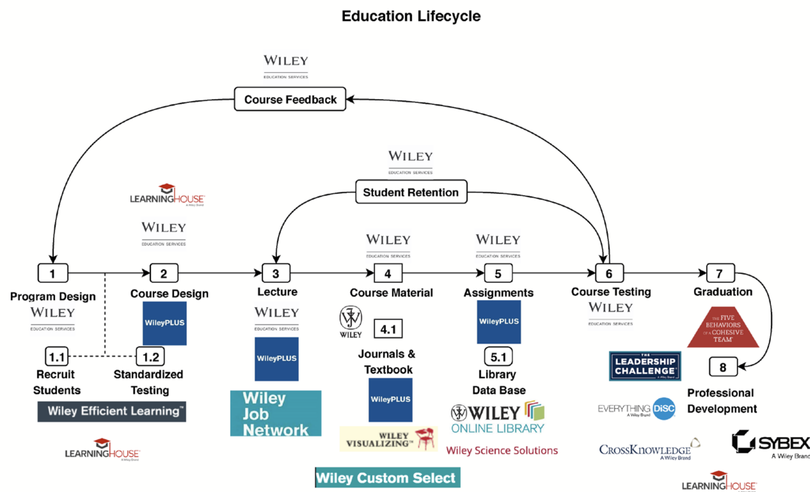
In their paper on vertical integration in academic publishing, George Chen, Alejandro Posada and Leslie Chan (2019) cast doubt on the assumption that widespread adoption of open access business models has led to the democratisation of knowledge. Instead, they point to the 'acquisitions and integration of scholarly infrastructure, the tools and services that underpin the scholarly research life cycle, many of which are also geared towards data analytics for the purpose of creating new income streams (2019: 1). The authors document the current market dominance in publishing and suggest that recent developments such as the shift towards data analytics, result from an 'already disproportionate' ownership of research content and data with implications for 'increased dependence by individual researchers and institutions, as well as the consolidation of an already unequal scholarly communications landscape, making it harder for alternative services and products to succeed in the industry' (2). This claim is supported by an examination of mergers and acquisitions by Elsevier (parent company, RELX), Wiley and Taylor & Francis (parent company, Informa).

In the twenty years to December 2017, Chen et. al. identify more than three hundred and forty mergers and acquisitions for Elsevier, eighty for Wiley and over two hundred and forty for Taylor & Francis. Since then, Informa, for example, the parent company for Taylor & Francis, has divested its intelligence businesses in order to focus on academic markets.[xiii]



Elsevier presence throughout the research lifecycle (https://books.openedition.org/oep/9068).

While Elsevier's acquisitions seek to encompass the research life cycle, including the research, publishing and evaluation processes, Wiley is concentrating on vertical integration in the education lifecycle from student recruitment to course design, assessment, graduation and professional development.



Wiley presence throughout the education lifecycle (https://books.openedition.org/oep/9068).

In exchange for more efficient and interoperable products and services, the higher education sector is ceding the power to decide what kind of research is produced, 'the way in which it is produced, and more importantly who gets to produce it' (24). Concentration of ownership creates exclusions around content, products and services for resource-limited institutions globally, along with increasing influence over participating institutions and individuals. There is indeed a conflict of interest when one of the largest suppliers of

scholarly journals, Elsevier, owns and promotes products and services that assess research quality and impact through metrics (25, 35).[xiv] The promotion of citation metrics increases the influence of journals published in the Global North which have 'benefitted from the Western modality of research as well as the Western norms of scholarship' (56). For the Global South, participation in scholarly communications increasingly comes at the cost of having to adopt Western norms of scholarship and be included in journals indexed in key databases such as Web of Science (56). In this way, vertical integration exacerbates academic neo-colonialism as it at odds with the diversification of knowledge production (59). Chen et. al. conclude that there is a 'clear need for a community-driven integration of scholarly infrastructure, one that is designed to mitigate inequality, that serves the public good within the community, rather than one which only seeks to maximise profits and co-opt open access for the objective of rent-seeking' (60).

In her article on 'The Platformisation of Scholarly Infrastructure and how to Fight it', Lai Ma also argues that the legitimisation of research is now in commercial hands and that increased platformisation works against bibliodiversity and multilingualism. Emphasising the need for public research infrastructures to combat the privatisation of research, she points out that it is 'absurd' that publicly funded research outputs are not centrally preserved' (2023: 9). Richard Poynder reminds us that this is primarily the case in the Global North where open access, which may have started as a moral issue, has become a market one (2019: 9). Government mandates, as Poynder points out, have accelerated the process of marketisation and rendered open access coercive: 'Individual researchers are now coerced by their institutions, research institutions are coerced by governments and funders, and cOAlition S wants to coerce other countries to adopt a system that will benefit the Global North to the disadvantage of the Global South'. In addition, he adds, 'Plan S was designed around the STEM disciplines but the arts, humanities and social sciences are being coerced into squeezing themselves into the same template, despite that template being inappropriate' (76).

While Northern-style open access becomes increasingly aligned with capitalism, homogenising research and scholarly communications and further marginalising the Global South, there has been some resistance to this epistemic and economic injustice. In Latin America, for example, countries have not outsourced journal publishing to for-profit companies to anything like the extent in the Global North. Universities and societies still run their own journals and if anything, Plan S has provoked a reaction in favour of maintaining national journals and publishing platforms (Poynder, 2019: 74). In 2018, the

Latin American open access portal Redalyc launched AmeliCA[xv] with the aim of promoting models 'more suited to the needs of the Global South – notably scholar-led university and society-based journals run on a non-profit basis' (74). AmeliCA seeks to build an infrastructure from and for the academy, and to establish a sustainable, non-commercial open access approach for Latin America and the Global South. Poynder suggests that this may result in a splintering of the open access movement as there has yet to be an equivalent backlash in the North.

I suggest that what we do have in the North, in place of a backlash, is a misplaced faith in a post-capitalist, accelerationist open access. Here, the idea is that more open access will somehow accelerate it beyond platform capitalism and complete commercial enclosure. The solution to platformisation is more platformisation or, as Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek put it in their *#Accelerationist Manifesto* (2013), the 'reprogramming and refitting of platforms towards post-capitalist ends'. Where this appears to chime, or could potentially chime with a call for a commons-oriented infrastructure, there is no reference here to anything other than technology itself. Accelerationism acknowledges the existence of a socio-political realm – of national differences and economic disparity for example – but it simply doesn't go there, believing instead in the latent, productive force of technology and the need to liberate it from capitalist constraints.

I will argue that the call to liberate technology from capitalism was at the heart of the original open access and copyright reforms here in the UK. This call established a technocratic consensus that united top-down, and bottom-up movements and effectively de-politicised open access and publishing in general. Sadly, this is the situation that prevails. The context for a left, or post-capitalist accelerationism is the failure of (left-right or antagonistic) politics that accelerationism perpetuates. The context for a grassroots open access is the failure of a post-neoliberal politics of communication that open access perpetuates. Open access is a form of accelerationism which demonstrates that it cannot function strategically, that it can be coercive in its alignment with technocratic power, but not interventional in the face of technocratic power. I have long argued that only by opening out from open access can publishing be re-politicised (Kember, 2014). The interventions made in the Global South are not about open access per se, but about the need to address epistemic and economic (in)justice and break the current technocratic consensus.

The technocratic legacy of open access and the need to re-politicise publishing

The *Finch Report* on open access, published in 2012, rejected barriers to access on the basis that they 'restrict the innovation, growth and other benefits that might accrue'(5). Published the previous year, the *Hargreaves Review of Intellectual Property* (IP) was also concerned that IP rights that 'support growth by promoting innovation through the offer of a temporary monopoly to creators and inventors' might at the same time 'stifle growth where transaction costs are high or rights are fragmented in a way that makes them hard to access' (2011: 14). For *Hargreaves*, the solution to IP as a route to market domination is a redesigned IP that facilitates competition and growth. Similarly, the solution to piracy in the context of digitisation 'where copying and distribution are more or less free' is not copyright enforcement, but rather a process of modernisation that enables 'open and competitive markets in licensed digital content' (10). These were neoliberal, but also specifically technocratic reforms.

The premise of the *Hargreaves Review of IP* was that the IP framework was out of date and had to adapt to new technology:

> IP law must adapt to change. Digital communications technology involves routine copying of text, images and data, meaning that copyright law has started to act as a regulatory barrier to the creation of certain kinds of new, internet based businesses. (2011: 101)

A deterministic, progressive approach to technology is joined, in both the *Hargreaves* and *Finch* reports, by a narrative of crisis and catch-up and by an ontology of the digital *as* copying, sharing and re-use. As I wrote in an article on feminism, publishing and the politics of communication in 2014:

> If digital technology simply *is* copying, re-use and sharing then the seemingly uncontestable [sic] assertion is that IP law should strive to set it free (where freedom is, of course, a function and condition of the market). (Kember, 2014: 102)

The narrative that IP and access were broken and had to be fixed united pro- and anti-copyright agendas in a consensus that elided asymmetries of power and de-politicised the debate.

A subsequent report, *Supporting the Creative Economy*, was produced by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), which supports the creative industries, including publishing. This was critical of the *Hargreaves Review* and suggested that there was an

underlying agenda to IP reforms, in turn supported by the Intellectual Property Office, part of a rival government department, Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). DCMS alleged that the BIS agenda was 'driven at least in part by technology companies (Google foremost among them)' (2013: 4-5). This argument was developed by a publisher, Zeljka Marosevic, who, in a now unavailable text published in 2012 or 2013, pointed to 'the concern of many in publishing and in other creative industries that cabinet ministers are holding private meetings and are keen to curry favour with the big tech companies, while they possess too little concern for the creative industries.'[xvi] The UK government, Marosevic suggested, was more interested in the rights of industry than individuals, more in favour of tech than publishing, and determined to dilute rather than enforce IP.

Legitimised through a narrative of crisis and catch-up, technocracy was embedded in UK open access and copyright reforms. It established a consensus that united 'pro- and anti-copyright agendas, advocates for commercialisation and those for creative commons' (Kember, 2014: 103). As this consensus has become naturalised in the drive for more open access, so the politics of publishing has been further marginalised, notwithstanding the potential splintering of North and South priorities and periodic rebellions by editorial boards no longer willing to tolerate the purely profit-driven practices of commercial journal publishing.[xvii] The possibility of re-politicisation is contingent on rejecting the technocratic consensus that underpins open access and opening out to publishing projects that (re)enact intersectional feminist agendas and investments in, for example, justice, care, collaboration and intervention. 'A feminist politics of communication does not (could not) posit radicalism in opposition to neoliberalism but does constitute a relation of antagonism' – one that is otherwise currently lacking (2014: 99).

The possibility of antagonism – the prerequisite for politics – is latent in the new scholarly publishing landscape consisting of new university and scholar-led presses. Here, there is an ethos of collaboration rather than competition, which could form the basis of an alternative economics as well as ethics of publishing. In a landscape study published in 2017, Janneke Adema, Graham Stone and Chris Keene argue that the 'sharing of information and advice is part of an ongoing ethos of collaboration and gifting, often in stark opposition to the closed-off and proprietary business and publishing models of commercial publishers' (13). The ethos of collaboration extends beyond consortia such as White Rose Press and, more recently, Scottish Universities Press. It informs grassroots organisations such as the Open Institutional Publishing Association (OIPA), whose mission is 'to create a new source of support and advocacy for established and emerging university presses and

institutionally-affiliated publishing operations striving for open access.'[xviii] There is also ScholarLed, formed in 2018 as a consortium promoting small-scale, scholar-led open access presses. This seeks to establish collaborative modes of working and non-profit, community-based infrastructures. ScholarLed were key partners in the now completed *Community-Led Open Publication Infrastructures for Monographs* (*COPIM*) project, which received funding from Research England and the Arcadia Fund. Currently consisting of six member presses, the first criterion for joining ScholarLed is to have published 'at least one book' and commit to making all publications open access 'without embargo'.[xix] The same embargo on embargos is stipulated by the Open Book Collective, a follow-on project from *COPIM*. It effectively excludes university presses such as the one I direct, Goldsmiths Press, which have a more mixed model of publishing that includes open access alongside traditional print and distribution practices. Small-scale, non-commercial publishers like Goldsmiths Press that work through print runs and distribution deals require an embargo period in which to sell books and attempt to recoup costs that are not covered by open access funding, book processing charges or library subscription schemes. This is not profiteering. It is about survival. The full costs of publishing are invariably not covered, requiring ongoing institutional subsidy that is always difficult to sustain.

The attempt by grassroots organisations to eliminate embargos goes further than current UK policy which limits the embargo period to twelve months for publications that acknowledge government funding.[xx] It is to my mind largely ideological, informed by a system of belief in open access as a public good, notwithstanding the co-option of open access by commercial entities and the privatisation of knowledge infrastructure. As Adema et. al. (2017) show, there is actually little interest in sharing platforms, for instance, with a number of small-scale presses preferring to work with commercial providers such as Ubiquity (40).

While the turn to collectivism is demonstrable in the new publishing landscape, the aim of the current open access collectives is primarily to accelerate open access. A wider politics of communication does exist, including in the mission statements of individual presses such as Mattering Press (care) and Language Science Press (community) (Adema et. al. 2017: 47-48), but on a landscape level it is subsumed by open access ideology and ultimately brought into line with dominant neoliberal imperatives.

Towards householding as a politics and praxis of publishing

Scholarly publishing needs to be re-politicised and my argument is that this cannot happen through open access accelerationism. Opening out from open access entails opening towards a non-technocratic, post-neoliberal publishing ecology founded on values that are common to feminist, anti-racist and other social justice movements. This would of course be more of a re-opening, a recreation of the relationship between publishing and social justice movements. The relationship lives on through independent presses, less so through scholarly publishing, Pluto Press and Repeater Books being among notable exceptions. Even if the fate of Virago and the Women's Press, for example, was to be absorbed by commercial publishers, it is the contestation in the present, the relation of antagonism (Mouffe, 2005), the opening rather than the openness that creates the necessary movement towards change.

Politics, for Chantal Mouffe (2005), is not about consensus. Non-consensual, ecological and feminist economics challenge the capitalist emphasis on growth and offer a toolkit for change which is applicable to the publishing ecology and economy. In *Ecological Economics for the Anthropocene* (2015), Peter Brown and Peter Timmerman resurrect a radical agenda by placing ecological economics in tension with environmental economics – understood as a field which applies the principles of mainstream economics to the environment and thereby perpetuates the illusion of infinite 'sustainable' growth. The context for this revival of ecological economics, initially proposed in the 1980s, is climate change caused by unsustainable growth and consumption and 'the living ghost of an economic theory that, no matter how much it is assaulted or how much damage it causes, refuses to die' (1). The current economic order, Brown and Timmerman maintain, 'is grinding itself into the physical face of the planet' (1). They offer an intervention, an economics that changes the economy by rethinking 'the human relationship with life and the world' (3).

Ecological economics is aligned with feminist economics in seeking to redress the elisions of mainstream economics, principally the relationship between human economy and the natural world and between *homo economicus* (autonomous, rational, masculine) and other subjects or conceptualisations of the subject. In place of man's dominion over nature (Merchant 1980), ecological and feminist economics prefer a model of mutuality or relationality based on epistemological, ethical and ontological interdependence. Here, the hierarchical division between Man and Nature which, along with

other binaries, is foundational to mainstream economics is replaced by what Karen Barad (2007) refers to as a relation of responsibility to lives and worlds that 'we' are always already co-constitutive of.

In her article on 'Feminism, ecology and the philosophy of economics', Julie A. Nelson clarifies the link between Western dualistic thinking and technocracy. She argues that 'the technocratic view accepts the ideology of human mastery over nature, and sees the problem as lying only in *insufficient* mastery' (1996: 158). This is how technological solutionism begets more technological solutionism and why Williams and Srnicek advocate 'maximal mastery' in their *#Accelerationist Manifesto* (2013: 21). This masculinist manifesto is predicated on autonomous, not relational subjectivity and on control rather than the cooperation and care that underpin feminist ecological economics. In another article, Nelson asks whether care and cooperation can take place in the context of business and commerce without generating damaging or unhealthy levels of cooperation (2021: 114), for example, between governments and big tech and without companies indulging in what the Care Collective term 'carewashing' (2020: 11). Here, 'powerful business actors are promoting themselves as 'caring corporations' while actively undermining any kind of care offered outside their profit-making architecture' (11).

It is not unthinkable that any of the big five commercial publishers might consider themselves to be caring corporations, so how to recognise or create a distinction which is already, to an extent, characteristic of scholar-led and university press publishing? The answer is precisely to do with the underpinning economic model. The Care Collective's *The Care Manifesto* (2020) is informed by feminist, ecological economics. Its premise is that growth is careless: 'perpetual economic growth is completely incompatible with environmental limits and with preserving a habitable planet' (9). Moreover, 'as neoliberal economic growth policies have become dominant in so many countries, the inherently careless practice of 'growing the economy' has taken priority over ensuring the well-being of citizens' (8). So care understood as a means of embracing interdependence and as 'a social capacity and activity involving the nurturing of all that is necessary for the welfare and flourishing of life' (5) is antagonistic to growth.

Degrowth is part of the feminist ecological economic toolkit. Its basic premise, that it is not possible to have infinite growth on a finite planet, was undermined by the push for green growth, whereby 'technological fixes in the production process are meant to solve the multiple crises we are faced with' by claiming to reconcile social, environmental and economic imperatives (Dengler, 2021: 370).

However, since greening the economy has had limited success, degrowth scholarship and activism has re-emerged as a critique of sustainable growth and 'instead of mere growth alternatives, it focuses on alternatives *to* growth' (370). As Dengler points out, this doesn't indicate the necessity of recession or even a comprehensive reduction in output. It is certainly antithetical, as is the wider feminist ecological economic perspective, to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a measure of human and economic development. Where this has been criticised for excluding unpaid domestic work historically undertaken by women (Waring, 1990), the problem, for Julie A. Nelson lies in the importance given to measurement and to numbers themselves: 'Using such as crude, single measure of production, even if refined, as a yardstick for economic welfare smacks of methodological reductionism' (1996: 160). Degrowth scholarship continues the work of reconsidering what counts towards a sustainable and just life and towards mutual flourishing on a global scale. It seeks to curtail 'the "imperial mode of living" of global elites', lifestyles and practices associated with the Global North that 'rely heavily on (i) the unlimited appropriation of resources; (ii) a disproportionate claim to global and local ecosystems and sinks; and (iii) cheap labour from elsewhere' (Brand & Wissen (2017) in Dengler, 2021: 370).

Degrowth is strongly associated with decolonisation and a challenge to the ongoing hierarchy of relations between the Global North and Global South. The appropriation and extraction of common goods, resources and labour, the perpetuation of gendered and racial inequality is seen to be endemic in the growth model which requires increasing levels of subsidy and exploitation. Growth is inherently careless and unjust.

What is required from an intersectional feminist approach to an ecological economics is a set of ethical tenets, or proto-political praxes that foreground mutuality, care and justice. To that effect, Brown and Timmerman (2015) propose the triad of membership, householding and entropic thrift:

(1) *Membership*: Humans are members, not masters, of the community of life.

(2) *Householding*: The earth and the living systems on and in it should not be seen as merely "natural resources." They are worthy of respect and care in their own right.

(3) *Entropic Thrift*: Low-entropy sources and sink capacities, the things that undergird life's possibilities and flourishing, must be used with care and shared fairly.

> Ecological economics is inexorably and fundamentally about justice. (16)

An emphasis on membership challenges the entire Western tradition and especially the assumption of human exceptionalism: 'the idea that human beings are special, are in some miraculous way not a part of nature' (75). The hierarchical binary of Man and Nature underpins an unjust economic and philosophical system and it is time to recognise the interdependence between people and between people and all forms of life on this planet, thereby expanding our sense of community. 'The attitude of domination of the world and its peoples must be replaced with respect and reciprocity toward all that is' (75). An expanded community might be considered to be a household, a single homeostatic, if not homogeneous system that requires careful house*holding*, awareness of differences, mindful decision-making and a balance between self-interest and a concern for others. The holding in householding is key. It is not the same as ownership and is antithetical to the pursuit of power. It about nurturing, preserving, enabling and holding over resources and relations from one generation to the next. It is not necessarily harmonious but must, literally, contain conflict. Entropic thrift offers a way of containing conflict through the fairer sharing of finite resources and through atonement 'for what we have wrought in the domination of the natural world and our fellow humans' (82). Atonement means responding to the 'collapse of whole systems' such as the oceans and ice sheets by radically reducing consumption where consumption is currently highest. It is clear that 'not all cultures have the same debts to come to terms with' and that the 'legacy of unjust carbon emissions and imperialism of the North is immense' (83).

How then could these principles be applied to publishing? The publishing industry as a whole is aware of the need for decolonisation (Santos de Carvalho & Oliveira Baghelli, 2021). Yet, despite the very apparent over-production associated with predatory publishing and competitive academic cultures, there is no real sense of the need for degrowth beyond the scaling-small agendas of scholar-led organisations.[xxi] Commercial publishing undertaken by the big five needs to be degrown. It will not degrow itself but requires regulation in excess of the current OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises.[xxii] The idea of responsible business conduct outlined here amounts to little more than self-regulation and remains oriented to economic growth. Anti-competitive practices go unchallenged (Lamdan, 2023: 20).[xxiii] It is clear that the extractive practices of commercial publishing, the appropriation of common goods and resources, the exploitation of free labour, remain fundamentally colonial. There is entropic profligacy here and an ongoing quest for

market domination that has transformed knowledge into a growth economy.

Regulation alone could only delimit the scale of such operations. So where could the intervention come from? I have suggested that there is a householding ethic shared by non-profit, mission-driven university press publishing, a nurturing attitude and a respect and care for the household of scholarly knowledge. While it is undoubtedly enacted by individual publishers, it can only be activated collectively. As valuable as the Association of University Presses, and the Association of European University Presses are, they have, inevitably, been somewhat side-tracked by open access policies and do not, in any case, regard themselves as activist organisations. In as far as activism is needed, it could come from within the university sector and from scholar-activists who have withdrawn and rerouted their labour, who no longer wish to work for Elsevier, Wiley, Springer, Sage or Taylor & Francis.

In March 2024, the editors, advisory board members, authors and reviewers of *Gender, Work and Organization* wrote to Wiley to tender their resignation. They complained of the narrowing and mainstreaming of a world class interdisciplinary journal, the appointment of academics in business and marketing and the failure to reflect the scope of feminist and gender studies reflected in the work of the journal to date. New appointments were not transparent or inclusive and marginalised those who had already donated free labour and contributed to the journal's success. They referred to autocratic management, and a misalignment of values. Articles rooted in the journal's critical heritage were being routinely desk rejected in favour of high-volume, low quality management papers. The letter's authors stated that they would no longer contribute to the journal in any way and would instead seek to establish a new home – or household – for their community.

There have been other instances of mass resignation. In May 2023, *The Guardian* reported a mass walkout from the Elsevier journal *Neuroimage* in protest at unethical open access fees. 'Academics from around the world have applauded what many hope is the start of a rebellion against the huge profit margins in academic publishing, which outstrip those made by Apple, Google and Amazon.'[xxiv] In August 2023, two-thirds of the editorial board of Wiley's *Journal of Biogeography* resigned over 'exorbitant' open access fees and a now widespread policy of steering rejected manuscripts to other titles.[xxv] Also in 2023, the entire editorial board of *Theory and Society* resigned because Springer Nature brought in new editors-in-chief without

consulting the board: 'At stake here is how much control we academics are willing to give to for-profit publishers who have so much influence over our professional trajectories on the one hand and rely on our uncompensated labor on the other.' [xxvi] The Retraction Watch Mass Resignations List has been keeping up-to-date with resignations across all disciplines since 2015 and indicates that the number has picked up significantly in recent years. There were eight resignations in 2023, many of them citing open access policies and fees, a number, including *Design Studies* (Elsevier) referring to editorial interference in order to increase output and no-reject publishing models. At the time of writing (March 2024) there have been five in 2024, all for similar reasons.[xxvii] It would seem that the rebellion has started, along with the search for new homes. Along with Amy Brand, Director of MIT Press, I have argued that university presses could help to establish these homes,[xxviii] perhaps by working as service providers for publishing cooperatives composed of academic journal editors. The aim of the Federation for the Future of Feminist Journal Publishing[xxix] is to establish itself as an international publishing coop. The Federation's vision states that:

> Feminists are calling time on the provision of free labour to commercial publishers, standardised forms of scholarship and the reproduction of epistemic and linguistic dominance by the Global North. There is an emerging demand for a "room of our own" in publishing and for existing initiatives to coalesce around shared values and goals[1]. This is a working statement that calls for further debate and action and shared attention to the question of *how* to build an innovative and inclusive space – through what practices, forms and infrastructure.

How is a key question, particularly in an international context where the approach to open access is not uniform and priorities may differ. The Federation has found it difficult to combine the quest to avoid corporate capture in the Global North with the demand for more visibility and recognition for feminist research (which points to inclusion in commercial journals) in the Global South. Among the fifteen journals represented by the Federation, there has so far been no mass resignation. The reasons are various. The journal may already be institutionally or collectively owned. Editors may feel allegiance to journals they have worked on and developed over a number of years, even if the journals in question are commercial and imposing increasingly unacceptable terms and conditions. It seems to me though that this situation may change, that more and more mass resignations will occur because commercial publishers are

committed to growth at any cost. There may be some carewashing, but there is no householding, no sense of membership of the scholarly community and no entropic thrift. The case for atonement is clear. The system of scholarly communications as-we-know-it is collapsing, is being extracted from the academy and privatised. While this is going on it is not apparent to funders, policymakers, authors, and academics that not all publishers have the same debts to come to terms with. The task for universities and their associated not-for-profit, mission-driven, householding presses is to collaborate through shared resources and infrastructure, learning from the example set by Lever Press, White Rose Press, Scottish Universities Press and others. Their distinction from commercial publishing must be clearly and loudly emphasised, including to emerging communities of scholar activists and dissidents. An alternative, ecological economics of scholarly publishing is possible and is neither about, or not about, open access per se. It rests on a refusal of the current technocratic consensus and a return to publishing as politics.

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End Notes

[i] For current UK policy, see: https://www.ukri.org/publications/ukri-open-access-policy

[ii] The current threat to the authority of scholarly knowledge might be understood through a heady mix of neoliberalism, populism and postmodernism. Jean-Francois Lyotard understood postmodernism as a condition of knowledge characterised by a loss of authority with respect to master narratives such as science, and the transformation of knowledge into information. If knowledge is intrinsic – a mental, cultured, human acquisition – information is increasingly extrinsic, instrumental, and systematised.

[iii] Elsevier, Springer Nature, Wiley, Taylor & Francis and Sage (based on the number of journals published). See for example: https://direct.mit.edu/qss/article/4/4/778/118070/The-oligopoly-s-shift-to-open-access-How-the-big

[iv] 'At its most fundamental, a contract is a transformative agreement if it seeks to shift the contracted payment from a library or group of libraries to a publisher away from subscription-based reading and towards open access publishing' (Janicke Hinchliff, 2019). https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2019/04/23/transformative-agreements/

[v] Information, it would seem, still wants to be free. Such was the mantra of the Californian Ideology (first described as such by British media theorists Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron) – the coming together, in the 1990s, of Silicon Valley entrepreneurialism with the free spirit of hippy culture. The idea that 'information wants to be free' underpins the Californian Ideology and now the open access movement. Combining individualism, technological determinism, libertarianism, and neoliberal economics, it unites the left and right in its challenge to dominant intellectual power and property structures and in its quest for a counterculture in which knowledge and information are equally accessible to all. But what we learned from the

history of the Internet – and what we now appear to have forgotten – is the corporatisation, social stratification, and monopolisation that took hold in this apparently free and open space.

[vi] Berry, D. (2017) 'The Uses of Open Access', *STUNLAW: Philosophy and Critique for a Digital Age,* 16 February 2017. https://stunlaw.blogspot.com/2017/02/the-uses-of-open-access.html

[vii] Including academia.edu.

[viii] F1000 Research (n.d.) 'Policies'. https://f1000research.com/about/policies#compint

[ix] 'Plan S is an initiative for Open Access publishing that was launched in September 2018. The plan is supported by cOAlition S, an international consortium of research funding and performing organisations.' https://www.coalition-s.org/

[x] Rupert Gatti (2018) 'Why OBP is not participating in KU Open Funding: and why libraries should understand the reasons', *ScholarLed*. https://blogs.openbookpublishers.com/why-obp-is-not-participating-in-ku-open-funding-and-why-libraries-should-understand-the-reasons/

[xi] ScholarLed (n.d,) 'The Enclosure of Scholarly Infrastructures, Open Access Books and the Necessity of Community', *ScholarLed.* https://blog.scholarled.org/open-research-library/

[xii] Certainly an unintended consequence of the original Budapest, Bethesda and Berlin declarations which consolidated the previously disparate open access movement under a common strategical focus.

[xiii] Informa (n.d.) 'Corporate Transactions'. https://www.informa.com/investors/shareholder-centre/corporate-transactions/

[xiv] See also Sarah Lamdan's argument in *Data Cartels*: 'The findings of researchers doing nonprofit, public interest research shouldn't belong to the same companies whose products determine what research gets funded and which researchers get tenure' (2023: 19).

[xv] Amelica (n.d.) 'About'. http://amelica.org/index.php/en/about/

[xvi] Marosevic, Z. (2013/2013) 'New Report on British Intellectual Property Laws Criticises UK Government Hints at an Underlying Agenda Between Google and Government'.

[xvii] For example, in March 2024, the editors, advisory board members, authors and reviewers of the Wiley journal *Gender, Work and Organization* wrote to Wiley to tender their resignation.

[xviii] Open Institutional Publishing Association (OIPA) (n.d.) 'Supporting open scholarship through community and collaboration'. https://oipauk.org/

[xix] ScholarLed (n.d.) 'Join ScholarLed'. https://scholarled.org/join.html

[xx] But note that Institutional Rights Retention policies are being set up in anticipation of REF 2029 which may align UKRI policy and REF policy, seeking to eliminate embargos.

[xxi] See Janneke Adema and Samual Moore (2021) on scaling small as a strategy for non-commercial knowledge production: https://www.westminsterpapers.org/article/id/918

[xxii] OECD (n.d.) 'Responsible Business Conduct'. https://mneguidelines.oecd.org

[xxiii] See also Moody, G. (2018) 'Leading Open Access Supporters Ask EU To Investigate Elsevier's Alleged "Anti-Competitive" Practices', *techdirt.* https://www.techdirt.com/2018/11/08/leading-open-access-supporters-ask-eu-to-investigate-elseviers-alleged-anti-competitive-practices/

[xxiv] Fazackerley, A. (2023) '"too greedy": mass walkout at global science journal over "unethical" fees', *The Guardian.* https://www.theguardian.com/science/2023/may/07/too-greedy-mass-walkout-at-global-science-journal-over-unethical-fees

[xxv] Upton, B. (2023) 'Wiley Journal Board Resigns After Monthlong Strike', *Times Higher Education.* https://www.insidehighered.com/news/global/2023/08/10/wiley-journal-board-resigns-en-masse-after-monthlong-strike

[xxvi] Sandhya, A.S. (2024) 'Mass resignation of Theory & Society's Editorial Board', *RC02.*

https://www.rc02.org/announcements/2024/1/10/mass-resignation-of-theory-amp-societys-editorial-board

[xxvii] 'The Retraction Mass Registration List': https://retractionwatch.com/the-retraction-watch-mass-resignations-list/

[xxviii] Kember, S. & Brand, A. (2023) 'The Corporate Capture of Open-Access Publishing', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 2023. https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-corporate-capture-of-open-access-publishing

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