

**NEW HEGEMONIC TENDENCIES IN THE PRODUCTION
OF KNOWLEDGE: HOW RESEARCH QUALITY
EVALUATION SCHEMES AND THE CORPORATIZATION
OF JOURNALS IMPACT ON ACADEMIC LIFE**

THOMAS REUTER

University of Melbourne, Australia

ABSTRACT

Many governments have now established systems for ranking academic journals in terms of their “quality,” as evidenced by their “impact on the field.” This article argues that the new ranking systems maintain or extend existing hegemonies of knowledge. While the declared goal of the schemes is to measure “academic output” more realistically than is possible with purely quantitative measures, the result is that journals previously considered equal are now ranked. While there has been consultation with academics, in Australia, for example, the scope provided for criticizing the scheme was limited to the details of how to rank particular journals. This formalization of journal rank orders will increase the degree of hierarchy in an international publishing world that is already full of disparities, between the core and periphery of power/knowledge, and between global and more local languages. If schemas of journal evaluation are shaped by the ethnocentrism of the globally dominant players, alternative cultural value-systems may be ignored and journals in marginal countries devalued. Another danger is that ranking can further marginalize different, alternative voices within our own culture, or within a shared global culture. Critical analysts in the humanities and social sciences, as well as all natural scientists whose work is in some way politicized, are particularly vulnerable to the kinds of punishments that now go along with publishing unpopular

ideas in small, progressive journals at the bottom of the hierarchy. Several strategies are proposed for combating these trends.

THE TWIN CHALLENGE OF QUALITY RANKING AND CORPORATISM

Governments around the world have been establishing various schemes to evaluate the quality of research publications in recent years. Such quality evaluation schemes will have a very significant, long-term impact on the working conditions of all academics. Together with teaching, writing refereed articles and books about our research constitutes the core area of academic work. Systemic change in the way publications are valued has direct and significant consequences for workplace relations in universities, because academics will be appointed, promoted, and rewarded for complying with whatever these schemes prescribe, or penalized for disregarding them. This new emphasis on qualitative assessment comes at a time when many of the smaller journals run by academic volunteers and many of the smaller, local or national book publishers have either closed up shop or been appropriated by larger and increasingly transnational corporate publishing conglomerates. This article explores the main implications of these twin trends toward quality ranking and corporatization by reference to specific case studies.

Less obvious perhaps than their impact on basic work relations but equally important are the consequences such evaluation schemes could have for intellectual freedom. First, from a scientific perspective, our independence as intellectuals is a fundamental prerequisite for engaging in the free and rational pursuit of the truth. This implies freedom of expression, and for all practical purposes in the academic world, freedom of expression means having fair and equitable access to the media that are publicly recognized as sources of truthful and reliable information. The danger that arises from quality ranking is particularly great in relation to scientific theories or social analyses that are innovative, uncommon, unpopular, or not in agreement with prevailing paradigms. Admittedly, guaranteeing equitable and unprejudiced access to publication has never been easy, even when governments did not interfere. Thomas Kuhn's (1962) work on the way paradigm shifts occur shows that such shifts often happen much later than they should, and only when evidence contrary to the old paradigm has become overwhelmingly strong. The mechanism for suppressing contrary evidence has long been that such evidence is kept out of the academies and their flagship journals by senior academics with editorial influence and with a vested interest in preventing a paradigm shift. When governments interfere, the situation becomes more serious still, because many other political motives as well as unintended distortions potentially enter the equation at this point. One example of the effect of new quality-ranking schemes is that academics using the well-established option of publishing innovative works in more progressive and

open-minded but perhaps less prestigious and lower-ranking fringe journals are now subject to additional penalties. Not only will their publications be marginal, but they won't count as "work" at all.

Second, from a political perspective, what is at stake is our ability to fulfill our role as public intellectuals by providing objective evaluations of government and corporate policies and actions. This is a crucial necessity for any democratic society because it is a bulwark against such attempts to misinform the public and manipulate public debate as any politically aware person would expect will always be made. When academics lose independence and are evaluated by nonacademic university managers, whose allegiance is to the dominant political and economic elite, then the risk is that our critical work can be denied access to publication or that we are intimidated into self-censorship by the threat of penalties. Once journals are the private property of corporate elites, which is increasingly the case, there is also a risk of editorial influence being used for the purpose of stifling criticism and manufacturing consent, similar to what is already happening to a growing number of newspapers (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). This kind of interference could prevent critical articles from entering precisely those journals that are the biggest, in terms of their global distribution and impact, and hence also the most highly ranked in the new evaluation schemes. None of our activities are immune to this process. Indeed, similar ranking schemes are being tried for book publishers as well, and even for conferences.

Finally, the new evaluation schemes also impact on global hierarchies of knowledge and tend to exacerbate existing inequalities in today's world. If quality evaluation and corporatization are disconcerting to academics in Western, English-speaking countries, the situation is much more difficult again for people in developing countries, and even in developed countries with a different language. Publication ranking lists often discriminate very strongly against journals and book publishers outside the Anglo-American mainstream, which now enjoys a position of global knowledge hegemony.

The combined effect of quality evaluation and corporatization could be a cementing of existing hegemonies of power and knowledge, a disempowerment of academics, and a decline in the academic values that have served the common good in democratic societies for centuries. This article thus also explores the epistemological and political implications of quality evaluation schemes and corporatization and their impact on intellectual freedoms, with reference to specific cases.

My perspective on these developments is international because, in my capacity as executive member and later as chair of the World Council of Anthropological Associations (WCAA; 2004-2012), I received numerous reports of the introduction of quality schemes around the world. I also was able to discuss the consequences of these schemes directly with the presidents of the relevant national professional associations in my discipline. By and large, the impact of these schemes on other disciplines is similar.

HOW MANY PENNIES FOR YOUR THOUGHT? RESEARCH QUALITY RANKING IN AUSTRALIA

National governments, and those whose interests they represent, are increasing their control over the processes of academic knowledge production and dissemination by establishing national research evaluation frameworks. The type of scheme varies, and this matters because it will determine the particular direction in which academic “output” is pushed in the country concerned. Comparisons are thus very instructive and necessary. There are also many common features across these schemes, however, given that governments have increasingly come to represent the interests of global corporate elites and given that universities are themselves corporations too nowadays, competing for students (“customers”) within a global tertiary education market.

For many years the assumption within the academic world has been that the evaluation of all our work should be based on peer assessment, performed on a voluntary and honorary basis, and that we must be allowed to set our own standards in this way because we ourselves are the most highly qualified experts in our various professional fields. This was a time when the suggestion that universities would one day be governed by a system of nonacademic corporate line management would have been met with distaste, shock, and even disbelief, given that such a governance structure would have been seen as a total inversion of the status hierarchy of the academic world. Governments today no longer recognize the idea that universities must form an independent “value sphere” in Max Weber’s sense. Rather, governments and those they represent now use bureaucratic procedures to control in a mechanistic fashion the very means by which value or “quality” is constructed in academic communities.

Adorno and Horkheimer (2002) theorized state interventions in civil society as a “colonization of the lifeworld” by systems of bureaucratic governance. Such interventions, they noted, are usually made in the name of an impoverished and instrumentalized notion of rationality, which is in fact a mere tool of bureaucratic control and private profit-making. It is no longer about being rational in the original sense in which Reason was understood, during the Enlightenment period in which modern science originated. Bureaucracies seek truth only where it favors the economic and political ends of their superiors to do so.

Quantitative performance indicators have long been an easy way for managerial elites to govern those whose work they do not understand, and academics have long grumbled about the bluntness of this measure. But while an evaluation that incorporates measures of quality is more accurate, it is also much more ambitious and potentially dangerous. Evaluation means the imposition of values, and strictly speaking a quantitative measure does not measure value at all, except insofar as quantity is an end in itself. Values are not just measured; they are the standards of measurement. Social science tells us that whoever can control the construction of value within a community has the power to define and control the community

itself. From this perspective, publication quality-ranking schemes around the world have the sinister potential of playing into the hands of vested interests. At a time when peer review is under pressure because academics are overworked and often do not receive adequate credit for volunteering to review papers, let alone books, the potential is that the editors and corporate owners of large commercial publishing houses could be used as gatekeepers to suppress dissent or keep unpleasant truths from public view, or at least to rob their proponents of scientific credibility. The implications are obvious for intrinsically critical disciplines like politics or anthropology, but the truth of natural science can also be considered “undesirable.” In Australia, for example, climate scientists now receive regular death threats amidst concerted climate change denial media campaigns financed by mining corporations (ABC, 2012), corporations that are now also buying up major newspapers and demanding control of editorial policy (Hill, 2012).

Australia is a pertinent example of how these schemes work. The Australian Research Council (ARC) began to establish a system for ranking all academic journals in terms of their “quality” in 2007, and Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) became fully operational in 2010, ending years of policy uncertainty. The ERA scheme is the successor to an earlier prototype, the so-called Research Quality Framework (RQF). The RQF was an initiative of the previous Liberal Party government under Prime Minister John Howard, a government that also attempted to undermine the independent peer review system of the Australian Research Council, by which research funding is allocated in this country (New laws whittle away academic freedom, 2008). The Australian Labor Party scrapped the RQF scheme before it could be implemented, after Kevin Rudd defeated Howard and became prime minister in 2007. Despite the change in government, however, the basic idea of establishing such a scheme remained on the table. A bipartisan agenda of subjecting all aspects of academic life to an ever-tighter audit culture thus appears to prevail in Australia, with the two major political parties both subscribing to the same basic neoliberal ideology: in the name of productivity, academic activities are valued only insofar as they can be quantified, monitored, controlled, and commercially exploited. Note that while the ERA scheme is run under the auspices of the ARC, which is headed by an academic, the ERA is independently managed in corporate style. The ERA’s current chief executive officer and executive general manager are really just managers and apparently do not have an academic grade (ARC, 2012a).

Australia’s experiment with qualitative research assessment has global significance because similar schemes are in force or under consideration elsewhere. In New Zealand, for example, a similar scheme is called the Performance Based Research Fund (Tertiary Education Commission, 2009), which includes quality measures to assess the performance of universities, who in turn pass these standards on to their employees. The fund allocates research money to universities that comply with the new quality (as well as other) measures. Fortunately, in New Zealand the panels assessing the work of academics in the social sciences and

humanities do not yet explicitly take into account journal rankings when reaching their judgments. As the president of the Association of Social Anthropology of Aotearoa/New Zealand (ASAANZ) put it, in a letter to the WCAA on 12 April 2010: “We say fortunately because we do not see that the use of such mechanisms would improve an already arbitrary and time-consuming imposition of audit culture.”

The declared goal of the Australian ERA scheme is to measure “academic output” more realistically than is possible by using purely quantitative measures (ARC, 2011). Admittedly, the previous quantitative system of measuring academic performance was flawed, because it did not consider the content of academic publications at all. This meant that academic promotion and the award of research grants and scholarships was prejudiced in favor of people who catered to the scheme by publishing as much as possible, never mind the quality, and disadvantaged those who published fewer, high quality articles. As with all such schemes, the proclivity of individual academics and universities to ‘play’ the system to their own advantage is an almost universal problem, and can cause serious distortions.

One possible response to the deficiencies of quantitative measures would have been to simply abandon this audit culture and return to a free system of allocating prestige to individual scientists. For centuries such informal, flexible, holistic peer assessment well served the purpose of working out who was a good performer, despite the occasional case of unwarranted favoritism or marginalization. But the decision of the government was to continue and to deepen the existing audit culture by adding the consideration of “quality” to the matrix, or, one could say, adding insult to injury. Instead of simply measuring the quantity of academic outputs generally deemed “valuable” by the academic community, such as peer-reviewed articles, the government now wants to control the very principles by which value or quality is constructed in academic life. This means for example, that the government decides how many articles are worth one self-authored book, how many points are allocated to journals of different rank categories, and what publications are deemed irrelevant.

The ERA was imposed by an exercise of state power, which rests on universities’ ongoing though diminishing dependency on federal funding. There was indeed very little appetite for argument among Australia’s corporatized universities, who are competing for international fee-paying students on the basis of global rankings that are determined largely by research metrics, which increasingly include research quality measures. A consultation exercise was conducted, but the scope provided for criticizing the scheme was limited to the details of ranking particular journals. The basic idea of measuring research quality was not up for discussion at all.

The impact of the ERA on the academic community in Australia is that journals, which until now were all considered equal for evaluative purposes, are now ranked, formally and more or less permanently. The measure of quality is “impact

on the field,” based on the size of a journal’s readership and, correlated to this, the number of citations elicited by an article. At first sight, this may seem reasonable. But the impact factor metric that is used as an indicator for rating the prestige of a journal, for deciding how much to fund each university based on the impact of publications, and for the rating of individual academics’ performance by university administrators is not in fact a good measure of the quality of research. Popularity does not indicate quality so much as it reflects hegemonies of distribution and conformity to the status quo of widely held opinions. Take Albert Einstein as an example, and assume he lived in Australia today. His famous theory of relativity was first published in *Annalen der Physik* in 1905, a German-language journal. Few foreign-language journals are recognized in Australia, not to mention journals in developing countries. By the time the impact of his theory finally became widely evident in the form of citations, his initial article would have long since been counted in some annual report, and counted as insignificant, if it had been assessed under the ERA or a similar scheme.

The conservative nature of flagship journals is precisely the reason why innovative or critical academic thinkers have often relied on journals outside the mainstream for publication. Under the ERA, however, having one’s work published in such marginal journals can see an innovative or critical thinker cut off from research support or even retrenched by his or her university, on the grounds of being “research inactive,” as it is called in Australia. The following quotation from the web site of Canberra University will give you an idea of how this is defined:

A researcher at level 4 . . . should be a nationally and/or internationally recognized researcher and should . . . [have] . . . three or more peer-reviewed research publications, preferably DEEWR [Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations] classified, in the last three years. (Canberra University, 2012)

Note that “DEEWR classification” now also refers to publication ranking within the ERA scheme, though this new qualitative measure is only just beginning to filter through to the coalface of academic life, where decisions are made about promotion, contract extensions, and the like. Canberra University is rather small and marginal. Australia’s top-ranked universities (here we go again) have even tighter criteria and are applying quality indicators in a proactive way so as to ensure that their staff members measure up to the new standards. One such case occurred in 2012 at the University of Sydney, one of Australia’s “group of eight” (top) universities, which was threatening to sack a world-renowned academic for not producing enough publications in a particular year, though he was clearly a very serious scholar and most highly regarded by his peers (name withheld for reasons of privacy). His main fault had been that he published books more often than journal articles, in keeping with the unwritten peer standards of his discipline. Books often have a long production time, and productivity measures

that are focused solely on outcomes, when they look at book publications, tend to create an image of heavily fluctuating performance, even though the academic in question is in fact working at a constant pace, just because some years do not yield a book, while others may yield two. A massive campaign by colleagues prevented the dismissal of the person in this case, but not everyone enjoys such support.

In addition to journals, the ERA scheme has now created a rank list of conferences, and other indicators are also being considered, including a ranking of book publishers. Finally, so-called discipline-specific matrices are being constructed; these aim to measure and regulate all kinds of academic activities that may be relevant as “performance indicators.” For my own discipline, discipline No. 140, who knows what the matrix will define as constituting “real” anthropology? (ARC, 2012b)

Professional associations such as the Australian Anthropological Society (AAS) were not actively consulted about the ranking of anthropology journals. Only individual anthropologists, myself included, were consulted, but as individuals we are powerless in the face of such machinations. The AAS on 12 March 2010 wrote to the ARC and expressed its concern about the lack of transparency and debate in setting up the scheme. In its response, the government denied any responsibility by saying that it was the AAS’s own fault for not coming forward and asking to be part of the consultation. Suffice it to say that the AAS executive is a group of underresourced volunteers. Their important work as the democratic representatives of a discipline is even more undervalued in the Australian university system than that of editors.

More generally, there is a growing sense of despondency in facing up to a system that does not want to listen to scientifically sound analysis because it has its own agenda and assumes its own superiority purely on the ground of commanding political supremacy. Since the time when neoliberalism achieved ascendancy, in the years of the Thatcher and Reagan governments in the UK and United States, “regimes of audit and accountability” have penetrated virtually every social institution, including schools, universities, hospitals, police forces, and even prison services (Shore & Wright, 2011: 1). Science is now merely an object, or a tool, and scientists should be seen but not heard. The agenda appears to be one of achieving perfect control, reminiscent of the line in a pop song by Tina Turner, in which a jealous lover says: “I’d sell my soul for total control.” This is not meant as a joke or as a metaphor. What I mean to suggest is that the colonization of the lifeworld that we are witnessing today cannot be dismissed simply as the result of a natural, healthy desire for perfection or power. Rather, it is reflective of a psychopathology in the contemporary political economy of the world that is becoming more and more destructive of life in any form or shape (Pettmann, 2012). It is a madness we need to understand more fully if we are to strike at its roots. The inflated desire for control leads to a veritable war on living communities and on life itself. Adorno and Horkheimer, as quoted in Fromm (1997: 54), identified this tendency as one of the negative aspects of modern society:

As soon as man discards his awareness that he himself is nature, all the aims for which he keeps himself alive—social progress, the intensification of his material and spiritual powers, even consciousness itself, are nullified. The enthronement of the means as an end, which under late capitalism is tantamount to open insanity, is already perceptible in the prehistory of subjectivity. Man's domination over himself, which grounds his selfhood, is almost always the destruction of the subject in whose service it is undertaken, for the substance which is dominated, suppressed and dissolved by virtue of self-preservation is none other than the life as functions of which the achievements of self-preservation find their sole definition and purpose.

In my view, therefore, the continuous extension of audit culture and managerial control into the lifeworld of academics is detrimental to its life functions, that is, the functions that make it productive in the first place, in the same way that global corporate development is destructive of the life functions of the natural environment. Silencing the voice of reason is tantamount to ignoring reality. Even though rigid control may appear to serve the specific survival of those who exercise it, such a high degree of rigidity is irreconcilable with life. Already the climate in today's corporatized universities has become detrimental to the free exercise of intellectual creativity in the service of humanity.

CORPORATE JOURNALS

There is another significant part to the story of modern publishing that must be considered in this context. There has been a gradual corporate takeover of the academic publishing sector by large international publishing houses, which in turn have used alliances or amalgamations to form ever-larger and more powerful cartels. Not surprisingly, the journals of these powerful publishing giants tend to rank very highly in research quality evaluation schemes, given that nobody reads the actual papers and that their value is instead assessed by counting citations elsewhere. Smaller commercial or noncommercial journals struggle to compete with these giants, because their circulation is often small and they do not enjoy the same global reach. The less favorable rankings they tend to receive do nothing to help the situation and thus preserve diversity. Rather, journal ranking favors the strong, and serves to consolidate power within the realm of academic print media.

Once a journal is officially assigned a low ranking, the journal may well be scorned by career-minded academics and thus further marginalized, and it may also be financially ruined. Low-ranking journals are often deserted by libraries and individual subscribers and thus come under pressure. As a direct consequence of the new ranking schemes, such smaller, alternative journals may soon no longer be available to give people the opportunity to publish unusual and provocative articles in the first place, even if they should be brave enough to ignore the career penalties for publishing in such journals.

In effect, therefore, the ranking and corporate streamlining of journals may silence academics with ideas outside of the mainstream of science. The humanities are particularly vulnerable. Any scheme that seeks to judge and evaluate research intrinsically concerned with political, social, and cultural criticism is likely to “undervalue” work that does not fit in with the political priorities of those who invented and control the scheme. Even in the natural sciences, nonconformity can be conveniently reclassified as deviance or as incompetence through these schemes. In other words, the danger is that ranking can be used to further marginalize different, alternative voices within a national academic community, or within the shared hegemonic academic sphere that now exists at a global level. Critical work—as it is—already struggles to get published in conservative mainstream journals whose commercial editors are eager to maintain their impact index ranking, which at once reflects and reinforces their financial position.

What has happened with disciplinary flagship journals in recent years? In the past such journals were owned and controlled by professional associations or small editorial teams of academics, but this is no longer true in many cases. In Australia, the universities that employed these volunteer editors became corporatized during the higher education sector reorganization in 1988-1989, which led to institutional amalgamations, the introduction of tertiary student fees under the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS), and the forced abolition of “collegial” (democratic) management practices in universities (see Breen, 2002, for a history of the Australian tertiary sector). The new corporate universities could no longer afford to reward the work of volunteer journal editors in the service of science, because they were redesigned to compel academics to engage in activities that directly add to the universities’ bottom line or do so indirectly, by producing research outcomes that the government designates as relevant to designated national research priority goals (ARC, 2012c). Current audit culture fails to consider adequately the voluntary work of editors for purposes such as “work load calculations” and promotion applications. Many such editors were thus pressured out of volunteering. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* (TAJA), is an illustrative example. TAJA was an independent entity affiliated with the Australian Anthropological Society (AAS) until recently. TAJA had been hounded by offers from corporate publishing houses for years and finally gave in to an offer by Wiley-Blackwell due to irresolvable staffing issues. The journal, like many others of its kind in Australia and elsewhere, is now run by a conservative, profit-minded multinational corporation.

The publishing giants that have bought up floundering volunteer journals are themselves amalgamating now, into ever larger and more powerful conglomerates. Unlike the professional associations, such global publishing conglomerates were very active in the ERA consultation process, writing submissions and ensuring their interests were met. They have by these and other means secured a position of market domination. This consolidation process happened very quickly. For example, a book I submitted to Curzon Press in 2001 became a Curzon-Routledge

publication by the time it came out in 2003, Curzon-Routledge being an entity that in turn is now owned by the Taylor and Francis conglomerate. Four large conglomerates now control more than 35 major publishers and the vast majority of the world's academic journals. These conglomerates are Reed Elsevier (1800 journals), Candoover and Cinven (1350), Wiley-Blackwell (1250), and Taylor and Francis (1000). These multinational corporations are not involved in publishing for the love of science, but seek to maximize profits. Consequently, from 1996 to 2005, average journal prices increased by 167%, at more than twice the rate of consumer price index (CPI) increases (for more figures on the massive consolidation of the academic publishing industry, see UC Berkeley Library, 2012).

A further dismal consequence of the dominance of large corporate publishers is that it increases the degree of hierarchy in an international academic world that is already full of disparities, between the core and the periphery of power/knowledge, and between global and more local languages. Insofar as the new schema of journal evaluation is shaped by the ethnocentrism of globally dominant players, the existence and intrinsic value of culturally diverse value-systems, among the diverse national traditions of a discipline, for example, is ignored and undermined. Journals in marginal countries are devalued, because their ranking is low. Within the ERA scheme, such a sidelining of non-English-language journals is clearly in evidence. Many important foreign-language journals are not listed, and articles and reviews published in them are thus not counted at all in annual research output reporting.

Apart from the fact that most major publishers do nothing to promote the dissemination of knowledge that originates in developing, non-English-speaking countries, the journals they produce are also unaffordable for tertiary institutions in developing countries. Indeed, they place a heavy financial burden on the library budgets of public universities even in developed countries. As the cost of journal subscription for libraries soars, the question needs to be asked why the public should pay exorbitant prices for accessing research largely supported by public funding in the first place. Academics provide free labor as authors, book editors, and peer reviewers to the publishers who defend this regressive system. This industry produces an annual profit of about 4 billion U.S. dollars. Elsevier, the largest science publisher, reported that its profit margin had reached 36% of revenue in 2010. This is a huge margin at a time when the Internet has greatly reduced the profits of newspaper, magazine, and fiction book publishers.

RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGE: ORGANIZED LOBBYING AND OPEN ACCESS PUBLISHING

Academics need to offer well-organized and well-argued resistance to exploitative rent-seeking and control schemes if we are to retain the independent ability to define what is valued within the academic world and the capacity to produce and

disseminate politically unbiased knowledge. I would suggest that apart from discussions such as this, which raise awareness about the consequences of government and corporate interventions in academic affairs, the two best options currently available to us are coordinated efforts to lobby against destructive government intervention policies, and to make every effort to maintain a wide diversity of outlets for academic publications.

There is scope for influencing policy if we are determined and united, and it is important to look at some examples. The Australian experience with the ERA is somewhat similar to the experience of our European colleagues with the European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH) journal lists, an initiative that began in 2001 and led to the publication of initial lists in 2007 (ESF, 2012). The development of these lists created a great deal of controversy in the UK and throughout Europe. During the establishment of the lists, the national research councils, which are the primary research funding agencies, expressed concerns about a lack of consultation. European and national professional associations covering the social sciences did not consider the lists to be robust and argued that ERIH rankings should not at present be used as a measure of quality. To the British Academy, the problems with ERIH were so fundamental that it asked for a root and branch rethink of the entire approach rather than simply tinkering with the original (and much criticized) lists produced by a small committee of people at the European Science Foundation in Brussels. Indeed, even some members of the committee that drew up the initial listings were concerned by the lack of transparency and system in the original decisions. As a result of such lobbying by the British Academy and others, the ERIH web site issued some fairly strong disclaimers with regard to the potential use of these “initial lists”:

The ERIH lists will help to identify excellence in humanities scholarship and should prove useful for the aggregate benchmarking of national research systems, for example, in determining the international standing of the research activity carried out in a given field in a particular country. . . . As they stand, the lists are not a bibliometric tool for the evaluation of individual researchers. . . . Categorizations of journals do not prejudge the scientific quality of individual articles that appear in those journals. . . . The ERIH Steering Committee and the Expert Panels advise against using the lists as a basis for assessments of individual candidates, be it for positions, promotions, research grant awards etc. (ESF, 2010)

Raising concerns through professional associations and academies clearly made a difference in this case, though many concerns remain. First, despite these caveats, the lists *are* being used as a ranking tool, if only informally. Second, in establishing these lists, the ERIH committee was strongly lobbied by journal editors seeking to boost their rank category. Third, there are plans to extend ERIH to cover other forms of publishing (books and publishers, etc.). Note that, in a letter, Association of Social Anthropologists-UK president James Fairhead told the WCAA that when they had offered to assist in developing an improved project,

the ERF had rejected their assistance, saying it would dialogue only with European organizations (such as the European Association of Social Anthropologists). This incident underscores the urgent need for better regional and international collaboration among national academic communities. There is a real need to offer well-organized and well-argued resistance to external control schemes, by strengthening the independence of global professional councils and interdisciplinary science councils such as International Council for Science (ICSU), if we are to maintain the power to construct value within the academic world. This is not some kind of antigovernment stance so much as a stance in defense of the diversity that characterizes and protects all living systems and that can be found nowhere more so than at the margins of these systems.

One of the best ways to counteract the second challenge I have touched upon in this article, the corporate domination of global publishing by large cartels, is the open access model of publication. Copyright rules do allow this as part of the standard contracts of approximately 65% of all journals, but few researchers make use of their rights. It is therefore important to reflect briefly on how open access works, and what it can and cannot deliver.

In February 2012, 300,000 scientists signed a petition to boycott Elsevier and the subscription model in general, organized through web sites created by individual scientists (Flood, 2012). In Australia, scientist Alex Holcombe (2012) created the web site “Open access pledge,” which was quickly followed by “Research without walls” (2012) and “Cost of knowledge” (2012). The first-mentioned has by now attracted more than 12,000 researchers pledging to withdraw their labor as peer reviewers from Elsevier journals. It is too early to know what the effects of this may be, but these actions, together with the widening of debates among researchers that they encourage, will impact significantly on a corporatized publishing system still reliant on a tradition of unpaid volunteering. Individuals alone cannot bring about this kind of change, and the need is clearly for a social movement among academics that will stand up to this and similar challenges.

The position of government agencies is considerably stronger, and they have shown that they are able to curb the power of corporate publishers with some fairly basic policy shifts. For example, the American National Institutes of Health (NIH) decided in 2007 that the researchers it funds must make their work freely available within a year (NIH, 2009), and in the UK, the National Research Councils introduced similar policies soon afterwards (RCUK, 2012). In Australia, the two major research councils (the ARC and the National Health and Medical Research Council [NHMRC]) have not yet followed suit, but some universities are starting to introduce mandatory open access models using in-house digital repositories (QUT, 2009). Mandating free access is a straightforward way for universities and governments to regain some control over the publishing industry, but there are also some downsides. It raises the question: Who will cover the costs associated with peer review, editorial work, and Internet publishing?

The publishing industry, within the normal bounds in which it has operated until recently, has delivered a fairly reliable and economical service with generally meager margins. Access cannot become any freer than that unless universities or government agencies start to recognize and pay for the labor of volunteer academic editors and reviewers, or begin to hire and pay for professional editors to manage their own research repositories. Governments and universities may actively support more open systems for disseminating knowledge, especially if pressure is brought on them to do so, but even the most open system comes at a cost. The real problems begin when education and research are divorced from the pursuit of the common good, either by acts of large scale corporate profiteering or by the interventions of governments that think they know better about what experts should do within their scientific practice to benefit society than the experts themselves, especially when those governments are no longer working in the public interest.

CLOSING REMARKS

Controversies over research quality assessment and the corporatization of academic publishing are not likely to disappear in a hurry; there is simply too much power, money, and status at stake. All the relevant stakeholders, academics, governments, universities, and commercial publishers alike, will continue to make efforts to claim their rights. Ownership of the means of allocating scientific prestige and ownership of the means of global knowledge dissemination have always been contested, and so it should remain. It is important, however, that academics, professional organizations, and unions do not fall behind and fall victim to the incursions made by other stakeholders.

Already the conditions under which we produce knowledge have been transformed, and unless there is a concerted effort to find alternatives, we could soon find ourselves in one or another Orwellian situation. Who will be the ultimate gatekeepers of this brave new world, in which academic work will be judged for its quantity and quality alike by nonacademics? Will the gatekeepers be government or university bureaucrats? Or will they be the editors of the journals now mostly owned by giant publishing houses, whose market position is only strengthened by the new ranking schemes? Or will the gatekeepers be the owners of the world's dominant publishing houses, who have the power to hire and fire their journal editors? Academics will certainly find it difficult to put pressure on governments with a neoliberal agenda to remake the tertiary sector into a profitable business venture. We will also find it difficult to hold editors and owners accountable for editorial policy decisions made behind closed doors, and given that the peer review process is anonymous. Much will depend on the extent to which these other stakeholders will be subjected to scrutiny and concerted pressure by us, the primary producers of knowledge.

While all these questions clearly still linger, and loom large for the moment, there are of course other developments that are keeping this entire landscape of concerns in a state of constant flux. Providing that censorship and invasions of privacy can be avoided, which is rather doubtful (see Fight for the Future, 2012), it may well be that the information tsunami that is the Internet will make some of these struggles obsolete and futile, by creating new avenues for publishing and for assigning prestige to publications. For better or worse, end users of knowledge may simply destroy commercial publishing by avoiding information that comes at a cost or requires a library login, and assign prestige to academic works by clicking on “Like” icons if they like the actual content. The task for academics is to stay abreast of these revolutionary technological and social developments, and to make use of all available means and opportunities to maintain intellectual freedom and the flourishing of knowledge.

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Direct reprint requests to:

Prof Thomas Reuter
Asia Institute
The University of Melbourne
Vic 3010, Australia
Email: thor2525@gmail.com