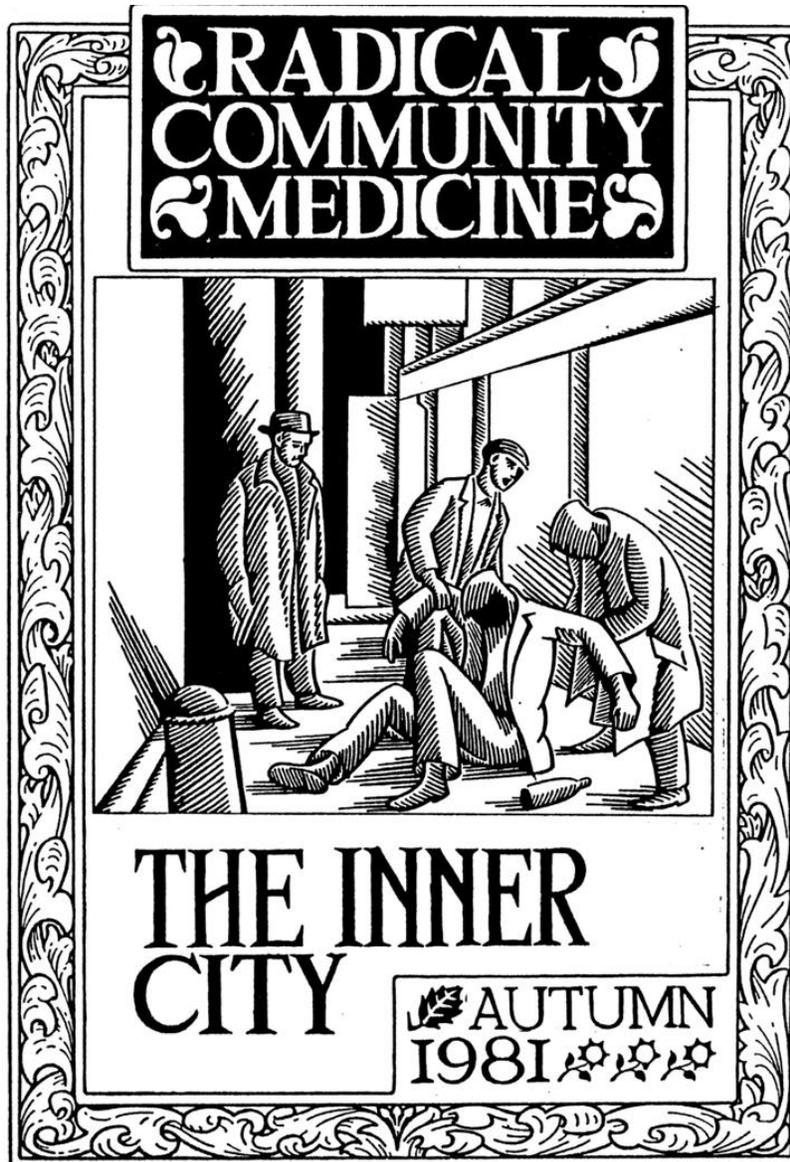


Critical Public Health and Open Access:
A Primer



Kirsten Bell
2021

How did Taylor & Francis come to own CPH?

CPH began life in 1979 as the pamphlet *Radical Community Medicine*, founded by Alex Scott-Samuel. Rebranded in 1990, it was not until 1997, when Robin Bunton took over the editorship, that CPH became a fully refereed academic journal (you can read about the transition [here](#) and [here](#)). Part of this transition involved negotiating a new academic publisher who would facilitate international distribution. Up to this point, publishing was managed by [Multilingual Matters](#), a non-academic press, with most of the production work done by the editorial collective. At the time, the subscription was £16 pounds a year for institutions and £12 for individuals.

Robin approached several academic publishers and ultimately went for a deal with Carfax, ‘as they seemed sympathetic to our mission and agreed to keep the price low’. Because the journal had been founded by an informal collective of scholars rather than an organisation or society, the publisher took formal ownership over the journal. At the time, this didn’t mean anything; the journal was not a profit-making exercise (and any profits were marginal); the publisher was sympathetic, accommodating and led by the concerns of the editorial team; and authors license their copyright to the publisher regardless of the ownership structure of any given journal.

However, things changed quickly. In Robin’s words, ‘It went really well for about six months, after that the great swallowing-up of publishing houses happened and Routledge bought out Carfax. Not long after that Routledge was bought out by T&F and by then, there was less control over things like price, plus an endless change of managing editors and support staff’. This is how CPH ended up owned by Taylor and Francis, and how we got from £12 for an individual subscription in 1997 (approximately £22 in today’s terms) to £209 in 2021 and £16 for an institutional subscription in 1997 (£30 in today’s terms) to £596 in 2021.

Broader shifts in scholarly publishing in the late 1990s

The mid-to-late 1990s witnessed the beginnings of the transition from print to digital, which effectively removed older material constraints on production and distribution – although it simultaneously introduced new material constraints such as access to computers, servers and networks. However, while the costs of publishing in the digital era were dramatically reduced, the fees publishers were able to charge became greatly inflated, so it’s critical to understand how this happened. Because libraries mediated between academics and publishers, these economic shifts were largely invisible to the former – except via notifications academics started to get in the late 1990s about their libraries having to cut journals.

The dramatic increase in the cost of journals during this period seems to primarily have resulted from two forces. First, as CPH itself can attest, the late 1990s witnessed the corporate consolidation of scholarly publishing, with small independent publishers bought up by big multinationals. The effects of this shift can’t be overstated. By 2015, [70% of all social science publications indexed in Web of Science were published by the so-called ‘Big Five’ publishers](#): Elsevier, Springer, Taylor & Francis, Wiley-Blackwell and Sage. Second, this consolidation facilitated the emergence of ‘[big deals](#)’ – the practice of bundling high prestige journals with lower prestige ones that required libraries to pay for the full package in order to access the journals they wanted – a.k.a. the cable company model. Given that demand for high-prestige journals was inelastic, commercial publishers could basically charge whatever they wanted.

The humanities scholar Martin Paul Eve has described the result as a ‘[zombified](#)’ [system of scholarly publishing](#), whereby the ‘no-brainer’ logic of selecting the most prestigious publishing outlet makes that outlet simultaneously *less* accessible and *more* desirable in a perpetual feedback loop that constantly drives up subscription prices. These transformations served to make academic publishing an extraordinarily profitable business for the leading companies. As [Peter Suber noted in 2012](#), in an oft-repeated observation: ‘the largest journal publishers earn higher profit margins than the largest oil companies’. The stats are equally grim/positive today (depending on whether you’re a librarian or a shareholder) – [Elsevier alone](#)

[posted a profit of £982 million in 2019](#). This, in conjunction with declining library budgets, was a key contributor to the serials crisis of the late 1990s, which provided a critical trigger for the open access movement.

What are the roots of the open access movement?

In 1994, the cognitive scientist Stevan Harnad published his ‘Subversive proposal’ at the Network Services Conference in London. In his proposal, Harnad highlighted the ‘Faustian bargain’ that academics had made with publishers ‘to allow a price-tag to be erected as a barrier between their work and its (tiny) intended readership because that was the only way to make their work public in the era when paper publication (and its substantial real expenses) were the only way to do so’. Arguing that the rise of digital networks had given academics the power to subvert traditional publishing structures, Harnad asserted that it was now possible to take our scholarship to ‘the airwaves, where it always belonged’, allowing the unimpeded flow of knowledge to everyone.

Harnad’s proposal was a touchstone piece in what ultimately became known as the open access movement. This vision is articulated clearly in the [2002 Budapest Open Access Initiative](#) and its successors, the [2003 Berlin Declaration](#) and [2003 Bethesda Statement](#) (collectively known as the ‘BBB’ definition of open access). Importantly, the open access movement was dominated by scientists in its early phase – this is largely because of the origins of the free culture movement within technological disciplines, coupled with the more challenging economic situation of science journals, which suffered the greatest increases in subscription pricing during the serials crisis. As [Janneke Adema](#) notes, the open access movement also caught on later in disciplines where books, rather than journal articles, were the most valued publication medium.

That said, it would be a mistake to just treat this exclusively as science-driven phenomenon. There are vocal advocates of open access in the social sciences and humanities (you can read some examples [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)); however, their vision of what open access looks like is rather different than the one that many of us now associate with open access. This is why it’s really important to differentiate the *concept* of open access from the *models* that have come to dominate.

So, what is open access?

‘Open access’ encompasses a variety of models that make scholarly publications *free to the end user*. Beyond that, it’s difficult to characterise the movement in any coherent way, because there are many players involved, all with different motivations and interests. For example, a growing number of research funders demand open access in the name of serving the interests of the public who fund the majority of academic research; librarians see it as a key means of reining in escalating subscription costs; and academics may be spurred by various motivations, from an self-interested desire to increase the reach and impact of their research, or pragmatic concerns about the inefficiency of the publication process, to an ideological commitment to making scholarship more accessible and ethical. Finally, although initially resistant to open access, commercial academic publishers have increasingly seen open access as a means of generating new revenue streams – a number of entrepreneurial players of varying quality and ethics have also entered the game (including so-called ‘predatory’ publishers – [although I have serious problems with the label](#)).

The push for open access has therefore created some rather strange bedfellows, where groups that agree on almost nothing else, agree on this one thing. This explains why it has moved from the margins to the mainstream in less than 20 years, with open access now mandated by various research funders, government agencies and widely embraced by corporate publishers themselves. According to [Martin Paul Eve](#), the speed at which it has been embraced in certain countries – and the questionable interests of some of those embracing it – has meant that supporters are today just as likely to be conservative politicians as radical egalitarians, and open access advocates often find themselves accused of being an anti-corporate Marxist one day, and a neo-liberal sell-out the next. For this reason, a subset of OA advocates (mostly in the social

sciences and humanities) distinguish [radical open access](#) from its increasingly institutionalised form. Highly critical of the corporate takeover of open access, its current and future impact on the geopolitics of knowledge production, and its connection with various broader transformations in the academy (including its metricisation, the rise of ‘the knowledge economy’, etc.), they are pushing for non-corporate models of open access. For those interested, the key critiques of current directions in open access are summarised in [Open Divide](#).

What are the different types of open access?

[Peter Suber](#) originally distinguished between two types of open access:

- *Green open access* – open access delivered by repositories.
- *Gold open access* – open access delivered directly by journals.

Green open access takes several distinct forms:

- The accepted version of a paper published in a subscription journal is lodged in a repository (typically a university repository, but it could be PubMed Central, for example)
- An unpublished manuscript is placed in a pre-print repository like [ArXiv](#).

Note: To fully understand the differences between green and gold OA and the significance of manuscript versions please refer to the final section on copyright.

‘Gold’ open access takes two distinct forms:

- *Author-pays open access*: the publication is free to the end user but the submitting author pays an article processing charge (APC) to cover the costs of publication. This is the form of open access typically referred to when people speak of ‘gold’ open access.
- *‘Diamond’ open access*: the publication is free to the end user and there are no charges for the submitting author. The name has emerged to differentiate it from APC-based models.

Further complicating matters, gold open access papers can be published in both OA journals and subscription journals. Subscription journals that make individual articles available open access via article processing charges are known as *hybrid journals*. Taylor & Francis calls this option ‘Open Select’ and offers it to authors publishing in all of its subscription journals, including CPH.

Hybrid journals have been widely criticised by OA advocates for ‘[double dipping](#)’. In essence, this means that publishers charge libraries the usual subscription rates while also charging authors to make their papers available open access, rather than reducing their subscription prices accordingly. In effect, hybrid OA has created *additional* rather than *alternative* revenue streams for many publishers, which is why some OA advocates are fundamentally opposed to it – their view, probably rightly, is that hybrid OA maintains the current ecology rather than actually moving journals towards open access.

What type of open access is more common?

Based on the [Directory of Open Access Journals](#), the most comprehensive available database of OA journals we have, diamond OA is more common than author-pays open access (11,689 of the 16,556 journals listed on DOAJ do not levy APCs). If this surprises you, it is because ‘gold’ OA has become conflated with author-pays OA. According to [Fuchs and Sandoval](#), this is basically a snow job: corporate publishers have managed to convince policy makers that author-pays OA is the only economically viable model, despite the ample evidence we have of other kinds of funding structures. Moreover, we all know that APCs are not based on the ‘real’ costs of academic publishing, but whatever the market will bear. This is why the APC charges in Springer Nature cost USD\$9,500 and those for CPH cost £2,690 (for UK-based authors) – it is journal prestige, not publishing costs, that dictate APCs.

This is not to say that there are no costs involved in scholarly publishing. This is a pernicious myth we need to rid ourselves of (and that no one who has ever been involved in the editorial side of publishing would

perpetuate). In a context of growing academic precarity, the idea that we will all labour for love is a recipe for exploitation – as the [mess surrounding *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*](#) (a diamond OA journal that has since moved to a subscription model) illustrates.

What are the funding models for diamond OA?

I'd place diamond OA journals into three broad categories:

- 1) Precariously funded OA – these are small labours of love that are funded through various ad hoc funding sources (siphoned grant funds, some institutional support, grants from funders) and often survive primarily as a result of volunteer labour and, in some instances, library staff. You can read more about such initiatives in reports by [cOAlition S](#) and [Libraria](#).
- 2) Cooperative models of OA – these are where groups of journals band together to pool resources; most receive support from a mix of sources such as funders, libraries and consortia. There are a growing number of such initiatives, including [SciELO](#) in Latin America – a combined digital database, library, publishing platform; [SCOAP³](#) – a group of journals in particle physics, and the [Open Library of Humanities](#) – a non-profit open access publisher and ‘mega-journal’ supported by a collection of libraries.
- 3) [Subscribe to Open](#) (S2O) – this approach converts subscription journals to open access by a core group of libraries committing to continuing to pay their current subscription-equivalent fees to support journal running costs. It has been successfully tested with a growing number of social science publishers, including [Annual Reviews](#) and [Berghahn Open Anthro](#) journals. It shares many similarities with the cooperative model and works best with a cohort of journals that are ‘sold’ to libraries as a package.

Note: All of these models are based on the premise that academic publishing should aim to cover costs rather than generate profits. I would class them all as examples of radical open access initiatives for that reason.

How influential is open access?

Although OA is a [transnational \(and, arguably, millenarian\) social movement](#), it has been taken up to different degrees in different countries. Notably, various regions outside the global North have actually led the way in terms of open access – most successfully, Latin America (you can read more about the Latin American model [here](#)). In terms of a top-down imposition, impacts are currently the mostly strongly felt in the UK and Northern Europe, where OA is increasingly mandated. In other countries like Canada, its presence is increasingly evident; for example, the Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council requires the research and journals it funds to be made available open access (currently via the green route in the case of the former; delayed open access is allowed in the context of the latter). In the UK, where CPH is based, a requirement of our dreaded national research assessment exercise, known as the ‘REF’ (Research Excellence Framework), is that all publications are made available open access via the green route. However, there is every indication that requirements will intensify further in the next REF, because Research England sits within the UKRI (UK Research and Innovation), which is a signatory to Plan S.

What on earth is Plan S and why is it causing such a tizz?

[Plan S](#) is an initiative for open access publishing supported by cOAlition S, an international consortium of research funders. Key funders include UK Research and Innovation (i.e., all the UK research councils), the Wellcome Trust, the Research Council of Norway, the Swedish Research Council, the Academy of Finland, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the World Health Organization. From 2021, anyone whose research is supported by a funder that is a signatory to Plan S is required to publish in a compliant open access journal or platform. While this might sound like your usual open access initiative, it differs in one crucial respect: Plan S does *not* support hybrid journals. This clearly has significant implications for CPH as a hybrid journal – it impacts not just members of the editorial team and board funded by signatories to Plan S, but also many of our authors.

Given that virtually all subscription-based journals operate under a hybrid subscription-OA model, the guidance could be read as banning publication in any such journals (pretty much all the most prestigious ones in basically every field). However, the [latest guidance](#) does suggest some latitude here in two respects. First, based on pushback from publishers, Plan S have loosened their requirements a little: hybrid journals will be eligible publishing venues as long as they can demonstrate that they are on a transitional pathway to full open access – i.e., they have a *transformative agreement* in place. Here is the somewhat confusing diagram they have provided:

	Open Access publishing venues (journals or platforms)	Subscription venues (repository route)	Transition of subscription venues (transformative arrangements)
Route	Authors publish in an Open Access journal or on an Open Access platform.	Authors publish in a subscription journal and make either the final published version (Version of Record (VoR)) or the Author's Accepted Manuscript (AAM) openly available in a repository.	Authors publish Open Access in a subscription journal under a transformative arrangement.
Funding	cOAlition S funders will financially support publication fees.	cOAlition S funders will not financially support 'hybrid' Open Access publication fees in subscription venues.	cOAlition S funders can contribute financially to Open Access publishing under transformative arrangements.

It's worth noting that the diagram does suggest a second option for CPH authors funded by Plan S signatories – which is making their publication available via the green route (i.e., lodging it in acceptable repository). However, the reality is much more complicated than that because of clashes between funders' copyright requirements and those of publishers themselves (whose requirements you agree to as a condition of publishing in a subscription journal). To understand the implications of this, please read the final section below on copyright!

What are transformative agreements?

In the simplest terms, transformative agreements are contracts between organisations and publishers that aim to shift contracted payments to publishers away from subscription-based reading towards open access publishing. These agreements have been enacted at a variety of levels – [between individual libraries and publishers](#), [between library systems and publishers](#), and [between national library consortia and publishers](#). In brief, there are two main types of transformative agreements (please see this [helpful primer](#) for further details):

- *Read-and-publish agreements* – the publisher receives a single payment that includes the costs of reading *and* OA charges. In effect, what institutions are paying for are subscriptions and the collective APC charges for any of their authors who publish in such journals (although the extent to which these agreements cover the full cost of APCs differs).
- *Publish-and-read agreements* – the publisher receives a payment for publishing (i.e., the collective APC charges) and the reading (i.e., the subscription) is thrown in for 'free'.

For example, in the UK context, many publishers (Wiley, Sage, Springer and [Taylor & Francis in April 2021](#)) have signed read-and-publish agreements with [Jisc](#). Jisc members (including most UK higher education institutions), are now entitled to have their authors' papers published open access in T&F journals, along with reading access to subscription content. While this resolves the immediate issues for UK-based authors funded by Plan S signatories, it doesn't resolve them in Northern Europe. Moreover, these transformative agreements only make content open for institutions involved in these agreements. Differently put, it means that most content is still behind a paywall for those without the purchasing power to demand otherwise (notably, most institutions outside the global North). Also, these agreements are, by definition, are transitional and transformative – the end game is supposed to be open access, and it's currently unclear on exactly how these agreements will bring that about.

Copyright differences between green and gold OA

Copyright is exactly what it sounds like: the right to make a copy. You automatically hold copyright over everything you write (in many countries now for 70 years after your death, [thanks to Disney's lobbying](#)) – unless you work for an organisation where you sign away that right as a condition of employment. In academia it is the norm for academics to retain copyright over their publications, but government employees relinquish it to their employer, which is why copyright licensing forms for journals always ask you about this. However, while you hold copyright over everything you write, if you want to *publish* it, you traditionally license your publisher the right to make copies of your work, in the process *relinquishing your own right to do so*. Copyright is therefore a zero-sum game: one party's rights come at the expense of another's.

[Creative Commons](#) was developed as a way of effectively getting around the existing copyright laws without actively violating them. A Creative Commons license enables the copyright owner to indicate how their work can be used. Thus, those people who are okay with others reproducing their work (and, in fact, see this as ideal) are able to specify this in the license itself. There are four distinct types of Creative Commons (CC) licenses:

1. **CC BY:** as long as people credit you (your 'BY'line), they can do what they want with your work (disseminate it, adapt it, make money off it).
2. **CC-BY-SA:** this is similar to the CC-BY license but means that any users have to share any further work (remixed, adapted, extra) under the same license – this is called 'Share Alike'.
3. **CC-BY-ND:** people can reproduce your work *in its original form* (i.e., 'No Derivatives') as long as they credit you.
4. **CC-BY-ND-NC:** people can reproduce your work in its original form as long as they credit you and don't make money out of doing so (i.e., the usage is 'Non-Commercial').

When you publish via gold open access (i.e., OA delivered by the journal), your paper will be automatically published under a Creative Commons license that gives others the right to share and distribute your work (although the nature of the licenses themselves vary from journal to journal – PLoS publishes under a straight CC BY license, but many diamond OA journals have more restrictive licenses in place to stop commercial publishers from repackaging and selling content). However, even if you publish your paper in a subscription journal under a standard copyright agreement where you relinquish all rights to reproduce your manuscript, you can typically lodge a version of the paper in a repository ('green' open access), and this will happen under a Creative Commons license.

How is this possible? This is where the 'version' becomes important. Most subscription journals will not let you lodge the 'version of record' (i.e., the published version) of the paper in a repository; however, they will allow you to lodge the 'author's accepted manuscript'. This is because they have not yet added any 'value' to the manuscript in terms of copy-editing or formatting, so they recognise (reluctantly, it must be said) that they don't control this version and that you retain ownership of it. However, many publishers place embargoes on when, where and how you can post this version – Elsevier is famously restrictive on this front. For example, Taylor & Francis places a 12-month embargo CPH on green open access (although they make an exception for authors, based on their funders' requirements), unless the author accepted version has been lodged on a personal website rather than in an institutional repository ([please note that Academia.edu and ResearchGate are not personal repositories](#)).

In the context of Plan S, these restrictions mean that while you can theoretically meet their requirements by posting a 'green' version of your paper published in a subscription journal in a repository, the publisher might not let you do this. It's worth bearing in mind that as soon as you sign the copyright license with your publisher, you legally subject yourself to their requirements.

A note on 'free' access: Free access looks identical to open access: in both instances, the paper is freely available to the public. So how are they different and does it actually matter? In a free access publication,

the author still licenses copyright to the publisher, and it's the publisher, *not the author*, who has control over whether the paper is freely available. Some journal publishers make papers freely available for a month (e.g., [Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory](#)) before they are moved behind a paywall. Other publishers make editorials, or 'editor's picks', or topical papers free access – you might have noticed that a lot of coronavirus papers in CPH are (or were) free access. However, the publisher can revoke this access at any time – don't expect any of those papers that are currently free to still be so in a year's time!

Biographical notes (Or, why Kirsty is such a relentless know-it-all about publishing):

For those who've been on the editorial board for any length of time, you've probably realised that I am *annoyingly* opinionated on this topic, so I want to give you a bit more information on why that is. My interest in scholarly publishing began during my six-year editorial tenure with CPH, when I got behind-the-scenes access to how scholarly publishing works and became increasingly frustrated with what I was seeing – especially when I became a co-editor. After various battles with Taylor & Francis (the final straw was their removal of the 'recommended reviewer' function based on their stated concerns about 'fake' reviews), I stepped down from my role at CPH in 2016 and took a year off in order to complete an intensive Master of Publishing at Simon Fraser University. I entered the programme with the vague idea of wanting to set up my own non-profit academic publishing house, but also because my sense was that one of the reasons for the current mess in scholarly publishing is academics' willingness to outsource publishing – the fulcrum of academic knowledge production! – to others, and that what was required is a firmer grasp of how publishing works, economics and all.

The degree focused on a bunch of different areas, from the practical (courses on editing and the business of publishing) to the conceptual (the history of publishing, the digital transition), and most of the academics in the programme were heavily invested in open access, which was where I started to learn intensively about it. As part of the degree, I completed an internship with the [Public Knowledge Project](#) (responsible for Open Journal Software, which is the manuscript submission platform that most diamond OA journals run on) and became connected with [Libraria](#) – a group of anthropologists committed to exploring cooperative alternatives to the current publishing ecology. Since returning to academia in 2017 upon the completion of my master's, scholarly publishing has become a key research interest, so it's an area I'm constantly reading in and writing about.