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As an admirer of the Triangle Scholarly Communication Institute, rather than a past participant, I do not have an SCI project to share. Instead, I will point participants to two short essays on the cusp of publication. The pair of essays are, in a way, opposites: One argues for the importance of utopian thinking in scholarly communication, while the other criticizes the commercial publishers for their latest round of data-extractivism, this time for AI training data. Both, however, mix critique with the conviction that a different scholarly publishing world is possible.

Links to the two essays are included below.

1. Large Language Publishing: The Scholarly Publishing Oligopoly's Bet on AI

forthcoming in *KULA: Knowledge Creation, Dissemination, and Preservation Studies*

[link to pdf](#)

Note: This is an expanded and updated version of an early 2024 essay published in [Upstream](#)

Overview

The AI hype cycle has come for scholarly publishing. This essay argues that the industry's feverish—if mostly aspirational—embrace of artificial intelligence should be read as the latest installment of an ongoing campaign. Led by Elsevier, commercial publishers have, for about a decade, layered a second business on top of their legacy publishing operations. That business is to mine and process scholars' works and behavior into prediction products, sold back to universities and research agencies. This article focuses on an offshoot of the big firms' surveillance-publishing businesses: the post-ChatGPT imperative to profit from troves of proprietary "training data," to make new AI products and—the essay predicts—to license academic papers and scholars' tracked behavior to big technology companies. The article points to the potential knowledge effects of AI models in academia: Products and models are poised to serve as knowledge arbitrators, by

picking winners and losers according to what they make visible. I also cite potential knock-on effects, including incentives for publishers to roll back open access (OA) and new restrictions on researchers' access to the open web. The article concludes with a call for a coordinated campaign of advocacy and consciousness-raising, paired with high-quality, in-depth studies of publisher data harvesting—built on the premise that another scholarly-publishing world is possible. There are many good reasons to restore custody to the academy, the essay argues. The latest is to stop our work from fueling the publishers' AI profits.

2. Before Progress: On the Power of Utopian Thinking for Open Access Publishing

forthcoming in *culture machine*, for a special issue on Publishing After Progress

[link to pdf](#)

Overview

In his late-2023 announcement that the open access (OA) movement has 'failed', journalist Richard Poynder cited a number of reasons for giving up on OA. One sign of failure, he wrote, is 'unrealistic expectations about diamond open access and the possibility of the research community "taking back ownership" of scholarly communication'. Good luck with that, he implied. At the same time, Poynder criticized the radical open access community for, in effect, going its own way: its 'scaling small' alternative is doomed for niche irrelevance and, as a result, 'offers little hope of the kind of systemic change that OA would need to succeed'. Poynder, a leading observer of the OA scene for two decades, has a point. There is little short-run prospect for the restoration of academic custody over scholarly publishing, on the large scale he has in mind. Still, I think Poynder is wrong in an important sense, or at least that he is unwise. His defeatism is self-crippling, since his claims may help *bring about* the conditions they purport to merely describe. This essay is a counterpoint—a brief for utopian thinking in scholarly publishing. I argue against a species of resigned realism that concedes too much to present conditions. It is important, contra Poynder, to maintain 'unrealistic expectations'. Whether or not another (scholarly publishing) world is possible, it is important to act *as if* it is. In both the short and medium runs, the way we talk about scholarly communication helps dictate the aperture of imaginative possibility.