

## Aaron Swartz, Intellectual Property and the Public Good

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Wednesday, January 30, 2013

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Should academic work be locked up like Disney[tm] artifacts? I've been quite inspired by this very good analysis of the context surrounding Aaron Swartz's suicide.

*As news spread last week that digital rights activist [Aaron Swartz](#) had killed himself ahead of a federal trial on charges that he illegally downloaded a large database of scholarly articles with the intent to freely disseminate its contents, thousands of academics began posting free copies of their work online, coalescing around the Twitter hashtag [#pdftribute](#).*

via [How academia betrayed and continues to betray Aaron Swartz](#) « [The Berkeley Blog](#).

The willingness of scholars to promote the freedom of information shows what kind of future many of us want. However,

*MIT's decision to make sharing journal articles a criminal matter is inexcusable.*

But this is no surprise because of our neoliberal world with a studied bloodlust for intellectual property. Universities are merely indoctrinating/extorting the next generation into the anti-sharing mentality. Our knowledge is ours to profit from and not for the good of humanity. And by ours, I mean the university's. Individuals have a virtually impossible time getting ahead academically if they don't submit to the intellectual property regimes by kissing their ring.

*But their real betrayal was allowing these articles to fall into private hands in the first place.*

And there are historical reasons for this, which the article explores very well.

*Although most academic research is funded by the public, universities all but force their scholars to publish their results in journals that take ownership of the work and place it behind expensive pay walls.*

If you read the remainder of the above article you can see how the institution of academia is inadvertently structured to oppress innovation and the creation of a new, exciting, better future for us all. Or maybe not so inadvertently.

Information wants to be free. Lots of us want it to be free too. Politics, Re-Spun started in part as a venue for me to paste academic work that reflects a great deal of reflection and research but that only had merit in an academic context before it became obsolete when a grade was bestowed. I've pasted, shortened, lengthened my essays into this site. I also took the valuable feedback from my profs and TAs to make my pieces better to share with everyone; the others were perfect already. :)

Others on this site have done the same. And hopefully more academic content will show up on here too in the future.

And frankly, when it comes to free information, governments have an obligation to make the vast majority of its information free, especially with extremely cheap hard drive space for internet servers. In the name of all that is good and quantum, my newest flash stick is 32gb, larger than the combined hard drive space of my first 6 computers I ever owned.

And governments need to unleash information without annoying freedom of information procedures designed to impede the freedom of information, information that, like much academic research, was paid for by our public dollars. Continuing to hide from the public the information about government has undermined citizens' capacity to evaluate whether governments are doing a good job.

And when it comes to academic knowledge "created" at publicly-funded universities, we should not let the cabal of journals monetize and privatize that information. At the very least, if it's publicly-funded, it should be publicly-available.

I'd like to end with two things. The first is a link to [the Wayward School](#), "a co-operative school of thoughts and actions" in Victoria. They understand a few things about freedom. They are a venue of change in academia. They deserve your support and attention.

And the second is this call out on academia, from the above article, which I support 100%:

*Had the leaders of major research universities reacted to this technological transformation [the interwebz] with any kind vision, Swartz's dream of universal free access to the scholarly literature would now be a reality. But they did not. Rather than seize this opportunity to greatly facilitate research and education, both within and outside the academy, they chose instead to reify the status quo.*