The Internet of people: can there be such a thing as a machine for the public use of reason?

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Overview

1. A humanist challenge: rethinking the Net as a conversation
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     - Before the Fall
     - After the Fall: is the medium just a medium?
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3. A specimen: the academic bubble
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6. "Speaking as a scholar": rights, not property
   - What is a publisher?
   - Kant' s copyright
7. More than a machine?

D. Searls, D. Weinberger, New Clues 2015 (1999)

"The Net is not a medium any more than a conversation is a medium."

"On the Net, we are the medium. We are the ones who move messages. We do so every time we post or retweet, send a link in an email, or post it on a social network. "

S. Harnad, 2003: Back to the Oral Tradition Through Skywriting at the Speed of Thought

Orality:

1. Hearsay has an adaptive advantage over trial and error. Unlike toilers, cognitive barters have not to reinvent the wheel every time
2. Oral tradition: collective, serial form of cognitive barter, whereby we inherit the knowledge of others and we add what we ourselves know and/or we pass on what we have learned
3. Knowledge passes across generation during synchronous discourse, by saying and hearing - in a living database

S. Harnad, 2003: Back to the Oral Tradition Through Skywriting at the Speed of Thought

Literacy, and beyond:

1. Writing dissociated asynchronous interactions from the speed and synchronicity of interacting thoughts. But: *verba volant, scripta manent*
2. The Net: as fast as synchronous oral exchange, and yet preserving written records.
3. Paywalls separating skywriters from their would-be skyreaders will not make sense anymore

Harnad: it is - or it used to be? - only a matter of time

"Our talking heads and their interacting minds will be incomparably more fecund' once those lazy iterative cycles by which our knowledge has been created are restored to the speed of stone age thought by skywriting in the post-Gutenberg galaxy. It is only a matter of timing."

D. Searls, D. Weinberger, The Internet as the kingdom of ends (2003)

1. Craig Burton: the Net's "stupid" architecture may be described as a hollow sphere comprised entirely of ends
2. Taking the value out of the center means enabling the flowering of value among the connected end points
3. When every end is connected the ends are not endpoints, but ends

Philosophical reference: Kant's kingdom of ends

The thought experiment of a world in which all rational beings are considered as ends, not as means to an end for other people.

Pierre Lévy, Cyberculture, 1997

Cyberculture would not be postmodern but continuous with the republican and revolutionary ideas of *liberté*, *égalité*, and *fraternité*. But in cyberculture, these "values" are embodied in concrete technological apparatuses. In the era of electronic media, equality is realized in the possibility for individuals to put in circulation for everyone; freedom exists in encrypting software and in transborder access to multiple virtual communities; lastly, brotherhood appears in global interconnectivity.

Dmytri Kleiner The Telekommunist Manifesto, 2011

1. The internet was born as an open, decentralized and distributed network - not as a fragmented, walled garden;
2. The Web 2.0, however, relies on a business model of private capture of community-created value - to harness collective intelligence

Tim Berners-Lee Long Live the Web, 2010

Universality was the foundation of the web: any person could share information with anyone else, anywhere

[Now, however,] your social-networking site becomes a central platform - a closed silo of content, and one that does not give you full control over your information in it. The more this kind of architecture gains widespread use, the more the Web becomes fragmented, and the less we enjoy a single, universal information space.

Jaron Lanier *You are not a gadget*, 2010

We [social media engineers] make up extensions to your being, like remote eyes and ears and expanded memory. These become the structures by which you connect to the world and other people. These structures in turn can change how you conceive of yourself and the world. We tinker with your philosophy by direct manipulation of your cognitive experience, not indirectly, through argument.

Jaron Lanier: Lock-in Turns Thoughts into Facts

Proprietary social media set up a rigid representation of human relationships on digital networks

The fancy web 2.0 designs of the early twenty-first century start off by classifying people into bubbles, so you meet your own kind. Facebook tops up dating pools, LinkedIn corrals careerists, and so on.

Algorithmium: a natural element ?

J. Lanier, Who owns the future

We can't tell how much of the success of an AI algorithm is due to people changing themselves to make it seem successful. People have repeatedly proven adaptable enough to lower standards in order to make software seem smart.

Re-inventing - again - how to be together

"We, the People of the Net, cannot fathom how much we can do together because we are far from finished inventing how to be together."

A very much cited Plato quote

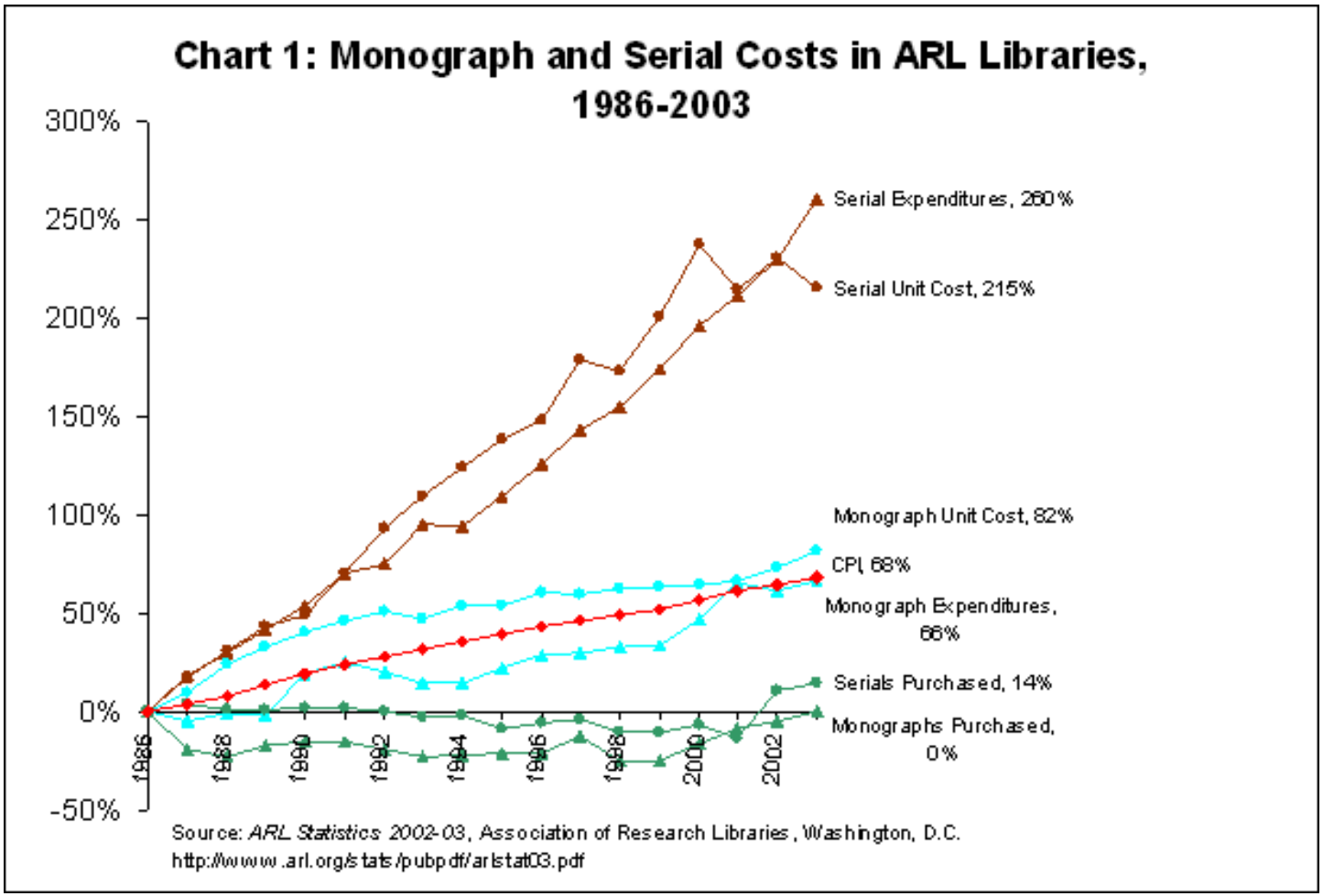
Phaedrus 275a on the invention of letters

For this invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practice their memory. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are no part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory within them. You have invented an elixir not of memory, but of reminding; and you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom, not true wisdom, for they will read many things without instruction and will therefore seem to know many things, when they are for the most part ignorant and hard to get along with, since they are not wise, but only appear wise.

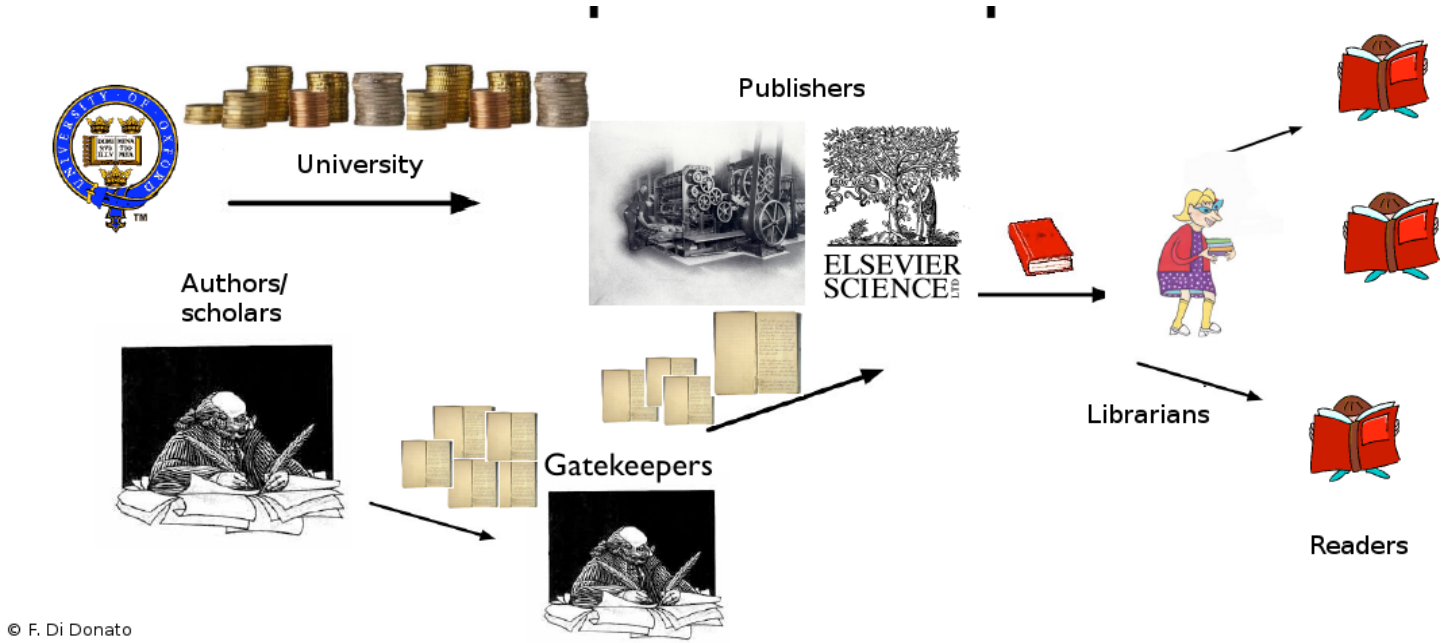
A humanist research/action program

1. separating people from media ("external characters which are no part of themselves“)
2. asking how they do, can and should get along
3. reconnecting them to the media with a better awareness

Serial prices crisis



Filter, then publish



Journals as proxies for the scholarly community

I am a good researcher when

- my papers are published in good peer-reviewed scholarly journals
- or my monographs are published by publishers of good reputation

Impact factor

The IF of a journal is calculated by dividing the number of current year citations to the source items published in that journal during the previous two years.

IF= cited articles / citeable articles

H index

An index for individual productivity and impact

A scholar with an index of h has published h papers each of which has been cited in other papers at least h time

Bibliometrics as evaluation proxy?

1. A good scholarly journal has a high impact factor
2. An excellent researcher has a high number of citations in good scholarly journals

Frying in the WoS (formerly ISI Web of Knowledge)

Bibliometrics is calculated on closed, proprietary databases (WoS, Scopus)
Every academic library must subscribe to them and to the journals they include
Publishers may raise the subscription prices *ad libitum*.

G. Monbiot, The lairds of learning, 2011

Capitalism? No: feudalism.

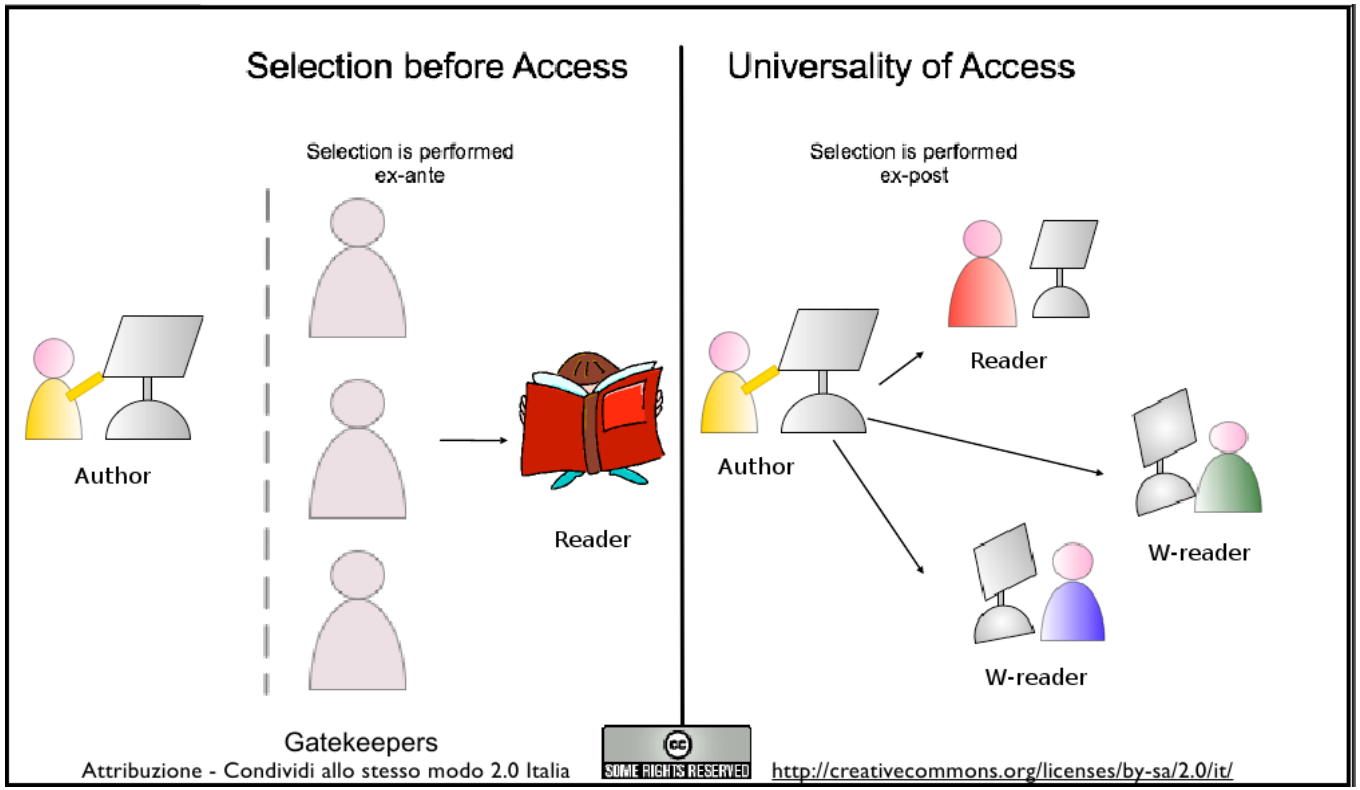
- The academic publishers get articles, peer reviewing and much of the editing for free
- Researchers and university libraries must pay them to get their own work back.

The academic bubble: an early application of the Web 2.0 principles

Four simple rules:

1. make scholars believe that they give away their thoughts for free because their work has no intrinsic value
2. make bureaucrats (and researchers) believe that bibliometrics can be used to evaluate researchers without reading their papers
3. give away the data (i.e. the articles), if you must, but maintain a firm proprietary grasp on bibliometric metadata and algorithms
4. profit!!!

Publish, then filter



Open access publishing

Peter Suber

Open-access (OA) literature is

- digital,
- online,
- free of charge,
- free of most copyright and licensing restrictions

Green road: self-archiving

- Disciplinary (e.g. arXiv) and institutional repositories (e.g. DASH for Harvard)
- Publisher copyright policies & self-archiving: `http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/`

Gold road: open access journals

- DOAJ `http://doaj.org/`
- "Predatory" open access
  1. lowbrow: `http://scholarlyoa.com/individual-journals/`
  2. highbrow: double dipping

Top-bottom OA policies

Our mission of disseminating knowledge is only half complete if the information is not made widely and readily available to society. New possibilities of knowledge dissemination not only through the classical form but also and increasingly through the open access paradigm via the Internet have to be supported. We define open access as a comprehensive source of human knowledge and cultural heritage that has been approved by the scientific community.

Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities 2004

We live in an (academic?) environment where top-bottom policies are the default

> We see, then, that modern technology has led to the concentration of economic and political power, and to the development of a society controlled (ruthlessly in the totalitarian states, politely and inconspicuously in the democracies) by Big Business and Big Government.
>
> A. Huxley, The Brave New World Revisited 1958

We are accustomed to use economics as proxy

There is a gross misunderstanding in the open access debate about the nature of academic research and publication. Academic research publication is a form of teaching. Academic research publications deal not in sets of facts or figures but in understanding. But academic research publication is a form of teaching that assumes some prior knowledge.

For those who wish to have access, there is an admission cost: they must invest in the education prerequisite to enable them to understand the language used. Current publication practices work to ensure that the entry threshold for understanding my language is as low as possible. Open access will raise that entry threshold. Much more will be downloaded; much less will be understood.

R. Osborne,Why open access makes no sense, 2013

We are accustomed to depend on the lords of metadata

Academically, the web 2.0 is nothing new

Big government and big business have succeeded in making us believe that the worth of our texts did not depend on their content, but on their distributors, the so-called core journals, and their bibliometric aggregation.

We live in a world of proletarized researchers

Here we encounter the same condition that is found wherever capitalist enterprise comes into operation: the 'separation of the worker [the researcher] from his means of production [the library].'

Max Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf* 1919

Who will win the OA war?

When the history of open access is written will it tell the story of **a group of high-minded individuals** who, in the teeth of fierce resistance from publishers, tore down the paywalls surrounding publicly-funded research? Or will it give an account of how **a highly innovative publishing industry** exploited the benefits of the digital network to set research free?

Richard Poynder on the state of open access: Where are we? What still needs to be done? 2014

Algorithmical scholars?

Reflexivity of social sciences: when you adopt a "social" unit of measurement as an evaluation standard, people (mis)behave accordingly:

1. Salami publication
2. Erroneous and fraudulent results ("attention to top journals shapes the content of our journals more than scientific rigor")
3. High number of retractions in top-journals

B. Brembs, *What ranking journals has in common with astrology* 2014

Let's speak about us ...

Kant, An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?"

But by the public use of one's own reason I mean that use which anyone may make of it as a man of learning addressing the 'entire reading public [*dem ganzen Publikum der Leserwelt*].

Why should Kant's definition concern us?

- It comes after a media revolution
- It is not just about conversation
- It is about an empowering conversation, which
  1. should help us to use our own understanding
  2. and to come of age

Conversations as means to be together

Kant distinguishes between two kinds of conversations:

the private use of reason: we make it as gears of some particular organization (state, army, church). It may be restrained, for organizational concerns

the public use of reason: we make it as rational beings belonging to the cosmopolitan society. It should be free. It helps people to learn to use their intellect in an autonomous way

Conversations as means to be together

Or, in other terms

the private use of reason is an enclosed conversation for and in particular corporations

the public use of reason is, ideally, a world wide conversation

Beyond the machine: Respublica noumenon

Kant, An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?"

But in so far as this or that individual who acts as part of the machine also considers himself as a member of a complete commonwealth or even of cosmopolitan society, and thence as a man of learning who may through his writings address a public in the truest sense of the word, he may indeed argue without harming the affairs in which he is employed for some of the time in a passive capacity.

An interlude with D.Weinberger and D. Searls

1. We all love our shiny apps, even when they're sealed as tight as a Moon base. But put all the closed apps in the world together and you have a pile of apps.
2. Put all the Web pages together and you have a new world.
3. Web pages are about connecting. Apps are about control.
4. As we move from the Web to an app-based world, we lose the commons we were building together.
5. In the Kingdom of Apps, we are users, not makers.
6. Every new page makes the Web bigger. Every new link makes the Web richer.
7. Every new app gives us something else to do on the bus.

In the language of Kant

- D.Weinberger and D. Searls are dreaming the Net as a cosmopolitan society
- Apps and proprietary social media build particular societies, whose rules are established by their engineers, as tutors of their users
- and which are populated with underage, mechanical (algorithmical) beings.
- A free, open science might help to spread the civility of an empowering conversation.

Is toleration all what we need?

A widespread instant philosophy after Charlie Hebdo attack

"In mature information societies, where you know more about your neighbour than you ever wished, and mad people of all stripes can broadcast themselves anytime anywhere, toleration is essential to ensure the peaceful resolutions of conflicts and the fruitful collaborations about shared projects".

Kant: "Tolerant" is a presumptuous title

Toleration is not enough (top-bottom)

1. Toleration depends on a gracious grant of an absolute monarch;
2. as it has been granted, so it might be revoked;
3. the monarch is entitled to use his whole power whenever he likes
4. because the tolerated has no right whatsoever

Toleration is not enough (bottom-up)

1. Toleration depends on the patience or on the ignorance of people putting up with a violation of their rights
2. it is the "virtue" of the weak or of the helpless

The danger of toleration on the Net

1. Because of copyright laws conceived during and for the age of printing, many of our everyday sharing and copying behaviours are legally murky. Yet, they are tolerated. Usually.
2. On the Net, we are accustomed to tolerate a lot of eyes peeping in our personal data. Is our toleration a virtue?
3. As scholars, we have been willing to give away our copyright to publishers for free, because we believe they have some power on us. Is it a virtue?

Kant's theory on copyright: relevant works

- 1785: *Von der Unrechtmäßigkeit des Büchernachdrucks* (*On the Injustice of Reprinting Books*)
- 1797: *Metaphysik der Sitten*, *Rechtslehre*, § 31, II

What is a book?

A book can be seen

1. as a material object
2. as a means of conveying thoughts
3. as a speech

1. The book as a material object

1. It may be reprinted freely
2. for the very principle of private property
3. if it has been purchased in a legal transaction

Property

It makes it easier to alienate things...

2. The thoughts "contained" in a book

1. They are not affected by books reprinting:
2. As such, they are non-excludable and non-rivalrous
3. Authors can keep on thinking them and being recognized as their parents, even if their books are reprinted

3. The book regarded as a speech

1. It is an action
2. It is, in other words, a way to engage a relationship with a public

Iura personalia

It is not a matter of right on things (*iura realia*) but of personal rights (*iura personalia*)

Ius personale

A right entitling someone to obtain acts from other persons

«the possession of another's choice [Willkür], in the sense of my capacity to determine it by my own choice to a certain deed» (MdS, §18, AA.06 271:04-10)

As moral subjectivity involves freedom, personal rights cannot be established without the concerned persons' consent.

(Un)authorized spokespersons

- The book is a medium through which authors can transmit their speeches to a public.
- In the age of printing, such a medium was provided by publishers.
- Thus publishers can be considered as spokespersons who speak in the name of the authors.
- As such, they need the authors' authorization.
- A pirate publisher is like an unauthorized spokesperson.

A copyright very narrow in scope

- It applies to texts (=speeches)
- It does not apply to works of art (=things)
- It does not apply to derivative works (=new, different speeches)
- It does not apply to personal copies that are not distributed to the public

The public is a stakeholder

- The publisher may neither refuse to publish – or to hand over to another publisher – a text of a dead author, nor release mutilated or spurious works, nor print only a limited impression that does not meet the demand
- If the publisher does not comply, the public has the right to force him to publish.

Medium means "means"

Publishers rights are justified *if and only if* they help authors to reach the public.

Interlude: Algorithmium: a natural element - o a kind of "reprinter"?

C. Sandvig, The Facebook "It's Not Our Fault" Study 2015

Last year there was a tremendous controversy about Facebook's manipulation of the news feed for research. In the fracas it was revealed by one of the controversial study's co-authors that based on the feedback received after the event, many people didn't realize that the **Facebook news feed was filtered at all**.

If you think humans are opaque, try algorithms...

Emily Bell, We can't let tech giants, like Facebook and Twitter, control our news values 2014

"Transparency and accountability have to accompany the vast, important role our key information providers now play in society.“ " We can build the internet in space, and robots are taking a central role in our lives. But we need an open conversation about who shapes their values ."

Rights shaping conversations

To hope to create a public space for our coming of age, we need a set of rights:

- the authors' right to choose whether and how to communicate with the public (It's not just about copyright: it's about "privacy")
- their right to be held responsible for what they say
- the right of the public to read, study, translate, elaborate and discuss every text
- the right of the public to resist the enclosures made by disloyal publishers and social media "reprinters"

An open conversation can help us to become more than a machine

Thus once the germ on which nature has lavished most care–man's inclination and vocation to think freely–has developed within this hard shell, it gradually reacts upon the mentality of the people, who thus gradually become increasingly able to act freely. Eventually, it even influences the principles of governments, which find that they can themselves profit by treating man, who is more than a machine, in a manner appropriate to his dignity.

Politics: more than algorithms (Kant)

It is perfectly true that the will of all *individual* men to live in accordance with principle of freedom within a lawful constitution (i.e. the *distributive* unity of the will of all) is not sufficient for such purpose. Before so difficult a problem can be solved, all men *together* (i.e. the *collective* unity of the combined will) must desire to attain this goal; only then can civil society exist as a single whole,

Politics: more than algorithms (Quintarelli)

A problem of the so-called sharing economy:

- distributively: we, as single individuals, could fear to get into a taxi-cab whose driver is a Muslim
- collectively: at the same time, we could recognize the right of the Muslim taxi driver to do his work

The cult of algorithms denies our political rights to make decisions in a *collective* way

Just like the cult of bibliometrics denies our intellectual rights to give individual, qualitative assessments to the papers we study.

Less than an algorithm - more than a machine

To be more than a machine we do not need just a set of distributive semi-public fiefs administered by private lords of metadata.
We need a collective public space, with its justice and our rights.
Architecture is not enough: we need both politics and philosophy, or, in other words:

1. digital literacy
2. open science
3. internet rights
4. a road to some kind of cosmopolitan democracy

. . . in an open Net.

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Thank you!