

## Social sciences and humanities publishing and the digital “revolution”

The scholarly world is buzzing with the words “digital revolution”, “e-science” and many other phrases designating more and more “projects” of conquest and settlement of a cyberspace which is all but virtual as it occupies our desks, offices and classrooms. Simultaneously there is no dearth of predictions, statements, declarations, conferences and even books — real printed paper books — mapping the domain and either promising glorious tomorrows or utter desolation.<sup>1</sup> Actually, we should not be surprised: a quick glance at what our 19th c. (and earlier) forefathers wrote about the American West or African or Asian colonies, or closer to us what our fathers wrote about television, should reassure us of the “naturalness” of the predictive process; it is, after all, the way imagination works to apprehend reality. The present article is probably affected with the same disease in spite of my effort to avoid anything resembling predictions.<sup>2</sup> My contention, however, is simple — some might even say simplistic: I am arguing that the digital “revolution” may turn out to be a great opportunity for HSS scholars and publishers not simply to do more and better (ie to improve our practice) but to return to the basics of their professional and intellectual activity.

### 1) Setting the stage

In the metacritical field of “publishing studies” (a non existing discipline as yet, but one that should soon emerge and maybe absorb the (now) venerable field book

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<sup>1</sup> Even a brief look at specialized blogs such as [Publishing Trends](#) or [homo-numericus.net](#) (held by two French specialists of electronic publishing) will show that there is no dearth of that kind of prophetic material. It is now for a large part present in specialized publications or in various studies and reports ordered by governments and funders, and conducted by various bodies. In the book publications on “the future of the book”, however, a historical trend can be seen among this lamento with a surge of interrogations which seems to have taken place in the mid 1990s and then a 10-year gap with a new peak of publication starting in the mid 2000s. For a list of recent relevant publications propising various analyses and predictions, see the reference list at the end of this article.

<sup>2</sup> As the studies that have been conducted by the OAPEN team (of which I am fortunate to be a member) as well as by others show, there is no significant evidence to substantiate any potential effect of digital information on the publishing world. There are only scenarios based on “ideological” decisions (ie based on ideas and programs) and a great dose of positive thinking on the part of the market evangelists who believe in a possible generation of revenues. My contention here is that as our whole economy is shifting (see Jeremy Rifkin, *The Age Of Access: The New Culture of Hypercapitalism, Where All of Life Is a Paid-For Experience* (New York: J.P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2000)) that of the dissemination of research cannot but change its economic model radically, abandoning the traditional selling of a product for other types of exchanges: selling of a service or even more the transformation of goods into service and its funding not by customers but by all (ie taxes).

history<sup>3</sup>) there are roughly two models. One is the “Darton approach”, expatiating the *longue durée* and thus looking at the present digital revolution in the context of previous changes / revolutions / mutations in the world of mediation (in writing). Robert Darnton, as a book historian, started mapping the field very early with his most famous 1999 *New York Review of Books* article.<sup>4</sup> In a recent publication, *The Case for Books*, collecting some older pieces together with a couple of texts written on this occasion, he sums up his faith in the “traditional” Gutenberg book while calling for a rational use of the digital media to enrich books (what he did as initiator of project Gutenberg-e<sup>5</sup>) and especially to disseminate them. But he also vehemently argues against the “either/or choice”, and remains convinced that the printed book should be kept alongside new forms of publishing, at least in the foreseeable future, for preservation but also for convenience of use. It’s difficult not to agree with him, but is it a feasible route?

The other model is that of the “Kuhnians”<sup>6</sup>, here more specifically the “cyberfaithful”. They know there is no (road)map to conduct a revolution and, as they sense that a scientific/epistemological revolution is on its way, so they proceed by trial-and-error, or all-out experimentation, boldly invading all forms of publishing by digital means.<sup>7</sup> They are found all over the world, but one of the hotbeds of this kind of approach is the Institute for the Future of the book.<sup>8</sup> Contrary to the Darntonians, they reject traditional categories and question the future of the book form on the grounds that it is linked to a given media (paper) and thus will take a different meaning in the digital world. This makes sense and is even very seducing as a posture: sometimes the best defense is offense, and occupying a territory first allows shaping it according to one’s needs. But does the promise of a paradigmatic shift really respond to the basic needs of scholars. In other words, will it improve their research in a significant way, rather than transform it for the simple reason that a new tool is available, slowly leading to a

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Darnton, *The Case for Books: Past, Present, Future* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Robert Darnton, “The New Age of the Book,” *The New York Review of Books*, March 18, 1999 (<http://www.nybooks.com/nyrev/index.html>)

<sup>5</sup> Project Gutenberg-e (<http://www.gutenberg-e.org/>) was an offshoot of Columbia University Press in collaboration with the American Historical Association created with support of the Mellon foundation in 1998-2000. It aimed at publishing the best history dissertations chosen by the AHA, greatly enriched with audio and visual documents. The project has so far published 35 books. Although it seems dormant at the moment, it remains to this day the most accomplished of this type of approach to the scholarly monograph on line.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962).

<sup>7</sup> As to the likes of Larry Lessig or Yochai Benkler, they are more concerned with a philosophy of the superstructure than with the epistemology of the sciences.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.futureofthebook.org/>.

situation where this very tool from available becomes compulsory as all the previous ones have been eliminated.

This “world without alternatives” is all too common in fast-changing times. Recent examples of significant technical shifts abound; let us just quote the move from paper photoprints to plastic prints and more radically from analogic imaging to digital imaging, which have opened many possibilities (as well as probably saved many natural resources) but in the meantime have eradicated a whole practice of black-and-white quality images which were still wanted and needed by some photographers, now limiting it to the rarefied world of wealthy creators or museums. For most of us, serious amateur photographers, it is just not an option anymore, even though it might still be needed.

Faced with this absence of choice, I suggest we shift to a “political economy of the book”. The phrase, although pompous, means something very simple. I intend to view books as an economic activity constituting a society and as such is the result of choices which are no more natural than immutable. There is nothing preordained in the “modernity” of the digital world, and there should not be. In any case it should not detract us from shaping it according to the long term view — whatever it is — about the future we want. We will not all agree, but it should be debated openly and not taken as a mere unavoidable fact. The future I want — and I will make no bones about it — is one that advances knowledge — and at least their artefacts — to be the common preserve of humanity. In the field of *scholarly publishing*<sup>9</sup> the practical outcome is “open access”<sup>10</sup>— a consequence that is both fundamental and desirable for reasons which are entirely political [or philosophical — that is to say conceptual] and not simply pragmatic — as an efficient response to a topical difficulty.

## 2) A revolution in context

The crisis of social science and humanities writing, and particularly of the book, is deeply embedded in the context of the last decades of the 20th century and the early

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<sup>9</sup> I do not write here about other publishing fields in which OA *might* prove to be counterproductive (or not) as I do not know them well enough to pass any substantiated judgments. As in many instances, one should be extremely careful in (cultural) history and sociology, to differentiate between objects (books, photographs, etc.) and practices or functions (inform, entertain, create, convince, etc.).

<sup>10</sup> Open access literature can be simply defined as “digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions.” (<http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/brief.htm>). It is conditioned by two factors: a technical base, the internet, and a legal/moral base, the consent of the author or copyright-holder. See <http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/overview.htm>.

21st century. The reason very often invoked for the demise of the academic HSS book is the so-called “serials crisis”, a term used to designate the vertiginous rise of the subscription to STM journals since the mid-80s which literally strangled libraries and led to fewer and fewer purchases of books/monographs.<sup>11</sup> Such evolution might have been “normal”, or simply “in the order of things” if meanwhile the book had not remained the main research object in the HSS (for reasons which will be developed *infra* and are quintessential to our theory). The resulting tension between supply and demand destabilized the whole field of academic publishing. In its heyday the systematic purchase of academic monographs by most libraries worked as indirect subsidizing. It had its drawbacks — not all monographs were equally good or useful and emulation/incentive was low. But emulation took place in the field of symbolic capital, away from the economics of publication. It allowed, however, for diversity and at least kept the sector alive. The reallocation of library budgets towards the much more expensive STM journals significantly lowered the economic viability of HSS monographs whose print runs plummeted (from an average 1500 in the 1980s, to ca 400 today), while the publication costs, despite automation and lowering printing costs, remained high because publishing — especially book publishing — is a labor-intensive activity.

But the deep-seated reasons for the crisis lie elsewhere, in another crisis, that of academia and of the HSS themselves, even though they seem to have been *revealed* by a technological revolution. Solely blaming the economics of publishing is missing the point by a very long shot. The “digital revolution” in communication and information hit academia just as Western societies were under great strains in their development model. The causes are well known: demographic shifts, a new world balance, and global environmental challenges. The practices, however, did not lag behind — as expected — but rather paradoxically and counterintuitively (in the mid 1980s, to take a convenient although imperfect starting point) underwent a powerful conversion to liberal economics of the most rabid sort. Academia, which had lived very much outside the world of market economics, experienced conversion — at least of its leaders and powers-that-be — to the market forces, toppling over in a very few

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<sup>11</sup> See Anthony M. Cummings, “University Libraries and Scholarly Communication: A Study Prepared for the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation,” (Publications of the Associations of Research Libraries, Washington, DC, November 1992) (<http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED371758>) and “The Crisis in Scholarly Publishing,” University of Waterloo (Canada) Scholarly Societies Project (<http://www.lib.uwaterloo.ca/society/crisis.html>).

years the social regulation patiently and difficultly established since the late 19th century in most Western countries and certainly since 1945 in all of them. This went along with the so-called “financiarization” of the economy, ie of people’s lives. The impact of such change on the world of research was probably even stronger than in the traditional market activities. The ethos of “social utility” or “public service”, which animated sciences (and particularly but not exclusively, social sciences) since their modern emergence in the latter part of the 19th c., exploded under the pressure of the market economy which took hold of even the smaller research units. In the name of “efficiency”, it coupled short-termism (against all the needs of “deep” research) with generalized individual competition (against the ethos of collaboration existing in many scientific practices), ushering a new subculture in the West, that of “performance”, or even, more bluntly, “of evaluation”. This was the *managerial revolution* coming to the campuses and labs, establishing a rat race for publication at all costs, and as the promising and highly paid jobs of the future seemed to be in business and finance, the social sciences, the humanities, and later even the sciences themselves lost their best students. The shift was particularly damaging to all fields engaged in reflective activities (as opposed to operational ones, e. g. engineering vs. quantum physics, or finance vs. macroeconomics), long term programs and, in the case of the natural sciences, those having steep learning curves and little financial or symbolic return on investment.

Such environment could only be detrimental to book reading as well as to book writing. Writing a book takes time, often a lot of it, and academics are now pressured with a growing amount of tasks, not only teaching but “animation”, administration, politics and management of all sorts of resources and they often have neither the means nor the skills to do so. Academic time, which used to be like a loft—free to be occupied and partitioned as each individual saw fit at any given moment—has changed into something fragmented and subject to permanent accountability. Even when manuscripts do get written, they do not always end up in book form for reasons which are not scientific but economic: the size, format, topic are deemed too narrow by publishing entrepreneurs who refuse to take the “risk” for publication. In other words, the final word is not with the peers (who validate the research) but with the “market”, or the perception of it publishers have.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> One should note how the profession of “risk manager” has taken on in finance, with the splendid results in forward thinking that we were able to witness in the past few years.

With the advent of electronic means of publication and even more with journal platforms (such as OJS or revues.org) which allowed the production of high quality journals with no visible and upfront investment (known as “entry barrier”) other than the intellectual work of the editors, the dream of disintermediation almost came true. Internet appeared as a way for professionals to get a grip back on their own field by seemingly freeing themselves from economic contingencies. In fact, far from liberating scientific publication from economics, it highlighted the dire need for public or semi-public investment in communication infrastructures. The development of platforms and tools for electronic publication was to a large extent possible because of direct investment either by a foundation (PKP) or the State (in the case of revues.org which is financed by CNRS, the largest French public research operator outside universities). This happened against the “market” which failed to deliver the goods needed but did manage to collect the golden eggs, organizing itself to siphon off vast amounts of public capital spent by institutions and states to buy back from publishers the knowledge content produced by their own employees (albeit with a certain level of added service).

Simultaneously evaluators of research, at macro-level at least, became people with little or no knowledge of the nature of research, politicians or (public) managers, top civil servants, consulting firms peopled with MBAs, who argued for “performance indicators”. This was a case of making a complex situation simple, a rather simplistic move. Metrics, now the mantra of all boards and committees, was paradoxically the child of quantitative social science itself, the dream of modeling life. It is still defended very powerfully by even the most forward thinkers like S. Harnad, who, through long and perfectly cogent and sophisticated demonstrations preaches for something akin to automatic/machine evaluation of performance. Nothing new here: it is the reinvention of metaphysics by Auguste Comte.

The vital need to be “visible” has led researchers to publish a lot and regularly as now all research has to adapt to “contract time”, anywhere between two and four years, which happens to closely follow political/election time. Almost by mechanical effect, it has forced the HSS, and especially the humanities, to rely more heavily on articles than on books. The article form, which had always been important in the elaboration of the work as were “lectures” and conference papers, has now taken on a single central value, not that of bringing something new to the field but that of assessing the person’s research, with a view to hiring, promotion, funding, and, more and more,

avoiding termination. It is what Noel Malcolm cogently calls, in a brilliant article, “tenure publishing” which he sees as akin to vanity publishing.<sup>13</sup>

### 3) Be realistic! Demand the impossible (May 1968 Situationist slogan)

Those who wanted to erase the past — be they economic liberals or post-situationists — may have seen the advent of the digital paradigm as a wonderful opportunity to get rid of the (academic) book, a costly, musty, dusty form which had passed its time. And do we really need books? Well, it depends what we mean by books. If by “books” we mean printed folios, the answer is probably that it might not be the most convenient form, at least for research. Despite its yet undisputed ergonomics and simplicity, the printed book lacks some of the possibilities that can now expand its use (analyze or scan its content quickly for instance). Those are now significantly called “services” because they can be marketed on top of free content. It is also limited by its fixity making updating cumbersome and expensive.<sup>14</sup> In short, more can be done with digital than with analogical information.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, if by books, we mean “a long organized, structured and developed research form”, then we do need HSS books, and for at least four reasons. Three are internal (or epistemological), and one is ethic (or political).

We need books because of the way HSS work. Most research in HSS is idiosyncratic and multifaceted both in its references, and in its outcome. Very often a scholar will actually build a new “territory” for himself, and this mapping out takes time. Also the actual formulation of the argument and the development of the hypothesis are as important as actual “results”.

Two, books are “spaces”, or “worlds”, they are places of debate and exchange, not

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<sup>13</sup> Noel Malcolm, “Drowning in a sea of words,” *The Independent on Sunday*, 21 July 1996, p.21.

<sup>14</sup> In the context of preservation, fixity and immutability is on the contrary an asset. It is highly telling that in 1996, one analyst could write: “Paper journals will have to convert to electronic publication or disappear. The role of paper is likely to be limited to temporary uses, and archival storage will be electronic.” (Andrew M. Odlyzko, “Tragic loss or good riddance? The impending demise of traditional scholarly journals”, *Journal of Universal Computing* (1994), DOI: 10.3217/jucs-000-00-0003.) We now seem to have somewhat reversed the focus, as long term preservation of digital material seems much more difficult and risky than that of paper, at least faces huge challenges that no one has solved so far, and which, once again are based on modelization and projections rather than experience. See for instance a most interesting blog on the subject: “Alan’s notes and thoughts on digital preservation” (<http://alanake.wordpress.com/>) Also the professional sites of the Digital Library Federation (<http://www.diglib.org/>), the INTERPARES Project (<http://www.interpares.org/>) in Canada or Digital Preservation Europe (<http://www.digitalpreservationeurope.eu/>).

<sup>15</sup> Technophiliacs speak of “fluidity” or “liquidity”, but the word “flexible” seems to me perfectly operative.

packets of verified information.<sup>16</sup> Research monographs in other words are neither instruction manuals nor the 8 o'clock news, and we need those specialized spaces, alongside others but not instead of others.

Then, we need books in order to slow down the process of research. A book epistemologically marks the temporary end of a complete research process and is not a mere accumulation of texts. Their aim is to stabilize — for a while — a given idea/set of ideas in a specific context. This process is indispensable to good science which cannot exist in constant flux and can only move by steps.

Lastly, the question of the need for books eventually boils down to the reasons why social and human scientists write. The answer is simple, but far reaching as well. They write to understand how societies work and change — so far all will agree — but they also do in order to help members of these societies to develop both their independence and their solidarity — a more contentious statement. It explains, however, why there is such continuity between scientists and society, and that scholarly publications reach far beyond professional readers, as opposed to the “hard” sciences where there is a clear separation between the professional publications, which are clearly inaccessible to the general public, and those specifically directed to the general public. In HSS, one writes about complex issues in a language which remains accessible to a normally educated person. It is part of HSS mission.<sup>17</sup> And so is, for this very reason, the “open access” to the results of research. Open access is defined as access to publications that are digital, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions. OA as an organized “method” was first developed in the STM as a means of speeding up exchanges between researchers, of bypassing the economic barriers of access to information in particular for the developing countries and of returning the results of public research investment to the public, at least symbolically. It also led to new ways of handling (and of mining) vast amounts of information in new innovative ways (what is called alternatively data-mining, e-science, and is already at work in the various Google engines, especially Google Books).

For the HSS, however, open access has other potential benefits. Most of all it will make the famous “administering of proof” via references, the documenting of

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<sup>16</sup> As Roger Chartier, among others, argues in Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> Pierre Bourdieu in texts such as *Raisons pratiques: sur la théorie de l'action* (Paris, Seuil, 1994) has quite cogently theorized the position of the researcher and his/her relationship to his/her object.



statement by evidence a reality by actually linking context to text and physically connecting primary and secondary sources for the readers. This will be a quantum leap in the quality of scholarly exchange. It will also improve the porosity with civil society. Take the catchwords of EC programs. There will not be any “knowledge society” without a “social economy”, that is to say a system of economic/cultural/symbolic goods that fully involve all citizens. Similarly, the notion of sustainability which is part and parcel of all EC programs, must be interpreted in the *ecological* sense, and not in the meaning it usually takes in the calls for tender where it basically means “something that sells enough to be self-sustainable in a market context.”

Here, we have come full circle, to our original question, that of the HSS faced with the digital “revolution”. How can we maintain the objects needed to help us be (more) human today and tomorrow? I have tried to show that we must manage to salvage the fundamentals of our activity in a whirlwind of change. It will not just “happen naturally”, and we should certainly view the digital media neither as value neutral nor as inevitable, in a sort of deterministic fatalism that we too often make ours without even realizing it.

The change we want will first require “spaces”, or to put it in different words, “infrastructures”. These are of two kinds. The first type is tools which are acclimatized by certain groups of scholars who get federated through the technology. The second type is the initiatives of pre-existing groups, publishers in general, who invest in digital publishing platforms to reinvent their role, and choose to do it with an open access model.<sup>18</sup> Those are often either learned societies publishers or university presses.<sup>19</sup> This is the sign of the re-emergence, through a technological revolution, of an old “place of knowledge”, the university, which had tended to be confiscated in the past decades by “the economy”. It is not that the university is

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<sup>18</sup> Strictly speaking there are two types of open “access”. The self-archiving by their authors of publications which are not published in open access, and not even digitally. It is called “green open access” or “the green road”. The other type of OA, called “gold OA”, is native open access, ie the publishing of texts directly accessible freely and with little or no restrictions. Although OA fans keep repeating that the two roads are complementary, it is clear that one (the green road) is merely a way of by passing the limitations of both the printed dissemination and of the publishing market, while the other (the gold road) is a true paradigm change. One wonders how the free distribution of content can long coexist with a pay distribution of the same content without leading to a complete revision of the economic model.

<sup>19</sup> See OAPEN reports: “Digital Monographs in the Humanities and Social Sciences: Report on User Needs” (January 2010) by Janneke Adema and Paul Rutten ; and “Overview of Open Access Business Models for eBooks in the Humanities and Social Sciences” (February 2010), by Janneke Adema (June 2010), both available on the OAPEN site (<http://oapen.org/>).

outside the economy. Nobody of course is. But the university is—or at least should be—in a different time frame from the rest of the world. It is a place where time is of the essence, a time which is neither more wasted nor less useful than the time of the monks of yore (and of today). It simply escapes the short term to prepare the long future.

#### 4) The New Ulysses: the true revolution of science.

The work of the academic publishers who believe in this mission is thus completely reinvented, quite a “revolution” for them. They must go back to another-type-of-profit model, and not simply a not-for-profit one (which still needs to be self-sustaining), as knowledge cannot be simply sustained by the market.<sup>20</sup> Many problems have to be solved, first and foremost that of quality standards. They are not really difficult though, and are certainly much less challenging than the resistance to short-termism that I was pointing out earlier. Here again, OA and the digital world can help. I am not referring here to metrics— download statistics and citation indexes— which are ways of correlating “usage” to the “value” of content, and are made possible by the digital nature of texts. Despite the great sophistication of their formulas, metrics have been heavily criticized for measuring an outside phenomena in the hope that a model can be built to translate it into evaluation of content, albeit indirectly. The major problem is that usage (whether reading or citing) is in no way indicative of quality, or at least not systematically and in fact rather haphazardly. The most metrics can do is construct a cloud or network of reference around a given work. Peer review, the traditional and time-honored basis for first evaluation in the world of academia (followed by reviews in scholarly journals), still does a good job despite criticism, as long as one takes it for what it is: beyond the most basic fact and method checking, peer review is merely a first opinion backing an editorial decision based on many other factors. It can, however, be greatly enhanced by all forms of discussions around books and even by improvement of their content. The various techniques of dialogue and annotation, already used in blogs, and undoubtedly to be perfected in the coming future, will be a way of making true the idea of books as worlds and

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<sup>20</sup> One easily agrees, especially since the last economic crisis, that the “market” is neither virtuous, nor wise, but simply amoral. And concurrently it is not difficult to subscribe to the point of view that serving the community is not a licence for irresponsible behavior, as liberals as well as populists would have us believe.

conversations.<sup>21</sup> But it will not suit every book and every commentator or writer, and conversation (just like colloquia) will not replace solitary work and long elaboration. The important point here is that this is just one more possibility added to an already broad panoply of tools. In other words, new avenues should not close off old ones which are still functional and needed, although they might be not profitable. . . . The digital nature of publications, their broad and open dissemination through open access, the potential openness of their worlds and of their usage, extending to sophisticated re-use (by virtue of the flexibility of texts), all will deeply impact the symbolic foundation of academia, the combined notions of author(ship) and reward. A legal evolution will be needed not simply in the forms of attribution of ownership (often designed generically and somewhat misleadingly as “copyright”). This may take the form of the already famous “publishing licenses”, the best-known being the Creative Commons licenses.<sup>22</sup>

But the true revolution lies in the deep change of the very concept of authorship in the near future, and with it the whole relationship to their “creations” of those professional scientists working for large research and teaching institutions who style themselves as “scholars”. Despite my promise not to edict predictions, I foresee the end of the Author in human sciences as it has disappeared in the hard sciences. He might still survive in the media, either in the form of an interpreter and mediator, or as a “media personality” (no names needed here, we know quite a few in our respective countries) for those with a great showmanship potential. They will be able to cash in on this gift or talent, but that is rather different from “creation”. All the better, as long as the others — the creators — have the means to continue doing their work and do not need the media to exist — and are not jealous of its rewards. For the core problem is, of course, the rewards. Changing the rewards, however, entails a revolution in mores. It might turn out as the first step in a reversal of practices, a reaction against the managerial university which right now is destroying our research potential (at least in Europe) in the name of efficiency, just as “free” market has abused our common (limited) resources in the name of liberty and efficiency. Scholars could search for rewards according to their talents in the various facets of research without compromising their work in the name of performance

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<sup>21</sup> For practical examples of “new books”, see The Institute for the future of the book (<http://www.futureofthebook.org/>), click on “Projects”.

<sup>22</sup> See Creative Commons at <http://creativecommons.org/> and an example of license to publish at <http://copyrighttoolbox.surf.nl/copyrighttoolbox/>

indicators other than the true scholarly ones.

We seem to have come a long way from my introductory remarks on the “digital revolution”, from computers, screens, e-books, “liquid texts”, e-science or creative commons licenses. (Language is also an issue which I left out and that would need greater attention.) Those are important issues involving major political and industrial choices. Yet, they are but the visible part of the symptoms as it were, of the *real* revolution which is taking place in the world of science. Digital media gives humanities and social sciences the opportunity to return to a few fundamentals after a long, demanding, and dangerous circumnavigation where they were almost lost. Digital media might be the Trojan horse of humanities in the world of modern utilitarianism. It is the story of Ulysses over again, that of the travelers who needed to see the world in order to reinvent their own.

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