Fulcrum

THE AA'S WEEKLY FREE SHEET

LOS ANGELES.

the right to start a library.

s.dockray

I want to begin with what should be a simple question: *who has the right to start a library?* (Let's assume for the most part that I'm talking about books here, although this presentation will drift into other media).

To pose this question in the current climate is particularly loaded of course, because right now when we think about starting a library we probably aren't thinking about how books are collected, stored, and made available to a particular locality via stacks stored within a building.

This is of course because we have to account for digital files and their vastly reduced footprint, while at the same time considering that this library is potentially accessible from any place on the planet.

This is not a new idea – H.G. Wells fantasised about it 1937 when he wrote that the World Brain presented a contemporary opportunity for "creating a new world organ" (rather than "tinkering with the highly conservative and resistant university system") to take advantage of the moment in which "modern facilities of transport, radio, photographic reproduction" made more "accessible assembly of fact and ideas than was ever possible before." Today, fully awash in the Californian Ideology, we'd probably associate this utopian vision with the Whole Earth Catalog.

Either way, now that the technology is in place to realise the ideas, the cultural conversation has centred less on content or even structure, but instead on rights; and when we're thinking about rights, it's the rights of the owners of intellectual property and not, say, the rights of people to education or access to knowledge.

So this question of the right to start a library has been reframed as one of piracy. A hundred years ago women's organisations in the U.S. amassed enormous collections of books, collections incidentally that formed the initial basis of 75% of public libraries. They weren't threatened with fines or imprisonment.

But it's different today – the ground has shifted beneath our feet and we are buying the license to access something, versus buying the thing itself. In a sense, this has completely outlawed libraries as many of us understand them, leaving private corporations in charge of managing the terms and costs of public access to knowledge. And as we all know, it's companies like Apple (a product itself of the Whole Earth Catalog) who have oriented their business around controlling both the distribution and consumption of media (most recently educational books, launched at the same moment as SOPA).

PIPA [Protect IP Act], SOPA [Stop Online Piracy Act], ACTA [Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement], Holder vs. Gonzalez, iBooks – all of these are happening against a background of austerity measures, including cuts to public education everywhere. Students and contingent faculty have responded by seizing buildings and seizing books, laying claim to the materials and spaces of an education that is rightfully theirs. It's no surprise that many of these occupations occur in libraries – or eventually produce libraries, in a way producing their own theoretical armature as a component of the action itself.

In tandem with defunding, the rights of starting a library are transferring to new media corporations – and the new libraries are remote data centres whose existence will absorb our public and private collections. This is the cloud: a sublimation of the world of objects and commodities into one of licenses, but also of ungovernable file-sharing into legitimate subscription-based access.

As bad as SOPA was, how do we think about the opposition's slogan: "End piracy. Not liberty." If there was ever a chant for marching into the cloud...

Sean Dockray is director of Telic Arts Exchange, an NPO for new media. He initiated AAAARG.org and thepublicschool.org

LONDON.

the field and capital.

h.redman

Through the possibilities of new media we are forming new methods of *distributing capital* and, arguably, a new *type of capital* in the form of distributed knowledge.

In architecture there is a struggle to define what is "good", i.e. worthy of merit (although merit from whom?) and to decide what can be accepted into the field of architectural discourse (whose field is it exactly?).

The social function of the field of architecture is primarily to produce the parts of the built environment that the dominant classes use to justify their position in the social order. In order to do so, the individual field must maintain itself. Pierre Bourdieu proposes that specific groups or professions within society create their own system of beliefs and practices as a means of forming and strengthening a cohesive group. They also seek to distinguish themselves from other fields; therefore the field or group dictates its own boundaries: who is included and excluded, who is promoted or criticised. This creates protection and capital benefits for those included within the field. A specific role of the field of architecture is to promote and dictate what the field considers to be "architecture" and distinguish architecture from other professions or fields.

It is worth noting that Bourdieu never applied his theories to architecture directly, indeed his writings only consider the "pure" and "autonomous" arts , i.e. literature and fine art.

Architecture can never achieve autonomy and inevitably acts as both an art and a profession because of its dependence on clients. Dr Garry Stevens, an "architectural sociologist" declares, "It is one of the great tragedies of architecture that its practitioners readily make a full time living from it."

A field's *capital* – let us say, the capital of architectural knowledge as produced by practice and discourse, and as proliferated through various media – only has value within that field.

The value of this capital depends on the state of the whole and is liable to devaluation or revaluation as this state changes. Applying this to architecture means that an architect's educational, cultural and symbolic capital's value depends on the health of the architectural field as a whole. By becoming a member of the field one is engaged in "the game" and has a belief in the value of the stakes. The question of value is the key issue here; can commons-based, open source and peer reviewed content online achieve the value and status to enter, let alone play a part in defining, the field of architectural discourse?

One might argue that value is endowed when one, or a body, is able to claim authority on a subject. But in a framework of anonymous, instant and peer-to-peer content sharing, who polices and protects this value, and where does this authority ultimately come from? There are obvious downsides to Internet-based discourse, in that there is little traceable filtration, so the quality of a text is hard to ascertain. However virtual discourse is gaining power and in some cases dominating traditional press. So what is it that sets online and paper publications apart? The key is the discussion, the speed and availability of the texts, the ability to comment and the sheer number of people talking. Within this mass conversation, those who continue to proliferate architectural dialogue through virtual platforms propose virtual discourse as a new form of capital, which even in its potential for individual and collective agency lays itself open to economic and proprietary conditions of capital production.

Harriet Redman is a fourth year Diploma student on the M.Arch course at The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL.

@techbar: What if #SOPA was what the Mayans were talking about?
jan 20, 2012

@google: Help protect the web. Sign the petition against SOPA & PIPA: http://t.co/zlj2BFCU
jan 18, 2012

@JoshMankiewicz: #SOPA is dead. I can go back to not understanding what it was.
jan 20, 2012

@BerinSzoka: Watching Congressmen speculate blindly on technical consequences of #SOPA is a bit like an argument at holiday dinner table on string theory.
dec 15, 2011

@AnonOps (Anonymous): #SOPA may be dead (for now), but the motivation to enact its laws are not. Never stop fighting for a free Internet. Say no to #censorship
jan 20, 2012

@finkd (Mark Zuckerberg): Tell your congressmen you want them to be pro-internet. My Facebook post is here: facebook.com/zuck/posts/101...
jan 18, 2012

@firefox: Mozilla is joining the virtual strike against Internet censorship. Help us fight #SOPA / #PIPA - take action today: http://t.co/zhjUQRdY
jan 19, 2012

@jimmy_wales (Wikipedia founder): 5.46m zip code lookups; 114m views yesterday. #wikipediablackout
jan 19, 2012

@Censorednewsnow: Everything ▮▮ ▮▮ is ▮▮▮ fine ▮▮▮ ▮▮▮ trust ▮▮▮ your ▮▮ government. ▮▮ #SOPA ▮ #PIPA #ACTA
jan 18, 2012

@latimes: Google says 4.5 million people signed anti-SOPA petition today http://t.co/t5uqWFke*jan 20, 2012*

@BrettGreene: @garymoskoff @jsnell #SOPA argument is predicated on imaginary revenues presumed to be there if only there were no piracy in the world. #Fantasyland
jan 31, 2012

@Wired: SOPA is censorship, but the bigger point is that its The Old Guard versus Innovators http://t.co/nvHVa98L
jan 19, 2012

@RonWyden: For all those who thought their voice didn't count in their government, I hope you now know it does. #SOPA #PIPA
jan 20, 2012

@DuncanKeeling: Slovak Economy Minister: #ACTA puts copyrights above basic freedoms. Agreement "would curtail basic human rights" #SOPA
feb 5, 2012

@twitter: 2.4+ million SOPA-related Tweets from 12am–4pm ET today. Top 5 terms: SOPA, Stop SOPA, PIPA, Tell Congress, #factswithoutwikipedia
jan 19, 2012

@Anonymous: Down with copyright! Down with patents! End false property now! #AcronymWar #SOPA #PIPA #ACTA #TPP #OPEN #PCIP #C11 #RWA #SOPAIreland
feb 4, 2012

@thejesusdonkey: LinkedIn freed the slaves #factswithoutwikipedia
jan 20, 2012

@ussenreid: After hearing from people with legit concerns, have withdraw support for #PIPA. Let's take time to do it right. #SOPA
jan 20, 2012

@PolicyChairman: Hi @GoDaddy , your ads pretty well stunk tonight, and so does your support of #SOPA et al legislation.
jan 17, 2012

@guardiantech (The Guardian): Sopa and Pipa would create a consumption-only internet.
jan 20, 2012

@bruniverso: 2012 APPEARS TO be the year social media finally becomes a true political power. > http://ow.ly/8UsXx #sopa #arabspring etc
jan 22, 2012

@creatm4n: Round of applause to the 13 million people who stood up - #SOPA #PIPA are tabled for now.
feb 3, 2012

@jack_self: Without Pirate Bay, Megavideo, TvShack (even Videoweed!) what is the Internet even for now? #SOPA #PIPA #ACTA
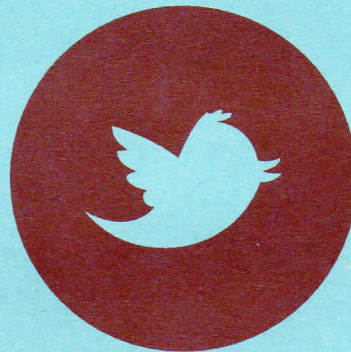*jan 21, 2012*

@glinner: "the day LOLcats died" – #protestsong #SOPA #PIPA, support the cause!
jan 18, 2012

@dannysullivan: How To Blackout Your Site (For SOPA/PIPA) Without Hurting SEO by @mattmcgee http://t.co/CjY-GiRmq
jan 15, 2012

@AnonCircle: Post #SOPA, it's time to protest #ACTA (on Feb. 11) #Anonymous
jan 31, 2012

@PatrickRuffini: Internet 1, Congress 0. #SOPA
jan 20, 2012

@LuiGestiada: RIP @btjunkie (2005-2012). F*** #SOPA!!! (†__†)
feb 5, 2012