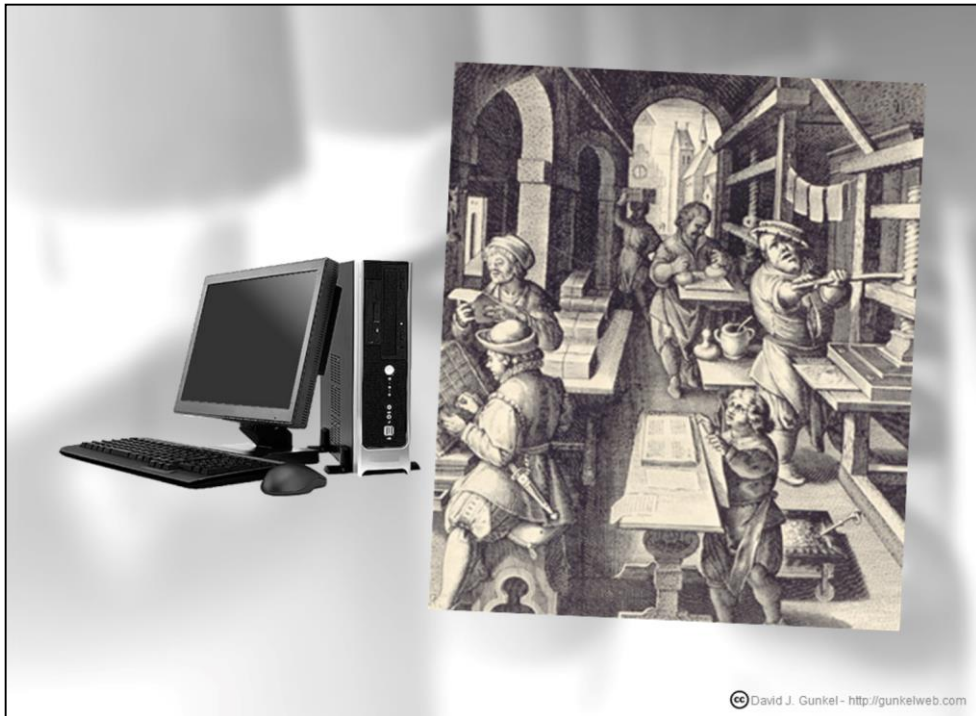


Note: Presentation at the Modern Language Association Conference, Chicago, IL (USA) – 10 January 2014



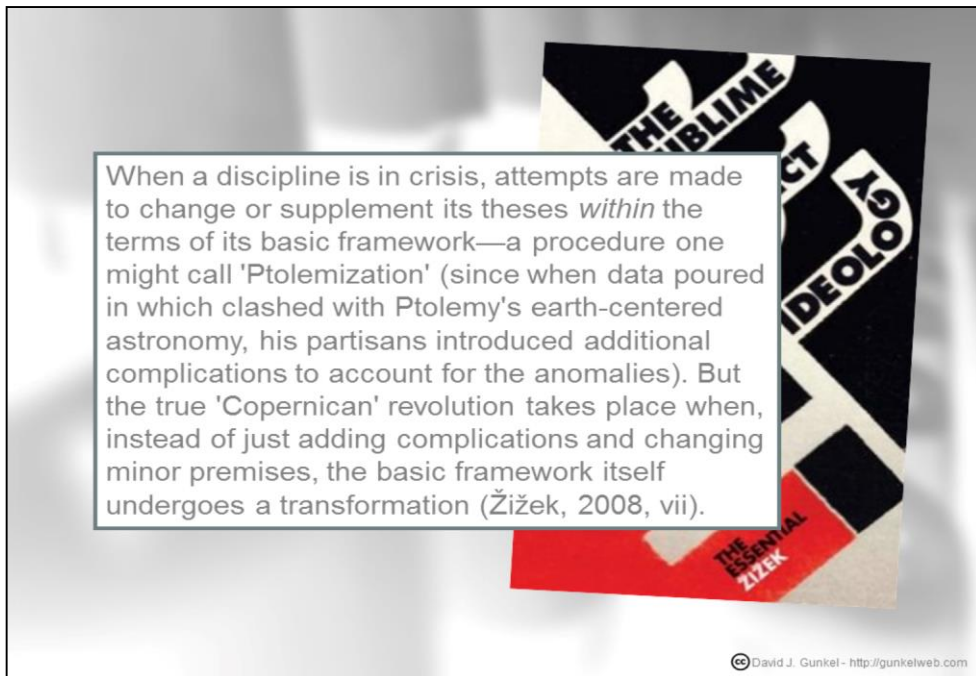
Given the amount of ink spilled on the subject, we are undoubtedly living through something of a crisis in scholarly communication.



The standard model of academic publishing—a model that initially developed in the wake of Gutenberg's innovation—vested considerable power in the hands of few middle men.

At one time, these publishers and presses were essential and indispensable for the publication and distribution of learning.

But the rules of the game have changed. New technologies—digital media, computer networks, and mobile devices in particular—not only challenge the print paradigm but allow for alternative modes of content creation, distribution, and access.



Responses to this crisis have taken two forms—which Slavoj Žižek, in a kind of clever remix of Thomas Kuhn, calls ptolemization and copernican revolution.

"When a discipline is in crisis," Žižek writes, "attempts are made to change or supplement its theses *within* the terms of its basic framework—a procedure one might call 'Ptolemization' (since when data poured in which clashed with Ptolemy's earth-centered astronomy, his partisans introduced additional complications to account for the anomalies).

But the true 'Copernican' revolution takes place when, instead of just adding complications and changing minor premises, the basic framework itself undergoes a transformation" (Žižek 2008, vii).

Ptolemization



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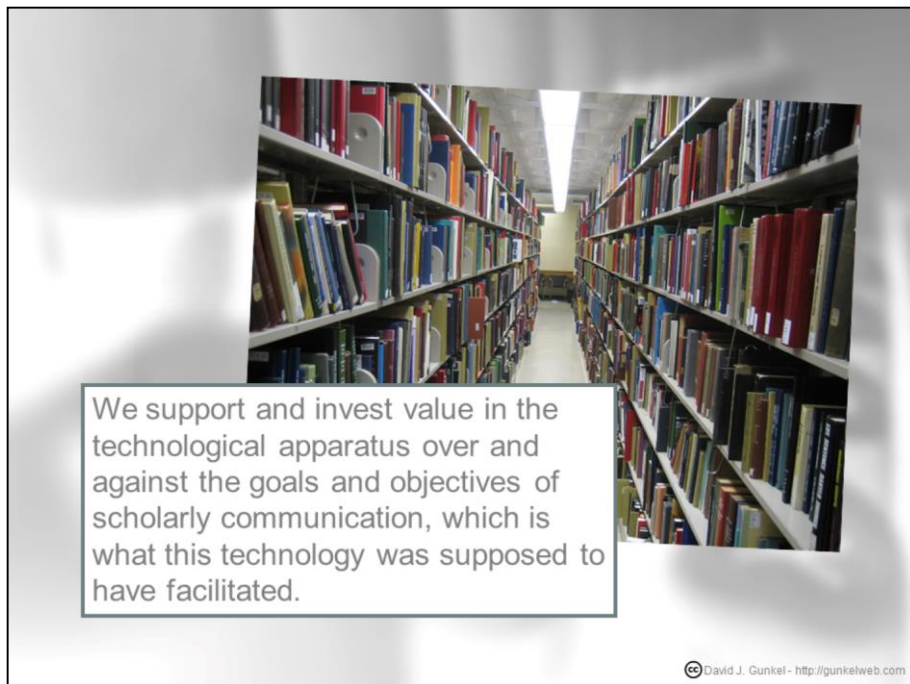
On the one hand, there has been considerable efforts to Ptolemize the situation—forcing the Internet, the World Wide Web and the wide array of digital devices to behave like print.

These efforts—undertaken by many of the established publishers and presses but also supported by major players in the IT industry like Apple, Amazon, and Google—introduce new ways to control information and regulate access to knowledge.

These forces of Ptolemization are undeniably powerful and successful.

They not only are well funded but have several hundred years of seemingly unquestioned precedent and tradition behind them.

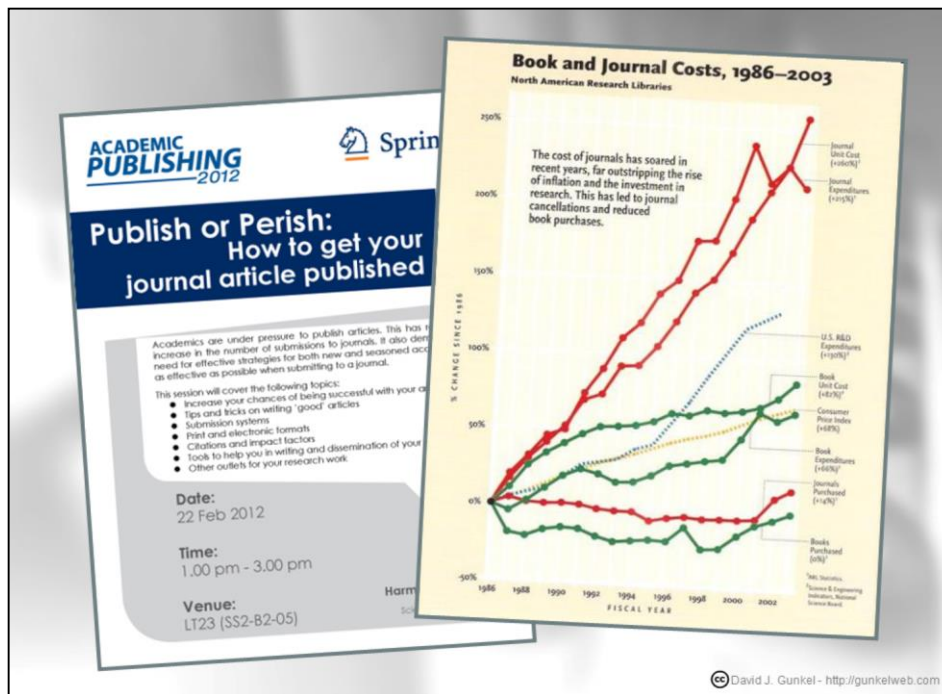
And to make matters worse their continued success is often supported by us—our practices, our disciplines, and our institutions.



The traditional print journal, in other words, has not been seen for what it is—a technological convenience and contrivance that was, at least for a period of time, useful and expedient for knowledge production and distribution. Instead, we have come to fetishize print.

That is, we support and invest value in the technological apparatus over and against the goals and objectives of scholarly communication, which is what this technology was supposed to have facilitated in the first place.

We continue to support, contribute to, and patronize journals that broker information for cash, that limit use by way of restrictive copyright stipulations, and that control access to content by warehousing knowledge behind password protected firewalls.



And what is perhaps worse, we continue to impose this expectation on our colleagues through tenure and promotion regulations that validate this tradition, its assumptions, and its practices.

Ptolemization, then, certainly works but it has considerable costs; it is expensive, inefficient, and ultimately unjustifiable.



On the other hand, we can allow for and release Copernican revolution.

That is, rather than Ptolemizing print technology and culture by retrofitting existing models and structures so that the previous paradigm continues to operate, we can work to reconfigure the entire system.

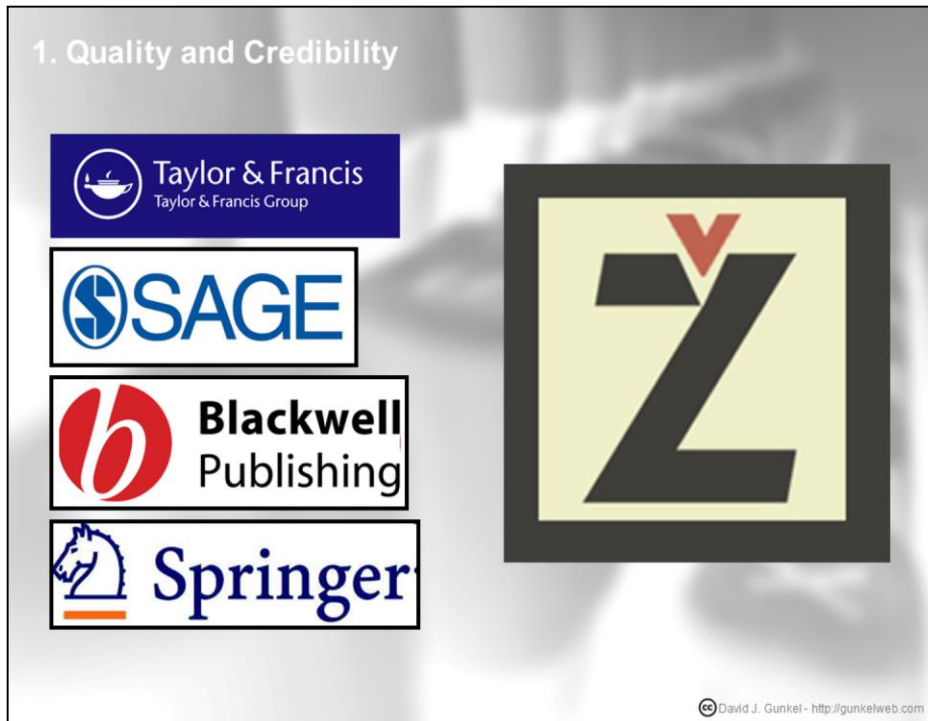
Instead of twisting, contorting, and restricting the Internet so that it operates as some kind of digital emulation of the printing press, we can recognize the truly revolutionary potential of this technological innovation—direct peer-to-peer distribution and access to information that operates without the established and increasingly expensive intermediaries and gatekeepers.



Understood in this fashion, open access publishing can be positioned as a kind of revolutionary transformation.

It not only reconfigures the basic structure of scholarly communication but deposes powerful authority figures and puts everything on the line.

This is obviously an enticing opportunity but there are several challenges that go along with it.



The first has to do with the quality and credibility of research.

We have, for better or worse, often associated the quality of scholarly communication with brand names, like Taylor and Francis, Sage, Blackwell, Springer, etc.

These corporations have, like any brand name product, come to represent not just the means of publication but a credible mark of quality and achievement.

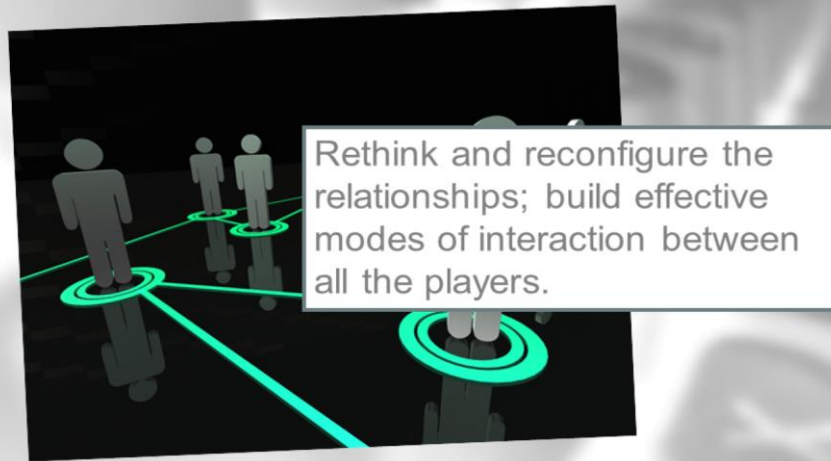
One of the on-going challenges to the DIY open access movement is to establish quality measures and assurances that are able to be disengaged from corporate identity and brand name publishers.



This requires, as we have learned at the International Journal of Zizek Studies a number of coordinated endeavors:

- Practicing rigorous and transparent peer review on the part of open access journals. It is the peer-review process and not the corporate brand that is the best assurance of quality.
- A commitment to and explicit statements supporting what we can call "media agnosticism" in tenure and promotion and university personnel documents—that is, we need explicit policy that recognizes the contribution of scholarly research irrespective of the medium of distribution.
- Review and accreditation by Open Access organizations like Open Humanities Press
- And explicit top-down support for participation in open access initiatives within the discipline and the institution by leading senior faculty and administrators.

2. New Alliances and Partnerships



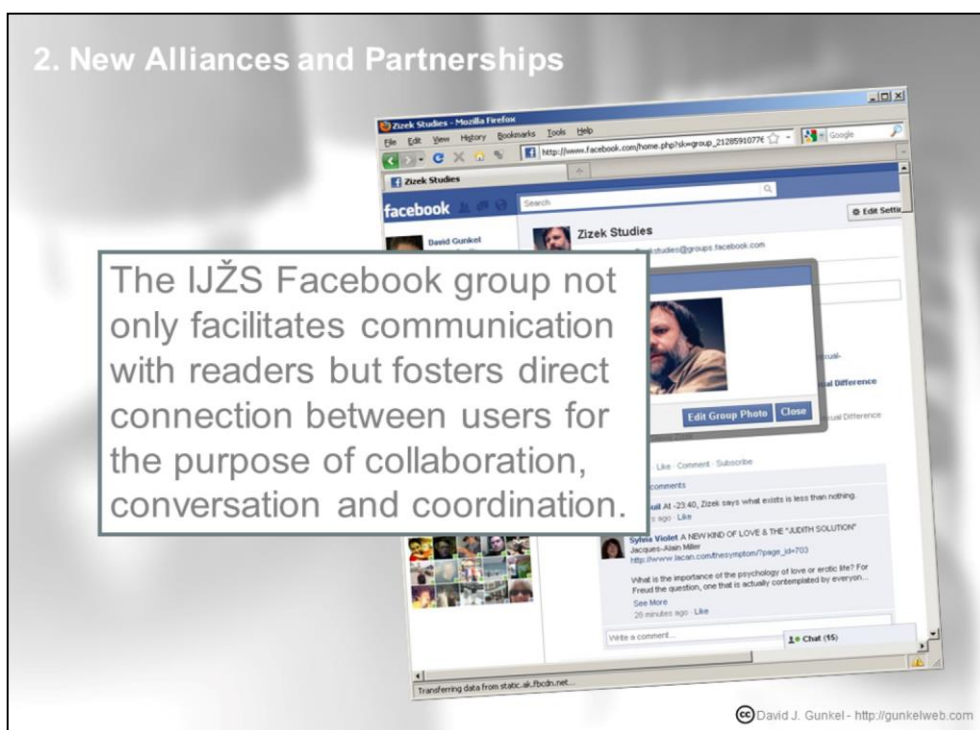
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Second, if DIY open access publishing is to be successful in the long term and not just a fashionable gimmick, we need to build new alliances and partnerships.

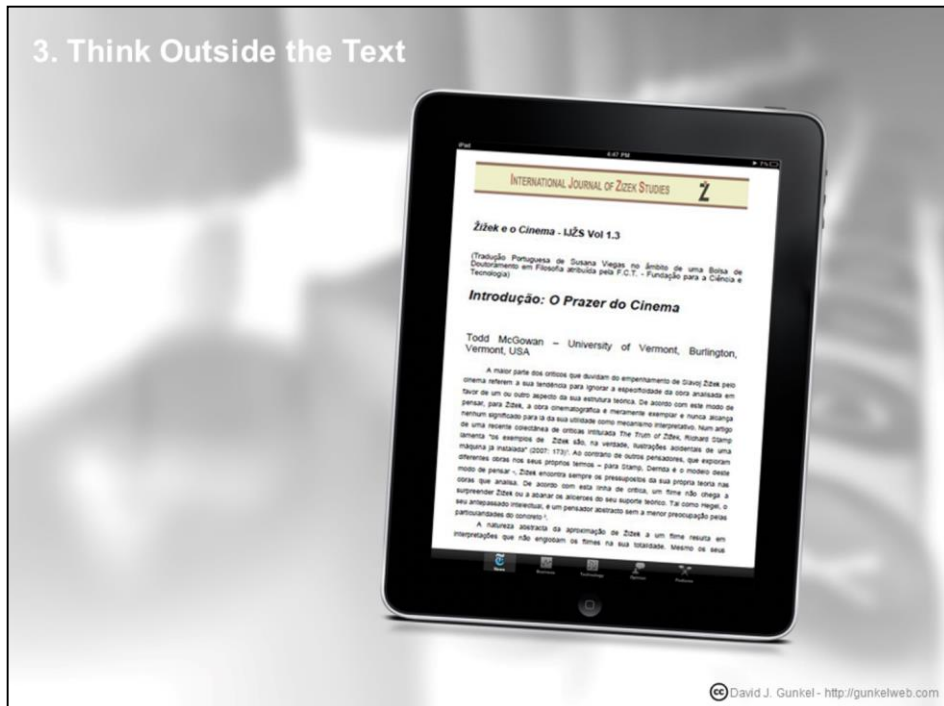
We need to recognize that the now deposed middle men also brokered many of our professional relationships.

Consequently, we need to learn what the music industry discovered over a decade ago—we need to rethink and reconfigure the terms of these relationships, building networks of exchange that can operate in excess of the traditional journal publisher and press.

2. New Alliances and Partnerships



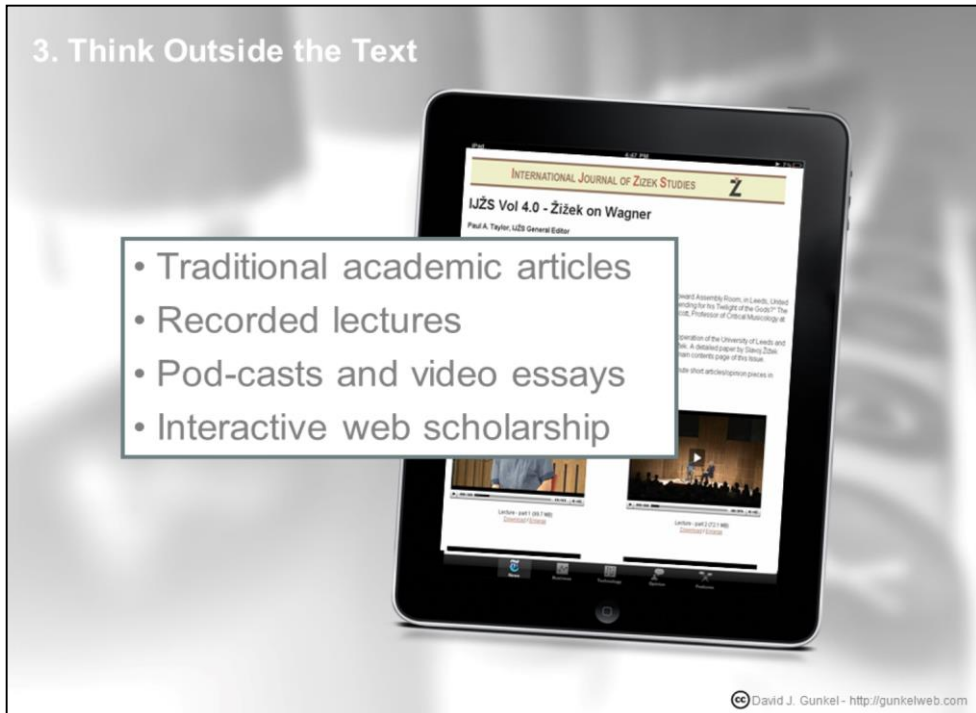
The academic journal has always been a form of social media, and the online nature of an open access journal is able to leverage this opportunity in a way that was unthinkable in the era of print.



Third, in order to fully capitalize on its revolutionary potential, online open access journals need to do more than emulate their print predecessors.

Clearly online, digital journals can do what the dead-tree print publications have done for centuries—and they can arguably do so more efficiently and effectively.

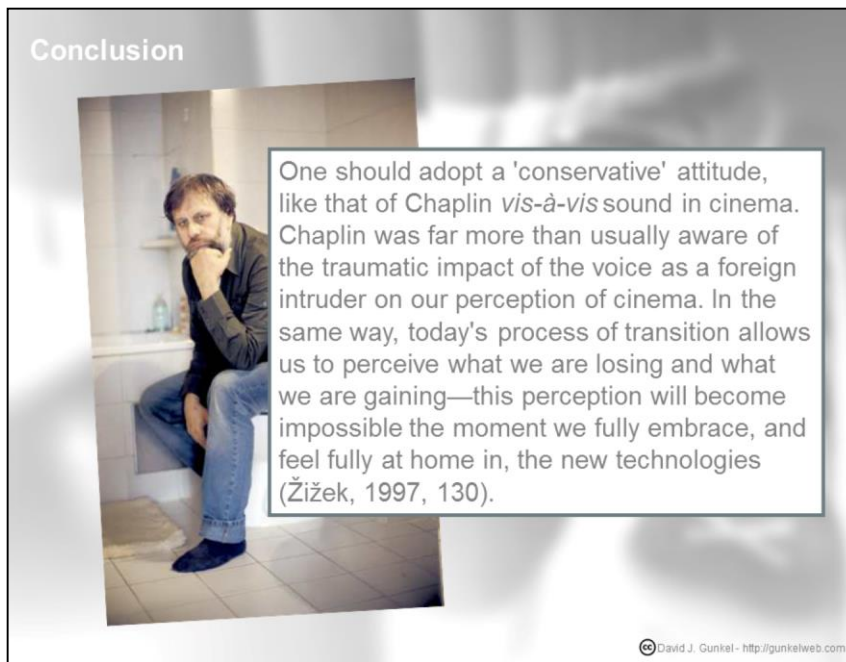
But that would be just evolutionary progress...it is not yet revolutionary. Instead open access, online journals need to think beyond and in excess of the print paradigm.



Toward this end, Zizek Studies has published not only traditional academic articles in text form but also recorded lectures in audio and video format, pod-casts, photographic slide shows, and interactive web-based scholarship that employs the full range and capabilities of this converged medium.

Print is, we must recognize, just one technological method for the communication of scholarly information, but there is no reason research and learning should be limited to this one particular medium.


And it is, we believe, incumbent on the online open access journals to push the envelope on what defines scholarly work, forcing us, if I may be permitted to rework a famous line from Jacques Derrida, to think outside and beyond the printed text.



Let me conclude, then, by recalling another quotation from Žižek...this one from *The Plague of the Fantasies*:

“One should adopt a 'conservative' attitude, like that of Chaplin *vis-à-vis* sound in cinema. Chaplin was far more than usually aware of the traumatic impact of the voice as a foreign intruder on our perception of cinema. In the same way, today's process of transition allows us to perceive what we are losing and what we are gaining—this perception will become impossible the moment we fully embrace, and feel fully at home in, the new technologies” (Žižek, 1997, 130).

Conclusion



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We definitely occupy a unique position—an historic time of transition from one technological system to another. But we are in *medias res* – in the middle of things

Print technology has not yet completely been displaced by the new technologies, and digital media is not quite at the point of completely taking over the show.

In response to this transformation, I have advocated Copernican revolution in opposition to Ptolemization.

At the same time, however, we should, as Žižek suggests following the example of Charlie Chaplin, take a conservative attitude to new media. Not conservative in terms of preserving the past—of ptolemizing print media and culture.

But conservative as it is described here—that is, not rushing headlong into a full embrace but learning to appreciate what is at stake, what could be lost in the process, and what new opportunities are to be gained.

The Open Access movement, therefore, should not be understood and situated as a violent overthrow of the previous regime. It is instead an “occupy movement” that squats in the restricted structures of scholarly publication in order to invent and innovate the future.



dgunkel@niu.edu
<http://zizekstudies.org>

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