CALL FOR PAPERS

Copyright and the Circulation of Knowledge: Industry Practices and Public Interests in Great Britain from the 18th Century to the Present

International Conference
7-8 October 2016
Maison de la Recherche, Sorbonne Nouvelle

Keynote speaker: Professor Ronan Deazley (Queen’s University Belfast)
‘Navigating the Copyright Cortex: Law and Cultural Memory’

New combinations of technology, culture, and business practice are transforming relationships among authors, publishers, and audiences in many fields of knowledge, including journalism, science research, and academia. Self-publishing, open-access, open source, creative commons, crowd sourcing and copy left: these are a few of the key words associated with recent changes in how knowledge is produced and circulated. While being celebrated for their potential to democratize knowledge, many of these changes have been accompanied by heated debates on such questions as the appropriate role of experts and ‘gatekeepers’; how to ensure that such projects are both trustworthy and economically viable; and how best to balance the interests of authors, publishers, and the general public. Copyright is often at the centre of these discussions.

Though the technologies involved have changed dramatically since the eighteenth century, similar questions were debated in the decades following the first British copyright statute (1710). Indeed, today’s discussions of piracy and copyright sometimes echo the eighteenth-century ‘battle of the booksellers’ that pitted advocates of a limited-term copyright (and the creation of a public domain) against proponents of authors’ natural (and perpetual) rights over their works. Then as now, many felt that the law was not always in step with cultural norms or trade practices. While some denounced all unauthorized republications as piracies, others experimented with new ways of disseminating knowledge through translations, abridgements, compilations (including the first magazines), and cheap reprints. During the nineteenth century, technological and cultural changes and the increasingly international market for books led to more debates over the legitimacy and public utility of various forms of reprinting, as well as new strategies for combatting piracy.

This conference seeks to bring together specialists of Great Britain from the eighteenth century to the present to explore the complex relationship between copyright and the circulation of knowledge. We welcome case studies that focus on a particular time period as well as papers that show how attitudes and practices have changed over time. Papers that bring past and present concerns into dialogue are especially welcome. Potential topics may include:

- the economics of publishing in a given period or sector, and its effects on the circulation of knowledge;
- the political, cultural, or philosophical underpinnings of public access to knowledge;
- the strategies developed by authors or publishers to protect their intellectual property;
- the perceived boundaries between legitimate and piratical publications;
- the consequences of specific laws or institutional arrangements for the circulation of knowledge in different domains;
- the use of historical examples in arguments about copyright and the public domain;
- the different forms of publication developed to republish or recirculate existing works, whether authorized or not.

Interested scholars should send an abstract of their proposed paper (200 words) and a short biography-bibliography (100 words) by 7 March 2016.
Proposals should be sent to copyright-conference@univ-paris3.fr

Organizers:
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