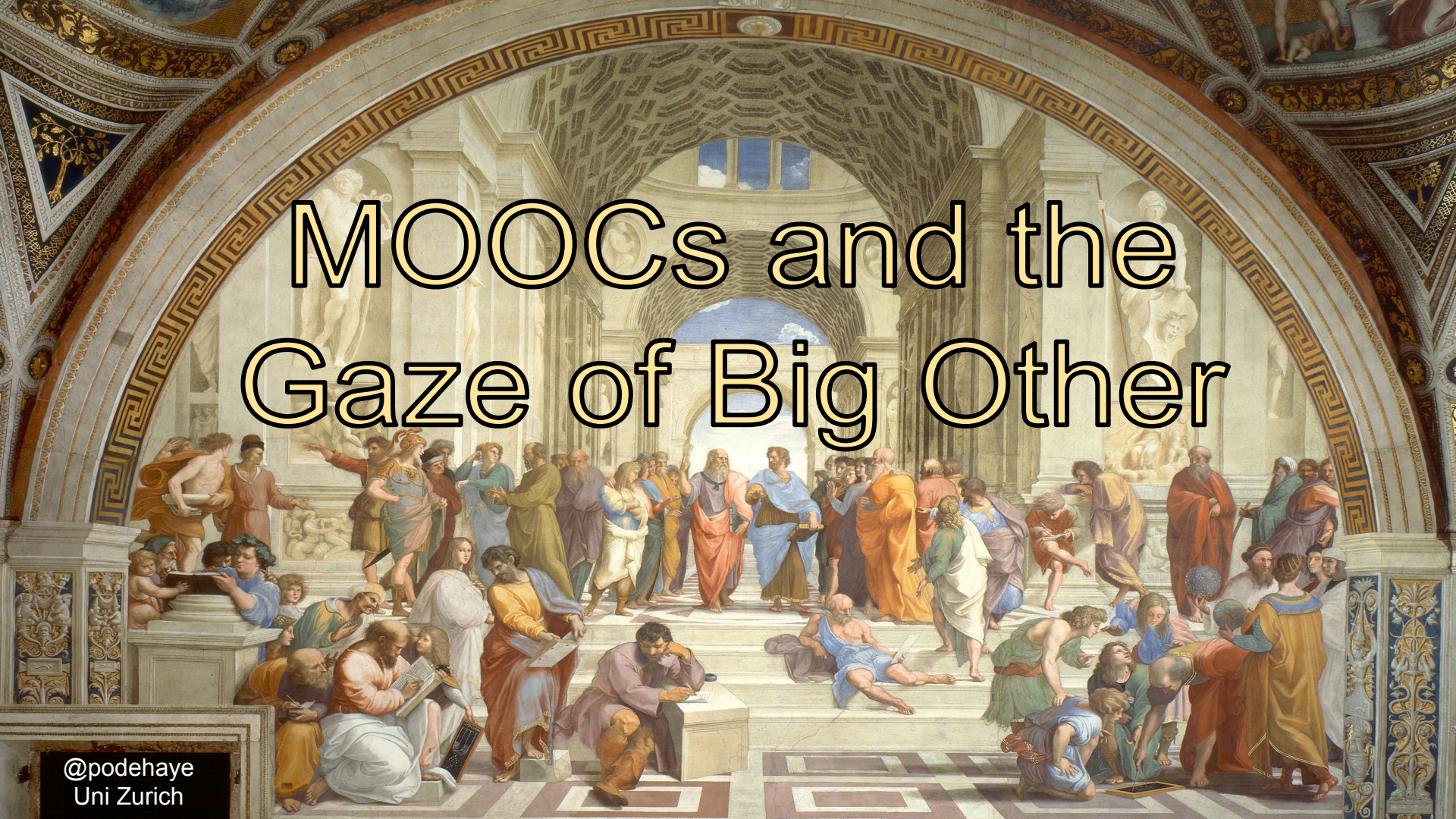
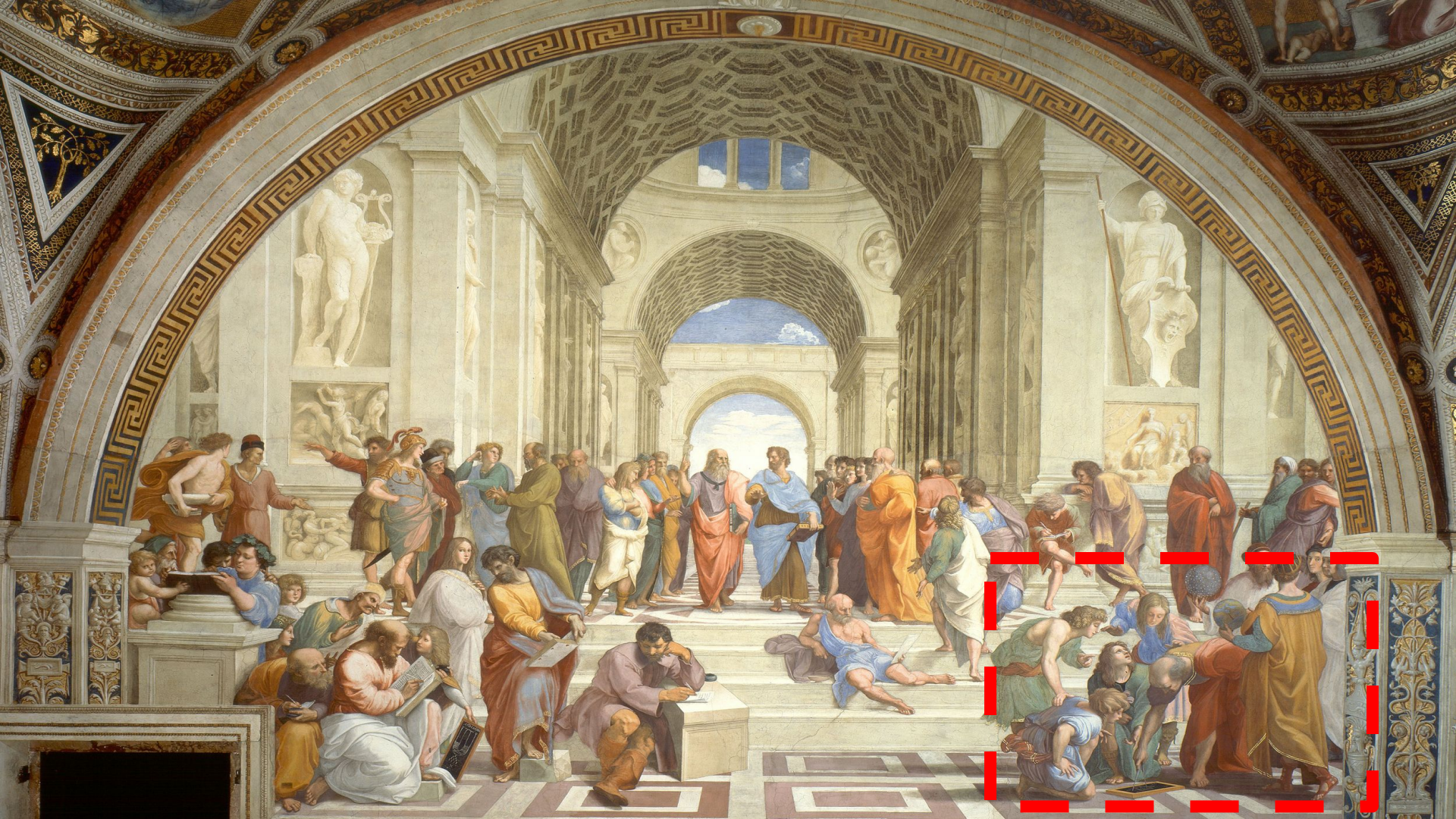

MOOCs and the
Gaze of Big Other
@podehaye
Uni Zurich



Goal

For:

- Autonomy of professors, but also universities
- Focus on MOOC **platforms**
- Deconstruct logic and technology enabling “Californian ideology”
- Try to be provocative in the point of view (not the opinion itself)

Not:

- address teaching
- xMOOC vs cMOOC

Why?

- Professors are not smarter than journalists when it comes to publishing
- Facebook Instant Articles now host newspaper articles

The content people are **platform naifs** and the
platform people are often **content morons**

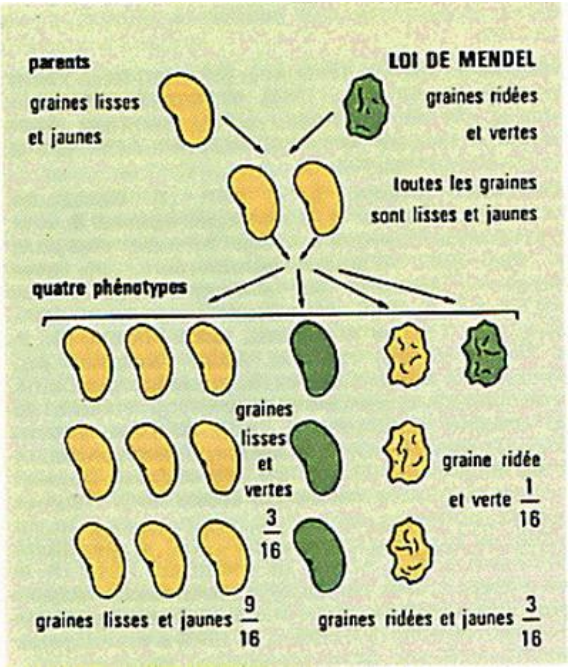
Twitter thanks you for your service, The Awl

Raising questions [about algorithm filters in Facebook Instant Articles]
is like “discussing the design of lifeboats on the Titanic’s aft deck”

Wolfgang Blau, head of digital strategy at the Guardian

Bean counting

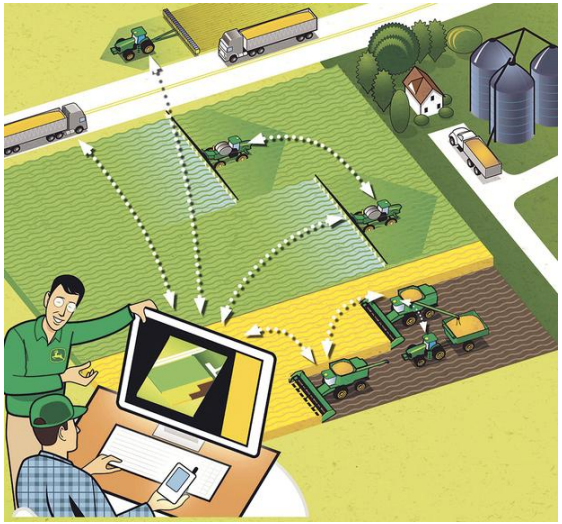
Bean counting: Mendel



Complement to Darwin’s natural selection

Bean counting: genetics

Bean counting: profit!



FG Insight

Monsanto

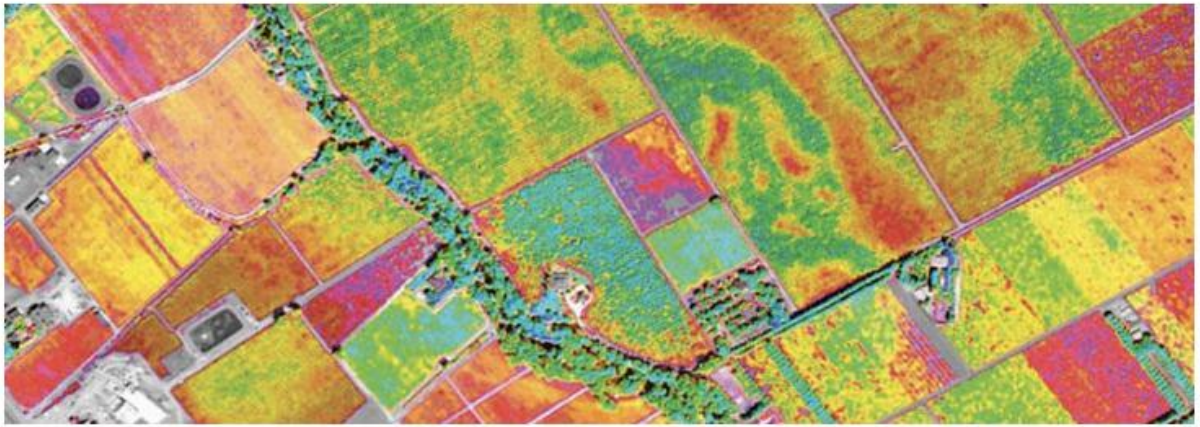
Tractors are “defective by design”

data, data, data

Bean counting: cooperative reaction

Farmers unite to share the new most valuable raw material in agriculture: Data

BY Fernando L. Mompó on 01 / 10 / 2015



Zuboff's Laws

Trends in the workplace:

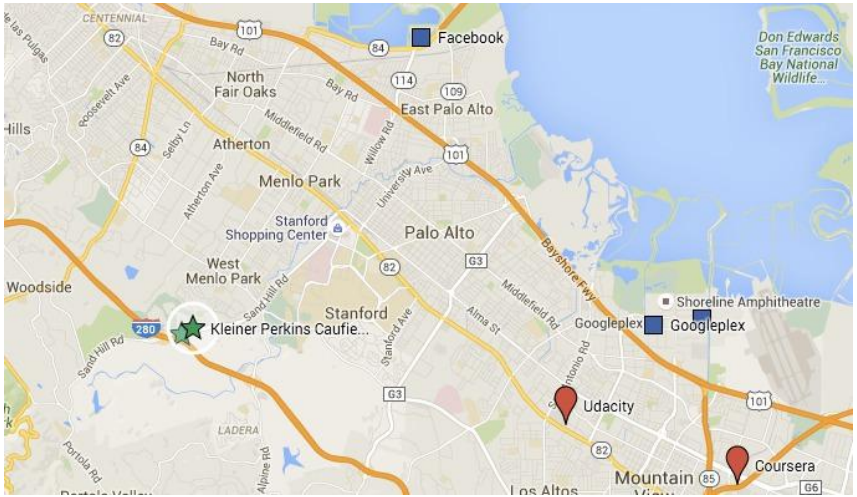
- Everything that can be **automated** will be **automated**
- Everything that can be **informated** will be **informated**
- Every digital application that can be used for **surveillance** and **control** will be used for **surveillance** and **control**

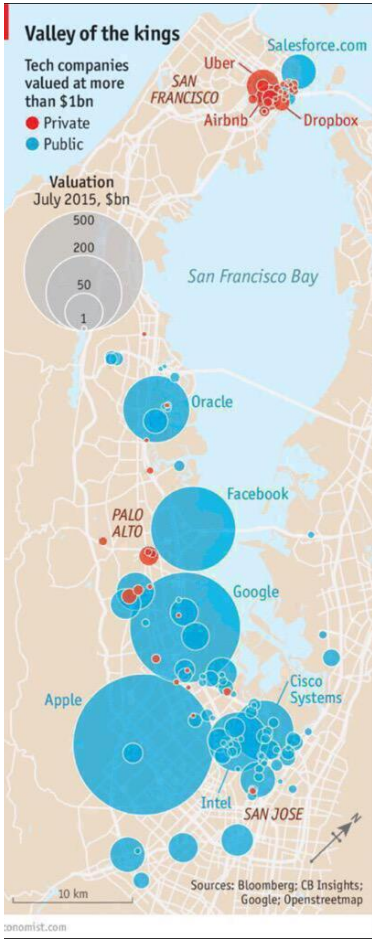
Informating: process that translates activities, events and objects into information

Logic of accumulation leads to *surveillance capitalism*: new form of capitalism that negates the "invisible hand of the market".

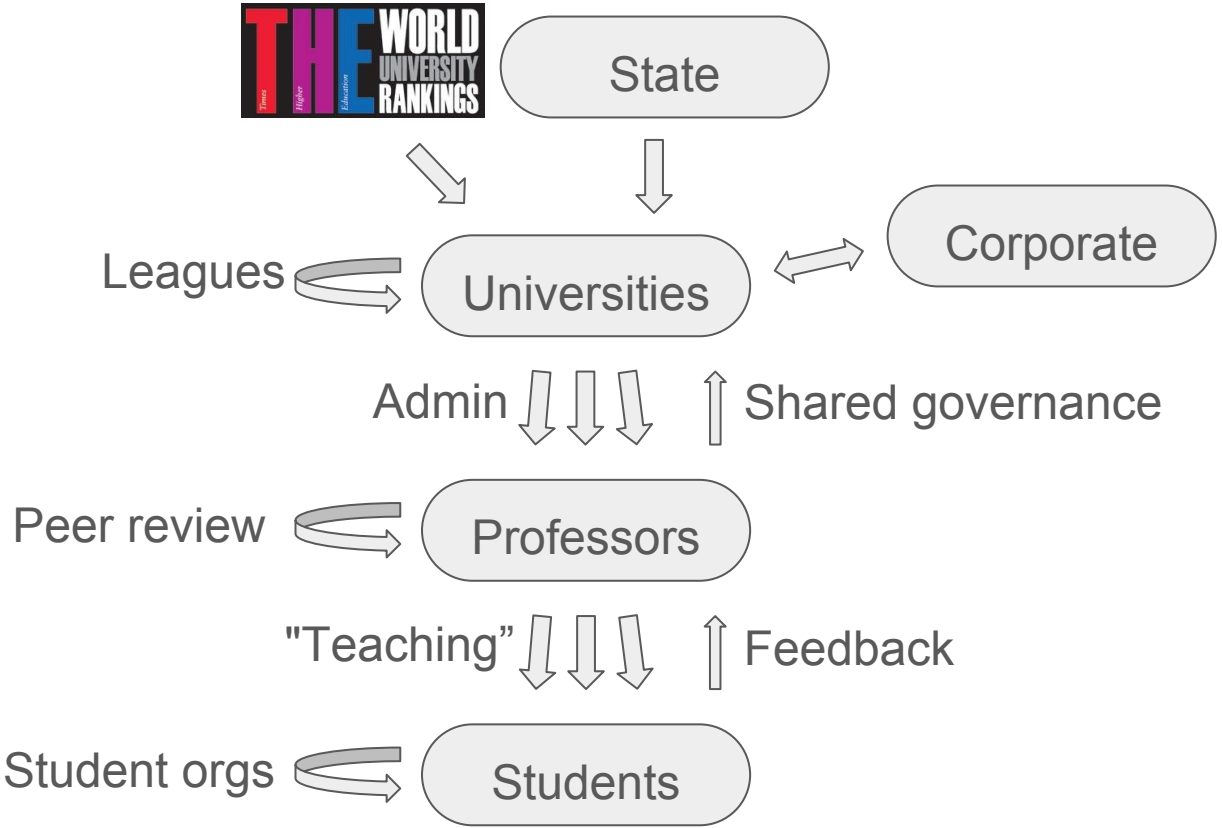
End result: *Big Other*

- distributed institutional regime of corporate actors
- each commodifying a different facet of digital life
- leads to dominance on each facet
- new expression of power renegotiating privacy/data rights

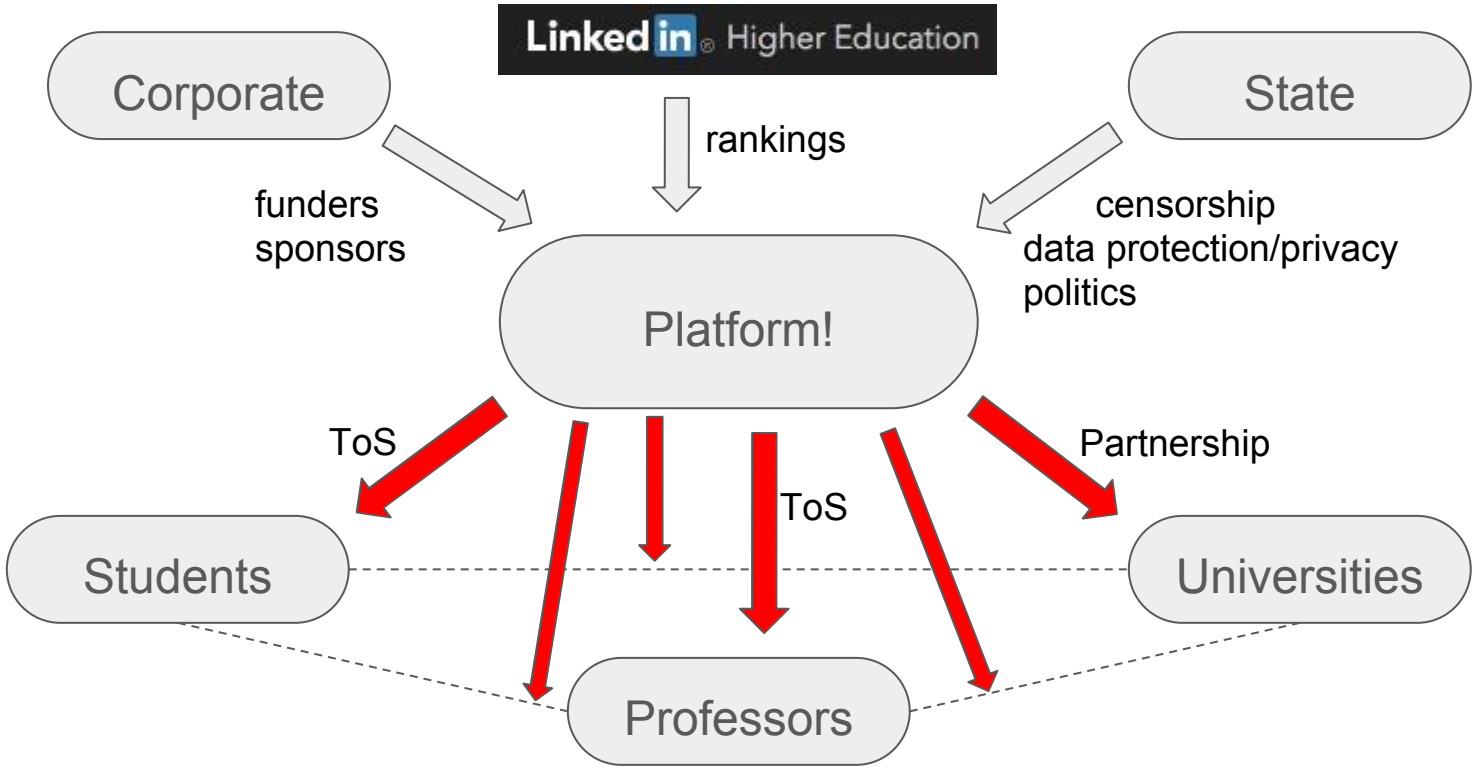




Network: actual



Network: virtual



Computer mediated interactions

- data collection and analysis
- personalisation
- constant monitoring enabling new forms of contract
- continuous experiments

Hal Varian

Interference

- Call for proposals/loans
- Optimise for user experience, time spent on site
- Standardization
- All marketing and data access goes through platform
- Segment peer actors and structure communications (Partner conferences, Help Center, Partner portal)
- Monopsony a-la Amazon: price, independence
- Search engine for courses, recommendations, rankings of instructors, courses, universities
- Pricing differentiation
- Continuous experiments (ethics!?)
- Keystroke dynamics, anonymous forums, automatic spam filter : trust?
- DRM for certificates (?)

Disruption: off the network

Max Schrems

Managed on his own to force:

- Facebook to detail privacy practices
- Irish Data Commissionner to investigate (*Schrems v Data Commissioner)*
- EU Commission decision to be annulled by EU Court of Justice
- EU/US debate on NSA/Facebook PRISM relations (more generally Big Other)
- 4000 US companies to scramble to comply with EU privacy regulations

Disruption: on the network

Ulysses Ali Mejias

Modes:

- paradox
- parasite
- paralogy (“creative and productive resistance to totalizing metanarratives”)

Tools:

obstruction, interference, disassembly, simplification, sabotage, misinformation, hiding, revealing, intensification

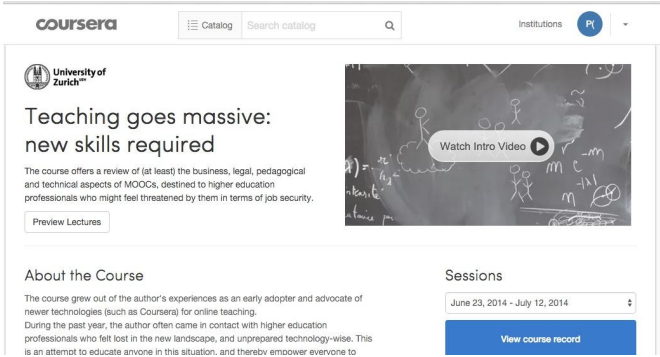
Disruption: mathematics

Glue logic(s) in self-referential way

- The barber who shaves all the people who don’t shave themselves
- The set containing all sets that don’t contain themselves (Russel)
- This number differs from the nth in my list in the nth digit (Cantor)
- This statement is impossible to prove (Godel)

Disruption: *Massive Teaching*

Coursera course that tells efficiently, for free, at scale, to Coursera students, why they could be skeptical and distrustful of Coursera's known logic



- originally "in the network";
- had to modify due to ethical concerns towards students;
- very restricted in possible modifications;
- was prevented to go through with the modifications;
- now "off the network", **as an individual**, copying Schrems

Bean counting: education

Khan Academy

Plant ideas/seeds, help students grow, gardener in keynote

Bean counting: education

Intentionally provocative: students as soil, ideas as beans

- Will they all reap rewards?
- Are we the farmers helping map out the yields for others to benefit?
- Do we control our tools?
- Do we give sustainable certificates to our students?
- Are our tractors defective by design?
- Are we contributing to a loss of diversity?

Break Through From Your Mold Zenos Frudaki