We Haven't Gone Paperless Yet: Why the Printing Press Can Help Us Understand Data and AI

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Argument:

We can learn lessons for AI and data by looking to the changes wrought by the printing press. The press made information much more widely accessible and created new political and social connections. Datafication is creating new governance possibilities for corporations by reshaping the distribution of power and shifting identities.

What is datafication?

- Storing and saving digital information
- Ubiquitous data collection
- Data collected actively and passively
  - Collected often without awareness
- Inputs to algorithms and AI

"Ethics" and "Economics"

- Ethics
  - Focus on transparency and fairness
  - Neglects implementation or standards
  - Influenced by "Big Tech" funding
- Economics
  - "Nonrivalrous" nature of data
    - Who owns it?
  - Scalability
    - Does not account for human interaction

Why are politics important?

- Politics is about power relationships
- Consider how state and economic actors respond to tech changes
- Regulations related to consumer consent and platforms

- Changes in economic power affect identity, what we call *constitutive* shifts, for individuals and groups.
- Moving from paper to digital, technology corporations gain in social and political influence
- New opportunities for engagement and knowledge but algorithmic influence can drive us into narrower communities

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