



HT '22
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From Users to (Sense)Makers

On the Pivotal Role of Stigmergic Social Annotation in the Quest for Collective Sensemaking

Ronen Tamari



DAOstack

Lauren Hebert
William Fischer

veeo

Daniel A Friedman



Active
Inference Lab

UC DAVIS
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Dafna Shahaf



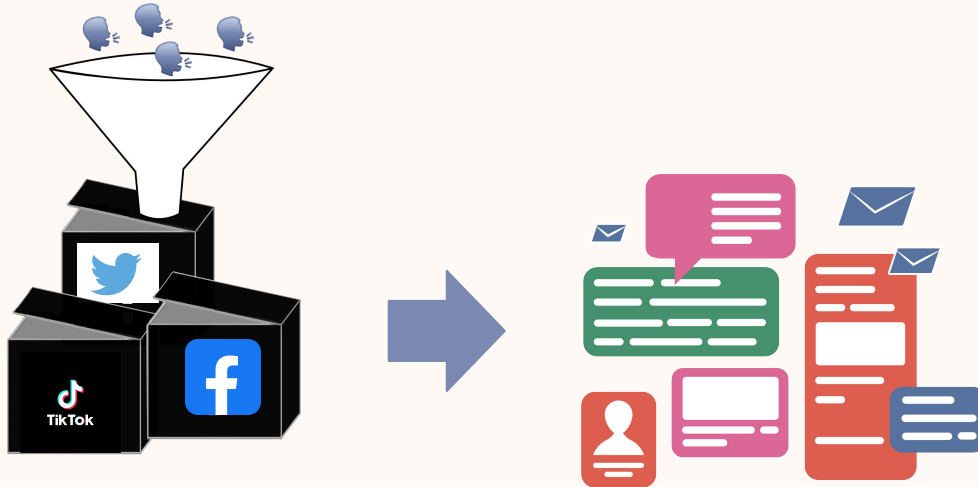
האוניברסיטה העברית בירושלים
THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM



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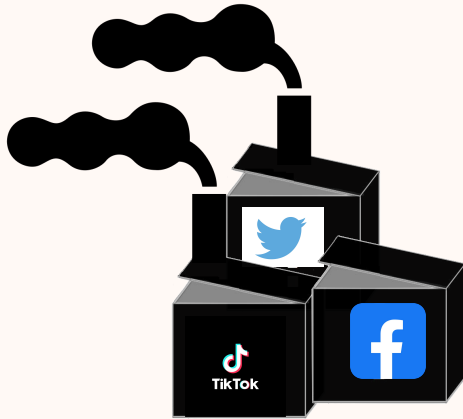
Global crisis: broken collective sensemaking

- We get most of our information online, but
- Online environments are a hugely challenging mix of **information overload** + **centralized, opaque platforms**



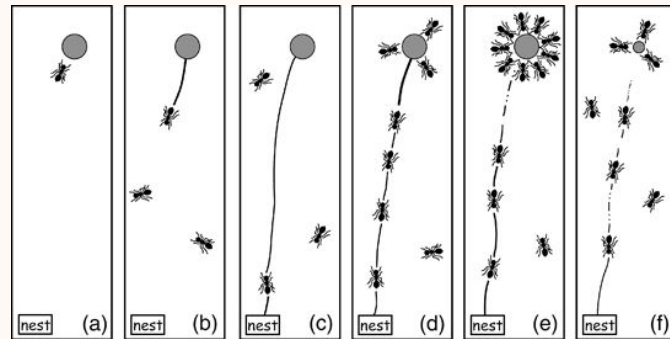
Polluted platform-centric information ecologies

- Platforms involved in a host of **deeply problematic social phenomena**: polarization, misinformation, epistemic distraction...
- But platforms' **network data and algorithms are hidden away** from public/scientific/ethical oversight



Stigmergy: key to healthier information ecologies

- Phenomena of **indirect coordination mediated by environment modifications**
- Agents make modifications which other agents react to (e.g. ants making pheromone trails)
- Stigmergy **underlies all large scale coordination**, is how we quite literally *make* collective sense (by making env. modifications)



DAVID MORGAN, E. (2009), Trail pheromones of ants.
Physiological Entomology, 34: 1-17

Stigmergic markers on the Web

Digital traces of human attention:



Reactions



Hyperlinks



Tags



Click-through data



Explicit markers

Implicit markers

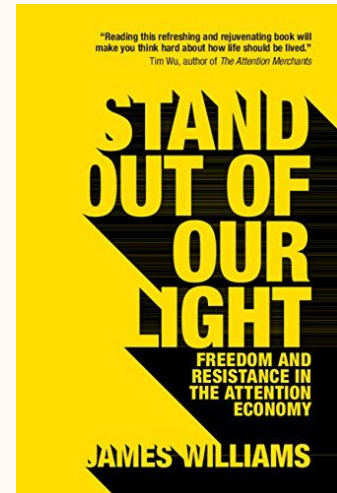
High information content, cheap to create & interpret by humans & machines!

Stigmergic markers could be harnessed for healthier collective sensemaking, but centralized platforms guard them carefully as “attention economy gold”



Quest for Collective Sensemaking

“If we’re at all serious about promoting freedom and autonomy in the digital age [...] what that would entail is starting to assert and defend our freedom of attention”



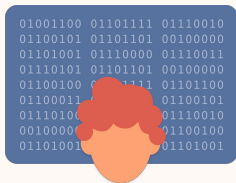
* From [RSA Shorts video book summary](#)

Our proposal: Open Source Attention

Open Source Software /
decentralization movements

freeing content creation
& sharing

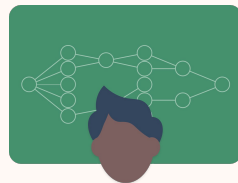
Hero: hacker



Open Source Attention movement

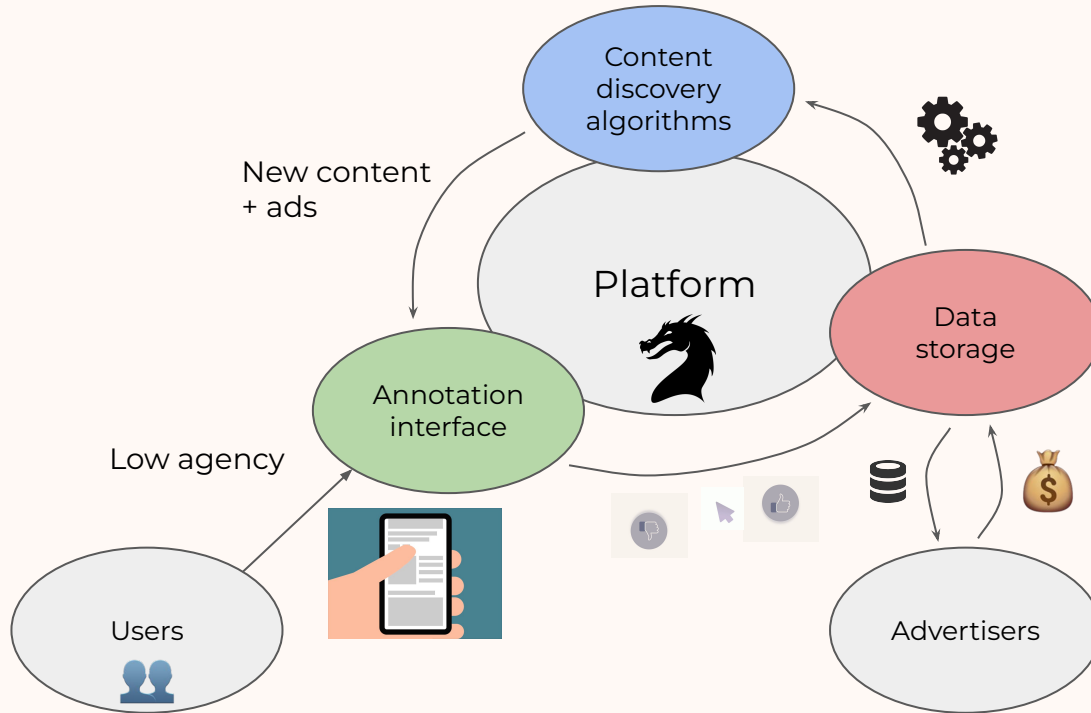
freeing **stigmergic marker**
creation & sharing (**reactions** to
content)

Hero: (sense)maker

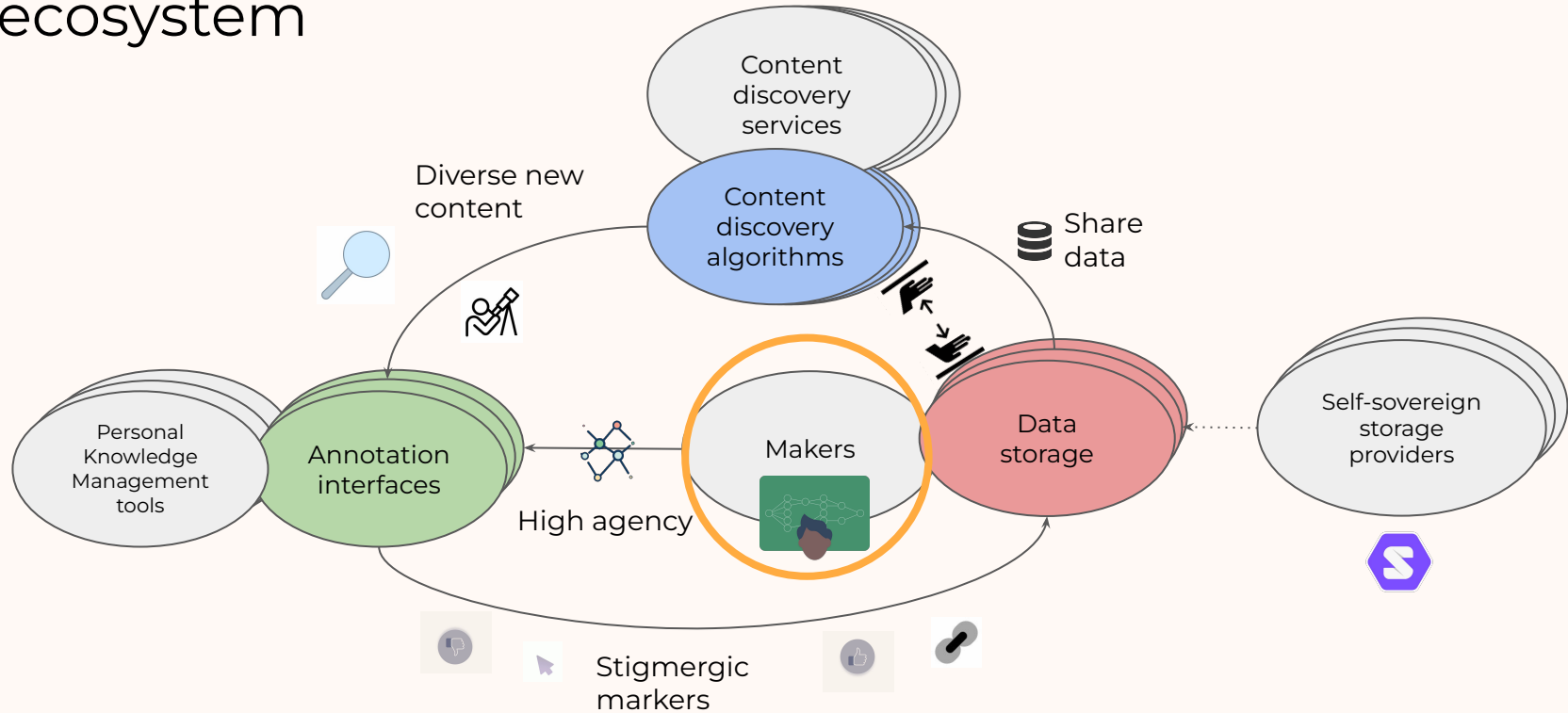


High-agency curators who annotate in
public, are mindful of their digital
attention

Current: platform-centric ecosystem



Open Source Attention: a decentralized maker-centric ecosystem



Next steps

Many open questions remaining (social incentives, tech stack, malicious use,...)

Call to action to the pressing challenge of collectively learning to build tech/culture for governing our attention

Check out poster/paper for more and connect with us @
[https://twitter.com/CSenseMakers!](https://twitter.com/CSenseMakers)