

# aaron's law

## A Tribute to Aaron Swartz

### About Aaron



Aaron Swartz, 2009 (Photo: Wikimedia Commons | Sage Ross)

Our ongoing project "aaron's law" is dedicated to Aaron Swartz, the American computer programmer, writer, political organizer and Internet activist for open and free access to knowledge (\* 8 November 1986 in Chicago, † 11 January 2013 in New York City).  
[www.netart.cc/aarons-law](http://www.netart.cc/aarons-law)



**Be curious. Read widely.  
Try new things. I think  
a lot of what people call  
intelligence boils down  
to curiosity.** – Aaron Swartz

Aaron Swartz was a brilliant mind, a relentless questioner, and a courageous activist who transformed his thoughts into action.

When Aaron and the Internet met, both were very young, and the technological implementation and development of the World Wide Web was just around the corner.

From the very beginning, he was involved in cutting-edge technical developments. As part of forward-looking teams or as an initiator of pioneering projects that explored the web.

Aaron's life was one of transformation, accompanied and shaped by influential thinkers such as Lawrence Lessig (Creative Commons), Tim Berners-Lee (W3C) or Carl Malamud (Public.Resource.Org). All of them were pioneers – eager to protect, develop and design this new and seemingly endless resource to share knowledge; and eager to fight for Open Access to Knowledge.

For Aaron, it was impossible to develop technological innovations without thinking about the socio-political consequences. Rather, his technical innovations and projects were driven by socio-political issues. He rebelled against injustice both in the real and the virtual world, especially against unjust laws and regulations in connection with the Public Domain. His credo was not to take anything for granted.

The title of our project series "aaron's law" refers to the name of a bill introduced in the United States Congress in 2013 after Aaron's death. Although this bill did not pass Congress, it was named for the lasting influence of Aaron Swartz, who was accused of violating the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA). The bill proposed correcting major errors in the CFAA, making the penalties (both prison terms and fines) for downloading copyrighted material less draconian, and giving more consideration to the value of the stolen material.

Aaron Swartz lived and died for his beliefs. He knew that the authorities wanted to make an example of him. Despite being terrified, he refused to betray his convictions by a plea deal.



### Aaron's Work & Legacy

- Aaron Swartz helped build the "plumbing" for Hyper-text and was part of the committee that drafted **RSS**.
- He was appointed co-founder of **Reddit** after the merger with his company Infogami.
- As the technical developer of the **Creative Commons** team, Aaron worked on the implementation of these free licenses ("some rights reserved") around the turn of the millennium.

**"Aaron's role was the computer part. Like how you architect the licenses so it would be simple or understandable or expressed in a way that machines could process it."**

– Lawrence Lessig, Founder of Creative Commons

With the project series "aaron's law" we celebrate his spirit and dedication, focus on his achievements, and share questions and knowledge with our artistic-technical partners and audiences. In doing so, we also keep an eye on the relevance for the present:

- **What can we learn from Aaron Swartz?**
- **What problems do we have to solve today?**
- **Are we really asking the right questions?**

If you would like to join in, please contact us: [renate.kreil@univie.ac.at](mailto:renate.kreil@univie.ac.at)