I don’t believe in copyright. I argue that we need to get rid of copyright, or at least dramatically reform it. The public domain has been stolen from us, and I want it back. Everyone reading this post has grown up in a creative world defined by capitalism, in which adapting and remixing works—a fundamental part of the creative process—is illegal. The commons is dead, and we suffer for it. But, this is all we’ve ever known. It can be difficult to imagine a world without copyright.

When I present my arguments on the subject, the most frequent argument I hear in response is something like the following: “artists have to eat, too?.” The answer to this argument is so mind-bogglingly obvious that, in the absence of understanding, it starkly illuminates just how successful capitalism has been in corrupting a broad human understanding of empathy. So, I will spell the answer out: why do we have a system which will, for any reason, deny someone access to food? How unbelievably cruel is a system which will let someone starve because they cannot be productive within the terms of capitalism?

My argument is built on the more fundamental understanding that the access to fundamental human rights such as food, shelter, security, and healthcare are not contingent on their ability to be productive under the terms of capitalism. And I emphasize the “terms of capitalism” here deliberately: how much creativity is stifled because it cannot be expressed profitably? The system is not just cruel, but it also limits the potential of human expression, which is literally the only thing that creative endeavours are concerned with.

The fact that the “starving artist?” is such a common trope suggests to us that artists aren’t putting food on the table under the copyright regime, either. Like in many industries under capitalism, artists are often not the owners of the products of their labor. Copyright protects the rights holder, not the author. The obscene copyright rules in the United States, for example, are not doing much benefit for the artist when the term ends 70 years after their death. Modern copyright law was bought, paid for, and written by corporate copyright owners, not artists. What use is the public domain to anyone when something published today cannot be legally remixed by even our great-great-grandchildren?