THE
Boothe Prize Essays
2011

School of Humanities & Sciences
Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education
Introduction to the Humanities Program
Program in Writing and Rhetoric
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Joshua Denali Benner
Allie Conway
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Thanks to the generosity of the late D. Power Boothe Jr., his wife Catie, and their son Barry, the Boothe Prizes recognize and reward outstanding expository, argumentative, and research-based writing of first-year students in the Program in Writing and Rhetoric (PWR) and the Introduction to the Humanities Program (IHUM). Each quarter, instructors nominate superior student work from courses in both programs to Boothe Prize committee judges. Then we collect and publish the winning papers. At a celebratory ceremony each spring, we award the Boothe Prizes and honor these talented student writers and their instructors.

This collection of essays from spring and autumn 2010 and winter 2011 represents the broad range of critical engagement achieved by Stanford’s first-year writers. They reveal the diverse research opportunities available to Stanford’s first-year students and how these students have negotiated their writing assignments. As you will see, these papers demonstrate clear analytic power and sophisticated rhetorical skills. The quality of work that these students have produced over the course of quarter, while managing the demands of their other courses, is remarkable. We take particular pleasure, then, in honoring these superior young scholars.

Our special thanks go to the Boothe family for their support and encouragement of Stanford’s first-year PWR and IHUM students in offering the Boothe Prizes and making possible the publication of these essays. We also thank the Boothe Prize Selection Committees for PWR and IHUM and the Project Committee, who have planned, edited, and produced The Boothe Prize Essays 2011. Most of all, our appreciation goes out to all the talented first-year writers whose essays have been nominated for the Boothe Prize and, especially, to the students whose exemplary work we include in this volume.

—HARRY J. ELAM, JR.
Freeman-Thornton Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education
ESSAYS FROM THE

PROGRAM IN

WRITING AND RHETORIC

Stanford University

Boothe Prize Winners &
Honorable Mentions
INTRODUCTION

First-year writing, one of Stanford’s oldest traditions, has been taught since the founding of the University. Current courses in the Program in Writing and Rhetoric (PWR) provide a setting in which students new to the University can focus their intellectual energies intently on the art and craft of writing. PWR’s small seminar/workshop classes offer students the opportunity to develop their writing abilities in analysis and research-based argument with the careful and consistent guidance of an experienced writing instructor.

The PWR requirement at Stanford currently consists of two courses. While the second-level PWR 2 course emphasizes oral and multimedia presentations of research, PWR 1, the first-year course in which students write the essays nominated for the Boothe Prize, centers on various forms of analysis and substantial research-based projects. The essays selected as the Winners and Honorable Mentions for the Boothe Prize represent the best of students’ work in these areas; it is our pleasure to share them with the larger Stanford community.

The PWR curriculum aims to lead students toward strong performance in all elements of writing, including crafting a persona that will effectively appeal to a particular audience, developing a compelling argumentative thesis drawing on primary and secondary sources, putting forward cogent proofs with persuasive evidence and reasoning, and writing with power and grace. Each of these essays demonstrates the ways in which PWR courses guide Stanford’s first-year students in presenting their ideas with the intellectual rigor and stylistic force expected of University students.

As Directors of the Program, we have the privilege of reading all of the essays nominated for the Boothe Prize each year. We have been impressed over and over again by how well these newest members of the University community have met the challenges of first-year writing. We value the intellectual curiosity, freshness of thought and expression, and engagement with the ideas of others represented in the essays published here, and we offer our heartiest congratulations to these writers as well as to their instructors.

—Nicholas Jenkins
Faculty Director, Program in Writing and Rhetoric

—Marvin Diogenes
Co-Director, Stanford Introductory Studies
In her study of direct-to-consumer advertising of antidepressants, Clarice Nguyen discovers a dark side to increased patient control over health care.

Focusing on the visual logic of two well-known advertising campaigns (for the antidepressants Prozac and Zoloft), Clarice discovered that pharmaceutical marketing strategies piggybacked on the recent movement to empower patients.

The sudden emergence and massive expansion of direct-to-consumer advertising of pharmaceuticals in the 1990s is well known, as is the concurrent arrival of a wide array of antidepressants, most notably, Prozac. Clarice’s analysis looks at these trends, discovering that the impact of antidepressant marketing is partly due to rhetorical power, and in particular, visual logic.

Advertisements for Prozac and Zoloft wrote a paradoxical script for the consumer, in which the person suffering from depression can “take control” of the illness by purchasing the advertised drug. This message contributes to positive social changes such as de-stigmatization of mental illness and increased patient agency. To the alarm of patient advocates, though, these changes are subordinated to the drug manufacturer’s economic goal, that of selling more medication.

Clarice’s essay demonstrates the power of careful rhetorical analysis when supported by thorough research. Her work shows the immense complexity of contemporary rhetorical situations: at the nexus of government deregulation, cutting-edge pharmaceutical research, and mass-mediated visual rhetoric, a simple story of patient empowerment changed both the pharmaceutical market and the landscape of mental illness.

—Jonathan Hunt
A black and white egg-shaped object with sad and forlorn eyes sits defeated beneath a foreboding raincloud. But eventually, with the help of Zoloft, this dejected blob regains its infectious enthusiasm and bounces across the television screen with its bluebird friend. Although unassuming and innocuous, this egg-shaped object, often deemed the Zoloft “blob,” “dot,” “bubble,” or “spot,” has symbolized the widely popular campaign for the antidepressant manufactured by pharmaceutical giant Pfizer. According to New York Times writer Kate Aurthur, “It [the Zoloft blob] makes the struggle for stability downright cute.” These seemingly harmless, ordinary, and even “cute” icons and images have surfaced in the advertising of prescription antidepressants in the United States during the past two decades, bringing a new face to the subject of depression and antidepressant medication. In this paper, I will explore the emergence of two antidepressants—Prozac and Zoloft—in the direct-to-consumer advertising scene and the reasons behind their effectiveness in constructing an altered reality for consumers.

I. Parallel Paths: Direct-to-Consumer Advertising and Antidepressants

The Zoloft ad campaign falls under the umbrella of direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising, a type of pharmaceutical marketing that attempts to sell, educate, and persuade the consumer directly through mediums such as print ads in magazines and television commercials. While DTC advertising is the form of marketing most familiar to the average American consumer, this type of advertising
actually accounts for a small portion of funds spent on pharmaceutical marketing (Abrams 157-8). Before the 1980s, most of the pharmaceutical promotional activity targeted physicians; this practice of “drug detailing” to doctors still continues to constitute the majority of marketing activity today (Abrams 154). Nevertheless, DTC advertising remains a significant issue since it seeks out an audience of lay consumers without substantial knowledge about the chemical and biological effects of the advertised drug. As such, DTC advertising then becomes a powerful tool for “educating” and influencing a population of non-experts.

The regulation of DTC advertising falls under the supervision of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) whose lax and vague guidelines regarding DTC advertising led to its increased use during the 1980s (Abrams 161; Arney and Rafalovich 50). Furthermore, the 1980s coincided with an era in which consumers gradually assumed greater roles in determining their healthcare needs, and it seems as though DTC advertising not only supported this trend of greater consumer knowledge and autonomy, but also augmented it (Conrad and Leiter 17). Perhaps even more importantly, it was during the 1980s that the antidepressant Prozac first became available in the United States; Prozac marked the “breakthrough” of the class of antidepressants called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, or SSRIs (Benkert, Szegedi, and Mueller 530). The appearance of Prozac on the market intersected with the growth of DTC advertising as well as the movement toward greater consumer freedom, which, in retrospect, seemed to have forecasted Prozac’s eventual popularity and incorporation into the DTC advertising scene. The trend of consumer “determinism” would continue into the next decade along with the use of DTC advertising and antidepressants (Stepnisky 29; Rosenthal and Donohue 171).

Somewhat surprisingly, DTC advertising through print ads in magazines and television commercials only became mainstream practice during the late 1990s. In fact, the proliferation of DTC ads came after the FDA lifted the requirement for the inclusion of the Brief Summary in 1997 and allowed for an “adequate provision” (Lurie 444). The Brief Summary had mandated the inclusion of side effects in advertisements, but the adequate provision allowed pharmaceuticals to refer consumers to a toll-free number, website, or print advertisement (Abrams 157). As a result of loosening restrictions, the amount spent by pharmaceuticals after 1997 soared (Conrad and Leiter 18). Incidentally, this was the same year that Eli Lilly launched its first DTC ad campaign for Prozac using print advertisements in magazines and spending up to $20 million on the promotional project (Valenti; Elliot). Again, the timing seems to suggest that, since the 1980s, the growth of DTC advertising developed in
tandem with the increasing prevalence of antidepressants.

Of course, the widespread DTC advertising campaigns could not be possible without the outpouring of copious funds. Indeed, amounts spent on DTC advertising totaled $965 million in 1997, and eventually reached $2.8 billion in 2001 (Arney and Rafałovich 50). It was also during this time that the Zoloft blob campaigns began airing on television in May 2001, signifying the rise of DTC advertising for another SSRI (Arthur). As evidenced by the ever-increasing amount of funds directed toward DTC advertising, it is likely that modern advertising tactics for prescription drugs now include DTC advertising. Indeed, Kravitz et. al. state that “DTC advertisements have become a stable...feature of the media landscape” (1995). Taking into account the parallel rise of antidepressants—namely the SSRIs Prozac and Zoloft that will be the focus of this paper—it would seem that DTC advertisements of these particular drugs would also become a natural and significant part of the advertising “landscape.” The apparent correlation between the growth of DTC advertising as a whole and the emergence of SSRIs sets the backdrop for this examination of antidepressant advertising for Prozac and Zoloft.

II. Discussing Depression Shouldn’t Be So Depressing

Generally, marketing any type of prescription drug emphasizes an appeal to the pathos of the audience, to its “beliefs and values,” rather than an appeal to rationale or logos (Faigley 10). In fact, “emotional appeals were far more prevalent than rational appeals in the promotional portion of DTC ads with just more than one-third of prescription drug ads containing a rational appeal in either the visual or the headline and nearly 89 percent including an emotional appeal in these positions” (Royne and Myers 68). Evidently, the audience becomes the focus of the advertisement, the entity around which pharmaceutical persuasion is shaped and tailored to achieve maximum effectiveness. The advertising of SSRIs, which includes Pfizer’s Zoloft and Eli Lilly’s Prozac, illustrates how successful advertisers were in making a sensitive and once stigmatized medical condition something that could be talked about in public (Grow, Park, and Han 166).

With the importance of the audience in mind, Pfizer and Eli Lilly sell their respective antidepressant drugs by utilizing visual techniques in DTC advertising that 1) make the drug and the condition (depression) appear more personable and comfortable to the consumer 2) simplify the medical condition itself and 3) ultimately lead the consumer to connect the particular drug to recovery and personal well-being through his own observations. When marketing antidepressants, pharmaceutical companies support pathos-driven
advertisements chiefly shaped around generating a comfortable tone to make the consumer feel more emotionally at ease when discussing depression (Valenti). Thus, the advertisement reduces the anxiety or fear associated with the medical condition while promoting a seemingly straightforward and uncomplicated solution to the problem at hand. In doing so, the advertisements subtly create a new reality surrounding both depression and the antidepressant in which the consumer holds jurisdiction over his medical needs with regard to depression (the original concept first suggested by Grow, Park, and Han to be discussed in further detail in Sections III and IV). They ultimately alter the consumer’s conception of the product and the larger medical condition behind the drug.

More often than not, pharmaceuticals use visual imagery which serves to effect the aforementioned changes in the consumer’s conception of SSRIs. In this paper, I will primarily center on the visual components of the following advertisements for Prozac and Zoloft. Initially, to create an atmosphere in which depression sheds its stigma and fear, both pharmaceutical companies Eli Lilly and Pfizer employed images that appear harmless and even mundane. For example, in 1997, Eli Lilly’s first DTC print ad campaign used a series of ads (see Figure 1) which displayed simple pictures on the left and right pages (like the rain cloud and the sun) that have opposing, conventional connotations (Elliott). The use of simple lines and commonplace objects to represent highly serious matters seemed to deemphasize the gravity of depression while simultaneously and effectively capturing the attention of the audience. In fact, Michael Valenti, art director of the Prozac campaign at the Chicago-based advertising firm Leo Burnett during the early 1990s, recalled:

When we did our research into depression we heard many people describing the experience with similar metaphors. The simple images were an expression of what we heard, knowing they would resonate and feel true to users. The opposite side, the “happy” side was the product benefit. Fonts, colors, art style and the simple two page layout were all chosen with the obvious attempt to create a good/bad, happy/sad, light/dark mood to connect with the viewer.

Clearly, the advertisement for Prozac was shaped around the needs and emotions of the audience and all visual aspects of the advertisement were taken into consideration. Indeed, these visual components were chosen with “the intention…to help lessen some of the bad PR Prozac had gotten in the past…” (Valenti). In this manner, a “scary” prescription drug for a “scary” medical condition becomes as naturally discussed as a pair of jeans or a new floor lamp. In fact, Eli Lilly placed its 1997 print ad campaign for Prozac in popular and accessi-
ble magazines such as *Good Housekeeping, Cosmopolitan, Marie Claire,* and *Sports Illustrated* (Elliott). The placement of ads for prescription medication in magazines such as these suggests that the ads attempted to embed the language of depression and antidepressants into the consumer culture of America. It appears as though the ads create a new reality around the antidepressant—what was once regarded as a taboo subject gradually transformed into a topic of more comfortable conversation.

![Figure 1. Print Advertisement for Prozac](source: Valenti Advertising (2010))

![Figure 2. Still Screen of Television Commercial for Zoloft](source: Patrick Smith)

Pfizer also followed the same guiding principles in its 2001 ad campaigns with the introduction of the Zoloft “blob” (see Figure 2). The Zoloft blob, like the cloud and sun, consisted of simple lines, making it appear cartoon-like and innocuous to the average consumer (Aurthur). Indeed, the Zoloft blob makes depression seem
more controllable and the consumer more relaxed with the idea of treating depression with an SSRI since “creating referential signs of humanness, while not showing a human, serves to reduce the stigma of depression” (Grow, Park, and Han 173). As in the case of Prozac, the Zoloft ad used simple icons to create a less charged atmosphere in order to lay the foundation for an altered reality of greater consumer control and to make its reception by the audience more acceptable and less frightening.

Meanwhile, Grow, Park, and Han continue: “With stigma reduced, the you becomes an individual abstraction, and the symptoms of depression become at once less threatening, more manageable, and personal. You, now signified as detached from the depression, codifies the medical model as the manageable solution to ‘your’ problem” (173-4). Interestingly, and somewhat paradoxically, it seems that using non-human images ultimately serves to return the issue of depression back to the human, the consumer. The authors convey the notion that a non-human character removes the personal connection to depression which infuses a sense of confidence and power in the consumer by making the situation appear less frightening. Then, building on that basis of self-empowerment, the DTC ad calls for the consumer to take action, which only furthers the sense of control over the medical situation.

Indeed, “the trick of all good advertising is to place the reader of the advertisement within a story that has an outcome already written by the advertiser, while at the same time constituting the reader as a free subject who is able to make his or her own choices, as a consumer” (Stepnisky 29). Thus, in utilizing certain visuals—Prozac’s and Zoloft’s simple lines and non-human icons—the pharmaceutical companies connect to the audience in a manner that effects comfort and ease. It appears that they subsequently write a “story” or build a world altering the consumer’s conception of the antidepressant by placing the drug in such a casual context. The simple icons appear to evoke a calming and comfortable image of the antidepressants that, in the end, serves a twofold purpose: first, preparing the consumer for the altered reality in which he has increased power over depression and second, taking a hand at actually constructing and shaping that reality.

III. Discussing Depression Shouldn’t Be So Complicated

While reducing the tensions associated with depression by using simple visual images, the DTC ads often simplify the medical condition itself, in effect reducing depression to a biochemical process easily fixed by the intake of a prescription drug. This, in turn, moves the consumer’s conception of depression beyond the category of “com-
fortable” and into that of “controllable.” For instance, in addition to employing the iconic sun and cloud imagery, Eli Lilly also applied the same concept to other seasons. During the winter, for example, a wilted tree represented depression on one side and then a fully decorated one symbolized recovery on the other (Grow, Park, and Han 172). Consequently, according to Grow, Park, and Han, “Lilly frames Prozac as the biochemical solution to a natural problem rooted in the consumer’s biological nature and simply triggered by seasonal experiences; thus constructed reality supercedes lived experiences” (174). Grow, Park, and Han imply that in their attempts to directly advertise to the consumer, pharmaceutical corporations actually build new realities around the medical condition; the ad implies that the biochemical cause-and-effect relationship between Prozac and recovery from depression is actually quite straightforward. Indeed, Valenti states that the Prozac ad was formed “by creating a simple, more appealing image to viewers and users.” The basis of the advertisement rested in the construction of an “image” with the intention of modifying the consumer’s conceptions regarding the drug and depression. It seems as if the DTC advertisement for Prozac allows the consumer to enter into a constructed world where talking about depression becomes easier and less formal and treating depression simply consists of popping a pill.

Similar attempts to attribute depression to a biological and chemical cause appear in Pfizer’s marketing of Zoloft. For example, in a Zoloft advertisement, the simple lines and black and white color scheme draw out a crude diagram of two nerves and chemical neurotransmitters (see Figure 2). In the same manner that the egg-shaped Zoloft character serves to reduce the stigma surrounding depression as a whole, the simple drawings of the nerves and neurotransmitters also seek to simplify the medical condition itself, making depression appear more manageable and less frightening to the consumer. “These simple, friendly, and approachable black and white illustrated advertisements frame and organize depression as an easily understood biochemical imbalance” (Grow, Park, and Han 176). In the context of modern medicine, it would logically follow that such a simple biochemical problem could be solved in an equally uncomplicated biochemical manner by using the advertised antidepressant.

Furthermore, because the diagram portrays depression as easily treatable, it continues to place more control into the hands of the consumer. Stepnisky notes:

In other words, the Zoloft advertisements provide linkages between otherwise inert biological matter and the human agent tasked with the use of antidepressants. In this manner, the Zoloft campaign makes the “inner life” of biology available to readers to understand both the putative mechanism
Stepnisky comments on the advertisement’s ability to empower the consumer by displaying depression as a condition that can be corrected by merely taking Zoloft. The simplification of this medical condition allows the consumer to feel in control of depression and able to take action to care for himself by purchasing the advertised drug. Merging together these altered realities of the actual antidepressant and depression, the DTC ads set the stage for a carefully ad-designed world in which the consumer believes he exercises the power to affect his medical future.

IV. Self-Synthesis

Already, one can observe that by appealing to the pathos and emotions of the consumer, most DTC advertisements for antidepressants follow a similar pattern. According to Arney and Rafalovich, they also utilize incomplete syllogisms, a strategy deriving from the Modus Ponens conditional logic:

If X then Y
X
Therefore, Y. (53)

In applying incomplete syllogisms to DTC ads for SSRIs, Arney and Rafalovich argue that pharmaceuticals often provide the first two statements within the verbal and textual content of the ad and leave the conclusion to be made by the consumer (54). Interestingly, the idea can also be modified and applied to Grow’s, Park’s, and Han’s visual and emotional analysis of antidepressant DTC ads. Rather than focusing on the textual content of the advertisements, Grow, Park, and Han consider the visual clues of the antidepressant DTC ads that generate similar and relevant statements made within the text of the advertisement; these visual statements urge the consumer to discuss the drug with his physician (Valenti).

However, Arney and Rafalovich argue that, in the end, the incomplete syllogism within the textual framework “severely decreases individuals’ responsibility and subsequently reduces the status of the actor [the consumer]” (58). Although they come to reasonable conclusions, I have postulated that the idea of the incomplete syllogism concerning the visual analysis forwarded by Grow, Park, and Han and the concepts suggested by Stepnisky may indicate the reverse: perhaps the visual statements follow the same fundamental concept behind the incomplete syllogism in that they leave the connection between the recovery from depression and consumer agency to be
formed by the consumer.

Using the specific Prozac and Zoloft advertisements mentioned earlier, one can see that by employing simple, harmless icons and imagery, both Eli Lilly and Pfizer 1) attempt to show that the consumer should not fear depression and 2) imply that depression itself is not as complicated as it may appear. Furthermore, the visuals in both the Prozac and Zoloft ads (the opposing images in the Prozac ad and the physical transformation of the Zoloft blob in the television commercial) illustrate the efficacy of the drug in eliminating depression in the consumer. Altogether, it then follows that the consumer makes the implied connection in his mind: because he is in control of the medical condition and the condition is treatable, then he possesses the ability to treat his condition by way of the advertised antidepressant.

Arney and Rafalovich propose that “the delivery of an incomplete syllogism seeks to shape the reader’s perception of her or his condition” just as the visual images in the Prozac and Zoloft ads construct a new reality (56). In considering the work presented by Grow, Park, and Han on the visual components of the ads for Prozac and Zoloft, perhaps one can suggest that not only do the ads effectively build this altered conception of depression and antidepressants, but in doing so, also instill a greater sense of control in the consumer by allowing him the autonomy to formulate his own conclusions. While the advertisements themselves intrinsically cause the consumer to feel empowered to make decisions by simplifying the situation and solution, they also leave a void to be filled by the consumer’s own inferences and assumptions; this furthers the notion that the consumer has control over the health-related situation.

V. New Realities, New Relationships

As seen in the DTC ads for Eli Lilly’s Prozac and Pfizer’s Zoloft, the ability of pharmaceutical companies to construct new realities through visual advertising can potentially shape the consumer’s actual beliefs and concerns. By the reducing the fear of discussing depression and increasing the level of ease surrounding the condition and antidepressant medication, the DTC advertisements carve a place for the prescription drugs in the modern American vernacular. As SSRIs gradually take on the character of consumer goods, it seems as if antidepressants are falling under the reign of the consumer.

As such, it appears as though a shift has taken place in the patient-physician relationship. In a study published in 2005, Kravitz et. al. tested the effects of patient requests for antidepressants on physicians and found that their “results underscore the idea that patients have substantial influence on physicians and can be active agents in
the production of quality” (1999). Because DTC advertising exposes the consumer to a drug and often encourages the consumer to inquire about it with his physician, the impetus for the use of a certain drug (in the case of this paper, an SSRI) comes from a new source: the consumer himself. This finding serves as an illustration of the increasing influence of the consumer in the medical context, an influence which possibly stems from the altered realities created by DTC advertisements. Furthermore, Donohue and Berndt conclude that while DTC advertising of antidepressants does not necessarily have a large impact on drug choice, it can potentially affect the market as a whole, perhaps increasing the chances of whether a patient receives an antidepressant medication or not (125). Their research indicates that DTC advertising for antidepressants does potentially affect the larger market, demonstrating the efficacy of these advertisements and perhaps even holding testament to the effectiveness of visual cues discussed previously in the Prozac and Zoloft ads.

Maybe the true concern lies in the new realities that these advertisements create by utilizing visual techniques that have the ability to appeal to the consumer’s emotions, simplify biochemical processes, and cement medical terminology into the dialogue of the American consumer (as seen in the ads for Prozac and Zoloft). These new realities, in turn, can potentially affect the consumer’s conception of his role in evaluating his healthcare needs. Because this altered conception can also affect physicians and the larger market, it would seem natural that antidepressant advertising has taken its place in the larger debate on DTC advertising.

This DTC advertising controversy has emerged and grown over the need to address the adaptation of marketing techniques to a product that has significant consequences for the consumer’s health and role in medical decision-making. Dr. Marcia Angell, a long-running opponent of DTC advertising states, “If prescription drugs were like ordinary consumer goods, all this might not matter very much. But drugs are different. People depend on them for their health and even their lives” (xix). While individuals and groups, consumer advocates and professional healthcare practitioners, like Angell, make valid statements and address logical concerns, one must not forget that DTC advertising, according to some, can possibly have positive effects as well by raising awareness of undertreated medical conditions, including depression (Abrams 167; Rosenthal and Donohue 171). The advertisements provide an opportunity for the consumer to become at least minimally exposed to an undertreated medical condition such as depression, but can also lead to misrepresentation of the drug if the consumer decides to absorb the information under the incorrect assumption that advertised prescription drugs are “safer” (Arney and Rafalovich 58; Lurie 446). It is the connection to
the larger DTC advertising debate that the effects of visual cues in antidepressant advertising possibly holds significance.

Indeed, perhaps the impacts of the visual techniques discussed in this paper have contributed to the overarching efficacy of DTC advertising for antidepressants, for better or worse. As examined previously in the examples of Prozac and Zoloft, simple icons and images evoke emotions in the audience that permit and construct altered realities and modified views of both the advertised antidepressant and depression itself. As a result of these visual cues, depression becomes medically simplified and its solution equally adjusted, planting the idea that the consumer holds the potential to bring about the solution through use of the advertised drug. Furthermore, the possibility that these altered realities could also arise from implied conclusions made by the consumer himself appears to forward and solidify the idea of consumer control of depression. Ultimately, there exists evidence that this might be the case since several studies have revealed that the consumer or patient possesses the ability to greatly affect the market for antidepressant drugs by influencing the physicians who prescribe those medications. Interestingly, perhaps this notion of consumer control simply illustrates the trend of consumer “determinism” that began in the 1980s (Conrad and Leiter 17). Because of this potential impact that consumers have on physicians and the broader prescription drug market, DTC advertising for antidepressants (and in general) has earned its place in an on-going multilayered debate.

Of course, the visual effectiveness of antidepressant ads necessitates further research before definite conclusions can be formed about its connection to American consumer culture and the prescription drug market.

Essentially, the Zoloft blob may appear “child-like” and adorable as its simple form suggests; however, it is precisely this simplicity that offers subtle, altered realities to the viewer. These realities appear to induce a sense of consumer control of what seems to be a manageable situation: depression is a chemical imbalance, Zoloft can treat this imbalance, and I can ask my doctor about Zoloft. By the time the tagline emerges at the end of the commercial, “When you know more about what’s wrong, you can help make it right,” it is easy to believe that you—the consumer—truly can make it right.
Works Cited


In his argument against the very idea of “virtual property,” David Wu employs a rhetorical technique common to pragmatists. Reading the essay again, I was reminded of Wittgenstein’s deflationary rhetoric, epitomized perhaps most famously in his wonderful remark that “Philosophy arises when language goes on holiday.” Like the pragmatist in his impatience with the idleness of philosophical talk, Wu interrupts a meandering theoretical discussion about virtual property that has held us captive for too long, giving us a new perspective with words that allow us to get back to work. Attempting to settle the dispute over ownership that has arisen between the developers and users of virtual worlds, scholars have typically appealed to three different models of property, the Lockean, the Hegelian, and the utilitarian. As Wu patiently shows how each of these perspectives is flawed, the more general implication that the legal framework of property is itself fundamentally misleading prepares us for the central reorientation that Wu effects. The language of service and contract dislodges, for Wu, the inappropriate because ineffective talk of virtual property; and it does so not because it is theoretically more elegant but because it promises to work better in the practical matter of settling actual legal conflict. In the spirit of practical conviction, Wu has written an essay of great clarity.

—Mike Reid
Virtual Property or Virtual Service?

David Wu

Property in the Virtual Landscape

In the last decade we have seen the rapid rise and development of virtual worlds, epitomized by the hugely successful Second Life and World of Warcraft. Gamers of all ages flock to these virtual lands, some realistic, some fantastical, perhaps to immerse themselves in a whole new world, perhaps to explore the inner depths of their own identities, or perhaps a combination of both. As we project ourselves into our virtual avatars, we have started to bridge the gap between the real and the virtual. And to further complicate matters, the development of these expansive virtual worlds has also triggered the establishment of bustling, virtual economies; already, there is a bidirectional flow of real money and virtual commodities. Thus, as we move forward into the twenty-first century, we are entering an era where the division between the real and the virtual is all but apparent. This will require a dramatic reevaluation of our current and historic notions of personal property and private ownership.

Before we begin evaluating the growing significance of these virtual worlds, we must define what we mean when we speak of a virtual world. Political scientist and video game analyst Edward Castronova describes the synthetic world as a world “that [is] created completely by design and lives only within computers,” while the real world is “the world of earth, air, fire, water, and blood that we’ve inherited from our forebears” (7). The virtual world, then, is just a world built out of bits and bytes, a world that simulates reality; when viewed from the outside world, all we see is the string of ones and zeroes. The computer or another digital interpreter must give these bits meaning and significance; thus, the virtual world is
intangible in all normal senses of the word. We can naïvely divide the different types of virtual worlds into two major categories. First, there are the virtual worlds that simulate reality; these are essentially social worlds where players can interact with one another in a more or less realistic setting. One such example of this type of virtual world is *Second Life*. The other type of virtual world is the fantasy world, where players take on the roles of fictional characters, generally termed *avatars*, in a distant and fantastical world governed by a different set of rules. MMORPGs (massively multiplayer online role-playing games), such as *Blizzard Entertainment*’s best-selling *World of Warcraft*, generally belong to this category.

In recent years, the number of users of virtual worlds has grown exponentially. For instance, *Second Life* developed from a population of several hundred thousand in early 2006 to a booming population of over five million by mid-2007 (Castronova 6). Similarly, *World of Warcraft*, first released at the end of 2004, garnered an impressive subscriber base of 11.5 million by the end of 2008 (“World of Warcraft”). This rapid growth of virtual worlds leads Castronova to postulate the development of a so-called “exodus” to the virtual world. As more and more time elapses, the allure of virtual worlds will only strengthen; “improvements in technology will make virtual worlds into veritable dreamlands” (Castronova 7).

Initially, virtual worlds may have just been separate worlds weakly connected to reality, but now, as more and more people begin an exodus into the virtual realm, the two worlds are no longer separate spheres of influence. One might argue that the primary connection between these two worlds is an economic one. Virtual economies and exchanges have developed in lands such as *Second Life* and *World of Warcraft* as well as a plethora of other virtual realms. In each of these realms, there is always some type of virtual currency, such as the Linden dollar in the case of *Second Life* or the generic gold coin in *World of Warcraft*. Initially, the purpose of these virtual currencies was to let users purchase virtual goods in much the same way currency is used in modern, real-world transactions; after all, part of the immersive nature of these virtual worlds is their ability to mimic fundamental aspects of the real world. Virtual currency, however, also serves as a bridge between the real and the virtual worlds; as time goes on, people begin to exchange virtual currency and virtual products for real currency and vice versa. Market-driven exchange rates between virtual currency and real currency have developed. For instance, at the time of writing, one US dollar may be traded for approximately 259 *Second Life* Linden dollars (LindeX Market Data).

In the case of *Second Life*, these exchanges are legal and even encouraged by the company; in other cases, these exchanges are prohibited by the game developer’s End User License Agreement (EULA).
Regardless of real world legal policies or the EULA, an undeniable flow of goods and money occurs between the virtual world and the real world.

The development of the virtual economy and its link to the real world implies that the virtual world ceases to be just a source of entertainment. Castronova presents the hypothetical example of Carla, who plays the role of an entrepreneur and manufacturer in Second Life; the only reason she can do so is because she is able to convert her virtual profits into actual profits (8). Additionally, research conducted in 2002 showed that Norrath, the virtual kingdom of Everquest, had developed a per capita of GDP of $2,266, a number greater than that of both China and India at the time (Lichtarowicz). These cases serve to illustrate the gradual fusion of the real and the virtual worlds; it would thus be naïve to continue to treat the two worlds as wholly disjointed and unrelated.

As people begin to profit from these virtual ventures, a question of the ownership of property, particularly the notion of virtual property, arises. Legal analyst Westbrook presents three criteria an object must have in order to be classified as virtual property: persistence (the object must remain in the virtual world between gaming sessions), transferability (the owner must be able to transfer the object to another person meaningfully), and exclusivity (only one person or a small group of people should be able to use the object at any given time). Virtual property, then, is just a piece of computer code that manifests these three primary properties (Westbrook). Fairfield expands this characterization by also incorporating the role of the developer and his or her claim to ownership in this notion of virtual property. Fundamentally, a virtual world is just a manifestation of computer code, an interpretation of the strings of ones and zeros. Since there is very little separating computer code and pure ideas, computer code is generally protected under intellectual property law. Fairfield goes further, however, by claiming that there is a duality to this classification, that not all computer code is the same. He claims that some types of code “are designed to act more like land or chattel [transferrable personal property] than ideas,” and in this category resides entities such as a website, an email account, or a virtual world (Fairfield). This kind of code fits into the framework that Westbrook prescribes: exclusive, persistent, and interconnected. Fairfield argues then that virtual property resides in this region between tangible property and intellectual property. Already in these basic definitions, we see the emergence of a conflict of interests over the ownership of virtual property; both the user of the virtual world and the developers of the virtual world appear to have some stake in claiming rights to a piece of virtual property.
Conflicting Interests and the Duality of Property

The core conflict in the issue of virtual property is that between the users of the virtual worlds and the developers and companies responsible for creating and maintaining the virtual world. On the one hand, one can claim that without the players, the virtual world would be nothing more than a lifeless computer simulation. The players and their avatars bring life to the world; from their interactions with each other reputations are built, friendships are forged, and fortunes are made in the virtual world. They are the ones who transform the code from a deterministic simulation into a unique and vibrant social community. In a sense, the developers of the virtual world only provide the framework, the raw materials, on which the players may construct the world they envision. Thus, the players are the true architects of the virtual world, and therefore, should have some claim to ownership to the world they helped create.

At the same time, the developers who created the world should also have some stake in the virtual world. After all, when examined from the outside world, the virtual world becomes just a sequence of ones and zeros, a peculiar pattern of bits and bytes. Naturally then, the virtual world is just the intellectual brainchild of its authors. Just as the contents of a book belong to their author and the design of a machine to its inventor, so too should the bits of the virtual world belong to their creator. Furthermore, by virtue of the fact that the developers wrote the source code for the virtual world, they have the ability to modify it at will; in essence then, the developers already have absolute control over the virtual world, and thus, by extension, effectively own it.

Thus, since both the clients and the creators of the virtual have a reasonable claim to ownership, no simple solution to this problem of virtual property exists. Recently, scholars have proposed three principal theories to address this conflict of interests: Lockean labor theory, utilitarian ideals, and Hegelian personality theory. The Lockean scheme primarily revolves around Locke’s claim that “every man has a property in his own person” and that “the labor of his body, and the work of his hands... are properly his” (Locke). This definition consists of two components: the ownership of one’s identity and personhood and the connection between labor and ownership. Applied to virtual worlds, one can thus claim that the time and energy that a player invests in developing his or her virtual avatar may be correlated with labor in the Lockean sense. Therefore, the player should have some claim of ownership to the product of his or her labor; his or her avatar and accompanying virtual possessions.

At the same time, one may consider the Lockean notion of property from the developer’s standpoint. Since the developer creates the
world, and thus invests tangible labor into the creation of the world, he or she should have legal ownership of both the world and everything that resides within it (Westbrook). After all, every item and every avatar created in the virtual world is just a sequence of ones and zeros arranged in a particular order; these ones and zeros are written by a programmer and reside on someone’s or some company’s server. Therefore, both the developer and the company have a legitimate claim to ownership under the Lockean scheme of labor and intellectual property. Westbrook thus dismisses the Lockean notion of property on the grounds that it neither defines a concrete notion of labor nor does it answer the question of “why do we want to reward labor in the first place, and when we should do so.”

The idea that the act of creation implies ownership of the creation tends to be more applicable to tangible objects than to intangible entities such as ideas. Horowitz draws on this distinction when he asserts that the developer of the virtual world only provides the framework or environment in which the clients may develop their avatars. The users enter the virtual world and use the resources to create virtual objects and avatars. In this sense, they have simply taken the available virtual resources and invested their own labor and creativity towards shaping a unique product that should be protected by Lockean property rights. At the same time, Horowitz outlines a potential counterargument in that in most cases, users earn many of these virtual items through “battles with virtual beasts or purchase them through trade with virtual shopkeepers.” In that regard, the virtual objects are created through the labor of the developers and only transferred to the users.

Just as the Lockean labor theory of property may be extended to the case of virtual possessions and other virtual goods, the Lockean theory of consciousness may also be applied to the trickier case of the player’s virtual avatar. While it is undeniable that the developers are the ones who create the virtual avatar, the player still animates the avatar. When the player manipulates the avatar, he or she effec-

1 Horowitz presents the following analogy to illustrate his point. Consider two people, A and B, where A develops an idea of a song and shares it with B in hopes of collaborating with B. B declines to collaborate, and instead proceeds to write a song based upon A’s idea. In this case, B holds the exclusive copyright to the song despite the fact that A developed the idea. In other words, “A’s idea is drawn from the natural common of ideas” which just happened to provide “the particular framework for creation” (Horowitz).

2 Horowitz highlights a potential counterargument in that one may claim that there is a distinction between an object that is guarded by a virtual beast and that same object owned by an avatar. The difference is that the item possessed by the avatar is different from the one possessed by the virtual beast; the item in the latter case is in its “natural state” while that which is owned by the avatar is in a non-natural or altered state. To convert the item from one state to the other requires an input of labor on the part of the avatar. In other words, while the developer provided the original resource (the item guarded by a virtual beast), the player modified it by taking it from its original state. Consequently, the player has a legitimate claim to owning the object (Horowitz).
tively communicates a certain degree of his or her own identity and persona into the avatar. And even when that player leaves the virtual world, the identity and persona embodied by that avatar continues to influence and live on in the memories and experiences of all the other avatars with which it interacted. From a Lockean scheme, one can argue that one’s virtual avatar functions as an extension of his or her identity in the virtual world. In a virtual environment, a player essentially projects his or her mind and imagination into his or her virtual persona; without the player, the avatar is a lifeless entity, a sequence of unchanging bits. Now, from Locke’s notions of personhood and identity, one’s virtual avatar simply becomes another vessel for his or her consciousness. By corollary, this allows the gamer a viable claim to ownership of his or her virtual embodiment.

Lastowca and Hunter expand upon this idea by combining the controller and his or her virtual representation into a single “cyborg entity.” In this theory, a player’s avatar provides a “vehicle for its controller’s desires for experimentation, self-expression, and social wish-fulfillment” (Lastowca and Hunter). Events that happen in the virtual realm can have emotional and psychological impacts on the controller in the real world. Therefore, Lastowca and Hunter postulate a strong, effectively inextricable relation between the controller and the avatar. Thus, the claim of ownership over another’s virtual avatar becomes absurd, for that would be analogous to someone trying to claim ownership over another’s real world identity.

Carrying this cyborg idea further, we arrive at another potential means of addressing the issue of virtual property rights: personality theory. Personality theory stems from Hegel’s view of property as being an extension of the self. Radin extends this idea by saying that the importance of an object may be measured by the degree of pain that would be caused to the owner if he or she lost the object (Radin). Under personality theory, property and the degree to which it should be protected is intimately linked with the value the owner attributes to the object. Radin makes two noteworthy distinctions: personal property, or property that is connected to a person’s sense of identity (i.e., the wedding ring of a loving wearer), and fungible property, or property that has no definite connection (i.e., the same wedding ring in the hands of a jeweler who crafted it and aims to sell it solely for profit). Carrying this analogy into the virtual realm, we can conclude that a virtual avatar is certainly personal to the controller but fungible to the developer, in much the same way the wedding ring is personal to the wearer but fungible to the crafter. The virtual avatar serves as a vessel for the player’s real identity, but to the creator, it is just a few lines of code that can be copied and sold to gamers.

Boone defends Radin’s personality-based approach to virtual property by presenting the example of rent control statutes; this is
a case where although both the tenant and the landlord have a stake in the property of interest, the law chooses to protect the property rights of the tenant over those of the landlord. This inequality is due to the fact that for the tenant, the property is his or her home, and thus of a much more personal nature, whereas to the landlord, the property is of a more fungible nature (Boone). However, Boone is careful in stating that just because the players have a personal stake in virtual property and the operators of the virtual have a fungible stake, this does not mean the player can override the operator on issues where the virtual world is reset to a previous state or if the properties of an object are changed without warning in order to balance some aspects of the game. Rather, he argues that virtual world operators cannot arbitrarily raise the subscription fee or close down a virtual world in order to set up a new, more profitable one; in these cases in which the operator is making changes for the sole purpose of profit, the rights of the players should supersede that of the operator (Boone). Thus, certain scenarios exist in which the interests of the players should be protected and even override the interests of the operator.

In addition to the Lockean and Hegelian notions of property, the third prominent theory scholars often consider in relation to virtual property is Bentham’s theory of utilitarianism. Here, the emphasis is placed upon “providing the greatest good for the greatest number of people” (Steinberg). From the utilitarian perspective, we see that in the case of a large virtual world, the collective interests of the users can potentially outweigh the developer’s interests in modifying or even removing the virtual world. As Lastowca and Hunter point out, though one additional avatar or one additional virtual creation does little to benefit the entirety of society, the value the individual creator places on that virtual creation is high; thus, when considering the aggregated benefits of all such individuals, the net utility is nontrivial. They go further by comparing virtual property rights to patents: on the whole, neither confers a substantial benefit to society, but at the individual level, their importance is much greater and indisputable (Lastowca and Hunter).

While personality theory and utilitarianism are reasonable approaches to addressing the problem of virtual property, neither presents a well-defined framework. In the case of personality theory, we lack definite means to assess the personal value of an object, either real or virtual. True, there is a definite qualitative distinction between a wedding ring in the hands in the hands of a lover and that in the hands of the jeweler, but it is difficult, if not impossible, to quantify the differences in the emotional and symbolic values of the wedding ring to the two parties. Similarly, we have no reasonable means to calculate the compensation a player should receive should
his or her avatar be stolen or lost, or in the case the developer decides to shut down the virtual world. There may be a way of valuing the time the player spends in building up his or her avatar, but finding a way to compensate for the more intangible investments, such as the player’s emotional and psychological investment in defining his or her persona, is all but impossible. Much like the case of the wedding ring, the only possible replacement for a lost avatar to a devoted player is that very same avatar; anything else would lack that same degree of unique and strongly personal investment.

Furthermore, as Radin notes, a fine line exists between strong emotional attachment and fetishistic addiction to an object. Once again, we face an element of uncertainty in our definitions. True, one may claim that if a person spends more than a certain number of hours a day immersed in a virtual world, then that should be considered unhealthy. However, such an attempt to quantify immersion and addiction cannot possibly be sufficient. For instance, one may present the case of the virtual entrepreneur who makes a real world living by working and interacting in a world like Second Life. Similarly, in fantasy realms like World of Warcraft and Everquest, there are people whose aim is solely to acquire items or build up avatars and sell them for real world currency. Naturally, since their job revolves around the virtual world, the fact that they spend a large number of hours laboring away in the virtual realm is not sufficient to claim that they are addicted to the virtual world. An alternate definition could be to consider how people respond to the virtual world. Then, one may say that if a gamer inflicts real world injury on another for virtual world actions, then that would constitute crossing the boundary between immersion and addiction. The problem again is that such a definition merely asserts that a line exists between healthy and unhealthy relations with the virtual world; we might easily determine the side of the line to which one belongs, but be unable to identify where along the spectrum one resides. In other words, the Hegelian personality

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3 Radin makes a distinction between healthy and unhealthy relationships between the self and an object. Unhealthy object relationships are ones that hinder, rather than support, healthy self-constitution; she describes these cases as fetishism, or essentially an unhealthy obsession with some object (Radin). This distinction is necessary to address the issue where obsession or addiction to some product causes one to behave irrationally or violently; such actions should certainly not be condoned or protected in a theory of property.

4 In 2006, Anshe Chung, a virtual entrepreneur in Second Life, became the first virtual avatar with a net worth of more than one million U.S. dollars (“Anshe Chung”). Furthermore, Chung’s virtual world profits are now being channeled to real world businesses and corporations, most notably Anshe Chung Studios (“Anshe Chung”). Thus, it is evident that virtual worlds can also be a source of revenue and employment in the real world as well as a source of entertainment.

5 Currently, entire industries have developed in countries such as China where people (termed “gold-farmers”) play video games in so-termed “virtual sweatshops” for a living (Dibbell). In exchange for real-world money, generally less than a dollar an hour, these young employees work to acquire gold and rare items in the virtual world or to train up a virtual avatar for their clients (Dibbell).
system defines a grand, overarching framework to approach the issue of virtual property, but offers little specific details that are essential in defining a strict legal framework.

The vagueness that plagues the personality approach to virtual property is also characteristic of the utilitarian approach. Now, instead of assessing the personal attachment and importance of a virtual object to its owner, we try and measure the net social benefit that results from a particular course of action. Once again, this is a philosophically reasonable idea, but one that lacks a pragmatic implementation. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with attempting to maximize utility in society; this, however, is just another lofty goal to strive towards. True, there are certainly clear cases such as when a developer decides to arbitrarily manipulate a virtual economy for his or her own gain and to the detriment of the gamers. The problem, however, is that very rarely are the actions of developers so clear-cut; in the general case, whenever a developer imposes some sort of change, a group of people will actively oppose the change. For instance, if the developer decides to weaken an overpowered item in order to better balance the virtual world, the people who possess that item will certainly protest the change. At this point, there are multiple conflicts of interests: the developers who strive to create a balanced world, the gamers who possess the item who now feel cheated by the change, and the group of gamers who benefit from the transition towards a more balanced world. One can make the claim that as long as the number of people who benefit from a particular change exceeds the number of people who would be hurt by the change, the net social benefit should allow for the change. Even with this modification, however, such a characterization is still insufficient. For instance, consider the case when the developer decides to sell limited copies of an exclusive, rare item to players as part of a promotion event. Later on, they decide that the item they sold severely unbalanced the game world and proceed to modify the item. Suddenly, the losses incurred by those who knowingly paid for the item, thinking that it had a special set of attributes, are much higher. In other words, the losses incurred by one player cannot simply be matched by the benefit another player would derive from a more balanced game world. The economic price one paid to obtain the item and the implicit value of the developer’s promise to the users must now be factored into the equation.

Another problem with a strictly utilitarian system is that it opens up the potential for the majority to begin dictating the terms of the virtual world to the detriment of both the developer and any minority groups. With the overarching goal of trying to maximize the net benefit, a very real possibility exists where one group benefits significantly more than another for the sole reason that they happen to be
the majority. Ultimately then, because of the fact that this notion of “benefit” extends well beyond just the quantitative and economic realms into the more subjective and ambiguous territories, this theory becomes a very challenging one to implement in a pragmatic manner. That being said, however, we may still consider the larger, overarching principles of utilitarianism when developing a more functional legal framework.

From Virtual Property to Virtual Services

These three prominent theories of virtual property all focus on extending notions of real world property to the virtual realm; fundamentally, they all hinge upon Westbrook’s characterization of virtual property as something that appears persistent, exclusive, and transferrable. Interestingly, however, the very dispute over virtual property is precisely over the second of these three attributes: exclusivity. The fundamental issue in the protection of virtual property is the conflict of interests between the developers who created the virtual world and the players who inhabit it. In this situation, goods in the virtual world do not belong exclusively to the player nor do they belong exclusively to the developers. When one party believes that it has exclusive rights to the virtual world, a conflict arises. Now, when we consider the matter from the exterior perspective of the outside world, we see that the notion of exclusive ownership is just an illusion of the virtual world. While it is certainly true that virtual property must appear to be exclusive in order to present an illusion of reality, in order to resolve virtual disputes in the real world, we must examine the issue with a notion of property that is not so keenly focused on individual or selective ownership of a good.

Former video game developer Dr. Richard Bartle presents an example that keenly illustrates the distinction between the in-game illusion of ownership and the external reality of the issue. Consider a Monopoly game, a game where players have the illusion of owning property; certainly, Monopoly is not as immersive or psychologically stimulating as World of Warcraft, but it is a game that has an implicit notion of property. A player can land on a “property” such as Boardwalk and “purchase” it with Monopoly “money.” Though the player has “purchased” the property, this does not mean the player can now walk away from the game and still possess his or her property. In other words, the notion of property exists solely in the context of the game and the owner of the Monopoly set retains full real-world ownership of his or her game when the game has concluded. Bartle now takes this one step further and presents the case in which one player pays another player real money for an in-game property in order to establish an in-game “monopoly” and thus gain an advantage over
others. In this unlikely scenario, the object that has changed hands is an in-game object, a virtual good in a sense; what has not changed is the fact that the original owner of the *Monopoly* set still owns the individual components of his or her game. Just because real money is involved does not imply the original owner of the board game now must surrender any part of his legal claim to his property. Otherwise, two players could simply work together to deprive the original owner of his game. Clearly, this would destroy the very notion of ownership and entitlement to our property. In other words, virtual property is more of an illusion present in only the virtual world; it is the toy property in the *Monopoly* world. Thus, when evaluating virtual property, we must not limit our worldview to within the game of *Monopoly* or the virtual land of *Second Life,* but rather, take on an exterior viewpoint.

Virtual property manifests itself differently when viewed from the perspective of a user and that of a developer. Thus, a more reasonable notion of property would acknowledge that fundamentally, no one individual or group owns a virtual product; rather, virtual goods are owned jointly, although not necessarily equally, by the developer and the user. Such a classification would not completely destroy the illusion of exclusivity players perceive in virtual worlds, but at the same time, would offer a different way of approaching the problem. Boone’s analogy of the landlord-tenant relationship now serves as an effective model from which to evaluate the problem. In the case of virtual property, the developer takes the role of the landlord, leasing and loaning parcels of virtual property to users and subscribers, the tenants in the analogy. Taking this analogy further, the relationship between the client and the developer is not just one of shared ownership and interest in the virtual world, but a relationship bound by a definite contract, namely the *Terms of Service* and the *End User License Agreement.* Our analysis thus far has, for all intents and purposes, neglected the existence of these legal documents and instead, focused more on the user side of the issue. Now, integrating these existing license agreements into a framework of co-ownership, a new picture of the relationship between the developer and the client emerges. Instead of defining a notion of virtual property based upon a conventional, material economy, we may instead view the development of virtual worlds as that of a new service-based economy. In this sense, then, virtual worlds can be considered to be just another rendition of the emerging software as a service trend.

In the software as a service scheme, a software provider licenses a set of computer applications to clients; this is subject to the particular set of terms that the provider defines, perhaps in collaboration with the client. Rather than buy a complete copy of the software as in the traditional model of software distribution, the client sim-
ply pays for the software as long as he or she needs the software. In particular, the client does not pay the developer with the intent to own a full copy of the software, as would be the case had the client purchased a CD or another physical copy of the software. As Turner, et al. note, the basic focus of software as a service is “separating possession and ownership of software from its use” (38). This approach is often a much more effective solution for clients who do not need a full copy of the software, for clients who have a unique set of needs that are not easily fulfilled by general-purpose tools, or for clients who only need the software for a limited period of time. In that sense, software as a service functions very much like a service in a traditional sense. It is bound by a contract on which both the client and the developer mutually agree. More importantly, however, though “the process may be tied to a physical product, the performance is nearly intangible and does not normally result in ownership of any of the factors of production” (Turner et al., 39).

Under these premises, virtual environments can be seen as a new, albeit subtle, version of software as a service. Although, in the general case, the type of software that is generally offered as a service tends to be business-oriented tools, the framework may be applied to the case of virtual worlds. Now, instead of offering consumers a business solution, the developer or company offers clients a form of entertainment, a means of exploring and interacting with others in a virtual framework. Just as software transitioned from something one paid for and owned to something one subscribed to as a service, virtual worlds may be perceived as the transformation of entertainment from the simple board games that one could buy at a store to more complicated and immersive environments to which one subscribes. In other words, the motto of this new form of entertainment is not so much “pay to own” as it is “pay to enjoy.” There is not so much a notion of private ownership and personal property, but rather, a system of agreements, contracts, and services.

In a way, by treating the virtual world as a service governed by a definite contract between the developer and the user, we have discarded many of the more profound philosophical issues of identity and duality in the dispute over virtual property. At the same time, by shifting the central focus to something much more tangible and defined in the form of a physical, written contract, we have achieved a much more pragmatic approach towards addressing the problem. Framing the issue in this manner, the developers are the ones who gain the upper hand in that they have the ability to define the terms of the service to clients. However, this is not as problematic as it might appear, for initially the developer is solely responsible for the creation of the virtual world. Before the virtual world goes “live,” it only exists as lines of code in the minds of those that are creating it.
True, there may be cases where the developer is collaborating with designers and other groups of people, but initially, there is very little direct interaction between the developer and the average end user. For instance, during the development of *World of Warcraft*, one can safely infer that the game developers at *Blizzard* certainly did not consult with and fully consider the opinions of the 11.5 million plus eventual players. A more real-world example would be the case of an author writing a book. When the author is writing, he or she should consider his or her target audience and write accordingly; however, the potential readers cannot dictate exactly what the argument is or what the plot will be. In other words, in its earliest stages, a virtual world is nothing more than the intellectual creation and ideas of its developers. Naturally then, they, the developers, own the initial rights to their creation, just as an inventor would own the initial rights to his or her patent and an author to his or her book.

A potential counterargument to the above construction would be to assert that the developer’s ideas are inextricably linked to the demands and desires of the target audience. While the initial development of a virtual realm may be unique, once the game or world has been released and has accumulated a sufficiently large user base, the developer must start listening to the demands of the users or potentially incur economic losses. Taken to the extreme, the roles between the developer and the player effectively switch; the players are now the puppet masters guiding the developer with their wants and needs. The developer now takes on the peripheral role of translating those desires into the code for the virtual world. Under this assumption, the developer’s creation is no longer truly his or her own; the very act of creation becomes a joint process, with the users developing the ideas and the developers implementing them. On the one hand, this is an interesting philosophical concept that suggests that the best way to examine the issue may well be to transcend our modern separate conventions of developer and user and merge them as a single, unified creative body. However, this would necessitate a complete redefining of our modern legal structure that draws distinctions between the creator, author, or inventor and the end user. In that regard, this theory presents an interesting philosophical point; however, it is also one that is difficult to adapt to the existing legal framework.

Rather than dismissing this theory solely on the grounds of impracticality, we may also examine whether the demands of users indeed effectively dictate the developer’s design. Consider the example of Facebook, a social networking company currently in the center of a controversial privacy debate. As reporter Dan Fletcher notes, Facebook has had a history of making user information more and more public, even despite vocal criticism from users, and more recently, legal institutions. As Fletcher notes, there are certainly the
disaster cases, such as Facebook Beacon, a service that automatically notifies a user’s friends whenever a user makes a purchase at various online sites. In this particular case, user criticism quickly forced the company to roll back the system and make it optional (Fletcher). However, despite some of the historic fiascos and even in the midst of the current debate over online privacy, Facebook has not drastically changed its service to fully agree with the users’ wants. It continues to move towards publicizing more and more of the user’s data. On a similar note, Fletcher brings up the case of the now almost foundational Facebook News Feed. When the News Feed feature was first unveiled, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg claimed that out of the 10 million Facebook users at the time, “1 million were complaining” (Fletcher). Nevertheless, the feature has prevailed and now serves as a fundamental component of Facebook. In other words, people will often oppose unexpected changes; however, to drive innovation forward, the developer must sometimes push a plan forward despite vocal opposition. There are many other examples in the software development arena of users initially rejecting new software or the direction a company is headed, and yet, these are the technologies that eventually become integral to the modern information revolution. In effect, the visionaries and individuals must drive change and technology forward. While users may protest and influence the direction of software development and the nature of these virtual worlds, the developer still makes the final decision over the design and the foundation irrespective of whether the users approve at that moment or not. Thus, there is limited evidence that the developer is wholly influenced by the users in creating the virtual world; the users may protest, as they often do, but the developer still retains the ability to develop his intellectual creation independent of the wants of the audience.

A Service-Based Model

Having developed the virtual world and made it publicly available, the developer is now entitled to freely define the terms of the service he or she will be providing to prospective users. At this initial stage, the as-yet-uninhabited virtual world remains his or her intellectual creation; thus, he or she may now set forth the terms on which people can choose to enter this virtual world. The developer is effectively marketing his or her virtual world, his or her form of en-

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6 In a recent interview, Apple founder and CEO Steve Jobs defended Apple’s decision not to include Flash on its iPad, even though users may claim that the “iPad is crippled without Flash” (D8: Apple CEO). Jobs also cites many examples in the past where they decided to make design changes that users generally perceived as inconveniencing, such as cutting out support for floppy disks on the iMac entirely (D8: Apple CEO). In other words, Jobs claims that the developer should not always cater to the current tastes of the users; rather, the developer should look forward into the future and work towards the next big innovation.
ertainment to prospective users. While the developer can make these initial terms arbitrary, he or she must present a set of terms that appeal to the average user in order to gain customers. For instance, charging hundreds of dollars on a monthly basis will certainly not be conducive to acquiring a definite user base. At this point in the process, the developer has essentially absolute freedom to dictate the terms of the contract. The only necessary protection would be to prevent deviously or ambiguously worded contracts intended to trick or defraud the client. In other words, the only restriction on the terms of the service is that it must be clear and easily understood; that aside, the client can determine whether he or she will subscribe to the service or not. Should a client later complain of the system being unjust or unbalanced, and the terms of service have not changed since the client last agreed to them, then the client is at fault. By participating in the virtual world, the client has had to accept the terms of the service provided by the developer, and as long as the developer has operated clearly within the bounds of the contract, then there is no legal issue.

At this point, there is already a simple solution to various types of disputes that may arise between the developer and the player or between one player and another player. For instance, consider the concept of ownership in a virtual world where the developer has explicitly prohibited the trade of virtual goods for real currency. Note that this is a common trend amongst many video game worlds, most notably *World of Warcraft*. Now if a player enters the fantastical world of Azeroth in *World of Warcraft*, and decides to purchase an item from another player using real currency, but ends up being cheated, the developer has no obligation to help the user, because the user’s actions violated the terms of the contract. While the client may take other legal action against the offending player for theft or deception, the basis of that ruling need not be hindered by ambiguities involving ownership of virtual goods. The agreement between the user and the developer has already addressed that problem.

Similarly, in the case where one inflicts real world harm for virtual world “theft,” if that “theft” occurred within the bounds of the license agreement, that person cannot defend his or her actions on the grounds of acting in defense of his or her private property. Essentially, if the developer chooses to downplay or eliminate notions of virtual property or real money transfers, then there is effectively minimal confusion over the legitimacy of claims to virtual property.

This service-based approach also resolves the issue of the developer making potentially unannounced changes to the virtual world. For instance, consider the previous example of a player who, after hours of arduous work, acquires a powerful item. To his or her dismay, the developer alters the properties of that item the next day in
order to better balance the world. Under the Lockean labor theory scheme, the player can make the legitimate argument that since he or she invested time, and by extension, labor, into acquiring that item, he or she effectively owns it and so the developer cannot change the item without his or her consent. On the contrary, the developer can counter with the argument that since he or she originally created the item, he or she has superior property rights. These two conflicting scenarios are easily resolved if we turn to this service-based model of the virtual world: either the developers’ actions are permissible in the contract between him or her and the client, or it is not. Now, one could point out the trickier case in which the license agreement does not explicitly state the legality of the action. In that case, the most reasonable course of action would be to give the benefit of the doubt to the client; if the license agreement did not explicitly prohibit an action or a belief, then certainly the developer cannot claim otherwise. The developer is in the position of power and is dictating the terms; therefore, the developer is responsible for closing the potential loopholes in his or her contract. Now, there are still more pathological scenarios where the developer, in defense of his or her actions, may allude to some rule being expressed in the spirit of the contract or implicitly implied. Either way, this falls under the category of ambiguity in the terms; once again, the client’s interest overrides that of the developer.

This definition effectively allows the developer to dictate the very existence of virtual property. In many ways, this framework has the potential to nullify the client’s claim to his or her intellectual creations and avatars in the virtual environment. This, too, however, is not as outrageous or unfair as it may sound. Under the Lockean scheme, the players can claim that since they have invested time and energy in the development of their avatar or the accumulation of virtual wealth, these products of their labor should be protected under the law. They may substantiate their claims by saying further that their artistic and personal input to the virtual world has transformed it in some way, and therefore, they now have a stake in the virtual land. On the surface, this sounds reasonable; surely, one has a claim to their intellectual and artistic creations. However, owning the idea does not necessitate, or even imply, owning the good. As Bartle notes, in many family-friendly establishments, there is often a table of Duplo blocks for children to enjoy. Now, a child can invest his or her time and energy into creating something from the disjointed blocks, but just because he or she creates something truly unique and interesting, he or she cannot claim to own the Duplo blocks (Bartle). In other words, there is a definite difference between providing the framework to create (providing the Duplo blocks) and providing the physical object itself. In the case of the Duplo blocks, there is an implicit
contract between the owner of the blocks and the children who play with them; the children can build whatever they want, but the blocks ultimately belong to the owner. In the case of the virtual world, this relation is explicitly spelled out in either the ToS or the EULA. Effectively, the service the developer or software company is providing is the right to use the framework in accordance with the terms of the contract. The clients, in accepting the contract, already acknowledge that they may only act and create within the bounds of the framework. If the clients do not agree with the terms of the contract and desire terms that do provide them some degree of ownership, then the client may either negotiate with the developer or simply choose not to use the service. In other words, on entering the virtual world where there is no notion of virtual possessions, the client has already agreed to the fact that the virtual world is just a framework for them to enjoy. Just as the children who play with Legos in a public facility should not expect to own the Legos even if they invest sufficient time and energy in creating something unique, so should the client not expect to own property in a virtual world where he or she has already agreed to a contract that does not allow for the existence of such property.

In the case of games like World of Warcraft where players cannot trade real currency for virtual goods and possessions, there is, nonetheless, a large, consistent flow of goods and currency between the two worlds. In this sense, regardless of the stance developers take in their ToS and EULA, there are inevitable connections between the real and virtual worlds, which if left unregulated, can still pose significant legal challenges. On the one hand, the clients who violate the terms of their contract with the developer can be appropriately punished by the developer—for instance, by having his or her account banned or privileges revoked. In the general case, there are either just too many violations, or the violations are sufficiently difficult to monitor that it is not cost effective to do so. However, while an illegal market has developed consisting of traffic between the real and virtual worlds, the actual legal cases are not particularly tricky. For instance, when one player sells a virtual item or an avatar to another, neither player should expect any guarantees. Both players, in entering the virtual world, must have accepted the terms of the virtual world, and thus have knowingly performed the transaction illegally. Just as one should not expect legal recourse if he or she is cheated when trying to sell stolen property, neither should players who knowingly buy and sell virtual goods illegally expect just compensation or protection under the law. Furthermore, in the case of the virtual world, it is difficult to construct a case in which one player can claim to be ignorant of the illegality of a transaction, for by virtue of entering the virtual world, that player has already accepted the
contract the developer has provided. Since virtual goods exist only in the context of the virtual world and are effectively nonexistent outside, there is very little risk of an ambiguous case of one purchasing a virtual good and realizing that he or she has been cheated without having first entered the virtual world.

By viewing the virtual world provider as effectively offering a service to the users, a service in which both parties may act freely within the bounds of the contract, we have a system that no longer relies on subjective evaluations of utility or attachment. It is also a system on which there is a defined foundation from which to evaluate and resolve conflicts of interests. Additionally, by focusing solely on the contract between the user and the developer and treating the software as a service, no rewriting or redefining of existing laws is required. The precise legal mechanisms for handling disputes involving the virtual world may now simply be deferred onto the existing legal institutions that handle such disputes. Thus, virtual realms are, first and foremost, a service and framework provided by the developer to his or her clients. The concept of virtual property, then, is ultimately subsidiary to the functioning of a virtual world; its definition may thus be delineated by the developer through the terms of the virtual world without introducing additional legal quandaries and ambiguities.

Concluding Remarks

The information revolution that began in the latter half of the twenty first century has drastically transformed our lives. One of the primary results of this technological revolution has been the proliferation of virtual worlds, some not so unlikely our own, and others that are more dream-like and fantastical. As more and more people begin their exodus to these new frontiers, a new set of legal challenges has arisen, particularly concerning ownership of property in these fictitious realms. At first glance, this problem appears simple and straightforward, but hidden beneath that cloak of innocence and simplicity is a complicated set of conflicting interests. The developers claim that he or she who designed and wrote the code for the world should own the world. The client counters that since he or she invested time, energy, and real money into the virtual world, he or she should receive some type of lasting entitlement to the virtual landscape. To resolve these conflicts, scholars have applied many conventional theories of property, particularly Lockean labor theory, Bentham’s utilitarian theory, and Hegel’s personality theory. However, none of these three theories presents a complete, pragmatic method of addressing the issues at hand. Each of the three either relies on subjective evaluations or introduces their own set of ambiguities and nuances when trying to resolve others.
The alternative, then, is to depart altogether from the above philosophical approaches and return to what some would argue is a simpler and perhaps more primitive system: treating virtual worlds as a service and framework provided by the developer to his or her audience. Such a service is bound by a contract that explicitly delineates and acknowledges the joint interests of the client and the developer. Ambiguities and loopholes in the contract are the fault of the developers, for they author the majority, if not all, of the terms contained within the contract. In this sense, the existing legal framework used to resolve disputes over terms, contracts, and services may be used to resolve legal disputes concerning virtual worlds and virtual property. While it may be a lackluster theory in terms of philosophical elegance, it does present an alternative to the otherwise ambiguous and ill-defined theories and notions of virtual property. And though it may not be the optimum or even leastambiguous solution, it is one that serves as a stepping-stone towards a more permanent and rigorous legal framework. Virtual property, then, is but an illusion that exists only in the virtual realm; the real-world contract serves as the bridge between these two separate worlds.

Works Cited


INSTRUCTOR’S FOREWORD

I knew my PWR 1 course, “Rhetoric, Social Media, and Virtual Worlds,” would attract remarkable students. After all, what would better suit freshmen attending a university in the heart of Silicon Valley than a course focused on the relationship between rhetoric and new frontiers of electronic life? I took it for granted that these remarkable students, whoever they might turn out to be, would be budding coders, scientists, or entrepreneurs, but Patricia challenged my assumptions. A journalist in high school, Patricia came to class already armed with a strong sense of what she wanted to write about and, befitting her vocation, was one of those PWR students who, during office hours and conferences, always, intensely listened.

Discussing her desire to write about citizen journalism, I casually suggested that she consider conducting interviews with subject-matter experts. I make this same suggestion to every student, but Patricia was one of the few who actually went out and did the interviews. Later in the quarter, as she was exploring ways of making her topic more specific, I mentioned a hyperlocal journalism experiment based in San Francisco called Mission Loc@l. Again, Patricia picked up on my suggestion and ran with it. Dedicated and diligent, she wrote a fabulous paper that pulls off a rare balancing act in student research: finding the local or particular example that perfectly opens up a universe of larger questions.

Patricia’s tremendous legwork allowed her to explore the topic of hyperlocal and citizen journalism in a way that would have been impossible for a more conventional paper. Patricia’s argument—that citizen journalism promises to supplement but not replace traditional journalism—takes on weight and depth because of the detail with which she documents the triumphs and troubles of Mission Loc@l’s experiment in recruiting a cadre of citizen journalists. Her general inquiry into the potentials and pitfalls of this new form of journalism becomes all the more convincing because of the cumulative, lived experience of Mission Loc@l that she meticulously documents.

—Lee Konstantinou
Citizen Journalism: Locally Grown, Community-Owned

Patricia Ho

In the wake of a violent gang shooting in San Francisco’s Mission District, an article published in *The San Francisco Chronicle* offers a brief report of the incident. The five-sentence article begins, “A man was shot and killed early Saturday,” lists the time of death and related suspects, and ends with a terse, “No arrests have been made” (Tucker). On the surface, this brief achieves its intended goal—it reports the incident in a timely manner, reveals key pieces of information from a reputable source, and describes the event in a concise, objective manner. A typical reader of the *Chronicle* may glance quickly at this article while skimming through the rest of page C4, perhaps noting to himself the prevalence of big-city crime. Ultimately, he remains removed from the event, which appears unfortunate, but not particularly earth-shattering.

However, to a person living in the Mission, the *Chronicle*’s coverage is abysmally uninformative. Three days later, no follow-up stories attempt to provide clarity to concerned neighbors and friends in the area. While the brief’s terseness may have resulted from the *Chronicle*’s push for a timely initial report, its effect is to raise several unanswered questions and create a sense of distance between the publication and the community it serves. For locals who may have heard about the shooting from next-door neighbors, while bumping into friends at the Mission Grocery where the event took place, or worse—having seen the gunfire themselves from their apartment windows—the brief simply confirms what they already know. While searching for more information, these community members may be understandably frustrated as they wonder, who exactly was involved? What caused this violence? And most importantly, how can we pre-
vent this from happening again?

Mission Loc@l, an online hyper-local initiative based in the Mission, depicts a different story. The website’s initial account of the event paints the scene in great detail, from the reactions of terrified onlookers to the sound of rain hitting the plastic bag that encased the victim, effectively capturing the tension and alarm that surrounded the incident. For increased context, the hyper-local report includes an extensive description of the police response, and places the incident within the context of ongoing gang activity within the Mission, noting that the shooting is only one of five violent attacks within the past three weeks. Photos of newly-sprayed gang graffiti defacing the Mission’s Solidarity mural emphasize that the shooting, far from being an isolated incident, is a cause for ongoing concern. Most importantly, the article addresses the community’s response to the issue, gathering reactions and information from sources close to the victims of violence. These conversations anticipate real-time discussions in reaction to the story itself; the page includes a feed with related tweets, as well as a comment section where a debate of over 20 contributions has begun.

Overall, Mission Loc@l’s community focus allows it to provide a more thorough account of a locally-based issue, accounting for a large gap in coverage that professional sources cannot fill. Given that gang violence is nowhere near resolution, the website provides answers where it can, but more importantly, makes a convincing attempt to ask the right questions. Mission Loc@l’s efforts to engage community members in the reporting process illuminate its strengths and weaknesses as a model for hyperlocal citizen journalism. Ultimately, the site indicates that successful citizen journalism initiatives can supplement, but not replace, the work of professional reporters. As user-generated content continues to grow and expand, it will present a challenge to media conventions established in the era of print journalism; given the rapidly changing nature of journalism’s transition to an online platform, this challenge is inevitable and, indeed, necessary to continue advancing our media industry into a Web-based century. However, some form of authoritative oversight remains necessary to keep our news grounded in core journalistic values of accuracy and professional responsibility. We must seek a compromise; although journalism ventures should be grounded in traditional conventions and standards, a successful initiative ought to rely on the interests of community contributors to shape its voice.

From the First Amendment to “Just the Facts”: Journalism’s Shifting Values

When determining the challenges that citizen journalism poses to traditional media, we must consider its role in a historical con-
text. From the penny press to blogs, the definition and values of the profession have undergone significant changes since its inception in the seventeenth century. Then, emerging journalists attempted to assign values such as impartiality, truth-telling, unbiased observation, and credible informants to their work, which made a crucial first step towards documenting important social issues. The media industry’s subsequent conflict between objective and interpretive journalism characterizes the debate leading up to the introduction of citizen journalism. At the time, the press functioned as a public service, prefiguring the civic-minded initiatives found in today’s user-generated content. As the industry expanded into the public sphere of the late eighteenth century, a new generation of “liberal” journalists began defining themselves as reformers, commentators, and revolutionaries, and viewed their work with a new goal—to “protect the public and its liberties” (Ward). These journalists set a precedent for the social influence that the press continues to wield today, as they were more focused on advancing society with their ideas than presenting hard facts: “Many... had little concern for what we now call objectivity. Papers had points of view, reflecting the politics of their backers and owners” (Gillmor 3). Here, media reflected the ideals of democracy and the freedom to share varying perspectives: “[Journalism] stressed a free marketplace in the world of ideas and in the economy” (Ward). By revealing significant issues and problems that society would have otherwise ignored, these truth-tellers set a standard for the type of investigative and personal journalism that continues to develop today. With the nineteenth century’s mass commercialization of media, journalists sought a different definition for their profession and equated their work with the values of objectivity and accuracy. Advocating a philosophy of including “just the facts,” these reporters aimed to become “independent, objective observers of events” (Ward), eliminating their opinions from the news as much as possible.

The conflict between interpretive and objective journalism has come to a head with the introduction of citizen journalism, which has the potential to create a compromise between the two concepts. Today, with the introduction of online news, the industry has encountered a growing global audience. Furthermore, the Internet has cultivated an increasingly open attitude towards news production, as our information is becoming universally accessible and interactive (Gillmor xiii). These shifts have culminated in the development of user-generated content, which promises to expand the profession to include amateur contributors. In determining whether these concerned citizens and experienced journalists can be given equal footing within the industry, we have come full circle in the process of defining the profession. By establishing a focus on “personal choice, assisted by the power of personal technology” (Gillmor 7), citizen journal-
ism questions the ideals of absolute objectivity and verification established in era of corporate print publications. At the same time, it marks a return to the fundamental goal of representing society’s voice in the news, and takes this concept one step further—by involving community members in the process of reporting, user-generated content blends the concepts of objective and interpretive journalism, with the understanding that the truths of a community can only be revealed through its own words.

The Emergence of Citizen Journalism: An Inevitable Movement?

Preceding the development of initiatives like Mission Loc@l, a much larger set of changes have been taking place online, as our news converges with the development of Web-based information-sharing tools. Increasingly, readers have taken to their blogs, smart phones, and Twitter accounts to provide their unique perspectives on issues that directly affect them. In addition to joining online discussions, many of these readers seek a more active role in the process of disseminating information. Dubbed by Jay Rosen as “the people formerly known as the audience,” amateur contributors no longer wish to be “on the receiving end of a media system that ran one way...with high entry fees and a few firms competing to speak very loudly while the rest of the population listened in isolation from one another.” Given new opportunities to engage with a larger, far-reaching community created in the context of the Internet, amateurs are naturally motivated to make their voices heard. Because of these developments, Rosen argues that former audience members have created a role for themselves within the media, dividing the ownership of the press between professionals and amateurs: “There’s a new balance of power between you and us.” This development, defined by Deuze as “any kind of newwork at the hands of professionals and amateurs, of journalists and citizens” (323), has been the subject of much debate. While proponents view citizen journalism as a necessary response to existing problems with the media, critics attempt to dismiss the movement on the grounds that it would compromise journalistic values, undermine traditional media, or at best, be too ineffective to be taken seriously.

On the whole, critics share a limited perspective of the citizen journalism movement. Rather than considering the potential for positive synergy between experienced and amateur reporters, naysayers exhibit a largely unjustified aversion to change. For example, The New Yorker columnist Nicholas Lemann assumes that citizen journalists can only be taken seriously if they can directly compete with, and potentially replace, our current media industry: “Citizen journalists bear a heavy theoretical load. They ought to be fanning out like
a great army, covering not just what professional journalists cover, as well or better, but also much that they ignore.” Here, Lemann views reader contributions and professional expertise as mutually exclusive concepts. By limiting the future of citizen journalism to only two options—what we have now, or a complete overhaul of the system—Lemann exhibits his refusal to accept changes in the media industry. Like several critics of citizen journalism, Lemann views the mere threat of an alternative as reason enough to dismiss the movement entirely.

Meanwhile, given the decline of traditional media and an increased demand to participate online, proponents argue that citizen journalism is emerging as a necessary and inevitable response to these developments. Experts provide different theories to explain the industry’s failures: while some defend it as an unwilling victim of the economic downturn, writer and former columnist Dan Gillmor argues that conservatism and corrupted financial interests have driven the industry to its demise. This development has “led to a hollowing-out syndrome: newspaper publishers and broadcasting station managers have realized they can cut the amount and quality of journalism, at least for a while, in order to raise profits” (Gillmor xv). By shifting its focus away from journalistic standards, the industry has sacrificed its quality and integrity for a single-minded obsession with profit. As a result, society loses vital information that corrupted publications deem to be insignificant. Furthermore, this leads to a growing conservatism in our news, which Gillmor defines as a separation or decline of communication between professionals and their readers: “Big Media, in any event, treated the news as a lecture. We told you what the news was. You bought it, or you didn’t. You might write us a letter; we might print it” (xiii). By disregarding the interests of their readers in favor of profit incentives, these publications assume complete control over disseminated information. Their attempt to wield authority over our news reflects their shift away from seeking the truth and expressing the voice of society.

The industry’s growing weaknesses stem, therefore, from fundamental problems that cannot be reversed immediately. Rather than attempting to fix the complications and potential corruption plaguing Big Media, we might turn to alternatives types of news, such as user-generated content. Deuze argues that citizen journalism, as a supplement to traditional media, marks a positive revival “toward a civic, communitarian, or public journalism” (“Future of Citizen Journalism” 256) powered by the proliferation of digital media: “What is important about these [participatory journalism] sites is that they provide clear and workable alternatives to the traditional separation of journalists, their sources, and the public” (“Preparing” 333). Even before the establishment of a profit-focused press, a
clear divide between journalistic experts and their audience already marked the industry. With user-generated content, there is an opportunity to level the playing field, as publications can use reader input to enhance coverage, rather than dismissing their suggestions as before. Given this theoretical background, our next step must be to study models that effectively harness the enthusiasm and unique perspectives of readers.

Voices of the Mission: Setting Up the Conversation

Mission Loc@l provides a compelling model to examine the successes and failures of hyper-local ventures. With its limited staff of only 20 editors and reporters, Mission Loc@l’s endeavors to engage community members in every way possible—from online discussions to the reporting process itself—are particularly admirable. By targeting smaller, more intimate audiences, these types of initiatives harness the collective power of experienced, dedicated locals to provide a rich database of information unique to the community, ultimately creating a much more dynamic, personal version of our news. In this way, a regional citizen journalism project is much more feasible; rather than creating a brand new online community, its task is simply to gather existing neighbors onto a Web platform, around issues that are already relevant to their lives. However, as relatively new developments, hyper-local websites also face several challenges; without the reputation or the manpower of larger publications, these initiatives have a limited ability to expand coverage or maintain citizen contributions in the long term. Additionally, they rely on small staffs of experienced editors to ensure the quality of the disseminated information, indicating that the enthusiasm of aspiring amateur reporters cannot replace journalistic expertise.

As the main project of her course at the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, founder and managing editor Lydia Chavez created Mission Loc@l in 2008, with the intention of training her students across platforms and providing them with opportunities to gain experience in the field. Funded by a foundation grant, the project aims to provide hyper-local coverage of a “journalistically underserved community” (Chavez). To distinguish Mission Loc@l from traditional publications, the website’s section titles reveal its unique community focus; in addition to sections titled “City Government” for local political news and “Trouble” for crime reports, the website devotes three sections to art, food, and photography. Because of its origins in Chavez’s journalism course, the publication’s content shifts by semester. In the fall, graduate students contribute a larger portion of Mission Loc@l’s content to fulfill their requirement of gaining intensive experience in the field, much like a reporting boot-camp—
During this semester, user-generated content will only make up ten to twenty percent of the site's content. In the spring and summer, as graduate students shift their focus to pursue other tasks, this number will increase to thirty to forty percent and the site includes more general community members. After speaking with several readers and contributors, Chavez found that the majority of amateurs prefer to contribute photography, as "fewer people feel comfortable contributing writing." The staff has therefore worked to present participation as an enjoyable activity, rather than attempting to force the daunting task of original reporting and fact-checking on first-time or casual readers. Additionally, the site presents readers with a clear payoff for their efforts, whether by providing a base for discussions with other readers, or by incorporating their contributions into original content.

After finding its niche within the San Francisco community, Mission Loc@l's gradual integration of citizen contributions into its overall content provides insight into its strengths and weaknesses as a model for user-generated content on a local scale. The website's structure supports the natural, spontaneous growth of citizen reporting, as it subtly encourages readers to contribute in a variety of ways. Using well-known features such as reader comments, polls, and social media tools, Mission Loc@l creates a sense of interactivity throughout the website and enhances dialogue between its readers and reporters. Overall, these features initiate conversations about topics that directly affect community members, which can later develop into more substantial contributions from readers. Although Mission Loc@l uses many of the same tools as professional news sites, the staff works to ensure that their readers' efforts to participate are much more rewarding.

At a first glance, Mission Loc@l's "Post a Comment" section, placed at the bottom of each story, is nothing out of the ordinary. As on most news websites, this feature prompts readers to share their reactions and opinions to an article. So far, Mission Loc@l receives a modest number of comments in comparison with larger publications; its most popular stories have fifteen to twenty comments each. However, Mission Loc@l takes advantage of its smaller readership; with fewer comments, the staff is able to manage input and engage with readers more effectively. To achieve this, reporters make an effort to participate in these discussions themselves by responding to their readers' suggestions and comments. For example, in her story about recent crime activity, reporter Heather Smith posted follow-up comments to directly address and thank individual commenters for their input. One such post reads:

Dean—we followed up with the police department, but no word as to what the shots were that you mentioned. Jorge—we stopped by the Mobile Command Center. They said that
they were definitely there because of the shootings this week, and did say that it was probably gang-related, and unlikely to be focused on ethnicity. Thank you both for commenting, and I’m updating the article to reflect this” (Smith, “Follow-up”). Smith’s reply reflects Mission Loc@l’s open-minded attitude towards its readers; by not only responding to readers’ comments, but by also updating her article to reflect their suggestions, Smith shows that readers’ contributions are valuable to the reporting process. After engaging readers in this process, Mission Loc@l’s coverage becomes much more dynamic and transparent, with input from various contributors. Therefore, Mission Loc@l takes its comment section a step further than most news websites; not only does the feature provide a base for reader discussions, but the website also ensures that these conversations are part of the news itself. In this way, Mission Loc@l views the comment section as an opportunity to home in on the issues that readers are most curious about, allowing the website to better serve its audience. Overall, this attitude is a necessary prerequisite to encourage more significant contributions from readers.

The site also uses this approach for more serious topics; for example, a feature on the front page with the title, “Know of a Problem? Report it!” encourages readers to take part in improving their community by speaking out about problems they may encounter throughout their neighborhood. The feature, created by a website called SeeClickFix, uses a map to display the locations of reported issues, which include broken streetlights, noise pollution, loitering, and drug activity. In addition to reporting original problems, readers can vote on existing issues; currently, the problem of most concern to readers, garnering eleven votes, reads, “Excessive Speed on South Van Ness—the speed limit is 25 MPH!” (“Know of a problem?”). By harnessing media and social tools, SeeClickFix aims to engage local government and concerned community groups in a joint conversation with the goal of improving a neighborhood. This feature reveals two assumptions that hyper-local and citizen journalism make about their readers: that they are familiar with the neighborhood, and are concerned enough about its well-being to contribute their day-to-day findings and suggestions. Individual stories also make assumptions about readers’ familiarity with the Mission; while describing the customers inside a coffee shop, reporter Heather Smith references a local college campus: “[It] allows you to muse—if you remember New College—about how long it’s been since you met someone in the Mission who was majoring in goddess religions or social change” (Smith). With esoteric references to places and people in the mission, Smith’s story speaks to a specific reader—one who has lived in the district for a substantial amount of time, and is therefore familiar with changes it has undergone in recent years. In this way, Mission
Loc@l takes advantage of the existing connections among neighbors in the district, to emulate the same sense of intimacy in its online community. Finally, the SeeClickFix feature exemplifies Chavez’s approach to encouraging reader participation—people are only willing to contribute if they are presented with a potential benefit from doing so. Here, readers are drawn by the opportunity to engage with other readers and local government to change the scenery of their own neighborhood.

**Striking a Balance: A Contributor’s Experience**

For amateur reporter Melissa San Miguel, contributing to Mission Loc@l was a chance to reconnect with her hometown. Having grown up in the Mission, San Miguel discovered the website while following local news online, and found that it provided a more thorough, balanced portrayal of the district than traditional publications. Despite her lack of prior journalism experience, San Miguel eventually approached Chavez to ask about potentially becoming a community contributor. San Miguel felt that her unique background as a Mission-native would allow her to provide a historical perspective about the changes that the neighborhood has undergone while surviving difficult economic times: “I think my experience could mean something for Mission Loc@l because I remember how things were before—even the little pieces of information, like the liquor store on the corner that’s been there forever. It seemed like a good chance for me to get into writing and to do something that mattered to me—I wanted to take down the history of the neighborhood.”

While Mission Loc@l attempts to equate amateurs and professionals in the reporting process, its experiments have faced logistical difficulties. While San Miguel exhibits a strong personal initiative to tackle the responsibilities of a journalist, not all community members are as proactive; in its attempts to expand the quantity and quality of user-generated content, the staff has faced several challenges with recruitment. At best, Chavez considers community reporting to be part-time volunteer work: “Most of the people who are contributing from the community have other jobs, so their ability to do that on a sustained level is minimal; they can add around the edges, and we value that.” While they may be actively involved with the site, amateur reporters alone cannot fulfill the necessary commitment to ensure sustained, in-depth coverage of a community, given their more pressing priorities. Furthermore, active recruitment attempts have generally failed; the staff often sets up informational tables at local events, and has led a poster campaign around the neighborhood to reach community members in person. According to Chavez, the turnout from these efforts has been disappointing, gener-
ally leading to only one or two requests from citizens interested in becoming regular contributors. Therefore, readers continue to depend on Mission Loc@l’s professional staff to provide a foundation for the website’s content. This conclusion leads naturally from Mission Loc@l’s origins, given that the site was founded and is now managed by experienced journalists.

Therefore, the website targets a specific group of contributors—dedicated, long-term amateur reporters, such as San Miguel—to ensure that user-generated content will be sustained in the future. Given that these community members already approach the site on their own, the staff aims to reward them for their voluntary work by including them in the Mission Loc@l team. Unlike casual participants, these dedicated contributors can potentially build up experience and background knowledge in the topics that they cover, allowing for continuous coverage. For San Miguel, her involvement with Mission Loc@l was only possible because of her relatively free schedule; she initially balanced reporting with a part-time job: “Journalism was always something that I wanted to try, but since I was focused on other things before, I didn’t have time to do it. But that being said, coming back to the Mission as an educated professional gives me a better perspective than I had before.” Although reporting demands a large time commitment, San Miguel finds the activity personally enriching, as she is led by a personal sense of curiosity while covering her own community. For contributors like San Miguel, Chavez says that further encouragement is helpful, but not necessary: “My sense is that people find us when they want to; the people who end up contributing in the long-term are very passionate.” Instead, Chavez seeks to maintain their dedication by building the website’s reputation for professionalism and responsiveness to readers. Chavez chose to equate the titles of staff and community reporters after posting work by Jon Logan, an amateur photographer at Mission Loc@l: “When I put Jon’s work online for the first time, I listed him as a community contributor in the byline. But then I realized that this was wrong; I wouldn’t put up his work unless I thought it was good.” By choosing not to differentiate Logan’s work with his byline, Chavez exhibits Mission Loc@l’s open-minded attitude towards its contributors, who work alongside professionals as equals. Accordingly, the staff works to provide adequate accommodation for contributors’ efforts: “We’ll put the photos into a slideshow ourselves, so they can see that we’re very responsive” (Chavez). Here, Chavez makes sure to reward contributors for their efforts by showcasing their work and thus paying respect to their dedication.

By showing her respect for their work, Chavez attempts to limit her role as a gatekeeper of the news and thus sets herself on an equal level with community members. While pursuing her first few stories,
San Miguel worked closely with Chavez, who encouraged her to work independently while conducting interviews and gathering information, despite her lack of experience: “She gave me a lot of room to explore and try things out on my own. I would go through the process of putting together the story myself, and she would just ask me questions to fine-tune my writing. I felt that I had a lot of freedom to figure things out by myself.” Rather than imposing authoritative control over her contributors’ work, Chavez trusts that these reporters will fulfill any necessary tasks to complete a comprehensive report. In return, reporters trust Chavez’s journalistic expertise to ensure that their work preserves their unique opinions and perspectives, without sacrificing accuracy. At the same time, San Miguel does not feel that the editing process is out of her control; rather, she often agrees with Chavez’s assessments of her stories: “I really liked getting her opinion about my writing because she’s been a professional in the field for so long. But even when she caught mistakes in my writing, her edits made sense to me—none of them were random or out of the blue.” Trust and open communication throughout the editing process are crucial elements to successful teamwork between amateurs and professionals. By taking a step back in this process, Chavez allows contributors to learn on their own, which is beneficial in the long term; contributors will apply the skills and knowledge they have gained while pursuing future stories. Finally, this shows that a balanced approach to citizen journalism is necessary. Both contributors and editors recognize that experience and oversight can provide a sense of guidance in the reporting process.

Challenges and Considerations

As Mission Loc@l attempts to expand citizen contributions and its influence on the Mission community, it faces several challenges. With the exception of a few particularly courageous and passionate amateurs such as San Miguel, the site’s readers have not yet made a complete shift from participation to original reporting. Although Mission Loc@l engages with participants who are willing to step forward on their own, the website does not fully reflect this attitude; with an outdated, limited means of communication between casual participants and the staff, the site limits its reach towards less ambitious readers—those who may have great ideas and contributions, but are more hesitant to provide them, or are unaware of their ability to do so.

Unknown to most of its readers, Mission Loc@l’s newsroom is a hub of creativity and collaboration; its unique atmosphere embodies the convergence of collaboration and professional oversight necessary to achieve a balanced model of citizen journalism. For example, San
Miguel has sought advice from other staff members to gain reporting experience and knowledge, which she described as an interactive and engaging experience: “The other reporters and editors made me feel welcome—I would tell them about my stories and ask questions, and they would give me informal feedback. The editors always made themselves available; everyone offered help, and sometimes I’d take them up on it.” Local initiatives such as Mission Loc@l have the added benefit of being based in a physical community; with the convenience of a local newsroom, contributors can work alongside their fellow reporters—whether amateur or professional—to learn about news coverage firsthand. Overall, this allows for a much greater ease of coordination, which ultimately creates a sense of equality among staff members.

However, as the staff increases its outreach to participants, it must ensure that the website functions as a virtual extension of its unique newsroom, reflecting its origins as a community-based initiative. Overall, the site is currently limited by its initial approach to hyper-local coverage, given that the initiative was spearheaded by experienced journalists, as opposed to community contributors themselves. Furthermore, the site’s origin as a Berkeley course increases the separation between community members and staff reporters; San Miguel noted that while she was able to work closely with Chavez and other full-time editors, she felt that her intentions were very different from those of the graduate students who write for Mission Loc@l during the school year; although they may be invested in the reporting process, they primarily aim to excel in a class, rather than working solely for the Mission’s interests. Therefore, the equality between these students and community contributors may only be expressed in principle, and not in practice. Eventually, the site must expand beyond its educational purposes to fully integrate its work into the broader community.

Furthermore, the site’s current method of communication between staff members and readers functions as a type of unintentional gate-keeping by the staff. Currently, community members can only submit story ideas to a staff e-mail address, with the understanding that their contributions will be read and potentially approved by editors. At best, Chavez will conduct an individual e-mail exchange with each community member to discuss his suggestions. However, this adds to the divide between aspiring team members and the team itself; without an open, interactive method of communication, the site unintentionally limits contributions from less proactive contributors. To achieve this, the site could implement an open forum or instant chat tool on its front page for readers and editors to discuss potential story ideas or provide suggestions on issues that need further coverage. This forum would also allow for real-time collaboration, as
contributors could combine different pieces of information to build a comprehensive story. Additionally, reporters could use the forum to organize schedules to divide the work of interviewing and researching amongst themselves. Finally, first-time reporters and experienced journalists could use this tool to discuss challenges and share advice about their experiences. Any tool used to facilitate these conversations would indicate that the input from staff reporters and input from readers are equally valuable.

While citizen journalism offers readers a voice in the news, the process of revising this work relies on an editorial hierarchy to ground their input in journalistic standards of accuracy and objectivity. Chavez strongly believes that citizen journalism should not be viewed as a direct competitor to traditional media: “We’re really open to local contributors, but I think the notion that citizen journalism will replace journalism and that it will all be done for free is ludicrous; I don’t see that happening at all. I think that as we get more higher-profile, people will want to contribute in different ways. But we do all the work with editing and oversight.” Indeed, Chavez fact-checks and edits every story before it is published, and oversees the expanded revision process with the help of only three assisting editors. Similarly, Downie and Schudson acknowledge readers’ increased demand to contribute online, while maintaining that experienced journalists are necessary to evaluate news quality: “Even if news organizations were to vanish en masse, information, investigation, analysis, and community knowledge would not disappear. But something else would be lost, and we would be reminded that there is a need not just for information, but for news judgment oriented to a public agenda and a general audience.” Therefore, while citizen journalism grows naturally and inevitably, it can only succeed in the long-term if facilitated by authoritative experts in a balanced manner.

**Becoming a Reporter: Future Implications**

Initially, Melissa San Miguel was hesitant to identify herself as a reporter; despite her enthusiasm and unique point of view, San Miguel doubted that her work had qualified her as a member of Mission Loc@l’s team, and that she had truly crossed the threshold into the realm of reporting. It was only after several staff members, including Chavez, convinced her otherwise that San Miguel was able to confirm her newfound identity as a citizen journalist, or a community voice integrated into the news. As media veterans and newcomers continue to grapple with the challenges presented by citizen journalism, success stories from experimental ventures provide inspiration for future attempts. Ultimately, the most effective initiatives empow-
er their readers to share their opinions, tell unique stories, and make their voices heard within an online community.

Expanding the hyper-local movement poses an intriguing challenge; given that these initiatives are focused within tight-knit communities, they aim for thorough coverage and an involved readership, as opposed to maximizing the website’s hits or total number of unique visitors. Unlike a traditional publication, these initiatives are focused on depth, not breadth. Therefore, their efforts can only spread conceptually, as each venture can provide inspiration for another community to emulate its efforts. However, each initiative must adjust according to the unique demands and interests of its own community, whether by focusing its content on specific issues, or by encouraging reader participation with different methods. To provide momentum for this growth, traditional journalists must embrace the concept that establishing a sense of equality between professionals and amateurs is necessary to set the stage for their collaboration. Because different citizen journalism initiatives will inevitably have unique staff dynamics, San Miguel’s experience with the Mission Loc@l staff is only one example of the new relationships formed between amateurs and professionals, and the negotiations that are necessary to maintain them. In this way, citizen journalism is characterized by constant experimentation—it will be impossible to find a one-size-fits-all model.

As journalists find new ways to integrate into an online platform, their readers’ expectations for their news are rapidly changing. Not only do they assume that information will be updated instantaneously, but readers also seek new ways to consume their news. On the one hand, new journalism models have the potential to provide more in-depth and long-term coverage in comparison with print newspapers; on the other hand, content farms such as Demand Media exemplify an extreme emphasis on breadth, as they employ vast crowds of freelance journalists to amass information and stories. Therefore, an ideal future model for journalism remains unclear. Throughout these experiments, proponents and critics alike must recognize that new opportunities on the Internet may pose a challenge to journalism conventions, but should not stray from core values of free speech, accuracy and transparency; regardless of who provides our news, it should always be in pursuit of the truth.

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FALL 2010 HONORABLE MENTION

Tonya Yu

INSTRUCTOR’S FOREWORD

Whereas some remarkable student papers arise from extensive consultation and conversation (see my previous introduction), others arise, as if by magic, almost fully formed, with little instructor intervention. Tonya is one of those students who started with a research topic that immediately achieved exactly the right level of specificity. Her focus on the MIT Media Lab’s One Laptop Per Child (OLCP) Project allowed her to anchor her inquiry into a broad range of questions related to technology, education, and international aid, without veering off into airy abstractions or ungrounded generalities. What Tonya’s paper reveals is that there is reason to be skeptical of OLCP’s claim to be “an education project” and not just “a laptop project.”

The problems OLCP seeks to confront—whether described as a “digital divide” or a “knowledge divide”—are real enough. But, as Tonya powerfully demonstrates, however important technology is, and however tempting it is to focus on the dazzling specifics of OLCP’s amazing hardware, one cannot simply airdrop XO laptops into an impoverished mountain region and expect miracles to occur. A vast human infrastructure must precede and enable such new technologies, if those devices—and the students they are meant to serve—are to achieve their full potential. As we discussed frequently in our PWR 1 class, “Rhetoric, Social Media, and Virtual Worlds,” technology is not only about microprocessors, flash memory, and open-source code but also about cultural codes, social memory, political-economic processes. If this perspective is correct, one must focus as much on curriculum as on code if one hopes to improve educational outcomes. Tonya’s affecting account of Diego, and the mystery of what he’s doing now, underscores the need to match technological development with human and social development.

—Lee Konstantinou
Diego is a seven-year-old Peruvian boy who lives in the small mountain village of Arahuay. He lives on the charity of neighbors because his father left the family long ago, and his mother works in the capital, Lima, about a hundred kilometers away. Nobody tells Diego to go to school, so he stopped going when his mother left. But one day, his former teacher paid him a visit to make a bargain: If he came back to school, he would receive a free laptop. Diego didn’t know what a laptop was, but he figured he could sell it for some money, so he returned to school, collected his laptop, and… discovered that he had a natural aptitude for it. Like a blind boy suddenly discovering sight, he became entranced by the magical fountain of knowledge and entertainment. He wanted to keep the laptop so much that he decided to stay in school. Soon he began teaching his classmates—each with his or her own laptop—some new features that he had figured out himself. He is now learning about possibilities of a life for himself outside of his village. Maybe when he grows up, he will be able to become an educated worker and earn enough money to help children like him in his village.

This is the kind of true story that fuels the ambitions of One Laptop per Child (OLPC), the project that supplied the laptops. OLPC is a global project spearheaded by Nicholas Negroponte “to empower the children of developing countries to learn by providing one connected laptop to every school-age child” (One Laptop Per Child “Mission”). The organization sells its specially designed “$100 laptops,” officially named the XO laptop, directly to national governments, which purchase and distribute the laptops to schools with their own resources. As of August 2010, OLPC has deployed 1.85
million XO laptops to over thirty countries around the world, most of them developing countries like Uruguay, Rwanda, Haiti, Mongolia, and Afghanistan (One Laptop Per Child “Deployments”). The children keep the laptops and are allowed to take them home. OLPC hopes that by furnishing these laptops to underprivileged children, the children will be able to gain the skillset needed to survive in the global economy and finally break out of the cycle of poverty.

Negroponte’s announcement in January 2005 of his organization’s plan to produce a $100 laptop initially generated much skepticism in the tech world. Prior to the XO laptop, computer manufacturers had focused on creating high-performance machines and had never even considered marketing to developing countries. OLPC essentially opened up a new education market for cheap computers and paved the way for the salability of netbooks in 2008 (Kraemer, Dedrick, and Sharma). This means that developing countries now have several options to choose from if they decide to implement one-to-one computing in their schools, and they do not have to become dependent on one particular system. Cheaper computers also make computing more affordable to many more families in general, democratizing information by bringing access to knowledge to a greater portion of the world.

But for all it has achieved, simply shipping laptops to disadvantaged areas will not solve any problems on its own. It is only the first step in enabling children to receive a better education. In order to ensure that children are actually learning how to take full advantage of their laptops for the right purposes, many other factors must still be taken into account in the education system, such as teacher training, curriculum integration, and systemized evaluation. In light of popular criticism that OLPC does not “recognize that technology is just a tool, and … that you need not only the tool, but the connectivity, the content, the teacher training to make it all work” (Barrett), the remainder of this paper will analyze how much focus OLPC actually puts on education rather than on just the laptops, and whether that focus is enough. First I will identify the problem that children in developing countries face, and why information and communication technology (ICT) is considered crucial to raising their education to modern standards. I will analyze how OLPC proposes to help solve that problem and how it currently carries out its intentions. Then I will consider other case studies of using laptops in the classroom and in third-world countries to suggest how OLPC could improve its strategy to better fulfill its mission as “an education project” and “not a laptop project” (One Laptop Per Child “Mission”). OLPC should be admired for its ambitious goals and recognized for prompting other companies and non-profits to take action regarding universal education, but it assumes that pure technology will solve more
problems than it is capable of doing, so it should concentrate more efforts towards training teachers and helping them develop curricula that fully integrate the XO laptop.

The Digital Divide

Diego’s hometown, Arahuay, is an agricultural and farming village of 700 people nestled in the Andes mountains of Peru on the slope of a valley. With only two buses that stop there each day and almost no mobile phone signal, Arahuay is not particularly connected with the rest of Peru, let alone the rest of the world. Many of the 2.1 million children who live in extreme poverty in Peru live in isolated mountain villages like Arahuay where they have “very few resources for a modern education” (One Laptop Per Child “Children > Countries > Peru”). Photos of Arahuay’s only school on the OLPC website depict spare, dusty classrooms furnished with old and clunky desks and chairs and chipped blackboards. The plumbing and scaffolding are completely exposed, and each room is supplied with only enough electricity to power a single light bulb. Students have generally never used computers before, and even teachers have had very little experience with them. Additionally, the schoolrooms lack any reading materials or reference books like dictionaries because they are too expensive (Monroy, et. al.). Without computers and dictionaries, basic learning tools that are often taken for granted in developed countries, the children of Arahuay will probably not be able to gain an education beyond the elementary school level. Even the schools in Lima at least have full electricity and limited computer access, which is enough to put their students at a slight advantage to those in Arahuay (Talbot). Students without such resources are wholly dependent on the capabilities of their teachers, who may have been formally trained but probably went through the same education system, and thus lack the competencies of teachers from the developed world (Krstić, “Astounded in Arahuay”; Negroponte, “Can the $100 Laptop Change the World?”).

Politicians call these discrepancies in access to technology and the ability to use it the “digital divide.” To have access to technology is to have more than just the ability to surf the Internet. It means that technology has been allowed to penetrate the society’s culture—its news media, commercial industry, and education system, for example—all while forming a new burgeoning IT sector that creates many high-skill jobs. As all industries move to incorporate information and communications technology (ICT) and become increasingly knowledge-based, developing countries without ICT fall farther behind, and their economies suffer even more for it. Without sufficient funds to build infrastructure for ICT, it follows that their education
systems will also lag more and more behind those of developed countries. As Marshall, Kinuthia, and Taylor remark in the introduction to the book *Bridging the Knowledge Divide*, “Unless ICT becomes an integral part of the development, delivery, and content of education, the disadvantages will deepen” (xxvii). Eventually, the digital divide deepens into a greater social issue known as the “knowledge divide”—where countries on the wrong side of the divide not only lack access to information, but also have not learned or are incapable of processing and managing that information (Marshall, Kinuthia, and Taylor xxvii).

But even with the support of world superpowers, it will take decades to build and implement the infrastructure to support ICT in developing countries, not to mention train all the workers and teachers to use the new technology (Negroponte, “Can the $100 Laptop Change the World?”). That’s why initiatives like OLPC believe the most worthwhile solution is to enable the children of developing countries—their “most precious natural resource”—to make use of ICT to expand their minds and enhance their educations in the meantime (“Nicholas Negroponte on One Laptop per Child”). Education is the fountain of all possible solutions to cure the many other socioeconomic problems that third-world countries face, and technology can be a powerful enabler of that education. In a 2009 report published in the *Harvard International Review*, Gallup researchers found that, when comparing countries with similar per capita GDPs, “students in countries where more people own computers performed better” academically¹ (Pelham, Crabtree, and Nyiri 75). Thus, computer ownership can be uniquely correlated to academic success. What children in developing countries lack is not the capability to use technology or to learn, but the opportunity and resources, and OLPC aims to fill that void.

“An Education Project, Not a Laptop Project”

The ambitions of the OLPC project actually grew from decades of experiences with other educational pilot projects. OLPC’s basic philosophy is founded on a learning theory proposed by Seymour Papert, Negroponte’s colleague, that he calls “constructionism,” which is strongly rooted in the “learning by doing” school of thought, combined with the belief that computers can help children “learn learning” (Tabb 339). Papert and Negroponte, along with computer scientist Alan Kay, ran a pilot project sponsored by the French government in 1982 in which they distributed Apple II microcomputers

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¹ Measured by PISA scores, “based on reading, mathematics, and science, with emphasis on both abstract knowledge and real-world application”; see Pelham, Crabtree, and Nyiri 74.
to school children in a suburb of Dakar, Senegal. Negroponte reported in his popular TED talk in February 2006 that the children “could just swim like fish; they could play these [computers] like pianos,” proving that “children in remote, rural, and poor regions of the world take to computers as easily and naturally as children anywhere” (One Laptop Per Child “Project”). According to Negroponte, the only problem was that the project did not scale (“Nicholas Negroponte on One Laptop per Child”).

However, others have been more skeptical about the real impact of the Dakar pilot project. According to former OLPC employee Ivan Krstić, the project was “a spectacular flop” that “demonstrated nothing about anything” (“Sic Transit Gloria Laptopi”). Krstić maintains that Papert’s constructionism theory is still but a theory, a concept that appears sound but that has yet to be proven on a moderate to large scale with one-to-one computing. The results that Negroponte saw in Senegal were likely only the immediate effects of introducing computers to that environment, and were not indicative of any long-term benefits. Since “clashes of management style, personality, and political conviction” caused the French government to quickly shut down the project, a follow-up to evaluate the results was never executed (qtd. in Krstić, “Sic Transit Gloria Laptopi”).

But Negroponte and Papert were nevertheless emboldened by the early success they saw in the Dakar pilot project and went on to found the MIT Media Lab in 1985 with a mission to “invent and creatively exploit new media for human well-being without regard for present-day constraints” (One Laptop Per Child “Project”). The Media Lab has since supported several constructionist projects in Boston, Costa Rica, and Cambodia (Krstić, “Sic Transit Gloria Laptopi”; “OLPC: Project”), though all on extremely small scales (limited to one school or involving twenty or fewer people). OLPC was Negroponte’s final and most ambitious project with the Media Lab before he left as its director to fully dedicate his time to the now-separate initiative.

In order to produce the laptops at such a low cost, OLPC had to first convince a computer manufacturer to produce a low-end computer, and then order them in mass quantities—Negroponte put initial estimates at 100 million units a year (“Negroponte on One Laptop per Child”). A completely new type of machine was envisioned so that it would be able to withstand the harsh physical conditions of many of the rural areas it would be deployed to, as well as the extra wear-and-tear handling of children. Not only is its hardware slimmed down from the specifications of traditional laptops (i.e. it uses a flash drive instead of a hard drive, and it does not have a cooling fan), but the laptop is rugged and moisture- and dirt-resistant (Tabb). The XO laptop is also unique for its constructionist underpinnings,
specially designed for children aged six through twelve. The laptops automatically form a mesh network with each other, so only one computer needs to be connected to the Internet, and it can propagate that connection to the other computers in the network (Silverman 2). They feature a distinctive childlike aesthetic, with bright green antenna ears and a shrunken keyboard to suit small hands (Tabb), partly to appeal to children, but also partly to deter theft by creating a product too specialized to sell on the gray market (Negroponte, “Nicholas Negroponte on One Laptop per Child”). The screen swivels around and lies flat to transform into an e-reader (Silverman 2). In addition, the Linux-based operating system, called Sugar, was also developed entirely in-house. It sports a pictorial GUI to be accessible to children of all languages and literacy levels (Zittrain 236), and its “zoom” paradigm shows nearby laptops to emphasize different levels of collaboration, from the greater community down to the individual “activity” that the child is currently working on. Such activities include a graphical music composition application, an “acoustic ruler” that measures the distance between two laptops, a “paint” program, and several graphical programming applications. Thus, Sugar places its emphasis on creativity and collaborative projects, rather than rote consumption of data (One Laptop Per Child “Laptop Interface”).

According to Negroponte during his TED talk in February 2006, about a year after launching the project, the organization had raised $20 million so far to develop the hardware and software of the XO laptops. The huge investment of time and money spent on the lap-
tops has aroused much scrutiny about the organization’s true goals, and whether it is more interested in the technology or in education. Even OLPC employees expressed disapproval at the excessive attention spent on the software. As Krstić wrote in an internal memo during his employment at OLPC, “Choosing to reinvent the desktop UI paradigm means we are spending our extremely overconstrained resources fighting graphical interfaces, not developing better tools for learning” (“Sic Transit Gloria Laptopi”). Notably, India’s Ministry of Education initially declined to participate in the program because it said its country needed “classrooms and teachers more urgently than fancy tools” (Óates), suggesting that OLPC’s efforts may be less appreciated than it had expected.

Other computer manufacturers have capitalized on this criticism by initiating production of their own low-end laptops using existing operating systems and software, such as Windows and Microsoft Office. In 2006, Intel unveiled the classmate PC, and the next year Asutek released the EeePC notebook, both designed for students in developing countries. Several other manufacturers began selling similar laptops or netbooks for just a couple of hundred dollars, spurring adoption of netbooks and helping lower the economic barrier of access to computers in developing countries—which will also aid in integrating ICTs in their economies and education systems in the long run (Kraemer, Dedrick, and Sharma).

However, these computer manufacturers have relegated educational goals in favor of focusing on increasing their market shares. OLPC’s ultimate mission as a non-profit, on the other hand, is to help solve a pressing global social issue. The Sugar operating system is arguably more child-friendly and better geared to encourage individual exploration, even outside of the classroom. OLPC justifies creating totally new software by claiming that it wants not only to promote computer literacy, but also to equip children with the means to use computers as tools in all learning pursuits, school-related or personal, while inspiring them to become invested in their own education (One Laptop Per Child “Laptop Software”).

Educating the Education Project

Unfortunately, OLPC’s current deployment strategy does not reflect the same careful attention to educational benefits that was paid to the development of the XO laptop. A prominent New York Times exposé in 2007 described how a one-to-one laptop program in Liverpool, New York failed to produce better test scores because teachers were not properly engaged and the goals of the program were not clearly explained (Johnson 73). Thus, it is critical that OLPC devote more energy to what happens after the laptops are deployed, because
introducing laptops means catalyzing an entire paradigm shift in those education systems—and no matter how intuitive it is to use the laptops, it will take a full support system to ease that transition.

It is especially paramount to thoroughly train teachers on how to integrate the laptops into their classrooms because there may be some resistance to full adoption of the laptops. Encouraging students to take charge of their own learning implies that teachers, traditionally in an authoritarian role, should suddenly take the back seat, which flattens the long-established pyramid of power. As an example of how some teachers feel about the laptops, one teacher in Arahuay told her students, “You won’t take your laptops home today because yesterday, instead of doing your homework, you were playing with your laptops,” even though students had not completed their homework due to other reasons (Monroy, et. al.).

Although the strategy of learning through exploration follows the constructionist theory, it does not adequately teach teachers and students how to take full advantage of the laptops in practice. Students can discover many new things on their own, but they need a wise teacher to guide them on the right path. Jason Johnson, who manages a one-to-one laptop program for fourth to sixth graders in the United States, says that he “depended upon having talented educators to capitalize on that energy and interest and redirect it toward more productive pursuits... Teachers and librarians pulled back the curtain to show students that their newly developed skills had value beyond the limited scope of the student’s immediate interests.”

Currently, OLPC only offers limited computer literacy training to teachers through brief on-site workshops in the few weeks after the laptops are received (Monroy, et. al.). There are just “a handful of trainers to cover the thousands of schools that will serve as distribution points, and the training function is more to ensure installation and functioning of the servers rather than true mastery of the machines,” leaving the rest to be learned through mostly trial-and-error (Zittrain 236). In a pamphlet-sized “OLPC Learning Guide” which devotes only two pages to glossed-over curriculum suggestions, OLPC says they are “not defining what children should learn with the XO because [they] believe that those decisions need to be made at the local level.” Yet using the XO laptops is so markedly different from traditional teaching methods that teachers who work with the OLPC program will need to create new lesson plans that focus less on meeting standards and more on fostering personal progress, a demanding task that may prove near impossible without supporting materials from OLPC (Canuel).

Meanwhile, other educators have recognized this void and have integrated the XO laptops within their own specially structured curricula. Maureen Orth, for example, is a journalist who founded the
Marina Orth Foundation to teach English, ICT, and leadership to children in Colombia. In an interview with a TechCrunch subsidiary, she said, “we really find that especially teacher training is the most neglected [in the OLPC project].” Her foundation works closely with the teachers every day and aids them in developing curricula which properly exploits the potential of the XO laptops (“Marina Orth Foundation”). This approach clearly defines the role of the laptop as a rich resource and tool to be tapped for learning, but not the end of the entire solution. If OLPC wishes to truly label itself as an education project, then perhaps it should take a similar approach and aim not only to educate students but also their teachers.

Ambition ≠ Success

Another factor which the OLPC project could improve on is that, despite its grand scale of the OLPC project, it has yet to address the failing points of the Dakar pilot project in the 1980’s: namely, it does not have a strategy to prove that constructionism produces long-term results on a global scale. During Krstić’s employment from 2006 to 2008, the organization did not even have a deployment team “helping to plan [deployment], working with our target countries to learn what works and what doesn’t” (“Sic Transit Gloria Laptopi”), calling into question how serious OLPC is about really improving education.

The first step to rectify this issue would be to listen to feedback from laptop recipients after they have had extensive experience with them. Recipients report now that “the desire to hear from ‘others’ is not well appreciated” at OLPC (Canuel). Negroponte himself has claimed that “this is not something you have to test” and “to criticize it is a little bit stupid” (“Nicholas Negroponte on One Laptop per Child”). This self-righteous attitude has been highly disparaged by education experts and developing countries’ governments alike. Without a willingness to reflect upon and improve its strategies, OLPC risks locking itself into the outdated, inflexible mindset of the very type of education it is trying to revolutionize.

The second step should be to perform systematic evaluations of the educational impact of integrating the XO laptops into third world classrooms. The OLPC website proudly states that “an early evaluation of progress in Peru released in May 2009 showed a 50% improvement in reading comprehension among students and of almost 60% for textual and mathematical analysis. The study also noted the texts produced by children and teachers demonstrate more creativity and improvement in writing and spelling” (emphasis added). In fact, experts have identified four phases of one-to-one laptop deployment, beginning with “euphoria” in the first eight to twelve months, then digressing to a “dip” phase in the next twelve months.
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where users become disillusioned with the technology (Canuel). Thus, an early evaluation should never be taken as a predictor of continued success or duplicability in other regions. With teachers already somewhat reluctant to accept the laptops as immersive teaching tools, it would be easy for them to give up on the laptops during the “dip” phase. OLPC loses integrity as a charitable organization with ambitious goals by not implementing a system to hold itself—and teachers—accountable.

Conclusion

The OLPC project has generated a multitude of both praise and criticism since its inception in 2005. Indeed, it is easy to esteem such a noble cause, but a project on this grandiose scale is bound to have many shortcomings as well. There are several points which would help establish OLPC as a credible education-focused organization. For one thing, teacher training should not be an afterthought but a priority. This would take considerable shifts in management and require much more manpower, because teacher training does not scale as quickly as laptop distribution. OLPC could also expand its Learning Guide and offer more materials for teachers to use as they begin to develop their own, suited for their unique environments. Also, while positive immediate feedback is crucial because it keeps up momentum and fuels publicity, long-term evaluation is necessary to ensure that the millions of dollars donated to OLPC are being used as effectively as possible. Diego’s story was written up in a report in 2007; we don’t know how he or his classmates are doing today. Have they fallen into the same trap of using their laptops excessively for entertainment, as students are wont to do?

Another issue to explore is the sustainability of a program like OLPC. What will happen when the children outgrow the XO laptops? After all, they are designed for children up to age twelve and are expected to have a five-year lifespan (Tabb 339). To dote on younger children and neglect them after they mature seems like fighting only half the battle. Developing countries risk becoming too dependent on OLPC, which could potentially snare them into a contract to purchase even more laptops for older children. And in the end, that would not really break the cycle of dependency that the XO laptops are supposed to eradicate.

Perhaps the best measurement of OLPC’s success that we have today is the effect it has made on the netbook market. There is no doubt that the introduction of the concept of a sub-performance laptop contributed to the sales of 10 million netbooks in 2008 (Kraemer, Dedrick, and Sharma). In the long run, this will make computers more accessible for people of all ages worldwide—that would help
reach the greater social goal of uplifting countries of poverty, which OLPC is trying to do through education.

Works Cited


Our perception of the past determines how we understand and frame the present. This is the central contention to studies of cultural memory and the politics of history and remembrance. The work of fashioning a cultural memory of violence, then, has stark consequences when the remembrance is called upon to demand violent retaliation and retribution.

Gillie Collin’s essay analyzes the Taliban’s use of national, ethnic, and religious history to persuade Afghans and the world at large that their cause is historically rooted, motivated, and justified. Sorting through Taliban propaganda, media representations, and speeches, Gillie goes beyond simply critiquing the “truth” in these representations to ask the more challenging question: what are the consequences of these historical interpretations, accurate or not? In her words, “The Taliban is not a dormant relic of history; instead, the movement engages history to accrue authority in contemporary socio-political contexts.”

In particular, Gillie challenges us to look beyond bound studies of cultural memory, nationalism, and “imagined communities” to assess the role of memory in international and intercultural exchange. The texts she analyzes are not nationally bound, produced for and by Afghans. Instead, they are cultural productions by individuals aware of their global resonance to invoke varying international memories of violence. Recognizing this, Gillie questions what it means to expand our binary conception of an American or Afghani cultural memory of the War on Terror. She takes cultural interaction seriously and asks that we consider an American-Afghani dual view that informs the inspiration, production, circulation, and reception of these historical analogies.

At every stage in her work, Gillie remains attentive to how these texts make the past relevant to the present and fundamental for imagining possible futures. Security strategists call this sort of fruitful analysis “actionable intelligence.” Here, consider it scholarship at its best, concerned with thinking critically about the world in order to make it better by reducing human suffering.

—Brian Johnsrud
The Neo-Taliban’s Neo-History: Re-Cognition in Resurgence

Gillie Collins

“Afghans have, throughout their history, lived in brotherhood and exhibited intense integrity, solidarity and unity as a single nation under the name Afghanistan.”

—The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Taliban Website

“Their goal seems to be to take the Muslim world in particular back to a sort of medieval, fanatical view of life. And progress is their enemy and freedom is their enemy.”

—Paul D. Wolfowitz, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense, on the Taliban and Al Qaeda

Whether the Taliban is a barbaric anachronism or a legitimate incarnation of traditional Afghan nationalism, these claims ground their arguments in the same rhetorical warrant: history—or historical memory—matters. The past defines us.

American politicians have long construed the Taliban as a backward-looking, “medieval” entity. In 2001, the U.S. declared the Taliban a historical relic. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld announced an end to “major combat activity” in Afghanistan, and


2 Bruce Holsinger, Neomedievalism, Neoconservatism, and the War on Terror (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2007), 47.
Deputy Secretary Paul D. Wolfowitz claimed “we have accomplished our major objective, which is the defeat of the Taliban government.”

Four months later, President Bush proclaimed that “as a result of the United States military, the Taliban is no longer in existence.” The Taliban’s dissolution seemed to affirm the Bush administration’s caricature: modernity defeated barbarism, progress uprooted fundamentalism. The trajectory of history was saved; that is, until the Taliban was resurrected.

Beginning in 2003, the Taliban demonstrated signs of recovery, destabilizing regions of central, eastern, and southern Afghanistan. “Neo-Taliban” resurgence mocked the so-called “post-Taliban order,” claiming international headlines and forcing Americans to remember a “forgotten war.” In fact, U.S. casualties in Afghanistan have largely escalated since that time; 2010 saw the most U.S. military deaths yet. Given ongoing military and civilian casualties in Afghanistan, the U.S. must ask new and urgent questions about the resurgence. If Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz is correct in his assessment that the Taliban offers a “medieval, fanatical view of life,” how has the regime continued to thwart America’s “nation-building” agenda? More fundamentally, how has the Taliban survived into the twenty-first century? And what role does history and historical memory play in the process?

The Taliban is not a dormant relic of history; instead, the movement engages history to accrue authority in contemporary socio-political contexts. In order to reconcile the processes of nation-building and statecraft in Afghanistan, we need to investigate the cultural hegemonic agency of the Taliban. In this paper, I argue that the neo-Taliban attracts popular support and new recruits by reworking Afghan historical memory. By weaving NATO’s occupancy into a historical narrative of colonial victimization, the neo-Taliban appeals to diverse constituencies, securing a sustainable foothold in Afghanistan’s dynamic sociopolitical fabric. Of course, when considering the neo-Taliban’s memory-making capacities, we need to bear in mind that every interpretation of the past is subjective. If we acknowledge that the construction and reconstruction of collective memory is ongoing, then we can begin to evaluate the origins and limitations of Taliban authority.


Taliban Beyond the Beard: Understanding the Enemy

To definitively oust the neo-Taliban, the U.S. must understand the Taliban beyond simplistic caricature. Operation Enduring Freedom has suffered because of historical myopia; ongoing U.S. failure to account for the complex roots of Taliban sociopolitical authority has cost American and Afghan lives. Since the 1990’s, U.S. media and leadership have depicted the Taliban as a historical anachronism, neglecting to sufficiently investigate and represent the movement’s complicated history. In this sense, exploration of the neo-Taliban’s recent resurgence must begin with an appreciation for the movement’s historiography and contend with the U.S. media’s tendency to muddle the historical narrative describing it.

In the 1990’s, *New York Times* reporter John Burns sought to interpret the Taliban’s ascent to power for a popular audience, winning a Pulitzer Prize for his efforts. That said, even Burns’ award-winning reporting suffers from historical shallowness. In 1995, for instance, Burns claimed the “Taliban formed barely six months ago in the southern city of Kandahar,” when the Taliban actually materialized in the 1980’s, as madrassa students organized armed opposition to Soviet occupancy. Following the Soviet Union’s withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, the Taliban emerged as victors of civil war among mujahedeen factions. When the Taliban first seized Kabul in 1995, Burns heralded the regime as a welcome “respite from war,” representing the Taliban’s obsession with law and order as a “peaceful” watershed in Afghanistan’s violent history. Similarly, in 1996, the Clinton administration, which was invested in procuring pipe-line routes through Afghanistan, endeavored to collaborate with Afghanistan’s new leadership. As Burns’ reporting suggests, the Taliban initially drew favor from U.S. political leaders and media outlets; by and large, U.S. rhetoric legitimized the regime as emergent victors of Afghan’s civil war.

A year later, Burns’ story changed. In October 1996, he reported that Kabul was “plunged into the medieval labyrinth,” as Taliban gunmen enforced their strict interpretation of Sharia law. Around

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9 Burns, 1995.


the same time, human rights and aid groups decried the Taliban’s repressive gender policies, compelling President Bill Clinton to sever ties with the regime in 1997. As the Taliban engaged a gory campaign to “purify” Afghan Islamism—targeting non-Pashtun minorities, stoning women, and banning technological “idolatries”—Americans recoiled. Unable to reconcile the Taliban’s sociopolitical appeal or fathom the movement’s atrocious human rights record, Burns deemed the Taliban a “backward” and “medieval” anomaly in an otherwise modern world. Burns’ reporting, in conjunction with the Clinton administration’s policy of blanket disengagement, epitomizes the U.S.’s deep-seated tendency to misunderstand the origins of Taliban authority and underestimate the movement’s ability to adapt and survive.

Such inattention to Taliban history especially undermined U.S. policy in the aftermath of September 11th, 2001. Nine days after al Qa’ida’s 9/11 attacks, President Bush declared a new kind of war—a crusade against an amorphous enemy. Presenting the Taliban and al Qa’ida as vaguely and equivalently inimical, Bush argued that a “war on terror” necessitated a war against the Taliban because “the leadership of al Qa’ida has great influence in Afghanistan and supports the Taliban regime in controlling most of that country.”

Again, U.S. leadership neglected to consider the movement’s complex origins and ongoing popular support base; by exclusively attributing Taliban political control to al Qa’ida’s support, Bush failed to fathom the movement as a discrete entity, a specific outgrowth of Afghanistan’s sociopolitical context. Even when the Taliban proposed to surrender bin Laden to a third party country for trial, the U.S. rejected the notion. As Wendy Chamberlin, Ambassador to Pakistan, told President Musharraf, “there was absolutely no inclination in Washington to enter into a dialogue with the Taliban.” In neglecting to exhaust—or even explore—diplomatic alternatives to invasion, the Bush administration grounded its post-9/11 policy in warrants similar to the faulty simplifications underlying John Burns’ reporting; figuring the Taliban a fleeting figment of history, U.S. oc-

12 Coll, 363.
15 Bush.
cupancy failed to account for the movement’s sustainable sociopolitical agency. Without acknowledging the Taliban’s history or future, the Afghanistan invasion left the U.S. blindsided.

While the U.S.’s “shock and awe” strategy reaped short-term successes, *Operation Enduring Freedom* proved wishful thinking. The Neo-Taliban’s resurgence since 2003 indicates that U.S. air and ground offensives have failed to effectively target and thwart neo-Taliban cultural, political, and military strongholds; as a result, Taliban resurgence maintains popular support today. In order to reconcile—and ultimately uproot—the Taliban’s influence in Afghanistan, the U.S. must first recognize the movement’s complexity. While Burns’ 1990’s reporting represents an important attempt to understand the Taliban, his writing also demonstrates the U.S. tendency to reduce the Taliban to a self-defeating, simplistic rubric. Where Burns failed to reconcile the Taliban’s ideological appeal, he reverted to caricature; similarly, because the U.S policy did not recognize the Taliban as a competitive cultural and political entity, American operations in Afghanistan were not prepared for a “nation-building” operation. Given U.S. tendency to misinterpret opponent and mission in Afghanistan, how can the U.S. evolve a more effective “nation-building” strategy?

**Gauging the Analytical Framework: Imagined Memories to Imagined Communities**

In reevaluating policy in Afghanistan, the U.S. must construe the Taliban as a cultural entity, remediating collective memory to consolidate sustainable national authority. In his recent memoir *Decision Points*, President Bush claims “Afghanistan was the ultimate nation building mission.”18 Ironically, the Bush administration underestimated the Taliban’s nation-building capacities. In Afghanistan—where state boundaries “forget” primordial ethno-cultural traditions—statecraft is the business of nation-building and memory re-cognition. Nationalism is a competitive enterprise.

To forge a competitive insurgency and undermine NATO’s nation-building operations, the neo-Taliban proffered alternative “memories” of Afghan nationhood. Political scientists, historians, and anthropologists have long acknowledged the role of collective memory in “nation-building.” In the 1980’s, Benedict Anderson canonized nations as “imagined communities,” claiming that nationalism is a social construct facilitated by propaganda.19 Nearly a hundred years earlier, political scientist Ernest Renan argued that selective

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remembering (and forgetting) contrives a precedent for sustained national unity. Especially in regions of contested histories—such as post-colonial, ethnically heterogeneous, and religiously divided countries like Afghanistan—political authority hinges on refiguring collective memory and contriving a common past.

The Taliban’s memory-making agency is also a function of the regime’s cultural hegemony. Antonio Gramsci coined the term “cultural hegemon” to characterize a “ruling class” that accumulates political authority by re-crafting cultural memory. “Ethico-political history,” he argues, “is an arbitrary and mechanical hypostasis of the movement of hegemony, of political leadership.” According to Gramsci, hegemons generalize values, attitudes, beliefs and morality that solidify status quo power systems. Importantly, Gramsci also contends that hegemony is contingent on popular “consent” and hegemonic “coercion.” In this sense, he figures the process of memory-making as inherently dynamic—an ongoing conversation between the societal elite and subordinate populace. By Gramsci’s assessment, the neo-Taliban’s political and cultural influence depends on Afghan civilian support, especially popular willingness to embrace the movement’s remediation of history.

Granted, this vision of cultural hegemony is not seamlessly applicable to contemporary sociopolitical fabrics; in particular, Gramsci’s theory does not account for grassroots resistance. In this vein, John Chalcraft and Yaseen Norrani argue that resistance and “counter-hegemony” threaten the political agency of hegemons in post-colonial states, where competing historical narratives challenge hegemonic conceptions of the past. Sustainable nation-states are not necessarily those that deploy national memory to indoctrinate subordinate masses. Often, stable states are those that embrace popular ideologies and opinions, generalizing both “state society” and “civil society” from the bottom up. In other words, cultural hegemony is not invincible—national-state stability is often contingent on popu-

24 Buttigieg, Gramsci, 236.
26 John Chalcraft and Yaseen Noorani, Counterhegemony in the Colony and Post-Colony, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 12.
lar sovereignty. As NATO state-building operations aim to promote democratic government in Afghanistan, the U.S. must invest in the Afghan population itself, bolstering civilian resistance to Taliban hegemony. In order to facilitate transition from unstable cultural hegemony to stable popular sovereignty, the U.S. must assess—then destabilize—the Taliban’s cultural hegemonic influence.

Analyzing Taliban hegemony requires pursuing, intercepting, and scrutinizing the regime’s communication. Because the movement does not command a stable “state apparatus” to legally impose influence, Gramsci’s rubric suggests that media and informal cultural communications are foundational conduits of Taliban authority.28 International Crisis Group, a leading conflict-resolution NGO, agrees: “The Taliban…lacks control over territory or state institutions. As a result, communications and media coverage assume greater importance.” 29 That said, accessing Taliban cultural rhetoric is a dangerous endeavor; a number of reporters have been kidnapped seeking interviews with Taliban figures.30 The process of accumulating and interpreting representative texts is also challenging. For instance, Radio Voice of Sharia, the Taliban’s radio station, is broadcast exclusively in Pashto. While radio is probably the most effective mode of communicating with a rural, illiterate population, these verbal communications are nearly inaccessible to the outside world.31 More broadly, US analysis should consider that the neo-Taliban depends extensively on informal (and virtually untraceable) community networks to propagate the movement’s message. While neo-Taliban propaganda is difficult to obtain and analyze, the U.S. needs to devote resources to studying available texts precisely because the movement’s communicative capacities are so enigmatic. Though such evaluations may not unequivocally define the neo-Taliban’s ideological message, or conclusively monitor public reception of resurgence rhetoric, the U.S can begin to analyze the movement’s methods of recruiting new forces and procuring popular support.

In this sense, studying Taliban propaganda is valuable, so long as we remember the communication’s intended audience. Where the multilingual Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan website targets inter-

28 Buttigieg, Gramsci, 157.
national readership, night letters (shabnamah) are hand-delivered or posted in rural Afghan communities.32 Because Al Samoud, an Arabic-language monthly magazine, is released both online and in print, articles are accessible to a transnational Islamic community.33 Increasingly, DVDs, audio cassettes, or MP3’s are distributed among potential recruits, especially in urban centers.34 If analysis of Taliban communication accounts for specific contexts and associated rhetorical agenda, the “Fog of War” is no longer impenetrable. Insurgence communication offers insight into the movement’s strategies for procuring recruits and civilian support, especially the neo-Taliban’s efforts to rework Afghan historical memory. Thus, in order to facilitate transition towards popular sovereignty in Afghanistan, the U.S. must first evaluate neo-Taliban rhetoric.

Yesterday, Today: Taliban Re-Mediation of the Past

To explain the neo-Taliban’s sustained political authority, the U.S. must study the movement’s construction and re-construction of Afghan historical memory. In particular, neo-Taliban propaganda figures U.S. invasion as the latest instance of western imperialism, working NATO occupancy into a longstanding memory-scape of colonial abuses. In a song published online, the Taliban re-mediates memory of the Second Anglo-Afghan War: “We will remind them of the Battle of Maiwand, and we will teach Washington / we are the soldiers of Islam, and we are happy to be martyred.”35 Here, the neo-Taliban contrives collective conceptions of historical continuity and reduces NATO aims to conform to imperialist rubrics. In particular, the neo-Taliban remembers the Battle of Maiwand as testament to Afghan capacity to confront and overthrow colonial affronts to Afghanistan’s sovereignty. The Battle of Maiwand, which took place in 1880, was one of the foremost conflagrations of the Second Anglo-Afghan War. Though Afghans incurred greater casualties during the conflict, Afghan militias ultimately defeated the British army. Thus, in resurrecting collective memory of the Battle of Maiwand, the neo-Taliban not only reminds Afghans of longstanding imperialist injustices perpetrated by the West, but also reinforces Afghan capacity

to resist such abuses. Likening Americans in “Washington” to British colonialists in the nineteenth century, the neo-Taliban uses historical memory to depict U.S. occupancy as an imperialist vendetta. The neo-Taliban also uses memory of the battle to persuade Afghans that victory against the U.S. is imminent, even as the neo-Taliban suffers severe casualties. Colonel Imam, a Taliban crony who trained the movement’s most preeminent leader, Mullah Omar, also cites the Battle of Maiwand as a touchstone for Afghanistan’s history of colonial victimization, claiming that “when people…heard the British were coming back, the cry went up all over…‘Remember Maiwand?... Then everyone, Taliban and non-Taliban joined together.”36 Colonel Imam invokes historical memory of Maiwand to bolster his argument that the “Taliban can never be defeated.”37 He figures historical precedent for Taliban victory, contending that Afghans can once again oust Western forces corrupting Afghan homeland. Importantly, he portrays collective memory of British colonialism as a source of national unity—all Afghans, by Colonel Imam’s estimation, share this traumatic and glorious past. According to Colonel Imam, collective memory helps accrue wider support for the Taliban cause, uniting both Taliban allies and neutral civilians in opposition to U.S. occupancy.

While the neo-Taliban certainly draws from distant history to consolidate authority, collective memories of Soviet occupancy in the 1980’s are probably more foundational to the neo-Taliban insurgence. In 2003, the neo-Taliban published a night letter entitled “Message to the Mujahed Afghan Nation!”, which re-mediated Afghanistan’s colonial heritage as a source of nationalism: “you have served Islam a great deal throughout history and have defeated the non-Muslims of the world…after one and half million martyrs of Jihad against Russians…be happy”38 Here, the neo-Taliban proffers a rendition of Afghan’s national history that exclusively includes legacies of Western abuse and unified resistance. In designating Afghanistan a “Mujahed” nation, the neo-Taliban promotes collective memory of cohesive opposition to past and present Western oppression (“mujahed” roughly translates to “those engaged in jihad”). Just as the Battle of Maiwand was portrayed as a source of national pride, “victory” against Soviet forces is reason for Afghan’s to be “happy,” to willingly sacrifice for a common Afghan future. When Graeme Smith conducted interviews with neo-Taliban militants in Kandahar in 2009, his subjects’ responses also demonstrated a similar tendency to conflate

36 Christina Lamb, “The Taliban will ‘never be defeated,’” The Sunday Times, 7 June 2009.
37 Lamb.
memory of Soviet and NATO invasions. When Graeme’s reporters asked neo-Taliban militants whether “foreigners had bombed their families,” respondents of all ages complained about casualties from Soviet bombings, in addition to those caused by U.S. airstrikes.\(^{39}\) In other words, where interviewers assumed neo-Taliban fighters would understand “foreign bombings” to mean NATO operations over the last decade, subjects spontaneously remembered violence perpetrated by Soviet forces more than twenty years ago. While limited sample size and selective regional representation renders this anthropological data anecdotal, Graeme’s studies suggest that the neo-Taliban garners recruits by blending together collective memory of Soviet and NATO occupation. The neo-Taliban leverages Afghanistan’s historical victimization to justify insurgence as vengeance. The neo-Taliban blends together Afghan traumatic memories, promising a means to avenge past injustices and guaranteeing collective victory.

In order to further highlight the tragedy of longstanding imperial exploitation, neo-Taliban remembers colonialism as a religiously motivated crusade. The neo-Taliban reworks collective memory of British, Soviet, and American occupancies, constructing a history of Western assaults on Islamic order and faith. As Abu Ahmed, creator of Al-Samoud magazine, described, “My father and grandfather told me: ‘You have to fight the Russians’. Now I tell my son: ‘You must fight the Americans’. The first thing we teach our children is ‘Allah’. The second is fighting the Americans.”\(^{40}\) Clearly the neo-Taliban identifies a violent, Afghan patrimony that legitimizes—even necessitates—continued violence. Tapping into both nationalist and Islamic identities, the neo-Taliban uses the past to accrue popular support in the present. By infusing “Allah” into rhetoric rejecting foreign occupancy, the neo-Taliban raises the stakes of resistance: NATO not only jeopardizes Afghan political autonomy, but also challenges Afghan religious sovereignty. In this vein, an al-Samoud article entitled “Sacrifice” reads as follows: “Our fathers knocked down great, great forces in history with the help of God. In this century our grandfathers gave a jaw-breaking response to England and our fathers to the Russians, and God willing we will give the Americans a similar response.”\(^{41}\) The Taliban defines Afghan nationalism as an inherited obligation to “sacrifice” for “the homeland.” Here, the neo-Taliban imagines a primordial Afghan ancestry—a nation committed to resisting secular, Western influence. Notably, the neo-Taliban remembers victories against Britain, Soviet, and US militaries as divinely


\(^{41}\) “Sacrifice”, Murchal, September 2006.
ordained; the neo-Taliban attracts support and recruits by suggesting participation is a religious duty and claiming every imperialist will be expunged “with the help of God.” Thus, to doubt the Taliban’s imminent success and “jaw-breaking” power is to doubt God’s authority. The Taliban uses imagined memory to define an “imagined community,” bolstered by religious, nationalist, and familial duties.

To frame the Taliban’s deeply embedded practices of collective memory manipulation, the U.S. must also reconcile the regime’s use of history to address in-country adversaries. In particular, the U.S. must consider how the collective memory of political dynamics within Afghanistan relates to collective recognition of international opposition. While the neo-Taliban manipulates a historic obligation to defend Afghan and Islamic sovereignty, the movement also identifies multiple enemies. Claiming that rival domestic authorities are appendages of the West, the Taliban styles itself as a movement to purify polluted government. In particular, the Taliban remembers the mujahedeen civil war in the early 1990’s as a fight to restore good governance and consistent rule of law. In My Life with the Taliban, a memoir by Abdul Slam Zaeef, the Taliban minister recollects the Taliban’s first formalized meeting in 1994: “Each man swore on the Qur’an…to fight against corruption and the criminals”42 Zaeef claims that the Taliban consolidated popular authority as an alternative to morally and fiscally corrupt mujahedeen warlords.43 As Zaeef’s interpretation of the movement’s foundation suggests, the Taliban remembers any alternative Afghan leadership as inherently “corrupt” and “criminal.” Today, the Afghan national government’s blatant corruption under President Karzai only substantiates the Taliban’s rendition of Afghan national history; the Taliban easily claims divine and historic ordinance to rout domestic fraud and secular impurity. To this end, the neo-Taliban redefines national governmental corruption as a byproduct of colonialism. Al-Samoud and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan website exclusively refer to the Afghan National Army and government as “Puppets”—recalling the same label used to describe purportedly pro-Soviet “Mujahedeen” opponents in the 1990’s. Stripping their political adversaries of both humanity and self-sufficiency, the Taliban conflates traumatic memories of internal and external abuses. Any unjust and “un-Islamic” political alternative is a figment of the colonial memory-scape.

As the neo-Taliban portrays both U.S. occupancy and the Karzai administration as inextricably intertwined figments of a neo-colonial narrative, the movement uses news coverage to represent the U.S. invasion as another imperialist endeavor. While the neo-Taliban

42 Abdul Salam Zaeef, My Life with the Taliban, ed. Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2010), 65.
43 Zaeef, 67.
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reworks Afghani historical memory to accrue sustainable popular support, the movement also interprets contemporary violence to conform to this conception of Afghanistan’s history. In other words, the process of blending together Afghan national memory of imperial victimization and contemporary U.S. occupancy is two-fold: the neo-Taliban mediates collective perception of the past and attempts to script popular conception of the present. To this end, The “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan” website contains a “news” section, which broadcasts Taliban military successes and underscores adversary vulnerability. The website typically releases ten to twenty updates daily, exclusively portraying Taliban victories. On March 8, 2011, for instance, the website released seventeen informs, claiming credit for killing fifty-nine US/NATO and Afghan National Military soldiers. Taliban news coverage engages the memory-making process, persuasively refiguring ongoing violence to submit to colonial rubrics and reinforce its version of Afghanistan historiography. In particular, the website consistently refers to all NATO and US military personnel and political leaders as “invaders,” figuring foreign occupancy as an unsolicited, hostile breach of national sovereignty. In this way, the neo-Taliban attempts to ensure that reports of ongoing U.S. operations in Afghanistan trigger collective memories of Soviet (and British) imperialism. The neo-Taliban interprets current violence to substantiate its interpretation of past violence. The result is an ostensibly cohesive connection between Afghan past and present, which bolsters neo-Taliban claims that the U.S.’s “nation-building” agenda is a thinly veiled colonial initiative. Thus, the neo-Taliban taps into long-term Afghan resent for colonial injustices and capitalizes on Afghan traumatic memory of imperial violence; the neo-Taliban, in turn, attracts recruits and support as a viable opposition to this historical pattern of abuse.

The neo-Taliban’s sustained political authority must be evaluated in the context of its cultural hegemony, especially the movement’s capacity to mediate Afghan historical memory. Neo-Taliban rhetoric often imagines historical continuity among instances of perceived western imperialism, including British, Soviet, and U.S. occupancies over the course of the last two centuries. The movement capitalizes on Afghanistan’s traumatic history of imperial victimization, acquiring broadbased civilian support by equating these past and present adversaries. The Taliban uses history to characterize the Afghan national government’s corruption as an appendage of sustained Western imperialism. In order to link past and present in a continuous narrative of colonial victimization, the neo-Taliban mediates reports

of US operations, ensuring today’s news submits to yesterday’s imperial paradigm. Incorporating NATO occupancy and Karzai administration governance into a seemingly cohesive historical narrative, the neo-Taliban offers a version of Afghan nationalism that appeals to diverse and dynamic Afghan constituencies.

**Forget-istan: Collective Memories Un-Remembered**

Engaging both distant and recent history, the neo-Taliban re-writes—and un-writes—the past. As the neo-Taliban mediates national historiography, the movement necessarily induces historical amnesia. In order to sustain a political foothold in Afghanistan, the Taliban fosters selective remembrance. Because the neo-Taliban’s interpretation of Afghan history hinges on collective “un-remembering” of Afghanistan’s past, the neo-Taliban’s cultural and political influence is fundamentally fragile. Inconsistencies in the neo-Taliban’s mediation of past and present represent distinct opportunities for the U.S. to offer a historical counter-narrative that alienates the neo-Taliban from its popular support base. To this end, U.S. nation-building must include memory building and re-building; the U.S. must insert itself into the competitive craft of writing national history, using “real” (albeit forgotten) memories to undermine the Taliban’s selective perception of the past.

While the neo-Taliban represents itself as a just, humanitarian alternative to the post-Bonn Agreement Afghan national government, such rhetoric is not representative of reality. Though neo-Taliban propaganda manipulates memory of contemporary violence to assume a humanitarian guise, the movement neglects to admit responsibility for civilian casualties. While the United Nation reports that neo-Taliban insurgents were responsible for 75% of Afghan civilian deaths in 2010, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan foregrounds civilian casualties as a cornerstone critique of NATO occupancy. In this same vein, the neo-Taliban has recently sought to distance itself from school destruction. Despite engaging a large-scale campaign targeting teachers and schools, Al Emarah claimed that the Taliban “do not torch books, not the schools of Muslims, nor kill students or teachers.” Zama Coursen-Neff, a senior researcher for Human Rights Watch, could not disagree more; while the Taliban vendetta against girls’ education is infamous, Coursen-Neff reports that the Taliban is now even “targeting boys’ schools and coeducational schools that offer the secular education promoted by the central government...they have killed teachers, threatened students...thousands

of students who were attending school are now shut out, especially in the south and southeast.” While Taliban rhetoric foregrounds NATO military failures to respect non-combatant immunity, the movement must “forget” its own egregious track record regarding civilian casualties. Thus, if the U.S. reduces conventional combat operations, which tend to incur civilian casualties, and instead reverts to securing rule of law, human rights, and popular sovereignty, the neo-Taliban’s representation of the U.S. “nation-building” as another imperialist endeavor will fall short.

Similarly, as the neo-Taliban re-mediates Afghan nationalism to procure political power, insurgence rhetoric “forgets” the Taliban’s historic efforts to exacerbate ethnic tensions. In order to appeal to a broad Afghan audience and enable diverse recruitment throughout the country, the neo-Taliban downplays tribal and ethnic rhetoric. Unlike the Taliban of the 1990’s, the neo-Taliban actively refrains from employing ethnic slurs. In spite of the neo-Taliban’s concerted efforts to “forget” the movement’s legacy of ethnic violence, memories of Taliban brutality are only superficially buried; mass graves of ethnic Hazaras, for instance, testify to the Taliban’s genocidal activity in the 1990’s. Today, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan’s website attempts to construct memories of Afghan unity, contending that Afghans should “heal rifts with each other to defend their country against oppositional forces...The people in Afghanistan, whether Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek, Hazarah, Baluch or Nooistani, have always joined common causes in safeguarding their common interests.”

Here, the neo-Taliban attempts “imagine” historical continuity and cohesion across Afghanistan’s diverse—and often adversarial—ethnic landscape. Using external threats to advocate internal cohesion, the movement also seeks to conflate Afghan ethnicity and nationality. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan website consistently appropriates the term “genocide” to refer to NATO occupancy—and perhaps distract from its own history of perpetrating genocide. In order to classify the 2001 invasion as an effort to exterminate Afghan ethnic-

47 Zama Coursen-Neff, “The Taliban’s War on Education: Schoolgirls are still under fire in Afghanistan,” The LA Times, July 31, 2006
48 Giustozzi, 37.
49 Patrick Cockburn, “UN finds mass graves of Hazara killed by Taliban,” The Independent, 8 April 2002.
50 Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, “Afghans should heal rifts with each other to defend their country against occupation forces...The people in Afghanistan, whether Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek, Hazarah, Baluch or Nooistani, have always joined common causes in safeguarding their common interests.”
ity, however, the neo-Taliban must remediate Afghan ethnicity to conform to state borders. In proffering a historical counter-narrative, U.S. “nation-building” operations must respect rather than suppress diverse and competing Afghan identities. Ironically, the U.S.’s “nation-building” operations are more likely to succeed in conceiving a stable, cohesive Afghan nation-state if Afghanistan’s government recognizes, appreciates, and represents the complex and conflicting communities that comprise Afghanistan.

Furthermore, in defining Afghan nationality via map boundaries, the neo-Taliban “forgets” that Afghanistan’s nation-state status is actually the product of colonialism—the very “oppositional force” the neo-Taliban vilifies. In fact, “Afghanistan” was first imagined by Britain; the state’s boundaries were constructed to buffer British and Russian colonial domains. By reducing Afghanistan’s history to a state narrative, the neo-Taliban inadvertently legitimizes the country’s legacy of imperial victimization. More broadly, the neo-Taliban contrives a national identity that “forgets” association and dependence on the West. The Taliban’s emergence in the 1990’s was, in many respects, a product of international support from Pakistan, Iran, and, most contentiously, the US. Where Mullah Zaeef recalls that the Taliban fought among the ranks of mujahedeen in the 1980’s—and uses this memory to glorify the movement’s genesis—he fails to acknowledge that the mujahedeen’s capacity to resist and ultimately repel the Red Army was contingent on U.S. sponsorship. Similarly, Taliban sovereignty in the 1990’s was also enabled by the U.S., as Washington aimed to secure oil and natural gas transport for the American oil company Unocal. In fact, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency cooperated with the Taliban through summer 2001, brokering agreements to mitigate Afghanistan’s burgeoning opium industry. In order to acquire popular support and recruits from across Afghanistan’s diverse ethnic and geographic landscape, the neo-Taliban must reconstruct national memory in a vacuum, imagining Afghan history independent of international narratives. Again, the U.S. has a distinct opportunity to supply a compelling counter-narrative to neo-Taliban selective remembrance. The U.S. should facilitate Afghani re-remembering of national history in a global context, especially foregrounding collective memories of U.S.-Afghan cooperation. The U.S. should make an effort to promote memories of Afghanistan’s mutually beneficial engagement with other states.

Because the neo-Taliban’s rendition of Afghan national memory is revisionary, the movement’s popular support base is fundamen-

53 Coll, 305.
tally unstable. The U.S. must take advantage of the neo-Taliban’s relative decentralization and ideological incongruities, intervening in the process of engineering Afghan nationalism and historical memory. Recognizing the cultural battlefront of war in Afghanistan, the U.S. should devote resources to ensuring Afghans have access to constant news coverage and accurate historical information, so that neo-Taliban rhetoric is not considered legitimate by default. The neo-Taliban’s cultural and political authority survives where U.S. “nation-building” strategies fail to account for the effects of historical memory. The U.S. must compete with the neo-Taliban’s conception of Afghan nationalism and national history. To oust the Taliban, the U.S. must empower Afghans to learn and embrace their complete histories and identities.

Remembering to Remember: Learning from the Past, Figuring the Future

In his July 2010 “Counterinsurgency Guidelines,” General David Petraeus directed US and NATO forces in Afghanistan to “secure and serve the population.” To this end, General Petraeus advised troops to “be first with the truth” and “get accurate information...to the people.” In short, General Petraeus acknowledged that, especially in nation-building operations, “the decisive terrain is the human terrain.” By General Petraeus’ assessment, state sovereignty necessitates popular sovereignty.

In Afghanistan, popular sovereignty is an antidote to the neo-Taliban’s cultural hegemony. My research suggests that the neo-Taliban’s sustained political influence is partly a product of the movement’s commitment to reworking Afghan historical memory. The neo-Taliban incorporates collective memory of U.S. occupancy into a larger narrative of Western imperial abuses and Afghan resistance. In other words, the neo-Taliban employs imagined memories to contrive an “imagined community,” invoking Afghanistan’s past to solicit support and recruits in the present. Because the neo-Taliban’s mediation of Afghan historiography is inherently selective, its rendition of Afghan nationalism is also unstable and unjust. The U.S.’s “nation-building” operations must capitalize on the Taliban’s historical fallacies to secure a safer, fairer Afghanistan.

To this end, the U.S. should consider reducing conventional combat forces in Afghanistan and channeling resources towards cultural and popular sovereignty efforts. The neo-Taliban will undermine Afghanistan’s stability as a nation-state until civilians widely re-


56 Petraeus.
tract support for the movement. The neo-Taliban will not be routed militarily; U.S. “victory” in Afghanistan depends on Afghan popular will. War in Afghanistan is a competition for the “hearts and minds” (and memories) of everyday Afghans.

Since 2001, U.S. “nation-building” efforts in Afghanistan have been hindered by US failure to consider the influence of collective memory in constructing nations and nation-states. That said, historical memory does not always dictate popular opinion; at a certain point, the warrant that the past defines us begins to erode. For everyday Afghans, the present and future matters more than the past. If U.S. “nation-building” operations effectively invest in Afghan popular sovereignty, and the Afghan national government offers civilians a stable and representative future, the Taliban’s political and cultural influence will finally be relegated to history.

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Over the quarter, Kurt produced a trilogy of brilliant essays on *The Social Network*. His first—like the X-ray image of two sunken man-of-wars—exposed the scars of a heated battle of generations concealed in the film’s visual rhetoric. His second deftly introduced us to the passionate spokesmen representing each side of this battle, writer Aaron Sorkin and director David Fincher, and charted their struggle over the meaning of the movie.

This final essay, “The Social Divide,” stands proudly on the shoulders of Kurt’s first two studies. With surgical sensitivity, the piece anatomizes protagonist Mark Zuckerberg, exposing his dual role as Sorkin’s tragic sociopath, and Fincher’s intractable young entrepreneur. Kurt paints the film’s complex hero as the offspring of these two clashing creators who—for the sake of a story they both felt was important—transformed their strife into a dynamic collaboration.

Kurt’s exquisitely researched treatment demonstrates how *The Social Network* labors, subtly and by means of its very structure, to make us believe in the imminent “demise” of a “social system based on privilege and aristocracy.” Waiting in the wings to replace this outmoded system is a model “centralized around innovation, entrepreneurship, and meritocracy,” and made possible only by the “brutality of cyberspace” and that great destroyer of decorum and privacy—the Internet. Kurt’s accomplishment is to make us feel the impact of Sorkin and Fincher’s debate as a tremor of the “seismic shift” that is bringing our society from an old, to a new, order.

—**Davy Walter**
The Social Divide:  
David Fincher and Aaron Sorkin As Counterpoints in the Dialogue over the Internet  

Kurt Chirbas

Introduction

Halfway through director David Fincher’s 2010 drama The Social Network, we witness what might be called an act of seduction. The camera cranes over a San Francisco nightclub: an early-aughties techno track blasts below, scantily, leather-clad dancers, armed with pink feather boas, oscillate their hips atop a table, and flashing strobe lights lend the scene a sense of either ecstasy or nausea. After the establishing shot, we arrive at the heart of the action, two young men sitting at a table on the balcony, trying to have a conversation over pulsating music. One is Mark Zuckerberg (Jesse Eisenberg), a 19-year-old Harvard undergrad who has moved out to Palo Alto for the
summer in hopes of expanding the social networking site, Facebook, he co-founded with his then-best friend, Eduardo Saverin (Andrew Garfield), from his dorm room. The other is Sean Parker (Justin Timberlake), the 22-year-old founder of Napster, a now-bankrupt music-sharing program, who’s looking to get in on Zuckerberg’s business venture. On the DVD commentary, Timberlake describes his role the best: Parker is the “mistress” who “comes between two good friends.” And in this scene, Timberlake says his character is trying to build a “love affair”—to get Zuckerberg to dump Eduardo in favor of him. He means this in a metaphoric, business sense: this is not an affair that would be consummated by sex, but stock shares.

Reviewers of the film agree, many stating that the relationship between Zuckerberg and Parker mirrors that of Faust and Mephistopheles: Zuckerberg is selling his morality, which is represented by his relationship with Eduardo, to the devil, in this case Parker, in exchange for fame, fortune, and a life in the fast lane. This interpretation, however, doesn’t ring completely true. Not only does Zuckerberg reveal at one point in the film that he declined a million-dollar deal from Microsoft to buy a program he created in high school, suggesting that he cares little about money or financial wealth, but he also seems completely unaware of the debauchery that is taking place in the club: despite the nearly naked girls surrounding him, he’s more interested in admiring the architecture of the building. Therefore, it’s unlikely that any of this would have persuaded Zuckerberg to remove his best friend from the company on its own. Peter Travers, a film critic for Rolling Stone, makes a more nuanced, and I’d argue more accurate, comparison by saying that Parker is a “seductive Iago to Mark’s ego-bruised Othello.” This analogy can be justified: both Iago and Parker use an everyday object to exploit their respective protagonist’s tragic flaws—to plant a seed in their minds—and eventually, achieve their own goals and worldly ambitions. While Iago uses a handkerchief to take advantage of Othello’s jealousy, Parker uses a business card: right after Parker reveals that his dream is for Zuckerberg to one day hand out a business card that reads, “I’m CEO, bitch,” Zuckerberg immediately becomes much more animated, laughing and smiling, and deciding that he will make a space for Parker not only in his business, but also in his life. Literally. He offers Parker stay in his Palo Alto house rental. Parker captures Zuckerberg’s attention, in the way most characters in the film can’t, because he has managed to tap into one of Zuckerberg’s fundamental beliefs, one that he holds on to with an almost religious-like fervor. As screenwriter Aaron Sorkin comments in one of the DVD’s special features, “‘I’m CEO, bitch’ is the church they both go to.” But what exactly does this line mean? And if we extend the Othello comparison, how does it characterize Zuckerberg’s tragic flaw?
It turns out the filmmakers were wrestling with, and arguing over, these same exact questions. Timberlake says that this scene was by far the hardest to act in because he didn’t have a complete script until the day the scene was actually shot. Sorkin and Fincher “kept changing out dialogue, so much of it, the order of it, what (Parker) was actually saying, the verbiage, even just small words” up until they started filming that day. On a DVD featurette called, “How Did They Ever Make a Movie of Facebook?,” the audience is taken behind the scenes of the production, and one of the sections shows Sorkin and Fincher collaborating and trying to retool this scene. The two have a debate over who is the “bitch” that the card is referring to. Sorkin is much more literal about the profanity, stating that it refers to the girls in Zuckerberg’s and Parker’s life that broke up with them, causing them to create their websites in the first place. Fincher, however, takes a different approach, saying:

I’m CEO, bitch’ is anyone who looks at a 21-year-old who says, ‘I invented this thing,’ and they say, ‘Isn’t that great! Of course, we want you on board, and we want your ideas, and we want a relationship with you, but now, you can go the fuck home. Because we know what the fuck we are doing with this thing, and you’re finished. (The Social Network)

This distinction demonstrates a wide gap between Sorkin’s and Fincher’s understanding of the character of Zuckerberg, and alternatively, what his tragic flaw is that results in his decision to oust Eduardo from the company. For Sorkin, his flaw is the inability to communicate effectively with those around him, which prevents him from factoring in others’ emotions when making decisions and causes him great social alienation; but for Fincher, it stems from a frustration with the rest of the world for not taking his unique talents and innovations seriously, simply because he does not follow what he considers pointless social conventions like fashion, etiquette, and limitations placed on age.

In an interview with Deadline Hollywood, an online magazine about the entertainment industry, the film’s producer Scott Rudin says that these contrary interpretations extend beyond the two’s disagreement over who Zuckerberg is calling a bitch. He says both Fincher and Sorkin were attracted to the film for different reasons:

We all had different things about it that made us interested. David was much more interested in the ruthlessness of innovation. David believes that Zuckerberg did everything necessary to do right and protect Facebook. Aaron’s point of view on the material is more Ibsen-like. Zuckerberg is a tragic hero who suffers a substantial punishment. (Fleming)

By looking at interviews, newspaper articles, their tracks from
the DVD commentary, and film reviews, it can be determined that Sorkin and Fincher entered the project with diametrically opposed motivations and points of view. While it would be overly simplistic to ascribe one definitive interpretation of the film to Sorkin and Fincher, Sorkin is more likely to view the film as a morality tale, one that cautions the audience about the dangers of fame, power, and the isolating effect of cyberspace, while Fincher is more inclined to see it as an inspirational story about a young entrepreneur, about a man who stood by and defended his creation regardless of what others thought about him. Because the film was born out of collaboration between these two men, it is very rich as a result, with both threads of Zuckerberg’s characterization still intact. Curiously enough, viewers’ interpretation of the film seem to be falling roughly along generational lines: surveys show that older moviegoers are more likely to buy into Sorkin’s view about Zuckerberg being a tragic figure who falls into temptation while younger audience members see Zuckerberg as an aspirational figure, who remains true to his convictions and becomes a billionaire as a result.

The dialogue between Sorkin and Fincher in the making of this film is representative of a much greater conversation currently taking place in American culture: the role of the Internet in our society. Some see the film as validation of the Internet’s alienating effect, which they see as having resulted in the loss of privacy, the development of hyperactive characteristics in youth, and the growth of new forms of bullying. Others take the opposite stance, arguing that the film illustrates the role of Internet as an equalizing force: no longer does someone need the support of monolithic institutions or to schmooze through old-boy networks in order to be successful. All one needs is the drive and the talent. This essay will assert that the two seemingly contradictory themes found in the film are the result of the unique collaboration between Sorkin and Fincher, and as a result, reflect the deeper discourse currently taking place in American society.

Configuring a Network

The Social Network is a film about a legal deposition. Well, technically, it’s a film about two legal depositions. Based on Ben Mezrich’s 2009 book, The Accidental Billionaires: The Founding of Facebook, a Tale of Sex, Money, Genius, and Betrayal, it tells the story of Zuckerberg, who launches Facebook from his Harvard dorm room and becomes the defendant in two separate lawsuits as a result: one with the Winklevoss twins (Armie Hammer), who claim the idea for the website was their own, and the other with Eduardo Saverin (Garfield), a Facebook co-founder and former best friend of Zuckerberg, who feels he was unfairly booted from the company when his shares
got diluted. It’s inspired by real events, but exactly how much portrayed in the film is true is up for debate.

The film’s history began in 2008 when an e-mail arrived in the inbox of the book’s author “completely out of the blue, at two in the morning” (Mezrich 257). The e-mail turned out to be written by a Harvard student, Will McMullen, and it said that his best friend, the real Eduardo Saverin, “had co-founded Facebook and no one had ever heard of him” (Harris). Mezrich was interested, and decided to build “a relationship with (Saverin) over the next couple of months” (Brown). He said he was so fascinated by Saverin’s story that instead of starting to write the book, he decided to rush a 28-page film treatment to Hollywood, pitching it to studios as “Superbad in the midst of a multibillion-dollar company” (Brown).

That’s when Sorkin entered the fold. He read Mezrich’s treatment, “got to page three” (Harris), and immediately signed on. The world got its first look the film on July 15, 2010, when Columbia Pictures premiered a two-and-a-half minute theatrical trailer on the film’s official website. Response to the trailer, which featured images from the film played over a choral rendition of Radiohead’s 1993 single “Creep,” immediately went viral. Josh Rottenberg, from Entertainment Weekly, said it was “brilliantly haunting.” Amy Kaufman blogged for the Los Angeles Times, “Who knew Facebook could be so deep?,” calling the trailer “dark, dramatic,” and the film “a possible award contender.”

She was right. After the film’s release, it swept all nearly all of the critics’ awards—winning Best Picture from the National Society of Film Critics, the New York Film Critics Circle, the Los Angeles Film Critics Association, and the National Board of Review—and took home the prize for Best Picture at the 2011 Golden Globes Awards. It lost, however, at the Academy Awards, where The King’s Speech took home the top award. The defeat caused the Los Angeles Times to ask, “whether the film was too young for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which is primarily made up of industry insiders over 50” (Horn and Sperling). Data shows this may in fact have been the case. CinemaScore, which tracks moviegoers’ opinions of films after exiting the theater on opening weekend, showed that the film received a B+ rating overall, but those under 18 years old gave it an A- (Brodesser-Akner). Not only did younger audiences like the film better, but according to YouGov BrandIndex, which measures public perception of certain corporations by surveying consumers, they also had a higher opinion about the actual Facebook site after seeing the film. The group found that there was a dramatic increase in Facebook’s approval number following the release of the movie among 18- to 34-year-olds: the number ticked up from 23.5 points of approval on Sept. 22, to 46.4 on the film’s opening day Oct.
1, to 51.5 on Oct. 6 (Warren). However, the opposite trend held for those over 50 years of age: approval for Facebook had been ticking up in this age group prior to the release of the film, but on opening day, the number plunged (Warren). Many began asking why these two age groups were responding to the film so differently.

The Anti-Social Network: Aaron Sorkin and the Internet

He's a 25-year-old computer-programming mastermind. He speaks in short, clipped sentences, and he's angry at a Hollywood movie that's just been released detailing the founding of a website he created. He thinks the film is so defamatory that he's taking legal action against its screenwriter. No, this isn't Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook CEO. It's Patric Edelstein (Jake T. Carpenter), a fictional character on a February 15, 2011 episode of the CBS legal drama The Good Wife. Edelstein explains at one point that the film “shows (him) creating this website, so (he) could pick up girls despite the fact (he) was engaged to be married and had no interest in picking up girls” —similar to a claim the real Zuckerberg made on a December 5, 2010 episode of 60 Minutes to discredit The Social Network. He says he was dating another Harvard undergrad, Priscilla Chan, at the time that he created Facebook, which would invalidate the theory that he created the website as a way of getting back at the girl who broke up with him at the beginning of the film. The show’s many parallels to Zuckerberg and the hullabaloo surrounding the film’s release are no accident though.

The episode is a clever way to satirize Sorkin’s widely known, and well publicized, aversion to the Internet—one that would seem to suggest he did not enter the project with completely unbiased intentions. For instance, in a recent interview with New York Magazine, he went on the record saying he’s “not a fan of the Internet” (Harris). The author of the story, Mark Harris, makes sure to clarify that in Sorkin-speak, “‘not a fan’ is not a euphemism for ‘I’m ambivalent’—it’s a euphemism for ‘I hate it’” (Harris). He goes on to list some reasons for Sorkin’s repulsion to the Web: it allows individuals look up information about his 2001 drug bust for all of eternity, and it contributed to the demise of his television series, Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip, because of an outpouring of negative reaction from bloggers. Harris then comments that the film might be in some ways a “well-aimed spitball thrown at new media by old media” (Harris).

This idea is explored on the episode of The Good Wife, called “Net Worth,” where Edelstein’s lawyer, Will Gardner (Josh Charles, who in a twist of fate once starred in Sorkin’s own television show, Sports Night), questions the film’s screenwriter, Rand Blaylock (Stephen Kunken, giving his best smarmy Sorkin impersonation), what
story he was trying to tell by using events from his client’s life. The two have a heated discussion:

BLAYLOCK: The story of the Internet, this age we’re in, where people just criticize each other anonymously, where all these tiny little loners, in their tiny little rooms, order out for pizza and just flame at each other all the time.

GARDNER: Or when those same loners blog about your drug abuse?

BLAYLOCK: Yes, I’m guilty lawyer-man. Malice. This whole movie was just my attempt at getting back at the Internet. Take that Internet.

GARDNER: You wanted Mr. Edelstein’s character in the movie to show that the Internet was alienating people.

BLAYLOCK: Not just that, but yes that. (“Net Worth”)

Obviously, the scene is a work of fiction, and should not be interpreted as anything more that. However, even if it was not the conscious intent of Sorkin, the explanation that Blaylock proposes in this episode—that his film is about the Internet’s alienating effect on society—is what many individuals have taken to be the main theme of *The Social Network*. Perhaps no one has clung to this view more feverishly than Mick LaSalle, film critic for *The San Francisco Chronicle*, who says that when he watched the movie he felt “angry and disgusted, but also a little afraid” (LaSalle). He cited as evidence the scene that follows the opening title sequence: Zuckerberg has just been dumped by his Boston University girlfriend Erica Albright (Rooney Mara) and goes back to his dorm room. He proceeds to blog about Albright in revenge—calling her a bitch, sneering at her last name, and publishing her bra size. LaSalle says that in this scene, Sorkin and Fincher are saying “something powerful and terrible, that in the years since that day, the social world has, to a large degree, configured itself around the contours of that one young man’s neurosis” and continues to point out that “that act of cruelty to an ex-girlfriend would be repeated a millionfold by others, on Zuckerberg’s invention Facebook” (LaSalle).

To some extent, he has a point. Larry Rosen, professor and former chair of psychology at California State University, Dominguez Hills, approached the film from a clinical perspective, and found that Zuckerberg’s character in the film showed “signs of many DSM-IV psychiatric conditions including adult antisocial personality disorder, Asperger’s, ADHD, and narcissistic personality disorder” (Stewart). He said these characteristics are most apparent in the first scene, where he has a date with Albright at a pub and demonstrates his in-
ability to communicate with individuals face-to-face. Unable to read body language, he is absolutely shocked when Albright reveals that he wants to break up with him. The audience is not. If anything, they’re shocked she didn’t do so sooner: he has insulted her education, her family, and accused her of sleeping with the doorman. But Rosen says the traits he exhibits are not completely out of ordinary, stating that Eisenberg “played Mark Zuckerberg exactly how we see people in our research acting online. Online people are abrupt, callous and nasty, and we accept it” (Stewart). As a result, he concludes that the scene provides a reason why Zuckerberg created Facebook: he needed “ways to communicate online,” where his behavior is more acceptable, so he would not have to interact face-to-face (Stewart).

Responding to the growth of Facebook back in 2006, Chris Cloke, head of child protection at the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, agreed. He said people act differently when they are online, saying that it’s “a completely unregulated world out there. I’d compare it to a modern-day Lord of the Flies. Children say things that are much more extreme and vindictive than they would in their everyday lives” (Kowalski 53). Ironically enough, this was the same argument Sorkin made on an episode of The West Wing, called “The U.S. Poet Laureate,” which aired on NBC on March 27, 2002. While screenwriter Laura Glasser penned the script, Sorkin wrote the teleplay, which was centered on Deputy White House Chief of State Josh Lyman (Bradley Whitford) discovering he has a fan site devoted to following his life. When he decides to post a response to one of the criticisms a blogger leveled against him, Josh finds that they don’t take his “response in the spirit that it was intended” and experiences a major backlash (“The U.S. Poet Laureate”). He later complains,
“It’s *Lord of the Flies* in there!” (“The U.S. Poet Laureate”). The story is based off on a real event in Sorkin’s life. When Sorkin responded to a complaint about *The West Wing* on a website called *Television Without Pity* in 2000, he ended up being lambasted by the online community. A New York Times article called this episode of *The West Wing* “his best and loudest available form of revenge against a phenomenon that has not always treated him fondly” (Sella). Perhaps speaking for Sorkin, Lyman states in the episode, “The Internet is a crazy place. It’s got a dictatorial leader that I’m sure has a muumuu and chain-smokes” (“The U.S. Poet Laureate”).

While the muumuu certainly doesn’t apply, Sorkin actually has Zuckerberg smoking in a May 2009 version of the script. This was probably a detail that had to be removed for legal reasons (there’s no evidence that Zuckerberg actually ever smoked). In fact, many of the rough edges that would have more directly supported the idea of the Internet as an isolating force were smoothed out during the production process. For instance, one of the forces that would have more powerfully proved the brutality of cyberspace was an overwhelming sense of misogyny that was ascribed to Zuckerberg in the original script. For instance, in the May 2009 draft, after hearing about how Zuckerberg created a website called Facemash that allowed Harvard students to rank the hotness of fellow undergrads, Marylin Delpy (Rashida Jones), a second year associate at the law firm representing Zuckerberg, has an exchange with him:

MARYLIN: Eight percent of the male population of Harvard had been on it within two hours?

MARK: Eighty.

MARYLIN: What?

MARK: Eighty percent of the male population. (*The Social Network*)

The tone of this dialogue is not admiring of Zuckerberg’s technical feat in quite the same way the dialogue in the actual film is. In the final cut, Marylin asks if “the site got twenty-two hundred hits in two hours,” to which Mark responds, “Twenty-two thousand.” The revision seems to emphasize the sheer amount of people Zuckerberg was able to reach with the site, almost marveling at his accomplishment. The original, however, highlights the vengeful, hormonal, morally questionable qualities of the project by reminding the audience that this site allowed men to rate girls without their permission. And this might not even be accurate. As journalist Lucas O’Brien points out in a blog post for *Slate*, “the real Facemash included photos of both men and women—a fact that cuts against the depiction of Zucker-
berg as a horny dude out for revenge.” It would seem as if Sorkin took liberties with the facts in order to advance his own narrative: that the Internet, as represented by Zuckerberg, is having a detrimental effect on human relationships.

“This is our time”: David Fincher and Innovation

However, this perspective overlooks the fact that many groups have been responding to the film in a completely opposite way, viewing it as an inspirational tale about the “American dream,” the idea that anyone can achieve success regardless of their social standing. For instance, the real Mark Zuckerberg said in an interview on 60 Minutes that:

I can’t tell you how many messages I’ve gotten from people who use Facebook writing in to say, “This movie was really inspiring to me. After seeing this movie, I want to start my own company.” Or “I want to go into computer science.” Or “I want to study math.” And if the movie had that effect on people, then that’s awesome. Great. (Stahl).

Even Eduardo Saverin chimed in. After seeing the film, he wrote an op-ed piece for CNBC, saying, “The true takeaway for me was that entrepreneurship and creativity, however complicated, difficult or tortured to execute, are perhaps the most important drivers of business today and the growth of our economy” (Saverin). He continues by writing that “unlike so many things in life, there are no boundaries as to who can be an entrepreneur” and that “true innovation is blind” (Saverin). Obviously both Zuckerberg and Saverin have clear stakes in what they are writing—they are talking about their fictional onscreen counterpoints here, and it would surprise no one if they tried to put a positive spin on the film in order to better suit their own public image.

But evidence shows, regardless of their motivations, they may be right. A March 3, 2011 article in The Harvard Crimson points out that the number of undergraduates enrolled in Computer Science 50, the university’s introductory course in the field, increased by 56 percent in the fall, citing Mark Zuckerberg—and by association The Social Network—as the force behind the sudden growth (Novendstern and Ye). And in a blog post for The Daily Beast, an online reporting and opinion website founded by former Vanity Fair editor Tina Brown, journalist Rebecca Dana says that Zuckerberg—usually seen sporting Adidas flips-flops, Gap pull-over sweatshirts, and cargo shorts—has become a fashion icon of sorts lately because of the film. The implication of Dana’s article is that the film is having a profound impact on youth culture: it’s even affecting how they choose to dress. Eisenberg, who plays Zuckerberg in the film, described the
trend in a phone interview with *The New York Times* shortly after the film came out:

I was asked by older people again and again how I could play a character who is capable of being so mean, as if I were almost condemned by this role, but young people never had that reaction. They kept saying, ‘This guy was genius. Look what he has created.’ For a lot of people my age, the message is that technology allows you to create something that can change things from a single computer. You don’t need a secretary, you don’t need an office building and you don’t need employees. (Carr)

The question remains, though: how can audiences can come out of the same film with such polarized attitudes about the main character? In an interview with *Deadline Hollywood*, Rudin gave an answer, citing “the unlikely marriage of these two collaborators” (Fleming), referring to Sorkin and Fincher, as the reason. Through his description of Fincher’s role of the set, Rudin is able illustrate how Fincher added an additional layer to Sorkin’s now-Academy-Award-winning screenplay, and it’s this layer that seems to be appealing most to younger audiences:

The way (Fincher) handled the anthropology of the movie was extraordinary. He really got so brilliantly underneath the culture that the movie was describing. He knows what it’s like to be 19 and come up with something and have somebody older and more monied try to take it away from you. (Fleming)

Fincher himself agrees that he tried to seek out another motivation for Zuckerberg besides just trying to get back at an ex-girlfriend, saying in an interview with Hitfix.com that Sorkin “was more comfortable with *Revenge of the Nerds* being kind of the muscle,” but he thought there had to be “something else to this guy that is way more than vaginal retribution” (McWeeny). As Rudin alluded to the previous quote, this new motivation for Zuckerberg ended up bearing a not-quite-so-coincidental resemblance to one from Fincher’s past. In the book *The Director’s Cut: Picturing Hollywood in the 21st Century*, Fincher describes an experience that in many ways parallels Zuckerberg’s own in the film. At 27 years old, Fincher was hired to direct *Alien 3*, the third in a film series whose previous installments had been helmed by major names like Ridley Scott and James Cameron, who would go on to *Gladiator* and *Avatar* fame respectively. Fincher says, “It was probably one of the most expensive movies at the time, and it seemed ludicrous to assume that some 27-year-old kid was given 56 million dollars” (Littger 173). But he also said that as soon as he arrived on set, he started fighting with the studio over what
type of film he should make (Littger 173). The result was a movie that mostly panned, receiving only a 40 percent approval rating on Rotten Tomatoes:

> When you spend all of your time fighting about what are the themes and what is the content. What are the ideas that you’re trying to get across, and are those ideas too lofty and too pretentious, and do they have any place in a sequel or do they have any place in science fiction...? It’s not good if you end up spending all your time arguing about what the contents should be in order for it to be the most successful movie—and by that I mean most profitable! (Littger 174)

In this quote, Fincher expresses many of the same concerns Zuckerberg has in the film. Not only were Zuckerberg and Fincher both young when they first achieved success, but society pushed both of them to compromise on their creations in order to make them more profitable. Fincher was told by the studio to make a film that had greater mass appeal, which meant sacrificing the story he wanted to tell, while Zuckerberg was told by Eduardo to monetize Facebook by selling advertisements, which would have forfeited the site’s “coolness” factor. If the film is analyzed through this lens, Zuckerberg isn’t betraying a friend at all when he removes Eduardo from the company. He is protecting his innovation and staying true to himself.

Besides giving Zuckerberg a new motive for ousting Eduardo out of the company, Fincher also helped to accentuate—through his directorial choices—the idea that society is experiencing a seismic shift because of the Internet. Throughout the film, the audience witnesses the demise of an old social system based on privilege and aristocracy and the rise of a new one that values innovation, entrepreneurship, and meritocracy. While it is true that this idea is integral to the film’s script, it is most clearly articulated by Fincher’s composition of scenes, especially when one compares how he framed the scene where Eduardo is being hazed by a final club, with the scene where Zuckerberg interviews interns for Facebook. In the first scene, Eduardo finds himself in the Phoenix Club—one of the most elite and prestigious clubs at Harvard—with other recruits, forced to drink from a bottle of Jack Daniels, and then hand it off to the person behind him (see fig. 3). The camera captures four parallel lines of students doing the same activity, lending it a sense of tradition and routine. The passing of the bottle in a line symbolizes the handing off of the club from one generation to another. All the recruits wear tuxedos, a sign of wealth and power, and chant a low murmur of “Phoenix, Phoenix” while drinking, an example of how individuals need to conform to a set of predetermined behaviors in order to fit into the old social structure at Harvard.
Similarly, Zuckerberg also uses a form of hazing to determine who will join the company in Palo Alto for the summer. Perhaps he got this idea from the final clubs themselves, but the way this scene is staged and shot shows how much the new social structure Zuckerberg has created differs from the old one (see fig. 4).

First of all, the setting of the computer science lab is much more modern than the Phoenix Club—the walls are made of cement instead of bricks. And while alcohol plays a significant part in this selection process as well—applicants must take a shot for every tenth line of code they finish—these students are not evaluated simply on their ability to gulf down alcohol, but on the basis of who could finish programming first, a task that requires skill and is much more meritocratic in nature. If the first still had a linear composition, this one has a circular composition. The applicants are not standing in a regimented line as they were in Phoenix, but sitting around a circular table facing each other, which creates a greater sense of
equality: they are being judged solely on their ability to code, not on their behaviors, their physical appearance, or their origin of birth. The lighting focuses on the table with the computers, highlighting the work at hand, but in the background, the audience sees a crowd uproariously cheering for contestants. There is no stifling of individuality here, and the atmosphere is kinetic, and seems better fitting to a party than to a job interview. This can be read as a movement away from a highly controlled and centralized aristocracy and towards a more open—and less judgmental—meritocracy.

This seems to be the message that most young moviegoers seem to be taking away from the film, and the one the real counterparts of both Zuckerberg and Saverin are trying to promote: the idea that anyone can become a dot-com billionaire and that the barriers once holding individuals back in the past—social class, start-up money, the need for assistance from somebody—are slowly eroding. As Harvard Law Professor Lawrence Lessig mentions in his critique of the film (while arguing the film doesn’t communicate this idea strongly enough):

Because the platform of the Internet is open and free, or in the language of the day, because it is a ‘neutral network,’ a billion Mark Zuckerbergs have the opportunity to invent for the platform. And though there are crucial partners who are essential to bring the product to market, the cost of proving viability on this platform has dropped dramatically... This is a platform that has made democratic innovation possible.

(Lessig)

It’s a stark cry from the idea that the film is a morality tale, as many reviewers have implied. Since this theme seems best expressed through cinematography and compositional choice, it seems clear that Fincher is primarily responsible for its inclusion, with his personal experience with as a young innovator providing the catalyst. And this seems to be one of the major attractions of the film to young adults: the idea that they too can become a billionaire, and start a social revolution.

Conclusion

Both Sorkin and Fincher began the project with dramatically different life experiences and perspectives on the technology and the world. For instance, Sorkin started his professional career as a playwright, writing for one of the world’s oldest art forms, while Fincher began by shooting stylized music videos, working with one of the world’s newest. And that’s on top of the fact that Sorkin has had several very public, antagonistic encounters with the Internet while Fincher shares a biographical history that similar to Zuckerberg’s own.

However, it seems a little bit unfair to imply that Sorkin and
Fincher were always on opposite sides of the fence when deciding on the film’s characterization of Zuckerberg. Both of the filmmakers say that they agreed far more often during the creative process than they disagreed (Harris). Unlike most productions though, Sorkin continued to have a very active role on set when the actual filming occurred, making the final product much more of a collaborative effort. Fincher said this marked a distinct change from his previous projects:

That’s what you get with Aaron. You can’t send him away. That’s television. The writers have control because in Aaron’s case, the pages don’t come out of his hand until he comes out of his trailer, you know, comes out of his office. And to be honest, I’ve never worked that way before, and there were things I disagreed with him on, like what was going on or the level of complexity that was going on. (McWeeny)

There are multiple instances in the film where we see the two creative forces compromising. Fincher eventually does have his way with the business cards. For the final cut, Sorkin rewrote the script, so that Timberlake as Parker now says:

What the VCs (venture capitalists) want is to say, ‘Good idea, kid. The grown-ups will take it from here.’ But not this time. This is our time. This time, you’re gonna hand them a business card that says, ‘I’m CEO, bitch.’ That’s what I want for you” (*The Social Network*).

However, in other cases, it was Fincher who gave in. When Zuckerberg finally gets the packet of business cards delivered to his desk, he takes one out and looks at it solemnly. The music in the background, a score by Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross, is literally an echo of what we heard at the beginning of the film during the title sequence. We are able to see how far the character has come, and how much he has lost in the process. Zuckerberg does end up a tragic hero in the end, exactly how Sorkin imagined the character.

Figure 5. At the end of the film, Zuckerberg has finally achieve his goal: he has a card that says, “I’m CEO, bitch.” However, he finds this does not make him happy. He ends up a tragic hero (*The Social Network*).
Through an analysis of those few areas where Sorkin and Fincher did disagree—for instance, in deciding who the word “bitch” would refer to—we can see on a smaller scale those divisions that currently exist in society over the role of the Internet. Is the Internet making us more callous and preventing us from making healthy interpersonal relationships? Or has it become an equalizing force, making society more meritocratic in nature since it takes nothing other than talent and a strong will to write a successful computer program? Perhaps, the film was so successful amongst the critic groups because it captures a moment in time where social networking sites like Facebook are growing in users exponentially, and their effect on society is being heavily debated. For instance, the media has cited the role Facebook played in the recent Tunisian revolution—Roger Cohen of *The New York Times* goes as far as calling Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, the “leader” of the revolution—as proof that the site is “empowering to the repressed, humiliated and distant” (Cohen). At the same time, it has also been called Orwellian because it pushes its users to reveal more information about themselves than they would be comfortable sharing in person. As Daniel Lyons asks in an article in *Newsweek*, “Who knew Big Brother would be not a big government agency, but a bunch of kids in Silicon Valley?” (Lyons). But perhaps, by giving us a highly nuanced, highly contradictory portrait of Zuckerberg, Sorkin and Fincher are actually providing us a forum where we can discuss our highly nuanced, highly contradictory ideas about the Internet. And in the end, it’s these varying viewpoints that contribute the film’s richness, considering it can accommodate so many perspectives without invalidating any of the others.
Works Cited


INTRODUCTION

The courses that make up the Introduction to the Humanities (IHUM) program present Stanford freshmen with opportunities to engage with significant issues, themes, and ideas concerning human identity and existence. Students select from a wide range of offerings specifically designed for the first year of college. Distinguished faculty members address these topics in lectures, and students explore them further in discussion sections and writing assignments. The success of IHUM students’ writing, represented by the Boothe Prize winning essays in this volume, validates the decision to organize freshman humanities in terms of freedom of choice rather than a single canon. One cannot but be impressed by the diversity of topics and the subtlety of argument as well as the admirable seriousness these essays bring to bear on a diverse range of subjects. The winning essays engage with a wide array of texts, from Homer’s *The Odyssey* to Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, and demonstrate a broad disciplinary range, from literature to the intersection of philosophy and economics. The Boothe essays, in keeping with the goals of IHUM, ask fundamental humanistic questions about the intersection between freedom and morality, the value of empathy, and the power of authorship and narrative. This extraordinary sweep is indicative of the breadth of the long tradition of liberal arts education at Stanford. We congratulate the Boothe Prize winners for 2010-2011, as well as the nominees and finalists, whose names are listed in this book. We are proud of these essays, and we are sure that you will find in them clear evidence of the vitality of and passion for humanistic learning that flourish during students’ first year at Stanford.

—Russell A. Berman

Faculty Director, Introduction to the Humanities Program

—Ellen Woods

Co-Director, Stanford Introductory Studies
The construction of a narrative that not only describes but also accounts for the development of science from antiquity to modernity is, to say the least, a challenging task. Success in this type of project requires the historian to demonstrate mastery of a diverse set of scientific theories from a range of cultural contexts. Moreover, the historian must advance some thread, which unanachronistically binds scientific developments together while still accounting for the evolution of the scientific tradition through the millennia. This task is so daunting that few historians attempt it.

In his essay, “The Idol of Prescriptive Normativity,” Zeller approaches this task with courage and finesse. He presents a pronounced shift in the philosophy undergirding the construction of scientific theories. Zeller argues that normative notions—e.g., the good, the beautiful, and the simple—play a new and problematic role in the modern scientific tradition. While, according to Zeller, natural philosophers such as Aristotle and Newton applied normative notions retroactivity to their cosmological theories, in physics today normative notions are prescriptive. In order for today’s scientific communities to accept a theory, the theory must be elegant. By bringing Francis Bacon’s *The New Organon* to bear on the philosophical assumptions of today’s scientific communities, Zeller describes the limitations and dangers of prescriptive normativity. That Zeller has the ability to not only reflect on the history of science but also apply historical lessons to future scientific developments is commendable, and it confirms for me that IHUM has the ability to nurture our students’ careers in science and technology.

—Jacqueline Feke
The concept of normativity has played a significant role in the history and development of science. In many instances, scientists have included normative notions in their explanations of the physical universe. In 350 B.C.E. Aristotle assigned an entirely normative structure to his geocentric universal model, and over one thousand years later, Isaac Newton incorporated similar normative notions into his proposed heliocentric universal astronomy. Moreover, modern scientific theories and discoveries, such as Maxwell’s Equations, special relativity, and E8 unification theory were all profoundly influenced by conceptions of normativity.\(^1\)

This paper examines the presence and historical development of normativity in science by considering Aristotle, Newton, and later theorists (e.g., Maxwell, Einstein, Lisi). A thorough analysis indicates that the normative notions incorporated into the early physical theories of Aristotle and Newton are different from those incorporated into modern science. Whereas the normative notions invoked by earlier scientists were descriptive (i.e., theories were developed and then normative notions were applied [to the theory itself or to the objects the theory reflects]), the normative notions invoked by modern scientists are primarily prescriptive (i.e., scientists predetermine which normative notions accurate theories must incorporate and then formulate theories). As demonstrated in this paper, the progression in scientific practice from description to prescription has the potential

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1 How these theories were influenced by normativity is discussed in detail later in this paper.
to severely limit scientific exploration and discovery.

**From Description to Prescription: An Evolution of Normativity**

Below is a depiction of the typical Aristotelian universal astronomy (figure 1).

![Aristotelian Universe](Digital image. CourseWork Stanford University. Michael Friedman. Web. 01 Feb. 2010.)

Figure 1: The Aristotelian Universe. (Digital image. CourseWork Stanford University. Michael Friedman. Web. 01 Feb. 2010.)

A slightly altered version of this universal astronomy (Christian Aristotelianism) was a widely accepted world system until the scientific revolution. As evidenced by his commentary in *De Caelo* (*On the Heavens*), Aristotle incorporates normative notions of perfection and value into his proposed universal model. Aristotle addresses the normative notion of perfection in describing the motions of the planets. He highlights that the planets move in circular orbits and that the circle is geometrically perfect or complete (269 a 19-32). Additionally, he assigns a normative value system to his astronomy. He claims, “...there is some other body separate from those around us here, and of a higher nature in proportion as it is removed from the sublunary world” (269 b 14-17). Simply put, Aristotle maintains that “better,” or more valuable, bodies are located closer to the periphery of the universe.² Aristotle’s contention that more valuable bodies are located closer to

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² When Aristotle’s model was adopted by the church hundreds of years later, the phrase “Coelum Empireum Habitaculum Dei et Omnium Electorum,” meaning “the dwelling place of God and all of the elect,” was written nearest the periphery of the universe to signify that God is the most valuable being.
the periphery of the universe is consistent with Aristotelian physics, which maintains that the sublunary realm is imperfect since the elements (earth, water, air, fire) are in a constant state of transition, while the aether that pervades the superlunary realm is unchanging. Aristotle’s discussion of his proposed universal model in *De Caelo* suggests that his incorporation of normativity was purely descriptive. Only after formulating his theory of the heavens did Aristotle point out that there are normative notions of perfection and value inherent in the motions and arrangements of the heavenly bodies. There is no evidence in *De Caelo* that suggests that Aristotle maintained that the planets must move in circular orbits because the circle is perfect or that the universe must have a structure consistent with any preconceived normative values. Mohan Matthen and R. J. Hankinson, professors of philosophy and scholars of Aristotle, echo this viewpoint in their paper “Aristotle’s Universe: Its Form and Matter.” They contend that, even though Aristotle “makes extensive use of degrees of perfection to explain some of the structural features of the universe,” there is nonetheless, “a distinctly empirical train of thought in Aristotle’s cosmology” (417). Aristotle’s conclusions (regarding the motions of the planets and cosmological structure) were drawn exclusively from observational or logical considerations.

Though Isaac Newton’s universal model (figure 2) deviated from Aristotle’s (in that the sun was at the center of the solar system and the universe was infinite in extent), Newton’s incorporation of normativity was similarly descriptive. Newton incorporates the normative notions of perfection and beauty into his infinite heliocentric cosmology through the harmonious motions of the planets.

![Figure 2: The Newtonian Universe. (Digital image. CourseWork Stanford University. Michael Friedman. Web. 01 Feb. 2010.)](image-url)
He describes his universal model as the “most elegant system of the sun, planets, and comets…” (Newton 90). He claims his model is mechanically and geometrically perfect in that the planets have “those just degrees of velocity, in proportion to their distances from the sun and other central bodies, which were requisite to make them move in concentric orbs about those bodies” (Koyré 186). Additionally, there is beauty and perfection associated with the mathematics of the Newtonian universe; by combining Newton’s law of universal gravitation \( F = GMm/r^2 \) with his three laws of motion, one can derive elegant equations of motion governing the planets (e.g., planets sweep out equal areas in equal time; \( T^2 \) is proportional to \( r^3 \)).

Furthermore, Newton (like Aristotle) assigns a normative, purposeful structure to his proposed model of the universe. Although Newton is not able to specify the normative purpose of his universe’s structure (i.e., explain—as Aristotle did—why the universe is structured as it is), he offers proof that his universe is structured purposefully and could not have arisen from mere probabilistic mechanical interactions. He evidences that out of all the possible planetary motions that can exist in a system with more than two attracting bodies (e.g., ellipses, parabolas, hyperbolas), the planets in his model move with the rarest and most regular motions, while other bodies, like comets, move irregularly. Newton contends that the harmonious motions of the planets are evidence that an intelligent being (referring to God) purposefully structured the universe because such harmonious motions are not “explicable by mere natural causes” (Koyré 185). He maintains that his proposed universal astronomy “could not have arisen without the design and dominion of an intelligent and purposeful being” (Newton 90). Consequently, Newton concludes that God purposefully arranged the planets and set them in motion (Koyré 186).

Newton’s incorporation of normativity, like Aristotle’s, is exclusively descriptive. Newton’s universal model was not derived from conceptions of normativity, but rather from mathematical, logical, and physical considerations; only after postulating his theory of the universe did Newton describe its structural features in terms of normative notions. Interestingly, modern scientists have strayed from Newton’s and Aristotle’s practice of first formulating a theory of the universe and then describing it in terms of normative notions. Instead of describing aspects of physical theories in normative terms, modern scientists prescribe certain normative laws to which any ac-

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3 It is interesting to note that Newton’s design argument is even more convincing after considering Henri Poincaré’s solution to the famous n-body problem. Poincaré concluded that the future motions of planets are increasingly sensitive to small changes in initial conditions, so much so that even the slightest change in the initial velocity of a single planet could result in chaotic planetary motions at some point later in time. Given Poincaré’s findings, it is miraculous that mere probabilistic mechanical interactions could give rise to such a stable solar system.
accurate physical theory must adhere. Simply put, whereas the scientists of yesterday would first formulate a theory and then analyze its normative features, contemporary scientists first promulgate specific normative properties that they believe any accurate theory must have and then go about deriving theories consistent with their conceptions of normativity.

As evidence that the normative notions invoked by modern scientists are primarily prescriptive, consider the 2007 scientific paper *An Exceptionally Simple Theory of Everything*, by American theoretical physicist Garrett Lisi. Even though the content of the paper is highly technical and primarily concerned with developing a theory that will unify the fundamental forces of nature, the introductory paragraphs provide insight into the role normativity plays in modern science. In considering what types of mathematical equations can govern the universe, Lisi proclaims “there is a classic principle for restricting the possibilities” (1). He writes, “The mathematics of the universe should be beautiful. A successful description of nature should be a concise, elegant, unified mathematical structure consistent with experience” (1). Essentially, Lisi maintains that the mathematics of any accurate description of nature must possess prescribed normative properties of beauty and elegance.

Lisi’s contention that any accurate theory must possess certain properties is not unique; rather, most members of the greater scientific community (e.g., Albert Einstein, James Maxwell, Brian Greene, Paul Dirac, etc.) share Lisi’s belief that any accurate description of the universe must incorporate prescribed notions of beauty, perfection, elegance, symmetry, determinism, simplicity, and unity. In his 2007 work *Why Beauty is Truth: A History of Symmetry*, Ian Stewart, professor of mathematics at the University of Warwick, comments that, “Mathematical beauty is expected to be a prerequisite for physical truth” (xiii). Albert Einstein, the father of modern theoretical physics, echoed this contention in claiming, “the only physical theories that we are willing to accept are the beautiful ones” (Farmelo, xiii). Hermann Weyl, a German mathematician who made profound contributions to both pure mathematics and the physical sciences, was influenced by normative conceptions of beauty so much so that he claimed, “My work always tried to unite the true with the beautiful; but when I had to choose one or the other, I usually chose the beautiful” (Chandrasekhar 52). Weyl’s choice to pursue the beautiful over the true is somewhat radical, even amongst scientists.

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4 He attempts to unify physics by providing insight into how we can physically interpret the dynamics of the 1-form and Grassman-valued parts of E8 Lie Algebra superconnections.

5 My italics.
As demonstrated above, there has been a definite shift in the types of normative notions invoked by scientists. Whereas earlier scientists incorporated normative notions into their theories after formulation, modern scientists predetermine which normative notions their theories must incorporate prior to formulation. Since descriptive normativity is applied only after scientific theories are logically or empirically formed, its invocation neither enhances nor hinders scientific discovery. Prescriptive normativity, in contrast, has the potential to thwart the scientific pursuit of knowledge. By searching only for theories that are consistent with predetermined normative properties, scientists are restricting exploration and discovery.

Prescriptive Normativity: At Odds with the Furtherance of Scientific Discovery

Scientists who practice prescriptive normativity believe that any accurate description of nature must be consistent with predetermined normative notions. Francis Bacon, esteemed philosopher and author of The New Organon (an inquiry into how to obtain certainty in the natural sciences), would likely argue that such a belief is scientifically unfounded. Bacon contends that in order for a scientific conclusion to be founded, it must be based in empirical arguments (i.e., must be confirmed by experimentation). He claims that all accurate scientific knowledge we currently possess can be attributed solely to “chance and experimentation” (90). Consequently, he holds that the only way to obtain knowledge of the material world is to perform a multitude of experiments and then generalize findings via induction; only after performing various experiments, constructing tables of instances, and intimately interacting with nature can one generate accurate conclusions. Bacon asserts that other methods for generating scientific conclusions (i.e., syllogistic reasoning) are not sufficient since “the subtlety of nature is greater many times over the subtlety of argumentation” (93). But, “axioms duly formed from particulars [specific experiments and observations],” he claims, “easily discover the way to new particulars, and thus render the sciences active” (93). Considering that there is no experimental evidence supporting the belief that accurate descriptions of nature must adhere to specific normative notions, Bacon would likely dismiss this belief as unfounded.

Furthermore, in The New Organon, Bacon warns that unfounded conclusions (i.e., intellectual fallacies) may curtail scientific discovery. Bacon appropriately dubs these intellectual fallacies “idols,” because just like the false idol of the golden calf mentioned in the Bible, intellectual fallacies are respected, and even worshipped by humans despite a lack of underlying substance. Bacon divides the idols into four different categories: (i) idols of the tribe (biases of human un-
nderstanding), (ii) idols of the cave (biases of individual preference), (iii) idols of the marketplace (illusions of understanding created by words), and (iv) idols of the theatre (biases and illusions of understanding created by received philosophical systems). In speaking of the idols collectively, Bacon writes, “The idols and false notions which are now in possession of the human understanding, and have taken deep root therein, not only so beset men’s minds that truth can hardly find entrance, but even after entrance is obtained, they will again in the very instauration of the sciences meet and trouble us…” (95). Evidently, Bacon had the foresight to recognize the potentially negative impact of idols on current and future scientific quests for truth. He acknowledges that idols not only thwart current scientific endeavors but also inhibit the successful revamping of scientific practice.

Prescriptive normativity fits in especially well with the Baconian concept of the idol. Scientists have come to accept as true the premise that all accurate theories of the universe must incorporate prescribed notions of beauty, perfection, elegance, symmetry, simplicity, and unity. Yet, as mentioned above, this premise is unfounded empirically. It follows that the idol of prescriptive normativity (i.e., the unfounded belief that all accurate theories must have prescribed normative properties) is at odds with the furtherance of scientific discovery. By searching only for theories that mesh with specific normative notions, scientists may in turn pass over the greatest truths of all. In order to push scientific discovery to the next level, it is important that theorists expand the scope of their search to a whole array of possibilities—not just those theories that possess carefully prescribed properties. It would be a beneficial exercise for theorists to assume that the laws of nature are not necessarily normative and that the theories that are beautiful, elegant, symmetric, and unified are the exceptions, rather than the rule. Such a simple change in perspective has the potential to revolutionize science.

Beyond the philosophical and epistemological considerations associated with prescriptive normativity’s role in the scientific method, there is also one practical consideration worth mentioning. Specifically, conceptions of normativity vary from scientist to scientist and it is often difficult to determine which theories incorporate normative notions and which do not. For example, even though nearly all modern scientists affirm that symmetry is beautiful, some mathematicians may find asymmetric equations to be the most beautiful of all. Since conceptions of normativity vary so much, it is imprudent for scientists to proclaim that the universe must have certain normative

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6 Specifically, the idol of prescriptive normativity can be considered an “idol of the tribe,” as is addressed in the counterargument section of this paper.
properties when normative properties can be interpreted in contrasting ways.

Counterargument: The Benefits of Prescriptive Normativity

Opponents of the belief that prescriptive normativity limits scientific exploration would argue that prescriptive normativity actually benefits science and should remain an important consideration in the scientific method. James Clerk Maxwell, for example, derived the namesake Maxwell’s equations from purely normative arguments. Specifically, Maxwell reasoned that the equations of electricity and magnetism ought to be symmetric and therefore introduced the famous displacement current term into Ampere’s Law so that the equations governing electricity and magnetism in a vacuum would be a symmetric set of partial differential equations. In commenting on Maxwell’s discovery of the displacement current, English physicist Norman Campbell writes, “Suppose you found a page with the following marks on it—never mind if they mean anything [figure 3]. I think you would see that the set of symbols on the right side are ‘prettier’ in some sense than those on the left; they are more symmetrical. Well, the great physicist, James Clerk Maxwell, about 1870, thought so too; and by substituting the symbols on the right side for those on the left, he founded modern physics and, among other practical results, made wireless telegraphy possible” (155-156).

\[
\begin{align*}
\nabla \cdot \mathbf{E} &= 0 \\
\nabla \cdot \mathbf{B} &= 0 \\
\nabla \times \mathbf{E} &= \frac{1}{c} \frac{\partial \mathbf{B}}{\partial t} \\
\nabla \times \mathbf{B} &= 0
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\nabla \cdot \mathbf{E} &= 0 \\
\nabla \cdot \mathbf{B} &= 0 \\
\n\nabla \times \mathbf{E} &= -\frac{1}{c} \frac{\partial \mathbf{B}}{\partial t} \\
\n\nabla \times \mathbf{B} &= \frac{1}{c} \frac{\partial \mathbf{E}}{\partial t}.
\end{align*}
\]

Figure 3: The equations on the left are Maxwell’s equations in free space without displacement currents. The equations on the right are Maxwell’s equations in free space with displacement currents. All equations are written in CGS units.

This phenomenon—deriving paramount theories from normative considerations—is not unique to Maxwell. Albert Einstein’s theory of special relativity, for instance, was also derived out of symmetry arguments (Stewart, ix-x). Additionally, Herman Weyl’s nuanced
unification of gravitation and electricity resulted from conceptions of normativity regarding the direction and length of a vector (Afriat). With such prior successes of prescriptive normativity in mind, it is not surprising that prominent scientists argue that all accurate theories of the universe must have a normative structure and that prescriptive normativity can play a beneficial role in the scientific method. After all, this conclusion is grounded in years of experience; many accurate scientific theories of the past few centuries have incorporated prescribed normative notions.

In The New Organon, Bacon explains how such prior successes of prescriptive normativity likely encouraged scientists to fallaciously conclude that the entire universe is normatively structured. He suggests that such a false conclusion exemplifies the “idols of the tribe.” Bacon writes, “The idols of the tribe arise because the human understanding is of its own nature prone to suppose the existence of more order and regularity in the world than it finds. And though there be many things in nature which are singular and unmatched, yet it devises from them parallels and conjugates and relatives which do not exist” (97). Essentially, Bacon maintains that having observed a few instances in which the laws of nature are well-ordered, humans are falsely disposed to generalize such observations and conclude that the universe as a whole is normatively structured.

As Bacon acknowledges, there may exist specific, well-ordered laws of nature (e.g., Maxwell’s equations in free space and special relativity) that encourage scientists to conclude that the entire universe as a whole is well-ordered and normatively structured. Nevertheless, this conclusion is overreaching, and there is substantial evidence indicating that the laws of nature are not necessarily well-ordered and do not necessarily possess prescribed normative properties. Consider the generalized form of Maxwell’s equations, for example. Though it is true that Maxwell’s equations are symmetric in free space (due to the introduction of the displacement current), they are completely asymmetric in the presence of electric charges (figure 4). To “correct” this asymmetry, many scientists have tried to prove the existence of magnetic monopoles (which would make the equations symmetric), but all attempts to date have been futile and wasteful—scientists have dedicated countless hours and immense funds to the discovery of magnetic monopoles to no avail. Additionally, consider quantum mechanics. Since the theory of quantum mechanics is probabilistic in nature, most scientists agree it is devoid of the normative notions of beauty, elegance, symmetry, and determinism that any accurate theory ought to have. In fact, quantum mechanics is a cantankerous, probabilistic mess, lacking even the
slightest trace of what most scientists consider beautiful or elegant. Yet, quantum mechanics is far and away the most accurate theory of subatomic interactions, having been experimentally confirmed without reservation. Upon consideration of such successful – yet not normative – theories, it is hard to argue that all accurate depictions of the universe must be normative in nature.

Concluding Remarks

Perhaps, the example of quantum mechanics best elucidates how the idol of prescriptive normativity has the potential to limit science. While deliberating quantum theory in Copenhagen, Einstein (in addition to other theorists) rashly and unjustifiably rejected the wave-mechanical formulation of quantum mechanics (the currently accepted theory) on purely normative grounds. He believed that such an interpretation of quantum mechanics could not be correct since any accurate theory of the universe should not be probabilistic in nature. In famously proclaiming, “I, at any rate, am convinced that He [God] does not throw dice,” Einstein nearly deprived the scientific community of arguably the most successful theory of the 20th century (Clark, 340). Simply because the wave-mechanical formulation of quantum mechanics was not consistent with the received scientific assumptions of the time (i.e., accurate theories ought to be deterministic in nature), it was “vetoed” by many prominent physicists.

In his 1962 landmark publication, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Thomas Kuhn explains the scientific community’s resistance to changes in assumptions (paradigm shifts) and how such resistance can have a negative impact on science. Kuhn writes, “Normal science, the activity in which most scientists inevitably spend almost all their time, is predicated on the assumption that the scientific community knows what the world is like” (5). Kuhn proposes that since the scientific community is willing to defend the assumptions of normal science at all costs, normal science “often suppresses fundamental novelties because they are necessarily subversive of its basic commitments” (5). In the same vein, because modern scientists so staunchly affirm that accurate theories ought to have prescribed normative properties, potentially revolutionizing, non-normative theories may be repressed.

Kuhn maintains, however, that the essence of “normal research” assures that novelty will not be repressed for long (5). He claims that eventually, some “anomaly” will come along that cannot be recon-

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7 Many scientists and philosophers consider quantum mechanics the least normative of all existing theories for reasons such as uncertainty relationships and tunneling probabilities. Additionally, solutions to most quantum mechanical problems are considered “messy” in that solutions often involve Hermite polynomials and Bessel functions.
circled with the assumptions of normal research (6). Accordingly, scientists will abandon the fundamental assumptions of normal research for new assumptions; such a change in “professional commitments,” Kuhn defines as a scientific revolution (6). Evidently, quantum mechanics was not anomalous enough for scientists to abandon the assumptions of prescriptive normativity, as prescriptive normativity still plays an important role in the scientific method. As a scientist myself, I can only hope that some time in the near future, another “anomaly” will arise, impelling scientists to put an end to the limiting, closed-minded, and underproductive pursuit of knowledge, which follows from the idol of prescriptive normativity.

Works Cited


SPRING 2010 HONORABLE MENTION

Lucy Richards

INSTRUCTOR’S FOREWORD

In her second paper of the spring quarter, Lucy tackled an abstract topic—the assignment was to consider the role of archaeology in the assignment of public meaning to places—by deftly synthesizing the material from much of the course into one key observation. Too many of the critiques of archaeology’s role in heritage conflicts, she argued, have focused on the product of archaeological research rather than its process. This deceptively simple assertion provided a platform for an argument that recognized the intractability of multi-causal modern conflicts like those over Jerusalem and Ayodha while simultaneously proposing a means of using archaeology to soften the stances of parties to those conflicts. Lucy suggests, in clear prose, an insightful approach to a daunting problem; the tone is hopeful without being naive.

Lucy’s paper recognizes the difficulties of archaeology in a postcolonial world without falling prey to a paralysis born of postmodern relativism. In its thoughtful and practical approach to the problem, it is cogent and sophisticated enough to serve as a model for academic archaeologists.

—Daniel Contreras
The Importance of Developing a More Inclusive Role for Archeology in Jerusalem and Ayodhya

Lucy Richards

Archeology, through its portrayal of the past, can be said to be involved in “place-making”—establishing and legitimizing a particular vision of the past at a locale. “Place-making” can take many forms; however, most would agree that it contains the moral imperative to soothe local conflicts rather than feed the flames. In her critique of the role of archeology in the conflict at Ayodhya, Julia Shaw laments “[archeology’s] various shortcomings have led to the view that ‘archeologists…had nothing specifically academic to contribute towards finding a solution to the problem’” (695). Implicit in her statement is the assumption that, in its act of place-making, archeology can and should shift its philosophy and methodology to advance peace rather than conflict. This belief forms the basis for most literature on archeology in both Jerusalem and Ayodhya, and this belief will also form the basis of my own argument. Most literature aimed at reimagining archeology’s role in Jerusalem and Ayodhya focuses specifically on the role of information obtained from archeological research—the methodology used to obtain it and its subsequent interpretation. Simultaneously, however, the same archeological literature suggests that the product of archeology has little power to soothe the disputes. I will demonstrate that this conception of the role of archeology as exclusively product-based hinders the ability for archeology to fulfill its implied mandate to pacify rather than antagonize conflict.

When invoking archeology in the context of Jerusalem and Ayodhya, both sides seem to reflect a common belief that archeology plays the role of an objective judge. At Ayodhya, Hindus claim that archeological evidence shows that there was a temple at the site when
the Muslims came to Ayodhya, while Muslims claim, with fingers pointing to archeological evidence as well, that there was no temple existing at the site when the Babri mosque was constructed (Myth, History, and Archeology 85). Both sides, however, share the implicit belief that archeology can show objectively who is right and who is wrong and, the assumption follows, that archaeological information can determine the solution to the conflict. Analogously, in the case of Jerusalem Nadia Abu El-Haj points out that Israeli archeologists, under the banner of archeology’s scientific neutrality, have constructed a chronology of the past that emphasizes Jewish heritage as the original heritage of Jerusalem (146). Israeli archeologists, like those at Ayodhya, use archeology’s objectivity to substantiate their claims to the past, and thereby to substantiate their claims to the Temple Mount and other important sites in the present. Archeological data is used by both sides to legitimize their own claims to territories in the present.

Because archeology is seen as an “objective judge,” criticisms of the role of archeology in these conflicts focus on the actual objectivity of the information being used as ammunition in the conflict. Abu El-Haj claims that archeological periods relating to Muslim heritage were “not very carefully excavated” (154), which produced material evidence, or “facts on the ground,” of Jewish heritage and discounted the material heritage of the Muslim past. Likewise, D. Mandal points out the flaws in archeology’s methodology: “The contention that a ‘pillared building’ was raised in the eleventh century A.D. is absolutely baseless… the stratigraphy was paid scant attention… the discussions reveal the selective manner in which some archeologists had cited the archeological finds to argue for the existence of a temple” (8). Both of these authors focus their criticism on the methodology of archeology in Jerusalem and Ayodhya, implying that these authors believe that if archeology were truly objective (for example, if equal amounts of Muslim as Jewish heritage were excavated and the stratigraphic analyses of the sites was flawless) then these conflicts would be diminished.

Julia Shaw’s criticism, on the other hand, focuses not on the information produced, but the way that material evidence is communicated to and understood by the public (697). She proposes that archeological interpretations should emphasize the multivocality and fluidity of Ayodhya’s past, arguing that, “the solution lies less in the reiteration of science… and more in its realignment with a new historical imagination that can recover for Ayodhya the variety and multiplicity of its pasts” (699). She claims that if the public received a more multivocal view of the past from archeology, then they would develop a more multivocal view of the present. For Shaw, the problem lies not in the information but the communication of archeology.
In light of these critiques, the question follows that if archeology could achieve perfect information and perfect communication then would the conflicts dissipate? D. Mandal states that, “Not only laypersons but historians too have occasionally done a ‘highjack’ appropriating from archeology conclusions it never pretended to provide,” (2) implying that even if archeology were able to produce perfect information, that would not prevent it from being misused and misinterpreted. Even Shaw seems to recognize that even well-communicated information would be a feeble restraint against the engine of conflict, remarking, “the presence of material remains demonstrating the facts of the past holds little sway against the power of the religious imagination.” (699) These statements indicate that however neutral the methodology and however pure the communication, archeology will still hold little influence over a society’s present feelings about themselves and about the “other.”

Superficially, Nadia Abu El-Haj, seems to contradict this conclusion. She states, “Science and the popular imagination were deeply enmeshed,” and that “archeological sites and the stories they told galvanized public sentiment” (1). However, throughout the rest of the book she focuses almost entirely on how present-day conceptions of Israeli culture are reflected in the material culture that they produce, and not the other way around. By “galvanizing the public,” in terms of her argument, she seems to mean that Israeli archeology reinforced present-day cultural conceptions rather than altered them. Much like pushing a train on a track to move faster is much easier than changing its direction, strengthening cultural conceptions is much more simply done than altering them. Thus, we can conclude that by “enmeshed” she means that cultural sentiments influence archeology to strengthen cultural affiliations that already exist, rather than fundamentally altering public sentiments. Though initially one might say she disagrees with Shaw, her choice of evidence for how public sentiments influence archeology recognizes that archeology can easily reinforce public conceptions, but not so easily alter them.

Why, then, are these authors criticizing the product of archeology when they seem to recognize that the product of archeology will have little impact on present-day cultural affiliations and the conflicts between them? There seems to be a disparity between the motives behind these criticisms, namely to diminish the local conflicts, and what the authors believe their criticisms can actually yield. This discrepancy, it seems, stems from the assumption I discussed above—that archeology derives its power to influence conflict through its scientific objectivity. Under this assumption, archeology’s role in calming conflict is limited to playing the neutral judge. However, these authors seem to recognize that no matter how neutral archeology becomes it will not be able to have a significant influence on the way present-
day conflicts develop, other than possibly deepening cultural schisms further.

If archeologists, therefore, want to play a more calming role in the conflict, then they must imagine their role outside the cliché of the “neutral judge.” As my argument suggests, the conflicts at Ayodhya and Jerusalem are the products of present-day cultural identities and beliefs that sway archeological data and not the other way around. If today archeology could point to one side of the conflict and say unquestionably that they are wrong, then would archeologists expect them to throw up their hands and give up? Even if archeology could endlessly point out that the two sides of the conflicts share a common past, according to Shaw’s argument for multivocality, would we expect people who are deeply angry at each other to care? In these instances, at least, it seems clear that the past is the past, and no matter how many times or how insistently we reiterate it, it will not become the present.

This does not mean that archeology must forfeit its scientific nature, only that it must reimagine its role beyond the scope of the information it can produce. For instance, if archeology’s ability to calm the conflict through its product is limited, perhaps it should consider calming the conflict through its process. In none of these works did any of the authors explicitly mention the demographics of the people doing archeological work. Though Abu El-Haj repeatedly mentions “Israeli archeology,” she does not make the exclusion of Palestinians from archeological work the basis of her argument. Clearly, however, in both conflicts both sides have a vested interest in the past. Perhaps archeology could become a model for teams of people from different sides of the conflict working together to create archeological data, drawing attention away from the information that is produced and towards the inclusive and collaborative process of creating it. Instead of trying to create a multivocal past, perhaps archeology would be more compelling if it created a multivocal present. However, regardless of how archeology reimagines itself in Jerusalem and Ayodhya, it is clear that its present role of neutral judge is limiting and impotent.
Works Cited


Shaw, Julia. “Ayodhya’s Sacred Landscape: Ritual Memory, Politics, and Archaeological ‘Fact.’” *Archeology and Identity in South Asia*. 
Students in the Program in Structured Liberal Education are encouraged to think of one’s scholarship as an intellectual response not only with texts and thinking, but with being and beings in the world which claim one’s responsiveness. Reading and writing in this sense is always a solicitous and critical activity. Kristian Bailey’s essay on *The Odyssey* evinces with fineness and seriousness both the stakes and rewards of such an endeavor. “Empathy vs. Emptiness: An Investigation of Human and Divine Responses to Pain” looks at different responses to suffering by gods and humans in *The Odyssey*. Kristian argues that a certain responsiveness to the other’s suffering—one that goes as far as internalizing his pain—distinguishes human relations from human-divine relations. More provocatively, he argues that empathy for the other’s experience of pain engenders an ethos of protection and release from suffering. Kristian finds this ethos expressed most truly in instances of connubial sleep in *The Odyssey*. He writes, “In sleeping together, though both partners do not experience the same sub-consciousness, they share the experience of being released from their daily suffering in each other’s presence.” As Kristian points out, couples are described as sleeping “next to” or “beside” each other. And after their sorrow-waged reunion, “after Odysseus and Penelope / had made sweet love, they took turns / telling stories to each other.” Their conversation, this manner of being “next to” each other in the marriage bed, reflects a kind of understanding that is experienced only among humans: it turns the other’s suffering into an act of shared suffering. The beauty of Kristian’s essay is not only its carefully crafted prose, not even in the subtlety and insight of his close readings. It is the quiet imprudence of addressing an aspect of human experience that might have easily gone unmarked—like sleep itself—in a tale of such heroic proportions.

—Yoon Sook Cha
Empathy vs. Emptiness: An Investigation of Human and Divine Responses to Pain

Kristian Davis Bailey

Characters in The Odyssey have three basic responses to individuals who are in pain. The first is indifference, or a lack of any emotional response at all. Next is sympathy, which evokes an emotional response—pity—but that response only demonstrates a condescending sorrow for those who are in pain. And finally, there is empathy, an internalization of the other’s pain, which evokes an understanding and emotional response. The difference in emotional responses to pain, the difference between some emotional response and none at all, is an important distinction between human and divine-human relationships. The gods, while sometimes sympathetic, generally feel no emotions towards humans and are never empathetic. This distinction is seen around moments of connubial sleep, which eventually becomes the most intimate and passionate site of human interactions in the world of The Odyssey.¹

The act of human connubial sleep represents the ethos of Odysseus’ Greece. If home is the center of Greek life and the married couple sleeps in the center of the home, conjugal sleep represents a symbolic treasure of human experience. The description of Arete and Alcinous during sleep highlights this valued experience. We see a description of the sleeping couple after Odysseus leaves Calypso, in search of lodging and safe passage home: “Odysseus, / who had suffered much, fell asleep on the bed / under the echoing portico. But Alcinous lay down / in the innermost chamber of that lofty house, / and his lady shared his bed and slept beside him” (7.359-7.366). In saying “nothing is sweeter than your own country / and your own parents, not even living in a rich house— / not if it’s far from family

¹ Unless otherwise stated, sleeping together has no sexual connotations.
and home,” Odysseus identifies family and home as the greatest treasures of the Greek human experience (9.37-9.38). Since Odysseus is not yet reunited with his wife in his own connubial bed, his distance from the physical center of the home demonstrates his remoteness from the metaphorical sense of the Greek home, an object of paramount importance to the Greeks.

In this way, Arete and Alcinous provide a foil to Odysseus. The married couple is united and sleeps in the “innermost chamber,” while Odysseus sleeps alone “under the echoing portico.” The term “innermost chamber” carries connotations that are not present elsewhere in the house. The center is the best-protected area of the home, as the exterior rooms provide a barrier to the outside world. This barrier gives warmth and insulation to those within its borders. In sleeping together, though both partners do not experience the same sub-consciousness, they share the experience of being released from their daily suffering in each other’s presence. Lying together within this warm environment creates a state of intimacy that only humans can experience. And Odysseus, separated from his wife, cannot yet regain that sensation. The depiction of conjugal sleep as intimate recurs throughout the text: “So they slept there / on the palace porch, the hero Telemachus / and Nestor’s glorious son. But Menelaus slept / in the innermost chamber of that high house / next to Helen, Zeus’ brightness upon her” (4.310-4.326). Zeus, who remains awake while the humans sleep, recognizes something special between the sleeping spouses. His brightness shines upon Helen after she has been reunited with her husband after ten years of separation. Their reunion represents peace after a long and brutal war and the atmosphere of divine light brings a sacred and tranquil nature to conjugal sleep. Sleep also brings peace to Helen and Menelaus, who demonstrate tension in their conscious interactions. At the end of each day, with sleep as a respite, the couple must reconcile their grievances with each other, if only for a couple of hours. When humans sleep together, the text explicitly says the partners slept “beside” or “next to” one another. So, the sanctity lies not in the act of sexual consummation, but in another aspect of sleeping beside another human being: the relinquishment of one’s self-consciousness. This intimacy is absent from Odysseus and Calypso and from all other divine-human relationships in the story.

The gods do not even feel sympathy towards human suffering. We see this when Calypso does not understand Odysseus’ pain during his gravest moment: “[Calypso] found him sitting where the breakers rolled in. / His eyes were perpetually wet with tears now, / his life draining away in homesickness. / The nymph had long since ceased to please. / He still slept with her at night in her cavern, / an unwilling lover mated to her eager embrace” (5.148-5.152). Though Odysseus
is trapped on an island with Calypso, a goddess, he sits “where the breakers rolled in.” Odysseus is on the outermost extremity of the island and as close to the rest of humanity as is physically possible. And Odysseus’ place in the breakers suggests he is similar to the rocks and shoals that bear the weight of the breaking waves—solid and durable on the surface, but eroding piece by piece as time progresses and wave after wave thrashes against him. Since he spends “days sitting on the rocks by the breakers,” we see that Odysseus willingly subjects himself to this pounding. Such daily abuse serves to remind Odysseus that, like his strength, his mortality and that of his loved ones are also slowly eroding with time. The waves physically trap Odysseus on the island, as they are constantly and unrelentingly breaking upon the shore.

Similar to the pounding waves, Odysseus’ pain never ends. Odysseus’ captivity causes him grief, as “his eyes were perpetually wet with tears now.” This characterization of Odysseus, heretofore the great, cunning hero of Troy, as perpetually weeping shows the intensity of Odysseus’ grief. Part of this grief may stem from the fact that Odysseus lost his entire crew during his journey home. The larger portion, however, stems from a more dire cause: “his life [was] draining away in homesickness.” The grief is so deep that it drains the strength out of Greece’s greatest living hero. Though the reasons behind Odysseus’ longing to return home are unclear, we know home represents his heritage, his family, and his position as ruler of Ithaca. At some level, all of these spheres imply a connection to other humans, something Odysseus has not had in seven years. So, whatever his motives, Odysseus’ life is directly at stake in his reunion with mortal men.

Pain, which often provokes an emotional response from humans, produces no such reaction from Calypso. The act of sleeping with Calypso then becomes strictly physical and is not intimate on a psychological level. Even though he “[sleeps] with her at night in her cavern,” the pain caused by Odysseus’s separation from home is so strong that Calypso “had long since ceased to please him.” Though he might experience carnal pleasure, Odysseus gains nothing of emotional value from sleeping with Calypso. When, despite Odysseus’ unwillingness and emotional frailty, Calypso holds him in “her eager embrace,” we see that she does not understand Odysseus’ grief. Instead, Calypso continues to compel Odysseus to sleep with her; insensitivity is one aspect of Calypso’s misunderstanding. So, while Calypso is physically attached to Odysseus, their relationship is like the “hollow, salt-rimmed eyes,” through which he constantly stares out to sea and towards home (5.157). The act of sleeping with a goddess is empty and meaningless. Emotional value is also absent when gods sleep with women. When the gods sleep with humans,
it is simply a physical act: “[Poseidon] unbound the sash that had kept [Tyro] virgin / and shed sleep upon her. And when the god / had finished his lovemaking, he took her hand / and called her name softly...with that he plunged into the surging sea” (11.248-11.251; 11.257). Poseidon not only violates the honor of a virgin human, but he also does so while she is asleep. Though Poseidon could be seen as sympathetic when he “[calls] her name softly,” there is no intimacy in the sex because it is not a mutual experience between the two, but “his lovemaking.” Significantly unlike human couples, Poseidon does not physically sleep next to Tyro after he has sex with her. And since Tyro is not even conscious during sex, the moment loses any sense of intimacy it could have held. Though sympathy is condescending, even that would be superior to the lack of emotional concern Poseidon demonstrates for human feelings.

The act of violating the conjugal bed comes to represent the deepest pain in Odysseus’ eyes. When Penelope implies their connubial bed was compromised, Odysseus:

> Could bear no more, and he cried out to his wife: / ‘By God, woman, now you’ve cut deep. / Who moved my bed? It would be hard / for anyone, no matter how skilled, to move it. / A god could come down and move it easily, / but not a man alive, however young and strong / could ever pry it up... / But I do not know, woman, whether my bed is still firmly in place, or if / some other man has cut through the olive’s trunk. (23.189-23.194; 23.209-23.211)

Odysseus, who carefully guards his actions and words, even as Penelope weeps in front of him and the suitors disrespect him in his own home, cannot endure the possibility that his bed’s honor was violated. This outcry is driven by Odysseus’ pride—pride in the durability of his craftwork and in the durability of his marriage. When Odysseus says Penelope’s comment “cuts deep,” we see that this pride resonates in Odysseus’ heart, inside his own innermost chamber. The pain seems to cut deeper than any pain Odysseus experienced in the rest of the text. Though the conjugal bed usually represents a site of extreme safety and comfort, here it is depicted as a cause of extreme distress. The strength of the olive trunk bed can be compared to that of Odysseus’ heart, as both objects are “cut” into in this passage. Trees are deeply rooted objects, and to cut through the base of such a firm element represents a powerful and fatal wound. From the severity of the pain Odysseus experiences, we see that home and the sanctity of his connubial bed are embedded deep within Odysseus’ psyche. His psyche compliments the degree to which conjugal sleep is extolled in the wider world of *The Odyssey.*

With the conjugal bed as the centerpiece of Greek ethos, Odys-
seus and Penelope’s reunion on their bed highlights the special empathetic nature of connubial sleep. Though Odysseus cries throughout his journey, “tears [were brought] from deep within him” when his wife recognizes him and he finally reenters his home (23.239). These tears are unlike any others, as they come from “deep within him.” Throughout the text, sleep had been an event caused either directly by the gods or unexpectedly “fell upon” the individual, as happened to Odysseus on the Phaeacian’s ship. However, when Penelope says, “But come to bed now, / and we’ll close our eyes in the pleasure of sleep,” sleep becomes an anticipated activity for Penelope and Odysseus (23.260-23.261). It is clear that both characters are happy to sleep together when Homer says, “and they went with joy to their bed /and to their rituals of old” (23.302-23.303). Though the “rituals of old” include sex, they are followed by the aforementioned relinquishment of self-consciousness.

Here we see exactly what is sacred about sleeping “beside” or “next to” one’s spouse. Finally, after their separate ordeals of grief and pain, “after Odysseus and Penelope / had made sweet love, they took turns / telling stories to each other” (23.306-23.308). Sex is described as “sweet” and as a shared experience for Penelope and Odysseus, unlike Poseidon’s affair with Tyro. Not only is this physical interaction better than sex between gods and humans, but it is also followed by an exchange of experiences and ideas. The ensuing conversation represents the emotional response to pain that is absent from the gods’ interactions with humans. Odysseus tells Penelope “of all the suffering / he had brought upon others, and of all the pain / he endured himself. She loved listening to him / and did not fall asleep until he had told the whole tale” (23.314-23.317). There is no mention of Penelope’s name in the first sentence, nor is there any of Odysseus’ in the second, which suggests that each spouse suspends his or her own consciousness to receive the other’s experience, in alternating turns. This relinquishment of self-consciousness is absent from divine-human relations, particularly Calypso and Odysseus’. Instead of selfishly considering their own needs, desires and worries, Penelope and Odysseus internalize the other’s pains. Though suffering is involved in the exchange, Penelope “loved listening to him.” This love connects sleeping together, an area of human relations, to the union of two experiences into one sense of understanding. This understanding is the counterpoint to Calypso and Odysseus’ experience. As Odysseus releases his war tales, pain from within his “innermost chamber,” his words touch Penelope’s heart. This moment has the opposite effect of “his life draining away in homesickness.” Reliving his journey becomes a release for Odysseus because he is able to look back upon the pain and uncertainty he experienced from the safety and security of the center of his home. And just as Odysseus’ life was
once at stake in his returning home, it is now revitalized by Penelope’s display of love. As Odysseus releases the suffering from his heart, the firmly planted conjugal bed becomes the site of deep-rooted understanding between him and his wife. This moment is so intimate that not even the audience has access to Odysseus and Penelope’s direct words within their “innermost chamber.” For anyone besides the married couple to have access to these words would violate the vulnerability of relinquishing one’s self-consciousness and the sanctity of two minds becoming one.

Love is an emotional response to Odysseus’ pain that is stronger than any response to suffering from another human or god in the text. Even Athena, who “had a soft spot in her heart for the hero,” never expresses love towards Odysseus (7.45). This strong emotional response and understanding of pain represent a truly empathetic response. The conjugal bed is ultimately portrayed as a site of release, comfort and mutual understanding. The gods, though sympathetic to human needs at times, cannot and do not experience the same pain; they cannot empathize, for they do not know what it means to experience pain.

Works Cited

INSTRUCTOR’S FOREWORD

It is always a challenge when reading Nietzsche’s *Gay Science* to craft a coherent understanding of his purposefully fragmented text without, however, oversimplifying his complex and sometimes contradictory ideas. In this, one of the most essential questions is how to pull together and make practical sense of Nietzsche’s numerous pronouncements on the importance of art in living well. Complicating matters, Nietzsche’s praise for art and artists seems at times difficult to combine with his alternating praise and denunciation of the role of “science” in human life. In this essay, Tyler offers a compelling reading of both of these central issues in *Gay Science*. First, he establishes a coherent understanding of Nietzsche’s concept of “intellectual conscience” as a science-inspired approach to questioning our existence. He then constructs an equally compelling explanation of how Nietzsche relates the self-questioning required by intellectual conscience to the lessons about observation and creation that we might learn from art and artists, and from the theater in particular.

Most impressive is the way in which Tyler structures his multi-faceted argument. Avoiding oversimplification of the text, he maintains clarity in his interpretation by stating specifically which sections of *Gay Science* will be his focus, and articulating the questions that are at stake at different points in his reading of them. After establishing that self-questioning is essential to Nietzsche’s idea of a well-lived life, Tyler asks how we go about learning to carry this out, what art teaches us about self-observation and examination, and why Nietzsche often focuses on the lessons to be learned from the theater—from the practices of actors, and even from the experience of being a spectator. Posing these questions explicitly is not only an effective way of addressing his reader; through them, Tyler also makes clear how the examination of the nuances of this complicated text can lead to a more practical understanding of how to live one’s life.

—Kimberly Lewis
Art as the Key to an Intellectual Conscience

Tyler Haddow

In his book The Gay Science, Friedrich Nietzsche repeatedly uses the words “us” and “we” to imply that he and his readers are members of an elite group capable of intellectual contemplation. He makes many demands of his reader regarding subjects as varied as art appreciation, morality, style, and truth. At first, it may seem that these demands are unrelated, floating independently of one another in an abstract philosophical haze; however, upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that many of his ideas are connected, and often closely attached. I intend to explore one such connection: the association between Nietzsche’s idea of the value of an intellectual conscience and his conception of the importance of art. I will argue that, according to Nietzsche’s statements in GS 2, 78, 299, and 301, art is essential to the development of an intellectual conscience because it allows us to assume a position outside ourselves from which we can contemplate and create our life.

It seems natural to ask what characteristic qualifies people as members of Nietzsche’s elite group. In GS 2, Nietzsche first introduces the intellectual conscience as that characteristic. He asserts that “the great majority of people lacks an intellectual conscience,” then proceeds to explain that “the great majority of people does not consider it contemptible to believe this or that and to live accordingly, without first having given themselves an account of the final and most certain reasons pro and con” (76). Clearly Nietzsche is condemning the common avoidance of the simple question, “why?” Most people, he claims, do not bother to contemplate the fundamental justifications (or lack thereof) for their beliefs or actions, even after those actions have been made. His use of the phrase “does not consider it con-
temptible” suggests that it is absurd not to realize that such blatant ignorance of the origins of one’s beliefs is wrong.

Nietzsche explains why this type of questioning is valuable as he continues, “what is goodheartedness, refinement, or genius to me, when the person who has these virtues tolerates slack feelings in his faith and judgments and when he does not account the desire for certainty as his inmost craving and deepest distress—as that which separates the higher human beings from the lower” (76). Here he claims that even the virtues that we consider most important are of little value if not grounded in reasonable considerations. Those that do seek explanation and crave “the rapture of such questioning” (76) have what Nietzsche would call an intellectual conscience, which he clearly sees as the crucial attribute that distinguishes the elite. Those who do not have such a conscience “stand in the midst of this rerum concordia discors1 and of this whole marvelous uncertainty and rich ambiguity of existence without questioning” (76). That he finds “contemptible” (77).

Given only GS 2, it seems that intellectual consciousness requires us to be self-aware, to question all of our actions and held convictions. What is still somewhat unclear is exactly how Nietzsche thinks we are supposed to question ourselves. An illuminating explanation lies in GS 301, where Nietzsche illustrates a particular method of thought essential to development of an intellectual conscience. Here he begins with an assertion similar to the beginning of GS 2: “What distinguishes the higher human beings from the lower is that the former see and hear immeasurably more, and see and hear thoughtfully” (241). But he proceeds to elucidate exactly what allows these “higher” humans to “see and hear immeasurably more”:

[The higher human being] fancies that he is a spectator and listener who has been placed before the great visual spectacle that is life; he calls his own nature contemplative and overlooks that he himself is really the poet who keeps creating his life. Of course, he is different from the actor of this drama, the so-called active type; but he is even less like a mere spectator and festive guest in front of the stage. (241)

This striking metaphor that relates our lives to theatrical performances is essential to understanding what allows us to develop an intellectual conscience. He portrays the “higher human being” as, first and foremost, a spectator of the “great visual spectacle” of his life. The essential image that we can draw from this passage is this “higher human” observing his life from an external position, while still maintaining the ability to keep “creating this life.” In Nietzsche’s phrasing, this person is “placed before” his life. His comparison of

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1 Discordant concord of things. (Kaufman’s translation)
life to a theatrical drama explains exactly how this should be interpreted: we are certainly not actors in this play; that would imply that we are only going through predetermined motions without understanding our reasons for them, much like the “lower” human beings from GS 2. But we are “even less” passive spectators; if we were, we would have no control over the play that is life. Nietzsche does not reveal what theatrical role would correspond to the external observer who “keeps creating this life” (playwright? director?), probably because there is no role that corresponds closely enough. Regardless, the metaphor has served its purpose: Nietzsche has demonstrated that seeing ourselves from a different perspective is essential to the development of an intellectual conscience.

Immediately after the passage quoted above, Nietzsche breaks from the play metaphor to describe exactly what one is capable of as an external observer: “As a poet, he certainly has vis contemplativa and the ability to look back upon his work, but at the same time also and above all vis creativa, which the active human being lacks, whatever visual appearances and the faith of all the world may say” (241). This “poet” of life possesses the abilities to contemplate profound questions in his life and to create his life accordingly. It seems that to Nietzsche, these two powers are codependent; it is impossible to be creative without contemplation, and it is worthless to contemplate without being creative.

So far, we have established that an intellectual conscience is the fundamental characteristic that sets the “higher” humans apart from the “lower.” Having examined GS 301, we are also able to recognize the importance of external self-observation in relation to the development of an intellectual conscience. We have seen that external observation is important to that development because it allows us to contemplate our lives and create them correspondingly. However, two critical questions seem to remain unanswered: What tools give us this contemplative and creative power if we have assumed the external position? And what allows us to assume the external position in the first place?

We might answer the first question by recalling the sentence in GS 301 (quoted above) where Nietzsche calls the contemplative man a “poet who keeps creating [his] life.” This immediately calls to mind GS 299, just two sections back, “What one should learn from artists,” which ends with an almost identical idea: “We want to be the poets of our life—first of all in the smallest, most everyday matters” (240). Nietzsche begins GS 299 by considering the fundamental question of how to create value where there is none:

How can we make things beautiful, attractive, and desirable for us when they are not? And I rather think that in them-

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2 Contemplative power; creative power. (Kaufman’s translation)
Nietzsche is saying that even if things lack intrinsic appeal, it is possible to assign beauty or value to them by changing how we perceive them, just as physicians “dilute what is bitter or add wine and sugar to a mixture.” He goes on to describe a few ways artists might change how things are perceived, such as “moving away from things until there is a good deal that one no longer sees and there is much that our eye has to add,” or “giving them a surface or skin that is not fully transparent” (239-240).

These techniques are important because we can also use them to give value to our lives. According to Nietzsche, “all this we should learn from artists while being wiser than they are in other matters. For with them this subtle power usually comes to an end where art ends and life begins” (240). We must surpass artists in this respect, by applying these techniques not only to aesthetic matters, but to life itself—that is how we can become “the poets of our life.” Art gives one the tools to contemplate and create one’s life.

Once we answer the first question by concluding that art gives us the power to contemplate and create our lives from the external position, we can consider the second question: how are we supposed to get to this position in the first place? What could possibly allow us to step outside of our own perspectives? Nietzsche’s answer to this question lies in GS 78, “What should win our gratitude,” which is very closely tied to both GS 299 and 301. Here we can see that art also answers the second question:

Only artists, and especially those of the theater, have given men eyes and ears to see and hear with some pleasure what each man is himself, experiences himself, desires himself; only they have taught us to esteem the hero that is concealed in everyday characters; only they have taught us the art of viewing ourselves as heroes—from a distance and, as it were, simplified and transfigured—the art of staging and watching ourselves. (132-133)

In analyzing this passage, two phrases stand out given the points I have addressed above. First, there is a striking resemblance between “the art of staging and watching ourselves” and the metaphor (from 301) that compares our lives with theatrical drama. Nietzsche is saying here that artists—through their art—have taught us to contemplate our lives from a different perspective, an external position. He even singles out the “[artists] of the theatre,” as special. Although
he does not mention exactly what makes playwrights so remarkable, it seems plausible that Nietzsche sees their art is especially powerful because their subjects are always humans in profound or revealing circumstances, and their work is therefore more accessible and directly applicable to our lives. The second phrase, “simplified and transfigured,” refers specifically to art as a means to perceiving things (in this case, one’s own life) differently than they actually are. That is precisely what Nietzsche said “one should learn from artists” in GS 299.

Thus, we can finally see clearly the intimate connection between Nietzsche’s conception of the intellectual conscience and art. We have seen that an intellectual conscience, the characteristic that separates the “higher” humans from the “lower,” demands that we question our own thoughts and beliefs. This questioning requires that we assume positions outside our own perspectives, since those positions allow us to contemplate our lives and create them accordingly. Lastly, art is the key that allows us both to step into external positions and to contemplate and create our lives once we have done so. The development of an intellectual conscience is therefore aided by—if not dependent on—art appreciation and creation. If we want to consider ourselves thoughtful people, if we want to consider ourselves “higher” human beings, worthy of Nietzsche’s words, it is imperative that we use art to step outside our own perspectives. The alternative, according to Nietzsche, is dismal: “Without this art we would be nothing but foreground and live entirely in the spell of that perspective which makes what is closest at hand and most vulgar appear as if it were vast, and reality itself” (133).

Works Cited
INSTRUCTOR’S FOREWORD

Tiffany Dharma’s thought-provoking essay departs from a rather astonishing claim: that John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* (1689) and Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904) “traced the same arc of thought” in their accounts of the origins of capitalism. This is an argument likely to surprise anyone familiar with these texts. While both do wrestle with this issue, they arrive at very different conclusions and rely on different methodologies. *The Protestant Ethic* is a work of historical scholarship, which attempts to locate the psychological underpinnings of capitalism in the theology of the Protestant Reformation. By contrast, *The Second Treatise of Government* is a work of normative political philosophy, which attempts to derive principles of just government from an abstract and ahistorical “state of nature.”

Moreover, Locke and Weber could with some justice be regarded as ideological adversaries. Locke is best remembered today as one of the founding fathers of liberalism, a political and economic doctrine of limited government that helped inspire not only the American and French Revolutions, but also the *laissez-faire* economic policies that gained ascendency in the nineteenth century. Writing from the perspective of the twentieth century, however, Weber viewed this spread of capitalism with ambivalence and even pessimism. Capitalism, he argued, had become an “iron cage,” systematically subordinating every other aspect of human life to the maximization of profit.

Yet by subjecting both works to a sophisticated and elegant structural analysis, Tiffany is able to uncover many striking parallels. In so doing, she not only sheds new light on classic texts we thought we knew well, but also, in the spirit of the very best works of history, invites us to rethink the present day—to ponder anew claims that economic activity should have an ethical underpinning.

—*Jeffrey Schwegman*
The pursuit of wealth is often seen as a godless endeavor characterized by greed and ruthless ambition. With principles like individualism, practicality, and accumulation, the central values of our contemporary capitalistic society seem to be antagonistic with a higher morality. But not everyone believed that economy and faith were always discordant: prominent philosophers have argued that religious thinking is not only compatible with capitalism, but may even be responsible for it. In the Second Treatise of Government, Locke suggests that private property originates from labor, a moral duty that is supported by a theological basis. Similarly, in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Weber retrospectively attributes modern capitalist culture to Calvinist ideals that stressed the fulfillment of a divine calling through disciplined work. Both texts integrate morality and economy through the idea that individual labor is a fulfillment of God’s expectations, authorizing the subsequent accumulation of property as a reflection of omnipotent will. While Locke acknowledges that the indefinite potential for wealth introduced an untraditional relationship between man and money, Weber argues that the inequality extends further: once only subordinate to God, humanity was now enslaved by the sanctified mindset of property accumulation. By establishing that a man-made economic system with capitalistic values originated from divine purpose, Locke substantiates Weber’s explanation for why modernity operates under an “iron cage” of acquisitiveness.

Imagining that mankind initially occupied a conceptual time period governed solely by God’s laws, Locke establishes a pre-societal state of nature characterized by equality and independence. In this
traditional state, mankind’s right to live freely and fairly was derived from a shared creator. Because all of humanity was “the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise maker,” man shared in “one community of nature” where “common equity is that measure God has set to the actions of man.” ¹ This equality meant that no person was inherently inferior to any other mortal being, for people answered only to God and his natural laws. These regulations stated that man was “bound to preserve himself” as well meant to recognize the “preservation of mankind” by not harming the “life, health, liberty, or possessions” of another.² Because each person was accountable for himself, an individualistic self-sufficiency was born from Locke’s definition of equality.

From this independent spirit, labor became a moral duty which fulfilled God’s intentions for the earth. Locke argues that God bequeathed “the world to men in common,” giving them “reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life and convenience.”³ Providence equipped humanity with the intellect and motive to work for their own survival and comfort. Ignoring these gifts from God would be irreverent and defy the decree for self-preservation. In order to utilize God-given reason and resources, man was “commanded to labor,” for the world was given to “the use of the industrious and rational, and labor was his title to it.”⁴ Not only is work the source of private property, but it also benefits the community: “He who appropriates land to himself by labor does not lessen, but increase the common stock of mankind: for the provisions serving to the support of human life, produced by one acre of cultivated land, are ten times more than those which are yielded by an acre of land lying waste in common.”⁵ By suggesting that God favors the diligent and productive, Locke assigns labor a chosen status. Because the Lord appreciates work, then it follows that private property must also be ordained. If labor and profit are moral duties, then what stopped people from cultivating more?

The equitable state of nature initially imposed organic restrictions on how much property one could remove from the commons. Described as limitations of sufficiency and spoilage, boundaries existed to keep people from misusing God’s gifts. The products of excessive cultivation must decay, which wastes God’s gifts; an avaricious person could also “invade his neighbor’s share,” contradicting

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² Ibid.
³ Ibid, 18.
⁴ Ibid, 21.
⁵ Ibid, 23.
the Lord’s command to preserve mankind.\textsuperscript{6} By restricting accretion to a practical and useful amount, natural law made certain that no person could abuse the commons and waste resources. To circumvent these expected constraints, mankind exploited a loophole within the otherwise equitable system. Humans consented to assign arbitrary value to money, whose inherent worthlessness and permanence made the sufficiency and spoilage clauses inapplicable. Although the laws of nature were still intact, money allowed humans to excuse themselves from these limitations.

A marker of emerging capitalistic ideals, this new potential for unrestrained profit removed humanity from the equitable state of nature. Locke writes that “As different degrees of industry were apt to give men possessions in different proportions, so this invention of money gave them the opportunity to continue and enlarge them.”\textsuperscript{7} This inequality introduced more tension and argument than people could deal with on their own. To protect their newly acquired property from contention, people were forced to make a concession: man agreed to subdue himself to majority rule. Mankind would “divest himself of his natural liberty, and put on the bonds of civil society” for “secure enjoyment of their properties.”\textsuperscript{8} Although this exchange was originally consensual, Locke believes that “the power that individuals gave to society can never revert to the individuals again.”\textsuperscript{9} When man-made government replaced God’s natural law as the moderator of inequality and the preserver of private property, humans permanently altered their traditional relationship with property. As people left the theological state of nature behind, they no longer needed to reconcile morality with economy: the latter could stand alone.

Published over two centuries later, Weber’s \textit{The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism} shares Locke’s theoretical trajectory from morality to economy. He postulates that modern values of independence and unrestricted property accrual originated from the Protestant conception of a personal duty to fulfill a divine calling. While Locke approaches the emergence of private property rights from a neutrally deistic standpoint, Weber blames this Calvinist theology for creating a suffocating atmosphere that was conducive to a capitalistic economic system. Contrasting modernity with a traditional state in which people only worked as much as necessary, he cynically defines capitalism as an unnatural arrangement characterized by man’s servitude to the quest for boundless profit. This text and the \textit{Two Treatises} share a common path: both credit the sanctity of individual labor with the rise of unnatural capitalistic values. However, Weber’s

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{6} Ibid, 24.
\item \textsuperscript{7} Ibid, 29.
\item \textsuperscript{8} Ibid, 52.
\item \textsuperscript{9} Ibid, 123.
\end{itemize}
nuanced evaluation of the culminating state of affairs is marked by far more negativity.

Where Locke derives man’s independence from God, Weber believes that self-sufficiency results from the lonesome pressure of Calvinist doctrine. Unique to this branch of Protestantism, predestination stipulated that God had already decided who would be saved or damned. This trapped followers in a constant state of anxiety over their eternal salvation. Devoid of the priests, sacraments, and repentant rituals of the Catholic tradition, Calvinism fostered “inner loneliness of the single individual” as he was “forced to follow his path alone to meet a destiny which had been decreed for him from eternity.” This isolating force indirectly imbued followers with a self-reliant ethic, as Calvinists strove to convince themselves of their chosen status. In order to “disperse inner doubts and give the certainty of grace,” the sanctity of labor became an outlet to alleviate their anxiety. Calvinists looked toward worldly productivity as the most suitable means for expressing inner piety and attaining the self-confidence that ensured one’s redemption.

Thus, the greatest parallel between Locke and Weber emerged: the moral sanctity of labor as a fulfillment of divine intentions. Branding work as a religious duty, Calvinists believed that “For everyone without exception, God’s Providence has prepared a calling, which he should profess and in which he should labor.” This calling ascribed a sacred significance to daily activities, making continuous and systematic tasks essential to man’s perpetual search for God’s grace. Every person bore an individual responsibility to pursue this mission, for it was “the only way of living acceptably to God.” Because “labor in a calling appears to him as the outwardly expression of brotherly love,” work became the central mode of following God’s plan and confirming that one was indeed chosen. People would traditionally only earn as much was necessary for survival and comfort, but work was now as eternal as God. There was no point at which an individual could stop pursuing his calling, quit following the Lord’s will, or attain pure confidence in his salvation. Now even sufficient capital did “not exempt anyone from the unconditional command.” Entrenched in Calvinist mentality, the divine mandate to labor endlessly meant that one’s earning potential was also unlimited.

Because Calvinists viewed hard work as an expression of godly

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11 Ibid, 67.
12 Ibid, 106.
13 Ibid, 40.
14 Ibid, 41.
15 Ibid, 106.
devotion, it followed that resulting prosperity was a reflection of God’s grace. A surplus of money was a reflection of divine goodwill, and even the consequences of an industrial society became permissible. Echoing Locke’s statement of inevitable inequality, Weber suggests that Calvinist belief accounted for the “unequal distribution of the goods of this world [as] a special dispensation of Divine Providence.”\textsuperscript{16} Because economic success and its pitfalls were equally justified, the acquisitive could pursue prosperity with the confidence of sacred support. As secular temptations of wealth eroded religious validations, the psychological hold of greed increased.

Though Locke accepted mankind’s sacrifice of liberty as a neutral trade, Weber’s ultimate analysis is marked by sorrow. He pities humanity, likening the mentality of modern times to entrapment in an iron cage. He laments that the overwhelming power of the economic system plays too great and irrevocable a role in our daily lives: “The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so.”\textsuperscript{17} Devoid of its former theological basis, economic accumulation runs rampant due to the hold that consumptive work and profit have over daily existence. Worst of all, Weber contends that this “irresistible force” has the potential to “determine the lives of individuals” until “the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt.”\textsuperscript{18} Humans bartered their morality for economy, and the West must keep the spirit of capitalism for eternity.

Perhaps if Locke were given an additional two hundred years to observe and reflect, he would agree with the doctrine of the iron cage. He and Weber traced the same arc of thought, from traditional property limitations to a state of unrestrained profit through the theological consecration of labor. Their agreement on this trajectory lends validity to this theory of how modernity reached its current state, even if Locke’s version is missing the final piece. Maybe morality and economy are discordant after all. Unable to return from our current state to the individual freedoms of yore, we have all the time in the world to look around and judge for ourselves—when we are not working, that is.

\textbf{Works Cited}


\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 120.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 123.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
Concerning Ulysses’ narrative in Canto 26 of Dante’s Inferno, Maya Krishnan writes that it is “an attempt to create a heroic image of himself that will stand in for the reality of his damnation.” It is precisely the notion that one can create one’s identity and reshape reality through storytelling that is at issue in Maya’s carefully argued essay, and it complicates the kind of reading that would ascribe an unlimited power to narrative to do so. It also begs the correlative questions of just who the storyteller is and whose story it is, and how these, in turn, contest the notion of a stable subject capable of doing so in the first place. For the story has changed by the time it’s (re)told in the Inferno: the Ulysses of the Inferno is not exactly the hero of the Homeric epic, and the story, as it emerges here, is already a refraction of its being simultaneously Vergil’s Ulysses and Dante’s Ulysses. As Maya points out, each storyteller – Ulysses, Vergil, and Dante – is driven to tell, and that telling is understood by each to be both an inward and outward imperative that at once shapes their own egos and the destinies of the men who fall under its reach. The discrepancies between what is outwardly the “same” story, however, ultimately speaks to the failure of Ulysses and Vergil to assume what Maya calls, “the controlling power of an author.” And so, it is this interplay between competing voices and their authorial power that must inflect our own reading of the significance of the story being told here. But is Dante free from the kind of “spiritual arrogance” that would reduce others to necessary props of one’s own epic journey? How does Dante, himself a poet, himself the hero of his Inferno, restrain his own virtuosity as a storyteller and, so, also, restrain the ego-serving impulses behind the self-identification of the epic hero?

“Launch out on the story, Muse,” goes the title of Maya’s paper. Perhaps under her deft hands and precise telling that becomes, in turn, an invocation for us, too, to tell the story already underway, as well as an imperative to understand the stakes of its wider meaning.

—Yoon Sook Cha
Launch out on the story, Muse: Ulysses, Vergil, Dante and the Struggle for Authorial Power

Maya Krishnan

Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man of twists and turns driven time and again off course, once he had plundered the hallowed heights of Troy. Odyssey 1:3

In The Odyssey, “the man of twists and turns” is a hero. Resourceful, cunning, and determined, Odysseus consistently manages to outwit those around him so that he may return home after victory at Troy. Centuries pass, and that same man is a sinner damned for all eternity. In Dante’s Inferno, Odysseus reappears in the eighth circle of hell as Ulysses, supposedly to receive punishment for his treachery in creating the Trojan Horse. Ulysses’ true sin, however, is apparent in the speech he delivers about his final adventure. Ulysses crafts a Homeric narrative about this adventure in an attempt to create a heroic image of himself that will stand in for the reality of his damnation. Dante criticizes Ulysses’ faith in the identity-constructing power of stories in order to examine the act of storytelling itself. Within Canto 26, Ulysses, Vergil and Dante each offer their own portrayals of Ulysses’ fate. Vergil aims to proclaim his authorial mastery by telling Ulysses’ story himself and acting as an intermediary between Dante and Ulysses. To Vergil, the supposed ability of the storyteller to reshape reality presents a tantalizing opportunity for him to assert his own ego. Dante uses the power struggle between himself, Vergil, and Ulysses in order to present a contrasting view: that belief in the potential of narrative to construct identity is itself a form of sin. Dante offers instead his own representational model of storytelling, in which the author uses narrative to contemplate his own spiritual
peril. While Ulysses' narrative is a means to create an amplified image of himself in the mind of his audience, Dante's narrative is a personal exploration of the perpetual possibility of damnation and a call to inner awareness. This radical new vision of the story is one of ways Dante's medieval epic distinguishes itself from its ancient predecessors. Inner contemplation and personal honesty, rather than the creation of heroes, emerge as Dante's true project. Both Ulysses' and Vergil's inability to reshape identities through their stories demonstrates that there is a limit to the constructive power of the narrative. Canto 26 is a sustained criticism of authorial arrogance that, paradoxically, serves as Dante's means of asserting his superiority to both Vergil and Ulysses.

Ulysses' love of adventure motivates his actions and determines his self-understanding as an epic hero. He describes the "ardor" he felt to "gain experience of the world" as a force that compelled him to go forth on an additional adventure after leaving Circe's island and returning home (26:97-98). He is unable to conceive of a domestic role for himself and instead determines his worth on the basis of his trials and travels. As a result, when he narrates his own journey, he does so using suspiciously Homeric descriptions. He boasts that after leaving his family he roamed "as far as Spain, as far as Morocco," repeating "as far" in parallel construction to emphasize what he believes is the enormity of his feats (26:103-104). He appears impressed by the lateral distance he traveled to reach Spain and Morocco, not the vertical distance he descended to reach Hell. Even in the middle of the flames his words betray a continued attachment to the ethos of the epic journey. He tells of ignoring the warnings Hercules gave that "one should not go further" to the West and speaks of exploring uncharted territory (26:109). Ulysses reshapes this episode into a story of surpassing boundaries that reinforces his image of himself as an uncontrollable adventurer. He therefore exists in the mode of the epic hero, rather than the mode of the chastened sinner. Symptomatically, once Ulysses begins to narrate his final journey, he does not mention his family again. The people who love Ulysses are displaced by Ulysses' own love of the epic journey, which dominates his image of himself.

Ulysses' punishment within the flames reflects his burning passion for epic deeds and the manner in which his desire to be part of a grand story amplifies that passion. Virgil's description of Ulysses as "swathed in that which burns him inwardly" implies that his overwhelming passion, once experienced from within, now consumes him from without (26:47-48). The Italian word "ardore" literally means "burning," and establishes a connection between the "ardor" Ulysses once experienced for quests and the fiery punishment he now experiences. In the past, Ulysses externalized his all-consuming passion for
heroic exploits through the treachery of the Trojan horse, which lead to the burning of Troy, and in Hell, that same fire turns back upon him. His ardor and passion are directed toward the completion of a journey. When relating his story, Ulysses states:

When
I departed from Circe, who held me back more than a year there near Gaeta, before Aeneas gave it that name,
neither the sweetness of a son, nor compassion for my old father, nor the love owed to Penelope, which should have made her glad,
could conquer within me the ardor that I had to gain experience of the world...

(26:90-97)

Ulysses’ assertion that Circe “held him back” indicates that she prevented him from achieving some goal, yet that goal remains unstated. While the endpoint of Ulysses’ journey might be reunification with his family, he notes that the “sweetness” and “compassion” he felt for his family was also insufficient to prevent him from continuing on his adventure. Home is an obstacle, not a destination. Ulysses establishes a parallel between Circe and his homeland in that they both attempted to impede his forward progress, but failed to do so. By portraying family as a distraction in a larger quest to gain experience, Ulysses demonstrates that he is engaged in a linear motion outward rather than a circular motion to return. The structure of Ulysses’ statement mirrors his meaning. His description of his family and of his imprisonment on Circe’s island literally holds back his story of adventure by providing a series of clauses that intervene within the sentence and delay the reader’s ability to reach the completion of the sentence. This structure is metaphorically significant, as Ulysses can only continue to exist as the subject of legend as long as he is continuing a journey. The distractions therefore impede the progress of both the story of Ulysses’ life and the tale that he relates to Vergil and the pilgrim. The imperative to continue these stories drives Ulysses’ actions in life and in the underworld.

Stories serve as both a motivating factor and a useful tool for Ulysses. In order to continue his journey, Ulysses must act as a storyteller by delivering a speech to convince his crew to proceed on their expedition to the west. This speech is, in essence, a story that Ulysses tells to the crew about their own identity. Ulysses asks his crew to “[c]onsider their sowing” and claims that they “were not made to live like brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge” (26:118-119). Ulysses’ oration manipulates the crew by forming an association between
continuing the journey and expressing their noblest natures. He implies that they have a great destiny because of their birth and the manner in which they were made, and presents continued action as the means of achieving that destiny. The distortions inherent in this speech are a part of Ulysses’ attempt to construct the identity of his crew. This attempt is intimately linked to the punishment for his sin. Through his assumption of the role of storyteller Ulysses manages to spread his internal fire to his crew, so that “after it [Ulysses] could hardly have held them back” (26:122-123). Both the transmission of the passion from one man to the next and the uncontrollable effects that the transmission has upon them mimic the actions of fire. This is the same fire, or *ardore*, that burns within Ulysses and causes him to pursue adventure regardless of costs. Just as Ulysses glorifies himself through a semi-Homeric tale of bold action that makes a claim to a heroic identity, he uses a parallel tale of epic greatness to cause his crew to glorify themselves. Ulysses’ ability to use a story to implicate others in his sin demonstrates the danger of excessive belief in the power of the narrative to shape reality.

Vergil attempts to control Ulysses’ story by introducing his own account of the adventurer’s nature and deeds. His effort to manage the perception that the pilgrim and the reader have of Ulysses indicates that the role of epic poet is constitutive of Vergil’s identity. Vergil’s account of Ulysses reflects Vergil’s own role as the creator of the *Aeneid*, an epic that describes the Trojan effort to found Rome. According to Vergil, Ulysses “made the gate to send forth the Romans’ noble seed” though his participation in the destruction of Troy. Vergil therefore defines Ulysses by the qualities that are important to his own epic. By speaking in his capacity as an epic poet, Vergil assumes the authority to determine the significance of Ulysses’ actions and then attempts to use that authority to influence Dante’s view of Ulysses. Through this action Vergil asserts his authorial power and attempts to establish himself as the true mediator between past and present. He therefore refuses to allow Dante to speak to Ulysses for fear that the Greeks would refuse to listen to a modern language. Upon introducing himself to Ulysses, Vergil speaks of himself a poet who “wrote my high verses” and thus deserves to request a tale of ancient days. (26:82) Vergil’s self-identity as a storyteller causes him to attempt to control the stories of those around him.

The discrepancies between Vergil’s account of Ulysses and Ulysses’ account of himself reveal that Vergil fails in his attempt to assume commanding power as an author. This failure serves as a warning of the danger of authorial overconfidence. Although Vergil asserts that within the fire of punishment Ulysses “bemoans [his] deceit” and “weep[s] for [his] art,” in actuality Ulysses does neither of those. In direct contrast to the expectations Vergil establishes both
for the reader and for Dante, Ulysses does not appear to be suffering at all. Rather, Ulysses tells his own semi-Homeric tale of glorious adventure, thereby usurping Vergil’s role as storyteller. Vergil prepares the pilgrim to hear the tale of a broken man who will relate “where, lost, he went to die,” but instead finds a proud sinner who is eager to tell his own story according to his conception of himself (26:83-84). Ulysses further subverts Vergil by stating that he stayed “near Gaeta, before Aeneas gave it that name” (26:92-93). By identifying his adventures as pre-Vergilian, Ulysses places himself outside of Vergil’s temporal reach and therefore makes a claim of independence. Yet Ulysses, like Virgil, fails as a storyteller. Although he tells his crew that they will follow “virtue and knowledge” by continuing on the voyage out, the crew’s subsequent descent under the waves and Ulysses’ descent into hell stand in stark opposition to his proclamation. Likewise, although Ulysses speaks of himself as an epic hero, he is in fact a sinner whose flesh is being consumed by flames as he narrates his adventures. Both Vergil and Ulysses attempt to craft their own representations of the workings of the world and their personal actions, but both fail due to a common overconfidence in the power of their words to reshape reality.

The imperative that both Ulysses and Vergil feel to act as storytellers could be interpreted as a reflection of their egos. Vergil’s celebration of his “high verses” and Ulysses’ boasts of his own deeds demonstrate that characters can use stories about themselves as a means of self-glorification. In both cases, that imperative could also be seen as an existential one: by telling stories, each man creates an identity that reflects how he desires others to treat him. This existential-egotistical dimension of storytelling is certainly a valid part of Dante’s portrayal of the act of authorship. Vergil’s desire to act as an intermediary to the ancients and impulse to boast of his verses demonstrate that his identity is based on his ability to construct narratives and cause audiences to accept his explanations of reality. Likewise, Ulysses’ glorification of himself is part of an effort to create an image of himself as a hero in the minds of Vergil and the pilgrim. Yet the discrepancies between Ulysses’ and Vergil’s narratives and their realities demonstrate that their stories are reflections of delusions rather than truly generative forces that can create personal identity. Vergil’s story about Ulysses is still inaccurate, and Ulysses is still a sinner. The stubborn persistence of these facts demonstrates that narratives are not valid constructors of identity.

Throughout Canto 26, Dante the pilgrim acts as the audience to Ulysses’ and Vergil’s stories. But he also appears as the poet who frames the entire journey of the Inferno, and therefore provides a third example of a storyteller and a potential alternate model for the construction of narratives. Canto 26 establishes a number of prima
face parallels between Dante and Ulysses in order to explore the differences in the way they create their own narratives. Both Dante and Ulysses are engaged in treacherous journeys of sorts. Ulysses describes his ship, directly prior to capsizing, as “always gaining on the left side” (26:125-126) and in the opening canto, the pilgrim describes himself as descending “so that my halted foot was always the lower” – so that the left foot drags behind the other (1:29-30). The left, which is strongly associated with baseness and evil, disturbs the physical progress of both voyagers. This sense of joint peril is intensified by the manner in which both Dante and Ulysses find themselves at passes: Dante at “the pass that has never yet left anyone alive” (1:26), Ulysses at “the deep pass” that blocked out the light of the moon (26:132). Both characters are therefore positioned at critical moments of instability in their lives, where the decisions they make will determine their fates. Finally, they are both severely disoriented. Dante has “abandoned the true way” and “cannot really say how [he] entered there” (1:10-12), while Ulysses continually loses sight of the light and is engaged in a “mad flight” (26:125). These descriptions of Dante and Ulysses indicate that they engage in journeys that present them with spiritually dangerous situations. The contrast in the way each character constructs a narrative from this journey speaks to the nature of Ulysses’ sin and what it means to truly be a storyteller.

While Dante’s account of his own actions is rich in deeply felt spiritual meaning, Ulysses’ account is spiritually dead. Dante describes himself lost in the wood that was “savage and harsh,” and his portrayal of the “abandon[ment of] the true way” is self-consciously metaphorical (1:5-12). The poet uses his description of being physically lost to communicate his understanding of himself as spiritually lost. The disorientation, instability, and spiritual descent within Dante’s story present a similar metaphorical significance to Ulysses’ experience of being drawn under the water. By way of contrast, Ulysses’ description of himself as lost in the dark and the “whirlwind [that] was born” refers only to his physical situation (26:137). Likewise, Ulysses’ description of the deep pass and the mountain before him is a purely physical explanation of a feature that was “dark in the distance” and “higher than any I had seen” (26:135). His words are prosaic and reflect an unsentimental view of a concrete obstacle. In contrast, Dante’s “spirit, still fleeing,” reflects upon the “pass that has never yet left anyone alive” (1:25-26). Dante conveys that the obstacles he faced were much more than physical, and thereby attaches a depth of meaning to his experiences that Ulysses fails to attach to his. While Ulysses’ incipient damnation demonstrates that he was in a state of peril equal to that of Dante, his narrative reveals that he was and remains oblivious to the danger his soul faced. Dante’s nar-
narrative is a way for him to reflect upon his spiritual state, rather than a means of constructing an identity or a motivation for action.

As Ulysses’ and Vergil’s failures demonstrate, narratives cannot construct reality. While they indicate the spiritual condition of the storyteller, their power is reflective rather than constructive. Ulysses’ punishment suggests that his belief in the story as a means of constructing identity is a form of sin. He is drawn so deep within the flames that he only appears as a “a tongue [of flame] that spoke [and] cast out a voice” (26:88-89). This instance of contrapasso ironizes Ulysses’ conception of the narrative by presenting Ulysses as a voice rather than a man. In Hell, he is all story and no substance. Ulysses believes that his presence within an epic story will make him a hero, but his misplaced faith merely serves to drive him away from his home and into damnation. By way of contrast, Dante the poet demonstrates an awareness of the seductive danger of constructing narratives. In the opening to the canto he notes that he now “rein[s] in [his] wit more than is [his] custom, that it may not run without virtue guiding it” (26:20-22). He asserts that he restrains his own virtuosity as a storyteller and thus contends that he is capable of crafting his story without committing Ulysses’ sin. The contemplation of spirituality, rather than the creation of an image, emerges as Dante’s intent.

Through Dante’s recognition of the failings of the storytellers who speak to him as a pilgrim, he allows himself the possibility to surpass them as a poet. Vergil’s desire to exert control over his subject matter blinds him to true reality and provides him with an excessive belief in the power of his own verses. Meanwhile, Ulysses’ conviction that the stories he tells about himself determine both his worth and his identity seals his fate as a sinner. Dante’s criticism of them within his own poem provide negative examples of the virtuous way to act as an author. These examples are also an expression of the danger Dante the poet faces as he creates his Inferno. Ulysses and Vergil commit their authorital misdeeds without realizing that they are doing so, and therefore present the possibility that Dante is also unwittingly in error. This tension reveals the inherent risk of Dante’s implicit claim to poetic superiority. Only Dante’s poetic descendents can reveal whether he is correct in his assessment of himself, or if he is merely another deluded storyteller.
Gabriele Carotti-Sha

INSTRUCTOR’S FOREWORD

Gabriele Carotti-Sha ventures to point out to some inconsistencies in Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s theory of freedom as conveyed in his Lectures Concerning the Scholar’s Vocation. These lectures were intended as a popular version of Fichte’s notoriously complicated philosophy. In most general terms, Fichte’s project is the reconciliation of the self-realization of rational and moral agents (“pure I”) with a causally conditioned, empirical world (“not-I”). In his careful and apt analysis of the second of these lectures, “Concerning Man’s Vocation Within Society,” Gabriele succeeds in illuminating Fichte’s notion of the true destiny of rational human beings, without having the argument depend on such a notion of free will that is actually not supported by Fichte’s arguments. Gabriele spells out the distinction and possible coexistence of ethical and causal freedom very convincingly, and finds a way to still argue for the irreducibility of freedom to material causes, which are descriptive, not normative, thus allowing Fichte’s project to still stand against materialistic criticism.

—Anne Pollock
Caught in the Causal Net:
A Reflection on Fichte’s Lecture on Man’s Vocation in Society

Gabriele Carotti-Sha

The structure of Fichte’s philosophy leans on the distinction between causation, which underlies the natural world, and free will. Ultimately, Fichte’s theory, as exposed in the series of Lectures Concerning the Vocation of the Scholar (1794)¹, evolves into an ethical theory according to the fundamental drives of human beings. It is my opinion that the notion of morality does not depend on the existence of free will and that in these lectures, particularly in lecture two, the concept of freedom can be misinterpreted. First, I will outline Fichte’s second lecture. Then, I will analyze some of his arguments and make an objection based on the notions of free will and of the social drive. Finally, I will reply to this objection on Fichte’s behalf, and conclude with a comparison between his theory and a possible opposing view. My aim is not to support the latter, but rather to note some ambiguities in Fichte’s thought.

The topic of the second lecture is man’s vocation in society. In the previous lecture, Fichte establishes that man’s highest drive is to be in harmony with himself; that is, man’s being is characterized by an impulse to achieve perfect unity. Since the inner condition of any human is influenced by the external world, in order to be in harmony with oneself one must strive to be in harmony with all external things as well. This harmony does not just involve a physical equilibrium between the embodied I and the not-I (the material world, which includes everything that is outside of and opposed to the I), but also the concepts that the I has of the external world.

¹ J. G. Fichte, Some Lectures Concerning the Vocation of the Scholar, edited and translated by Daniel Breazeale (Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings, Cornell University Press, 1988)
One way of saying this, or perhaps a consequence of it is, “all of the concepts within the I must have an expression or counterpart in the not-I” (VI, 304). For example, it is not enough for one’s concepts to be coherent, but they must also have an object corresponding to them in the real world. Rationality must find an expression, or else it resolves to nothing. Given this, Fichte raises an argument to prove that the rational beings that appear around us truly exist. He states that the very concepts of reason and of rational action also require counterparts. What characterizes rational action is purpose, which is itself characterized by the “harmony of multiplicity in a unity” (VI, 304). However, at this point Fichte makes a distinction. Causal necessity gives the impression of following a design, or of having a purpose. So, in order to be distinguished from causality, a rational action is also characterized by being free.

His definition of freedom runs as follows. I cannot be conscious of my freedom because freedom is presupposed by consciousness. However, I can at least be conscious of the fact that I am conscious of no other cause for my voluntary actions other than my will itself. Consciousness of freedom is, in this sense, consciousness of the lack of any necessary cause. Whenever a substance that is presented to us through appearance is altered by our own action of this nature, the cause of that alteration is rational and free (VI, 305). In other words, there are phenomena in the world that are generated by free rational agents. Thus arises an “interaction governed by concepts,” (VI, 306) or a society constituted by free rational beings.

After introducing this concept of freedom, Fichte declares the social drive as one of man’s fundamental drives. Furthermore, this drive does not strive for subordination, which is exercised upon passive objects, but coordination, which instead admits the existence of other free rational beings. If one subordinates, he is only taking into account the “theoretical ability” of others (VI, 308), not their free rationality. In considering himself a master of others, he forces himself to be a slave just like them. The reason for this is that our own freedom presupposes the freedom of others. Through subordination we contradict the freedom of other rational beings, and, consequently, we act against our social drive. As a further consequence, we make it impossible for us to harmonize with the not-I and therefore to establish harmony within ourselves. This is Fichte’s proof that he who looks onto others as slaves brings about a contradiction with his own self.

One objection to this theory involves the definition of freedom. In his proof, Fichte defines freedom as the opposite of causal necessity in a way that recalls Spinoza2. He then brings this notion to an

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2 From Spinoza’s Ethics, Part I: God, “D7: A thing is called ‘free’ if its own nature—with no input from anything else—makes it necessary for it to exist and causes it to
ethical dimension when he speaks of subordination versus coor-
dination. But, in the strict sense of freedom as what is not causally
necessary, it is possible to consider others as free rational beings and
still subordinate them whether they really are free or not. This can
be noticed in many dynamics of power and authority: a tyrant does
not always see his enemies as mere furniture but as other rational
beings to be afraid of and to pit his cunning against. His idealization
of these other men still works towards a sort of harmonization of
the not-I (which in this case actually contains other I’s) with himself,
although it is of a perverse and immoral kind. Considered within
Fichte’s theory, it would therefore ultimately be a false kind.

Despite this, it is a case in which ethical freedom (as in the right
to live or die, or to be responsible for other human beings) is different
from causal freedom (as in the fact that we and others are not deter-
minded by necessary causality). The sphere of ethics exists alongside
causal necessity, so to be a “slave” of the latter is not necessarily to
be a slave of immorality, and vice-versa. It is possible to be causally
determined but moral (to do what is “best”) or to be free and im-
moral (which is what Fichte believes, and criticizes humanity for). In
light of this distinction, the social drive could either be considered as
the drive to admit that there is free will apart from causal necessity
or as the drive for human beings to behave morally with respect to
each other, which generally means not to harm each other. Trying to
combine the two could be risky because of the subtle difference.

This discrepancy is reinforced by the fact that Fichte’s proof
of the existence of other free agents could be criticized for circular
reasoning. First he states that some events are caused by something
that cannot be reduced to natural causality; then he defines free will
to be the explanation for just these events. His conclusion that a free
agent exists and is a “free cause” relies entirely on this definition. But
it could be that what we perceive as will is actually an empty label: it
might simply turn out to be consciousness of the actions we commit,
but not necessarily a “free cause”. It is possible that there are neces-
sary causes governing our actions of which we are unaware. If this
is the case, our perception of our actions is given the term ‘will’ only
because of our limited knowledge. As a simplification of Spinoza:
there is no free will because nothing occurs without a cause. Our
drives too could be seen as necessary causes.

At least in these lectures, there is no proof that free will exists:
a materialist like Spinoza might call it an arbitrary statement. The
negative definition of freedom as the opposite of what is causally
act as it does. We say that a thing is ‘compelled’ if something other than itself makes
it exist and causes it to act in this or that specific way” (translation by J. Bennett,
2004). Later, in proposition 32, Spinoza claims that the will is always an effect of a
cause, and as such it cannot be called free but is necessarily compelled by something
else.
determined is never informative enough to be built upon.

In lecture Prof. Wood argued that Fichte was very well aware of the conflict between a materialistic view of the world and the existence of free will. In order to save the importance of the social drive within his theory of perfect harmony, Fichte must face this conflict. Here is a possible reply to the previous objections.

First, empirical description of phenomena is not a true explanation of their causation. We cannot know what something is simply by looking at it: we will only know what it looks like. A materialistic view is therefore no more stable than a theory that includes the notion of free will. What Fichte means by necessary causation is the system that enforces natural laws on all its elements; he believes that these same elements can be subject to intervention by other “causes” which aren’t necessary but freely determined by a rational source. As an example, when I raise my arm I can describe the motion by representing it through the physical laws that govern it. However, when I keep asking “What moves the arm?” “Nervous signals?” “What sends the signals?” “The receptors and the brain?” “What in the brain initiates these signals?” etc, I am looking for the primary source of that action, which is intentionality. This source is what guarantees free action. While Fichte might be using circular reasoning in his argument, what he is doing is not so much proving the existence of freedom but defining it as we are forced to define any fundamental concept, even that of causality.

Secondly, Fichte’s ethical theory may still show a direct correlation between freedom in the causal sense and ethical freedom. When a person is morally a slave, he is subjecting himself to the laws of nature: he will not be capable of reacting properly when injustice is committed to him, like a plant will not retaliate against he who cuts it down. This moral slave will commit injustice onto others without a notion of what injustice truly is. He will just act, and have no reasonable direction in his actions. This means that he will not follow a vocation but only satisfy his volatile physical desires.

This leads to a man being a tyrant not in his own eyes but in the eyes of others. From his own perspective, he is neither wrong nor right; but if we change perspective and consider him from the point of view of others, they will feel injustice is being committed toward them, and this feeling will spark their moral sense. The very law of the jungle, which can lead to insubordination when one is subordinated, shows that moral sense is in some way derived from self-dignity, instinct of survival, refusal to do something if there is no advantage to it except the advantage of someone else. Causal necessity would leave no space for certain kinds of insubordination: the set of events in the world cannot merely be a chain of determined causes and effects, or all human beings would behave predictably. When something
cannot be predicted, or explained by causal necessity, it can only be
defined as free.

At this point, a new principle must be found in virtue of which
to establish what it is to act accordingly with other human beings.
This principle is morality by definition, since it guides social behavior
and is therefore the law by which the social drive of human beings
finds expression. It necessarily springs forth from our admission that
other beings are free. This admission can be split into two steps: first,
that others are not objects; second, that they should not be treated
as such, given that unlike objects they have the potential to react to
subordination.

This reply might or might not be convincing. Ultimately, it seems
that one’s choice of following Fichte or of following materialism
depends on whether one is willing to admit that there is free will. A
rigorous proof, at least a universally convincing one, is not given in
these lectures. Then again, materialism not only goes against our in-
tuitive sense of our own free will, but is also faced with limits: physics
only offers objective descriptions of events, not explanations of what
they are.

The social drive still persists whether one believes in Fichte’s law
of ultimate harmony or in materialism. If the progress of society
is not necessarily determined, we could easily imagine it assuming a
form other than its current one. The possibility of the current state
of affairs being different would seem to give hope to the existence of
free will by showing that we are free to make mistakes and to cor-
rect them. A purely deterministic account may not seem convincing
because we can always imagine the situation being coherently dif-
ferent, even though this is no proof (for how do we know it really is
coherent?).

In any case, just as morality can be defined either in a determi-
nistic world or in a world containing free agents, the same goes for soci-
ety: as long as there is one, under any definition, it will presuppose a
social drive in man.