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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

I consider what the work of the scholar in the age of searchable information networks. I do this with regard to both intellectual inquiry and the political motivations of scholarship. I also explore the notions of books and technology.
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Chapter 1: The Scholar’s Work Alongside the Network

How useful, when roasted meats and other foods are before you, to see them in your mind as here the dead body of a fish, there the dead body of a bird or pig. Or again, to think of Falernian wine as the juice of a cluster of grapes, of a purple robe as sheep’s wool dyed with the blood of a shellfish, and of sexual intercourse as internal rubbing accompanied by a spasmodic ejection of mucus. (Aurelius, 2006, p. 47)

The passage above is my favorite from Marcus Aurelius’s Meditations. Quoting it is possibly the most exhaustive way to ruin a date that’s gone well. Though it might not seem so, there’s something potentially more unsettling than the Stoic definition of sex. It’s what’s said about human work in the penultimate remark of the same passage: Nam gravis impostor est fastus, et quando maxime putas, te res serias agere, tum maxime in fraudem inducit. In other words, when you most think you’re making or doing something serious, that’s when you’re maximally duped by pride. I feel especially duped, after having spent over an hour perfecting a translation of the Latin, which I hadn’t realized was a translation itself. Though Marcus Aurelius was a Roman emperor, the Meditations were originally written in Greek. If
you’re ever curious about how to lose friends and alienate people, you might prompt a colleague who studies sexuality to talk about their research, only to interrupt them with, “Ah, you’re in genital friction studies!” I try to avoid it, but sometimes what’s impressed on my mind is that the pursuit of a PhD is not but the almost decade long preparation to write a document that four people will read. All this is literally true, but one would hope that this type of truth is misguided.

On some level, we all know that our dinner is but heated up dead things, but we don’t understand it that way. It isn’t only that it’s necessary to disavow what food is in order to eat comfortably; it’s also that we fail to understand a good meal if we don’t. What’s missing from the dead carcass description is a description of how we, as humans, value a good meal. A delicious meal isn’t something we’re only instinctively compelled to eat, but we view it as choice-worthy. We also want it. Similarly, sex is caught up in desire. It isn’t merely that we’re compelled to rub our genitals to the point of secretion. And lastly, it follows that this is why sublimating and devoting inordinate intellectual energies to the study of sexuality is worthy of esteem.

Gender and sexuality used to be my area. That was many years ago, and I’ve changed my focus since then. With the change came the habitual wondering about whether or not I had made a mistake. I was convinced I would eventually be doing important,
urgent work. Now that I don’t do anything explicitly politically usable, I’m not so convinced.

The worry about whether or not we’re doing something choice-worthy isn’t an uncommon concern. It’s important that we do important work, but why? There are many professions that don’t carry with it this same burden. I’ve had my share of jobs in which I knew I was doing something not only useless, but perhaps harmful to the species. Still, I was able to stay at these jobs because I was also able to hate them. Ideology worked just fine. I was content to think that though I’m doing something awful for a living, I’m still a person of integrity, for underneath the surface of polite professionalism and practical concerns of rent, utilities, and food, I can’t stand that I’m making life miserable for the working poor who, because of me, get their wages garnished for non-payment of medical bills. It was nice to be duped. Why, though, is a scholarly career something that one can’t merely approach as a job one does?

One reason might be that many scholarly paths concern the examination of ideology. We’re thus denied ideology’s analgesic properties. In other words, we’re necessarily located in the also duped position of the “non-duped” who try to stand outside of ideology, duped because according to our own claims, there is no outside. To do what we do, we have to presuppose a meta-ideological position. In other words, we’re forced to claim to
see beyond the already invisible veil that absolutely no one, regardless of perspicacity, can see through. Though we shouldn’t conflate ideology and the unconscious, we have something similar in psychoanalytic criticism, something that heavily influences my work. Namely, what approach does psychoanalytic criticism take with regard to its field of inquiry, the unconscious? The unconscious can’t be known. Here are teachings about it!

This isn’t to disparage as futile the social sciences and the humanities writ large, nor is it to disparage the smaller subset of people who work within the body of knowledge gathered together under the rubric of psychoanalysis. What we have here isn’t a contradiction. You can fit the study of ideology or psychoanalysis into this model, but this is merely to be satisfied with the round peg that, given certain idiomatic conditions, necessarily fits into the square hole. I’ll have more to say on this later, but I think the scholar is instead in the position of one who never gives up. We are those willful individuals who keep trying when it’s a forgone conclusion that we can’t succeed. So how did Althusser unbind himself from his middle class position to write about ideology? He couldn’t, but he nonetheless wrote. Yes, so there’s this.

But there’s another reason why a scholarly career isn’t something you can just do while representing it negatively to yourself all the way through. Colloquially speaking, we can’t
approach it with the same contempt as many other jobs because it’s necessarily a labor of love. Not as colloquially, what we generally know as lovingly laboring is what we also know through the psychoanalytic concept of sublimation. Sublimation has to do with esteem, thus our concern about the choice-worthiness of our paths within the profession. This, too, will be explained further, but sublimation is the satisfaction of the drive through the inhibition of its aim. The drive doesn’t get caught up in the structure of desire in sublimation, so the question that a perfectly good neurotic would have—I say this only half jokingly because it’s actually different for the perverse subject and the psychotic—can have an answer. The neurotic can have an answer because the question of, Who am I for your desire? becomes reformulated. It becomes reformulated because the satisfaction of the drive displaces two things, and those are the subject itself and the desire of the Other. The question becomes, Is my work worthy of your esteem? When I’m sublimating, I know what you want. You want my work to be good. You want, in other words, valuable work. The answer to the question is either yes or no.

This is why many of us in the social sciences and humanities want our work to be politically efficacious. Having written that, I realize how contentious—and possibly smug sounding—a claim I’m making. In my defense, though, I’m not psychologizing. I don’t claim to know the inner, hidden workings of anyone’s
mind. That’s actually against what I take to be a major tenet of psychoanalysis. The unconscious is not directly knowable without distortions. In fact, its existence is only deduced because there are distortions in conscious discourse. I’m perhaps using the term want a bit to equivocatingly. I’m not saying there’s some part of us deep down that wishes our work to have political efficaciousness. Rather, I’m saying that we pursue this because we find ourselves forced into a position that makes our work subject to the evaluative criterion measuring political utility: Does your work just interpret the world? Because it needs to change it too! Otherwise, though your manuscript is carefully crafted, we wish you the best.

From our most careful readers, we’re often posed with the question of, So what? As of late, we’ve generally tried to answer this with, Because it’s important, important politically. I think—and I’m taking a cue from Badiou—that we’ve become sutured to the political as a truth procedure. Pursuing the truth through the political is necessary, but not sufficient. “The personal is political,” had been a useful slogan because it can’t literally be true. It had a jarring, dissonant overtone. It was a useful caution against not seeing the political where it was veiled, in these places that we wouldn’t otherwise think of as political, places such as the personal. Not everything we thought was non-political, that is to say, was actually so.
Still, we mustn’t go too far the other way. Critical activity for the scholar shouldn’t be reduced to finding the political in places where it isn’t. I’m claiming that there’s one area where it certainly cannot be. That area is comprised of the things composed of the drives.

This, too, is a contentious claim. Let’s tease it out. First, desire is composed of the drives. Thus, I must hold it that desire is not political. In fact, I believe that if anything, the political is influenced by desire, and not the other way around. Though I do talk about this later, it isn’t my focus. I bring it up because it helps to reinforce my claim that technology is not political, nor is the act of sublimating. These last two are major points I wish to make.

At most, technology and the act of sublimating are social. They can involve groups of people and values shared by those people, but they are not, strictly speaking, political. I’m going by a narrow definition of the political. Namely, what I’m calling the political has to do with the polis. For me, perhaps surprisingly, matters of the polis only have to do with the State and governance secondarily. Primarily, the political—as I’m defining it—has to do with protecting the interests concerning the biological life of a citizenry. I’m modifying a capabilities approach somewhat. I’m modifying because I’m not convinced that all the capabilities outlined by someone like Nuss-
baum (2006) for instance, can be matters for the State. We might want the State to protect certain capabilities, but this might extend the State beyond what it can do. We extend thus when we try to make the State protect what we consider to be human flourishing, flourishing specific to the human. I feel confident that the State can protect the life of a citizenry insofar as the life that it protects is the biological life a citizen shares with all other forms of life. This isn’t the life that’s particularly human. The reason why I’m unconvinced about the State’s ability to protect human flourishing is that human flourishing doesn’t seem to be protectable in the first place. We may be able to ensure that the conditions necessary for human flourishing are protected, but the flourishing itself is a matter of willing. Willing cannot be protected because it can’t be threatened. All this shall be explained in detail later in the penultimate and ultimate chapters. But why are technology and the act of sublimating at most social and not political?

If the political protects bios, or bare life, then technology and the act of sublimating cannot be political because both concern life particular to the human. Further, the political tries to postpone death while technology and sublimating have an aim toward death. Technology and sublimating, then, are not political for two reasons. First, their orientations with regard to death are opposing vectors. Second, they involve different
types of death. The death involved in the political is a biological death. The death involved with technology and sublimating, things composed of the drives—which are all partial and death drives to begin with—have to do with death in the symbolic. Death in the symbolic allows for immortality. What is the immortal? It isn’t necessarily just that which must only live, but it’s also that which can’t be killed. We might not be accustomed to thinking of it in this way, but that which is already dead meets this latter criterion. You can never die twice, at least not in the same way. The symbolic allows for an existence that literally cannot die; something that comes to be symbolized becomes im-mortal because it becomes literal. In this way, to symbolize a thing is to kill it so that it cannot be killed again.

Those are the differences, but what the political and that which is composed of the drives share is that both are only trajectories, things that are marked out by vectors. Aims never get anywhere. Aims only point to a there. It’s the things travelling through trajectories that go places. Thus, political aims and the aims of drives qua aims never get anywhere either. If we’re talking about change in the world, we’re definitely not talking about what’s composed of the drives, but we’re also not talking about the political. This is what I feel is at the bottom of all the contentiousness of what I’m claiming: Though the political
doesn’t only interpret the world, it doesn’t change it either. It only gestures toward one. But I’ve introduced the end of this document. I’ve explained neither how we get to these conclusions, nor have I mentioned what this document’s title seems to promise.

This is a document about networks, one that considers the scholar after the network and tries to answer the question, What ought we do? Scholars became esteemed for the rigor of their scholarship. To be called an ivory tower intellectual is an insult, but to be called a coffeehouse intellectual is quite the opposite. We marvel at the well-read and their ability to draw surprising connections between texts. These are expert craftspeople, those who’ve mastered the techne of scholarship. But, as with many technological innovations, comes a threat to the craftsperson. Technological innovations allow the amateur to produce results similar to the expert, and if this is so, why should we esteem the expert? Though photography didn’t make extinct realist painting, it did cause a crisis for it. Though it didn’t make the craft any easier to master or less amazing that one had, it made it far less valuable. What happens when the scholar’s efforts at mastery and mind is pitted against Google’s Google Books library and Google Scholar search engine?

One may prize something like handcrafted furniture, but not scholarship. I’m not going to get more esteem if I claim that
I’ve written this document without the use of the Internet or searchable databases. No one would want that, and I’ve used both. With the network comes a completely indexed library of information. The network is a concordance. It isn’t necessary to read as we once did to become an expert. To be an expert in any one field, one first had to become a voracious generalist. It was necessary to read in disparate areas to be sure that one wasn’t missing something. This is rigor. With the search engine, to become an expert in any one field, one only need to perform a database search for relevant texts.

As someone who began scholarly pursuits at the border between the two eras, I remember having read tirelessly hoping to find the definition for *imago*. I found the word trying to read Lacan’s *Ecrits*. I reasoned that it must have had something to do with image, but felt that this was a specialized word. Dictionaries didn’t help, and none of the countless secondary sources I read defined it. The journal titled *American Imago* was also a dead end. When I first got Internet at home, “imago” was one of the first things I looked up. There were no hits. But this was all long ago, a time when there was not even Google. I’m sure if I googled it today, I would find plenty. I won’t, this out of fidelity to my initial efforts. I still don’t know what the word means, and somehow to find out any other way than I had been at-
tempting would feel like cheating. I’m lamenting something, but at the same time, I feel silly for doing so.

As scholars, we’re becoming more specialized because we have to be. I doubt very much that the academic market has become less competitive. I will not make the prediction that it ever will be. We’ve always needed to be experts, but now that it’s no longer necessary to be well-rounded to be at one’s best in one’s area, it seems that the market encourages us not to be. I’m not saying that networked information gives us the luxury of reading less. We still need to read as much. What’s stolen is the luxury of reading broadly. There’s always too much to read, but now that too much is only in the area we’ve chosen. We’re responsible for that literature, and now we know how large a body of literature that is because all that literature is indexed. The imperative of academic rigor compels us to read as much of that literature as possible. Because we can, we must! And we must specialize.

The coffeehouse intellectual is becoming extinct. If you ask me to substantiate that claim, I can’t. I can only point to the fact that I’ve not been able to find someone with broad knowledge at the café downstairs from my apartment, at least no one who’s younger than I. The people I know know what they know, and they know it well, but they don’t know much more. I should add that I’m including myself in the set of people I know. I
once had aspirations to drink more coffee, but alas, I’ve become Sartre’s absent Pierre.
I. The Political and Intellectual Inquiry

The political and intellectual inquiry had gone forth from network inefficiency. The network, inasmuch as it makes possible a certain type of making or doing, is now efficient. The network is approaching absolute realization of that which is most suited to it. And although the network is old, it’s approaching this realization only now because of electronic mediation. Not only does this approaching of network efficiency provoke a crisis for both the political and intellectual inquiry, but it curiously draws them together.

First, the efficiency of the network is a limit where the political terminates. The network exceeds the governed, so the governed starts at the boundary of network inefficiency. Boundaries, remember, can be either initial or final. Second, the everyday reality of intellectual inquiry was that it encountered the limit of knowledge not being fully networked. This limit of network inefficiency wasn’t, however, the point at which intellectual inquiry stopped or encountered an impasse. It was the limit from which intellectual inquiry proceeded. Network efficiency, then, pulls out the ground from which intellectual inquiry had built up. Network efficiency is the point where intel-
lectual inquiry stops; it constitutes an everyday reality, but a new one.

That the political and intellectual inquiry have the same initial boundary doesn’t mean that the two are overlapping trajectories. Rather, the two proceed from that limit away from each other. Now, however, as they approach the limit of network efficiency, both are starting to come together insofar as they’re drawn to the same terminal limit. But this is to start at the end of the argument. We’ve much unpacking to do, so let’s begin with what we mean by the network.

Being situated within the structure of the efficient network might make us think we’re connected to the world, but the world is gigantic. Though we may have the potential to connect to an almost innumerable number of other nodes, on the level of the everyday, we tend to actualize only a nearly negligible fraction of that potential. What’s important about the efficient network is the potential it generates, not the actualization of that potential. In fact, that the network is efficient, that it makes possible these interactions, seems to make our drive to realize these potentials less pressing. It might be that we’ve realized that realizing these potentials isn’t something we wanted in the first place.

Although digital aspects relating to the network may be something having only recently emerged, the network itself is
much older. Think, for instance, of roads. Roads are physical aspects relating to the network. Mail is yet another example. The network isn’t only what pertains to the electronically mediated. Still, electronic mediations lend themselves well to the structuring of the efficient network. The speed at which electronic mediations occur verges on the immediate. Literally, the immediate is that which is without mediation. Heidegger (1988) gives us the definition of the immediate as the not yet mediated in his lecture Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit. Electronic mediations tend to efface themselves because of their speed. Mail traveling through roads, for instance, is slow. After email, it’s been renamed “snail mail.” As mediations, mail and the roads through which mail arrive make themselves salient. But though mediations affect the network, they aren’t necessarily what constitute the network. Bumpy roads and poor quality paper may affect some aspects of how the message is received, but they are not, for instance, the subpoena itself, for a subpoena is no more pleasant or unpleasant if it comes to you comfortably and is written on scented paper. It’s perhaps more accurate to say that mediations help the network come to its end and that they can better do so if they tend toward vanishing. So if mediations aren’t part of the network, what are?
II. The Network as Concordance

What’s constitutive of the network are indexes. The network is a structure, and what makes up that structure are codifications that point. Indexes are things that indicate. This can be opposed to signs from which one can derive meaning through interpretation. The network doesn’t contain meaning, but only codes, indicators, things that provide directions when accessed. So if the only things in the network are indexes, the network is a concordance—a complete listing of indexes—for all networked objects. Let’s be clear, however, that networked objects themselves are not objects that make up the network, but objects indexed by the network. They’re objects that have become unbound in the structure of the network because the network is a particular type of structuring. We should stress that the networked objects are in the network only insofar as they’re contained by the structure of the network, insofar as networked objects are within the purview of the network. They’re actually outside of the network if we’re thinking about an in-ness that’s constitutive, for networked objects are not themselves constitutive of the structure, only their respective indexes are. This leads us to a more general caution when thinking about the network. The network is a structure, and a structure mustn’t be conflated with what it contains. Still, what do we gain by excluding the mediations and objects from the network?
We gain theoretical clarity about the how the network functions. We must rethink theorizations of the network assert that nodes (objects), linkages (mediations), and interactions of nodes across linkages are what constitute the network. This overemphasizes the identity of the objects and their functions. What makes a node networked, or contained by the structure of the network, is that it’s accessible, that it has the potential to be accessed, and that it’s able to access other nodes. Further, the linkages help allow this potential for the interaction of access. It’s the potential that’s important, not the actualized accessing. We should instead emphasize what keeps the potential in place: the fact that networked objects are things pointed to by indexes in the network. The network functions as a structure in the way that it does because it’s the concordance of all networked objects. The indexes make up the network, for what makes the network the network is potentiality. Potentiality is the essence of the network. And it is not that the potentiality ceases to be when it is realized. As Agamben (1999) notes, something retains potential when it exhausts its impotentiality. Potentiality is retained here because the structure of the network exhausts an impotentiality, the impotentiality that would otherwise bind objects in the network, the impotentiality that would otherwise make those objects inaccessible.
Further, if the network is a concordance, then it generates an archive. In the spirit of Michel Foucault (1982), let’s think of an archive not as the preserved and collected itself, but as a structure that confers upon objects the status of being preserved and collected. Because of this archive generated by the network, networked objects become caught up in a relationship to each other. All network objects share the quality of having become indicated by an index in the network. Again, the network is the structure in which and because of which the networked object has become unbound. The network is what results from being networked. But to be unbound or networked is not to be a node interacting through linkages to other nodes. To be networked is to be unbound within a system because of that system. Further, this is claiming something different than that the network is boundless.

We aren’t claiming that what’s characteristic of the network is that it’s ever expansive, or that its principle characteristic is that it is additive. This is to fall into the trap of a spurious infinity. It’s the spurious conception that something is infinite if we can forever add something to it. In the case of the network, we might be able to forever add one more node and connection, but this is not what makes the network infinite. What makes it infinite is the unbinding. The network is a structure in which things have become unbound.
III. Unbinding

When something is bound, it’s bound by something. It encounters a limit because of that something. Book pages encounter a limit because of the spine; the bondsman encounters a limit because of the lord; and the citizen encounters a limit because of the law. Further if a bound something isn’t bound by another thing, then it’s bound to its location. A thing cannot be bound by itself in the capacity of another thing, for that would be to assert that the thing is itself and something other than itself. In other words, a thing can only be said to be bound by itself if we think of binding in terms of encountering a limit. If something is to encounter the limit of nothing other than itself, then it can only encounter that limit because its existence is contained by a particular there. Something bound by nothing other than itself encounters the limit of its there. That something is bound to its location. In fact, all bound things are bound to their locations, whether that location be a physical space or a position in a system. At this point, we should make clear two things we are not claiming.

First, though we are speaking of location, it should be evident that we are not theorizing movement within or through the network. While networks may indeed make possible the traversal of space, what’s of interest isn’t the space itself.
Space can function as an impediment. What’s of interest is the binding that space can accomplish. When there’s a traversal of space in the network, there’s an unbinding. The object becomes no longer snared or impeded. Further, something like the declassification of information also functions to unbind. With declassification, information that had been bound by secrecy becomes unbound. The object becomes accessible or, as we say, networked. So with these two examples, we see that there are two things that unbinding in the network allows: 1. it allows an object contained in the network to become unbound from its location, and 2. it allows access to an object from other locations contained in the network. But with all this talk of objects having become unbound, we should take care to not say that the objects have become freed, if only to avoid saying the network is something liberating. The network can be used for the act of liberating, but it’s an agent, not the network who does the freeing.

Second, because we are claiming that the network is the structure resulting from objects being networked, we must be claiming also that the network is not a governing structure, but a resultant one. Put a different way, the network isn’t something obeyed, but deduced. This leads us to the crisis that the efficient network—what we’ve just described—causes for the political.
IV. The Political

Prohibitions bind. For instance, were a governing entity to mark something as classified, this wouldn’t be to destroy that thing. It’s a binding prohibition. It binds whatever is classified to its location, for it cannot be accessed from other locations. Further, if a governing entity were to limit the usage of the index of a network, this is to bind the node attempting access to its location. As we’ve noted networked objects must be unbound. Thus, to govern networked objects is to transform those objects into something else, to transform them into bound objects. This is to inject into these objects certain impotentialities, and as we’ve seen, what’s important for the network is the exhaustion of impotentialities, to operate according to a fully realized potentiality.

One might argue that this sort of binding exceeds the purview of the government. Governing entities are meant to protect the life of its citizens and the rights belonging to those citizens. With the exception of documents that would threaten national security or substances that endanger the public, one could argue that the networking of objects threatens neither the life of citizens nor their rights. The network merely indexes objects. Thus, to govern the network itself is to govern something nonthreatening. Governing should not be focused on the network, but on threatening objects. It’s true that threatening
objects can become indexed, or that indexing certain classes of objects can make them threatening, but what should be governed, with few exceptions, is the use or actualized access to such objects, not the indexing. Still, this is not the crisis that the government encounters with network efficiency. It isn’t only that the network necessarily exceeds the governable insofar as governing tends to diminish what is networked. What threatens governing entities is something different.

Governing laws are codifications of the will of governance in the form of prohibitions. They can be transgressed. In fact, that what is willed can be transgressed is the reason that that will must become a governing law in the first place. Unchecked transgression of governing laws tends to weaken those laws. Thus, the will written into the governing law must transform those transgressing the law. Governing laws are what make possible this necessary transformation. The transformation transgressors must be made to suffer is what we know as punishment. Scientific laws too can be transgressed, but this does nothing to weaken the laws. However, that which transgresses a scientific law must undergo a transformation. We cannot will or enforce this transformation, but only deduce it. For instance, matter cannot be destroyed, but only transformed into another type of matter. Were matter ever to be destroyed, then that something having been destroyed must have undergone a transformation mak-
ing it something other than matter. Scientific laws operate within the realm of deduction, not will. The law of the network is something that we describe according to something that looks more like a scientific law than a governing one.

The concordance of indexes pertaining to network objects—in other words, the network—cannot be governed because governing can only be done in the presence of laws. Governing laws must have recourse to the signifier because there can be no prohibition without it, but the concordance doesn’t contain signifiers as such. The index may have been generated according to rules or laws, but those exist outside of the index. If one says that the rules are inscribed within the form of the index, then this is to conflate the container with the contained. The form of the index is outside of what it contains. It is merely the container of the index. The observable laws that apply to the index may have to do with combinatory limitations, but these are not rules insofar as there is no thing that obeys. That I can deduce something does not entail inscription. Inscription entails an interpretive scheme by which the inscription came to be written. Deduction requires the act of interpretation, but not that what was interpreted had been written. We deduce things about the network, but more importantly we deduce things from the network. We deduce locations from the indexes contained in the concordance that is the network. It’s from here that we gain accessi-
bility. This non-governable accessibility is the threat. That there is a structure that operates without recourse to the signifier is the terminal limit of governance. Governance cannot proceed beyond this point, and it's for this reason that the efficient network causes panicked responses by governing entities. The U.S. Patriot Act is but one example. In other words, from the perspective of governing, there's danger in the network insofar as what cannot be governed poses a threat. The network is the container of the ungovernable. Thus, as the political encounters network efficiency, governance itself encounters its terminal limit.

V. INTELLECTUAL INQUIRY

But we said that intellectual inquiry encounters this limit also, and it so happens that this is a manifestation of what seeks to extend scholarship on the political. We should see what implications the efficient network has for scholarship concerning the political, but let us explore intellectual inquiry first in more general terms.

The adoption of technologies often involves the migration of human labor to machines. Poster (2006) implies that this migration cannot exist without political implications insofar as there is a mediation of relationships between the two. These technologies have their greatest impact when they become mun-
dane, when our day to day tasks become so dependent upon them that for the most part, we forget we’re using them. With network efficiency, we have two new technological objects. We have the concordance of all networked objects and the archive that results from it. The concordance allows scholars to interact with existing bodies of knowledge, for objects of knowledge receive an address insofar as they’re indexed. Think, for instance, how the Internet has changed the way research is conducted. Moreover, with the coming of complete searchable libraries such as the one the Google Books Library Project seeks to create, all written text will become searchable. For the scholar, this would mean that a large part of scholarly labor will become migrated to the machine. The concordance constitutive of the network allows us to access knowledge in a different way. It isn’t merely that it allows space to be traversed with greater speed, but memory becomes a prosthetic memory. The efficient network becomes a complete and searchable library in which knowledge becomes unbound. Scholars are encountering the limit of having access to a networked library.

The way scholars interface with the non-searchable library involves a certain amount of necessary ignorance. Many of the books we’ve read we’ve read without having known whether or not they’ll prove to be useful. We finish books with the hope that they’ll contain something of use, but we can never tell until we
finish them. Consequently, we end up finishing many books that we don’t find immediately useful, but still, we consider ourselves better off for having read them—unless of course the book was bad, but in that case, it’s likely that we wouldn’t have finished it. Further, we happen upon many of these books by accident. They have interesting titles, or the dust jackets make the book seem promising, or the book is on a press we like. Or perhaps we’ve read a book review, or the book was cited in another book, or we’ve been recommended that book by an acquaintance. In all cases such as these, we read the book with only a vague promise of usefulness. We must interface with books in a way that doesn’t allow us to know what we’re missing—or not missing—until we’ve read them. Our assessment of the book’s utility only comes after having finished it. If we start interfacing with the library via the network, then things become much different.

With a networked library, we start with an interest, search that interest, and all the relevant networked objects come to be at our disposal inasmuch as we are able to access their locations. This is so, for we’re searching more than just subject headings and titles. We’re searching within the text itself. Instead of having a vague promise of usefulness, we start with a computer-mediated assessment of a text’s utility, and once we’ve decided upon its utility for ourselves, we proceed to read that
text. The technology of the search engine, an incarnation of the concordance of the network, seems to change our reading practices. Now, as scholars, we generally try to read everything that’s out there so we can have found everything that’s suited to our interest, and our interests often become shaped by our attempts to read everything we’re able. Still, the goal is to prune away the inessential, to establish a collection of the useful, to make our personal canon. If we have a search engine, our reading becomes more focused. We tend to become specialized.

In *Representations of the Intellectual*, Said (1996) warns that, “Specialization means losing sight of the raw effort of constructing either art or knowledge; as a result you cannot view knowledge and art as choices and decisions, commitments and alignments, but only in terms of impersonal theories or methodologies” (p. 77). Less is left to accident, and the glut of what our searches return will leave little time to read anything else, for if we are still operating with the imperative of scholarly rigor—with the imperative of knowing everything that’s out there in our area—we become answerable to the question, Why haven’t you read this? We have no excuse not to have known about something if knowing about it only involves a search engine search. We’ll end up having less tolerance for ignorance—in both ourselves and others—but this intolerance will only enforce a
self perpetuating focus upon the interest with which we’ve begun.

With the imperative of rigor, to know all that which has already been known before proceeding in my goal to create something else to be known, then I am prohibited access to the unknown by the searchable library of all texts. If there’s something I ought to do, I must first be able to do it. Thus, the imperative of rigor implies that I must know all there is to know about my object of inquiry before I proceed. However, I can’t know that I know all there is to know without having read all texts. Thus, I can only approach the ideal of rigor because I have no means by which to realize rigor in any practical way. Whereas I would’ve had to have read all texts in order to know what I had not known, the searchable library allows me to proceed efficiently. It makes knowing all there is to know about my object of inquiry within the realm of the possible. In other words, I don’t have to read the totality of all texts, only texts that are relevant to my object of inquiry. This will often prove to be a nearly impossible task, but it is not the absolutely impossible task of reading everything.

Mastery becomes impossible because the search technology makes it theoretically possible. Mostly, there’ll still be too much to read, only we’ll always know what we’re missing because all of the citations will have come up in the results of a
search engine query. Without search engine technology, however, mastery is possible because we go into the activity of attempting mastery with the foregone conclusion that mastery is impossible. Here, though we never end up mastering that which was impossible anyway, we still accomplish a kind of mastery, albeit a different kind. We become well read. But perhaps this is too simplistic. If it is, it’s so at least partly for the reason that we begin with the premise that the good of doing research is only utility, that we acquire knowledge because it’s a means to some end.

Speedy access may be beneficial to researchers working in the sciences or in technical fields, but while it may be true that the social scientist or humanities scholar has easier access to scholarship, speed isn’t necessarily a benefit. It isn’t necessarily a benefit because in these disciplines, speed isn’t the highest value. I think it’s true that speed isn’t something that is necessary for either the social sciences or the humanities. Speed is not something one thinks of along with social justice or the arts. We can’t think of the arts in terms of efficiency. Art is exactly what is inefficient. The arts have no use value. For issues of justice, and this is the more important point with regard to our argument, there is a sense of urgency. Speed and urgency are two different matters. Speed has a sense of efficiency; urgency is only timeliness. If we applied the no-
tion of efficiency to justice, then we fall into a kind of utilitarianism. Our only concern becomes what is the most expedient way to maximize the good. When we do this we end up treating certain classes of human beings as mere means.

VI. CRISES

In sum, the crisis that the efficient network causes for intellectual inquiry is that it migrates away from the scholar most of what constituted scholarly labor: becoming well read. Further, if we conflate the speediness that comes with the efficient network with ideas of justice, we get into the mess of conflating efficiency with urgency. Political thought needs to come to a resolution because demands for justice are timely. If we must act, we must act quickly, yet with deliberateness, not with the facile utility of the efficient. This is something that ought to be reversed, especially if our intellectual inquiry takes the political as its object.

There is a crisis for the intellectual. The intellectual is moving from being someone who retains great amounts of the library in their own memory. In fact, the intellectual has not been this person for quite some time. It could be that remembering knowledge will be valued less and less for the reason that it will become more and more unnecessary with the everyday reliance on the prosthetic memory achieved by an efficient network.
What would be valued more and more, it would seem, is the individual who has the capacity to make the greatest use of the knowledge that is remembered for us. The assumption would eventually be that all the components are there, that most of what is to be known is already known in some way, and it’s just that these components need to be put together in novel ways when new problems arise. Truth as that which is revealed becomes an easier task in some senses. Searching becomes speedy whereas it once had been what occupied much of the scholars time. Without the complete and searchable library made possible by the efficient network, searching would’ve involved the careful study which is becoming well read. Here, there would be a premium on creativity. The efficient network could thus be seen as a crisis centered around the parameters by which we establish intellectualism. It wouldn’t be retained knowledge, but the refashioning of what is already in place. But is this what will happen, or are we missing some point? Is this too simple?

We are missing the point of the importance of ignorance. Ignorance is the necessary ignoring of the knowable, and it results in a type of knowledge production that’s creative. It’s necessary to the practice of scholarship as we know it. That is, it’s necessary to what is creative in scholarship, that which proceeds from accident and mistake. This is what Hadot (1995) points out. There existed in Western philosophy the tendency to
believe that there were certain authoritative texts, usually around which a school of thought was built. Further, it was believed that, “Truth was contained within these texts; it was the property of their authors, as it was also the property of those groups who recognized the authority of these authors, and who were consequently the ‘heirs’ of this original truth” (p. 73). Thus, the task of philosophy was an exegetical one. Bad interpretation is precisely what led to error. If we’ve moved away from this conception, and we believe that there is only misreading, and creative misreading at that, might we not be returning to an older model of knowledge and knowledge production with the networked library? The fact that we would want to use it seems to belie that the truth is to be found in what is already known, and to create new truths, we must know what has already been known. This is the technological par excellence. It is the belief that new knowledge is that which builds upon the old. But is there not a certain type of knowledge that can’t be built up, something that is other than the accumulation of techniques. There is a knowledge that is part of a creative—as opposed to productive—contemplative activity.

When I am engaged in the act of contemplation, my experience is mediated by ignorance. Ignorance always exists insofar as it’s the necessary state in which there is an unknown not known. The possibility of knowing that a particular knowable
thing is not yet known rests on the impossibility of knowing all there is to know. Formulated a bit more clearly, I need to know everything before I know if and what, exactly, I don’t know. If ever there is something that I do not know—which is always—my thinking moves forward from the knowledge of there being a perpetually not known. My thinking moves forward from this initial limit. And it’s from the not known that I create new thought. In other words, I generate something that is known from what is not known. It’s a creation ex nihilo. The unknown is the limit from which intellectual inquiry had begun, and it should continue to do so. That the networked library has come to be should not let us lose sight of this. The crisis is easy to avert if we recognize this.

Further, with everyday reliance on the prosthetic memory, it will be the case that creativity becomes valued over memory, then the original value of memory is being forgotten. What, exactly, is being forgotten? What’s forgotten is the value of study as a good. Study isn’t an instrumental good for advancing the storehouse of knowledge that lies ready for our use, study is itself a good because it is part of human flourishing. Education can indeed be instrumental, but it isn’t only instrumental. It is not that the efficient network can be educated for us, in our place. This is to take the good of human flourishing to be instrumental for development. Rather, we should be taking devel-
opment as an instrumental good for human flourishing. Human flourishing itself isn’t development. Development is only a means to flourishing. To take it as an end is mistaken. But what do I mean by this? Often we think of a craft as the mere process that is a means to an end, and it’s the end that’s inherently more valuable. For instance, if I want a guitar, then I have an appreciation for the luthier because he or she is the craftsper-son who constructs my guitar. I think, however, that we have an investment in inefficiency because at some level, we feel that knowing a craft and using it can be part of human flourishing. It is in this that technology—the efficient network—should not flourish for us. But what the point of this discussion?

VII. Crises Resolution

Study is the craft of the scholar. It is the process by which we commit things to memory. And though we have a technol-ogy that can study for us, we ought not to neglect study because it is not simply a means to an end, this end being published scholarship. Rather, having studied, having committed things to memory, this thing that we generally call education is a good in and of itself because it is a component of human flourishing. This point seems rather obvious, but it still seems to be some-thing that has been missed. We have evidence of this by the mand-ate of scholarly publication, this mandate to produce novel re-
search. Implicit in this mandate is that it is the published scholarship that we value, not the process of learning the craft of scholarship undergone by the scholar. To be blunt, no one cares if you’ve read and committed to memory everything there is in your area of study. No one would value “handmade” scholarship produced without a search engine. What is valued is that you produce something new in your field. Is this not the standard and quick way to reject a piece of scholarship submitted for publication: “You do not build upon existing research in this area”? True, one could say that to produce something new, to move the state of the art in a particular field forward, one needs to have read and committed to memory everything there is to know about that field. So it could be that education is indeed valued, but taken as a given. It is just that the requirement of producing something new is a high requirement. What is required in academe is that you master your craft, and you advance it. I grant that this is the strongest argument, but if this is so, that would mean that we are approaching a crisis. The crisis is that now novel research can be produced without the craft of education. This need not be a crisis if we re-evaluate what we value.

Resolving the problem for governance lies here as well. The crisis, as we have seen, is that governance cannot govern the efficient network, but why should it? Why must governance have
any relation to the network in the first place? The crisis is initiated because we’ve gotten into a political monism. Not everything is constituted from the political. Not everything needs to involve it. It’s true that we can look at much of the world through the lens of the political, but we needn’t do this. At bottom, to place a great amount of value in the political is not to insist that everything be politicized. The ungovernable is a threat to governance so long as governance is valued as the only thing that there is.

And this is the curious drawing together of the political and intellectual inquiry. Intellectual inquiry does not realize its goal with efficiently accessible networked knowledge, for what this makes possible tends to diminish the value of education, the actual target of intellectual inquiry. Education involves a type of necessary ignorance. Education is not enhanced by speed. Intellectual inquiry must be aimed away from the efficient network. Governance does not realize its goal by governing everything. It mustn’t try to subsume the efficient network, for ought implies can, and the network contains the ungovernable. Governance, too, must be aimed away from the efficient network. This isn’t to say that the efficient network needs to be destroyed in order for both intellectual inquiry and governance to proceed, only that neither of them should try to encounter it and adapt to it. What resolves the crises is a move away from
adaptation to the network. Both should be aimed away from there
terminal limit. Moreover, as we’ve discussed, the two should be
aimed away from each other. Intellectual inquiry is aimed toward
the contemplative, of creating from the unknown. The political
is aimed toward action, toward the urgent. What, then, should we
say about intellectual inquiry about the political, something in
which this essay partakes?

Recall that we had claimed that the initial limit from
which both intellectual inquiry and the political proceeded
forth was the inefficient network, that both had developed from
this point. What is the inefficient network? It is the lack of
network itself. A non-functioning network is not a network as
such, but something that memorializes the ideal of network effi-
ciency. To say that intellectual inquiry and the political pro-
ceeded forth from this is to say that they proceeded forth from
an ideal, from something only possible. Both began in the same
place filling in what had not been achieved by the ideal of the
efficient network, but each filled in what the other was unable
to achieve. Thus, intellectual inquiry about the political bene-
fited the political insofar as intellectual inquiry itself
doesn’t have the requirement of urgency. It has time to deliber-
ate, and this deliberation can be used for action. There’s no
reason that intellectual inquiry should stop serving this func-
tion. Further, intellectuals are always of their time. Thus, the
political benefits intellectual inquiry insofar as when intellectual inquiry takes up the political as its focus it grounds the thought of the intellectual in his or her time. There’s also no reason why this should stop being the case.

In the next chapter, we will explore intellectual inquiry and its necessarily incomplete nature in more depth. Namely, we will explore the scholar’s relation to books. We’ll have some help from Walter Benjamin, a scholar whose fascination with books is evident from his often fragmentary work.
Chapter 3: Books and the Library

I. THE ADDRESS

There’s a vignette that I’ve been reading over and over in what’s considered to be the final version of Berlin Childhood around 1900. It’s titled “Boys’ Books”.

“My favorites,” Benjamin writes, “came from the school library. They were distributed in the lower classes. The teacher would call my name, and the book then made its way from bench to bench; one boy passed it on to another, or else it traveled over the heads until it came to rest with me, the student who had raised his hand. Its pages bore traces of the fingers that had turned them” (Benjamin, 2006, p. 58).

There’s a fitting description here of information transmission, one that we might apply to the notion of network. It’s only after the boy is addressed by the teacher that the book makes its way to him via the mechanism of tiny hands. The network facilitates transmission because it makes use of the address. Places are pointed out and named.

What I find more interesting, though, is the last sentence I quoted: “Its pages bore the traces of the fingers that had turned them.” We might assume that these traces are not actual fingerprints, ones made, let’s say, from the residual stickiness
of ein Berliner, the pastry. Because this is around 1900, we might guess that Benjamin is referring to page yellowing. Acid-free paper, of course, wasn’t commonly used for book printing until the time around my childhood, the 1970s, and one reason why the older paper yellows is that it reacts to the oils on your fingers. Fingerprints tell you who touched what, but yellowing only tells you that the book was touched, that its pages were turned. I believe this might tell us something about what happens to intellectual inquiry when the network becomes fully efficient.

The passage quoted above, as I mentioned, is from the final version of Berlin Childhood. It’s presumably a revision or a replacement of the vignette from the 1932-34 version, “School Library”. At first glance, Benjamin’s tone seems different:

It was during recess that the books were collected and then redistributed to applicants. I was not always nimble enough on this occasion. Often I would look on as coveted volumes fell into the hands of those who could not possibly appreciate them. (Benjamin, 2006, p. 143)

This is a description of stolen enjoyment. It’s young Walter who has the wherewithal to appreciate these books, yet they fall into the hands of his philistine peers. In the final version, there isn’t a blatant dismissal of his peers’ abilities, yet we might unveil a similarity if we compare the two closely. Notice
that in the final version the pages are “turned”. This doesn’t mean, necessarily, that they were read. If we take both passages together, then there’s some worry over stolen enjoyment, but in the final version, it is an indeterminate other, an unaddressable other who turns pages. And it is precisely this idea that I’d like to explore with regard to what might happen to intellectual inquiry: What is being stolen from the practice of intellectual inquiry with the coming of the infinite library of the network?

II. The Index of the World

Technologies have their greatest impact when they become mundane. I use the term mundane here deliberately. In other words, technologies have their greatest impact not only when they are everyday, but when they become of the world. Though the two are distinct, when we think of the network we should also say something about globalization. We might think of globalization as that which is world forming, and we find ourselves in a world that will have been formed in a particular way, a world that is, as Jean-Luc Nancy puts it in The Creation of the World or Globalization, “the common place of a totality of places” (Nancy, 2007, p. 42). We find ourselves in a world that will have been made by an efficient network. And as we shall see, the network is about places, places that have been given an address. The to-
talized entity of places to which we refer as the “global” is not possible without the network.

What’s important about the network is the potential it generates, not the actualization of that potential. We may feel as though the world is getting smaller, but it’s still gigantic. What we’re actually experiencing isn’t a shrinking of the world, but the growing accessibility of things located in the world of the network. If one isn’t convinced, imagine if we were to surf all websites, mail parcels to all addresses, and go everywhere marked out by a map. Though the network is massive, not all nodes and connections are continuously accessed. This would mean that the size of the world would be in a perpetual flux tied to activity only, not countable places. The world does not only consist of what nodes are interacting at any one moment through particular connections. What is massive about the network is the collection of what’s indexed, what’s pointed to, what has an address. If the network has become so massive that it has created the world, then that network is efficient. It is efficient in terms of being a causa efficiens.

The network creates the world by its gathering together of things to which it gives an address, through indexing. Because the network creates the world through indexing, we can better understand the concept of network through a particular part of the network in which the index is the most salient: the infinite
library of the network. Though it doesn’t yet exist, this net-
worked library would be totalized and searchable. It would be
the size of the world of written texts and would be fully in-
dexed. It would be a totalized textual archive retroactively
created by a concordance—or exhaustive index—of that archive.

III. THE SET OF BOOKS

At this point, not all books are searchable. The technology
exists, however, to make this so. Libraries can be digitally
scanned, archived, and fully indexed in a search engine. In the
efficient network, recorded information itself becomes a total-
ized and searchable library in which knowledge becomes unbound.
The efficient network gives us an infinite library. But what is
an infinite library?

One way to think about a library is to think about it as a set
of books. To think about a complete library would be to think
about a library that contains the set of all books. But what
does it mean to think of an infinite library? On the one hand,
the answer might seem to be a simple one. An infinite library
would be one that contains an infinite amount of books. But here
already, the simplicity of the answer starts to break down. We
know that this isn’t possible, for to contain an infinite amount
would be self-contradictory. As we have already pointed out,
what is infinite is by definition without bounds, so it can’t be
the case that an infinite number of anything can be contained, for to contain something implies that there are boundaries. So within the realm of possibility—both conceptual and material—an infinite library would seem to be one that would always allow the addition of one more book. It would be a conception of a library that involves a set that isn’t closeable insofar as that set of books cannot contain the last book. In some sense, this is what we have already. The medium—paper, digital, or otherwise—doesn’t matter so much.

True, digital libraries seem to lend themselves better to the realization of this type of library than do paper libraries only because paper libraries take up more space, have to be maintained, stocked, etc. It isn’t impossible, though, to have this type of paper library; it’s only difficult to realize. Further, electronic libraries seem to be infinite insofar as the number of copies of individual books is not finite. It doesn’t contain duplicate copies of books, in fact. Duplicate copies are generated within the point of access—a personal computer, let’s say—and there can be as many copies of a particular title as there are points of access. For instance, a library may have ten copies of a certain title, but when those ten are charged, to charge an eleventh book would involve some patience on the part of the prospective borrower. With an electronic library, the only limits to the amount of copies that can be charged are how
many points of access exist, but this isn’t a limitation of the library itself. The points of access—are mere nodes, something we are taking to be different from the infinite library of the network.

Further, it would seem that there isn’t anything that stops us from writing yet another book. So long as there’s some medium upon which and time during which to write, provided there is a place for it, we can always add one more book to the collection of books that have been written already. And though it may some-day contain all texts, the infinite library is frozen in incompleteness. It is a perfected or finished incompleteness, something which might seem counterintuitive, but we’ll explain this below. This, I think is an important point, the point that with our current conception of the library in general, there’s no such thing as a last book. With the infinite library of the network, it isn’t a necessary condition that there be a last book, nor is there a promise of a last book. Rather, there’s a promise that there will be no last book, but not because there will always be more books to write and index. There can be no last book, for there are no books in the library of the network.

Let’s clarify. The infinite library of the network is created by the index of the network. It’s something that’s merely gathered together by the index. The network, being only the structure created by an index, cannot contain the actual books. It’s
the library—taken merely as a set of books—that would contain the books. However, we aren’t talking of just any library. The library of the network, insofar as it results from the network’s index, is different. It’s different, for that which is indexed becomes transformed. Remember, it isn’t only book titles that are indexed by the network, but all text. With the coming of the infinite library of the network, we have a concordance for all public text. For this reason, it’s a library that can’t be unpacked.

IV. THE INCOMPLETE

Benjamin’s essay “Unpacking My Library” is a poignant one for the bibliophile. Property and possession do indeed belong to the tactile sphere, and it isn’t difficult to agree that collectors are people with a tactile instinct. True, some of his descriptions may be rare occurrences nowadays. We may no longer be discovering cities, for example, by searching for books in stationery stores or antique shops. Nonetheless, there’s something about holding a book in one’s hand and owning it. And this might be why one can feel so threatened by the library of the network. Might we feel threatened by the prospect of no longer having actual books, by the prospect of having no libraries to unpack? Yes, it could be this threat to the tactile, to the materiality of books, but this seems to be only half of the story. I think
there’s something else going on that’s parallel. Benjamin’s last sentence in the penultimate paragraph is this: “Only in extinction is the collector comprehended” (Benjamin, 2005, p. 492). Similar to this, I think what could possibly be anxiety producing about library of the network is that the possibility of the extinction of the book is forcing us to comprehend the non-material concept of the book itself. But before we get into this description of the book, we should attempt to address who this collector is, precisely. To understand the collector, we must understand the notion of collecting, and the paired notions of incompleteness and completeness. Let’s again look to Benjamin:

What is decisive in collecting is that the object is detached from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest conceivable relation to things of the same kind. This relation is the diametric opposite of any utility, and falls into the peculiar category of completeness. What is this “Completeness”? It is a grand attempt to overcome the wholly irrational character of the object’s mere presence at hand through its integration into a new, expressly devised historical system: the collection. (Benjamin, 2002a, pp. 204-5)

It’s somewhat ironic that the passage above comes from Benjamin’s great, incompleted work, The Arcades Project. Still, it gives us a good description of collecting. It’s the process of
removing an object from the realm of its utility and placing it into relation with things of the same kind, placing it into the category of completeness.

What’s more ironic, we might point out, is that to someone like a book collector, the most collectible items are precisely the ones that can’t be collected, at least in the sense of a gathering together of like objects. To the collector in general, the most collectible are the items that are one of a kind. In classified ads, for instance, we see descriptions like, “Only of its kind, a rare collectible.” So what makes the non-collectible collectible so precious? The attribution of preciousness might be explained as something that’s on the brink of the anxiety provoking.

Anxiety is an affect responding to loss. In particular, it’s a response to the loss of loss itself. In other words, anxiety appears when where there should be a loss, there’s instead something like an object. Loss applies to something that had been but is no longer. And from this we see that it can’t be the lack of a loss. It isn’t that loss was never there. Rather it’s the case that there had been loss, but that loss is no longer. One is forced back into a wholeness that should not be. And here we get back to why the precious is on the brink of the anxiety provoking.
The precious, non-collectible collectible is an object that appears in the midst of loss. Something that is not isn’t in the midst of anything. If something doesn’t exist and never has, then we have no context for it. As in the quote from Benjamin above, there would be no “expressly devised historical system”, for what is context but this historical system? The fact that the non-collectible collectible is one of a kind puts it in the context of a possible abundance. It creates this historical system, but can only fill it with one item. The non-collectible’s collectibleness implies that there should be a number of these items to be gathered together, but the fact that there’s only one imposes the constraint of can on that should. Thus, the one of a kind item is always in need of others. It becomes the most collectible for the very reason that the act of gathering together cannot be completed. The reasoning behind this being that if something is collectible and one has finished collecting, then upon finishing the act of collection, there’s nothing “-ible” about it. The completed action of collecting results not in collectibility, but in the having of a collection. What we see, then, is that the most collectible item belongs to the incomplete, for there is no gathering together in the presence of only one. But what does it mean to be incomplete?

We can start to answer the question by referring to its opposite: completeness. That which is completed is that which, most
generally, has come to an end. So completedness is always something that exists in a perfected state, whether past and present, or future perfect. It’s something that’s come to an end and remains having done so, or it’s something that will have come to an end eventually. The incomplete, then, would seem to be that which could never exist in a perfected state. One might argue that there’s no sense in which something can be “incompleted”, for if incompleteness were to become perfected, that would only mean that it would pass over into completion. But is this so? Is it possible that something can indeed be incom- pleted?

If we start something that has no possibility of finishing, then might we not say that its incompleteness exists in a perfected state? It is comparable to the reading of Benjamin’s Arcades Project, for instance. We can never finish reading it because Benjamin was never finished writing it. It is something that is perpetually incomplete, and it will remain so. After all, this is what it means to be perfected: for something to remain perpetually what it has become once it has passed into a certain state of existence. In this sense can something be incom- pleted.

Globalization is the same. We might speak of the global insofar as we have entered a stage in which the making of the world is frozen in this incompleteness. Might we not say that to impose
a structure upon something—a structure such as the one formed by the index of the network—is at the same time to impose upon that thing incompleteness. Structures are always formed around a negation, for things only come to be determinate through negation. But with the very structuring through negation, we are forced to deal with the negation of negation itself, and as such, this is that which cannot be absorbed by the structure. This is the very outside of structure that can never become determinate. And if all things that are determinate can come to be symbolized—if something is determinate, then we can have a name for it—then the negation of negation is that which resists being written, spoken, or gestured toward. The negation of negation would be everything as indeterminate. It would be everything as an indivisible something, for if negation is not, then nothing can be divided. Division only exists through negation. True, we can give a name to the state of affairs that exists because of the negation of negation. But this is only to name the state of affairs itself. What the negation of negation entails is that nothing within that state of affairs is namable. Whether that state of affairs is namable or not is inconsequential, for we are naming that state of affairs from the outside, not from within it. So at bottom, what we are acknowledging is that when we impose a structure upon the world, we introduce at the same time that which resists structure. This is the global. Put an-
other way, when we make things determinate through the process of negation, we introduce the possibility of the negation of negation itself, something that leaves us with everything as indeterminate. Still, let’s return to the library.

When we introduce an order to the library, we introduce along with it a boundary. The idea of order makes it necessary for there to be a set that can be ordered and that that set to contain more than one member. The members of this set are books. But the stipulation that there be more than one member to this set, a stipulation made necessary by the requirement of order sets a limit. Though it doesn’t impose a limit on the side of a progression—there can always be one more book—it does impose a limit on the side of inception. There’s a limit on the side that one must begin with at least two of something. Thus, the first of the set is equal to two. Order cannot be made within a set wherein division is not possible, in a set that must consist of one and only one. Thus, any ordered library is finite. And, again, I do not mean by order a system of organization. It isn’t as though alphabetizing or imposing a system of categorization by subject matter makes a library finite. Rather, what I’m suggesting is that the requirement that order imposes of there being at least two is what makes a library finite. Thus, an infinite library that’s always infinite in and of itself—infinite without partaking in the spurious infinity of always one more—is
one that isn’t bound to the rule of divisibility. An infinite library is one wherein division doesn’t exist. An infinite library is a set that consists always only of one. But what would this mean? It would mean that we don’t think about the library as a set of books, but as a set that contains one member. It is at this point that we can return to our question about the extinction of the book.

In “School Library”, Benjamin describes his experience of the assigned readers as this: “I had to remain confined within particular stories, as if within barracks that—even before the title page—bore a number over the doorway” (Benjamin, 2006, p. 143). There’s something binding about this description of the book, and we might supplement this idea with what Jacques Derrida puts forth in Paper Machine. It’s the idea of a gathering together that’s the book’s most salient quality. A book is a gathering together under a title, a title bearing the book’s name, its identity, its legitimacy, its copyright. This gathering together extends to the library, the gathering together of a store of books (Derrida, 2005, pp. 6-7). But, Derrida asks, might we still call a library that which no longer gathers together this store of books? For what would be a gathering together of texts with no paper support, electronic texts that are not finite, that may be open textual processes over global networks, texts that may be actively or interactively co-authored
by readers? Could it be that the book as we know it has no fu-
ture, or that if it has a future, it will no longer be what it
was? Could it be that we’re awaiting this other book that will
rescue the book from what is now happening? And what of this
book to come, a book whose past has not yet reached us, but
whose past we nonetheless must think about? Might we not say
that the library of the network is exactly what is this book to
come? Ideally, it’s a gathering together of the totality of all
books that at the same time creates a dispersion, a dispersion
because its searchability has no respect for titles, or that
which is the delimiter of the book qua book.

So here we have thus far had two descriptions of books, one
from Benjamin and the other from Benjamin as supplemented by
Derrida. The book is that tactile object that one can possess
and at the same time an abstract something gathered together un-
der a title. With both descriptions, the book can be collected
in a library, but one is the private library of a collector, a
library that can be unpacked. In the other description, the book
belongs to a public library that has the potential to contain
everything in a way that can’t be unpacked. In the literal
sense, the library of network can’t be unpacked. It’s a unified
whole; other than orthographical symbols, there are no discrete
units as far as the searching is concerned. Figuratively, this
library belongs to no one in particular, so there’s no one to do
the unpacking. The book collector ceases to exist, becomes extinct as Benjamin might say, and this is so not only because there is no need to gather together books, but because the library has moved away from the model in which books are members of a set that constitutes the library. Rather, through the coming of the library of the network, the conception of the library has shifted to the totality of the published, to the totality of publicly readable text. It is precisely in this way that the library becomes infinite. It becomes a set that can only have one member. It is infinite insofar as that one member necessarily no longer retains divisions. True, the member of that set is in perpetual flux. It does indeed change every time more text is added to it. Still, it remains the totality of all that has been published, only it gets bigger with each indexed addition. But we again return to the book collector. We have explained collecting in general, but who is this threatened collector?

V. The Scholar as Collector

Though the practice of intellectual inquiry is not limited to the scholar, it’s the labor most appropriate for the scholar. It stands to reason, then, that it’s the scholar who is most affected by a change in the means of intellectual inquiry, a change that will come from the existence of a totalizing and searchable library. For the scholar, this would mean that a
large part of scholarly labor will become migrated to the ma-
chine. Interfacing with a digital library through a search en-
gine would allow us to access knowledge in a different way. It
isn’t merely that it allows space to be traversed with greater
speed, but memory becomes a prosthetic memory. If anyone can be
as smart as they are able to use a search engine, might this be
the extinction of the scholar? Will the intellectual be anyone
with access to the network? Is this how we will comprehend the
scholar, only after the scholar becomes outmoded? But perhaps
the scholar is not the same as this collector. Consider what
Benjamin says of the historian Eduard Fuchs:

From the outset, he was not meant to be a scholar. Nor did
he ever become a scholarly ‘type,’ despite the great
learning that informs his later work. His efforts
constantly extended beyond the horizon of the researcher.
(Benjamin, 2002b, p. 263)

If what made Fuchs not be the scholarly type was what extended
him beyond the horizon of the researcher, then might this not be
the act of collecting? This isn’t the archival collecting that
creates what Nietzsche called the “historical malady.” Fuchs is
clearly not this type of historian, but a collector of a differ-
ent sort. Perhaps the scholar can evade extinction by becoming
this other type of collector. Perhaps it’s the case that the
scholar who is threatened with extinction wasn’t a collector in
this sense to begin with. Perhaps the archival collector should indeed face extinction. With the coming of the infinite library of the network, there is no need to esteem this type of collecting. It is no longer socially useful. What we should esteem in scholars is something different. Now, as scholars, we generally try to read as much as we possibly can, so we can have found everything that’s suited to our interest, and our interests often become shaped by our attempts to read everything we’re able.

Still, the goal should be to prune away the inessential, to establish a collection of the useful, to make our personal canon. Consider what Benjamin writes about the book in *One Way Street*.

And today the book is already, as the present mode of scholarly production demonstrates, an outdated mediation between two different filing systems. For everything that matters is to be found in the card box of the researcher who wrote it, and the scholar studying it assimilates it into his own card index. (Benjamin, 2004, p. 456)

This is what the scholar as collector accomplishes. The good scholar who is also a collector collects such a “card box” and transcends the book. It is in this way that we can transcend being the type of archival collecting that we might associate with scholarship. If the book is but an outdated mediation, perhaps the mediation of the infinite library of the network should re-
main precisely that: a mediation. The scholar in general needs not face extinction because the network is but an in-between that should for the most part vanish. The network doesn’t threaten to wipe out the scholar. Rather, it facilitates the creation of scholars. But this isn’t to say that the network is a genie granting us genius. Genius must be protected. Certain uses of the network can threaten genius, in fact.

With the networked library, all knowledge exists as an accessible totality at once, and although this has always been the case, it hasn’t been practicably accessible because of ignorance. Ignorance as a mediator doesn’t usually vanish. Not knowing that a text exists doesn’t allow for a true synchrony. However, with the networked library, ignorance does tend to vanish. Knowledge becomes immediate insofar as it’s no longer mediated by ignorance. Nothing is lost because it can be searched electronically. This is how there is the loss of lack in the infinite library of the network. It is herein that the anxiety lies.

So what we might see, then, is that genius has thus far proceeded from ignorance and aimlessness. Again, we might find resonances with this in a quotation from The Arcades Project:

Basic to flânerie, among other things is the idea that the fruits of idleness are more precious than the fruits of labor... Most men of genius were great flâneurs—but industrious, productive flâneurs. (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 453)
Like the strolling flâneur, we must read industriously, but resist the mechanistic systemization that can come with certain usages of the infinite, networked library. We must continue to be scholars, but resist that position as a position resulting from the division of labor. True, we are subjected to this labor and may find ourselves alienated in it by the requirements of rigor, but we must approach intellectual inquiry as a labor of love. We may be able to enjoy a certain amount of ease with the infinite library of the network, but this is an enjoyment we must refuse. We must learn to say no to this enjoyment. Let’s return to that vignette I’ve been reading over and over, the one titled “Boys’ Books”. Here’s the beginning of the ending paragraph:

Or is it with older, irrecoverable volumes that my heart has kept faith? With those marvelous ones, that is, which were given me to revisit only once, in a dream? What were they called? I knew only that it was those long-vanished volumes that I had never been able to find again.

(Benjamin, 2006, p. 60)

There’s something about keeping faith with that to which we must have a relation of not knowing. Certain usages of the infinite networked library threaten to rob us of this not knowing. It is not so that because we can enjoy something, we must. For it’s an enjoyment of ease afforded to us by the infinite library
of the network that steals the enjoyment of discovery, a discovering enjoyment that reproduces itself, an enjoyment like that of when we were children reading at a time when we “still made up stories in bed” (Benjamin, 2004, p. 464). What is lost is a loss similar to the “I don’t know” of childhood. We might try to retain an enjoyment of the library similar to that of what Benjamin describes of Karl Hobrecker, a collector of children’s books: “That childlike pleasure is the origin of his library, and every such collection must have something of the same spirit if it is to thrive” (Benjamin, 2004, p. 406). The infinite library of the network can turn the pages for us, and it can do this even before we get to read them. Still, we must yearn to grasp these books for ourselves, though we may often not be nimble enough to do so.

As we’ve seen, the most collectible items aren’t collectible in the sense that we can gather them together. The most collectible are one of a kind. With the library of the network, we already know beforehand that an abundance is lost. When everything is unveiled with the searchability of the infinite library of the network, what’s lost in abundance is the ignorance of not knowing what’s out there. What’s lost is the abundance of potential discovery. What becomes most collectible, what becomes one of a kind, then, are our strolls as scholars, as intellectuals. For there’s still something that can’t be gathered together by
the index of the network, and that’s the particular path we stroll. A stroll is movement, and because movement isn’t divisible, it can’t be gathered. It can’t, in other words, be indexed. Strolling resists the network. We must now learn how to move boundlessly in this way through the boundless networked library. It’s only by means of such singular movement through knowledge that we can have a relationship to the oppressive wholeness of totalized knowledge and remain scholars.

To have mapped the world is not to move through it. To apprehend the globe with the view of the gods is not to see it as the human traveling on foot. This is what must remain. We cannot allow the network to steal our intellectual wanderings. The infinite library of the network should merely give us a bigger city, not an itinerary.
I. IS TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESSION A MOVEMENT?

What is technological progression? Progress contains within it the idea of advancement, but with regard to technology, is there indeed this type of movement forward? With this question we might ask from what are we moving and also toward what. How we might answer these questions depends upon what we think of as the end of technology, and this is assuming that we take it for granted that technology does indeed have an end. Still, if there is this type of movement, technological progression would certainly not be linear. Technological practices converge with other practices that are also in states of development, and it isn’t as though all technological practices keep pace with one another. The state of development of certain practices might hold other practices back, for instance, and with these intersections, it would be difficult to argue that technological progression has an absolutely linear trajectory. Still, one might argue that though it proceeds in fits and starts, technology does have an overall movement, and it’s one that moves forward. After all, even if I’ve pushed around a cinder block erratically and in circles from here to there, one can still plot a displacement vector provided that the block isn’t in same place as when I started. From the standpoint of physics, I’ve done some
work. It doesn’t matter how circuitous I may or may not have been. To make an analogy with technology, it might not matter that we’ve sometimes gone backward after having gone forward and that not all practices kept pace with the others, for overall, there’s progress.

Though this might seem like a reasonable way to think about technological progression, I’d like to suggest that it’s more useful to think in terms that don’t involve movement at all. In this way, we wouldn’t need to question from what and toward what when we think of technology’s progress. Rather, the question would be one purely of value. What I’m suggesting is that technological progression is indeed a trajectory, but not a developmental one. I’m suggesting that technological progression cannot be developmental as such because technology itself has no end. Rather, technology is only an aim, is purely an aim. As such, technological progression is not an instrumental good. But why do I think technological progression isn’t best thought of as movement?

Technological progression isn’t best thought of as a movement insofar as movement is indivisible. At least this is how Bergson (1991) explains it. “Every movement,” he says, “inasmuch as it is a passage from rest to rest, is absolutely indivisible” (p. 188). He gives the example of moving one’s hand from point A to point B. One can perceive this movement as a traversal of
space, and space can be divided indefinitely. So one might also think movement to be divisible. However, this is to confuse the divisible space with the indivisible movement. And when considering Zeno’s paradox in, this is exactly what Bergson (2001) warns against. Achilles never passes the tortoise in the paradox insofar as the indefinitely divisible space is confused for two motions that are separate and indivisible. So what does it mean to say that technological progression isn’t movement? It’s to say that it isn’t a continual something. It’s to say that technological progression is divided. But let’s be concrete and take as an example the inventions of the mechanical typewriter and the word processing computer. It isn’t that we’ve gone from the mechanical typewriter to the computer in one indivisible movement. Rather, kinds of typewriters have come and gone as have different kinds of computers, and the comings and goings of both types of writing technology have overlapped each other. In other words, it isn’t as though we used the mechanical typewriter, invented the electric typewriter and stopped using mechanical typewriters altogether, and so on until we get to the computer. It isn’t as though the typewriter is point A and the computer point B and everything in between is what constitutes technological progression. Technological progression is better thought of as characterized by events. To use the writing technology example, the invention of the typewriter is one event, the inven-
tion of the computer another event, and the differences between the knowledge memorialized in the production of these two things is technological progression. What occurs between these two events are differences in efficiency and the defining of practices as obsolescent. And these differences constitute values. We need to explain what we mean by values, but we can only do so with a clearer idea of what we mean by efficiency and obsolescence.

The technological involves efficiency. It involves efficiency in the sense of a *causa efficiens* or efficient cause. The technological is a producing, a bringing forth from what is, for yet another way to think about technology is it is that which facilitates. But in addition to this, technology is also concerned with a revealing of truth. Rojcewicz (2006) notes that this is precisely how we should take production in Heidegger’s sense: It is a drawing forth which is also a disconcealment or revealing of truth. Technology is that which lends itself to bringing about making and doing while at the same time revealing. Thus, the progress of technology is a ceaseless drive to make more progress. However, technology itself does not answer the question of why things should progress in the first place. This is so because technological progression is an aim without a target. More recent scholarship on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* have followed the distinction that between *telos* and *skopos*. 
Whereas *telos* refers to an aim, *skopos* refers to a target. The two concepts are easily confused, especially when we think of teleology as being end related. Pakaluk (2005) tries to differentiate the two by translating the former as “goal-like” and the latter as “target” (pp. 317, 321). Its aim is without a target because its aim is only towards an aim which is itself. Technology is an aim aimed at aim. How so? It’s the progression of progress. But what can we mean by this if we are claiming that technological progression is not a movement? Isn’t progression a movement? Progression is not a movement if we maintain a distinction between *progressing* and a *progression*. Progressing is something that occurs through time. It’s diachronic. A progression is synchronic. It’s something ascertained at a point in time, deduced from the existence of two events that have already occurred and exist as contemporaneous inasmuch as both are remembered. What does this mean?

Techniques exist simultaneously. The techniques are memorialized by the products of those techniques, and in order to be a technique as such, a certain type of remembering is necessary. There’s no technique without the possibility of repetition. As Heidegger (1982) notes, a craft isn’t a craft if it isn’t practiced. Further still, the remembrance of a particular technique isn’t a remembrance of only itself. It’s also a remembrance of other techniques. Any technique brings with it a history of
other techniques that have made that technique possible. Those other techniques may be incorporated into that technique and in this way remembered, or a technique itself may have arisen as a replacement to another technique. If the case is the latter, then the replaced technique is remembered by the replacing technique in the form of obsolescence. Obsolescence is not when a technique is falsified. Techniques are practices and are neither true nor false. Rather, techniques become replaced when another technique helps us achieve something we value in a way that is more efficient. But if this is so, techniques and, hence, technology would be instrumental goods, and this is precisely what I said I was not claiming. In other words, one might object that if we value, then we are valuing something. The fact that techniques are replaced is evidence of the evaluative, and because techniques produce a result, we must view technology as instrumental. This is a strong objection, but could it be that though techniques cannot exist without the produced, the value belonging to the technological can exist without an object? I’ll suggest that value can be directed upon itself and in this way value becomes universal instead of being something historically and culturally contingent. But to explain this, I need to explain the notion of aim.
II. Aim

An aim is a trajectory. A trajectory is a path through which something can move. But to have a path is not necessarily to have a movement through that path. To have movement, there must be two things: 1. a path through which the movement can occur and 2. something to move through that path. To have a path, then, is a necessary condition for movement, but it isn’t sufficient. There needs to be something that can move. If in technological progression, we say that the technology is what can move forward, then we’re reifying technology. Above, I rejected an instrumental view of technology, and here I am rejecting a substantive view of technology. We’re saying that it’s technology itself that moves through the path, but this is to confuse technology for a material thing. It’s in this way that it helps to think of technology as an aim only. Technology is a path insofar as it’s the potential for movement, not movement itself. Further, it’s only a potential for movement because nothing actually moves through technology. To make a metaphor, one can build a road through which no one travels. Again, I consider technology to be a progression. I’m taking technology to be that which is deduced synchronically from events having occurred. It’s a snapshot, so to speak, of how a constellation of techniques are arranged with relation to each other. I view technology as the state of the art.
To be clear, what I reject from an instrumental view of technology is the finality of ends that it assumes. Technology is not a mere means by which we attain something we value because the end of technology is progression, something itself an aim. Further, if I am claiming that technological progression is an aim, then perforce I cannot hold a substantive view. An aim is not something material. So to take stock of what I am claiming thus far, technological progression is not an indivisible movement insofar as its progression is not determined by a traversing, by the getting from one point to another. It isn’t a development. Rather, technological progression occurs when there’s a determinateness between simultaneously existing techniques (or groupings of techniques) that have the same end. That which makes those techniques determinate is a difference in efficiency. This difference in efficiency gives rise to certain techniques being valued as obsolescent and others as state of the art. But we had put aside the question of valuing. How is valuing important to our discussion?

III. TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESSION AND THE POLITICAL AS ACTS OF VALUING

Technological progression, although not a movement is an aim. It’s a particular type of aim that has no target. Techniques themselves have targets; techniques are instrumental and as aims can attain their targets. However, once a technique be-
comes part of the technological and gets caught up in technological progression, there’s a residue. That residue is the demand for efficiency of technological progression. This is nothing but an act of evaluation, or valuing.

Values and ends are different. For instance, if I have a typewriter, I know its end is to produce typewritten documents. But still, I haven’t made a judgment upon the value of a typewriter. It may be, for instance that I believe the typewriter to be of negative value if I value only handwritten documents and feel that typed documents are deplorable. Conversely, if I value legibility, then a typewriter is a valuable object. And because the word processing computer is even more efficient than the typewriter at producing these typed documents, I would hold the computer to be more valuable. But this is an example of something, an example of technological progression. And as we know examples work only because they are a universalizable singular (Agamben, 1993). If we think outwardly, it must be that technological progression has value also. But what is the value of technological progression? The value of technological progression has to do with life, with a life that is particular to being human. And what distinguishes human life from other forms of life is that the human is a political animal. In this way, the technological is an aim directed in the same way as the politi-
cal. But what does it mean to say that the technological and the political are similar as aims?

It isn’t to assert the idea of a political technology, the way that the political deploys techniques to control bodies. It isn’t that which you find in the first volume of Foucault’s (1990) *History of Sexuality*. No, what I mean is that the political and the technological have the same aim insofar as both attempt to preserve and make better human life. For instance, techniques such as those in biomedical technology help keep us alive. Similarly, very broadly speaking, there are laws that are made to protect our lives from harm. But this is life in the sense of bare life. If we are thinking of the life that is particularly human, then we are thinking of a form of life to which technology and the political must have a different relationship. We are thinking about a form of life that consists of demands that can be articulated by a speaking subject. But what are those demands? This is to be political, properly speaking.

To be political is to make demands for justice, and like the technological, political progression is not best thought of as a movement. To think of it as a movement makes the project of the political to treat the political subject as that which is only given over to death. It is to treat the subject as only something that can die, and this form of life is not particularly human insofar as death is quality that human life shares
with other forms of life. Technology can make life better or worse. There's an ethic for technology precisely because of this. Namely, as Jonas (1984) shows, we have the duty to be responsible with regard to technology for the reason that technology has surpassed being a somewhat effective means to achieve moderate ends. Now, modern technology is an infinite thrust and has become central to human purpose. But again, if we have this drive, the question is to what are we driven? I think what Jonas suggests, though not explicitly, is that since technology is an infinite thrust, it can only be this drive. Something that is infinite is something without a target. Had it a target, then it would be something finite, something that would end once the target is reached. Thus, if technology is central to the end of what it means to be human, then the end of what it means to be human is something that isn't an end at all. And it is in this way that I believe we should look at human flourishing. We will take the view that human flourishing has less to do with something individual, but more to do with the concept of the neighbor. Further, to be properly human, both the technological and the political have to take a path that is similar to the psychoanalytical concept of desire. But before we do this, we must say more about what counts as the activity of valuing for the political. We have hinted that the concepts of efficiency and obsolescence are activities of valuing for technology, but what is
this when taken as an analogue for the political. I’m suggesting that the seeking of justice is the activity of valuing in the political.

IV. What is justice?

I should first explain what I mean by injustice because this has to do with the conception of Lacan’s symbolic. Injustice, for our purposes, is a part of justice, part of it because it is partial justice. It isn’t, in other words, that which is not justice. That which is negatively determined from justice is what one has in the state of nature. Justice is that which relates to the law, and in a state of nature, the law is not. If there is—perhaps only as a hypothetical place holder—a pure imaginary, then in this pure imaginary, there are no laws, for laws are only symbolic. For our purposes, the imaginary is equivalent to the state of nature. In the state of nature, if there is any type of social—as opposed to political—organization, it would be identificatory. We’re always presupposing the symbolic when there’s a subject. And when we aren’t merely creatures in the animalistic, imaginary state of nature, but subjects of the State, something that’s an entity insofar as it is only through its laws, the law always pertains to us. But to continue, justice is the target of a particular type of demand. It’s the target of a political demand. Demands themselves
are articulations of drives, and going further back, drives circle around their object because the purpose of a drive is to reproduce itself. In other words, a drive does not seek satisfaction in its object, because it only seeks to continue being a drive. This is the compulsive nature of the drive. Zizek (1991) calls this compulsion a mechanical insistence, one that cannot be caught up in the dialectic of desire. It is something that is demanded, and one persists in it to the end. It’s compelled to repeat itself. And though he is talking about Nietzsche, I think Heidegger (1987) has a useful insight regarding desire that’s compatible with what we’re saying. Namely he notes that for Nietzsche, willing is a kind of desiring and striving that is not a blind compulsion because, "What is desired and striven for is represented as such along with the compulsion" (p. 54). In other words, it is not the striving of animals toward food for nourishment. The animal does not represent the food to itself as such. Thus, if drives don’t get caught up in desire by being articulated in a request, we’re left with the pathological. When they do become caught up in desire, they aren’t pathological because they must have first become articulated in a request which is dialectical. The request has two parts. First, it’s articulated seeking to satisfy a need, but though that need may become satisfied, there’s a remainder that cannot be. That remainder is a request for love. So then, requests request two things, and
the difference between those two things is what is desire. Desire is that part of the request for love that exceeds the demand for a particular need to be satisfied. But this, we should remember, is the formulation for unconscious, amorous desire. What we’re after is justice, and the demands made regarding justice need to be transparent to consciousness. At this point, let us flesh out part of my argument and anticipate another part.

V. Valuing as directed upon itself and the creation of universal values

Earlier, I had suggested that values can become universal if valuing becomes an activity directed toward itself. I think this can happen if valuing takes a path similar to how drives become desire as described above. Thus, it must be that demands for justice must turn upon themselves and become an activity of valuing. It must do this to escape being an activity that is only concerned with treating human life as only that which is given over to death. For if the political, the seeking of justice, is to be a particularly human activity, it must distinguish itself from other forms of life. And although demands for justice are equivalent to demands for a particular type of benevolence involving need, what characterizes these demands pertaining to needs as distinct from the animalistic is that humans have a different relationship to ignorance. But before we get
too ahead of ourselves, let us explain how demands for justice are demands for benevolence.

Demands for justice are demands for benevolence, a particular type of benevolence pertaining to needs. When we’re concerned about justice, we attempt to determine the needs in terms of political rights and access to material goods that each individual has. Once we have done this, we go about trying to meet those needs. Thus, demands that have justice as their target do not get caught up in something like desire insofar as there’s no remainder left after subtracting need from the demand for love. In other words, need is not the smaller term when political demands are concerned. There is no demand for love in a political demand. However, in the demand for benevolence of justice, the need always exceeds any benevolence that can be given. All justice can do is guarantee that there shall be a protocol for meeting those needs should the needs come about. So what we see here is the inverse of our formula for desire. Namely, those formulas might be thought of as 1. Demand – Need = Demand for love (Desire) and 2. Need – Demand = Demand for benevolence (Justice). Lacan (1977) writes that “desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second” (287). I have formulated it above slightly differently, but I think it amounts to the same thing. This can be so because
use of subtraction isn’t quite mathematical. In Lacan’s formulation, desire is that which is the demand for love with need (appetite) subtracted from it. In other words, one is still starting with a demand, but what remains after the “subtraction” is a pure demand for love. For that reason, I think it’s simpler to think of the demand for love as equivalent to desire as long as we factor out need. With justice, what is in excess is never the demand, as in desire, but the need. For example, though I may have an apparatus that guarantees that I am never without food or shelter, you cannot shelter and feed me just once. I may only have to articulate my political demand a finite number of times, but the need persists and will persist, too, in others like me. What we have shown thus far, then, is that when there’s part of a demand that exceeds need, there’s desire; and when need exceeds the demand, we have an issue of justice.

But what we should not forget here is that this type of justice focuses upon a subject that is different from the way Lacan might mean it. Namely, this is the subject of the State, an entity in which the symbolic consists of a constitution, a network of laws: in sum, justice. This isn’t the subject of unconscious desire. So we see that we have at least two types of subjects. We have the subject of justice and the subject of desire. The differences between these two are in many ways diametrical. The subject of justice has an excess of need, does not
exist in the unconscious, and is caught up in the cycle of life and death. The subject of desire has an excess of demand, exists in the unconscious, and is immortal. We’ve already shown the difference between the demand for benevolence (justice) and the demand for love (desire). Further, we’ve implied that the subjects of justice and desire must respectively belong to the conscious and unconscious. The demands of the subject of justice are transparent on at least the literal level of the utterance, whereas the demands of the subject of desire’s demands are not transparent. But how is it that the first is caught up in life and death and the other is not? The answer has to do with the status of the neighbor and jouissance and its quality of being both enjoyment and suffering.

VI. THE NEIGHBOR AND JOUISSANCE

In his contribution to The Neighbor, Reinhard points out along with Žižek that there is a fundamental incommensurability between love and justice. Love privileges a singular neighbor, while justice is the remembrance of those who are left out when privileging the singular other. In other words, justice applies uniformly to a symbolic representation of another, and love applies to another with whom one can have a face-to-face encounter, a dualistic, imaginary other. But then this is to assert a particular conception of justice. If we have a symbolic concep-
tion of justice, then it cannot be only that which treats the human as given over to death. The subject is immortal insofar as the subject exists as a signifier, and to signify a thing is in some sense to immortalize it. It is to immortalize it insofar as to signify is to substitute a signifier for a thing. When this substitution occurs, the thing can die, but the substituted signifier cannot. The signifier is immortal insofar as it is unable to die. This is obviously true, for the signifier has not in the first place lived. This is the status of the neighbor in the political. It is a signifier. Thus, if justice is sought for the neighbor, and not an individual who can die, the political is removed from the realm of the purely animal. But still, we haven’t explained the concept of jouissance.

For Lacan, jouissance is both enjoyment and suffering. But how can it be these two things? It is both enjoyment and suffering because it causes suffering for one’s neighbor. But who is this neighbor other than the other that is oneself. The neighbor is the imaginary neighbor, the other with which the ego is confused. Thus, this neighbor is caught up in the problem of utility. One attempts to maximize the good for the neighbor, but this isn’t purely altruistic. One is also maximizing the good for oneself. In Lacan’s (1992) words in Seminar VII, “What I want is the good of others provided that it remain in the image of my own” (p. 187). So here is a paradox, one that Lacan
doesn’t mention explicitly, but one that’s nonetheless implied. Let’s suppose that altruism is our ethical imperative, that we must always be altruistic no matter what. If I attempt to show altruism toward my neighbor, then isn’t it the case that my neighbor must refuse that altruism, for altruism is equally a requirement for him or her? We might say that this is what Lacan means when he says, with respect to this sort of utilitarian altruism, “I am damned for having assured him to whom it would cost more time and trouble than me, what precisely? — some measure of ease that only means something because I imagine that, if I had that ease or absence of work, I would make the best possible use of it” (187). But this somewhat lighthearted observation isn’t the most significant implication of this paradox. What if this neighbor has a need that exceeds a demand, a demand that he or she doesn’t necessarily utter, but one that’s made upon us by the altruism encoded in justice? In mendicancy, for example, we better see how jouissance is suffering. A beggar is in no position to refuse altruism because this person’s existence is caught up with death. Thus, since this is the domain of justice, justice is caught up in the domain of life and death. It’s concerned with an animal existence, not with that which is immortal in the human. What we see is that the subject of desire tends toward jouissance. It’s unconcerned with issues of life or death. We can understand Lacan in this way when he says that
jouissance is the acceptance of death without sublimation (189). Further, we see again that pursuing desires cannot be out of compulsion like that which is animalistic.

But here we again see justice as caught up with the domain of life and death, as that which treats its subject as that which is given over to death. Why is it that justice seems to move back and forth between the animal and the particularly human. I suggest that it is a transitional space. Transitional spaces—perhaps in the same way that Schmitt (2005) suggests that borderline concepts are not vague concepts but ones pertaining to the outermost itself—might be interpreted in other ways than that which is a little bit of this, a little bit of that, or could be this or that. A border or transitional space can be thought about as the most extreme position of this space and that space, as the extremity of all the spaces adjacent to each other. It will become more clear why the political, and the technological are such spaces, but we should say more about human life first. Namely, it partakes in the infinite by way of the technological and the political, but it is a particular conception of the infinite.
VII. Human life as partaking in the infinite as mediated by the idea of ignorance

In Seminar XVII, Lacan (2007) follows Bichat and asserts that life as the totality of forces that resist death. This is the life that belongs to the political subject demanding justice. This is the subject that can suffer. But there is the other subject of desire that suffers, but in the way of a suffering enjoyment. And this desiring subject is the one answerable to Lacan’s ethical imperative to never give ground to your desire. But what does it mean to not give ground to your desire? In Ethics, writing that since desire is in the domain of the unconscious, Badiou (2001) interprets this imperative as not giving up on that part of yourself that you do not know. Butler (2005) adds that nowhere in this imperative does it suggest that desire must be satisfied, only that it mustn’t be stopped. However, I think the essence of the imperative is best explained by Egginton (2006). Egginton writes that this imperative considers desire as desire. It is acting upon one’s desires knowing full well that they will not be satisfied, “that despite and in the face of the most extraordinary experience of rapture, desire, as it always does, will go on” (165). We’ll again pick up with how the technological and the political overlap as aims with a discussion about Rawls, but we need to explain how the drive of technology is infinite, and in what way this relates to the
workings of desire as that which continues despite its lack of object. This will lead into a discussion of ignorance, that which I am claiming is what distinguishes the way human needs are structured as opposed to the animal. So the drive of technology is infinite, but infinite in what way?

It isn’t the sort of drive that seeks to perpetuate itself. This sort of drive is infinite insofar as it’s a totality consisting of parts that support each other rather than limiting each other. Rather, technology is infinite in the way that it is not finite. It’s infinite because it goes over and against the finite. It both exceeds the finite and is the opposition of the finite. It’s the infinite of having always one more possible. It’s what Hegel might call a bad or spurious infinity. Here the infinite is the negation of the finite, and because it is not contained in the finite, it finds its limits there. But for the infinite to have any limit would make it not infinite, for to be infinite is to be without limits (Science of Logic, 153). Technology, being this sort of infinite drive, or thrust, has the perpetual possibility of being more efficient, of producing more. In this way it can never reach its target, for the target is always just beyond the state of the art. We might think of a certain genre of marketing slogans, the ones that are various iterations of having tomorrow’s technology today. While the consumer gets the sense that what’s being promised to them is the
state of the art, he or she also knows that this isn’t actually possible, for tomorrow never is; it’s only always a speculation. But why is this important?

If we look at technology as a heaping up of techniques, as a standing reserve of knowledge, then we can always add more to this. It would be a type of infinite that exceeds the finite and is the opposition to it with regard to knowledge. You can always know more. This knowing more is always possible. But what’s wrong with this type of accumulation is that it, too, has a limit. That limit is ignorance. Thus, the infinite progress of knowledge is perpetually defined by what is just beyond that highest state of knowing: that which is not known. Thus, what stands at both sides of the state of the art is ignorance. The state of the art is the place in which ignorance is behind and in front of it. For when we move forth in knowledge, we leave ignorance of what we now know behind, but there is still ignorance in front of what we know, for how is one to know what one doesn’t know? How is one sure that there isn’t something left to know? The answer is that one can’t. With this conception of technology as an infinite drive, we can by definition never get to a goal, because it is an aim such that our goals are something that we never know. This is the technology explained by a metaphor of movement. But if we don’t use a metaphor of movement, then we needn’t fall into this trap.
If we turn technology into a drive that’s self-contained, then there isn’t the problem of forward from what and toward what. But in order to do this, we must have a conception of ignorance which doesn’t limit technology. It isn’t that because we have finite knowledge we are ignorant and that the potential for knowledge is always there, so it is infinite. Rather, we need to conceive of ignorance and knowledge as a unity. Ignorance and knowledge must be bound together in a relationship of mutual support. Ignorance isn’t the thing that needs to be perpetually turned into knowledge. This system is an absolute system, so it must be that ignorance and knowledge are equally important and contained within each other. How is this so? How can ignorance be important and not just something of which we need to rid ourselves?

One type of ignorance is an acknowledgement of a lack of knowledge. When I claim to be ignorant of something, I am claiming that I know that there is something to be known, but that I cannot know it. We can list many types of examples of this ignorance, but let’s only focus upon one example that will become relevant to our discussion. That example is ignorance of the contingent or accidental. This type of ignorance is also a type of knowledge. It is both because I know a set of possibilities, and I know further that the realization of one of the possibilities precludes the other possibilities from occurring. However,
until one of the possibilities is realized, I won’t know an outcome. I am thus ignorant of outcome until then. For instance, I know that the first coin that I flip today can come up either heads or tails, or it may be that I won’t flip a coin at all today. Until I flip a coin or the day passes without having flipped one, I am ignorant of the outcome. But let’s take an example in which the stakes are somewhat higher, an example that involves responsibility.

What if the example involves a potential threat to continuity of the human race? Let’s say, for instance, that the state of the art in genetic engineering is to have techniques to genetically modified certain foods such that the supply of those foods becomes more efficiently replenished. Say that I modify corn so that it grows much faster than unmodified corn. Let’s also suppose that employing such modifications on a certain number of foods will solve the global hunger problem. And further suppose that I’m not entirely certain that this series of genetic modifications won’t disrupt the food chain in such a way that causes a global catastrophe or some type of illness in the potentially massive numbers of people who will need to consume this food if the global hunger problem is to be solved. In this scenario, I’m faced with a dilemma: I can potentially solve the world hunger problem, but only by putting the entire human population at risk. Whether or not I start to employ this new tech-
nology depends upon how seriously I take the idea of responsibility. I can either put everyone at risk and hope that nothing goes wrong, or I can use some restraint and realize that the risk is too great. Either way, ignorance is put into play. Firstly, I must acknowledge that although have knowledge of the likely possibilities, I am ignorant of what the actual outcome might be until it happens. If I am responsible and I take into account that one of these possibilities poses too great a risk and restrain using the technology, then ignorance is also at play. I never took the risk, so I’ll never know what could have happened. In other words, it could be heads—global salvation, tails—global catastrophe, or I could choose not to flip the coin at all.

Had we gotten caught up in the notion of technological progression that is defined by movement, we might run the risk of forgetting about responsibility. While it’s doubtful that the hard lines of the previous example would actually be drawn as distinctly in actuality—either global salvation or global catastrophe—the example does have similarity to a truth. We do in fact eat genetically modified foods. It’s true that these foods have been tested and determined safe, but these foods have been placed in the market for consumption without knowing for certain the long range implications of doing so. Though the potential risks may have been determined to be minimal, no one knows for
certain that there won’t be any long range implications, because a significant amount of time hasn’t passed before these products were mass produced and mass consumed. With genetically modified foods, we have not chosen to not flip the coin. And without sounding too alarmist, we can at least take the point that ignorance and knowledge are intertwined in this example, that it can’t simply be the point to replace ignorance with knowledge. Were this the case one might then become inclined to choose to solve global hunger with an unknown outcome. In other words, the reasoning might be that we should replace the ignorance of not knowing whether or not genetically modified foods will cause a global catastrophe, possibly at the cost of global catastrophe being realized. Again, the lines might not be this distinct, but the fact is that we do eat genetically modified foods. And with this example, we can see how the needs of the human differ from the needs of the purely animal. As I had suggested along with Heidegger above, the animal does not represent food to itself as such. The need for food is shared with by the human and the animal. However, the human must also consider responsibility along with need, and as we have seen, this involves a kind of ignorance. How so? Technological progression is a progress of knowledge through the use of communication, but as such, it should not be an imperative to replace all ignorance with knowledge. Ignorance and knowledge are part of a system in which one is not
the limit of the other. In the system of ignorance and knowledge, both are necessary insofar as they support each other. Let us call this a mindful ignorance.

Let us call this ignorance mindful insofar as it isn’t an ignorance of not knowing. For instance, the animal, too, can be ignorant about global catastrophe, but this is an ignorance that results from the structural impossibility of knowing that is characteristic of the animal. Because the animal cannot represent anything to itself other than something that is in itself, knowledge is not possible. Since knowledge is not possible in the first place, only ignorance of all is possible. I, too, can have this type of ignorance. For instance, I may not know the author of *A Theory of Justice* because I have no idea that this book exists. It would be structurally impossible for me know this book’s author if I don’t first know about the book. But it may be that I may not know the author of the book because I haven’t yet learned it. In this way, ignorance is mindful insofar as I am aware that this book has an author, only I acknowledge that I do not know its author. Thus, mindful ignorance is a knowing of something only as that which might become known. It is this type of mindful ignorance that is important to justice, and creating that which guarantees justice: a just constitution. We shall see too, via Rawls, how ignorance is put into play, namely through a discussion about the veil of ignorance which is
a requirement of the original position, this space in which a
just constitution must be conceived.

VII. Justice and Ignorance

What is it to be veiled? A veil is a covering, so something
veiled is something covered. But to be veiled is to be covered
in a particular way. A veil is a covering calling attention to
itself as a covering, so as such, something veiled is something
covered obviously. A veil isn’t a covering hiding what’s covered
in a way either allowing or intending the forgetting about
what’s covered. Rather, a veil’s conspicuousness reminds us
about the covered thing. It reminds us that there’s something to
which we aren’t allowed access. So what is a veil of ignorance?
Again, for our purposes, a knowing of something only as that
which might become known is mindful ignorance. Thus, a veil of
ignorance is a covering of something whereby the cover consists
of a knowing of something only as that which might become known.
It’s a covering by ignorance neither allowing nor intending the
forgetting about what it covers. What the ignorance covers is
its own object. But what is the object of the veil of ignorance?

In the veil of ignorance, what’s veiled is any sort of in-
formation that would allow a group or individual to tailor prin-
ciples to create advantage. Generally speaking, they are one’s
temporal position, situation in society, or natural advantages
(Rawls, 1999). It’s necessary for principles to exist between generations in order that justice be something enduring. One’s temporal position, therefore, must be veiled to ensure that principles chosen are ones that will hold for all generations. It’s also true that society has different positions that come to be occupied by individuals. Principles need to be made with this in mind, and to veil one’s own social position ensures that one cannot tailor principles to advantage that particular social position. Further, individuals are endowed with abilities different from each other, so these too must be veiled. In other words, the components of one’s social reality must remain veiled. But what does this mean?

What gives rise to social reality is ideology, so if the components of one’s social reality are veiled, what is veiled is that which has been produced as reality by ideology. To say ideology is our only reality isn’t to say that there’s something more real to which we have access. It’s precisely to say that there isn’t anything that has more reality. It’s to say that as far as reality is concerned, ideology is all we have. This has implications for how we might read Rawls.

One way we might read Rawls is to say that what he wishes to do with the original position is to create a non-ideological political space. Now we know that this idea seems to be a contradiction in terms, but herein lies the brilliance of the veil
of ignorance. A veil does not change the object that it covers. Rather, it only hides that object in plain sight. It isn’t as though Rawls is saying that we should forget about the ideological when attempting to construct a just constitution. The fact that the products of ideology are veiled remind us that they are there. Thus, what the veil of ignorance solves is the problem caused by the fact of ideology being our only reality. One might argue that if ideology is our only reality, then one can’t construct any constitution that is non-ideological, for if ideology pervades all reality, and we construct principles from that reality, the result will be ideological. There is no outside to ideology. However, Rawls’s solution seems to be one that neither needs to deny that all reality is ideological nor to be bound to it. Because the products of ideology remain veiled—remain known as that which might be known—there is not a need to deny that the components are ideological. However, ideology must function in a state of recognition. One thinks of Althusser’s hailing police officer and the subject who responds. If there is not recognition, then ideology doesn’t function. So when ignorance veils the components and makes them unrecognizable, yet we still build with those components, we have built without being held under the yoke of ideology. We are building a constitution without being subjects of and to ideology. Once the veil is lifted, we may see that what we have produced is in fact ideological,
but we have produced it in a space that was not ideological. And thus, with the veil of ignorance, we are able to enter this space to modify the constitution as needed non-ideologically. The metaphor of the veil works nicely here insofar as a veil can be lifted and lowered as needed without changing that which it covers. But what does this have to do with technology?

IX. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TECHNOLOGICAL AND THE POLITICAL

If technology is generally synonymous with not only a making and doing, but also a revealing or disconcealment that leads to truth, then we see something interesting in Rawls. Namely, we see that a mindful ignorance reveals truth. Thus, we cannot say that the way to truth is to empty out the unknown with the known. Ignorance is a necessary component of revealing truth. It is sometimes the case that the truth must be veiled, covered in a way that is not a forgetting. The way to truth isn’t as simple as a mere uncovering, for this is to assume that there is only one type of covering—the covering of hiddeness—and further, we need to deal with the condition of our reality which is ideological. And it is here with Rawls that we see that valuing in a universal, just way—the way through the original position—requires that the human have a particular relationship to ignorance.
I think Žižek (2004) is right to assert that the trick of ideology is to make us believe that justice is an impossible ideal, when in truth it’s fully realizable. However, I would add that justice is realizable in a particularly problematic way. The realization of justice is always only possible. It’s always only a potential, but never anything that will have been actuated. This is different from saying that the realization is never possible. “Never possible” is the same as the not possible or the impossible. It’s that which cannot happen. However, that which is “always only possible” is that which can happen, but won’t. It’s what could be, but never will have been. For instance, when we add the expression, “When pigs fly,” to the utterance of a promise we don’t intend to keep, we know it’s entirely possible that there could occur a genetic mutation in pigs that would over many generations give them the ability to fly. Still, there’s something that forever keeps this from being realized. This is somewhat nominalist, but that which keeps this from being realized is the fact that if this does indeed happen, the flying creature would no longer belong to the class of pigs, but to something else with a different DNA sequence, etc. Thus, it’s only a perpetual possibility. In short, I think we might think about justice as that which will only perpetually be possible. But what is it that keeps justice in this state of perpetual possibility? It’s the fact that justice partakes in a bad
infinity, the infinity of the always one more. This is the same perpetual possibility that pervades certain conceptions of technology, conceptions that view technology as a movement. Rather, to think both the political and technology as things which have the possibility of attaining truth, we need to consider them in ways other than those that need a recourse to this bad infinity. We can do so by thinking of both as things that indeed have development, but not through time. We need to think of both synchronically, and to do so, we need to think of both in terms of valuing. It is true that values can be culturally and historically contingent, but there are types of values that are not. And these types of values must be created in a space that somehow escapes the hold of ideology. As, we’ve seen with the closing discussion on Rawls, ignorance is a necessary component for this to be possible.
Chapter 5: Pursuing Our Projects

I. Changing the World

It’s easy to imagine Marx’s 11th thesis on Feuerbach handwritten on a sticky note taped to the computer monitor of a progressive scholar. What might be more difficult, however, is to imagine another such sticky note containing Nietzsche’s command to pursue your best or worst desires or Lacan’s ethical imperative to never give up on your desire. In light of all the suffering and injustice that exists, it seems flippant to be concerned about desire, especially just one’s own. On the face of it, it seems that there’s an order of concerns that should be followed. First, we must contend with the material suffering of the other, and only then can we be free to consider things of secondary importance such as desire. Here, what is of utmost importance would be that we act according to an ethic that pursues the expediting of the elimination of the other’s suffering. And the most expeditious way to do this is to seek justice. But are things this simple?

I think things are more complex, but I don’t mean to suggest that the suffering of the other is of less importance than the pursuit of one’s own desire. What I will suggest, however, is that isolating justice as the sole means by which humans can achieve their final end is misled. I agree with Badiou that we
only encounter problems when we pursue truth by means of only one procedure. Badiou (1999) argues that philosophy becomes suspended when it becomes sutured to one of its truth condition, of which there are four between which there must be intellectual circulation. One such suturing exists in canonical Marxism wherein philosophy is sutured to its political condition only. If we look to justice alone for the solution to the problem of non-flourishing, then we necessarily reach an impasse. Further, I will suggest that the political and the amorous, the respective domains of justice and desire, are intertwined in such a way that to think about justice outside of desire is to treat the beneficiary of justice as something less than human. What Badiou (2001) suggests, and I agree, is that we should not look at the human as that which can define itself as a victim. To do this is to see the human condition as being merely biological, as animal, a condition in which the worst possible thing that could happen is death. This is the conception of the human as a being-for-death, as a mortal. Rather, one might understand being human as that which tends toward the immortal, that which has a different relationship to death. In order to have this conception of the human, we must go outside of the realm of the political. We must consider desire and enter the political only from this perspective.
II. Your Best and Your Worst Desires

In Book I, §1 of *The Gay Science*, addressing the issue of the preservation of the species as being the end of human existence, Nietzsche (1974) gives us a strange command: “Pursue your best or your worst desires, and above all, perish!” Let’s examine this command in two parts.

What does it mean to pursue your best or worse desires? When we evaluate desires in terms of best or worst, the implications are that we ought to pursue the best desires, ought not to pursue the worst. In this evaluation, there’s an implicit suggestion, if not a command. However, if we’re commanded to pursue either, the implication is different. Consider what Nietzsche writes in the sentence following: “In both cases, you are probably a promoter and benefactor of humanity.” Is it that Nietzsche is suggesting that the end of preserving the species is unimportant and that we may thus do whatever we please? Were this the case, we could reason that if preserving the species is unimportant, then the other is unimportant, and I need not consider the effects of my actions upon that other. Indeed, such a conception seems not only to disregard the other, but to be contemptuous. I’d like to suggest, though, that this is an unnecessarily extreme interpretation. Rather, it seems that Nietzsche is urging us to reconsider our understanding of desire. But how so? First, in framing the pursuit of our desires in this way, he removes
desire from the realm of utilitarianism. Second, he removes the evaluative categories of best or worst from the realm of desire. Desire is removed from the realm of utilitarianism insofar as the end of preserving the species will be met regardless of whether or not the best or worst desires are pursued. There is no outcome to consider. And it is this move, precisely, that allows Nietzsche to make the second move of removing the evaluative categories from the realm of desire. The pursuit of a particular desire can only be deemed in terms of best and worst if the pursuit of desire is something like an instrumental good, if we pursue desire to achieve some final end. If there’s no outcome regarding desire to consider in the first place, then the evaluative categories don’t make sense. If not for some end, why would desires be either best or worst? They can only be best or worst for something.

In fact, in §4, Nietzsche makes the link between utilitarianism and the application of the evaluative categories a bit more clear, if in a somewhat oblique way. He writes that there is a “profoundly erroneous moral doctrine that is celebrated especially in England: this holds that judgments of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ sum up experiences of what is ‘expedient’ and ‘inexpedient’.” Here, in this reference to utilitarianism, Nietzsche writes that what is understood to be good is that which is species-preserving, and that which is not is understood to be evil.
However, it often proves to be the case that “evil instincts are expedient, species-preserving, and indispensable to as high a degree as the good ones.” So in this utilitarianism, not only do we get into the problem of the ‘good/evil’ type of morality that Nietzsche finds problematic, but see that the terms good and evil are applicable at most to instincts, not desires. There’s a subtle move here towards a distinction. When Nietzsche writes of desires in §1, the evaluative categories do not apply, when he legitimizes the use of the evaluative categories of good and evil—categories similar to best and worst when used within the context of the ends based—we see that we have shifted from desires to instincts. Thus, what we see here is that Nietzsche considers desire as desire, not as a means to an end, nor as something that is biological or compulsive as the instinct. This means that desire is not instrumental and cannot be pathological. But this is only the first part of the command. What about the second part, ‘and above all, perish!’?

In addition to pursuing our best or worst desires, we’re commanded to do something. And strangely, that something is to die. It seems strange because commands are given when the commanded has an initial choice prior to being possibly compelled to obey. On the forced choice, Zizek (2001) writes that membership in any society involves a subject choosing freely what will be imposed on that subject anyway. To embrace freely the state
of things entails "integrating this state of things into one's symbolic universe," writing further that, "In this precise sense, the gesture of willing freely one's own death signals the readiness to come to terms with one's death on the symbolic level as well, to abandon the mirage of symbolic immortality" (p. 112). Although Zizek is here discussing Wagner, we can draw a parallel to the example of Nietzsche we are examining. One might object here that there's no initial choice in the first place, and rightly so. Humans are mortal and must die, regardless of being commanded or not. In fact, this objection echoes a caution Nietzsche (1966) himself makes against Stoic philosophy's imperative to live according to nature: "Why make a principle out of something you already are and needs must be?" (§9). The answer is that this is an attempt on the part of the Stoics to incorporate into nature their own ideals by issuing something that only seems to have the grammar of a command. It's for this reason that the Stoics, insofar as they are unaware that this is what they're doing, are "self-deceivers." Thus, it doesn't seem likely that Nietzsche would have intended the command to perish to be a command formulated quite in this self-deceptive way. So if this is not a self-deceptive command, something else must be going on.

It must be that Nietzsche thinks of perishing other than in the way one is usually accustomed to thinking about it. Namely,
Nietzsche (1978) seems to think that perishing has a relationship to willing. And further, this is how we might interpret dying at the right time, the voluntary death that comes because one wishes it ("On Voluntary Death"). The relationship, however, isn’t one of a choosing between options. It isn’t that Nietzsche thinks we can choose when or when not to have our non-volitional death. People fall ill and accidents happen. Nor is he saying that death should instead always be volitional; voluntary death isn’t suicide. Even when Nietzsche explicitly writes about suicide, this still isn’t the point. For instance, Nietzsche (1996) asks why it should be laudable that an old man “who senses the decline of his power to await his slow exhaustion and dissolution than in full consciousness to set himself a limit?” (§80, Part I). Further, he follows this passage writing, “There exists a right by which we take a man’s life, but none by which we take from him his death: this is mere cruelty” (§88, Part I). What’s at stake in these two passages?

In the first passage, the point is that suicide is better than dying without being able to will. It’s better to will a limit. Suicide is a wholly natural and obvious action, but it is only insofar as it’s a victory of reason. Suicide isn’t laudable in and of itself. Further, there’s some resonance with the criticism of the preachers of a slow death (“On Voluntary Death”) who preach “patience with all ‘earthly things’”
(Nietzsche, 1978). Aren’t these earthly things all that is caught up with the biological, or put another way, that which is not immortal in the human? Thus, a patience for these things is a succumbing to the biological as with the example of praising the old man who accepts the decline of his power. In the second passage, the raising of the issue of being able to take a man’s life, but not his death seems tantamount to saying that there is something else other than dying at stake here. We might have the right to execute someone, and this someone can do nothing to prevent the execution once we’ve decided to exercise this right. Still, even in taking this person’s life, there must remain something that belongs to this person even in doing so. And if it’s clear that the volitional part of death is neither self-deception nor mere suicide, what part of this person’s death is volitional? Given all this, how can death be related to willing without inconsistency?

III. “Perish, you!” - Death = Will To Power

The fact is is that there is indeed some inconsistency, but only if we implicitly fault Nietzsche for being ungrammatical, if we fault him for not understanding the syntax of a command. If Nietzsche is indeed commanding, then by this fact, there must be that initial choice, and that initial choice must be something else other than death. If we think about death as biological,
then what Nietzsche must grant—if, that is, we allow him to remain grammatical—is this: All death (other than the possibility of suicide which we have eliminated from our interpretation) is non-volitional. If, on the other hand, we take death to be something that is not caught up in the biological, but instead caught up in willing, all death is volitional insofar as to choose the immortal, the non-biological, is to choose death. What is im-mortality but the inability to die? And since death does not admit of degrees, how can one die if already dead? Thus, the voluntary death of which Nietzsche speaks can actually only be understood when taken in light of his command to perish. Why? Because when we take this command to be grammatical, it must be that the death contained in “Perish!” is but a non-volitional condition pertaining to a volition that does indeed exist as a precondition for some implicit command also contained in “Perish!” And what is this command?

When we eliminate death from the structure of the command to perish, all that remains grammatically from that command is pure volition itself. To put it quasi-mathematically, “Perish, you!” - Death = Pure Volition. To have framed a command in terms of death removes the choice between simply willing and not willing. It creates an event in which we must choose to will or not to will in the face death, in the face of that which cannot be chosen. It is a choosing situated over the void of death, a void
that separates the biological and the immortal. At bottom, what we see is that willing becomes reflexive. To choose between willing or not willing is equivalent to willing to will or doing otherwise. But what is this doing otherwise? Is it not willing to will, or willing not to will?

The otherwise that Nietzsche (1989) might attribute to the ascetics would be the second, the willing to not will. The ascetics would rather will nothingness, than not will at all (§1, third essay). Here the will to nothingness is a goal, and an achievement of that goal is a triumph over willing. This doesn’t constitute what is the not obeying of the command to will to will. First, it’s unlikely for Nietzsche to have chosen the ascetics as a model to follow when the issue is willing. But more importantly, the first formulation—not willing to will—constitutes the not obeying of the command because willing to not will is still willing. Were this the only option, there would be no real choice involved, and thus, there would be no command. But before this becomes too confusing, let’s allow ourselves to simplify the formula. As we have shown, the command to perish as a command as such must be grammatically transformed into the command to will to will in the face of something which is both non-volitional and the precondition for volition itself. Further, if willing to will is what is called will to power, then the command is directed toward the will to power. Heidegger
(1987) offers the following interpretation of “will to power”: “For in [Nietzsche’s] view will is nothing else than will to power, and power nothing else than the essence of will. Hence, will to power is will to will” (p. 37). So more generally, ‘Perish!’ as a command can be simplified into the imperative, ‘Have will to power!’

IV. DESIRE!

To reassess, we’ve removed desire from the realm of any evaluative categories and that which is concerned only with utility. Further, we can interpret the command to perish as a command to have will to power. Thus, together, we see that we must pursue our desires as desires that above all wills to will in the face of the non-volitional. If we take this formulation as a model for Nietzsche’s project, we can see how similar this is to Lacan’s ethical imperative to never give up on your desire. But what we have shown thus far makes desire seem modifiable, that I can choose my own desire.

So is the point, then, that desire is modifiable? This wouldn’t be very Lacanian. Lacan’s point against ego psychology is that it makes the path to wellbeing the modification of desire, and the model to imitate is the desire of the analyst—‘Just desire as I do, and you, too, will be healthy!’ The point of psychoanalysis shouldn’t be the miming of another’s desire,
but to not give ground up on one’s own desire. But are desires modifiable, then, for Nietzsche? Is it to say that the strong, for instance, can will themselves to be weak, and the weak can will themselves to be strong? No, for Nietzsche (1989), desires are not modifiable either. He writes, for instance, “To demand of strength that it should not express itself as strength... is just as absurd as to demand of weakness that it should express itself as strength” (§13, I). So does this mean that Nietzsche falls into an essentialism that isn’t compatible with the will to power? Not quite. First, this isn’t essentialism because it doesn’t have to do with essences, but desire. But more importantly, it isn’t essentialism because there is no subject here that exists non-fictionally. Nietzsche is speaking of strength and not the strong. What follows immediately after that passage is one that asserts that a quantum of force is equal to a quantum of driving, willing, and effecting, and further, it’s only language that makes it appear otherwise, that these things can appear caused by a subject. In other words, this measure of force—strong or weak—is only willing itself. It only makes sense that strength as a type of willing, for instance, can’t be other than itself without being something else. And even then, if we have recourse to the fiction of the subject, one can’t ask the strong to be other than what that subject is because it can’t desire that way. But if desires aren’t modifiable, how are they
under the yoke of the will? How are they a part of will to power, this will to will? They can be thus because in some sense desires, even though unmodifiable and in that sense not your own, are in another sense your own nonetheless. But how is this so, this being one’s own and not?

Desires are your own insofar as they are unconscious and the unconscious is nothing but a type of memory. It’s the memory of that which is always irrecoverably “forgotten” already, the memory of the repressed. Further, it’s a type of memory that can only contain things with the potential of standing in for something else but does not. These things are signifiers, for only signs realize this potential and mean. In this way, then, desires are your own because they are a memory that belongs to you. However, the unconscious is also not yours and is outside insofar as it’s of the symbolic order, an order that always precedes the subject both logically and temporally. They symbolic contains the subject, and therefore must come before it. So desires are both yours and not yours. This memory constituted of signifiers belongs to you, but the memories are not of your own making and have come before you. And what is this “you” of which we are speaking? It is none other than the subject, or that which arises through language, arising according to both Lacan and Nietzsche. So desires are your own, but is this not being your own equivalent to saying that those desires belong to other
people? It can’t be. This wouldn’t make sense for Lacan because the argument against adaptation wouldn’t work. Desires would always be someone else’s already, so were this the case, why command against miming desires in the first place? Further, for Nietzsche, how would it be that we would pursue our desires? Let’s explore further why these desires don’t belong to other people, again starting with Lacan.

The symbolic order that contains the unconscious is not the social, that which is comprised of the community of other humans. It’s merely the treasury of signifiers. True, the symbolic is the Other, which as a whole can stand in for the Other subject, but this Other, even as an Other subject is not the same as the subject that has an unconscious. This Other subject is but a signifier in the unconscious. It does not have an unconscious in the sense that the subject does. The Other subject, in other words, doesn’t have the memory of what is forgotten, but is part of the memory which is forgotten. The social, this community of humans, is something we share with animals. It is thus imaginary. And if the social is more than this community and involves communication, then, it involves both the imaginary and the symbolic taken together in such a way that meaning is generated between the two orders. Clearly, the symbolic alone is not the social. But why is it important that desires not be those of
other people? It has to do with the place of justice that we have outlined.

We mustn’t confuse the political with this structure of desire. When demands are articulated on behalf of others, these are subjects not of desire, but of politics. The political itself is the way through which subjects—let us make note of the plural—are addressed in a way which is imaginary, a way of addressing subjects that are beings toward death. The political is that which tries to evade death, rather than being driven toward it. Though the demands of politics and the demands of desire are different insofar as political demands are transparent and not caught up in the dialectic of asking for one thing while really wanting that which cannot be granted as satiation, both demands have a certain excess. Consider Žižek’s assertion that what’s wrong with the configuration of how we currently make political demands today—especially those made by leftist scholars—is that we tend to “hystericize” those demands. For example, Zizek (2003) criticizes Hardt and Negri’s Empire for doing exactly this, writing that the three point, positive political program of global citizenship, the right to a social wage, and the right to reappropriation approaches “the hysterical subject trying to provoke the Master by way of bombarding him with impossible demands” (p. 202). Further, writing in a Nietzschean vein, Brown (2001) writes that the seemingly political “moralizing injunc-
tion to act, the contemporary academic formulation of political action as an imperative, might be read as a symptom of political paralysis in the face of radical political disorientation and as a kind of hysterical mask for the despair that attends such paralysis” (p. 29). This does have a certain amount of explanatory power, but we’re still left to question how psychoanalysis might be useful for describing how political demands would be made in a just State. What a psychoanalytic perspective brings to the table is its ability to address excess. Instead of having an excess in the demand, as we have in desire, we can see that political demands always have an excess of need. But how, exactly, does the psychoanalytic perspective of excess address an excess of need? It’s precisely in its positing of jouissance in the real. Jouissance is an excess of enjoyment, an enjoyment that as such is also suffering. It is an enjoyment in the real since it is prohibited to the speaking subject, and the speaking subject is absent from the real. The need in political demand is also in the real, and it is cut from the same material, so to speak, as jouissance. Namely, the need is a material suffering. Further, both jouissance and the need of the political demand are at bottom grounded in the idea of rights. Jouissance is doubly enjoyment in terms of being a kind of pleasure and an enjoyment in the order of an “enjoyment of rights”. When the need of political demands are satisfied, the result is nothing other than this en-
joyment of rights. So the connection between demands for love and political demands for benevolence is what they share in the real.

True, psychoanalysis addresses demands for love, or desire, and these are articulated in between the symbolic and imaginary dimensions, with the non-articulated, non-attainable object cause being in the part of the symbolic which is the unconscious. That which is the object of the political is not unconscious. But the experience of jouissance as it pertains to desire and the experience of need in the political is always in the real, is always contained within that which cannot be symbolized. Suffering, whether it’s the enjoyment suffering of jouissance or the suffering from a lack of enjoyment of rights, is always inarticulable. There’s always a hard kernel, an excess, that resists being spoken about. The experience of suffering is never fully communicable. Further, the real is not divisible. Division is only possible with the capacity to negate, and this capacity to negate is a function of the linguistic. Because the real lacks signifiers existing in differential relations, the real is infinite. The concept of infinity is only possible in that which is not cut up by signification. It is this infinity which gives rise to the infinite need. Needs always return and are infinite because they never stop being needs. This is in the order of the infinity of “always one
more”. The infinity of desire and Nietzsche’s eternal return, for example, is in the order of circularity. And what I am suggesting is that we need to articulate political demands in terms of the latter type of infinity. In other words, to avoid this hystericization of political demands, this always having one more demand when this or that demand is satisfied, we need to make demands in such a way that our demands always return to the same place. And that place is precisely the place of human flourishing.

Is this to say that we need to universalize all subjects, disregarding the singularity of each? Not necessarily, for the eternal return, is not an eternal return of the same. It is a repetition, no doubt, but each repetition is singular. For instance, Deleuze (2001) writes that the eternal return is not a return of the same because “the same doesn’t come back; only coming back is the same in what becomes” (p. 87). It’s only that each singularity is universalizable. It isn’t that we need to assume a political universal subject and try to claim that all individuals are just particulars of this universal. The trajectory of our universalizing should be centrifugal, not centripetal. But let’s be more concrete: What we shouldn’t do is perpetually create more “victims” as Žižek suggests we might be doing. Consider what Zizek writes: “What we encounter here is again the paradox of victimization: the Other to be protected is
We shouldn’t start with demands made on behalf of women, let’s say, then when those are satisfied, move to demands made on behalf of women of color, then move to demands made on behalf of women of color with disabilities, and so on. True, all subjects within these smaller and smaller categories will have political demands that need to be addressed. I am not suggesting that any needs be ignored. Rather, I’m pointing out that this gets into a perpetual cycle of creating victimized identities. Identities are not the needs themselves, so the creation of identities doesn’t necessarily mean more justice. Also, the creation of an identity that’s victimized doesn’t lend itself to flourishing. It only names a state of being unable to flourish. Brown (2005) points out that endless iterations of narratives of one’s own suffering can become ways in which one lives or refuses to live in the present, without actually working from those narratives toward emancipation. This trajectory is to start broad with the goal of addressing narrower and narrower needs. This is the bad infinity of the “always one more” insofar as even though we may refine our scope to have included every individual, there is still always the possibility of another individual coming into existence that has particular needs. This makes the political project one that is theoretically impossible, one that could lead to the type of nihilism Nietzsche was critiquing. There are two ver-
sions of nihilism: 1. the devaluation of our values, and 2. the resignment to the idea that our values are unrealizable. These are both goal oriented. The first one says that our goals are not worth achieving because the values behind them are groundless. "Why should anyone aspire to live a flourishing life? Who says flourishing is good anyway?" The second one says that there is nothing wrong with our values, but that the goals those values make for us are impossible. "Of course it's good to live a flourishing life, but we can never really do that because the world is too inhospitable." Reginster (2009) identifies these two types of nihilism and asserts that the first leads to a type of disorientation, the second to a type of despair. So what should we do?

We might instead start with each individual and treat each as a having a singular identity to begin with, a singular identity that is universalizable. We would start at the level of individuals' for flourishing and try to make a universalizable demand from this that fit all individuals. Rather than creating more and more refined identities, we would start at the level of experiences and wants. In other words, as Brown (1995) suggests, instead of starting with the question of "Who are we?" we would start with the question of "What do we want?" (p. 75). This universalized want from the totality of singularities can be summarized as the want to flourish. Flourishing is different for each
individual, yes, but the necessary conditions for flourishing are not so broad in scope. But to what point have we come?

V. Never Possible or Always Only Possible?

When the trajectory of our political demands takes the form of trying to answer the question of what we want, we enter the realm of desire. In other words, we are no longer sutured to the political and the seeking of justice as the be all and end all of human pursuit. Thus, when political demands pass through the realm of desire, we are allowed a way to sidestep the nihilism that might otherwise ensue in the realization that the project of justice can never be completed. We sidestep this because we are given the command to never give up upon our desire, upon that which we cannot know. In other words, the question of “What do we want?” is as unanswerable as completed justice is unattainable. However, the question of what we want partakes in a type of infinity that is always complete. It’s an infinity, yes, but one that revolves around an impossibility. Justice, on the other hand, has an infinite incompletion. It chases after perpetual possibility, something that isn’t quite the same as an impossibility. An impossibility is never possible, a perpetual possibility is always only possible. To take the eternal return as an example, we can never say, “Thus, I willed it,” to the past. It’s a forgone conclusion that this is impossibility. Yet
we enter into the eternal return knowing this, so we will in the face of the non-volitional. Similarly, we never give up on our desire—that part of ourselves that we can never know—fully aware that there is an impossibility at the core of our pursuit. So at bottom, to pass political demands through desire allows us to have the sort of completion that we have in the eternal return and with never giving up on our desire.

True, we’re only bound to repeat endless iterations of never giving up upon that which we can’t know, but this circular structure has built within it a mechanism that allows us the possibility of never giving up. We’re pursuing something that can’t be had, so in a way there’s no room for giving up. We know from the outset that once we enter into this circular trajectory we’re pursuing for the sake of pursuing, desiring and willing for its own sake, not for an object. The object is impossible, and the impossible can never itself be the ground for pursuit. At most, it is the cause of our pursuit. Political demands for justice don’t have this same mechanism. Justice is the ever possible object of the political demand. Here, we are pursuing for the sake of an object. What will satisfy our demand is transparent. It’s only there will necessarily be other demands to satisfy, and perpetually so. So in order to avoid the despair of there always being perpetual possibilities, we might enter justice instead as we enter desire. We should enter into its pur-
suit for the sake of pursuit, not thinking of justice as the object, as—in a utilitarian way—the end for which our pursuit is but a means.
Chapter 6: Concluding Scholarship?

We’ve seen in the second chapter that the network is what’s in excess of the governed, and that network inefficiency was the initial limit from where intellectual inquiry proceeded. Along with this inefficiency came the time necessary for rational deliberation, something useful for the political, and now that the network is speedy, this speediness should not necessarily be aligned with the urgency of necessary political actions. Although actions might need to be rushed in order to postpone death, the thoughts behind them mustn’t be. In the third chapter, we saw how the scholar might make use of the efficient network: We can stroll through it. This strolling through the network resists what network efficiency tends to steal from the scholar. Network systemization that comes with indexing tends to steal the individual (non-divisible), intellectual paths of the scholar, but not if we have fidelity to a kind of productive wandering. In the fourth and fifth chapters, we saw how we need to think of both the technological and the political in terms of a valuing that is not through time. This has implications for the political insofar as it displaces urgency as the sole obligation of the political. We should see the political independent
of chronology, and instead conceptualize the political in terms of a type of willing particular to the eternal return. We thus see how a model of desire helps us understand the political. So where have we come? We’ve come to a point that prepares us to address the worry I had when I began thinking about this document.

Broadly, my worry can be phrased as, “What should I—someone who’s not incidentally attempting to be officially designated as a scholar with the completion of this dissertation—be doing?” If there’s an ethics of scholarship, it’s the question underlying that. How ought I live as a scholar? I felt that this was an important question to ask because the answer we had to that question might not hold anymore. I’ve come to the point where what I think is something somewhat frightening. I’m wholly convinced that scholarly research as we’ve known it—at least the type of research we do in the humanities and some strands of social science—is unnecessary.

Scholarly research is unnecessary. This is frightening, but only for the scholarly profession. Network efficiency gives people speedy access to knowledge, something that in the past would’ve taken decades of study to accomplish only partially. This should be good news in general. The utility of the scholar was in the fact of the scholar’s expertise, that the scholar had suffered the labor of becoming an expert for the benefit of oth-
ers. But if everyone can become an expert without suffering through the labor, good! This is only bad news for the scholar because it seems that the scholar needs to find something else to do to be esteemed.

I. A SHAMEFUL ADMISSION

Why is the ease with which we accomplish our task as scholars consciously unacknowledged? Why do we behave now as though the product of scholarly labor is worthy of the same esteem as scholarship produced without the aid of network efficiency? I believe it’s for the reason that there’s something like fetishistic disavowal happening. There’s something that’s avowed, but this avowal is repressed. Thus, in conscious discourse, what’s avowed in the unconscious is at the same time not known.

To be esteemed and to be desired are different. This is for the reason that though sublimation, like desire, has its origin in the drives, sublimation satisfies the drives by inhibiting their aim. This satisfaction comes in the form of the esteemed, and esteem can only be had in conscious discourse. The criteria for evaluation must be readily knowable, and the evaluations must be transparent. But might there not remain something repressed in sublimation? No one can sublimate fully, after all.

Might not what remains repressed—still—after sublimation be the paternal metaphor? This must be repressed at all times if
the subject is to remain a subject. As we know, given certain physical circumstances, the dissolution of subjectivity could result in psychotic thought. If sublimation doesn’t threaten a subject with possible psychosis, it would only make sense that after sublimation, the paternal metaphor remains repressed. This is not to say, however, that the function of the paternal metaphor remains the same in sublimation as in desire.

Whereas the paternal metaphor prohibits access to a unity to the maternal body in desire—this is the prohibition of incest—I am suggesting that the paternal metaphor has the function of shame in sublimation. And this is where there is a discontinuity, one that looks much like fetishistic disavowal. The signifier of shame remains repressed, but esteem given after completed sublimation must be conscious.

Esteem and shame aren’t on an oppositional spectrum. Things on an oppositional spectrum don’t have a “zero” midpoint that connects them. In other words, there shouldn’t be something that’s neither esteem worthy nor shame worthy. The midpoint of an oppositional spectrum is a point of equilibrium, not neither/nor. There are things that are neither worthy of esteem nor shame, but not things worthy of esteem as much as they are worthy of shame. Esteem and shame should not otherwise be bound together, for they aren’t opposites, but merely different. However, I believe that they must become bound together for the
reason that sublimation does not escape the purview of the paternal metaphor.

II. Esteem and Shame

With esteem comes a sense of accomplishment, a sense of achieving an ideal state. Shame, however, isn’t merely an emotional response to a failure to achieve some ideal state. This would imply a continuum of shame to esteem. Though there is the shame that acts as a deterrent—something that stops you from doing something—the other end of this is not having achieved esteem, but shamelessness. Further, we use the term shame to refer to a particular affect, and this seems to contradict my argument, for if shame is an affect, how can the paternal metaphor function as shame in sublimation? There are no unconscious affects, after all. Though it’s obvious that there’s an affect belonging to shame, shame must be more than an affect if it’s to have a place in the unconscious.

Consider the phrase, “Have some shame.” Let’s take the phrase literally. This cannot refer to shame the affect. Because we don’t think of the generation of affects as being volitional, to command someone to have the affect of shame doesn’t make sense. As I’ve noted, commands are only commands in the strict sense if one has the choice to obey or disobey, and we aren’t in the realm of obedience or disobedience. But the command does
make sense, so there must be another way to think about shame. That other way is to think about it as something nomotic. There’s a shame that exists because there’s the context of a rule system. So in a sense, the phrase, “Have some shame,” can be interpreted as an iteration of, “Obey the rules.”

Because I can still feel ashamed of myself when I’ve not been caught, when we think of feeling shamed before others, the others aren’t the source of shame. The source of shame is being a subject through a relationship to the normative, through a relationship to the law. But what does that mean, for there are at least two types of shame, one affective, one nomotic? We feel the affect of shame when we’re unable to meet the expectations outlined by the normative. But this is being in a relationship to the normative; it’s one in which we fall short of the prescriptions. More importantly, we must be through a relationship to the normative. This means that there pertains to us a mode of existence that is caused by the law, that we’re able to perceive ourselves only because the law precedes us. In other words, to be able to have some shame, we must be normative subjects. So though we may feel shame before others, it’s the Big Other before which we have it. This is why I hesitate to fully adopt Nussbaum’s (2006) perspective on shame. Though there’s no lack of clarity between the feeling of shame and nomotic shame, there is a lack of clarity between others and the Big Other. What I
would add is that it’s for this reason that Nussbaum doesn’t consider the difference between actual shame and shame as a potential.

For potentials to remain potentials as such, they can never be actualized. Otherwise, they pass over into something else; they become something other than what they were. This is one way to think about desire, for example. Desire is a type of potentiality. Were desire to ever catch up to its object, then it wouldn’t be desire. It would pass over into something else. If we think of desire as being something that’s perpetual—at least when it’s functional—then we can’t really think of desire as being a desire for or directed toward an object. That’s why we instead think of desire as being without an object and only having an object cause. If desire is to continue, it must be the object cause that passes over into something else, not the desire. It’s for this reason that objet a is the first in a series.

But this is desire. Sublimation is different. Sublimation is purposive and achieves satisfaction. In other words, sublimation has an object, and that object is the esteemed. This is the necessarily conscious part of sublimation. Because sublimation originates in the drives, however, it becomes related to something repressed, and that repressed something becomes the origin of shame. The paternal metaphor—as in desire—remains the origin of the law, and nomotic shame by definition cannot exist without
the law. So although esteem and shame are not on an oppositional spectrum, they do become tied together through something that functions like disavowal.

III. The Scholar’s Shame

Let’s make our discussion a bit more concrete. What I am suggesting is that non-affective, nomotic shame is equivalent to becoming a subject through a relationship to the law. We have this shame not when we fail to live up to an ideal. This is the affective, dualistic shame in the Imaginary. In the Symbolic, we have shame period. This is the position we’re in through the relationship that allows us to remain subjects even as when we sublimate, when the drives achieve satisfaction. The prohibition of the paternal metaphor in desire is replaced with a mere positioning with regard to the law, for there is no forbidden in sublimation. There needn’t be a forbidden, for the aim of the drives must be inhibited as the condition of the satisfaction to be achieved. The law without prohibition itself becomes pure authority, and shame is how we can characterize the subject’s relationship to this authority that does not prohibit. We have shame before the law, especially when the law is not prohibiting anything. So here, we can get back to our question. Why can we not admit to the ease with which we can now perform our tasks as scholars?
We can’t admit to the ease for the laws by which we function as academics do not allow us to do so. Esteem must be earned. Esteem is a question of desert. If the norms of academe are still norms of rigorous study, then we cannot achieve esteem through the proxy of the efficient network. *I am not arguing that we need to rid ourselves the norms of rigorous study. I’m only pointing out that our norms are no longer compatible with our material conditions, with the condition that we have access to a network that makes possible what had not been.* The norms functioned as norms with the no longer obtaining presupposition that the efficient access we have to recorded knowledge now is not possible.

IV. BEYOND THE SCHOLAR’S DISAVOWAL

Are we thus caught at an impasse? I’ve implied that the focus on the political might have been a stopgap solution to the problem. I’m asserting it now that I’ve explained the problem that the efficient network causes for scholarship. We focused on the political as an attempt to change the norms of academe to fit the material conditions of our craft: Now that it’s easier to produce research, it must be politically useful in order to be esteemed. But I think that this isn’t a permanent solution for the reason that changing the world shouldn’t be an end.
Change in the world is what there is. As we’ve seen in with the discussion about Nietzsche and desire, whether or not the pursuit of desire is flippant in light of human suffering, the pursuit or non-pursuit doesn’t have much impact upon change in the world. In some sense, to believe in the difficulty of changing the world is to relieve us of the oppressive responsibility that comes with not being able to do anything but partake in a changing world. In fact, in spite of our best efforts, the world changes. The difficulty lies in keeping things the same. It’s only with great difficulty that we can create a conception of the world and impose our will upon the world so that it conforms with that will. This, as I’ve argued, is the project of the political. Phrased another way, the political does not seek to change things, but to make the world conform to the will—and keep it that way. The aim most appropriate to the political is an eternal state of more of the same.

So the political is not about changing the world. Still, could it not be an aim worthy of esteem? It can’t be worthy of esteem because it’s actually an object of shame, of affective shame. The political addresses urgency. Urgency is a response to necessity. We don’t esteem the accomplishment of the necessary. I win no esteem, for instance, by keeping my child alive. If I have a child, it’s urgent that I do this, and it’s what I ought to do. Esteem must surpass the necessary. Affective shame, how-
ever, exists when I fail to do what I ought. So it isn’t the case that as academics, we should feel shame for not being more politically active. We should feel this shame as citizens. The political is not the type of law that lacks prohibition, so we should feel it!

We can’t esteem ourselves as academics when we live up to the ideal of being a citizen. This is to cheat at the game, to bait and switch. Rather, we should focus upon re-evaluating the norms of academe. We should focus upon finding something else to do. If the law pertaining to sublimation is not a prohibition, this is not to say that it isn’t a command. The law pertaining to sublimation is an imperative to do something original. We must do something that is not heretofore possible. We must chase what is necessarily never able to be complete—and we must be willful enough to not give up. The drives in sublimation may be satisfied because their aims become inhibited and are instead directed toward an object, but that object becomes the transgression of the norms, the pursuit of the original, which itself is a proximity to the origin.

It’s for this reason that I think the law of sublimation is not a prohibition. The law of sublimation is an imperative to transgress the law, to go beyond what the law foresees. Do we not say an original work is original insofar as it breaks with what has become conventional. Do we not esteem this kind of
work? In art, do we not esteem work that breaks with the conventions of a genre, for instance. In intellectual inquiry, do we not esteem work that breaks the barriers of what had heretofore been an impasse? What we must do is make for ourselves a new challenge.

The challenge coming with the condition of our access to the efficient network is to work against the burden of the absence of forgetting. It was easier to do this when the origins were forgotten, but we now have access to a prosthetic and very effective memory. These, therefore, are anxious, not mournful times. They’re anxious for instead of having a loss to grieve, there’s an overwhelming completeness. To relieve our anxiety, we must make what’s now complete again incomplete. We must return to this origin to be original, for adding more words into what has become an already too burdensome historical malady can’t possibly be the answer. It seems we only have one direction left. We need to gesture toward an incompleteness. This incompleteness can only be gestured toward because it’s necessarily the inexpressible, and it’s expressing this impossibility that we mustn’t give up on. But what would this look like? We’ll only know when we’re able to transgress the obtaining law of sublimation and create a new one. We’ll only know when we’re able to value differently. This ending will be too abrupt, but its abruptness will be in keeping with my suggestion.
Might we perhaps consider valuing teaching over publication? Let’s be good companions to our apprentice flâneurs.
References


