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The Self-Imposed Limits of Library and Information Science: Remarks On the Discipline, On the Profession, On the University, and On the State of "Information" in the U.S. at Large Today

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The Self-Imposed Limits of Library and Information Science: Remarks on the Discipline, on the Profession, on the University, and on the State of "Information" in the U.S. at Large Today

The past few years have seen a very interesting phenomenon among many of the doctoral students at the Department of Information Studies at UCLA. That is, many of these students—with faculty help but, nonetheless, what seems a lot of individual effort—have taken it upon themselves to learn the language of critical theory and to apply themselves to critiques of imperialism in the so-called information society, and they have been investigating how information technologies enable or free us from imperialist tendencies. Their work has been particularly extraordinary in the context of Library and Information Science (LIS) research—a relatively small and in some ways parochial discourse and discipline carried out by programs that traditionally were centered on library studies, but more recently which have been orienting themselves toward information studies as their primary focus. In many such schools these studies are largely confined to American Library Association (ALA) edicts and library training at the Masters level and to so-called user studies or to technological studies involving information retrieval, knowledge organization, bibliometrics, or now, scientometrics. Against this background, many of the doctoral students at UCLA seem to me to have forged a brave path in engaging in social critiques that push against social norms and against the, at best, apolitical boundaries of so-called library and information science. This talk attempts to honor the students with a similar discourse. I would also like to particularly thank Andrew Lau for having me here and thank my other friends and colleagues here—some old, some new—for the invitation and for the conversations, past and future. I can honestly state that many of the most stimulating and interesting conversations that I have had in this field are with persons associated with the UCLA information studies program. I very deeply appreciate their support both in aiding and objecting to my thoughts and writings.

1. My topic is the self-imposed limits of Library and Information Science discourse and its institutional discipline. Generally, I am interested in the marginalization of critical thought in the field in the interest of 'positive' research. With this, I am also interested in why public information in the sense of 'the news' and education is not seen as part of our domain of inquiry. Last, I am interested in how persons are largely constructed as 'information seeking' and 'information using' subjects in this field. I think that all these questions point to the creation of a political subject both within and outside of information research and both within and outside of information professionalism. I have always found the creation of what I will call the 'informationalized subject' to be both curious

and alarming, not the least because 'information,' we are told, is so important for social and personal freedom in this so-called information age. I will add that I do not think that these issues are confined to LIS, but in some ways form problems in universities today and in U.S. culture and politics, at large.

As I asked in my book *The Modern Invention of Information: Discourse, History, and Power,*[1] isn't it curious that in the information age we have so little information about how the modern concept of information—as a rather privileged social episteme of representational knowledge, not to say, simply, a "trope"—was formed, how information ages are produced, and why assumptions about the meaning of information and the procedures and methods of information research are so little questioned, if they are questioned at all. If we look at LIS as some sort of minor—though also significant and symptomatic—paradigm of these tendencies, we are struck by the poverty of foundational theories, particularly as they are built upon incoherent and inaptly applied metaphors (for example, the so-called Shannon-Weaver model, which—at least in Weaver's famous commentary on Shannon's original paper—is built upon the folk-psychology conduit metaphor; the DIKW (data-information-knowledge-wisdom) hierarchy, which is built upon a Lockean naïve empiricist theory of knowledge; Brookes' poor reading of Popper's three worlds thesis; Belkin's ASK (Anomalous State of Knowledge) model which is an inverse form of the conduit model, and so forth).[2] We might also be struck by the profusion of epistemologically confused and poorly done methods in 'information seeking behavior' research[3] and the profusion of so-called models for understanding persons as 'users' and various entities as 'information.' ('Mixed methods' sometimes being taken as an antidote to inappropriately chosen topics in regard to the methods used and epistemological confusions regarding methods, thus compounding confusion upon confusion.) And in regard to these models, we may also be struck at how they are not subject to either empirical testing or a priori critical analysis, but instead, how they form epistemological frames that operationalize reality for the purpose of their own discursive production. These frames are then taken as 'approaches' and 'foundations' of various types (so-called theoretical, metatheoretical, and so forth) in what seem to me to be very unclear epistemological categories.

On the other hand, when critical questions are raised, they tend to be in the form of what I can only refer to as a sort of disciplinary naval-gazing. While so-called perspectives or approaches are brought in from other fields, they are sometimes domesticated in a mode of 'applied theory' so that they are nearly unrecognizable. And, at the same time, the field seems to me to resist interdisciplinary research in other than the direction of computer science to a high degree. Basically, in my view, LIS research tends to be extremely conservative and insular, yearning for establishing foundations, narrowing its research to technological concerns when it does expand, and applying domesticating and

gate-keeping strategies throughout in order to preserve a pureness of method and vocabulary, despite the dubiousness of method in not a small part of its core research and despite the shakiness of conceptual foundations throughout.

The question occurs, even beyond the particulars: What is wrong with all of this? What is left out?—not in the sense of what is not included within the traditional domains, but what is left out by the very disciplinary mechanizations that I have been pointing to? What is left out, of course, is the notion of critique.

What is critique? Much of the field seems to understand critique as criticism, that is, a sort of oppositional stance to some sort of norm. This is a sort of naïve dialectic, which as I will shortly discuss, is a logical trap that we must be careful to avoid.

The modern sense of critique originates in Kant's works of the late 18th century and it is a term that belongs to the Enlightenment, itself understood by Kant as a break in established historical norms. I will return to the ethical and political implications of this toward the end of my talk, but for now, let us stay with an epistemological understanding of critique. In Kant's three famous critiques, critique is characterized in terms of understanding the formal conditions for understanding, practical action, and judgments of taste.

I read Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* as arguing that the work of critique takes place against the 'positive' assertions of a certain type of research that starts from unexamined assumptions and continues research within those frames. In medieval thought, such research was carried out under theological tenets, in terms of argumentative analysis. In modern times, as Heidegger reminds us, such research is sometimes carried out in the name of science through, what is claimed to be, empirical analysis.

LIS, it seems to me, is a positivist field, not the least because it so much stresses this very type of positive—or as Kant put it, "dogmatic"—research. As we know, 'positivity' has also been a core ethical and social value, particularly since the beginning of the age of Reagan, in the United States. To be 'critical' is often thought of as being 'negative' in not just an analytic, but also a personal sense. So, I would suggest there is an institutional and social, as well as a methodological, sense to 'positive' research that influences the sociology of research not only in LIS, but more generally, in U.S. academe and society.

What we see in such positive approaches, I think, is a certain reverence for knowledge understood according to the modern sense of information—that is, as a fact. In modern empirical research, such facts take the form of 'data.' I will return to the role of data and method in securing information as the foundation of knowledge through a discussion of rhetorical form. The epistemological problem, however, is that of positivism. Positivism is the belief that facts give rise to theory, instead of recognizing that theory constitutes a priori forms for the seeking, discovery, and recognition of facts.

The historical predecessor for this understanding of knowledge as facts lies not simply in a Lockean naïve empiricism, but in Descartes' understanding of truth as "clear and distinct" knowledge. Knowledge, here, is a rhetorical value masquerading as an epistemological one, since the "clear and distinct" knowledge of enduring substance in the midst of changing form that Descartes finds through his analysis is only the result of "grammar"—in Wittgenstein's sense of the term. (For example, in Descartes' *Meditations*, thinking belongs to the grammar of human being and the quality that he sees as the enduring substance of wax in spite of the candle's changed form while burning belongs to the chemical grammar of wax as a material substance. In other words, these essential qualities that Descartes claims to discover as irrefutable truths are part of the everyday grammar of understanding the substances of "man" and "wax." Further, the argument that he makes between the essence of human thought and the essence of the candle is, simply, an analogy.) In the Lockean formulation, essential substance is found via the analysis of empirical entities, understood according to corpuscular and mechanical theories of substance and causation prevalent at the time. Descartes' epistemological criteria for truth endure in Lockean empiricism through the notion of simple and complex substances. In LIS, Lockean empiricism and its cognate Cartesian criteria for information substances can be seen as the epistemological and ontological foundations for various, well-known, theoretical models, ranging from those found in Brookes and Belkin's works, and extending up to the so-called DIKW hierarchical model.

Since information is so heavily understood in terms of rhetoric, and in fact has become a trope for clear and distinct forms of representation, then it becomes obvious that critique, as the critique of representational knowledge, should be concerned these days with the concept of information, not just in LIS or Information Science, but as it is deployed throughout society and culture. But, I think that it is not only a sign of the triumph of the modern conception of information that it has erased its own social and historical construction, though perhaps, as I suggested in my book, it is a logical requirement of information, understood as positive, empirical knowledge, that it does so.

2. This self-erasure of the conditions of the production of knowledge was understood in deconstruction as the hallmark of knowledge and truth within what it termed 'the Western metaphysical tradition.' The self-erasure of the very historical inscription of truth through systems of power allows for knowledge to be understood as a certain type of "auto-affective presence," to use Gasché's formulation of Derrida's notion of "presence." "Presence," in this sense, is akin to a naïve empiricist sense of knowledge or 'information.'

Most classically, the self-erasure of writing by truth is seen in the attack upon writing in Plato's writing. In Plato, as Derrida well directly and indirectly critiqued, thought precedes writing, which then imperfectly represents thought.

In LIS discourse, one sees such an epistemology in two places. First is the popular understanding of intellectual freedom in library practice that holds that the researching subject should have unfettered access to 'information.' The term 'information' is understood here as something akin to naturally occurring empirical objects. This approach is naïve at the extreme, in so far as it fails to account for libraries, persons, and 'information,' as historically formed entities with socially and culturally constructed relationships to one another.

But the more problematic appearance of this epistemology takes place in LIS research discourse, according to what Heidegger termed "the thesis of the precedence of method."[4] What Heidegger meant by this term was the tendency of the modern sciences to take method as the guarantor for truth. The effect of this upon critique is to see critique—that is, the logical and historical investigation of a priori forms for empirical understanding—as a sort of, at best, secondary, form of knowledge. This, in my opinion, is both a practical disaster and an affront to the very notion of science in the modern university, as I will soon attempt to argue.

LIS research, as does research throughout the university today, takes the form of a turn from language to that of data as the basis for reason. Data—or what in LIS is sometimes called "numbers"—is secured as reason by the use of methods upon so-called empirical phenomena. Perhaps it would not be too much to suggest that data has replaced argument and rhetoric as the basis for understanding and judgment in the modern university.

It may be that the proliferation of documents in the past twenty years and the turn of writing composition and rhetoric in universities from argumentative composition to 'research' composition, has helped erode a concept of writing that involves the thinking through or critique of an argument in terms of its own construction. In its place, literature has become a background, against which new opinions or findings are presented. Already, in Heidegger's work, one can see the argument that the author is now less of a thinker through writing and more of a researcher despite writing. Rhetoric, increasingly in the sciences of the 20th century, has faded into the background as both the means and the tools for disassembling arguments. In LIS, following the sciences, literacy, much less sophistication, in the language of composition is secondary to the assemblage of literature and the presentation of scientific data. In the modern senses of the terms, science is not about inscriptions, but about research. This was the background against which deconstruction reasserted the problematic relationship between inscriptions and truth—writing and philosophy—only to be turned back in the 'culture wars' as a sign of irrationalism and decadence.

In research composition as it is understood today, research occurs prior to writing and writing is understood as the representation of research. According to scientific discourse and rhetoric, writing is organized according to a set method of argument, which is rigorously or loosely followed. Textual information is summarized in the literature review, the method of research—which is focused on 'facts' other than the literature itself—is presented in a section on method, the results of the study are in a results section, and a discussion section pulls further conclusions from the results against the background of the prior literature review.

In sum, the model of the information seeker, as well as that of the social science researcher, is of a laborer in a field of informative data or, simply, information. Through searching and researching methods one finds evidence for new points of view against old points of view. Information, in this sense, is additive, not fundamentally critical. Language fits within assumed frameworks for representation rather than critiquing those frameworks *as* representation. The information seeking model now covers both practical searching and scientific research, though the notions of 'information' may be different.

3. The rhetoric and the epistemology of knowledge and truth in the modern period has had various sociological effects, of course. Time allows us to only remark upon this briefly, but I think that I would be amiss to completely pass over such a topic.

In a text that I will return to, Kant's public letter of 1784, "What is Enlightenment?" he refers to the possibilities and limits of expression under the rule of Frederick the Great by writing: "Only one sovereign in the world says, 'Argue, as much as you want, and about whatever you want, but obey.'" Of course, the central issue, which Kant does not dare state in this political context, but which is implied by the very essay in its public form, is that which is echoed in his three critiques: the necessity of questioning dogmatically derived assertions, not only in regard to knowledge, but in regard to actions, and to judgments of taste. In the 20th century, with the Frankfurt school and later, these tasks would be explicitly taken up in regard to politics—particularly the relation of politics to the rise of the mass media—in the mode of 'critical theory.'

I think one thing that Kant is telling his readers in the very form of his public essay, is that critique involves a contestation over the form, as well as over the content, of powers of expression. Such powers are *shown* by the formal arrangement of materials in the construction of truth, as well as are said in statements. The turning of statements back upon the conditions of knowledge is rhetorically and epistemically difficult because thought must, in a sense, think its own rhetorical and social conditions and then say such within the very same conditions that erase such reflection. This was the very struggle, for example, that I had in *The Modern Invention of Information*—namely, to investigate

information as a dominating type of knowledge within the horizons of an academic book, which is usually seen as an informational genre. This is a familiar problem in the history of critical philosophy and it has led to more radical, 'non-scholarly' strategies such as Nietzsche's use of aphorisms, Benjamin's use of montage in his historiographical practices, Wittgenstein's convoluted investigations utilizing strategies of analogy, and Heidegger's poetic turn both in content and in form in his later work, as well as, of course, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, which was hardly a publication success due to what was seen at the time as its dense and convoluted style. (Indeed, a review shortly after its publication stated that Kant's work was "incomprehensible to the greatest majority of the reading public" and that it was appropriate only for teachers of "metaphysics" [a great irony, since it attempted to overturn what was generally considered to be metaphysics at the time].)[5]

Many of the attacks upon critique—or as the critics in LIS and elsewhere like to call it in their sweeping generalizations, 'postmodernism'—take no account of the relation between form and content as an issue of representation within a sociological or a formal analysis. They take no account of this because they refuse to acknowledge the paramount importance of structure—whether it be rhetorical or political—in shaping knowledge and in shaping certain understandings and institutions of science and scholarship, particularly those that support their own positions and work. They themselves engage in all sorts of rhetorical flourishes, which under the guise of normative representations are seen as common sense and scholarly truth, while condemning much less when it is used for cultural analysis, not for entertainment. Sadly, nothing is new in this.

For critical information theory one question is how critique is incorporated into the disciplinary study of information itself. In LIS, the answer is that it is very infrequently employed. Critique is either seen as not being science or is seen as 'theory' with the task of aiding the current science in establishing more epistemic 'foundations.' By contrast, critique involves a historico-critical and rhetorical questioning that attempts to think beyond the foundational horizons of knowledge. Such an approach is part of the history of the modern university as founded in science writ large—*Wissenschaft*—which involves not simply technical research, but also the continual critical analysis of assumed foundations and forms, all in the spirit of preventing dogmatism. In sum, critique involves the questioning of social norms and cultural forms that act as a priori means for 'empirical' work. It attempts to work through the grammar and logic of existent discourses and their agent activities.

4. Given this definition of critique, the question occurs as to how it might be seen as contestational. This is a difficult question, because by asking it one is thrown into a variety of established positions. This was seen, for example, in the

reinterpretation of Derrida's concept of *différance* by the term "difference," in the context of the U.S. discourse on identity and in the literature of the media-hyped 'culture wars.'

The history and polemics of the culture wars do not interest me as much as the system of knowledge and the system of logic that operates as its politics. In particular, I am interested, here, in the epistemology of systems and the logic of dialectic. The modern epistemology of systems emerges in the 18th century as a production of classification systems across the sciences, which as Latour and others have argued, were for administrative, as well as scientific, purposes. Identities, here, are understood as products of differences within systems of identification. Within such systems, individuals are seen as representatives of classes, which are arranged by a system of classification. In other words, systems are made up of representations that constitute identities for singular beings. Systems, in this classical sense, are relatively synchronic and do not reflect the historical development of individuals as singular differentiations of common being. For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to identities that are understood essentially and within relatively synchronic measures as 'individuals,' proper, and to identities that are understood as expressions and emergences that are historically determined powers, as 'singularities.'

Historically, the notion of identity in late 18th century and early 19th century science and philosophy was understood as individuals in systems of classification (The Great Chain of Being, for example) and the notion of identities in the 19th century, particularly after Darwin, appeared and appears as singularities formed out of evolution and charted through, for example, cladistics. In so far as individuals, proper, are seen as a priori understood and essential identities, I see them as informationalized beings and persons, because they are re-cognized according to re-presentational systems in language, culture, and society.

Where this becomes important in politics is in trying to understand the role of representation in political systems. The state or sovereign's rights, in Hegel's work and others, is not just a function of the state or sovereign's power, but it is an expression of the power of its transcendental Right in granting civil and expressive rights to properly identified non-sovereign figures. Justice, in other words, is viewed as the rights granted within the sovereignty or the state's Reason. Further, rights are granted to rational beings, that is, those who are recognized as certain types of beings entitled to certain rights within the domain of the sovereign or the state's reason. Such typologies of rights and identities are based on precedence, so as to follow and preserve the logic and unity of the sovereign or the State as a transcendental entity—that is, as a *state* (stasis).

The logic of system and dialectic as a political logic transcends monarchical or totalitarian states and extends into certain notions of democratic

states, namely those that see persons as represented and representational identities. The critical concern overall, though, is not only what is the system by which identities are made—for example, in the U.S., the grammar and logic of 'race'—but also, what becomes of politics when a cultural politics of representation dominates it.

This is not an easy question to answer, particularly within the context of U.S. discourse which is so heavily historically based in certain 18th century notions of identity and in which once and perhaps still essentialist representational categories such as 'race' function, not just as social dynamics of recognition, but as political ontologies, grammars, and logic.

The problem is not just that of the system of identification, itself, but of its exclusion of a language of critique vis-à-vis its regulation of the grammar and logic of intervention. The issues here are not only practical, but expressive as well, in so far as a critical language for contestation tends to be either rejected or co-opted, seen as nonsense or as clear and distinct. For example, deconstruction attempted to trace the dialectical logic of representation at given historical moments and in exemplary cultural texts, and so it stood at the margins of that logic in terms of its function and its grammars. 'Lack of clarity' was the necessary price paid for operating at the edge of Reason, but it was a price to be paid within the language of Reason. For this, it was attacked by both conservatives and liberals in the U.S., both claimers to Reason's Right and supposed critics of such.

In sum, by confining the theorization of political struggle to representational categories sanctioned by the reigning state, political struggle can be reduced to a concept of struggle for rights alone, understood within the reigning state's grammar of representation and its logic of identification.

I would assert that potential struggles for justice cannot be reduced to a cultural grammar and logic of representation, though such struggles may be forced to conform to such a logic by the force of law and its monopoly upon violence. The ideal of critique, however, is not toward simple opposition or toward simply being granted identity within the norm's grammar and logic of recognition and representation, but rather, toward justice, that is toward all beings being considered as equal, each according to the terms of its specific singularity, as well as its in-common being. In Heideggerian language, ontologically, beings are singularities, though ontically they may remain within systems of representation and so remain what we have termed 'individuals' proper. A politics of justice must see beyond the Right or Reason set by grammars and logics of representation, that is to say, beyond informationalized subjects and the 'clear and distinct'—or representational—utterances and identities given and expected of them.

5. In what follows, I would like to look at critique more generally, namely in terms of the political space and time of critique.

Within a general prohibition against structural and later types of analyses and within an ideology of naïve empiricism, nationalist exceptionalism, and market purity, critique in the American context has always been an uphill battle against faith, dogmatism, ideology, historical ignorance and amnesia—i.e., what ends up as 'common sense.' Rather than being criticism, in the sense of opposition, per se, however, critique has stressed a critical attitude that is tactical in its interventions.

We could describe critique in different manners.

One oversimplifying, but I think not necessarily incorrect, manner of epistemologically understanding critique begins with the idea that theories are explanations of practices, which of course, also constitute and enable discursive practices themselves. The difference between practice and theory, then, is not the difference between non-language and language, but rather, between an activity that is a habit or custom and an activity that while it, too, may be a habit or custom that is practiced, is meant to be reflective upon the former. Critical theory enters into such an array as moments of critique upon both levels—that of practice, and that of the models or explanations of the former, that is, theory. It is called for in times of the immobility or contradiction of practices—both practical and theoretical—and it intervenes by looking at the history, the cultural forms (not least being language), and the social norms and logic of these activities.

Another way of understanding critique is in terms of its relation to dogmatism and politics and in terms of time and the world. In Kant's "What is Enlightenment?" which I alluded to earlier, critique appears as a duty and as a response to sovereign power. It seems to appear in, and cause, breaks of historical time—something akin to the concept of "caesura," as used by Kant's contemporary, Friedrich Hölderlin.

As I mentioned earlier, Kant's public letter occurs under the yoke of princely control, but the notion of an historical state of exception that affords and calls for science does not end with Kant or with the conventional historical boundaries given to the Enlightenment. Instead, it continues in an historical line culminating in the founding of the modern university prototype, the University of Berlin in 1810.[6] I will remind you here that American universities are founded upon the University of Berlin model, though later adding more professional schools and a greater emphasis upon practical skills.

The question thus occurs, how does this critical moment—the moment of exception for thought—come about? In Kant's public letter, there is a paradox to what brings about this moment. In Kant's text, critique is said to be necessary in order to make humankind 'mature,' that is, responsible for itself, individually and as a group. The reason for humankind's immaturity is stated in the text as being

that of men's "laziness and cowardice." But cowardice because of what? Despite Kant's praise for his sovereign, it is obvious that the cowardice is in the face of the sovereign and of sovereignty itself, which acts as a paternalistic power over human self-governance, limiting its freedom and restricting the opening of thought to the world and to time. In Kant's text—as a little later in Fichte's, too (for example, in his 1794 "Lectures on the Scholar's Vocation")—intellectual laziness and cowardice also appear in the face of the greater world and to human finitude in it. It turns out that human beings' intellectual laziness and cowardice is not only in the face of sovereignty, but also in the face of beings as a whole and in regard to being itself. The 'scientific' (*Wissenschaft*) impulse that one sees in Kant and Fichte and which was instantiated by Wilhelm von Humboldt in the University of Berlin model is one that is not afraid to risk all in regard to knowledge. One sees such risk in not only the texts of these writers, but even more perhaps, the natural history explorations of Wilhelm von Humboldt's brother, Alexander, and, of course, most magnificently, in Darwin's explorations and writings, for Darwin was remarkable because he was not afraid of facing the death of the concept of man, which was essential for his age. Briefly, what Kant called Enlightenment refers to the reassertion of the expanse of the world and of time, and so of thought itself, against dogmatic assertions of knowledge and its transmission. In the historical event of Enlightenment, the confrontation with the sovereign marks an event of freedom and an awareness of death, just as a confrontation with knowledge as science marks an event of freedom and a sharp awareness of finitude. And naturally enough, in the face of such, laziness and cowardice drive us back to dogmatic certainty.

The result is that while critique may be a tactical moment in regard to dogmatism, it is a permanent one. For Kant and Fichte, it is, particularly, a task of a certain professional group, namely that of scholars, and more generally, that of learned people.

Scholars, as other professionals of the modern era, have been granted many exceptions to the lives of other working people—among them, self-governance and work flexibility—though, of course, these privileges have been greatly eroded in the past thirty years. In addition to these privileges, scholars are said to enjoy—though this has been greatly eroded, as well—a certain exceptionalism in terms of critical speech—so-called academic freedom.

Whatever government workers these faculty are, whatever factory of knowledge that they are working in, the German tradition of scholarship and the modern university—which is the founding model for U.S. universities—grants these workers a right of critique that is rather exceptional. Some—and, indeed, in some ways even more—of these same rights are granted to students, as well, who, too, are even still generally seen as existing prior to or outside of the conditions of 'normal' employment.

Of course, Kant does not present in his essay an equal's view of the sovereign, as an author such as Machiavelli does. Kant always views the sovereign from the position of subordination and with a bit of resentment, rather than from the viewpoint of an equal giving advice, and so we have to understand the total form of Kant's public letter—we have to read 'between the lines,' as it were. The reality of the sovereign state is stated in Machiavelli's work, in insights such as those that the prince should always seek to be viewed as good, but it should be known, too, that he will act with maximum violence upon anyone who falls outside the reason of his sovereignty. Such an insight reveals that the social contract that the subjects have with sovereignty and the state is based on a permanent state of the sovereign and State's exception. The social contract is obedience to the sovereign/State's Reason. Disobedience—however rational it might appear to the subject him or herself—is a result of falling outside of the sovereign's law. In other words, rationality is guaranteed by absolute irrationality, which is possible because, as Walter Benjamin noted, the state maintains an ultimate monopoly upon violence.[7]

The state and its reason is, thus, founded on its own exception. The irrational violence of the sovereign state guarantees that it will not be violated in the social contract, but this also assures that the state will remain bound to its own show of rationality, resulting in dogma. It is true that sometimes some comic relief can break this logjam of authoritarian madness—Shakespeare often presents such a figure as the court fool and Ancient stories tell of the cynic Diogenes jokingly offending Alexander the Great, reportedly to the latter's offense and then delight. And Machiavelli presents the figure of a trusted servant. But in modern times, when the scholar is neither playing the fool or the trusted servant to Reason, on the historical occasion when something else is made possible, then this something else is critique.

But this does not mean that critique is itself a state—for example, there is no such unified body of knowledge or an institution known as 'postmodernism' nor is there is any body of knowledge identified as *critique,* per se. Indeed, critique has an inverse form to dogmatism. From the viewpoint of critique, dogmatism is a state of control over ruptures in historical rhythms, which, in reality, constitute time and the world. But from the viewpoint of dogmatism, there is nothing but the state and the opposition to it. The historical task of dogmatism is to conserve its forms, foremost, its logic, including its recognized opposition in the liberal form of 'the loyal opposition' or in the more seemingly radical form of 'minority' or 'challenging' viewpoints. As conservatism, it is in constant struggle to conserve its power over time and the world, to control the alternating waves of history that it sees as threatening to its dominance, a state that it refers to as 'relativistic' or 'irrational,' in order to maintain the illusion of its possession of reason. And conservatism protects itself by emphasizing itself as the core tradition

and by asserting its own foundational status, even as it 'entertains' challenges to it. In brief, sovereignty maintains its reason as a state of metaphorical death upon itself by perpetuating actual death upon others, through a permanent state of terror, marginalization, exclusion, and actual execution. It is, in short, reason that is grounded in, and only can maintain itself by the masking of its contradictions and the fury of its madness for power over others.

What I have described in this paper as 'the state' is the governmental form of any sovereignty, whether it be at the level of nations or academic disciplines or institutions. LIS may be relatively extreme in the disciplinary spectrum of the academe, but it is hardly alone in its general sociological makeup.

Is any of this new? No. What is new, though, are the concessions made over the past 30 years in the university that have gradually abandoned critique in the face of a technocratic and increasingly authoritarian system. This system follows capital markets, national ideologies, and growing waves of science and pseudo-science. In other words, to return to the spirit of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, it marks a return to dogmatic positivism, one based both in a type of epistemic faith and in an administrative obedience. Public institution academics are seen as state workers, but increasingly today, this is a state of the market, which defines their work either according to the training of workers or according to the promulgation of established lines of 'scientific' rhetoric and 'research.'

From a certain viewpoint, it appears ironic that in the age of what is said to be our own "Enlightenment"—that is, the 'information age'—critique is being increasingly abandoned.[8] The reduction of knowledge to a representational sense of information is the very opposite way that we should be understanding knowledge. The implications for this and the abandonment of critique run throughout American politics and culture, not the least being the university.

The famous Stanley Fish has written that academics should save the world on their own time, but in the sense that Fish seems to mean such a statement I find this to be an incredibly ignorant and arrogant statement—ignorant of the historical foundations of the modern university and the duties and tasks prescribed to it and an arrogant administrative viewpoint based on a relatively recent vision of the technocratic university as a purveyor of state–corporate-sponsored values. Fish should realize that the university changed two hundred years ago with Wilhelm von Humboldt and others who challenged the static transmission of information in the medieval university and the separation of teaching and research. The duty and task of _changing_ the world *is* historically invested in the modern university structure as science writ large (*Wissenschaft*) and it remains inscribed, though largely unused, in the work conditions of increasingly rare full-time faculty. And it remains possible in the hopes, efforts, intelligence, and energy of students. This duty and task reflects the change that *is* time and *is* the world. Practically, it begins with the notion that everything can be done better. Thought begins not

with the question of 'what is it correct to do?' but with the statements, 'wouldn't it be nice if…' or 'this should not be…'.

The academic and larger political struggle against the dogmatic attitude has a tradition reaching back to Kant and constitutes the tradition of critique in modernity. In terms of LIS, it should be the responsibility of those charged with investigating 'information'—including information's own rise and prominence as an *episteme* of an age—to try and understand information's formal boundaries and to intervene in some of its disciplinary and social deployments. Information schools should have as the center of their tasks that of investigating the social and personal structures that afford information to appear as certain types of knowledge. This investigation must be concerned, too, with the structural devices and policies that create both scholarly and public information. The educational and research functions of the field must not be content with simply surveying information practices, but must aim at theorizing and critiquing structural elements—that is, cultural, social, psychological, and political forms and devices—that regularize expressions and forms for expressions.

There are some who are trying to '*save* the world' in academe, and these are people for whom the world is a given. What they are trying to save is the world as a dogma. But the world is not a given and when it is given, it is the job of the university and its students to dislocate it and to change it for the better. As long as conservatism as a form of dogmatic repetition remains and as long as persons enjoy the power that comes with maintaining such controls, there will be the need for critique. The permanent state of exception ensures that the moment of critique continues as a tradition of struggle for nothing less than time itself and the rights of persons to time. People have the right to reinvent the world and not just 'on their own time.' The struggle is, in the last, over the nature of being in time. In this struggle, the episteme of information appears. The meaning of the term 'information' and the contestation over it are a concern not only for LIS, but also for the university structure and for society at large.

Notes

[1] Day, Ronald E. (2001). *The modern invention of information: Discourse, history, and power.* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
[2] I am indebted to Lai Ma, SLIS, Indiana University, for highlighting these examples.
[3] See, for example, Davenport, Elisabeth. (2010). Confessional methods and everyday life information seekers. *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology (ARIST), 44*, 533-562. Other than method, so much of the core problems in 'user studies' taken as a supposed group in LIS research involves the confusion of what Bernd Frohmann has termed the difference between "realist"

and "nominalist" views of information (see the important second chapter of his book, *Deflating Information: From Science Studies to Documentation*, University of Toronto Press, 2004). Frohmann's earlier critiques of Belkin's ASK and Brookes' theoretical articles are, of course, of primary importance as well. See Frohmann, Bernd. (1992). The power of images: A discourse analysis of the cognitive viewpoint. *Journal of Documentation, 48*(4), 365-386.

[4] Heidegger, Martin. (1977). The end of philosophy and the task of thinking. In *Basic writings from Being and time (1927) to The task of thinking (1964)* (pp. 373-392). New York: Harper.

[5] Kuehn, Manfred. (2002). *Kant: A biography* (p. 254). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

[6] On the relation of Kantian philosophy and German Romanticism to the founding of the University of Berlin, see Shaffer, Elinor S. (1990). Romantic philosophy and the organizations of the disciplines: The founding of the Humboldt University of Berlin. In A. Cunningham & N. Jardine (Eds.), *Romanticism and the sciences* (pp. 38-54). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. On the history of the American university system see for example, Veysey, Laurence R. (1965). *The emergence of the American university.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[7] Benjamin, Walter. (1996). Critique of violence. In *Walter Benjamin: Selected writings, volume 2, 1913-1926* (pp. 236-253). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[8] From the viewpoint of the dominance of the social sciences, however, this is not ironic. The social sciences represent the mode of critique of the information age – that is, the mode of critique of 'research,' with the precedence of method sometimes adopted in order to make some studies and fields appear to be 'science' and an advance upon 'critique' in the manner that I have presented it. "Critical theory" thus becomes subsumed within the domains of a certain episteme of 'truth,' which in the case of some in the Frankfurt School, for example, it foremost opposed. The 'advance' upon critique by social science research, as some undoubtedly see to be the case, is in need of critique via its being read within the ideology of research today. It is necessary to add that the issue here is not that of empiricism versus non-empiricism, but rather, what is to be understood as 'empirical' and the role that method plays in this within the episteme and ideological diffusion of certain senses of modern science.

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