Appendix C

Symptom “A”: The End
As the author-pay model spreads across academic publishing, what are the possible consequences? Will the current rage for open-source scholarship actually accomplish anything other than shifting the furniture around on the Titanic? Will not Open Source in combination with Digital Humanities further destroy the very idea of “slow” and “thoughtful” work in humanistic studies?

Is this model spreading because there is, finally, a revolt by academics serving for free as content providers, editors, and ex-officio peer-review panels for for-profit publishers of books and journals? Or is it spreading because of the tightening grip of neo-liberal capitalist control, with text- and data-mining procedures enforced from on high both from within academia and from without? Perhaps it is caused by symptoms operating in-between exploitation and revolt, as the revolt is, at best, episodic at the moment. If it is scholarly journals that are first to be hit with this model, with books trailing behind, will the book not be a probable “place” to counter the virulent aspects of this emergent symptom?

More to the point, it would seem that the author-pay model (formerly attributed to predatory publishers) is just another way of extracting tribute for the “privilege” of being
published—enforceable only because academia has ratcheted up the stakes by enforcing research metrics and citations, in the public universities a practice that is primarily enforced by external “industrial” connections. Almost all public and private universities are heading toward measuring output with metrics—many academics now tailoring their CVs to show why they are “important,” mirroring the social-media campaigns of celebrities and politicians, and many universities now citing their own “corporate” rankings when promoting their product (the University, the Institute, the Department, the Professor).

Where this is all going is toward increased precarity for anyone who does not play the game. Individual, solitary scholars will have few options.

The options for alternative models (such as modified open-access and a block-chain inspired “walled garden” for works that resist assimilation) will have to be vigorously networked—another manifestation of the same processes of converting scholarship to media—foremost on the peer-to-peer (P2P) and public-relations (PR) side. In adopting the necessity of the digital network, the product (books, not journals) will have to be kept in sight. The physical book is the only product that might benefit both the author and the alternative model proposed—against neo-liberal capitalist exploitation. Modified open-access publishing might become, in this scenario, the last stand for the immaterial rights of authors.

The great conundrum here is that socially generated forms of cultural production (retrospectively denoted “cultural heritage” or “cultural patrimony”) have been hijacked, with atomization of scholars the intention of the machinic model enforced by Capital. Non-democratic, neo-liberal capitalism wants it two ways at once. It says to scholars and universities: We take the profit, you socialize the labor and risk. This is the exact premise or formula for what brought on the 2008 global economic catastrophe through the massive securitization of everything tangible and intangible. Must we now endure a
global intellectual catastrophe as well? All signs point to the fact that we are already halfway there.

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