Aaron Sorkin and David Fincher’s The Social Network asks you to participate in the meteoric rise of Facebook creator Mark Zuckerberg, who by all accounts ruthlessly cheated and lied his way into billionaire status. It is not terribly surprising that Sorkin (screenwriter) and Fincher (director) chose to avoid a direct critique of Facebook—by now it is virtually a truism that Facebook has contributed to the rapidly deteriorating state of our social relations—what is surprising is that Sorkin and Fincher have created a portrait of an internet tycoon who is in many respects a blank slate. The first thing we learn about Zuckerberg in the film’s opening sequence is that he received a perfect score on his SATs and that he very badly wants to gain entrance into Harvard’s exclusive final clubs. Not exactly sui generis for a Harvard computer nerd. Nevertheless, Sorkin’s dialogue is sharp and he pulls you in as Zuckerberg proceeds to talk himself out of a relationship. Before his bewildered ex-girlfriend takes off she leaves Zuckerberg with the following diagnosis: “You’re going to be successful and rich. But you’re going to go through life thinking that girls don’t like you because you’re a tech geek. I want you to know, from the bottom of my heart, that won’t be true: It’ll be because you’re an asshole.” Commentators have suggested that this declaration functions as Zuckerberg’s “Rosebud.” Doomed to wander Silicon Valley as his bank account expands, Zuckerberg will nevertheless fail to win the affection and respect of anyone.

The meat of the film proceeds as a transmission of Zuckerberg’s assorted lawsuits, particularly with “best friend” and CFO Eduardo Saverin, who Zuckerberg eventually froze out by reducing his ownership share to 0.03%. Additionally, Zuckerberg is sued by Cameron and Tyler Winklevoss for misleading them in the development of the “HarvardConnection,” a precursor to Facebook. Whether or not the details of these trials are accurate is almost beside the point—Zuckerberg is clearly a self-serving entrepreneur who is willing to lie, cheat, and steal for the sake of his company. The film is most successful in its portrayal of the speed and contingency of internet entrepreneurship—while the Winklevoss brothers wait for Zuckerberg to complete the HarvardConnection, Zuckerberg proceeds to develop and launch the Facebook without their knowledge. It is here that the logic of neo-liberalism presents itself—while the entitled Winklevoss brothers represent a “rule-bound” era of the American ruling class in their attempts to appeal to Harvard

Critique without a Critique

President Larry Summers, Zuckerberg feels no such compulsion to adhere to the rules of the game. Saverin also falls prey to the illusory notion that Facebook has contributed to the rapidly deteriorating state of our social relations—what is surprising is that Sorkin and Fincher have created a portrait of an internet tycoon who is in many respects a blank slate. The first thing we learn about Zuckerberg in the film’s opening sequence is that he received a perfect score on his SATs and that he very badly wants to gain entrance into Harvard’s exclusive final clubs. Not exactly sui generis for a Harvard computer nerd. Nevertheless, Sorkin’s dialogue is sharp and he pulls you in as Zuckerberg proceeds to talk himself out of a relationship. Before his bewildered ex-girlfriend takes off she leaves Zuckerberg with the following diagnosis: “You’re going to be successful and rich. But you’re going to go through life thinking that girls don’t like you because you’re a tech geek. I want you to know, from the bottom of my heart, that won’t be true: It’ll be because you’re an asshole.” Commentators have suggested that this declaration functions as Zuckerberg’s “Rosebud.” Doomed to wander Silicon Valley as his bank account expands, Zuckerberg will nevertheless fail to win the affection and respect of anyone.

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demonstrate. Namely, that Facebook is not the invention of an individual, but rather the result of a set of social and technological conditions which allowed Zuckerberg and his immediate colleagues to launch a marketable platform. In the final analysis, no one is able to say who “invented” Facebook, for the internet is an infinitely connected, infinitely contextual thing.

Where the film fails is in its strange inability to distance itself from the anti-