CONSUMING THE SELF: AN ECSTATIC NATURALIST EXPLORATION OF CONSUMERISM

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Committee Chair: Robert S. Corrington, Ph.D.
Henry Anson Buttz Professor of Philosophical Theology

Theresa Marie Ellis

Drew University

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ABSTRACT

Consuming the Self: An Ecstatic Naturalist Exploration of Consumerism

Ph.D. Dissertation by

Theresa Marie Ellis

Graduate Division of Religion
Drew University June 2017

This dissertation analyzes how consumption is a reaction to human ontological woundedness, specifically that individuals grieve their separation from the Other as well as their unfulfilled nonmaterial needs. In the resulting angst due to separation, people amass consumable goods in an effort to build a figurative bridge which would connect them to those around them and satisfy their need for self-fulfillment and love. This continuous acquisition of material goods to meet nonmaterial needs leads to a schizophrenic distortion in the human perception of the actual planetary limits of such consumption. Furthermore, as fallible individuals, with complex subconscious drives and insecurities, the acquisition of consumer goods feels, in turn, cognitively appropriate and emotionally satisfying. Cognitive dissonance arises when one recognizes that their consumption has a negative impact on themselves and others, leading to a growing separation from their own selfhood and from the Other.

This project uses ecstatic naturalism as a foundational metaphysics, specifically as a theological and semiotic base. Ecstatic naturalism animates this project by placing primacy on experience, favoring the unconscious, privileging ontological woundedness and ontological parity, and extricating the tendency toward honorific or eulogistic classifications of the past and/or of material reality. An essential part of this project is naturalism's ordinal phenomenology: the practice of clearing away everything

extraneous from a particular phenomenon, while still employing all of the senses to fully experience such. This approach is valuable to this project as it is common for systems of economics and understandings of capitalism and consumerism to suffer from bad metaphysics; specifically, they are subject to (mis)understandings of cause and effect. Second, ecstatic naturalism as a metaphysical system is dedicated to providing glimpses of the threefold process of the self, the community, and the world, which help to uncover the deep and often suppressed motivations behind acquisitive behavior, the ethical challenges accumulation creates for communities, and the treacherous implications consumerism has on an ever unfolding nature.

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Trying to fill real but nonmaterial needs—for identity, community, self-esteem, challenge, love, joy—with material things is to set up an unquenchable appetite for false solutions to never-satisfied longings.
Meadows, Randers, and Meadows[1]

I. Introduction

Humans, as inherently social beings, long for and in many ways require connection with others. In the modern era, social connections are colored and even strained by the prevalence of consumer goods whereby consumption is constitutive of who the individual is. This dissertation is an analysis of how consumption is a reaction to our ontological woundedness[2], specifically that we[3] grieve our separation from the Other[4] and we grieve our unfulfilled nonmaterial needs. In the resulting angst we amass consumable goods in an effort to build a figurative bridge which would connect us to those around us and satisfy our need for self-fulfillment and love. This continuous acquisition of material goods to meet nonmaterial needs leads to a schizophrenic distortion in the human perception of the actual planetary limits of such consumption. Furthermore, as fallible individuals, with complex subconscious drives and insecurities, the acquisition of consumer goods feels, in turn, cognitively appropriate and emotionally satisfying. Cognitive dissonance arises when we recognize that our consumption has a negative impact on ourselves and those around us, leading to a growing separation from our own selfhood and from the Other. In order to alleviate the dissonance, we justify our consumer behavior in a variety of ways, one of which includes consuming more.

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[1] Meadows, Donella H., Jørgen Randers, Dennis L. Meadows. *Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update*. (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2004), 262.
[2] In philosophic terms, ontological woundedness is that inherent separation of one from another. See chapter three for a more complete discussion of the ontological wound.
[3] All references to "we" and "our" include specifically those people in the US, but such references are made only for convenience sake. There is acknowledgement the implicit heterogeneity of people living in the US.
[4] A definition of Other-ness will be amalgamated from Robert Corrington's philosophical theology and from Emmanuel Levinas' religious ethics.

Consumptive behavior is complex and involves various factors including ideology, psycho-social development, issues of attachment, cognitive dissonance, ambivalence, abjection of the self,[5] and distorted worldview. Consumption is a very necessary part of modern global capitalism[6] and consumers are praised for their participation in this system. However, this perspective ignores and even conceals the more pathological aspects of consumption. In our current US society, consumerism is the norm and has become naturalized and ritualized behavior. Nevertheless, the way in which consumption is typically viewed is overly simplistic and neglects the critical role of reflexivity and ideology in consumer behavior where the interiority of the individual's needs, priorities, and values, and the exteriority of social expectations are in dialectic. This tension is exacerbated in a consumerist society.

Modern global capitalism is a system of the *hyper-supply* of consumer goods whereby unimagined numbers and types of goods, purportedly designed for comfort and convenience, are made ubiquitously available. There is a seduction in the fantastical, even magical, presence of *things we didn't even know we needed before we saw them for sale*. The consumer system in the US is designed to distort perceptions which permit the disavowal of the complications and destruction inherent in the extraction, manufacture, distribution, and disposal of resources as these processes are hidden literally and

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[5] This term is taken from Julia Kristeva: "There is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the *want* on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded. One always passes too quickly over this word, 'want,' and today psychoanalysts are finally taking into account only its more or less fetishized product, the 'object of want.'" *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980/1982), 5.

[6] Modern global capitalism is discussed at length in chapter two. A working definition is taken from Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 15: "'Modernity' can be understood as roughly equivalent to 'the industrialsed world', so long as it be recognized that industrialism is not its only institutional dimension. I take industrialism to refer to the social relations implied in the widespread use of material power and machinery in production processes. As such, it is one institutional axis of modernity. A second dimension is capitalism, where this term means a system of commodity production involving both competitive product markets and the commodification of labour power."

figuratively from view; therefore, acknowledgement of the source and result of the consumer goods expended is never really required. This seduction and disavowal causes people to become ethically bereft and spiritually impaired, leading to irrational understandings of limitlessness and/or despair, both of which often lead to further consumption. It is a self-perpetuating system which is, in the end, an inadequate response to ontological woundedness and unmet nonmaterial needs. This project will employ a hermeneutic of suspicion *vis-à-vis* consumption whereby the ostensibly obvious causes of consumption, such as desire, perceived need, and competitive acquisition, can be deconstructed and reassessed.

The research on consumerism is typically aimed at "how do we get people to buy our stuff?" (numerous marketing journals, books, blogs, etc.), or "people buy stuff that they don't really want and don't really need."[7] Modern consumerism has a nebulous definition according to sociologist Colin Campbell, who argues it is due to the fact that those who engage the topic can typically be divided into two groups: those who want people to be consumers and those who question consumption.[8] Most likely, people find themselves vacillating between these poles. It is essential to find the root causes of consumption in order to combat the onslaught of demands placed on people's time and attention in an effort to continually create a desire in people to *buy this thing*. This study is neither empirical nor ethnographic. It is not an attempt to analyze consumer data. Rather, the central goal of this dissertation is to employ cross-pollination between various

[7] George A. Akerlof and Robert J. Shiller, *Phishing for Phools: The Economics of Manipulation and Deception* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Juliet B. Schor, *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998); Tim Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002).
[8] Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and The Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1987).

disciplinary and methodological approaches to explain the pandemic of destructive consumer behavior. People need to be empowered to alter some of the more cancerous aspects of their own consumer behavior. While this project is not an attempt to analyze the current field of marketing, it will look at marketing as an appeal to consumers which will lead to the analysis of why people buy things *they don't really need*, or even want for that matter. Analyzing consumerism is not novel by any means; but, as will be argued herein, each disciplinary and theoretical approach can enliven our insight with the hope for movement toward resisting consumerism by suspending the horizon of meaning such that the ideology of commodification is destabilized which will allow us to imagine a post-consumerist society.

The Case of American Consumerism

The average number of objects in a US home is astounding to consider. In studies conducted by anthropologists and professional "de-clutterers" that number is upwards of 300,000 items.[9] Along with the growing number of objects in the home, Americans generate an inordinate amount of garbage, with some estimates as high as 4.4 pounds of garbage produced by each person per day in the US.[10] We have become a disposable society. Much of what is amassed in people's homes is transitory; it is kept for a while but then it is discarded. It has not always been this way. Consumerism in the US seems to have reached a fever pitch.

In attempting to understand the trajectory of US consumerism, historian Frank Trentmann, who specializes in the history of consumerism, writes that one of the main

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[9] Mary MacVean. "For many people, gathering possessions is just the stuff of life," *LATimes.com*, March 21, 2014. (http://articles.latimes.com/2014/mar/21/health/la-he-keeping-stuff-20140322).
[10] "Municipal Solid Waste." *EPA.gov*. (Accessed July 17, 2017, https://archive.epa.gov/epawaste/nonhaz/municipal/web/html/).

ways that consumption has changed over the past centuries is that people are now accumulating considerably more things than in past eras.[11] The question is why? Is it because people have more disposable income or because items are cheaper? In many ways, the prevailing opinion of advertisers—that consumers are irrational and impetuous—was the *modus operendi* of manufacturers to get their product into the consumer's home.[12]

Advertising of consumer products paints its own picture of American culture, not necessarily reflecting the actualities of social upheaval and class struggle. The aim of advertising simple: create desire. Said desire is created by signifying a lack or deficiency in the observer's life due to the absence of the product being offered. Cultural anthropologist and graphic design historian Jim Heimann says that "[f]rom 1945 to the late 1960s the advertising business evolved rapidly, first reflecting and then *boldly redefining the ways Americans thought and bought*. As America's gross national product rose, from around $100 billion in 1940 to $300 billion in 1950 and more than $500 billion in 1960, the business of selling to America was serious."[13] The seriousness of the particular business of advertising was seen as a necessary driver to the virtually unhindered prosperity of the post-WWII era. Advertising existed for many decades prior, but what shifted especially in the 1960s was what advertisers called "the Big Idea."[14] Advertising had previously relied on "lengthy, turgid texts" with an attractive photo or drawing of the product.[15] Conversely, the Big Idea was a means to communicate with

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[11] Frank Trentmann, *Empire of Things: How We Became a World of Consumers: From the Fifteenth Century to the Twenty-first* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016), 1.
[12] Ibid., 288.
[13] Jim Heimann and Steven Heller, *Mid-Century Ads: Advertising from the* Mad Men *Era* (Köln, Germany: Taschen, 2012), 19, emphasis added.
[14] Ibid., 341.
[15] Ibid., 342.

images and slogans, which meant that advertisements had to impart a lasting impression as well as continually amuse their audience.[16] In modern marketing, advertising seems to work as a means to assure brand loyalty.[17] It is difficult, if not impossible, to determine the impact of advertising, e.g., whether an ad will actually cause a consumer to use a particular product or to switch to a particular brand of a product. An argument could be made that some advertising is a means to affirm consumer choice, i.e., an advertisement for a product already purchased serves as a confirmation that the consumer made the right choice.[18]

The concept of choice is discussed at length herein because in a consumerist society there is the prevailing supposition that all consumers are ultimately free to make whatever choices they wish with regard to the products they consume. However, as this project argues, consumer choice is based largely on an individual's striving toward love and acceptance.

Philosophical Context

This project uses ecstatic naturalism as a foundational metaphysics, specifically as a theological and semiotic base. Ecstatic naturalism incorporates a philosophic-theological approach of non-deism and rejects any aspects of supernaturalism: there is nothing outside of nature.[19] Speaking phenomenologically, ecstatic naturalism acknowledges "the utter breadth and scope of nature, while honoring the constant

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Arjun Chaudhuri and Morris B. Holbrook, "The Chain of Effects from Brand Trust and Brand Affect to Brand Performance: The Role of Brand Loyalty." *Journal of Marketing* 65, no. 2 (2001): 81-93. The researchers in this study controlled for brand trust and brand affect in order to isolate the variables of purchase loyalty (buying same product again) and attitudinal loyalty (saying they would purchase the same product again if they needed it).
[18] Op. cit.
[19] Robert S. Corrington, *Nature and Spirit: An Essay in Ecstatic Naturalism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), 14.

creative rhythms that enter into the growth of meaning within the world."[20] As a metaphysical conception, ecstatic naturalism holds space for ever-evolving semiosis as well as the animating forces of nature to continue to bring into being the innumerable orders of the universe.

Ecstatic naturalism animates this project by placing primacy on experience, favoring the unconscious, privileging ontological woundedness and ontological parity, and extricating the tendency toward honorific or eulogistic classifications of the past and/or of material reality.[21] An essential part of this project is naturalism's ordinal phenomenology: the practice of clearing away everything extraneous from a particular phenomenon, while still employing all of the senses to fully experience such. Ordinal phenomenology is a particularly potent methodology for this project in that it serves to help assess the systemic and metaphysical assumptions of the various theories explored in this dissertation. In other words, ordinal phenomenology creates a clearing whereby phenomena can be experienced "on their *own* terms."[22] Theological philosopher Robert S. Corrington emphasizes the need for the discipline of allowing phenomenon to arise without "interference from…bad metaphysics."[23] This approach is valuable to this project as it is common for systems of economics and understandings of capitalism and consumerism to suffer from bad metaphysics; specifically, they are subject to

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Honorific and eulogistic language tends to favor only the positive aspects of a given object, person, or experience. Ordinal phenomenology within the context of ecstatic naturalism acknowledges that "the human process gives shape and texture to the innumerable orders of relevance [of/within nature]" but that there are extra-human processes which are just as important and thorough semiosis should reflect that understanding. Ibid., 10.

[22] Robert Corrington, *Deep Pantheism: Toward a New Transcendentalism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), xxii, emphasis in original.

[23] Ibid., xxii.

(mis)understandings of cause and effect.[24] For example, in terms of global market capitalism, most (if not all) of the planet's resources are given a value in terms of their service to capitalistic gains; some resources, like gold, are valued much higher than other resources, like paper pulp. The value of resources is "blamed" on the "laws" of supply and demand, as if the value of such resources was as simple as how much was demanded versus how much could be supplied. This perspective ignores the not-always-invisible machinations of economic establishments, such as Wall Street. Second, the use of ecstatic naturalism as a metaphysical system provides glimpses of the threefold process of the self, the community, and the world; this also facilitates the uncovering of the deep and often suppressed motivations behind acquisitive behavior, the ethical challenges accumulation creates for communities, and the treacherous implications consumerism has on an ever unfolding nature.[25]

Psychoanalytic Context

A particular focus of this project is the Self/Other dialectic and how these realms mutually inform each other and ultimately shape the self, and particularly how the development of the self influences and is influenced by consumption. Pediatrician and psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott observed that babies, usually under the watchful eye of their mother, acquire objects with healthy curiosity. It is this same *infant acquisition*

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[24] Thomas Princen, *The Logic of Sufficiency* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2005); Robert B. Reich, *Supercapitalism: The Transformation of Business, Democracy, and Everyday Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

[25] Described and explored in Robert Corrington's work, specifically in *Nature's Self: Our Journey from Origin to Spirit* (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996), *A Semiotic Theory of Theology and Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), and *Nature's Sublime: An Essay in Aesthetic Naturalism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013).

behavior[26] which humans use to continue their learning about the world. Children learn to mirror appropriate behavior from parental figures, primarily the mother in Winnicott's observations (in his given historic context), and this is what leads them to develop a healthy sense of self. This project will explore how this behavior turns pathological in the milieu of an excess of goods provided by global capitalism.

Psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut criticizes growing individualism and greed during the late 1960s and early 1970s.[27] He argues that children need to have relationships with healthy adults, whom they can mirror in their own development, without which they will develop a narcissistic personality. Kohut argues that narcissism, in a healthy person, is the trait that empowers the inner self to have boundaries in order to keep it from merging fully with the outer world or the outer self. When attachment and mirroring of competent adults as a child is inadequate, the adult person employs self-aggrandizing behavior in order to conceal their low self-esteem. This is misperceived as the healthy love of self. An individual falls in love with the self, in an unhealthy way, as a means to avoid "unpleasure" and as an attempt to reassure the self that there are pleasurable aspects to life.[28] The narcissistically unhealthy child, and then adult, seizes those things which bring them pleasure.[29] It is argued herein that there is the transference of pleasure seeking from *interpersonal bonds* toward *consumer goods*. Additionally, it is argued that the excessive

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[26] This is my phrase for what D. W. Winnicott describes as healthy infant behavior whereby a child acquires an object, samples the object (usually by putting it in its mouth), and then discards the object. This behavior is essential in order for the baby to learn about the world. See *The Child, The Family, and the Outside World* by D. W. Winnicott (1957: 75-78).

[27] Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971/2009).

[28] "Unpleasure" is Sigmund Freud's term used to signify the difference between "pleasure" and the opposite in his theory of "the pleasure principle." Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (James Strachey, trans. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1920/2015).

[29] Corrington argues that Heinz Kohut and Wilhelm Reich "lack insight" when they conclude that the child will focus on the erogenous zones as a means of dealing with their poor parenting (2013:56).

number of objects in the developing child's purview, including the excessive number of objects used by their primary relationship adults,[30] creates confusion and a lack of attachment to a viable transitional object[31] leading to other issues of object acquisition and interpersonal attachment in adulthood.

In his theories of the *pleasure principle* and the *death drive,* Sigmund Freud asserts that consumption is a factor of the ego's attempts to avoid "unpleasure" and its desperation to live life in the most intense way possible. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud proposes that it is the mind's desire to avoid "unpleasure" which truncates its ability to deal in a healthy way with the unconscious.[32] The pleasure principle is the theory that the individual seeks pleasure to avoid those issues of utmost importance, especially the task of dealing with the unconscious. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud's theory of the "death drive," with its antithesis the "life drive," holds that individuals engage in behavior which is ultimately dangerous and hastens death.[33] Researchers, as recent as 2007, have found that in the case of addictive behavior that people are not consciously seeking death insomuch as they are seeking to live life *to the max*[34] which is exacerbated by poorly adapted object relations.[35] Pathological

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[30] This includes parents, caregivers, and siblings.
[31] A transitional object is typically a teddy bear or blanket and is meant as a source of soothing in the absence of the parent, a tangible symbol for the child of the bond between the parent and the child (Winnicott 1986:50).
[32] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (James Strachey, trans. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1930/1961/2010).
[33] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.
[34] Italics are used throughout to indicate emphasis. Other words and phrases are enclosed by quotation marks indicating a special use of those words.
[35] "Death and annihilation anxieties in anorexia nervosa, bulimia, and self-mutilation" by Sharon K. Farber, Craig C. Jackson, Johanna K. Tabin, and Eytan Bachar in *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, Vol 24(2), Apr 2007, 289-305; "Object relations and addiction: The role of 'transmuting externalizations'" by Alan Graham and Cheryl Glickauf-Hughes in *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, Vol. 22(1), March 1992, 21-33.

consumptive behaviors can be evidence of these two principles when acquiring an object is required for pleasure and tends to give the sensation of *living to the max*.

Both "pleasure" and "drives" function on an individual and social level, mirroring the reflexivity of consumptive behavior, as detailed by sociologist Anthony Giddens.[36] Giddens argues that modernity has developed its own form of reflexivity which "undermines the certainty of knowledge" as technology enables the constant questioning of what was previously considered truth, thus leading to an essential breakdown of ontological trust.[37] The breakdown of trust results in the exacerbation of the ontological wound resulting in increased feelings of alienation. Giddens goes on to argue that this lack of trust leads to ontological insecurity, where we fear utter chaos what is lurking *just on the other side* of our ability to glean information about the world.[38] These aspects of mistrust and insecurity are what have allowed our existence to be commodified by capitalism.[39] In other words, we consume (and are encouraged to consume) because we are seeking after a *lifestyle*—an intangible, nonmaterial need to be fulfilled—which is ultimately a project of self-development but fails in the face of the intrinsic nothingness of consumable goods.[40] Other psychoanalytic theorists, such as Carl Jung, Eric Fromm, Erik Erikson, and Leon Festinger will be used to both critique and expand the theories of the pleasure principle, the death drive, narcissism, cognitive dissonance, attachment theory, nonmaterial needs, and object relations.

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[36] This includes all aspects of the social life of an individual including, but not limited to, spouse, family, vocation, and political and economic systems. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).
[37] Ibid., 19-23.
[38] Ibid., 50.
[39] Ibid., 196-97.
[40] Ibid., 198.

Vital to this discussion is the larger milieu of the individual self. Self-identity is the ground of the self, and the power of objects form both how the individual is able to see themselves as well as who the individual sees themselves to be. In terms of this discussion, a significant part of that self-identity is consumer behavior. Corrington gives a robust philosophical definition of *selving* in the "human process" which includes the understanding that selving is "the most complete moment within the power of individuation" and that this process "unfolds within the context of our embodiment and its various forms of finite existence."[41] That is to say, we become who we are within the context of the unseen forces of the unconscious, the collective unconscious, and the tangible forces of our material reality including the ideological attributes of objects, e.g., consumer goods. The shared meaning of consumption as well as its imprint on the selving process is a primary focus of this discussion.

The work of Emmanuel Levinas is used to shape the discussion of Otherness and community and *the Third*. Levinas states: "[t]o be *we* is not to 'jostle' one another…[it is the] presence of a third party (that is, of the whole of humanity which looks at us)…"[42] Subsequently, it is not simply a matter of discourse or relation between two individuals, because even when there are just two subjects there are already, always, and everywhere more, symbolized both mathematically and philosophically as *the Third*. The ethical conundrum of consumerism thus begins with the question: What does my consumption have to do with them? Levinas' conception of The Third is not just a human but is

[41] Robert S. Corrington, *Nature and Spirit: An Essay in Ecstatic Naturalism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), 60-61.
[42] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1961/1991), 213, emphasis in original.

ethological and includes the entire environs of that/those human/s; it is the *Eco-third*.[43] The impediment in making an ethical response to consumption is that this would inherently involve a decrease or suspension of the consumption of most individuals in the developed world, and given the pathological reality, we are seemingly unable or unwilling to make such sacrifices of our own perceived (however temporary) pleasure.

This dissertation will conclude by suggesting a partial antidote to the pathology of consumerism. Corrington's conception of involution offers hope in that it "…works internally to open up spaces for semiotic growth within the individual organism, and sometimes, under the right conditions, the social self."[44] Involution is a phenomenological description of those specific breaks or shifts in awareness where the self encounters the spiritual (or deity) creating an awakening and ultimately a shift in selfhood. Concepts of biophilia (the love of nature) and philanthropy (the love of humans) will be used to chronicle how the love of nature and the love of other creatures generates a positive self-image and nurtures pro-social behaviors. The work of political philosophers, ecophilosophers, Christian ethicists, and environmental activists will be used to outline the prospects of transforming our concepts of ethics, justice, and love from abstractions to verbs and thus transforming the self's need for consumption.

[43] This neologism is my own. The *Eco-third* will be discussed at length in chapter four.
[44] Robert S. Corrington, *Nature's Sublime: An Essay in Aesthetic Naturalism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), 114.

II. We Are Living in a Material World

In a 1984 homage to Marilyn Monroe's 1953 performance of "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes,*[45] pop icon Madonna's video for "Material Girl" portrays a budding actress on the seeming rocket ship to stardom, much like Madonna in real-life.[46] The lyrics are vapid: they speak of wealth and expensive presents as the only way to win the starlet's heart. "Only boys who save their pennies make my rainy day." The hook of the song is: "We are living in a material world, and I am a material girl." The plotline of the video portrays the starlet being pursued by a wealthy man who showers her in gifts which she wantonly tosses aside. The irony is that the starlet is also being pursued by a rich movie studio owner who pretends to be poor in order to win the starlet's affections. The video ends with the studio boss and Madonna snogging during a rainy night; apparently, his penny-saving paid off.

This romanticized version of love in the modern era touts the trappings of a consumerist society. In looking back on the decades since the 1950s, there has been nothing short of an industrial and technological explosion which has greatly increased the materials economy of the entire world.[47] More and more consumable objects are available and more objects are designed for one-time use, e.g., water bottles, baby food in disposable plastic pouches, and single-cup coffee pods. Our desire for instant gratification has been met with a plethora of immediacy. But the steady increase of consumable objects, somewhat like an escalating-pace conveyor belt, does not equate

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[45] *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, directed by Howard Hawks, 1953, 20th Century Fox Studios.
[46] "Material Girl" written by Peter Brown and Robert Rans, performed by Madonna, released 1984, Sire Records, BAN-026-A. Music video directed by Mary Lambert.
[47] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 257-58. Hobsbawm makes a particular note that while the US surged ahead in its GDP in the 1950s and 60s, other countries like Japan, France, Germany, and Britain surged ahead of the US in the 1970s and 80s. "Materials economy" refers mainly to the use of natural resources for the production and manufacture of consumable goods.

substantive pleasure or even relative satisfaction.[48] In spite of this, the fantasy persists. The real irony is that like Madonna's character, we long for that which is authentic, even as we settle for the illusion. Often, we desire lavish gifts to be thrown at us just so we might be afforded the option of refusal.

Aside from pure fantasy, the materials economy has significantly augmented humans' ability to mold and control their given environment. Additionally, the methodologies of economic theories, such as unlimited economic growth, have been manipulated such that most people in the Western world have abiding faith in a materials economy.[49] Most hold fast to unlimited growth possibilities such that all other options are seen as a threat to both individual and national well-being.[50] Simply put, we in the US have developed a society whereby we expect to dominate our niche instead of adapt ourselves to it, as is the case with most other creatures.[51] On a more complex level, humans are exactly like every other living creature on this planet in that we need to consume in order to survive. Survival is based on many factors, not the least of which is access to the supply of those items necessary for subsistence.

In the more developed parts of the world, humans have excelled in modern times at insuring nearly constant access to the necessary substances of human life, such as food and water, consequently creating a niche where human life can excel. This often creates a situation where those in the less developed parts of the world struggle for life's basic necessities, but the dire condition of those others is often hidden from purview. Excelling within the human niche created in the developed world may create a delusion of humans

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[48] Issues of pleasure and satisfaction are discussed in chapter three.
[49] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005), 42.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ursula Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (New York: Oxford University, 1998), 78.

being the "fittest" of the creaturely species. Biologist Ursula Goodenough reminds us that "there is no such thing as the 'fittest' kind of organism. We can only talk about how an organism propagates in a given niche, how its life strategies have become adapted to that niche."[52] The theories of survival and fit-ness clarify that it is not that the "fittest survive," but rather that those organisms which have adapted to a niche environment persist, and even thrive, in that niche provided their ability to adapt coincides with any change in the given niche. What is different about humans in most developed countries is that we have mastered the means to modify and acclimatize our niche.

Shelter, protection from predators, food and water storage, and various relative comforts, such as beds and blankets, are some of the basic components which have provided an ample occasion for the propagation of our species. While the details and intricacies of the development of niche-improving consumable objects from pre-history to the modern period are extensive, suffice it to say that the overarching goal of any consumable object falls under the auspices of improving human existence. The improvement of our existence, it turns out, goes far beyond simply having enough food and water and a roof over our heads. Humans need far more than food and shelter in order to thrive; but, as the idea of human thriving has no real referent, the number and type of objects required for human flourishing is radically open to interpretation. Objects are imbued with meaning, both physically and emotionally, due to their functionality.[53] Often, functionality falls within the category of human need, that is, objects are needed by humans for their survival and flourishing. This is a foundation of US capitalism: consumable objects are created to fulfill a need. But this is not always true. It is important

[52] Ibid.
[53] Neva R. Goodwin, Frank Ackerman, and David Kiron, *The Consumer Society*. (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1997), 3. The often pathological attachment to those objects will be discussed in chapter three.

to understand the constructs of how consumable objects are created within capitalistic structures in order to begin to grasp the ethical problem created by consumerism.

The purpose of this chapter to is to outline the political and economic structures which have been the fiat for the current mode of global capitalism. Representative democracy in the US influences and is influenced by global capitalism especially in recent decades with the increase in the prevalence of lobbying efforts and influx of campaign contributions due to relaxing legislative restraints. This discussion will begin with an exploration of how labor functions in a materials economy, specifically, how the devaluation of labor is a perennial factor in capitalism. There will be a brief historical analysis of capitalism and class formation in order to examine the reification of class first through neoliberal and then neoconservative economic and political policies. Lastly, there will be an examination of advertising and how it functions to foment modern manic consumption.

A Brief Overview of Global Capitalism

Global capitalism is the prevailing economic system in North America and Western Europe.[54] Modernity, industrialism, and capitalism (with its component parts of markets and labor) function as parts of a whole, to wit:

> 'Modernity' can be understood as roughly equivalent to 'the industrialised world', so long as it be recognized that industrialism is not its only

[54] "Global capitalism" is defined by Farlex Financial Dictionary as: "The integration of global markets by the reduction trade barriers, improved communication, foreign direct investment, and other means. Globalization allows a multinational corporation to make a product in one country and sell it in another. This provides jobs in one country and less expensive goods in the other. Globalization also allows for the free flow of capital between countries, which many believe spurs economic growth. Proponents of globalization argue that it allows developing countries to continue and hasten their levels of development, and that it protects consumers in developed countries. Opponents believe that globalization serves the interests of multinational corporations at the expense of small businesses, which sends jobs to other countries needlessly." *Farlex Financial Dictionary*. S.v. "Global capitalism." Retrieved September 14, 2016 from http://financial-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Global+capitalism.

> institutional dimension. I take industrialism to refer to the social relations implied in the widespread use of material power and machinery in production processes. As such, it is one institutional axis of modernity. A second dimension is capitalism, where this term means a system of commodity production involving both competitive product markets and the commodification of labour power. (Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991, p. 15)

Globalization is defined in terms of not only previously unprecedented access to information all around the world, but also in terms of the fact that a majority of the world's most powerful corporations have seemingly unlimited access to resources (specifically labor and natural resources) which extends around the world. Additionally, the available pool of consumers extends far beyond US borders, and in some cases reaches nearly the entire globe, e.g., The Coca-Cola Company.[55]

The more powerful corporations have forged channels of supply and commodities exchange whereby smaller and less powerful companies can take part in that system to their advantage, e.g., a small entrepreneur can manufacture *widgets* by having the component parts, perhaps made far away, delivered to their relatively small factory, assemble the *widgets*, and then ship the *widgets* to potential markets around the world. Because there are already global shipping methods in place, movement of goods happens

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[55] Joel Bakan, *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power* (New York: Free Press, a division of Simon & Schuster Inc., 2004), 3. "Coca-Cola Journey: Front Page," the Coca-Cola Company, Inc.: "The Coca-Cola Company (NYSE: KO) is the world's largest beverage company, refreshing consumers with more than 500 sparkling and still brands and more than 3,800 beverage choices. Led by Coca-Cola, one of the world's most valuable and recognizable brands, our company's portfolio features 20 billion-dollar brands, 18 of which are available in reduced-, low- or no-calorie options. Our billion-dollar brands include Diet Coke, Coca-Cola Zero, Fanta, Sprite, Dasani, vitaminwater, Powerade, Minute Maid, Simply, Del Valle, Georgia and Gold Peak. Through the world's largest beverage distribution system, we are the No. 1 provider of both sparkling and still beverages. More than 1.9 billion servings of our beverages are enjoyed by consumers in more than 200 countries each day. With an enduring commitment to building sustainable communities, our company is focused on initiatives that reduce our environmental footprint, create a safe, inclusive work environment for our associates, and enhance the economic development of the communities where we operate. Together with our bottling partners, we rank among the world's top 10 private employers with more than 700,000 system associates." (Accessed August 25, 2016, http://www.coca-colacompany.com/.)

with relative ease.[56] Other companies extract natural resources and sustain a supply-chain, and use the established shipping channels to transfer resources to those who can transform them into consumable goods. These examples illustrate only the most rudimentary elements of global capitalism. There are many other components which perpetuate global capitalism such as political structures, governments, financial institutions, trade agreements, and individual consumers and a new class of super-wealthy individuals.[57]

Consumption is the most essential part of global capitalism and consumers are praised for their participation in this system. However, this perspective ignores and even conceals the more pathological aspects of consumption. In present-day US society, consumerism is considered normal; it has become naturalized and ritualized. Global capitalism is comprised of the *hyper-supply* of consumer goods whereby unimagined numbers and types of goods, purportedly designed for comfort and convenience, are made ubiquitously available. There is a seduction in the fantastical, even magical, presence of *things we didn't even know we needed before we saw them for sale*.[58] In the

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[56] One example is FedEx, a global shipping corporation with over 265,000 employees in the US alone. "We Connect the World. FedEx offers the best of both worlds — global reach backed by local expertise. Our worldwide network is served by five regions outside the U.S.: Canada; Asia Pacific (APAC); Europe; Middle East, Indian Subcontinent and Africa (MEISA); and Latin America, Caribbean (LAC)." ("About FedEx: Our Story," accessed August 25, 2016, http://about.van.fedex.com/our-story/global-reach/.)

[57] Chrystia Freeland, *Plutocrats: The Rise of the New Global Super-Rich and the Fall of Everyone Else*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 4-6.

[58] One particular example is the Dollar Tree chain of stores. "It's all about the thrill of the hunt! We love to hear from our customers and overwhelmingly the two comments we repeatedly receive are: 'I can't believe this cool item I just found at Dollar Tree!' AND... 'I can't believe it's only $1.00!' That's when we know we've done our jobs right! We have worked hard to create an environment where shopping is fun... a place where our customers can discover new treasures every week... a store where entire families can enjoy hunting for that special something. Every Dollar Tree store is bright and well lit, clean and well organized, and stocked with endless hidden treasures!" ("About Us," accessed August 25, 2016, https://www.dollartree.com/custserv/custserv.jsp?pageName=About.)

In addition to creating a "fun" shopping environment, Dollar Tree is a publicly traded company. "Headquartered in Chesapeake, VA, Dollar Tree is the largest and most successful single-price-point retailer in North America, operating thousands of stores across 48 contiguous U.S. states and five Canadian provinces, supported by a solid and scalable logistics network.

US, global capitalism has created veneers of illusion designed to distort our perception of the destruction caused by consumerism, allowing us to disavow the complications and destruction inherent in the extraction, manufacture, and disposal of resources as these processes are hidden literally and figuratively from our view; therefore, we are never forced to acknowledge the source and result of the consumer goods we expend. In the comfort created by our disavowal, we can cheerfully sing along with Madonna, "We live in a material world, and I am a material girl."

The way we are able to manipulate the material world is based almost exclusively on socio-economic class. As some recent research attests, lower-tier-income households have attempted to keep pace with upper-tier-income households with regard to consumption even though the rate of income increase has not been even.[59] Further, middle-income households report more financial duress when they are proximate to upper-income households.[60] What some researchers have discovered is that there is a supply of "rich" goods in areas where middle- and lower-income people reside.[61] The access to goods is seen as a probable reason for consumption disproportionate with income, or "trickle-down consumption" where those in the lower income brackets feel compelled to try to consume goods far beyond their means.[62] The differentiation and resulting inherent tension between the *haves* and the *have-nots* is a driving force behind

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"At Dollar Tree, we are committed to serving the best interests of our shareholders. We seek to enhance shareholder value not only through exceptional business performance and practices, but also through responsible and effective communication. To help put Dollar Tree, Inc.'s financial performance into perspective, our Investor Relations site provides the latest company information relevant to the individual." ("Investor Relations," accessed August 25, 2016, http://www.dollartreeinfo.com/investors/.)

[59] Marianne Bertrand and Adair Morse, "Trickle-Down Consumption," NBER Working Paper Series, Working Paper 18883, *National Bureau of Economic Research* (March 2013): JEL No. D1,E21.

[60] Ibid.

[61] "Rich" goods is a broad category which can include upscale, luxury stores; spa and glamour services; and even grocery chains like Whole Foods and Wegman's.

[62] Op. cit.

consumerism. There is always the lure or push to appear better than one currently is. Victor Lebow, who is often credited with the notion of planned obsolescence, commented in 1955: "If the consumer's basic loyalty to his standard of living is understood correctly, it is clear that the family thinks only partly in terms of the individual items that satisfy its aspirations. The real goals are to *look* better, *live* better, *dress* better, *travel* better."[63] The goal is always *better*. The manufacture of dissatisfaction with one's class is built into the system through advertising and public display of commodities, all of which is fuel for the machine of global capitalism.

Labor, Production, and the Materials Economy

The Story of Stuff (*TSOS*) is an animated documentary short written and created by activist Annie Leonard in order to raise awareness of the dire circumstances our planet due to the burden put on it by our materials economy.[64] "Materials economy" is defined as the lifecycle of a consumable product, specifically the extraction, production, distribution, consumption, and disposal of a product.[65] *TSOS* explains in clear and tangible ways how the materials economy is, at its core, unnecessary, unhealthy, and unfair. *TSOS* begins with Leonard's own confession of being obsessed with her *stuff*, and that because of her obsession she decided to do some research into where her *stuff* came from (extraction and manufacture), how it got to her (distribution), and where it was going when she was done with it (disposal). Leonard contends that people tend to have an

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[63] Victor Lebow, "Price Competition in 1955," *Journal of Marketing*, 31, no. 1 (1955): 5-10; 9, emphasis in original.

[64] "The Story of Stuff Project," http://storyofstuff.org/. The *TSOS* video has been viewed more than 40 million times by people in nearly every country on the planet. *TSOS* is being used in this project as a touchstone in our discussion and understanding of global capitalism. While there are certainly more sophisticated analyses available, *TSOS* is supported by thorough research which is translated into straightforward concepts.

[65] Annie Leonard, *Story of Stuff:* Referenced and Annotated Script, (retrieved April 22, 2016, from http://storyofstuff.org/wp-content/uploads/movies/scripts/Story%20of%20Stuff.pdf, 2007), 1.

idealized understanding of *stuff,* specifically that we are not fully aware of the fact that the linear system of the materials economy is "interacting with societies, cultures, economies, [and] the environment" and that the system it is encountering limits which are largely ignored.[66] *TSOS* explores the process of the *laissez-faire* materials economy in the US, pointing out the rapacious aspects of extraction, the serfdom of laborers in production, the pathological prodding toward consumption, and the detached attitude toward disposal. Even with all of the materials, energy, and labor required to force commodities through this system, it is estimated that only one percent of items purchased are still in use just six months after purchase.[67] The rest is just put in the trash. From this perspective, it is easy to see how people inculcate a distorted sense of what a commodity is aside from something that is used and then disposed.

At the outset of his endeavor to thoroughly analyze capitalism as a political, social, and economic system, Marx uses a rather pragmatic definition of "commodity": "The commodity is, first of all, an external object, a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind. The nature of these needs, whether they arise, for example, from the stomach, or the imagination, makes no difference."[68] At first glance, Marx has penned a useful overarching definition which fits nicely into the rest of his theoretical constructs. Marx did not critique the purported needs of people, only that the commodity was necessary to satisfy those needs. More problematic is the fact that Marx lumps all commodities into one homogeneous category, but then argues that each has a "use-value" which reflects the singular object's usefulness and therefore its value.[69] Marx

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[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., 9, referring to Paul Hawken's *Natural Capitalism* (1999) p. 81.
[68] Marx, *Capital, Vol. 1*, 125.
[69] Ibid., 125-26.

argues in one of his prefaces to *Capital* that the process of abstraction which he has employed is necessary in social science.[70] Considering commodities as singular items is an arduous task; some distortion is unfortunately inevitable.

Commodity distortion is not new. In *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, Marx argues that a commodity is never simply a commodity. A commodity is *never just* something people purchase and consume. Instead, the commodity points to an ideology of the surplus value of the labor invested in said commodity.[71] Marx argues that the fetishization of commodities "arises from the peculiar social character of the labour which produces them."[72] However, in modern production the labor is practically, and in some cases literally, hidden from view. Modern fetishization comes from our relationship to the commodity itself, as if it is magically imbued with properties which can only be experienced in the consumption of it. The modern "social character of labor" is not so much toil as it is something much more ineffable and intangible.

In one particular example of the "social character of labor," Marx discusses the process of acquiring a pair of trousers. Rather than hire a tailor to come to his home and make the trousers (which was an option for him), Marx chooses to buy them already made in a store simply because they are cheaper. The tailor performs the same exact task of making a pair of pants; the difference is that in a factory, the tailor's services are hidden behind the merchant who pays the tailor for only six hours (in the form of decreased wages) when the tailor performs twelve hours of work, thus syphoning profits

[70] Ibid., 90.
[71] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes, (New York: Penguin Books, 1867/1976/1990), 974-75.
[72] Marx, *Capital*, 165.

toward the merchant and the merchant's investors.[73] "As soon as he can, the merchant tailor seeks to convert the trousers back into money, i.e., into a form in which the distinctive character of the work of tailoring has totally disappeared, and the service performed becomes embodied in the fact that one thaler has become two."[74] Marx goes on to relate how services are simply a form of "use-value," meaning that the labor is not an object but an activity whereby the actual labor performed "is either obliterated or simply absent."[75] The disparity is striking in that "[t]he worker, too, purchases *services* with his money. This is a form of expenditure, but it is no way to turn money into capital."[76] In other words, the worker can never become the owner of the means of production. This is the class chasm which cannot be spanned in the world of capitalism. In capitalism, the merchant, i.e., the owner of the means of production (including the labor of the tailor), is ultimately rewarded for their supposed ingenuity at refining a system which exploits the labor of others. In an irony that should not be lost, Marx is advocating for the overthrow of the bourgeois but is not willing to support the craftsman tailor (the proletariat in this scenario) by purchasing his trousers directly from the tailor and bypassing the merchant. Apparently, Marx's own *thaler* is hard-earned and needs to be stretched as far as possible even if that means actively participating in the very system of oppression which he is agitating against.

In our modern situation, commodities, i.e., consumable objects, appear seemingly out of thin air. Marx, writing in the nineteenth century, drew the conclusion that fetishism was the result of the "social character of labor" imbued in a commodity, but that is

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[73] Marx, 1046-47.
[74] Marx, 1047. A "thaler" is a silver coin first minted in the sixteenth century.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Marx, 1047, emphasis in original.

because the idea of what kind of and how much labor was involved in the creation of a commodity was not too far removed from everyday experience. In Marx's time, nearly everyone had some idea of what was involved in the making of a pair of trousers and it was considered skilled labor, meaning that not everyone could do it. In the twenty-first century, however, the majority of people have little to no actual comprehension of how trousers or other clothing is made, specifically the skill-level required, the conditions under which given items are manufactured, or what the workers are actually paid.[77] The same can be said, and to a much higher degree, of almost any other modern consumable object. One particular example is an iPhone. The design of an iPhone (any model, really) is such that it is impossible to see how they are even assembled. The misunderstanding on the part of the consumer is that there is no *real* labor involved; the phone is intended to look as though it is manufactured by a machine. Only after the scandal of the labor conditions of the factories in China did consumers come to have even a small understanding of the "social character" of the grueling toil involved.[78] Sadly, even after the discovery, this information did little to impact sales.[79]

Controlling labor, which constitutes a significant sector of the means of production, has always been critical to the sustaining of profits and continued accumulation of capital.[80] The critics of this system, including Marx, have decried the exploitation of labor for over a century. With the increased acceleration of technology

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[77] In the realm of clothing manufacture, sweat-shop conditions are so pervasive around the world that government oversight and watchdog organizations have a difficult time policing all of the labor abuses. Jake Blumgart, "Sweatshops Still Make Your Clothes," (March 21, 2013, http://www.salon.com/2013/03/21/sweatshops_still_make_your_clothes/).
[78] Joel Johnson, "1 Million Workers. 90 Million iPhones. 17 Suicides. Who's to Blame?" *Wired Magazine*, Feb. 28, 2011, accessed September 9, 2016, https://www.wired.com/2011/02/ff_joelinchina/.
[79] Ibid.
[80] David Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), 102.

and the evolving capitalist methods of production, it is necessary to find new and more convincing justifications for the obvious inequalities between laborers and those who control the labor.[81] Joseph Stiglitz writes about one particular theory of labor which began in the mid nineteenth century, and is still influential, is "marginal productivity theory." This is the concept that those who are more skilled and seemingly contribute more to society should earn more.[82] However, the fallacy in this theory is that *contribution* is a subjective reality; *contribution* is determined and valued not by the laborer, but by the owner of the means of production. The historical trajectory of "marginal productivity theory" can be traced through every category of labor: from agricultural work to production-line manufacturing to "modern hi-tech…brainpower."[83] The controllers of the means of production in a given epoch place a value on the various types of labor as contributing to production which accounts for the devaluation of certain types of labor, e.g., domestic service, and the overly inflated value of celebrity labor, e.g., baseball and football players, or those in the financial industry, e.g., hedge-fund managers and stock brokers. Nonetheless, the historical arc of the valuation of labor accounts for only part of the capitalist system.

The historical aspects of capitalism are not nearly as important for Marx as are the continued functioning of the capitalistic system:

> The gist of [Marx's] argument [in *Capital, Vol. 1*] is that, once capitalism establishes itself as a fully articulated system, it is *indifferent* towards the conditions of its emergence. There were two main conditions: on the one hand a workforce freed from its "substantial" attachment to the objective conditions of production (means and objects of production) — reduced to the status of pure subjectivity; on the other a surplus of money (capital).

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[81] Joseph Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012/2013), 37.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.

> How these two conditions originated is of no concern to dialectical deduction. It is simply a matter of empirical historical research — a dark story of violent expropriation and plunder, of merchant adventurers, and so on; a story with which we *do not* have to be acquainted in order to grasp the "synchronous" functioning of the capitalist system. (Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* [London: Verso, 1991], 210, italics in original)

Laborers are reduced to objects, but that is inconsequential simply because it is the reality of a capitalist system *ad infinitum*. The synchronous functioning of capitalism, as articulated by Marx and interpreted by Žižek, Joseph Stiglitz, and David Harvey, depends on the continual devaluing and hence control of labor. The combination of low-value labor and consumer desire create a perpetual motion machine which continually churns out consumer goods.

In certain aspects, the control of labor is manifested in terms of technological advances, literally the replacement of the human laborer with a machine. In other aspects, labor is controlled by its outsourcing to geographic locations, e.g., developing nations, or the import of laborers, as in the migratory workers in US agriculture. In both situations laborers have little to no rights in the workplace. Robotisation and full automation are seen by some companies as *the solution* to *the problem* of labor. As David Harvey writes, "Robots do not (except in science fiction accounts) complain, answer back, sue, get sick, go slow, lose concentration, go on strike, demand more wages, worry about work conditions, want tea breaks or simply refuse to show up."[84] But replacing workers with robots will ultimately lead to a decimation of the number of those who are able to purchase consumer goods. Harvey argues that this is an inherent contradiction in capitalism's use of labor.[85] The outsourcing and importing of labor results in the same

[84] Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions*, 103.
[85] Ibid., 104.

end: a decline in the number of consumers and a rise in class differentials.[86] Filling the vacuum are retailers such as Walmart and Dollar Tree which provide cheaper consumer options because they use their economic power to demand that their manufacturing supply chain squeeze its laborers and producers. But this does little to address the more cancerous attributes of a capitalist system. It is in this tension between labor and consumption that we find those who control the means of production surging forward in the drive to create ever-new products to consume in order to maintain and hopefully increase profits.

In the rise of production which followed World War II, there was (already) a concern regarding income distribution in the US and how this would affect commercial retail sales in the post-war world.[87] Marketer Victor Lebow, writing on behalf of Chester H. Roth, Co., argues that a solution to income inequality is distribution and manufacturing costs (post-war) would have to be driven down to wit: rather than independent stores, chain stores with larger customer bases would be preferred; lower price mark-ups would lead to more competition; and name brand items would fade in favor of less expensive alternatives.[88] Lebow's work is being included in this discussion because it is indicative of the methods of manufacturing corporations to publish white papers in marketing and business journals in order to shape the business community's understanding of capitalist economics to guarantee a uniform understanding. Many of

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[86] Ibid., 105.
[87] Victor Lebow. "The Nature of Postwar Retail Competition," *Journal of Marketing*, 9 no. 1 (1944): 11-18. Chester H. Roth, Co. was a manufacturer of hosiery and was acquired by Julius Kayser & Co. in 1958 to become Kayser-Roth, a subsidiary of Golden Lady. They manufacture hosiery and intimate apparel; among their brands are "No Nonsense" pantyhose, and Calvin Klein and Jockey underwear.
[88] Ibid. The influx of store brands to replace name brands can be seen particularly in Walmart's "Kirkland" brand and Target's "Up & Up" brand.

Lebow's models and concepts, such as planned and perceived obsolescence and impulse purchasing, have been fully integrated into modern capitalism.

The mid-1940s "solution" of constricting the cost of manufacturing and distribution continued on into the twenty-first century. Controlling the cost of labor is seen even by small business entrepreneurs as a virtue.[89] By 1948, Lebow was writing about how the massive influx of consumer goods in post-war manufacturing had to be more effectively and efficiently distributed—he basically wrote the Walmart model of establishing a chain store into every small burg across the US in order to put the so-called less efficient mom-and-pops stores out of business.[90] What is particularly interesting in Lebow's 1948 article is that he is making appeals to ideals like "American ingenuity," "freedom and democracy," "love of liberty," and the American "way of life." The final two paragraphs of his article are quoted here:

> This is speculation based upon the postulates of *freedom and democracy* in America. If the decline of competition proceeds during the decade ahead with the speed at which it is now moving, and if the economic—and therefore the political—power in the United States continues to be concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, then we shall have a regimented economy, stipulated products, fixed prices, ordained mark-ups, and a wholesale destruction of independent enterprise.
>
> But this would be to discount the underlying strength of the American people, *its love of liberty*, its ingenuity and enterprise—and its intelligence. For American industry and agriculture have demonstrated unforgettably that they are capable of producing plenty for all—such riches as the world has never before seen. Before us is the challenge of mass distribution. *I believe that our distributive system will accept that challenge and prove the virtues of our way of life in the only fashion which makes sense—by delivering more goods to more people*. (p. 22, emphasis added)

[89] Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions*, 104.
[90] Victor Lebow. "Our Changing Channels of Distribution," *Journal of Marketing*, 13, no. 1 (1948): 12-22.

While Lebow argues that a decline in competition will lead to "a regimented economy," he is not willing to concede that what he is proposing—fewer retailers offering more goods—would result in less competition and a systemic conundrum that would dramatically contradict what he is referring to as American values. Obviously, his perspective is shaped by a singular demand for profit. Lebow sounds the consumerist battle cry wrapped in an American flag: deliver more goods to more people in the name of *freedom* and *democracy*.

In a paper published in 1949, Lebow writes about monopolies, categorizing them as essentially non-existent, but dismisses them nevertheless because he argues that no one can have a monopoly on distribution.[91] Larger distributors, however, can compete for good store locations, create their own in-store brands, and even engage in "illegal activities to put the competition out of business."[92] But of particular focus is how Lebow reveals one of the secrets to the success of the larger chain distributors: "One key to the drive for 90 or 100 per cent locations by many chain stores is the importance of so-called 'impulse buying.' The volume of unplanned purchases made as a result of tempting display will obviously correspond to the traffic [of customers]."[93] The goal of *more goods to more people* can be achieved not just through advertising, but by putting goods within the literal reach of consumers, affirming the supposition that consumers are irrational and impetuous.

By 1955, Victor Lebow had left his position as vice president and general sales manager for Chester H. Roth Co., Inc. and established himself as a marketing consultant

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[91] Victor Lebow, "New Outlooks for Marketing," *The Journal of Business of the University of Chicago*, 22, No. 3 (Jul., 1949), 160-168; 164.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.

and president of Victor Lebow, Inc. In a paper published in the *Journal of Marketing* in the spring of 1955, Lebow had synthesized his marketing theories into a few key nuggets. These theories were based on two intractable premises: first, the capitalist economy in the US demands an ever increasing supply of consumer goods; and second, growing competition among manufacturers, distributors, and retailers is something to be feared.[94]

> *Our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfactions, our ego satisfactions, in consumption.* The measure of social status, of social acceptance, of prestige, is now to be found in our consumptive patterns. The very meaning and significance of our lives today is expressed in consumptive terms. *The greater the pressures upon the individual to conform to safe and accepted social standards, the more does he tend to express his aspirations and his individuality in terms of what he wears, drives, eats*—his home, his car, his pattern of food serving, his hobbies.
>
> These commodities and services must be offered to the consumer with a special urgency. We require not only "forced draft" consumption, but "expensive" consumption as well. *We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever increasing pace.* (Lebow, 7, emphasis added)

Lebow is advocating for a society where rapacious consumption is the source of our physical, emotional, spiritual, and social meaning. Whether Lebow is writing prophetically or just as a means of observation is immaterial. What is critical to the understanding of modern global capitalism is the fact that ritual consumption is the prevailing form of individual expression and that manufacturers are providing the objects treated as sacred to be *consumed-burned up-worn out-replaced-discarded*.

Somewhat suppressed but not lost from this discussion is the issue of resource extraction. While extraction is a function of human labor (and central to this discussion), what is equally important to remember is the fact that many resources come from far

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[94] Victor Lebow, "Price Competition in 1955," *Journal of Marketing*, 31, no. 1 (1955): 5-10; 5.

afield of their use. While the US is using much of its own natural resources, often beyond sustainable limits, manufacturers also exploit the natural resources of the rest of the world. In the words of Annie Leonard, "So, my country's response to this limitation is simply to go take someone else's! This is the Third World, which—some would say—is another word for our stuff that somehow got on someone else's land."[95] It is important to see how fetishism is shaped by the connection between the "social character of labor" and natural resources. We lose the texture and scope of the way in which sand becomes glass, mountains become coal and concrete, and cows become dinner and shoes. The idea of parsing the process of acquisition and manufacture behind every consumable object that passes through our hands is an almost impossible prospect. It would demand that we question every ethical aspect of the distribution and use of natural resources. This is an important element in the power of fetishism: to obscure the reality of commodities with their processes of the extraction, production, distribution, consumption, and disposal and replace it with an inexplicable mystery as this allows the consumer to accept that the product comes to them without effort and without consequence.

Capitalism and Class Formation

Marx's abstraction of what is a commodity does not diminish his overall argument against capitalism: the primary problem is not that people have desires but that the system of production is usurious toward laborers and consumers. The system results in the formation of enduring inequitable economic classes. As David Harvey argues, classes are primarily formed by separating people from the means to provide for

[95] Leonard, *The Story of Stuff*: Referenced and Annotated Script, 3. The issue of the unsustainable nature of our materials economy will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four.

themselves.[96] Someone has to be the provider and someone has to be the one provided for. Of course those with more access to capital, i.e., money or property, are the ones to be provided for.

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber argues that the various divisions among Protestant denominations are forged along class lines. Moreover, he suggests that "[t]he greater the freedom enjoyed by capitalism, the more evident this [division] has been."[97] Weber's general argument is that religion helped to forge the foundations of modern capitalism in that a person's devotion to their secular vocation is viewed as devotion to God.[98] Specifically within the Calvinist denominations, austerity is praised and wasteful spending on luxuries or donations to the poor are sternly discouraged as such philanthropy is seen to encourage sloth in others.[99] Consequently, capital increases on both micro and macro levels through the act of saving surplus income in a bank making it available for investment. The stratification of denominations, Weber argues, is the result of the ranking of every given career/vocation, e.g., jobs in commerce ranking above those in agriculture.[100] The "spirit" of capitalism is seen by Weber as the result of the "religious value…placed on ceaseless, constant, systematic labor in a secular calling," while repressing the temptations of self-indulgence.[101] This both credits and implicates the church as a vehicle of capitalism. From Marx's point-of-view, organized religion should be blamed for the oppression of the underclass. In Weber's view, people

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[96] David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's* Capital (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2010), 305. The concept of "primitive accumulation" – separating people from the means to provide for themselves – will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.
[97] Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. trans. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells, (New York: Penguin Group, [1905] 2002), 1.
[98] Ibid., 115.
[99] Ibid., 110.
[100] Ibid., 197 (note 295 from p. 116).
[101] Ibid., 116-17.

tended toward religion and it was simply opportune that laborers found spiritual reward for their physical toil.

A century prior to the work of Marx and Weber, political economist Adam Smith wrote of the stratification of class not so much giving reason for it, but rather describing its formidable structure.[102] Smith categorized people into three groups: "to those who live by rent, to those who live by wages, and to those who live by profit."[103] The first group is not necessarily property owners but managers of property and its useful production, e.g., livestock, agriculture, or manufacturing. The second group is the labor class. The third group is what we would consider to be the upper class or bourgeois. The managerial class is described by Smith as being indolent and ignorant as the result of not actually laboring for their wage. In his comments about the labor class, Smith categorizes them as suffering from lack of education and lowly habit which renders them unfit to understand their own predicament within the labor force: that being that their wages and usefulness are in the hands of their capricious employers. The third group, which Smith describes as the laborers' employers, is described by him as having education and acumen but which is used only in the self-oriented endeavor of increasing their own "particular branch of business."[104] (Smith did not hold many people, irrespective of class, in high regard.) Smith's understanding of the class structure is predicated on the one hand by everyone acting in their own best interests, and on the other hand the belief that the middle and lower classes are uneducated enough as to be a detriment to their own best interests. Regardless of these shortcomings, Smith contends "that the private pursuit of self-interest

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[102] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, (New York: Cosimo, Inc., 1776/2007), 138-39.
[103] Ibid., 139.
[104] Ibid., 140.

would lead, as if by an invisible hand, to the well-being of all."[105] What Smith could not reconcile in his analysis is how the incentives for the upper class to eliminate any competition would lead to an equitable situation for the laborer. Unlike Marx, who uses Smith's work, Smith was not necessarily concerned with the plight of the laborer, but rather observed the class situation as an obligatory evil.

The advances made in the US labor force with regard to workers' rights and better wages can be likened to Marx's call for the rising up of the proletariat. Unions flourished in the US through the 1950s-1970s.[106] However, there were still issues of class related to both union and non-unionized labor. The emergence of neoliberal economic and political policies dealt a significant blow to the labor class and swelled the ranks of the working poor. The paradox operating just below the surface of the perception of class position is the "American Dream." It is predicated on the fact that if one works hard enough, they can "realize the dream," which means transcending one's given class. Alas, while there might be one or two people to transcend their class, they are the exception, not the rule.

Neoliberalism and the Reification of Class

Anthropologist David Harvey chronicles the rise of neoliberal political and economic apparatuses within the US and Great Britain contexts during the early 1970s.[107] Harvey argues that while there was not an acknowledgment of the project of (re)establishing an elite economic class, there was instead a meticulous program of appealing to individuals' sense of choice and freedom. Specifically, "[b]y capturing ideals of individual freedom and turning them against the interventionist and regulatory

[105] Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality*, 40.
[106] Issues faced by unions will be discussed in the following section.
[107] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005).

practices of the state, capitalist class interests could hope to protect and even restore their position."[108] What distinguishes neoliberalism from other previous economic and political policy eras is that it shifts fetishization from commodities to the fetishization of money itself.

One particular example of the implementation of neoliberal political and economic policies can be seen in the early 1970s in New York City. In the prior decade, there was a significant exodus of manufacturing facilities from the city and wealthier residents were relocating to the suburbs. The resulting decrease in the city's tax base forced the city government to acquire loans in order to keep public services going. The situation reached its most dire point when it could not get the lending institutions to restructure (roll-over) the loans. Simultaneously, President Richard Nixon declared an end to the "urban crises" (even though it was nowhere near its end) all across America which ceased the flow of federal funds as well. The only option, other than full bankruptcy, was to funnel all available resources toward the servicing of the debt. All inessential public services were discontinued and the progress of the municipal unions was halted. The CUNY university system was forced to start charging tuition for the first time in its history. Public employees were required to invest their pension funds in city bonds, thus guaranteeing that they would be moderate in their union contract demands rather than risk the possibility of the city going bankrupt and losing their pension funds altogether. Hence, NYC was held at the mercy of corporate capitalists instead of managing their economic crisis through their democratically elected government.[109]

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[108] Ibid., 42.
[109] Ibid., 45. A very similar situation has happened in Detroit, which resulted in the appointment of a manager by the state and eventual Chapter 9 bankruptcy.

The actual carrying out of neoliberal policies occurred in many different channels, e.g., national and international lending institutions, the stock market, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank, as well as the coercive pressure put on elected governments by those in the economic realm. Neoliberal political and economic policies were already proven "successful" in other parts of the world including Chile, Mozambique, and the Philippines, and were carried out in much the same way as outlined in the example from NYC above. President Ronald Reagan and UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher were particularly adept at seizing the opportunity to implement such changes in the US and British context.[110] What is perhaps most important in the reflection on the rise of neoliberalism is the process by which a previously minority opinion, in both the political and economic realms, was adapted and subsumed by the majority.[111] So resilient was the embedding of neoliberalism, Harvey comments, "that both [President Bill] Clinton and [UK Prime Minister Tony] Blair found themselves in a situation where their room for manoeuver was so limited that they could not help but sustain the process of restoration of class power even against their own better instincts."[112] And thus these same neoliberal policies have perpetuated into the current decade.[113]

The rise of neoliberalism can be attributed to what is called "primitive accumulation." David Harvey, as one of the foremost scholars on Marx's *Capital* and other writings, critiques Marx's portrayal of the rise of capitalism—not that Marx is necessarily wrong, but rather, the story is much more nuanced.[114] For example:

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[110] Ibid., 40.
[111] Ibid., 62.
[112] Ibid., 62-63.
[113] It could be argued that since the election of Donald Trump that the neoliberal and neoconservative policies of the past are merely a starting point for even more damaging economic and political strategies.
[114] Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's* Capital, 304.

> Throughout *Capital*, but also in many of his other writings, Marx tends to relegate processes of primitive accumulation [i.e., separating people from the means to provide for their own needs] to the prehistory of capitalism. Once that prehistory is done with, then the "silent compulsion of economic relations" takes over. Marx's political project in *Capital* is to alert us as to how these silent compulsions operate on us, often without our noticing, hidden behind the fetishistic masks that surround us at every turn. (305, italics in original, underlining added)

Contrary to Marx, Harvey argues that "primitive accumulation" is not a *once-and-done* process. Rather, primitive accumulation is a continuing process within the machinations of capitalism. He goes on to state: "Capitalism would long ago have ceased to exist had it not engaged in fresh rounds of primitive accumulation, chiefly through the violence of imperialism."[115] In many ways, neoliberalism can be described as *domestic imperialism*: capitalistic policy is turned inward and implemented by force through the crushing of unions and continual devaluation of labor. Separating people from the means to supply their own needs is, in actuality, the formation of classes. Once the classes are established and one's place in them is set, the amount of toil it takes for someone to acquire a pair of trousers is the measure of their worth. The hours required for a laborer to earn enough to buy a pair of trousers are significantly more than the hours required by a doctor or banker to make the same purchase. This is the "silent compulsion of economic relations."

In the same line of argument, Harvey goes on to write:

> [The "silent compulsion of economic relations"] shows us how, as I earlier argued, *there is nothing more unequal than the equal treatment of unequals*; how the equality presupposed in the market exchange of things deludes us into a belief in the equality of persons; how bourgeois doctrines of rights of private property and the profit rate make it seem as if we are all endowed with human rights; *how illusions of personal liberty and freedom (and how and why we act on those illusions and even fight for them politically) arise out of market freedoms and free-trade*. (Ibid., emphasis added)

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[115] Ibid., 306.

The significance of Harvey's argument is borne out in everyday market relations. It can be seen in everything from the relatively capricious price of daily necessities such as gasoline and milk to rates of return on investment versus interest rates and fees assessed on debt. The illusion of equality is a ruse—"there is nothing more unequal than the equal treatment of unequals"—when things like late fees and an additional $.20 per gallon at the pump are applied equally but the actual burden of such inflationary practices is only truly experienced by those in the subordinate classes. So engrained is the understanding of the right to profit that rarely is there resistance against the means by which additional profit is extracted. As Annie Leonard contends, many people believe that it is the government's job to "look out for us," but often it seems that the government's goal is to make sure that the corporations are happy with their profit margin.[116] Perhaps this is the enduring legacy of neoliberalism: that the continued mix of corporate monies into political campaigns has led to a representative democracy which is made up of elected officials who have a stratified constituency where the desires of corporations are at the top and the needs of people fall somewhere close to the bottom.[117]

The emulsification of corporations/politics/advertising/consumption in many ways perpetuates the violence of continued primitive accumulation and domestic imperialism. Instead, there is a misplaced projection (in psychoanalytic terms) of the fairness of *the market* onto human relations. Rather than see that capitalism is in fact a system bolstered by violence, both literal and symbolic, many believe (for they have been

[116] Annotated script, *The Story of Stuff*, 2.
[117] This is also seen in the 2010 Supreme Court case of *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (558 U.S. 310; 130 S.Ct. 876), where the court held that the right to freedom of speech was extended to corporations (both for profit and non-profit), labor unions, and other organizations. Specifically, free speech is recognized as the use of money which results in political campaign contributions, even though they have to be disclosed, as a form of free speech.

taught thusly) that *the market is free*, meaning that the "law" of supply and demand dictates an inherent fairness. The systemic violence goes unacknowledged or is forgotten, or perhaps not recorded in the annals of history. The "American Dream"—where you can achieve financial success if you just try hard enough—is the modern opiate of the masses. There is no freedom because there is no real option, no real choice.

Philosopher Glen A. Mazis contends that freedom is a "metacognition" not to be confused with some sort of resolve to command the mind/body to proceed in a certain direction. True freedom is a means of letting thoughts and actions emerge more organically.[118] Mazis expands his understanding of freedom and choice-making:

> This is root human freedom—to make sense of the world in differing ways and to attend to the world and to ourselves in such a way that different aspects of the background of our context are presented and new possibilities become actualized. *We often think of freedom as the ability to choose one way or another, but this is not the primary sense of freedom—it comes too late.* Choosing between alternatives presupposes a human's ability to enter into a relationship with the surround in differing ways that give rise to differing senses and therefore differing choices. *It is this primary sense of freedom to construe the world otherwise that so many humans either do not realize or flee from in order to preserve the status quo, either personally or collectively*. (158-59, emphasis added)

Mazis also concedes that people often do not act in their own best interests.[119] The presupposition of *ability* assumes that a person realizes that there are different ways of perceiving the world. In the context of modern global capitalism it is impossible for most to imagine another reality. Not recognizing or fleeing from options outside of consumerism is not only normal but expected. Class is reified through the sometimes malevolent but usually inadvertently self-interested action of corporate actors imposing their will over elected officials who in turn slacken their oversight of things like

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[118] Glen A. Mazis, *Humans, Animals, Machines: Blurring Boundaries*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008): 157-60.
[119] Ibid., 158, somewhat contrary to Adam Smith's assessment of people acting in their own interests or being to ignorant to do so.

minimum wage increases, paid sick and family leave, and job security through the support of labor unions and other legislation. What is particularly exasperating about capitalism and class is that most people are so enamored of the idea of the "American Dream" that John Steinbeck is proven right again and again: "Socialism never took root in America because the poor see themselves not as an exploited proletariat, but as temporarily embarrassed millionaires."[120] Most refuse to see themselves as victims of primitive accumulation and thus their class standing as a permanent situation.

Neoconservatism and Class Warfare

In the turn from neoliberalism to neoconservatism in the US, the (unholy) marriage of neoliberal economic and political policies with the moral stance of the Christian right appealed to the baser instincts of the majority of "the white working classes."[121] Harvey argues that the white working class had a "besieged sense of moral righteousness (besieged because this class lived under conditions of chronic economic insecurity and felt excluded from many of the benefits that were being distributed through affirmative action and other state programmes)."[122] Neoconservatism appeals to assumed common religious convictions and the "cultural nationalism" of working-class whites, which is often a less-than-opaque veil for an agenda of homophobia, anti-feminism, and racism.[123] There are two significant differences between neoliberalism and neoconservatism: The first is neoconservatism's appeal to power—power in the form of military and police, and to some extent fire protection—as a means to control the "chaos

[120] This quote is most often attributed to John Steinbeck.
[121] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 50
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid. Credit is given to an anonymous source who described patriotism as "loving your country but knowing there are some things which need to be fixed" and nationalism as "loving your country and thinking that it is perfect and nothing needs to be fixed."

of individual interests."[124] The second is the neoconservative drive toward "an overweening morality as the necessary social glue to keep the body politic secure in the face of external and internal dangers."[125] The ways in which this is actualized can be seen in the post-9/11 commodification of the military in its presence in national professional sports such as the NFL, the NBA, and MLB. The Seventh Inning Stretch at many Major League Baseball games is now a combination of "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" and "God Bless America." In what should have been a scandalous disclosure, it was revealed that the US federal government had been paying the National Football League for pro-military displays both before and during games.[126] Across leagues, many player uniforms have been transformed into military-print camouflage. The rhetoric of terrorism, both internal and external, is fodder for the continued commodification of militarism. Harvey concludes, "The effect was to divert attention from capitalism and corporate power as in any way having anything to do with either the economic or the cultural problems that unbridled commercialism and individualism were creating."[127] This is nothing less than a very elaborate version of *wagging the dog*.[128]

Wagging the dog is certainly not new in capitalism. The lead-up to the Great Depression looked much like the social and economic milieu of the pre-2008 Great Recession: Wall Street was corpulent with excessive gains, wages were stagnant, and rising debt created a chokehold on individuals, households, and governments. Although

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[124] Ibid., 82. Neoconservative *talking points* credit the military with "protecting our freedom" and police and firefighters with "protecting our stuff."
[125] Ibid.
[126] Laura Barron-Lopez, "Pentagon Paid Up to $6.8 Million of Taxpayer Money to Pro Sports Teams for Military Tributes," *The Huffington Post*, November 4, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/defense-military-tributes-professional-sports_us_5639a04ce4b0411d306eda5e.
[127] Harvey, *A Brief History*, 50.
[128] "Wagging the dog" is a colloquialism for a (typically political) diversion created in order to get people to focus on something that is usually false or innocuous.

the details of the two events differ, the one constant is that the federal government was not adequately involved in the oversight of governing restrictions which eventually led to the respective economic collapses. Through the ensuing years of the Great Recession recovery, many of these same issues have not been addressed. The perpetuation of financial tension has led to increased rates of drug and alcohol-related deaths and suicides among whites.[129] Additionally, racial tensions in the US continue to be a significant issue that provides sound-bite comestibles for news talking heads and politicians alike. Issues of terrorism, race, and immigration (rather than economic inequality) are the current *modus operandi* of wagging the dog.

The entanglement of race and class and capitalism can be illustrated by a comment by President Lyndon B. Johnson regarding issues of federal economic policy development in the Civil Rights era: "If you can convince the lowest white man he's better than the best colored man, he won't notice you're picking his pocket. Hell, give him somebody to look down on, and he'll empty his pockets for you."[130] In other words, the one having their pockets picked or emptying them of their own freewill does so (unwittingly) because they can then convince themselves that they are not at the absolute bottom of the social hierarchy. Pockets are emptied in the form of lower wages, fading job prospects, disintegration of unions, and habitual consumption which perpetuates a heroin-esque stupor.

The time of the rise of the Christian Right also saw the rise of sensationalism in media, especially in television. From the late 1980s, tabloid television and "reality"

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[129] Anne Case and Angus Deaton. "Rising morbidity and mortality in midlife among white non-Hispanic Americans in the 21st century," *PNAS*, 112, no. 49, 15078-83.

[130] Bill Moyers, "What a Real President Was Like; To Lyndon Johnson, the Great Society Meant Hope and Dignity," *The Washington Post*, November 13, 1988, http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/washingtonpost /doc/307079109.html.

programs have been a boon to national television networks ABC, NBC, CBS, and FOX, as well as some cable networks such as MTV and Bravo. One particular show, "America's Most Wanted," on Fox TV was credited with capturing over 570 fugitives thanks to phone-in tips from viewers.[131] Under the guise of *cleaning up this town*, tabloid TV shows had a platform to discuss all manner of previously tabooed topics, e.g., pornography, paternity, sexual deviance, and gruesome crime. According to Kevin Glynn's argument, the rise of "Reaganism" (during the Reagan administration, 1981-1989) prompted a posse-mentality among the populace such that the "average citizen" felt a kinship with police and wanted to punish the "bad guys."[132] The particular appeal to authoritarianism, which is the hallmark of neoconservatism, was being lived out through reality shows about cops, courts, and bedrooms. Modern television is still host to shows like "Survivor" (in its sixteenth year), "The Bachelor" (twenty seasons in fourteen years), and "The People's Court" (in continuous production since 1981), not to mention the myriad talent-related shows such as "American Idol" and "The Voice." The voyeurism required by these shows should not go unnoticed. The viewer is peering into the most intimate aspects of people's lives from a position of power as the arbiter and judge. Sure, we may disagree with who gets voted off "American Idol" but that doesn't cause us to stop tuning in. We feel we are deputized morality police with a sworn duty to pass judgment. Given the opportunity to judge others also serves to distract from larger, more important economic issues.

The tumult of neoconservativism is far from its end. Post-Great Recession bailouts were given to some of the largest corporations in the US, with $180 billion going

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[131] Kevin Glynn, *Tabloid Culture: Trash Taste, Popular Power, and the Transformation of American Television*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 2.
[132] Ibid., 51-53.

to AIG alone. This is more money than the total amount given in welfare to US citizens in the years 1990-2006.[133] Rather than these expenditures being a catalyst for policy change, those who were objecting to the kind of corporate welfare which followed the Great Recession were categorized by the political Right as being divisive.[134] The Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement which started in the summer of 2011, three years after the Great Recession began, was the organized demonstration of class discontent. While the OWS movement has faded, some credit it with refocusing the political conversation on issues of income inequality and worker rights, issues which have yet to bear fruit.[135] Categorizing discontent as class warfare is "an all-purpose rhetorical cudgel favored among conservatives any time public debate threatens to oscillate outside the approved range of questions such as 'Tax cuts: Super Awesome, or Merely Awesome?'"[136] We are still faced with the unfortunate situation where, paraphrasing the words of billionaire Warren Buffet, there is a class war and the upper classes are still winning.

Advertising and Modern Manic Consumption

In 1955, marketing consultant Victor Lebow wrote this about the influence of television:

> Probably the most powerful weapon of the dominant producers lies in their use of television. To a greater degree than ever before a relative handful of products will share a monopoly of most of the leisure time of the American family. We will have over 30 million television households next year. And television achieves three results to an extent no other advertising medium has ever approached. *First, it creates a captive audience. Second, it submits that audience to the most intensive*

[133] Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality*, 225.
[134] Ibid., and p. 278-79.
[135] Michael Levitin, "The Triumph of Occupy Wall Street," in *The Atlantic*, June 10, 2015, accessed September 14, 2016, http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/06/the-triumph-of-occupy-wall-street/395408/.
[136] Chris Lehman, *Rich People Things: Real Life Secrets of the Predator Class*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011), 53.

> *indoctrination. Third, it operates on the entire family*. ("Price Competition in 1955," p. 6, emphasis added)

In 2014, The Nielsen Company estimated that there were 115.6 million televisions in homes across the US.[137] There is an estimated population in the US of 324 million people, which equals roughly three people per television. This does not include the number of other ways television is observed by people, such as through computers and mobile devices, or in public spaces, restaurants, bars, and even small-screen versions on gas pumps. Lebow's prophetic voice has proved true. As sociologist Joseph D. Rumbo argues: "By colonizing public, discursive, and psychic spaces, advertising becomes a central part of our commonly held cultural repertoire, one whose hegemonic control over these spaces poses enormous obstacles for those who wish to reclaim them."[138] The triumvirate of the creation of a captive audience, intensive indoctrination, and operability regardless of age is the goal of advertising.

"No credit? No problem!" "I'm lovin' it!" "This Bud's for you." "Just do it." "Open happiness." "A diamond is forever." These are the sirens' wails of our everyday existence. Advertising is woven into the fabric of our public, and often private, existence. Branding (and rebranding) as it is called in modern advertising, is the means by which we come to associate a certain desire with a certain consumable object which is created by a certain company. Some companies have been so successful at branding that we mainly use the brand name to refer to that item, e.g., Band-Aid, Q-Tip, Kleenex, Listerine, Vaseline, to name just a few. But this is just the tip of the branding iceberg. Juliet Schor, one of the leaders of the Center for the New American Dream, reports that as of the early

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[137] Nielsen Newswire, May 7, 2013. Accessed September 1, 2016, http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2013/nielsen-estimates-115-6-million-tv-homes-in-the-u-s---up-1-2-.html.
[138] Joseph D. Rumbo, "Consumer Resistance in a World of Advertising Clutter: The Case of Adbusters." *Psychology & Marketing* 19, no. 2 (2002): 127-148, p. 129.

2000s, "American kids display more brand affinity than their counterparts anywhere else in the world; indeed, experts describe them as increasingly 'bonded to brands.'"[139] Branding is re-inscribed by catchy slogans, jingles, and images such that one cannot think of the product itself without thinking of the brand.

Most producers of consumer goods are wholly dependent on their branding yet customer loyalty is dicey.[140] Although people tend to be "bonded to brands," there are still major retailers, such as McDonald's and Starbucks, which invest large sums to ensure return customers and customer retention.[141] Many companies offer rewards and loyalty programs in order to boost overall sales. Now some companies are pooling their efforts in partnerships. For instance, a grocery chain, Safeway, Inc. (which includes Vons, Pavilions, and Albertsons stores) has partnered with Chevron/Texaco to offer rewards in the form of a discount at the pump for points earned in grocery purchases. A second example is the consolidation system managed by Points International Ltd., which provides a means to pool and redeem points earned through customer loyalty for airline, hotel, and other travel purchases.[142] These reward programs have their own form of seduction. The customer already intends to buy groceries and pay for other necessities which now appear to have a cost-free incentive. However, the "expense" is in the consumer being tied to a single company. There is also a hidden monetary exchange which is lucrative enough to finance Points International which is a publicly traded

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[139] Juliet Schor, *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture*, (New York: Scribner, 2004), 13.
[140] Nichole Leinbach-Reyhle , "Customer Loyalty in Today's Modern Retail World," *Forbes.com*, accessed August 31, 2016, http://www.forbes.com/sites/nicoleleinbachreyhle/2016/04/20/customer-loyalty-in-todays-modern-retail-world/#17ba0bb23008.
[141] Ibid.
[142] https://www.points.com/.

company.[143] Of course, the cost of these "free" incentive rewards programs is passed on to the consumer who has essentially purchased their own limitations.

Another dimension of the consumerism spectrum is fads and crazes, and these are often inexplicable in their rabid popularity. Recent history is dotted with product explosions, e.g., My Pet Rock, Cabbage Patch Kids, Tickle Me Elmo, Pokémon trading cards, and Beany Babies. Most recent is the Shopkins rage. Manufactured by Moose Toys in Australia, Shopkins are anthropomorphized consumer objects and have sold over 600 million characters in the US since their inception in 2014.[144] The pocket-sized toys, which are in the shape of everything from apples and strawberries to lipstick tubes and perfume bottles, are fairly inexpensive with a price-point of approximately $1.00 each. Shopkins are released in "seasons" which correspond to a series of animated videos released directly to YouTube (with over 900 million combined views)[145] and a series of books published by Scholastic Inc. Shopkins is aimed particularly at little girls and has extended their merchandizing reach with fabric (for making clothing, etc.), princess-type costumes of some of the main characters, and a seemingly never-ending line of brand-image paraphernalia.[146]

The reason the Shopkins phenomena is critical to our discussion of global market capitalism and modern manic consumption is that it illustrates *modern manufactured desire*. With many prior kitsch fads there was a lag between the recognition of the craze and the ramp-up to meet the new sales potential. Consequently, there emerged knock-off

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[143] "Points, publicly traded as Points International Ltd. (TSX: PTS; NASDAQ: PCOM), is the global leader in loyalty currency management." Accessed August 31, 2016. http://investor.points.com/

[144] Jennifer Berger, "Shopkins Secrets and Fun Facts," *Newsday*, July 26, 2016, accessed September 9, 2016, http://www.newsday.com/lifestyle/family/shopkins-secrets-and-fun-facts-1.12058684.

[145] CookieSwirlC, https://www.youtube.com/user/CookieSwirlC/videos, accessed September 2, 2016.

[146] Moose Toys has expanded their platform of pocket-sized toys with "The Trash Pack" and "The Uggly's Petshop," both of which feature gross and decomposing food and animals, respectively, apparently as an attempt to appeal to boys. (http://www.trashpack.com/us/ and http://www.theugglys.com/)

and black markets for items, especially for Tickle Me Elmo and Cabbage Patch Kids.[147] Due to the breadth of the modern production stream, the supply of fad items can be increased. And, as is the case with Shopkins, the manufacturer comes out with a new "season" of characters which also creates new demand.

Manufacturers and retailers alike profess that they are simply responding to the demands of the consumer. What is never discussed is the fact that the so-called demand is cultivated in the petri dish of advertising and impulse purchasing. The entire purpose of advertising is to construct a need for a particular item, which is often not actually needed at all. The premise is that one's life will be complete/better/happier and without that item life is incomplete/worse/sadder. The subtext of advertising—that life is not what it could be—is aimed at that part of the self which already struggles with being assured of its sufficiency. Advertising confounds our ability to discern our own needs and so we regularly resort to a tactic of "more is safer." As will be discussed in chapter three herein, consumption is often a result of unmet non-material need, such as the need to be loved and accepted unconditionally. Advertisements overtly and/or covertly promise that their product will meet non-material needs, their product is merely a means to an end, and that without their product your non-material needs will go unfulfilled. Quite similar to advertising, impulse purchasing functions the same way. The idea of "needs met" is introduced to the consumer with the advent of the product itself, and because of convenience, i.e., the product is literally at-hand, the promise of life being better immediately is very difficult to pass by.

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[147] Karley Weinmann, "5 Marketing Lessons from the Craziest Holiday Fad of All Time," *Business Insider*, December 10, 2011, accessed September 2, 2016, http://www.businessinsider.com/marketing-lessons-tickle-me-elmo-2011-12; Colleen Kane, "Cabbage Patch Fever: 25 Years Later," *The Huffington Post*, November 17, 2011, accessed September 2, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/colleen-kane/cabbage-patch-fever-25-ye_b_152470.html

As advertising has evolved over the last century, we see that certain shifts of censorship and cultural acceptability rarely stick. For instance, in 2005 Carl's Jr. (a western regional name for the Carl Karcher Enterprises, CKE, a national fast-food chain) released a commercial featuring Paris Hilton in a bikini writhing on and next to an expensive car while washing the vehicle (supposedly) and eating a Carl's Jr. hamburger.[148] There was an immediate negative reaction to the indecency of the commercial. Carl's Jr. and Hilton were unapologetic.[149] The ad was pulled from many broadcasting markets. But like the phenomena of a banned book, everyone wanted to see it.[150] Taking the hysterical popularity as a nascent *yes* by the public, CKE has continued producing similar commercials and has basically cornered the market of correlating salacious (some would say indecent) female sexuality (hardly ever male sexuality) with gluttonous food consumption. The ultimate irony of these commercials is that at a conscious (or subconscious) level, most people assume that models subsist on a diet which does not include hamburgers, so their indulging heightens the voyeur experience in that they are doing something they would otherwise *never* do.

CKE's latest offering is an ad for the "Bacon Three-Way Burger" which features three models in white bikinis in a kitchen, feeding each other bacon in sexually suggestive ways. The commercial's only spoken lines come from one of the models: "Yeah, yeah, I know what you're thinking. But come on, it's called a Bacon Three-Way

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[148] "Paris Hilton Carl's Jr. Commercial 2005," accessed September 1, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_eKQvCS9YKY.
[149] Caleb Silver, "No Apologies for Sexy Paris Hilton Ad: Burger Chain Carl's Jr. tells watchdog group infuriated over scantily clad soap-up to 'get a life.'" *CNN Business News*, June 1, 2005, accessed September 1, 2016, http://money.cnn.com/2005/05/24/news/newsmakers/carls_ad/.
[150] Carl's Jr., Press Releases, "Explosive Response to Paris Hilton Ad Crashes Carl's Jr. Web Site," May 23, 2005, accessed September 1, 2016, http://www.carlsjr.com/company/releases/explosive-response-to-paris-hilton-ad-crashes-carls-jr-web-site.

Burger. What'd you expect?"[151] What do we expect, indeed? We cannot know for sure that this line of advertising will lead to an increase in profits for CKE, but it must be working on some level because how else can we explain the fact that they have released a steady stream of this same genre of commercial since 2005? Of interesting note, CKE has a second Bacon Three-Way Burger commercial which poses as a "content warning" similar to the type of warnings given at the beginning of shows which are rated TV-14. The subject matter is the same, the salaciousness is implied, but there are no scantily-clad models.[152]

CKE and other advertisers have found increased willingness on the part of media outlets to run salacious ads as push-back from corporations against public outcry has given them license to continue collecting advertising dollars as well as relaxing their own approach to programming content.

> The divide between neoliberals and neoconservatives partially reflects a difference as to where the lines are drawn. The neoconservatives typically blame 'liberals', 'Hollywood', or even 'postmodernists' for what they see as the dissolution and immorality of the social order, rather than the corporate capitalists (like Rupert Murdoch) who actually do most of the damage by foisting all manner of sexually charged if not salacious material upon the world and who continually flaunt their pervasive preference for short-term over long-term commitments in their endless pursuit of profit. (Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 166)

In some ways, the salacious programming of networks like Fox, FX, Bravo, and even ABC, NBC, and CBS, have all been pushing against Federal Communications

[151] "Carl's Jr Commercial 2016 Bacon 3-Way Burger Fantasty [*sic*]" accessed September 1, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDE3yYibelo.
[152] Carl's Jr., "Bacon 3-Way Burger 'Explicit Bacon' Commercial," accessed September 8, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27ZYB-rTfHM

Commission requirements against profanity and nudity on broadcast television.[153] Advertising and programming are actually reflections of each other.

Media outlets have acquired other television networks, e.g., ABC owns Disney television and ESPN, and radio and outdoor advertising melds, e.g., iHeartMedia, Inc. (owners of iHeartMedia broadcast and internet radio stations) owns Clear Channel Outdoor, Inc. (billboards, etc.), so as to create a seamless advertising platform indoctrinating viewers and branding content.[154] Advertisers can extend their reach by aligning themselves with these media marketers. Smartphones and mobile computing devices have added to the captive audience, intensive indoctrination, and wide reach which Lebow credited to the television. The reach of global media outlets includes other political and economic aspects sometimes overlooked, including "lobbying efforts, executing certain strategies, or producing particular content."[155]

In the category of "producing particular content" falls content marketing. A formal definition of content marketing is: "the marketing and business process for creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience—with the objective of driving profitable customer action."[156] A familiar type of content marketing is found in print magazines which looks like a feature article on a particular product but at the top of the page(s) is printed the word "ADVERTISEMENT" in a font much smaller than the rest of the article. Other types of content marketing are found on social media feeds like Twitter, Facebook,

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[153] https://www.fcc.gov/general/regulation-obscenity-indecency-and-profanity.
[154] Benjamin J. Birkinbine, Rodrigo Gómez, and Janet Wasko, "Introduction," in *Global Media Giants*, ed. Benjamin J. Birkinbine, Rodrigo Gómez, and Janet Wasko (New York: Routledge, 2017).
[155] Ibid., 4.
[156] Content Marketing Institute, accessed September 2, 2016. http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2012/06/content-marketing-definition/.

and Instagram. The tack of these advertisements is slightly different in that they are not (necessarily) shouting "Buy our product," but rather they are saying, "Look how cool/sexy/satisfied people are who eat/buy/consume our product." Some content marketing comes in the form of whitepapers, e.g., like those published by Victor Lebow on marketing, or videos, e.g., Buzzfeed's "Dear Kitten" series sponsored by Purina Friskies (cat food),[157] or "placement journalism," e.g., articles written to extol a product's virtues and posted or published in online or print press. A less formal definition of content marketing is: "owning, as opposed to renting media. It's a marketing process to attract and retain customers by consistently creating and curating content in order to change or enhance a consumer behavior."[158] Advertising's purpose is changing and enhancing consumer behavior through ubiquitous presence. David Harvey's argument, aimed at Rupert Murdock and Fox, that they "actually do most of the damage by foisting all manner of sexually charged if not salacious material upon the world" is not far off the mark.[159] A significant portion of advertising is repackaged and distributed through channels of conglomerate media ownership. The operative word here is "foisting"; salaciousness is a matter of degree.

There is some discussion over the growing concern of the media influence over people's lives and decision-making. In the case of "embedded" advertising, where a product is used in a film, television show, or in online content, there is a continued discussion over what role the Federal Communications Commission should be playing to balance the First Amendment rights of the manufacturer and the ethical responsibility to

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[157] BuzzFeedVideo, "Dear Kitten," accessed September 1, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4Sn91t1V4g. This video/commercial has almost 27 million views on YouTube.
[158] Op. cit., http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2012/06/content-marketing-definition/.
[159] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 166.

the viewing public.[160] As technology has advanced, webpages are now availing themselves of "cookie" advertising where there is a placeholder on a webpage which inserts a product you have viewed elsewhere on the internet. For example, if you visited Amazon.com and searched for hammocks for your backyard and then clicked over to another website which sponsors cookie placeholders, you would see an ad for hammocks, thus reminding you of your desire to purchase a hammock.

The Story of Stuff tells us that Americans spend the small amount of leisure time we have on shopping and watching TV.[161] *TSOS* chronicles the situation of many Americans who work, sometimes more than one job, just so they can be told by advertisements (and programming) that they are not sufficient as humans and so they try to resolve that supposed problem by buying something new. This is the petri dish of manufactured demand. This is modern manic consumption. Economic theories would have people believe that consumers are demanding new consumer goods, when in fact it is manufacturers who are striving after profit (and some notoriety) so they produce *the new* while simultaneously concocting *the demand*.

Conclusion

Historian Eric Hobsbawm chronicles the period of 1914-1991, which he termed the "Short Twentieth Century." [162] He asserts that historians can't agree on why capitalism flourished the way it did. Hobsbawm writes:

> Just how and why capitalism after the Second World War found itself, to everyone's surprise including its own, surging forward into the

[160] Jennifer Fujawa, "The FCC's Sponsorship Identification Rules: Ineffective Regulation of Embedded Advertising in Today's Media Marketplace," *Federal Communications Law Journal*, 64, issue 3, article 64, (2012): 549-75.
[161] Annotated script, *The Story of Stuff*, 12.
[162] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991,* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 8.

> unprecedented and possibly anomalous Golden Age of 1947-73, is perhaps the major question which faces historians of the twentieth century. There is as yet no agreement on an answer, nor can I claim to provide a persuasive one…for the changes in human life it brought about all over the globe were as profound as they were irreversible. (p. 8-9)

The profound changes in human activity, at a more basic level, are a result of the surge in capitalist prosperity. However, capitalist prosperity should not be confused with prosperity overall. Neoliberal and neoconservative economic and political policies have re-inscribed class disparity so that even as the US GNP has skyrocketed, the labor classes have lost ground in the overall economic growth of this country.[163] It seems that the prophecies of those like Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels seem to have come true, at least in the sense that there has been a breakdown in social values and human relationships as a result of capitalism, however, some, like Hobsbawm, argue that capitalism is digging its own grave.[164] In other words, the rapaciousness of our capitalist economy is starting to show signs of wear and tear. Hobsbawm makes a rather emotional claim that due to the social and cultural changes brought about by capitalism, our present and future is literally cut-off from the past and the result is that we face a future "[i]n which we do not know where our journey is taking us, or even ought to take us."[165]

Hobsbawm is articulating a loss of meaning, a situation where there is a breakdown in both socio-spatial relationships as well as ethical foundations. Philosopher and cultural critic Slavoj Žižek writes of how capitalism "de-totalizes meaning":

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[163] Retail trade in the US has increased 168% from 1992 to 2016, United States Census Bureau, "Business and Industry." Accessed September 1, 2016. https://www.census.gov/econ/currentdata/dbsearch?program=MARTS&startYear=1992&endYear=2016&categories%5B%5D=44000&dataType=SM&geoLevel=US&adjusted=1&submit=GET+DATA&releaseScheduleId=. The lowest category of household income has increased 81%, from $12,600 to $22,800 for 1992 to 2016, United States Census Bureau, "Historical Income Tables: Households," accessed September 14, 2016. http://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-income-households.html.

[164] Hobsbawm, 16.

[165] Ibid.

> Perhaps it is here that one should locate one of the main dangers of capitalism: although it is global and encompasses the whole world, it sustains a *stricto sensu* worldless [*sic*] ideological constellation, depriving the large majority of people of any meaningful cognitive mapping. Capitalism is the first socio-economic order which *de-totalizes meaning*: it is not global at the level of meaning. There is, after all, no global 'capitalist world view', no 'capitalist civilization' proper: the fundamental lesson of globalization is precisely that capitalism can accommodate itself to all civilizations, from Christian to Hindu or Buddhist, from West to East. Capitalism's global dimension can only be formulated at the level of truth-without-meaning, as the Real of the global market mechanism. (Žižek, *Trouble in Paradise: From the End of History to the End of Capitalism,* [Brooklyn: Melville House, 2014(a)], 10, italics in original, underlining added)

This deprivation of "meaningful cognitive mapping" is the result of the hidden aspects of the materials economy. Most people are largely (blissfully?) unaware of those aspects of capitalism which are ethically questionable or morally depraved. As capitalism has adapted itself, or has been adapted by the owners of the means of production, it has become the Real. It is the Truth. To quote Coca-Cola's most famous branding, "*It is the real thing*."

Consumers have, in fact, adapted their niche and created their reality. There is a ubiquitous and mostly inescapable ideology of consumerism. Most attempts to deconstruct that ideology lean toward a tendency to look at the *reality* of the consumerist society. However, as Žižek argues, "…the critique of ideology should not begin with critiquing reality, but with the critique of our dreams."[166] We all dream of an easier life, one where our toil will benefit us not only with trousers but perhaps even extravagant gifts which we have the option of refusing. We can be *material girls* living in a material world. Still, this so-called material world is the Matrix[167] of a system of oppression of most and profit for the few over and against the many. In Friedrich Engels' initial critique

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[166] Žižek, *Trouble in Paradise,* 220.

[167] "Matrix" refers to the modern movie *The Matrix* (1999), where the known "reality" is a computer-generated illusion and the humans are used as batteries to run "The Matrix."

of capitalism, he wrote that the battle against feudalism was in fact a battle against the Church and the Church's role in the perpetuation of the feudal system; therefore any attack was an act of heresy. Engels argued that, "[t]he social conditions had to be stripped of their halo of sanctity before they could be attacked."[168] Global market capitalism is protected by a secular halo which bestows a particular form of grace. This inviolability concedes the sacrifice of laborers and natural resources all in the name of profit. In order to critique global capitalism as an ideology, it needs to be stripped of its sanctity.

In 1759, Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* outlines the ways in which conspicuous consumption had begun to emerge in the second half of the eighteenth century. Although Smith espoused prudence as a guiding virtue, he held the opinion that the changing fashions, e.g., clothes, furnishings, architecture, were necessary in order to appropriately adorn the "great" because "it is connected in our imaginations with something that is genteel and magnificent."[169] Smith believed that the reason that the fashions of clothing and furnishings changed with regularity was due to the fact that these items were "not made of very durable materials."[170] In 2016, it is the case that fashions and furnishings (and a great many consumable objects) are often made of less than durable materials, but that is certainly not the reason why they are replaced with regularity. Nevertheless, in 2016, just as in 1759, being *adorned appropriately* is still highly valued. Now it is not so much to be "genteel and magnificent," but rather to achieve social acceptability and, in most cases, to feel loved.

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[168] Friedrich Engels, "The Peasant War in Germany," in *On Religion*, ed. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1850/1957/2008), 99.
[169] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments,* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1759/2006), 197.
[170] Ibid., 198.

"The whole economic system rests on generating desires that the commodities can profitably satisfy, it is hardly to be expected that a critical analysis of the irrationality of desires would be popular."[171]

III. The Ontological Wound and Consumption

There is an inherent subtlety in consumption which makes it difficult to differentiate what is consumed for the sole purpose of sustenance and those consumptive behaviors which are parts of an emotional need and/or have a psychological underpinning. It is argued herein that much of the consumption in the US is a reaction to an individual's ontological woundedness specifically that individuals experience anxiety as a primary emotion as a result of the ontological wound and they consume in order to assuage that anxiety. Additionally, non-specific anxiety is the result of the separation from the *Other*[172] and unfulfilled nonmaterial needs. In the resulting angst people amass consumable goods in an effort to build a figurative bridge which would connect them to those around them and satisfy their need for self-fulfillment and love. Conversely but with the same result, angst leads others to amass consumable goods in order to construct an emblematic wall of protection around themselves as a shield against having to contend with the unmet need for love and connection. In the given reality of global market capitalism in the US, we are so surrounded with consumer goods that accumulating consumable objects is unimpeded, even for people with very limited means. Furthermore, as fallible individuals with complex conscious and unconscious drives and insecurities, the acquisition of consumer goods feels, in turn, cognitively appropriate and emotionally satisfying.

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[171] Eric Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC), 292.

[172] A definition of Other-ness will be amalgamated from Robert Corrington's philosophical theology and from Emmanuel Levinas' religious ethics. Other-ness will be one of the topics in chapter four.

It is central to the argument of this project that American consumer desire finds its genesis in the first weeks and months of life, which then grows due to psychological recompense and social reinforcement. In order to elucidate this, concepts of ontology, specifically ontological woundedness and ontological trust and insecurity, are used to interpret and understand the inception and reinforcement of individual and collective consumerism. Combining these aspects of ontology with a metaphysical perspective of ecstatic naturalism and theories of ontological parity, anxiety, object relations, abjection, and non-satiation will allow for the adumbration of the phenomenon of consumerism.

The analyses in this chapter will employ ordinal phenomenology—the practice of clearing away everything extraneous from a particular phenomenon, while still employing all of our sensory and extrasensory perceptiveness to fully experience such—as its primary methodology. Ordinal phenomenology creates a clearing whereby phenomena can be experienced "on their *own* terms."[173] Robert Corrington emphasizes the need for the cognitive discipline to allow phenomenon to arise without the burden of "bad metaphysics."[174] He writes, "Ordinal phenomenology examines traits from a variety of perspectives, that is, it rotates the natural complex through several (or more) of its ordinal locations, and refuses to privilege one of these locations as being the foundational or 'really real' thing in itself."[175] Consumerism as a socio-politico-economic system and the consumptive behaviors within that structure are weighed down with classically bad metaphysics. As discussed in chapter two, the metaphysics of global market capitalism contains various notions: that "the market" is a force unto itself; that the market is

[173] Robert S. Corrington, *Deep Pantheism: Toward a New Transcendentalism.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016, xxii.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid.

somehow autonomous enough to "make demands" of the natural resources of the planet; that capitalism is based on something as straightforward as supply and demand; and that the production of commodities is the highest calling of a market entity. The value of an individual in a capitalist economy is measured only by their ability to consume. While there might be some resistance to such a characterization, the inculcation of this assessment permeates the psyche of even those who are of stiffer constitutions and are able to critically analyze their place in a consumerist society to some degree, and in some way think and behave outside the overarching capitalistic metaphysical order.

Capitalism, in its purest form, is propagated by individual consumption; consumption is little more than an individual's relationship to objects. This chapter will demonstrate how object relations begin with birth and the primary parenting relationships. Theories in child psychology and self-objects and transitional objects will be woven together with theories of the ontological wound and the human need for belongingness. Understandings of fantasy and delusion will be analyzed through the lens of ontological parity in order to more closely scrutinize the ways in which desire for consumable objects is a function of the human imagination. Along with the interior psychology of the individual, social constructions of consumerism will be examined. Issues of ontological trust, reflexive ontology, and theories of bifurcated consciousness illuminate the role that social constructions play in a consumerist society. Theories of anxiety are examined to show the correlation of anxiety with consumption. Finally, theories of abjection *vis-à-vis* want (as in desire) along with *death* and *life drive* theories will be analyzed in the context of the understanding of how infants acquire and test objects in order to learn about the world.

Birth Trauma and the Ontological Wound

Much of what goes on during human birth and immediately afterward is rarely discussed in contemporary westernized societies, even among close friends and family. There is seldom mention of the newborn's passing of meconium—the tar-like substance coating the infant's intestines while in utero—which is sticky and smelly, and stains practically everything it touches. There is little discussion of the baby's umbilical cord stub which withers and turns black but remains attached to the bellybutton area for a period that can last from a few days to a month. Hardly anyone debates how the newborn's skin sometimes reacts violently to the shift from amniotic fluid to air resulting in a moderate to full-blown shedding of the epidermis as if the baby is recovering from sunburn. There is a spectrum of other maladies, depending on the relative health of the baby, all of which can be categorized as traumatic; and very few, save crying, eating, and sleeping, are discussed. It can be assumed that the baby might be feeling some of the same physical distress as the mother: some pain, a lot of discomfort, and exhaustion. These physiological aspects of a baby's first days are mentioned here in order to illustrate, in a very small way, the literal and figurative violence that is birth. The peace and passive existence in utero is obliterated by the birthing process. The human being, which was once fully-integrated-in-the-mother, one-with-the-mother, is now separated. The lack of discussion surrounding the baby's first days and weeks post-partum is perhaps the westernized reaction to the fact that most people are uncomfortable with the inherent trauma. Silence is perhaps born of the fear of the possible horror and tragedy of the death of either the mother or the baby, and then relief is expressed in the glowing, romanticized terms like, "Oh what a beautiful baby!"

Without digressing into a debate as to whether or not the newborn, or even adult, can cognitively remember the intrauterine experience, suffice it to say that there is a "memory" of that experience because people know that every human was once there, in *the place* where *life was good* and the *livin' was easy*. There was a time, albeit brief and outside of our conscious recollection of it, when there were no worries, no fears, no anxiety;[176] there was no distress about bodily functions like hunger and elimination, waking and sleeping, movement or lack thereof. Compared to the corporeal experience of everyday life, the utero experience might seem like an easy way out of the stress and anxiety of our day-to-day existence. In many ways, conscious and unconscious, our desire to be anxiety-free can be said to dictate most of our thoughts and behaviors.[177] In the emotional and intellectual consideration of this tension between "life as we know it" and the real or imagined place in utero, most find a particular yearning and yet an unknowable existence. In our rational minds we know it is impossible to maintain or re-experience the utero phase, but this does not stop us from trying to manipulate our reality, on both a conscious and unconscious level, such that we are free from anxiety and want.

Psychological theories illuminate how the process of birth and all that follows is fraught with both fear and anxiety. Sigmund Freud cites Otto Rank's theory of the original anxiety of birth, stating that Rank "had already discovered the central feature of his [Rank's] doctrine, namely, that the anxiety-experience of birth is the prototype of all later danger-situations…The danger of mental helplessness corresponds to the stage of

[176] Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.,1933), 122.
[177] Horney, Karen. *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1937), 46.

early immaturity of the ego…."[178] Freud holds that the ego of a newborn is not fully developed[179] and therefore lacks the capacity for cathexis.[180] Sensory perceptions in the womb are almost completely muted and interaction with the outside world in both a physical and emotional sense does not yet exist. It should be noted that the lack of a differentiated ego for a fetus can been seen as necessary inasmuch as a fetus with an ego would be impossible to sustain in the womb. Speaking in purely developmental terms, the ego is only an ego after it engages with the experiences outside of the womb.[181] Moreover, it is unknown how much damage the ego would sustain if it had to endure the restrained and nearly sensory-free environment of the womb, and the actual event of birth.

Psychoanalyst Otto Rank follows Freud's lead by tracing anxiety back to the trauma of birth.[182] Specifically, Rank observes that it is in the realm of therapy that the patient will conjure their first "memories" of their separation from their mother when it is time to break the relationship with the analyst.[183] Rank reports that many of his patients,

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[178] Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, 122.
[179] Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* translated by James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1923/1960), 8, 11-14.
[180] There is an inherent problem of translating "cathect" or "cathexis" from German to English; "*Besetzt*" is translated into "invested" instead of "cathected." See "Translators' Note" in Jacques Lacan's *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Sylvana Tomaselli and notes by John Forrester (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978/1988/1991), vii.
[181] Op. cit.
[182] Otto Rank, *The Trauma of Birth* (Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books 1924/1952/2010). Rank's theory of infantile anxiety is problematic in that he assumes all children are afraid of animals and that children displace fear of animals onto the father (using Freud's totemism), and equating the presence of the father as preventing "the return to the mother," 12-13. While some children are fearful of animals, it certainly does not hold for the majority of children. Regarding fatherhood, modern parenting tends to disprove most psychoanalytic theories of fearing the male parent. I would argue that Rank's theories should be taken with a grain of salt in that many of his conclusions are reached by means of problematic methodology. Rank's therapeutic theories of analysis are being used here only for their more psycho-social observations rather than his conclusions. Like Freud, Rank's theories were developed out of his therapeutic practice where it can be assumed he only engaged people who were suffering mental illness in some way. This may account for some of his conclusions.
[183] Rank, *The Trauma of Birth*, 4.

men and women, would create this same "terminal situation," but concludes that this is necessary in order for "the patient to repeat with better success in the analysis the separation from the mother."[184] Ultimately, "[*t*]*he analysis finally turns out to be a belated accomplishment of the incompleted* [sic] *mastery of the birth trauma.*"[185] Rank admits that his therapeutic technique is such that he is forcing the patient back through previous libidinal stages and to the final stage that is, in fact, in utero.[186] Perhaps what Rank does not state as clearly is that by establishing a therapeutic relationship in psychoanalysis the patient is most likely looking for relief from their anxiety, even if that course takes them back into previous libidinal stages. The wrenching separation at the end of analysis, which for Rank continued four to eight months, is born of the fact that the patient is now expected to maintain the daily-ness of their life without repeating previous patterns of anxiety and resultant regressive behavior.[187]

As will be discussed in the section on anxiety below, birth is considered a trauma because of the stress and anxiety experienced in the first few years of human life. Freud holds that it is because humans are born relatively less developed than other animals that their experience of anxiety can be traced back to those primary developmental years.[188]

> For this reason the influence of the external environment is intensified… the dangers which the environment presents are increased in importance, and the value attached to *the object who alone can offer protection* against these dangers and effect a substitution for the intrauterine life which has been lost, is enormously augmented. This biological factor of helplessness

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[184] Ibid., 5
[185] Ibid., emphasis in original.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid., 5-6. Rank noted that he observed the "Freudian rule" of seeing his patients everyday (perhaps not weekends?) for the term of the analysis of four to eight months; this works out to about eighty to one hundred thirty therapy sessions. Rank's writings consist of his theories and do not necessarily include an analysis of the success (or failure) of his therapy. Therefore, it is difficult to make assumptions about whether his patients were "cured."
[188] Sigmund Freud, *The Problem of Anxiety*, trans. Henry Alden Bunker (New York: The Psychoanalytic Quarterly Press, 1936), 93-94.

> thus brings into being the first situations of danger and *creates the need to be loved* which the human being is destined never to renounce. (p. 100, emphasis added)

Freud draws the biological and psychological together in the form of *the object*, which exists figuratively within the self and literally outside of the self. The connective thread which deserves our focus here is that the need for protection (once outside of the womb) *creates the need to be loved*. Consequently, when one feels protection waning—and *protection* takes the form of both protections from danger but also provision of food, comfort, and care—anxiety rushes in to replace the libidinal energy created by the perceived void. A decrease in security also triggers questions of lovability as the assumption made at the withdrawal of care is that love is also withdrawn. This is a tenuous existence, even for those who receive what can be considered excellent parenting. The tendency to exaggerate the smallest indications of neglect can be a function of individual personality; others may not be so disposed toward such exaggerations. In any case, there is a haunting of these first memories of helplessness which follows us into adulthood.[189]

The contemplation of the blood, bone, and guts of the material reality of the post-partum existence leads us to consider a more philosophical understanding the trauma of birth, specifically the inherent separateness otherwise known as the ontological wound. In characterizing the ontological wound, Robert Corrington contends that:

> The infant is thrown into the world of involvements and is positioned on both sides of the presemiotic and semiotic. The ontological wound is latent but still present in the earliest stages of life. It is actualized when the infant moves further and further away from the immediacies of the maternal and struggles with the soaring codes of the public order. The transformation of the self is made possible by the internal and external rhythms that open out the ontological wound. *Without this wound there could be neither*

[189] Ibid., 101.

> *consciousness nor social positioning*. (Robert S. Corrington, *Nature's Self: Our Journey from Origin to Spirit*, Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996, p. 27, emphasis added)

Philosophically speaking, the ontological wound is that givenness which is typified by the separation from the mother and the subsequent existence whereby individuals are physically and psychologically separated from one another. In a greater or lesser degree of pathology, the individual strives for connection thereafter, all the while believing they are the only one to sense the surfeit of loneliness. There is an overarching persistence in our need for connection which is then manifested in all areas of our lives. Without connection, there is suffering. As Corrington writes: "The great wound at the heart of the self is social, personal, and ontological."[190] Our connection to others, our connection to our own self, and our being-ness suffers from this wound of disconnection. Recalling the discussion above, the ontological wound *is what it is*, specifically that our collective and individual existence is founded in this separateness and without it we would not be fully human.

In our more reasonable moments, we may be able to imagine that others are just as lonely as we are, but there is complexity to our ontological woundedness which may only be conveyed by art or music.[191] The British rock band, The Police, typify the feeling of woundedness in their song "Message in a Bottle." *Just a cast away, an island lost at sea-o / Another lonely day, no one here but me-o / More loneliness than any man could*

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[190] Robert S. Corrington, *A Semiotic Theory of Theology and Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 148.

[191] Corrington, *A Semiotic Theory*, 148-49. "The commonplace image of the tortured artist acknowledges far more that it realizes. The artist is doing part of the work of the emancipatory community whenever he or she breaks through the concresced and safe shells of social semiosis to forge new self-changing forms that can evoke the underconscious of nature." (Ibid., 149)

bear / Rescue me before I fall into despair-o.[192] The song recounts how a solitary man casts a message in a bottle out to sea as an S.O.S., proclaiming his loneliness. After a year passes, he goes out to find *one hundred billion bottles washed up on the shore*.[193] The final verse, *Seems I'm not alone in being alone / A hundred billion castaways looking for a home,*[194] posits the opposite of loneliness as home. The "home" sought has an ineffable quality which is typically described in poetic or metaphorical terms. Perhaps the idea of home is what Freud and others were attempting to formulate in their theories of a "return to the womb," of course without the benefit of art's or music's metaphor which allow for adumbration of phenomena and create a space for imaginative consideration of the complexity of the self-in-process. Rank's method of taking his patients back through previous libidinal stages, culminating in the stage of "the womb," can be understood as an attempt, rather, to experience the place where loneliness did not exist. On the one hand, the construct of "home" is stilted and often soiled by bad or unhealthy experiences, and is more times than not the place we wish not to return. Conversely, we may retain a romantic version of "home" as being the place, much like the womb, where our stressors were non-existent, but is no "real" place in any sense of the term. "Home is not where you are born; home is where all your attempts to escape cease."[195] Attempts to escape loneliness and to avoid anxiety result in a perpetual existence as a castaway without a real home; we are left to believe that there is *no one here but me-o*.[196] Despair, like a great fog, is stalking our sunnier moments to eventually devour us. In order to stem the tide of

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[192] "Message in a Bottle," music by Stewart Copeland, words by Sting. Released as the first single on the album *Regatta de Blanc*, recorded 1979, A&M Records.
[193] Ibid. The sheer number of bottles returned to the castaway may seem hyperbolic, but is poetic license for the magnitude of the paradox of loneliness.
[194] Ibid.
[195] This quote is attributed to Nobel Prize Laurette Naguib Mahfouz. No suitable citation source could be found.
[196] Op. cit.

despair, we seek that which will re/create a veritable barrier—that *object* which can provide protection, *à la* Freud's concept of the maternal—which will keep us from feeling separate and lonely, and thus anxious. In order to assuage the feelings of loneliness and separation, a natural path is that of creating a fantasy which elevates or removes the self from those uncomfortable feelings.

Ontological parity and fantasy

In order to understand the psychological phenomenon of fantasy, it is important to first understand ontological parity. Ontological parity is defined as the metaphysical exercise of not giving priority to one type of phenomena over another. For example, the wireless keyboard I am using to type this sentence is made of plastic and various other precious and semi-precious metals and is very real in the sense that it can be touched and it occupies space on my desk. However, the idea that I would really rather be outside enjoying the afternoon breeze and observing the birds is not necessarily as real as the keyboard if we are to engage in the practice of ontological priority. Because of the culturally-inscribed convention of relying on ontological priority, it is nearly impossible to give something with the absence of tangible matter the same weight of importance as the presence of tangible matter. In other words, the existence of tangible phenomena in the everyday world outweighs the premise that other intangible phenomena have equal importance. Corrington discusses how we tend to be indolent in our semiotics and allow a place of priority to tangible things: "Habit and laziness serve to reinforce and reward priority schemes and to block out the light of the more tenuous or delicate traits that should have an equal place within the resultant phenomenal field."[197] An understanding

[197] Corrington, *Nature's Sublime*, 17.

of ontological parity is central to this discussion, along with the equal placement of the intangible which can be objectified in the same way as other tangible objects. By doing so, a space for the shape and form of the various hypotheses about consumerism can remain radically open. Furthermore, as will be discussed in more detail below, it opens a space to engage in an imaginative process about consumable objects and fantasies about how life would be better or easier if we just had *more*[198] is essential to our understanding of consumerism.

As the individual's imagination takes shape in the early years of development, it is discovered that people are often comforted, entertained, and sometimes even terrified by the machinations of their inner thoughts. For better or worse, the imagination is powerful and can sometimes operate to an individual's own detriment. Engaging in ontological parity allows for the full recognition of the power of the imagination to bring about desire for consumer objects. Freud's germane definition of the unconscious as being that portion of the mind (comprised of the ego and super-ego according to Freud) which was at one time *known* to the individual but is for whatever reason latent.[199] For Freud, while there might be some psychic material which remained in the unconscious to be drawn out only under the most adept psychoanalytic methods, he believed "that most conscious processes are conscious only for a short period; quite soon they become *latent*, though they can easily become conscious again."[200] In many ways, this might be experienced as "forgetting" a particular thought or experience, but then can be recalled again and again.

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[198] The word "more" in italics is used throughout this discussion to mean literally more, i.e., additional, extra, excessive; but also to mean something different, e.g., trading in the old car for a new one.
[199] Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, 99-100.
[200] Ibid., 100, emphasis in original.

From this assessment I turn to Carl Jung's work on fantasy. Jung pioneered the psychoanalytic field with regard to embracing and analyzing the material of his patients' and his own fantasy life, finding rich meaning there and interpreting those understandings in the cause of the "less ill."[201] While Jung's clinical work focused mainly on those suffering from schizophrenia or other psychosis, it is perhaps due to his self-reflexivity that it can be seen how he interpreted deeper and richer meaning from fantasy.[202] Jung engages the interconnections of fantasy and advertising as functioning as a "trigger" in the mind of the reader—a trigger which might stir unconscious material or long-forgotten memories from childhood.[203] While some "thoughts lose their emotional energy and become subliminal," other thoughts can become obsessive.[204] It is important to examine this line of Jung's thinking *vis-à-vis* the fantasy of most people wanting *more*. Quoting Jung at length:

> Perhaps it may be easier to understand this point if we first realize the fact that the ideas with which we deal in our apparently disciplined waking life *are by no means as precise as we like to believe*. On the contrary, their meaning (and their emotional significance for us) becomes more imprecise the more closely we examine them. The reason for this is that anything we have heard or experienced can become subliminal—that is to say, can pass into the unconscious. And even what we retain in our conscious mind can reproduce at will has acquired an unconscious undertone that will color the idea each time it is recalled. Our conscious impressions, in fact, quickly assume an element of unconscious meaning that is physically significant for us, *though we are not consciously aware of the existence of this subliminal meaning or of the way in which it both extends and confuses the conventional meaning*. (Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, 27, emphasis added)

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[201] Carl G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections,* trans. Richard and Clara Winston, Aniela Jaffé, recorder and ed. (New York: Vintage Books1961/1965), 126-27; the term "less ill" is my own as a means to interpret Jung's thought that: "At bottom we discover nothing new and unknown in the mentally ill; rather, we encounter the substratum of our own natures." (127)
[202] Jung, *Memories*, 188.
[203] Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, 23.
[204] Ibid., 25; Jung *Memories*, 126-27.

Therefore, it is not necessarily the preciseness of the fantasy of having *more*, but the fluidity of the fantasy passing from conscious thought into sublimation and back, all the while confusing the "conventional meaning" (if there is one such meaning). The more imprecise the meaning of obtaining the object(s) of desire becomes, the more likely it is to be differently "colored." Therefore, the desire for the consumable object takes on life of its own; the desire takes on motivational power to even seek out and acquire the object. In this portion of his discussion, Jung includes a photograph of an advertisement from Volkswagen where numerous VW Beetles are arranged in the form of the VW logo; it is a sea of cars. Jung wrote in the caption for the picture, "If these memories [of toy cars] are pleasant, the pleasure may be associated (unconsciously) with the product and brand name."[205] This is the aim of every advertisement: the unconscious, pleasant association with a company's product. The concept of pleasant association can also be seen in the ways in which "housekeeping" is associated with "home." (See the section immediately preceding for the discussion of "home.") Advertisements for cleaning products allude and sometimes directly state that a clean house is the only type of house that is a proper "home." This is how both pleasant and unpleasant associations work and how having the *object* of protection, i.e., a home, often means obtaining the "right" cleaning product. The conventional meaning of cars, cleaning products, and any other consumer object is colored by these associations which are made in our minds in milliseconds and often without rational reflection.

[205] Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, 23. Of interesting note is the fact that Jung writes that the advertisement was a picture of toy cars. On closer examination, you can see a sizable building as the boundary at the top edge of the display of cars. Either way, whether the cars are actual size or toys, the hope on the part of the advertiser of a pleasant association is the same. I find a display of actual size cars to be much more impressive, which moves toward abundance in a literal sense, making associations in a different but still powerful way.

It may be easier to understand this concept of fluidity if we use an example from observing children. A child has possession of a toy which is not particularly attractive. A second child approaches and wants to take the toy. The first child is not amenable to relinquishing the toy, so the second child proceeds to get increasingly upset about not having the toy for their own. It is not that the toy is exceptional in any way, but rather that one possesses it and the other does not. Now, we may take this scene at face-value and assume that it is simply the selfish desire of the second child to take the toy and wreck the enjoyment of the first child. Or, we can consider that it is the selfishness of the first child's unwillingness to share. More expansively, the focus of the examination can more valuably be: *Why* does either child desire the toy so intently?

This is where Jung's analysis directs our gaze toward the second child. The second child is probably unable to articulate exactly why they want the toy, other than they *want it*.[206] We can now imagine that the desire for the toy has meaning for the child—and the toy itself might have some meaning of its own—reaching down into their unconscious and melding with conscious thoughts of toys and other possessions. The less astute observer may conclude that the second child is somehow sadistically motivated and wants to separate the first child from the pleasure of the toy, and while we cannot rule that out, it is an overly simplistic conclusion to a very complex psychic reality. The second child wants the toy for any number of reasons, not the least of which is the fact that the toy symbolizes (and perhaps even delivers) pleasure and satisfaction, which function at both conscious and unconscious levels. The child's understanding of their desire is colored by the bloom of unconscious material into their conscious mind,

[206] Barring a digression into linguistic abilities on the part of either child, we are able to discern the second child's intense desire for the toy.

obscuring the original or essential meaning. Hence, it may be that the child is even experiencing confusion and ambivalence in their own desire.

Moving outward in the chronological schema, it is possible to conceive how our own desire for an object has a certain *je ne sais quoi* about it. As adults, we may be able to better articulate our desire for particular objects especially when the meaning of those objects is clear, but with regard to other objects we find ourselves without a clear sense of our desire. In some ways, we are the unwitting bearer of conflicting and nebulous desire which is shifting from the unconscious to conscious thought and back to the unconscious. Situations such as "buyer's remorse" and hoarding, whether experienced personally or witnessed in those we know, can more easily be explained once we understand the problem of desire. Returning to Freud's theories of birth trauma, *the object* symbolizes so much more than valid desire or sensible satiation. *The object* is a symbol of care and love, the feelings for which are complex *all the way down*. In reflective consideration, we might find ourselves identifying or at least sympathizing with the second child in the example above.

The developing imagination of babies and children is a necessary part of human growth.[207] What D. W. Winnicott calls the "inner world" of a child is mixed with the outer world, what adults might call the "real world." Winnicott makes assurances that there is no need to be concerned about entering into the imaginative/inner world with the child. As the child grows and learns more about the world, fantasies such as being able to

[207] D. W. Winnicott. *The Child, the Family and the Outside World.* (New York: Perseus Publishing, 1957/1964/1987), 70-71.

fly fade in due course. What Winnicott warns against is to "clamp down reality" on a child because the child eventually learns that there are two different kinds of "real."[208]

Holding Winnicott's thoughts in mind, let us consider what Freud has said about the more neurotic propensities of some to not relinquish the fantasy world of childhood (or even adulthood) in that "… [s]atisfaction is obtained from illusions, which are recognized as such without the discrepancy between them and reality being allotted to interfere with enjoyment."[209] Freud continued on in this particular part of his chapter to discuss the ways in which those who are particularly mentally ill cannot abide what others might call *reality* and therefore recede into a place of permanent fantasy where enjoyment is never deferred or denied. Yet he included these thoughts regarding those who are not necessarily mentally ill:

> It is asserted, however, that each one of us behaves in some respect like a paranoiac, corrects some aspect of the world which is unbearable to him *by the construction of a wish and introduces this delusion into reality*. A special importance attaches to the case in which this attempt to procure the certainty of happiness and protection against suffering through a delusional remoulding of reality is made by a considerable number of people in common. The religions of mankind must be classed among the mass-delusions of this kind. *No one, needless to say, who shares a delusion ever recognizes it as such*. (Freud, *Civilization*, 51, emphasis added)

Winnicott asserts that there can be two kinds of reality held simultaneously, but perhaps incorporating Freud's assertion about delusions—or differing types of reality—which are held in common is necessary in order to fully understand the significant shift from fantasy to delusion. As discussed in chapter two, global market capitalism functions on a foundation of delusion—that there will always be *more* to consume and that this is never a bad thing—and the strength of this delusion is found in its number of adherents and the

[208] Winnicott, 71 and 74.
[209] Freud, *Civilization*, 50.

systems in place which protect and propagate it. This leads back to the original thought of wanting to have *more*. If the delusion is that there will always be *more,* and the sincere desire for *more* is fluid and traversing the conscious and unconscious mind, and because this discussion uses the metaphysical perspective of ontological parity, it becomes more apparent how consumerism is formed primarily in the mind.

Whether there are two types of reality or a full-fledged delusion, or even some other driving forces which remain hidden from purview, this reality/delusion of there being *more* is reinforced by what is seen in the stores, in ads, and elsewhere. There is an automatic distortion of perception because we are not threatened by our fantasy life (the "second" type of reality) and/or we cannot actually recognize a delusion for what it is.

In his efforts to more closely analyze modern consumerism through the established lens of Max Weber's work in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,*[210] Colin Campbell argues that a Consumer Revolution emerged alongside the Industrial Revolution.[211] Consumers were encouraged, and even cajoled, into "making the economy work" by their participation in its system by the buying of goods. As successive generations have been inculcated in this system, Campbell argues, modern consumers are generally in a constant state of "want" and people are driven to satisfy

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[210] Max Weber. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. (P. Baehr and G.C. Wells, trans. New York: Penguin Group, [1905] 2002.

[211] Colin Campbell. *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1987). While Campbell's hypothesis does not negate Weber's Protestant Ethic thesis, it does push against the boundaries of Weber's argument in that the consumption witnessed in the US and Western Europe during the latter part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries was not simply a matter of Protestant austerity leading to burgeoning modern capitalism. Rather, Campbell argues, it was due to the unprecedented displays and availability of consumer goods.

their desires in a hedonistic way.[212] Campbell concludes his argument regarding "modern autonomous imaginative hedonism" with these thoughts:

> The inexhaustibility of wants which characterizes the behaviour of modern consumers has to be understood as deriving from their permanent desiring mode, something which, in turn, *stems from the inevitable gap between the perfected pleasures of the dream and the imperfect joys of reality*. No matter what the nature of the dream or, indeed, of reality, the discrepancy between them gives rise to a continuing longing, from which specific desires repeatedly spring. It follows that not being a modern consumer would mean either failing to day-dream or restricting one's imaginative activity to non-real fantasizing. The former is, in effect, the option of traditionalism, whilst the latter approximates the rare, 'other-worldly' response of a few Bohemians or those labelled as eccentrics. (p. 95, emphasis added)

It could be argued that the Industrial Revolution awakened the imagination of people in a way that they would envision those goods that they desired, and even if they could not imagine them, they are presented with advertisements of yet-to-be-known items, thus fueling the fantasy that such goods could supply endless pleasure. In many ways, it is the power of suggestion which leads to desire, much like the second child in the example above. Campbell's argument takes its form around the core of hedonism and fantasy for the sake of emotional pleasure, arguing that those who do not engage in such fantasy are (pathologically) either eccentric or Bohemian.

In the current economic system in the US, people are essentially force-fed consumer goods, most of which are imbued with a fantasy. In the fantasy (or shared delusion) of modern consumerism, people are afforded the opportunity to constantly *test the gap* between what they might imagine their lives to be and what they actually are. In the realm of child's play and imagination, the child can pretend that the stick is a sword and hobbling around the house in their parent's shoes makes them a grown-up. As people

[212] Ibid., 94-95.

become adults, the ability to *make something out of nothing* fades and is replaced by the desire for the actual object—the actual sword or the accoutrements of being grown. An adult's imaginative/fantasy life of possessing those things which are out of their reach, e.g., the fancy car, the big house, the expensive vacation, is built on other fantasies, e.g., winning the lottery. For some children, there is rarely the time of imaginative play when they had to conceive of objects as something else because they are simply given miniature or plastic versions of adult objects, e.g., princess costumes and Star Wars light sabers. It is the longing for the object which lulls us into a stupor and we are perhaps less reflective on the actual meaning of the object, i.e., we want the nice, new thing which will inevitably decay/break/go-out-of-style and will need to be replaced by a new thing, even though none of those things can assuage our need for protection, acceptance, and love.

Ontological trust and reflexive ontology

Modernity has developed its own form of reflexivity which "undermines the certainty of knowledge" as technology enables the constant questioning of what was previously considered truth leading to an essential breakdown of ontological trust.[213] Anthony Giddens argues that this lack of trust leads to ontological insecurity, where we fear that utter chaos is lurking *just on the other side* of our ability to glean information about the world.[214] These aspects of mistrust and insecurity, Giddens writes, are what have allowed our existence to be commodified by capitalism.[215] In other words, we consume, and are encouraged to consume, because we are seeking after trust in our

[213] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 19-23.
[214] Ibid., 50.
[215] Ibid., 196-97.

reality, the security of belongingness and, perhaps most of all, love. These intangible, nonmaterial needs which we all need to have fulfilled are ultimately a project of self-development, but that project fails in the face of the intrinsic nothingness of consumable goods and "artificially framed styles of life."[216] Instead of developing the self and seeking healthful means of fulfilling our non-material needs, we substitute "the consumption of ever-novel goods" and "appearance replaces essence as the visible signs of successful consumption come actually to outweigh the use-values of goods and services in question themselves."[217] The breakdown of ontological trust results in the exacerbation of feelings of separation born of the ontological wound, resulting in increased feelings of alienation. Essentially, the ontological wound is exacerbated by a lack of basic trust and striving after appearances. In the ensuing pathology, material needs take priority over and against non-material needs.

Destabilizing an individual's certainty is the sheer plethora of information to which they have ready-access. The use of smart phones and similar devices allows for a constant *check-in* with how the rest of the world might see them. In the virtual-reality extension of one's *appearance*, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram keep a running tab of how many "likes," "re-tweets," and "hearts" one can accumulate, so that it is not just an individual's appearance in public but their appearance in this virtual space which is also tipping the scales in favor of materiality over substance. Consequently, one can understand how "the reflexivity of modernity actually undermines the certainty of knowledge."[218] Giddens argues that it is the ever-evolving field of science which is the cause of much of our mistrust because modern science is built upon a

[216] Ibid., 198.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Ibid., 21.

foundation of doubt so that "no matter how cherished" a scientific theory might be there is always room for "new ideas or findings."[219] The acceptability of, or even demand for, doubt which is the foundation of this mistrust is ultimately problematic. Giddens contends that it is "[t]he integral relation between modernity and radical doubt is an issue which, once exposed to view, is not only disturbing to philosophers but is *existentially troubling* for ordinary individuals."[220] There is considerably less surety of science perhaps because of the ways in which it is reported in the news. Reports of the health benefits of chocolate and red wine are presented as panaceas, rather than as anecdotal findings which may or may not be an authentic scientific study. Issues of health, via science, are compounded by the onslaught of information for the pharmaceutical industry leading to even greater and more troubling angst.

In the face of existential distress, people tend to seek out the referent of their existence. The easiest and most accessible proof in this modern US culture is consumer goods. A slight variation of the Cartesian idiom gives certainty against the malaise: "I consume, therefore I am." The reflexivity of the phenomenon of consuming is constitutive of modern social and institutional life. As Giddens argues, reflexivity is not simply a function of individual human activity. On the contrary, "[m]odernity's reflexivity refers to the susceptibility of most aspects of social activity, and material relations with nature, to *chronic revision* in the light of new information or knowledge."[221] The "chronic revision" of our understanding thus makes us even more susceptible to the predominance of doubt.

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[219] Ibid.
[220] Ibid, emphasis in original. The accepted doubt of science can account for the continued stance of climate change denial. This topic will be discussed in chapter four.
[221] Ibid., 20, emphasis added.

In the corporeality of modern global capitalism, doubt is the subtext of any and all advertising. The goods (or services) being advertised tout the benefits of what is being offered, all the while pointing out that those without said product are obviously lacking in some way. It is not clear whether we generally accept the premise of doubt in all other aspects of our cultural context because of the way in which advertising so permeates our daily lives. Similarly, we are left to wonder if we are so willing to accept the doubt of the sufficiency of our lives—as viewed through the imagined world of advertising—because of the other ways in which we have been more or less trained to doubt the concreteness of things previously considered indisputable, such as religion or science. We have been empowered to rely on our own intellect and accept or reject whatever is presented. In other words, we know that doubt is an option, but an option we are free to use or not, or so we like to think.

We are operating reflexively in a consumerist society and its overarching, prevailing experience. The ultimate problem with this is that society establishes and imposes itself by coercion. Sociologist Peter Berger speaks of this coercion as the means by which reality is lived. "The final test of [society's] objective reality is its capacity to impose itself upon the reluctance of individuals. Society directs, sanctions, controls, and punishes individual conduct. In its most powerful apotheoses (not a loosely chosen term…) society may even destroy the individual."[222] But even if an individual attempts to choose against the prevailing demands of society—in this case, to *not* be an active consumer—there is damage sustained because "…the fundamental coerciveness of society lies not in its machineries of social control, but in its power to constitute and to

[222] Peter L. Berger. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1967). 11.

impose itself as reality."[223] We cannot help but see ourselves in this reality, even if we are attempting to maintain the fantasy (*à la* Freud) of not being a consumer. This resultant double-identity is ultimately problematic.

Bifurcation of Consciousness: Gender, Race, Class and the Market

In many aspects of socialization, especially those dealing with the more strident structures of gender, race/ethnicity, and class, individuals are habituated into a perspective of seeing themselves from the perspective of the dominant group. For example, feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith argues that it is the function of patriarchy to subordinate women as "the other" in such a way that women accept the subordinate position as the obvious and natural reality of human relations.[224] All thought and expression for women is formed in the context of their relationship to men and "[f]rom that center women appear…as objects" rather than subjects.[225] In the context of patriarchal gender structures, women learn to look at themselves and other women as men look at them, as subordinate objects. Smith goes on to briefly mention the ways in which women are demeaned and objectified in advertising, but it is her theory of a *bifurcated consciousness* which is important to this discussion. Smith concludes that because of the ways in which knowledge is created, shared, and expressed, specifically by men, women are forced to rebel—if they can—from a place transected by a fault line, constituting the two halves of the self: that which is object and that which is subject.[226] It is the system of dominating patriarchal power which causes the fault line.

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[223] Ibid., 12.
[224] Dorothy E. Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), 49-51.
[225] Ibid., 51.
[226] Ibid., 52-53.

Similar to gender constructions though not exactly the same, racial and ethnic identification is also normatively defined by whiteness. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, sociologist W. E .B. Du Bois describes the way in which Black people develop what he calls a *double-consciousness* in response to the domineering culture of white supremacy in the US. "Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence [*sic*] or revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism."[227] Du Bois is not offering a solution but rather a vociferous assessment of the emotional malignancy caused by racism. The subtext of his appraisal is that the options of revolt or radicalism can only result in death, and therefore pretense and hypocrisy, while not preferred, are *necessaria vitae*.[228]

Du Bois' work in *Black Reconstruction in America* encompasses the principle that race and class are inextricably linked.[229] In his comprehensive analysis of the post-Civil War era, Du Bois draws the correlation between issues of race, class, and violence. Specifically, he writes that:

> It is easy for men to discount and misunderstand the suffering or harm done others. Once accustomed to poverty, to the sight of toil and degradation, it easily seems normal and natural; once it is hidden beneath a different color of skin, a different stature or a different habit of action and speech, all consciousness of inflicting ill disappears. (p. 52)

Du Bois argues that in order to not be detected in mannerisms of action or speech as different from whites, Blacks have to adopt the characteristics of those not equal to but subordinate to whites in order to have a "share in modern culture."[230] But ultimately,

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[227] W.E.B. Du Bois, "Of the Faith of the Fathers" in *On Religion*, (Phil Zuckerman, ed. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press. 2000), 54.
[228] Ibid., 54-55.
[229] W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, (New York: The Free Press. 1992/1962/1936).
[230] Op. cit., 55.

"[t]he price of culture is a Lie."[231] The price of double-consciousness is indeed steep but is sublimated in the coercive assimilation imposed by a white-supremacist society.

The construction of economic class is yoked to the construction of race to the benefit of the ruling elite.[232] In *Learning to Be White*, Thandeka analyzes the tensions of race and class *vis-à-vis* shame.

> As we have seen, the constructed racial identity of the poor white is not the product of an act of love and respect by a ruling white elite, but rather is the result of upper-class race ploys for the purpose of social control. The ostensible equality among whites of various classes is thus, at best, skin deep. (p. 54)

Rather than being aware of this socially constructed reality, poor whites develop a bifurcation of consciousness where they cling to their theoretical elite status of being white without recognizing their impoverishment, both economically and culturally, as a function of oppression by white elites. The ideals of *choice* and *freedom* are bestowed upon the lower classes as a result of the neoliberal/neoconservative economic system.

In the case of consumerism, the predominant power is that of *The Market*. The domain of The Market encompasses our cultural and social reality and transcends boundaries of gender, race, and class. As is discussed in chapter two, there is no part of material existence which falls outside of the pressures of global market capitalism, even if that is by way of resistance, e.g., using existing items rather than purchasing new.[233] Applying Smith's theory of a bifurcated consciousness to consumerism, we are apt to see

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[231] Ibid.
[232] Thandeka, *Learning to Be White*, (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc., 2007).
[233] The burgeoning "hipster" culture, especially in places like Brooklyn, ascribes to "vintage" taste, so that buying things like clothes and home goods at second-hand shops or thrift stores is considered essential. Hipsters are trying to be counter-cultural but probably don't recognize the fact that they are simply consumers of a different stripe. While buying repurposed or second-hand items reduces the use of new resources, hipsters are still participating in consumerism. For the less-astute hipster, manufacturers have already jumped on the bandwagon with "vintage-look" items which allows for a wider distribution and consumption of the hipster style.

ourselves as The Market sees us: as mindless, insatiable, voracious consumers. As with Du Bois' *double-consciousness*, propensities to nurture those attributes in the *self* which, outside of The Market's reach, would be lauded as noble are quelled and aspirations of a whole self are crushed beneath the dominant forces of capitalism.[234] Because of this oppressive power structure and resulting fractured selves, rebellion against The Market is at best difficult and at worst impossible. The authority with which (1) men speak in the context of gender relations, (2) whites speak in the context of race, and (3) elites speak in the context of class grounds itself in the place of supposed neutrality, impersonality, and factuality, which automatically relegates the speech (or thought) of the non-normative—woman, transgender, Black, Latina, underemployed, poor—to a *lesser-than* position.[235] The authority with which The Market *speaks* is also seen as neutral, impersonal, and factual, and therefore the voice of the consumer is inexorably juxtaposed to that authority. Given that most people are already adept in the ontological reality of a bifurcated consciousness, domination by The Market is easily accommodated. No one is a subject in The Market; everyone is an object. Any reflexivity which might be experienced is caught in a toxic feedback loop of wanting to resist the dominant force of The Market but at the same time feeling the lure of consumer goods as a means of satisfying non-material needs. This is the very similar to the way that women may feel valued by men, non-whites may feel equal to whites, and poor people may feel that there is a possibility of transcending their economic status. Consumerism is "the Lie" and it

[234] Du Bois, "Of the Faith of the Fathers," 55-56.
[235] Smith, *The Everyday as Problematic*, 53; Du Bois, "Of the Faith of the Fathers," 56; Thandeka, *Learning to Be White*, 54.

imposes itself upon us as a reality.[236] We cannot trust anything but the doubt we feel as the *Other* in relation to consumerism. In a tragic irony, the predominant option to assuage that doubt is to consume. This kind of doubt typically manifests itself in anxiety.

Anxiety

Anxiety is one of the first emotions humans experience. Freud held that the first life event which left an "affective trace behind" is "the process of birth."[237] Taking from the physiological aspects of birth, Freud believed that it was the shift in heartrate and breathing, "which are characteristic of anxiety, served a useful purpose."[238] One cannot be sure of the birthing methods that Freud witnessed, but it might be assumed that the typical Western medicine method (during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) of holding the newborn by their ankles and even slapping them as a means to activate their breathing is not too far afield. Inasmuch as birth was a cause for anxiety, at least somatically, Freud held that "[t]he first anxiety of all would thus have been a toxic one."[239]

Freud classed anxiety in two basic types: objective anxiety and neurotic anxiety. Of course, his concerns were with neurotic anxiety as objective anxiety was considered a reasonable response to perceived danger.[240] In the category of neurotic anxiety, Freud found three forms: first, a "free-floating" anxiety which seeks to find connection to "expectant dread"; second, the type of anxiety which is associated with certain taboos, but which is "enormously exaggerated"; and third, the most extreme form of anxiety

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[236] This refers to Du Bois' argument that "the price of culture is a Lie," and Berger's theory of how social constructs impose themselves as reality.
[237] Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, 114.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Ibid. [As discussed above, Freud believed that the memory of birth was kept in the unconscious mind. See Freud's *The Problem of Anxiety*,(New York: The Psychoanalytic Quarterly Press, 1936), 93-95.]
[240] Ibid.

where there is no *visible* source of danger but the somatic and emotional distress is severe.[241] Freud reached the conclusion that "[t]he most frequent cause of anxiety-neurosis is undischarged excitation. A libidinal excitation is aroused, but is not satisfied or used; in the place of this libido which has been diverted from its use, anxiety makes its appearance."[242] In other words, anxiety is the placeholder for agitation resulting from the perceived need for action. Freud deduced in the end that "[w]hat one fears is obviously one's own libido…and that it is not consciously recognised."[243] Understandably, this proceeds toward a self-perpetuating system inasmuch as the fear of one's own libido can become its own anxiety-provocation, leading toward an even more abstracted internal struggle.

In his psychoanalytic practice, Freud worked with his patients to find the connection between the external sources of anxiety, as in the case of an agoraphobic who experiences severe anxiety when walking down the street, with the internal sources, such as the fear of what kind of temptations he may experience when seeing people on the street.[244] The fear of going out onto the street is the "symptom" of the anxiety caused by the fear of libidinal excitation. Refusing to go out onto the street is protection against having to deal with said fear; he has rescued himself from danger.[245] Freud says that the signal of a past trauma is what creates the anxiety, where the possible recurrence of a trauma is sensed by the individual.[246] Regarding what Freud called the instinct of self-preservation (as a reaction to anxiety), he argued that those instincts and the libidinal

[241] Ibid., 114-5.
[242] Ibid., 115.
[243] Ibid., 117.
[244] Ibid., 117-8.
[245] Ibid., 118.
[246] Ibid., 130.

energy associated with them can be flexible, changing their objective(s), and can even be held in temporary abeyance or substituted one for another.[247]

Psychoanalyst Karen Horney's definition and analysis of anxiety builds in some ways on Freud's foundational work and opinions on anxiety.[248] Horney echoes Freud by differentiating anxiety from fear in that fear is a proportionate or *natural* reaction to impending danger, whereas anxiety is a disproportionate or pathological reaction to danger, whether real or imagined.[249] As Horney perceived, there is a flaw in this basic definition in that it does not account for the cultural components of said anxiety, specifically "whether the reaction [to danger] is proportionate depends on the average knowledge existing in the particular culture."[250] Thus, anxiety depends greatly on the social and religious taboos of a given culture as to whether or not a particular situation will produce fear or anxiety. Horney uses the example concerning the eating of certain animals where a specific tribe has a taboo against it; this may produce mortal fright (anxiety) if one of the tribe's members thinks they may have mistakenly ingested tabooed meat.[251] Someone observing this situation from the outside would likely think the reaction disproportionate, but on reflection considering the tribal customs and taboos, would find the reaction not out-of-line given the culturally-located event.

Perhaps given the cultural-bias towards being "normal" or because of the intricacies of the unconscious mind, Horney indicates that people who report having anxiety do not report having any more than a typical, i.e., normal, person would experience. This data leads her to conclude that because of an unconscious denial, "we

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[247] Ibid., 134.
[248] Horney, *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 42.
[249] Ibid.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid. (Freud uses the example of obsessive hand washing. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, 117.)

may have anxiety without knowing it."[252] More importantly, and echoing Freud, Horney suggests that even though we have anxiety without conscious knowledge of it, anxiety is most likely a defining feature in our lives.[253] Escaping anxiety is of primary concern and no behavior or mental gymnastics are too extreme if these allow the individual to avoid the results of anxiety, specifically feelings of helplessness.[254] Horney folds-in the cultural dimension of anxiety in the US by theorizing that it is due to the fact that our culture puts such a high value on individualism and rationality that feelings of the need for affection or feelings of irrationality are so anxiety provoking.[255]

When feelings of the need for affection or of irrationality are actually acknowledged by the individual, what follows is the idea that there is something implicitly wrong; instead of addressing the task of fixing what might be broken, the individual clings to defense mechanisms and the notion that everything is satisfactory, all of which cause replication of the cycle of anxiety.[256] In order to maintain the illusion of satisfactoriness, Horney posits four main methods of avoiding the feelings of anxiety: rationalization, denial, anesthetization (in the form of narcotics or alcohol), and avoidance.[257] In addition to methods of avoidance, Horney holds that anxiety is closely linked to hostility in that it is often the case that there has been some past emotional or physical injury which has incited hostility which must be repressed by the individual; in this case, it is the repression which causes the anxiety.[258] Hostility finds its genesis in childhood when the child is relatively helpless and their care, or at least their

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[252] Ibid, 45.
[253] Ibid., 46.
[254] Ibid.
[255] Ibid., 47.
[256] Ibid.
[257] Ibid., 48-53.
[258] Ibid., 63 and 77.

understanding of it, hinges on their cooperativeness with those who have power over them.[259] Horney differentiates her theory of anxiety from Freud at this point in that she holds that instead of regression to an earlier developmental phase (Freud's theory), the adult develops a more sophisticated, albeit neurotic, "uninterrupted chain of reactions from early anxiety to adult peculiarities. Therefore the later anxiety will contain, among others, elements conditioned by the specific conflicts existing in childhood."[260] The hostility which results from not getting your way or of being left by your mother is repressed by socialization, especially when the mother threatens or imposes punishment for the hostility. The repression of hostility is engrained throughout childhood and adolescence, thus creating the "chain of reactions" from helplessness to hostility to repression to anxiety.

Horney goes on to discuss some of the other neurotic means of dealing with feelings of helplessness, one of which is of particular impact on this project, and that is the striving after possessions.

> Protection against helplessness and insignificance or humiliation can be had also, in our culture, by striving for possession, inasmuch as wealth gives both power and prestige. The irrational quest for possession is so widespread in our culture that it is only by making comparisons with other cultures that one recognizes that it is not a general human instinct either in the form of an acquisitive instinct or in the form of a sublimation of biological founded drives. Even in our culture *compulsive striving for possession vanishes as soon as the anxieties determining it are diminished or removed*. (Horney, 172-3, emphasis added)

But can the anxieties be diminished or removed? In the context of global capitalism, where there is an endless supply of objects just waiting to become possessions, the anxiety is reawakened every time one moves into any social situation or even when one's

[259] Ibid., 77-8.
[260] Ibid., 78.

mind wanders into the realm of "what if?". Anxiety is created in our culture because most people feel judged by the very visible signs of their class and social status. People are made to feel helpless, and hence anxious, often unconsciously, in a consumerist society.

It is important to consider the cultural significance of perceived helplessness and resultant anxiety because it is often the case that the cultural milieu is not easily distinguishable as the *cause of neurotic* anxiety. That is to say, if most everyone feels anxious about a perceived impending danger it is then considered "normal." As psychoanalyst Erik Erickson argues, when one's identity is tied to pathological societal expectations, then the judgment as to whether a particular anxiety is justified can be skewed.[261] Correlating the theories of anxiety of Freud, Horney, and Erickson to twenty-first century western society, it is apparent that anxiety, as opposed to fear, is woven into the fabric of cultural reality. Horney draws the distinction where fear is a proportionate reaction to danger and anxiety is a reaction which is disproportionate to said danger or a reaction to what is imagined as danger: "This distinction has one flaw, however, which is that the decision as to whether the reaction is proportionate depends on the average knowledge existing in the particular culture." [262] Measuring the "average knowledge" in a given culture is undoubtedly difficult. If we were to glean our understanding of knowledge from outlets of popular culture, e.g., television ads, popular music, or mainstream media, we would draw conclusions that people are germ-phobic, sex-crazed, and generally rapacious. Is this what is considered "normal"? Evolutionarily speaking, have we become a species for whom anxiety is normal? Is the delusion of our society—

[261] Erickson gave the example of a man who was anxious over having to live on a wage that was only ten times that of the average worker instead of 25 times, so much so that he contemplated suicide. *Childhood and Society*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1950/1963/1985), 407.
[262] Horney, *Neurotic Personality*, 42.

striving after possessions—such that we are made to feel "abnormal" if we are *not* anxious?

In the context of consumerism, we experience some level of anxiety every time we encounter (or even imagine encountering) another person. Sociologist Irving Goffman says that it is the moral character of how we present ourselves in public (to others) which establishes the framework for our interactions in a given situation.[263]

> Society is organized on the principle that any individual who possesses certain social characteristics has a moral right to expect that others will value and *treat him in an appropriate way*. Connected with this principle is a second, namely that an individual who implicitly or explicitly signifies that he has certain social characteristics *ought in fact to be what he claims he is*. In consequence, when an individual projects a definition of the situation and thereby makes an implicit or explicit claim to be a person of a particular kind, he automatically exerts a moral demand upon the others, obliging them to value and *treat him in the manner that persons of his kind have a right to expect*. He also implicitly forgoes all claims to be things he does not appear to be and forgoes the treatment that would be appropriate for such individuals. (p. 13, emphasis added)

Goffman implies that people will manipulate whatever they have at their disposal, e.g., clothing and other objects signifying the desired projected persona, in order to benefit from social cache for the best possible treatment in a given social setting. Anxiety is generated because deep down one always fears that the thin veneer of their projection will be detected and ridiculed, and the moral demand will be scorned. To a varying degree, we all want to be treated more highly than we perceive ourselves worthy. In a society where gendered identity, race and ethnicity, class, age, and sexual orientation are highly-charged issues in social interaction, that self-perception also carries with it an additional objective fear that social encounters will fail due to the fact that no amount of positive projection can overcome the bias or bigotry of others.

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[263] Irving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday Publishing, 1959), 13.

Psychologist Rollo May feels that some anxiety is a good thing, e.g., when one is getting ready to give a speech to a group of people.[264] In other words, anxiety is necessary to an extent defined by one's situation, but that most anxiety is nebulous and follows the pathological progression similar to what Horney argues.[265] May's theories of anxiety echoed those of Horney in that anxiety is conditioned by cultural standards.[266] May discusses how social interactions translate into competitiveness among existing stereotyped categories, giving the example of how men in our society are expected to appear dominating and strong, apparently succeeding in the "competitive struggle."[267] There is a great deal of anxiety created by the constant effort needed to both repress their own needs for love and acceptance, and mask the fear of failure, so that "*individual competitive success is both the dominant goal in our culture and the most pervasive occasion for anxiety*."[268] Drawing on sociologist and psychoanalyst Erich Fromm's theories of aggression, May argues that aggression against one's "fellows" is seen as just one means of recognition.

> This suggests an aspect of individualism which is present in competitive economic striving of the present day—namely, *that aggression against one's fellows is accepted as the way to gain recognition from them*. This reminds us of the fact that an isolated child will commit delinquencies in order to gain at least an inverted form of concern and recognition. (May, 168, emphasis added)

Isolation is but one manifestation of the ontological wound. Perhaps it is the terror of isolation, whether actual or perceived which drives people to commit acts of aggression.

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[264] Rollo May, *The Meaning of Anxiety*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1950/1977), xvi.
[265] Ibid., 62-70.
[266] Ibid., 157. However, May's theories were somewhat stunted by his socio-historical context–with the bulk of his research on anxiety occurring before 1950–which led him to conclude that anxiety is typically the burden of the "middle class." (Ibid., 338-39) I am sure that if May were researching anxiety in the past two decades, he would conclude that anxiety is a defining feature of most people in the US.
[267] May, 157.
[268] May, 158, emphasis in original.

Goffman's theories on how people present themselves in public might illuminate how there can be an act of aggression in that the more ostentatious one appears, the less likely it is that others will doubt the domination or the moral demand an individual has quite obviously made to be treated as they expect.

In an effort to avoid anxiety, individuals conform to their culture's defined measures of success. In the US, these measures are most commonly material wealth and position. Someone can expect security but instead end up feeling like Dr. Suess's Yertle the Turtle, commanding their fellows to lift them to the point of their own self-deluded grandeur.[269] Like Yertle, they will eventually find themselves wallowing in the mud, confirming their own anxiety. And perhaps worst of all, this striving has no end-point. There is no pinnacle of achievement where one can rest and consider themselves *successful*. Success in this case is measured in terms of *things* and/or the ability to amass *things.* Ontological woundedness keeps people both separated and anxious, feeling that others are not experiencing the kind of solitary confinement experienced as a result of anxiety and the feeling of being *pathologically unique* fills the individual with dread. People rarely, if ever, get to the point where they can recognize their neurosis—using this term psychoanalytically—because a given social context gives passive approval to said anxiety. Horney describes the threshold of neurosis as:

> [A] psychic disturbance brought about by fears and defenses against these fears, and by attempts to find compromise solutions for conflicting tendencies. For practical reasons it is advisable to call this disturbance a neurosis *only if it deviates from the pattern common to the particular culture*. (Horney, *Neurotic Personality*, 29, emphasis added)

What people are experiencing through the shared delusion, *à la* Freud, is that the collective neurosis is not neurosis but rather something necessary in order to feel

[269] Dr. Seuss, *Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories*, New York: Random House, 1958.

successful or at least to feel that one is attempting to be successful. It would be perceived as neurosis if an individual were to deviate from striving for possessions, and thus be labelled a Bohemian or eccentric as Campbell warned.

Max Weber's contribution to the phenomenon and perception of success bears quoting:

> Today this mighty cosmos [of the modern economic order] determines, with overwhelming coercion, the style of life *not only* of those directly involved in business but of every individual who is born into this mechanism, and may well continue to do so until the day that the last ton of fossil fuel has been consumed. (*The Protestant Ethic*, 120-21, emphasis in original)

The lifestyle Weber is referring to is not constrained to just those who achieve a relative level of wealth, but rather he is describing the way in which the economic system of capitalism subsumes all people (and resources) within its machinations. When the literal *everything* of a given shared reality is part of a socio-politico-economic system, there is *no neurosis*. If the anxiety is felt by *everyone* then it is "normal" and it makes us who we are. Acknowledging the elephant-in-the-room of anxiety would betray a person's own self-worth. May echoes Weber's theses by arguing that it is the reward for the "good deeds" of hard work and "conforming to bourgeois morality" which is deemed economic achievement.[270] The individual can then attest that their own striving is the key to their success and conversely claim that those who are unsuccessful are apparently slothful. This mindset permits a plethora of social injustice, but most importantly it sanctions anxiety as proof against indolence.

[270] May, 170. May goes on to state, "It is important to note that the acquisition of wealth, as the accepted standard of success, does not refer to increasing material goods for sustenance purposes, or even for the purpose of increasing enjoyment. It refers rather to wealth as a sign of individual power, a proof of achievement and self-worth." (p. 173)

Striving for economic achievement substantiates Goffman's assertions of the desire to be accepted in public as a *certain kind of person*. Namely, people are constantly engaging in social situations where economic achievement is called into question. Many of the things people consume are for sustenance purposes, but sustenance does not end with simply making sure one has enough calories to survive. Indeed, individuals need to have their success acknowledged, they need to have their *rights* and *rites* of social interaction observed and affirmed. This is the conundrum: people think that they are making choices of their own *freewill,* when in fact the given social condition is such that they are participating, not altogether unwillingly, in a consumerism-fashioned treadmill. In an attempt to convince themselves that they *need* a particular consumer object and that their acquisitive nature is a means to heal their ontological wound when, in fact, it does nothing more than exacerbate feelings of isolation and inadequacy. Consequently, most people find that it is easier to be a consumer and *just go with the flow*, repressing their anxiety with each new consumer good.

May leans on the theory that it was the radical individualism of the Renaissance which led to our current issues of consumerism and its attendant anxiety.[271] From what has been discussed thus far, it is conceivable that the exacerbation of the ontological wound came with the burgeoning of the radical individualism of that era. Moving into the modern era, individualism and the constant access to information, as Anthony Giddens argues, can intensify anxiety. Continual access to information also allows people to see what consumer goods are available, thus increasing the tension between the desire for more and the desire to repress a perceived need. It is expected that people will fantasize about going grocery shopping—perhaps not in the same way people may fantasize about

[271] Ibid., 162-65.

going to Tahiti—but the difference between the fantasy of getting whatever is wanted is crushed by the reality of getting only what can be afforded, especially when there are so many "delicious" things for sale at the store.[272] Like visiting the grocery store, it is not the case that one may go seeking after the information as to what they might purchase, even when there is no need, but rather that they are literally bombarded by enticing store ads and coupons which fuel the consumerism-treadmill and increase their anxiety.[273]

Anxiety is realized in the reflexivity of a given social context. As May argues "*that the capacity for anxiety is not learned, but the quantities and forms of anxiety in a given individual are learned*."[274] In other words, an individual may experience anxiety as a natural reaction to a given fear, whether that fear is well-founded or not. However, it is the *particular kind of situation to fear* is what is learned. The prevailing example of this thesis is that the fear of not having *enough stuff* gives rise to anxiety. May engages Freud's work on anxiety, specifically where Freud argues that birth is the origin of anxiety, that separation from the mother is the foundation of anxiety.[275] What May neglects to analyze, even though he does extensive clinical work with single mothers, is the fact that it is not just the separation of the infant from the intrauterine existence, but the fact that the mother does in fact have to set the baby down from time to time.[276] It does not take long for the infant to recognize that their hunger or other discomfort cannot

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[272] Several times I have had the opportunity to take graduate students from developing countries to a grocery store in Southern California for the first time. Their utter astonishment at the sheer volume of goods for sale is a helpful illustration of this argument.

[273] For example, every Tuesday, I receive a "mailer" of more than twenty sheets of local store coupons. More than four times each week, I receive credit card offers from Capital One and other credit card companies. At least once a month, I receive a coupon from Bed, Bath & Beyond. When I go online, the cookies from earlier website visits enable ads for those goods to appear in unrelated content, including animation to get my attention.

[274] May, 202, emphasis in the original.

[275] Ibid., 202-3.

[276] It should be noted that advice on mothering has varied from two polar extremes of leaving the baby alone in a crib (or other holder) or keeping the baby in constant contact with the mother.

be alleviated by their own ability. Even the pleasure of thumb-sucking is not everlasting. Separation from the mother is, in itself, the fear that "I cannot take care of myself." As the child grows they become able to master certain aspects of their own self-care, but in their place come other tasks and dangers which are wholly insurmountable. While these fears and the resultant anxieties are considered normal, this is where the essence of anxiety is established.

Horney and May expand their concepts of anxiety by framing them within a given culture. Given the cultural context in the US, it is the perception of unmet needs which results in anxiety. Unmet needs reflect those needs which a majority of people in this culture deem necessary, specifically the need for material goods as a show of power or social cache, as Goffman concluded. The theories on anxiety conclude that when an individual's needs are not met, either through their own inability to meet them or otherwise, they experience the same sort of anxiety as being separated from their primary caregiver. There is a subtlety here because as people grow and mature individual needs become less specific. When a certain need is not directly tied to the concrete fear of not obtaining or maintaining a particular object the more diffuse emotion of anxiety takes the place of fear. As May argues, the security base of the individual is threatened and begins to breakdown the differentiation between subject and object. In other words, not having consumer needs met produces the diffuse anxiety which results in the dissolution of the self. Pathologically speaking, without the consumer object, there is no self.

Self-Objects and Transitional Objects

In the larger scope of objects, psychoanalysts classify objects into two significant categories: self-objects and transitional objects. Psychoanalyst Ernest S. Wolf distills the

definition of a self-object as being that person, place, or thing—a tangible noun, if you will—that structures and sustains the self.[277] There is a "*subjective* aspect of a self-sustaining function performed by a relationship of self to objects who by their presence or activity evoke and maintain the self and the experience of selfhood."[278] Rather than an interpersonal relationship, a self-object "denotes the experience of imagoes [i.e., idealized adult figures] that are needed for the sustenance of the self."[279] The first self-objects of the infant are typically the mother and father, but can also be other significant caregivers and siblings. What makes them self-objects is their ability to, as Wolf describes, structure and sustain the self of another through the mirroring of appropriate emotional responses, such as empathy and responsiveness. Self-objects generate the organized and unified structure of the self which is imbued with a healthy sense of the world being a good and safe place.[280] Without the context of suitable experiences with the self-object, the self would not exist.[281] As one grows into adulthood, healthy self-objects can be seen as an outgrowth of one's connection to a community, e.g., music, art, recreation, and activities such as occupation and vocation. Experiences such as reading (for pleasure or learning) or listening to music are part of the environment which is also populated by family and friends, all of which are considered sustaining self-objects.[282]

Transitional objects are related to self-objects in that transitional objects are viewed as a kind of placeholder for the self-object. To illustrate this concept we need look no further than a child's favorite teddy bear or blankie. As can be observed in

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[277] Ernest S. Wolf, *Treating the Self: Elements of Clinical Self Psychology* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1988), 184. Wolf was a student of and then collaborator with Heinz Kohut.
[278] Ibid., emphasis in the original.
[279] Ibid.
[280] Ibid., 14.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Ibid., 15.

nursing infants, the baby will suckle and caress a part of the mother/caregiver or a part of a toy or blanket. This object, which is considered the first possession of the infant which is not part of the infant's own body, develops into an essential part of the infant's being.[283] It does not necessarily have to be the first object of the infant's attachment, but rather something that the infant (or child) develops an affinity toward. Specifically, the transitional object "represents the infant's transition from a state of being merged with the mother to a state of being in relation to the mother as something outside and separate," as well as demonstrating how the infant is creating their own world by imbuing the object with meaning.[284] Winnicott's longitudinal observations of children and their various transitional objects show that some of those attachments evolve into preferences and affinities in adulthood.[285] Wolf's analysis of adulthood self-objects, e.g., listening to music or reading, find their origin in those first transitional objects which were (and are) used to alleviate the anxiety of separation or other stress.[286]

Relating transitional objects to the topic of anxiety, it is evident that the transitional object is the receptacle for anxiety. Recalling ontological parity, that specific reality is in the mind of the beholder. If I believe I can't live without my teddy bear, then that is, in fact, the reality by which I live my life. The absence of the bear creates untold anxiety. But imagine that it is the case, given my particular cultural milieu, that my attachment to the bear is completely normal and not judged to be neurotic in the least. How ontological parity and fantasy function in our real or perceived "traumatic factor" is

[283] Winnicott, *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World*, 167.
[284] Ibid., 168.
[285] Ibid., 169.
[286] Ibid., 170. As a personal observation, all three of my adult children still find comfort in both music and reading as listening to music was often part of our household and reading was a nightly bedtime ritual.

important.[287] Whether or not the threat of trauma is real resides in the mind of the individual. If the cathected object is in danger of being taken away, the *threat is real* and therefore the trauma is quite real. This can be observed with a child and their mother when the mother is departing or when the mother is behaving in a way that is similar to planning to depart.[288] The fear of the impending departure, actual or mistaken, is itself trauma-inducing. Anxiety can be categorized as an "excitation within the body" which needs to be dispelled or focused in a particular way.[289] Typically, an external object is the source of the energy and Freud found that those impulses (of anxiety-induced energy) can join together with others, sharing their fluctuations and permeations "and that in general the satisfaction of one instinct can be substituted for the satisfaction of another."[290] This can be seen in the way in which the child's transitional object can be given as a way to placate their anxiety pending the mother's departure. The child's anxiety-energy is focused on the object with the hope that in it they find comfort. The toy or blanket is a transitional object: the *thing* that substitutes for the primary caregiver is also the recipient of anxiety-energy. It is for this reason that if the transitional object is removed from the child for washing or care, the trauma experienced in that event is sometimes even worse than the departure of the mother for which the transitional object was probably first cathected.

As the child grows, however, the transitional object changes, and in some cases is replaced by many other objects or by behaviors. "There is a particular kind of

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[287] Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, 130.
[288] It should be noted that at different developmental phases babies have differing reactions to the departure of their mother. At some stages, babies will part happily from their mother, while at other stages the baby will cling and cry with great passion. There is also the fact that there are varying personalities which account for varying degrees of anxiety.
[289] Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, 133.
[290] Ibid.

modification of aim and change of object, with regard to which our social values come into the picture; to this we give the name of *'sublimation.'*"[291] Sublimation is the way that the "traumatic factor" is seen working in the lives of adults who are influenced by their own "libidinal demand," especially when the perceived desired object is not readily forthcoming. For instance, when the desire for a latte in the middle of the afternoon strikes, but there is no Starbucks close-at-hand, anxiety-energy builds not so much because of the actual physical need for caffeine, but rather the abstract need for something one perceives as fulfilling. The fact that a latte is a socially acceptable device for satisfying such a desire tends to justify that desire. Because of the complexity of the psyche, it is difficult to objectively separate these differing needs. One becomes habituated to cathecting consumable objects and can simply substitute the need for comfort from the primary caregiver to comfort from food or beverage. As Winnicott says, imagining himself in the place of the weaning child, that "[b]eing hungry is like being possessed by wolves."[292] Wolf-possession is an apt metaphor for the traumatic factor of the need-yet-to-be-satisfied existence. The ensuing distraction of not getting a latte, or other consumable object, is easily compared to that feeling of being weaned in infancy: we wonder whether we will survive. And with some particular cathected consumable objects, like coffee for some, there is an inherent terror of being forced to go without.

In a healthy developmental setting, self-objects and transitional objects work to keep the individual's selfhood intact. In less healthy or even pathological developmental settings, when caregivers are indifferent about transitional objects, e.g., throwing out the dirty and tattered teddy bear, or when the caregivers themselves fail to be suitable self-

[291] Ibid.
[292] Winnicott, *The Child, The Family, and the Outside World*, 81.

objects, the individual's self suffers. Consequently, the individual employs neurotic behaviors and emotions such as grandiosity and narcissism in order to compensate for their deficient sense of self. Heinz Kohut describes an analysand who suffered because of the failure of his mother to mirror empathy and thus establish and maintain the man's self in a healthy way by being a sufficient self-object.[293] To compensate for this lack, the man attempted to mirror his father and use his father as the idealized self-object. As the father was a word-smith of sorts, the man became a master of words, using his abilities in his work as an art critic. Unfortunately, the father also failed to be a sufficient self-object, and while the man gained some satisfaction from his work, it was not enough to maintain a healthy sense of self. In his analysis, Kohut concluded that the man suffered from a deficient self, but there is something more to be considered. Instead of mirroring his father, the man either consciously or unconsciously sought to be better than his father and to exhibit a level of proficiency which the father did not reach. By the man's attempt at mirroring his father's characteristics (even though the father was an inadequate self-object), he was very likely aware that the care he received from his father was also deficient, and the combination of the failure of both parents to become idealized self-objects contributed to his neurosis and need for psychoanalytic care. As a reaction to the failure of parenting and because the man reported an affinity with his father's line-of-work, it is possible that the man sought to outdo his father in an effort to maintain some semblance of self by making his work, reminiscent of his father, into his idealized self-object.

Philosophically speaking, transitional objects are "understood to be self-objects in that they dip down into a field of meaning that touches the underground currents of the

[293] Heinz Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press.1977/2009), 10-13.

unconscious of nature."[294] Corrington's theory reflects back on what Wolf writes about how self-objects maintain the self even in adulthood inasmuch as self-objects continue to create and be created by the individual. However, most likely due to a failure of idealized self-objects in childhood, some individuals strip self-objects of their "depth-dimension."[295] "In essence, the self settles for less being in order to avoid the demands of more being, a heightening of being that is a gift to the self from the self-object."[296] When confronted with a demanding self-object, one which would require the individual to adapt and change, often it is the path of least resistance which is chosen, "clos[ing] off the selving process from the growth prospects that require courage in the face of anxiety and the new."[297] I would add that the path of least resistance is often chosen because it is ubiquitous; there are many other options to divert time and attention away from a demanding self-object. One can work to remove the depth of meaning from a demanding self-object, such as a sacred text or when one is confronted with the degradation of the planet, both of which would demand that they change their behavior and attitudes. A person can simply tell themselves that those things do not matter and move toward an easier option. I would also posit that anxiety itself is nurtured and maintained within that space of denying or relegating the more complex self-object through the unfortunate fact that individuals rarely learn that they can engage the more complex self-object with ultimate success. This leads back into the discussion of birth trauma and the connection to the anxiety people feel when they are separated from the material maternal. It is not

[294] Corrington, *Nature's Sublime*, 62.
[295] Ibid., 63.
[296] Ibid.
[297] Ibid.

until one learns that they will not actually perish, physically or emotionally, from said separation that the selving process can progress.

The individual learns to protect themselves from the pain of being denied that which has essential worth by replacing it with objects, which are inherently of less value. As Corrington writes,

> [t]he maternal gets captured in innumerable ersatz substitute objects and signs that only partially still the hunger of the foundling self… The fragile self is more than willing to enter into this Faustian bargain and to accept semiotic closure rather than endure the mystery of betweenness and the loss of Eden. (*Nature's Self*, 44)

Some of these ersatz objects and signs to which Corrington allude are in fact those tangible consumer objects which are so readily available. The semiotic closure occurs when one has a ready-made substitute, and they are in the position of being placated or even temporarily sated. Consequently, the foundling self is stunted in its growth because rather than step into the space of betweenness and grow, the semiotic closure has already occurred. The "social codes and restrictions" which are often demonic, are in fact the very socializing structures which lead to consumption as the counterfeit ideal.[298]

The Anatomy of *Want*: Abjection, Non-satiation, and Drives

Under the watchful eye of their mother, babies will usually acquire objects with healthy curiosity.[299] For instance, the child may pick up a spoon, sample the spoon by putting it in their mouth, and offer the spoon to their mother as a means of discerning

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[298] Corrington, *Nature's Self*, 44.

[299] D. W. Winnicott practiced medicine in the mid-twentieth century in Great Britain. Given his historical and social context, his understandings were shaped by mothers being primary caregivers and fathers being economic providers and protectors. Of interesting note is that Winnicott is advocating for mothers to take (back) control of the rearing of their children, which in middle and upper class families had been handed over to (wet-) nurses and nannies.

their mother's affinity for the object.[300] After a while, the baby will drop the spoon and the spoon is returned to them. This series of events will repeat for a while until the baby is finished with their learning about the spoon. All the while, the baby is affirmed by the mother and other caregivers to proceed with their discovery and data collection. This behavior, called *acquisition behavior,* is essential in order for the baby to learn about the world.[301] An infant will employ this same technique about all of the objects in their world: taking possession of them, sampling them in whatever way seems advantageous, and then discarding them. It is this same *acquisition behavior* which humans use to continue their learning about the world even as adults.

Winnicott emphasized the need for the baby to be allowed to practice their *acquisition behavior* with minimal interruption as this allows "time for the baby to go right through an experience."[302] Winnicott contends that these "*total happenings*" are necessary for "babies to catch hold of time."[303] In other words, allowing for a "total happening" gives the baby the ability to sense the beginning, middle, and end of an event so that each phase can be enjoyed if pleasant, or tolerated if boring or uncomfortable. If a baby has far too many objects within their purview it would be impossible for the baby to have a total happening with any one object. Consequently, the baby learns that they do not have to tolerate a boring or frustrating object because they can just move on to the next one. Erik Erikson echoes these understandings of how necessary a total event can be in the development of a child.[304]

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[300] D. W. Winnicott, *The Child, The Family, and the Outside World*, 75-78.
[301] This is my phrase for what Winnicott describes in his observations of babies and objects.
[302] Winnicott, 77.
[303] Ibid., 77-78.
[304] Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1950/1963/1985).

> [The imposition of irrational outer controls] leaves a residue of an *intolerance of being manipulated* and coerced beyond the point at which out of control can be experienced as self-control. Connected with this is an *intolerance of being interrupted* in a vital act, or of not being permitted to conclude an act in an idiosyncratically important way. All of these anxieties lead to impulsive self-will — or, by contrast, to exaggerated self-coercion by stereotypy and lonely repetition. Here we find the origins of compulsion and obsession and the concomitant need for vengeful manipulation and coercion of others. (p. 409, italics in original, underlining added)

This is not to say that all compulsion, obsession, or vengeance and coercion stem from irrational outer controls, but rather that the residual effects of irrational control over the child—which might be seen in perpetual interruption or passive inattention—in their *acquisition behavior* and *total happenings* stunts their ability to learn about the world in a healthy way. *We want what we want when we want it*, but in the realm of developmental phases when this *want* goes unchecked, that *want* becomes pathological. Then as consumerist adults, there is great difficulty determining what is actually needed or genuinely desired.

The increased speed and commodification of every aspect of life also impairs the ability to think through desires—the *want*—because it is colored by how efficient one perceives those choices to be. The modern American concept of time can keep us from having a *total happening* and our continued *acquisition behavior* is encumbered because of what is perceived as a leisurely pace is discouraged. Leisure is for vacation time, or so people are led to believe. In this "time-is-money" culture, the speed with which one can consume and dispose of an item is lauded as efficiency. Any number of commercials say, "Get it done and get on with your day." This expediency is, in modern child development, part of the basic experience of the child and is reinforced by nearly all interactions with the world including the speed with which food is prepared and

consumed, the fast-pace of toys and games, and the experience of electronics as sources of entertainment and interaction. People find that they are in fact "coerced beyond the point at which out of control can be experienced as self-control."[305] Individuals have little or no control over their time, in any significant way, and even when they want to experience consumable objects at a more leisurely pace they are confronted by the fact that there are few options which aren't convenience-oriented. Instead of finding this a daunting situation, people convince themselves that the expediency of our experience is saving them time to do other things, thus maintaining pseudo control of circumstances over which they have no actual control. In terms of modern consumerism, instant gratification is compounded and even worsened by precipitous consumption in the form of the proximity of consumable goods and impulse purchases.

Freud writes about a particular observation he made of a young boy where the boy would play a game by causing certain of his toys to disappear and then reappear.[306] Freud perceived that the child was acting out (in the form of playing) some of his worst experiences namely that of his mother going away from time to time.[307] The little boy would proclaim the spool attached to a string gone, i.e., *fort* in German, and then recover the spool by tugging the string and proclaim it *da* (there). The little boy had a particular attachment to his mother but there were extenuating circumstances of the father being away at the war and the addition of a younger sibling which may have intensified some of the boy's reactions. Freud was left pondering if the child's behavior is a function of

[305] Ibid., 409.
[306] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 8-11.
[307] It should be noted that the mother's absences were completely normal and within the bounds of what can be considered good parenting.

working out and mastering an "overpowering experience."[308] The little boy would also make himself "appear" and "disappear" from a mirror in his home by looking in the mirror, *da*, and then crouching down, *fort*. "For, in the case we have been discussing, the child may, after all, only have been able to repeat his unpleasant experience in play because the repetition carried along with it a yield of pleasure of another sort but none the less a direct one."[309] The pleasure Freud is alluding to is not defined specifically, but it can be inferred from the child's actions that he was exerting a form of control over his toys and his mirror image in the same way that he probably felt that his mother was exerting control over her absence and appearance (from his perspective). While the little boy felt he had no control over his mother, he could easily control his toys and his image in the mirror.

Corrington discusses the *fort-da* game as a means for the little boy to begin to enter "into the breach of the ontological difference."[310] In semiotic terms, the child is experimenting with both the shock of the disappearance and then the joy of the reappearance of the spool. In the seemingly small ways of throwing and then retrieving the spool, and of appearing and disappearing in the mirror, the little boy is acclimating himself to the ultimate lost object: his mother. While the boy is much too young to negotiate the more "complex rhythms of the ontological difference," he is "struggl[ing] between the propulsion for autonomy, accepted yet resisted by the nascent self, and the

[308] Op. cit., 10.
[309] Ibid.
[310] Corrington, *Nature's Self*, 37.

longing for the lost object."[311] In many ways, this is how the child begins to build his inner emotional stability along with his own "semiotic autonomy."[312]

Winnicott, and even Freud to a certain extent, both argue that there is a benefit to a relaxed and unhurried tempo of a child's play, even if that play is in fact a working out of some terrifying aspect of the child's life.[313] Allowing space for the unfolding of unconscious material in due time, for which both Freud and Winnicott advocate, is part of the tension in the realm of instant and impulsive gratification. As Corrington remarks regarding the shortcomings of the pragmatic philosophic tradition: while some aspects of pragmatism can insure the survival of the individual, other features serve to "close off the self to its own deeper needs."[314] A portion of the pragmatic haste toward social and physical assimilation in the natural world can be attributed to the loss of the maternal (the ultimate lost object), but in the rush toward mitigating the pain of the lost object, "[d]epositioning and the emergent betweeneness structures open up semiotic possibilities that are often quickly filled by demonic social codes and restrictions."[315] In other words, when the experimentation with ontological difference—literally the *fort-da* space where the trauma of the lost object is worked out—is truncated by expediency, then all manner of erroneous information about how the world *should* work is incorporated into the self. Consequently, there are a great number of individuals with compromised selfhoods, with a tendency toward "exaggerated self-coercion,"[316] who more easily accept the semiotic constructs of a dysfunctional society as *the way things should be*.

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[311] Ibid., 39.
[312] Ibid., 40.
[313] Winnicott, *The Child, The Family*, 77-79; Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 9-11.
[314] Op cit., 44.
[315] Ibid., 44.
[316] Erickson, *Childhood and Society*, 409.

In more closely considering the realm of parenting and of mothers in particular, Winnicott contends that it is the "good enough mother," as opposed to the idyllic "good mother," which is sufficient for sound child-rearing.[317] Similarly, Winnicott maintains that it is the "good enough environment" which allows the child to experiment with their own independence. What is discovered by the child as they become more adept at discerning what they might consider to be a "better" mother or environment is that they are ambivalent towards these aspects of their life's situation: they can both love them and hate them even at the same time. In discussing ambivalence, Freud's notion rests on the relationship one has with their parents. "I have often had occasion to point out that emotional ambivalence in the proper sense of the term—that is, the simultaneous existence of love and hate towards the same object—lies at the root of many important cultural institutions."[318] Freud believes that in some ways this ambivalence is "fundamental to our emotional life."[319] It could be argued that ambivalence is what propels an individual through the various psycho-social developmental phases as they become disenchanted with their relationship to various potent objects in their life, including their relationship with their parents.

Similar to ambivalence, but much more formidable, is the concept of abjection. Psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva discusses abjection in terms of what is abject, literally what is rejected by the body as in those things which we find repugnant such as waste, feces,

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[317] This theory is repeated many times by Winnicott. See, *inter alia*, the essays "Cure" (1971), "Children Learning" (1968), and "The Concept of a Healthy Individual" (1967) in *Home is Where We Start From: Essays by a Psychoanalyst*, edited by Clare Winnicott, Ray Shepherd, and Madeleine Davis (1986), W.W. Norton & Company.

[318] Sigmund Freud. *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*. (James Strachey, trans. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1913/1950), 157.

[319] Ibid.

and the like.[320] It is the body's powerful rejection of these things which can be credited with our continued survival. There are many things about our own bodies, argues Kristeva, which we find repugnant but which are very much a part of who we are such as saliva, vomit, urine, as well as the corpse we will all someday become. In order to *be human* we must continually disentangle ourselves from that which is most signifying of death, which Kristeva explains as a "border."[321] Kristeva's poetic description of abjection is quoted here at length:

> The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object….It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but *what disturbs identity, system, order*…Abjection, [as opposed to a lack of cleanliness or health], is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, *a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it,* a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you…." (p. 4, emphasis added)

Consumerism is a form of the "immoral…passion that uses the body for barter," disrupting human's most basic material reality, i.e., the experience in one's own body. What disturbs this identity is the social construct of never wanting to be, nor having to be, satisfied with what one already has. There is always something more to be obtained. In the attempts to extricate oneself from what is seen as death—and death in a capitalist society is to cease to consume—people consume all the more.

The understanding of ambivalence and abjection leads to the question: if we know what we think we want, or even if we abject it from the self, can we ever be sated? Winnicott discusses how babies cry from pain, like the pain of hunger or the pain of being removed from the comfort of warm clothes, but then the cry often transitions into a

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[320] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,* (Leon S. Roudiez, trans., New York: Columbia University Press, 1980/1982), 2-3.
[321] Ibid., 3.

cry of the fear of pain, as if in anticipation. The desire to be sated and to remain that way is strong enough to necessitate a preemptive expression of discontent by crying.[322] As Winnicott describes and many caregivers have experienced, an infant can be sated by typically attending to their basic physiological needs, e.g., a full tummy, a clean diaper, and temperature-appropriate clothing. However, as a baby matures, satiation becomes more complex and physiological satisfaction is complicated by social and emotional needs which are often much more difficult to satisfy. As adults, we find that physiological and emotional needs are sometimes hopelessly entangled which makes satiation all the more elusive.

Concepts of satiation are woven into the capitalist system, particularly that of never being sated. Historical economist Lorenzo Garbo deconstructs how US and Western Europe economic models incorporated the theory of non-satiation as a fundamental truth of consumption.[323] Garbo finds the correlation in historical economic theory between acquisition and happiness, to wit: "the non-satiation assumption—also known as more is better, the monotonic property of preferences, or secularized greed—expresses unequivocal causality between materialistic acquisition and human happiness."[324] As is argued herein, the dictum of material acquisition creating happiness is practically without argument, meaning that even though there is a growing counter-voice to consumerism there is still the haunting seduction by the idea that: *If only I had that one thing or experience, I would be happy*. But, the idea that if we just have the right stuff or the right amount of stuff we can be happy is tempered by an albeit fleeting

[322] Winnicott, *The Child, The Family, and the Outside World*, 60-61.
[323] Lorenzo Garbo, "Early Evolution of the Assumption of Non-satiation," *Review of Political Economy* 24, no. 1 (2012) 15-32.
[324] Ibid., 17.

feeling of ambivalence. As Garbo points out "non-satiation became a synonym of rationality" and thus the pathology of consumption: thinking that which is irrational is actually rational.[325] This is the shared delusion of US culture as well as the anxiety-inducing reality which is established as *not* anxiety.

The shared delusion goes even deeper. There are social economists like Richard H. Thaler who are adamant in their opinion that economic models built on a *rational economic actor* are simply not accurate or true.[326] Rather, Thaler argues, people seem to act in irrational ways when it comes to the myriad economic decisions they have to make ranging from getting groceries to deciding on a mortgage lender. When the "stakes" of a particular decision are higher people tend to be worse, i.e., more irrational, at making those decisions.[327] Because seeing ourselves as irrational in our decision making makes us uncomfortable, it is much more encouraging to think that we are making the best decision we can, given the information at hand. The solace of this *lie* is akin to Freud's theory of delusion or Berger, Du Bois, Smith, and Thandeka's arguments of how part (or all) of the self is sacrificed on the altar of the dominant culture.[328] In this case, it is the dominating culture of consumerism which assumes people possess insatiable appetites for consumer goods and are therefore willing to submit to maintain or even advance their place in the given social hierarchy. It could be argued that perhaps that is why relatively small purchases of consumer goods are so satisfying: we are more sure of the "rationality" of the purchase we've made.

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[325] Ibid.
[326] Richard H. Thaler, *Misbehaving: The Making of Behavioral Economics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015). Thaler's book argues for the deconstruction of economic models which use supposed consumer rationality as their base.
[327] Ibid., 50-51.
[328] See sections, "Ontological Trust and Reflexive Ontology" and "Bifurcation of Consciousness" in this chapter for a more thorough discussion of these scholars' work.

There seems to be reasonableness in consuming as people seem willing to agree that consumption is need-based. The irrationality of acquisition or acquisitive behavior is both uncomfortable and contrary to prevailing economic theory. As is discussed in greater detail in chapter two, the infrastructure of global market capitalism has been created for the benefit of those in the US such that the overwhelming majority of evidence of extraction, production, distribution, and disposal is removed from the purview of the majority of people. Therefore, the proof of the irrationality of consumption does not really exist, at least not in any *real* way. Rationality in Weberian terms, specifically those in *The Protestant Ethic*, is the shedding of all extraneous behaviors or goals that hinder capitalist profits; people become more rational in terms of adhering to the capitalist economic model.[329] It is only in hindsight that it is discovered that the capitalist economic model is actually completely irrational in a psychological (and even physiological) sense. Moral philosopher Adam Smith's ideas of non-satiation give us a heightened sense of rationality, specifically that the shedding of extraneous impediments to wealth making and accumulation is not only necessary but seen as a bounden duty to ourselves and to others.[330] Smith did not see indulging in enjoyment as a problem, even "though sometimes [enjoyment is] violent and very difficult to be restrained, is in general only momentary and occasional."[331] Smith consigned both consumption and saving, i.e., in the literal sense of saving money for the future, to the realm of being a purely physiological problem. Much in the same way that Weber tends to "fault" Protestantism for the proliferation of capitalism in the US, Smith "faults"

[329] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells, (New York: Penguin Group, 1905/2002).
[330] Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: Cosimo, Inc. [1776] 2007).
[331] Ibid., 186.

biology for consumption both in the present and in the form of saving up for consumption in the future.[332]

As Garbo argues, it is the separation of the realms of the spiritual from the physical during the British Enlightenment allowed the concept of greed to become secularized and even justified by the acceptance of science over and against theology.[333] The de-coupling of greed from sin in the theological realm allowed it to be considered necessary, if not valorized, in the political and economic realm of capitalism. Weber argues that while greed was condemned, i.e., accumulating wealth for its own sake, "a religious value was placed on ceaseless, constant, systematic labor in a secular calling as the very highest ascetic path and at the same time the surest and most visible proof of regeneration of the genuineness of faith."[334] From this Weber derives the "'spirit' of capitalism."[335] The foregone conclusion of these contentions is that no culpability can be found in capitalism itself, but rather if any damage is incurred in the cause of capitalism it is forgiven on the basis of simple biology and faithfulness.

Once greed is defanged and essentially removed from the echelon of the seven deadly sins, it is discovered that there is a bigger problem: that, in fact, we get exactly what we wish for. Like the mythological King Midas, we find that the objects which turn to gold are only fleetingly satisfying and that in our haste for riches we are given a curse.[336] As Freud comments, "[a]n unrestricted satisfaction of every need presents itself as the most enticing method of conducting one's life, but it means putting enjoyment

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[332] Op. cit. and ibid.
[333] Garbo, *Assumption of Non-Satiation*, 24.
[334] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 116.
[335] Ibid.
[336] Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 44-45.

before caution, and soon brings its own punishment."[337] We are not sated even when, or especially when, we get everything we want. Garbo articulates this concept in more detail:

> The origin of the non-satiation assumption thus reveals a tragic shortcoming of the sensorial and mental associative apparatus of the human being: a short-circuit of the physiological and gravitational compounding of ideas that, even though constantly motivated by the pursuit of pleasure, ends up sabotaging the pursuit itself as no pleasure is actively experienced. (p. 27)

Garbo aptly echoes Freud's theory of the *pleasure principle*. The pleasure principle is the theory that the individual seeks pleasure to avoid those issues of utmost importance, especially the task of dealing with the unconscious. Freud theorizes that it is the mind's desire to avoid "unpleasure" which truncates its ability to deal in a healthy way with the unconscious. Freud asserts that consumption is a factor of the ego's attempts to avoid "unpleasure" and its desperation to live life in the most intense way possible. "What we call happiness in the strictest sense comes from the (preferably sudden) satisfaction of needs which have been dammed up to a high degree, and it is from its nature only possible as an episodic phenomenon."[338] We come to discover that the satisfaction of needs loses its power of being satisfactory because our needs are no longer unfulfilled, we are able to get what we supposedly want exactly when we think we want it. The pleasure of the satisfaction is lost because there was not sufficient refraining or staving off of desire.[339] In the face of constant satisfaction we have to double the efforts of our fantasy life to resupply our desire.

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[337] Ibid., 45.
[338] Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 43.
[339] Freud (ibid.) inserts an aside footnote quoting Goethe's warning that "nothing is harder to bear than a succession of fair days."

Forestalling desire is becoming more difficult in the milieu of modern technology and even more frenetic attitudes regarding shopping. Online purchasing has diminished in-store purchasing such that "Cyber Monday" has been met with some stores opening on Thanksgiving in order to reclaim some of that purchasing power. The attempts to entice shoppers into stores through advertising has been met by online providers making it so ridiculously simple to purchase items that *in-person* shopping seems unnecessary. Amazon has launched what they call "Amazon Dash." The "Amazon Dash Button is a Wi-Fi connected device that reorders your favorite product with the press of a button," thus avoiding the *unpleasure* of launching your web browser and searching for a particular item.[340] Granted, it is conceivable that there is little pleasure gained from getting a new bottle of Tide or Listerine, but one is able to avoid the *unpleasure* of forgetting that item on their next trip to Target. In the context of King Midas, a Dash Button may not turn things to gold, but it distances the consumer from the constitutive illusions of choice, e.g., price comparison, shifting brand preference, and even discontinuing use of a product, which is really the consumer's most powerful weapon in the game of capitalism.

As greed falls from the pantheon of deadly sins, so goes lust: the "thou shalt not covet" commandment finds at its core either greed or lust, or both. However, the US economic system is predicated upon our ever-growing desire for consumer goods, where greed and lust are encouraged and perhaps even demanded. Due to the pervasive reality of consumerism people are more easily able to transform the less attractive aspects of greed and lust into something as innocuous as the avoidance of *unpleasure.*

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[340] Amazon. Accessed July 20, 2016. https://www.amazon.com/Dash-Buttons/b?ie=UTF8&node=10667898011.

Freud's theory of the *death drive*, with its antithesis the *life drive*, holds that individuals engage in behavior which is ultimately dangerous and hastens death.[341] However, recent studies on addictive behavior indicate that people are not consciously seeking death insomuch as they are seeking to live life "to the max" which is exacerbated by poorly adapted object relations.[342] Pathological consumptive behaviors can also be evidence of these two principles when acquiring an object is a perceived requirement for pleasure. On the other side of the same coin, the *life drive* constitutes that part of our self, through sexual drives or even self-preservation, which is the seat of the *I*. Reflexively speaking, the self is made up of how we see ourselves and how we perceive others see us. Consequently, we find that having the right clothes (or any other *proper* consumable object) is experienced as an enhancement of our life. Freud tempers his theory, however, by admitting that there are often other forces at work which oppose the pleasure principle and thwart immediate or long-term pleasure.[343] In fact, it is actually *reality* which mitigates our pleasure.

> Under the influence of the ego's instincts of self-preservation, the pleasure principle is replaced by the *reality principle*. This latter principle does not abandon the intention of ultimately obtaining pleasure, but it nevertheless demands and carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of possibilities of gaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure. (Ibid., 4)

In adults, Freud argues that "novelty is always the condition of enjoyment," but not in children, whereas, according to Freud, they enjoy the repetition of the game until they are

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[341] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 37.
[342] "Death and Annihilation Anxieties in Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia, and Self-mutilation" by Sharon K. Farber, Craig C. Jackson, Johanna K. Tabin, and Eytan Bachar in *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 24, no. 2 (2007): 289-305; "Object Relations and Addiction: The Role of 'Transmuting Externalizations'" by Alan Graham and Cheryl Glickauf-Hughes in *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 22, no. 1 (1992): 21-33.
[343] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 3.

exhausted from it.[344] Freud goes on to say that, "[n]one of this contradicts the pleasure principle; repetition, the re-experiencing of something identical, is clearly in itself a source of pleasure."[345] Hence, both repetition and novelty can be constitutive of the desire for objects, just as ambivalent feelings of *wanting* and *not wanting* to consume things such as potato chips and ice cream can cause confusion and cause people to question their own ability to be sated.

While Winnicott advocated for "good enough" parenting, in this society it is subject to fads and confusing advice, often from advertisers. It is not difficult to see how consumptive parents are likely to produce consumptive children. Furthermore, the constant introduction of new and exciting toys and other objects to a child distorts the child's ability to have a "complete experience" as well as to find substantial meaning in any one object, limiting the prospects for a substantive self-object.

Conclusion

Consumerism is the water in which we live, and like a high tide that floats all boats, we are lifted even against our will into a consumerist culture where capitalist society has imposed itself as the reality. The fingerprints of behaviorist B. F. Skinner's theories of operant conditioning and reinforcement[346] are evident in all aspects of consumerism. Just as Skinner put a hungry rat or pigeon into a "Skinner Box" in order to get them to perform some desired behavior, people have been similarly put in the *Capitalism Box*. Those birds and small mammals' ravenous (and reactionary) performance was rewarded with food, something they desperately needed. In the same

[344] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 29.
[345] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 30.
[346] B.F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, Indianapolis, IN: Hacket Publishing Company Inc., 1971/2002.

way, individuals are faux-starved by manufactured desire for consumable objects and they consequently feel more desperate to obtain those objects than they otherwise would. Resisting or rebelling against every facet of consumerism is impossible given the fractured consciousness people suffer under the dominating forces of global market capitalism.

Consequently, people have great difficulty acknowledging their oppression in the capitalist system within the context of bifurcated consciousness. Instead, we like to think that we are in control of the situation, using our power to "pay what we want" or "pay how we want" for goods, e.g., buying the least expensive apples or buying the organic apples for reasons of health or justice. When our ability to purchase the best apples is thwarted, we mitigate our disappointment by locating ourselves in the socio-economic echelon. We can always locate ourselves in a stratum above those more impoverished, those "not like me," so that we are assisted in our fantasy of thinking that if we just try hard enough, we can have the goods that we are so often denied. The signifier of our consumer reality is easily denoted every time we bring home an apple. The reflexive performance of apple buying and consuming re-inscribes our delusion of control and draws our attention away from the fault-line between being empowered members of a supposedly fair economic system and being cogs in the machine which runs for someone else's benefit.

As anxiety permeates our society, the question becomes whether anxiety is itself addictive. Do we habituate anxiety as a means of diverting attention from our ontological woundedness? If we are, in fact, associating our perceived lack of material goods with our birth trauma, can we ever achieve wholeness?

Unfortunately, our own childhood development makes us susceptible to equating consumer objects with the expression of love and care.[347] Winnicott encouraged mothers to not allow their "bad day" to interfere with their caregiving of their baby.[348] It seems, paradoxically that we have molded our consumerist society after the model of a carefree, self-sacrificing mother: the mother's care is exhibited in tangible ways, not the least of which is by the giving of objects which will satisfy the baby's desires. In this way, the desire to be loved and cared for carries over into the utter dysfunction of consumerism.

The meaning of consumer goods is nebulous. We cannot directly discern exactly what consuming a particular object means and because we have so many *needs* and perceived desires, the meaning can shape-shift in order to fit the rationalization that we must have that object. Consumption is both pleasure for pleasure's sake and an ideology. And the problem with ideologies is not that they are opposed to reality, but that they structure reality.[349] Dorothy Smith adapts Marx and Engels' concept of ideology "as those ideas and images through which the class that rules the society by virtue of its domination of the means of production orders, organizes, and sanctions the social relations that sustain its domination."[350] This is why a commodity is never just a commodity, because it is burdened with the hopes and dreams that will bridge the chasm and alleviate the anxiety which perpetuates ontological woundedness. When we recognize the burdened-ness of the commodity we are able to begin moving toward a post-consumerist ontology. Freud hopefully suggested, over one hundred years ago, that "[i]t is possible that cultural developments lie ahead of us in which the satisfaction of yet

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[347] Winnicott, *The Child, The Family, and the Outside World*, 89.
[348] Ibid., 87.
[349] Slavoj Žižek, *Trouble in Paradise: From the End of History to the End of Capitalism* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2014[a]), 219.
[350] Smith, *The Everyday as Problematic*, 54.

other wishes, which are entirely permissible to-day, will appear just as unacceptable as cannibalism does now."[351] It does not take much foresight to imagine the parallels between cannibalism and consumerism.

[351] Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, 13.

IV. The Ethical Challenge of Consumerism

When engaging the world outside the self, one in which consumerism functions as a major mode of engagement, individuals are exposed to thousands of messages and images regarding consumer goods and brands.[352] These messages are designed to create desire on the part of the consumer through a variety of mediums. As discussed in chapter three, the genesis of consumption is in the mind where the meaning of a particular object morphs, adapts, and shifts due to the imaginative machinations of the conscious and unconscious mind.[353] Chapter two describes the way in which the supply chains of global capitalism have reached a level of efficiency whereby manufacturers are able to preemptively provide consumable objects in order to fill a fabricated desire generated through multi-platform channels of marketing.[354] This chapter will focus on the framework for making an ethical response to consumption. Given the current mode of US consumerism, any ethical response would inherently require significant changes in the way most individuals in the US are basically socialized to be consumers.

Over the last few decades, it has been established that consumerism is detrimental to the health of the planet and to the prosperity of many of its inhabitants. This problem requires a moral and ethical response. Responding to this ethical challenge is hampered by what Christian ethicist Cynthia Moe-Loebeda calls "methodological fault lines" due to

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[352] The average number of advertisements ranges from 4,000 to 10,000 per day (Ron Marshall, "How Many Ads Do You See in One Day?", *RedCrow Marketing, Inc.,* September 10, 2015, http://www.redcrowmarketing.com/2015/09/10/many-ads-see-one-day/); the average exposure to ads on TV is estimated at more than one hour per day (MarketingCharts Staff, "The Average American is Exposed to More Than 1 Hour of TV Ads Every Day," May 13, 2014, http://www.marketingcharts.com/television/the-average-american-is-exposed-to-more-than-1-hour-of-tv-ads-every-day-42660/). Both of these articles concede that it is impossible to know how many ads are actually viewed and retained by the individual.

[353] See Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, Freud, *New Introductory Lectures* and *Civilization and Its Discontents*, and Winnicott. *The Child, the Family and the Outside World* as referenced in chapter three.

[354] See Birkinbine, Gómez, and Wasko, "Introduction," in *Global Media Giants*, and Schor, *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture* as referenced in chapter two.

a separation of spiritual matters from matters of morality.[355] Ethics overall has been slow to pose the transformative question of "Wherein lies the moral agency to be and do what we ought, when that calls for highly oppositional practice?"[356] Opposing the systems of global market capitalism takes great moral fortitude, but such opposition is tempered by the perennial promise of prosperity for those who ascend, or aspire to ascend, into the supposed economic security of the so-called middle class.[357] Moral agency is also hindered by the realities of issues of the self and its development and self-definition. Encompassing any ethical response is the functioning of the ontological wound whereby disconnection from the other and unmet non-material needs haunt selfhood in sometimes pathological ways.

In recent studies on consumerism, researchers have found that consuming more rarely makes people happy or content.[358] In a 2012 study of undergraduate college students, researchers found that when presented with pictures of "desirable consumer goods," study participants experienced a decrease in their perceived social wellbeing.[359] Further, the participants showed a marked increase in competitiveness along with "feelings of anxiety and dissatisfaction, and disinclination to trust other people and engage with them in deep, collaborative ways."[360] Particularly problematic is the fact that

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[355] Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, *Healing a Broken World: Globalization and God* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 152-53.
[356] Ibid., 153.
[357] In the modern middle-class, it is understood that there are not the same types of securities as was the case with decades past. Neoliberal economic policies can account for most of the stripping away of salaries and benefits to workers. See chapter two for a fuller explanation of class formation and reification.
[358] Other studies will be cited below, however Juliet Schor analyzes several studies in *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need*, especially chapter six, "Learning Diderot's Lesson: Stopping the Upward Creep of Desire" (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 145-67.
[359] Monika A. Bauer, James E. B. Wilkie, Jung K. Kim, and Galen V. Bodenhausen. "Cuing Consumerism: Situational Materialism Undermines Personal and Social Well-Being." *Psychological Science* 23, no. 5 (2012): 517-523, 517. The "desirable consumer goods" were categorized and ranked by other research studies.
[360] Ibid., 522.

consumerism is constantly "cued," meaning that there is no practical way to escape the prompts to consume.[361] A 2016 study reviewed recent empirical studies on materialistic behavior in order to develop a working macro theory of consumerism.[362] Researchers concluded that while consuming does not provide long-lasting positive feelings, the short-term feelings of an improved self-image are enough to perpetuate the cycle of consumption.[363] At the same time, other scholars have concluded, based on brain scan research, that people just need to consume the *right stuff* in order to promote and maintain both a healthy self-image as well as prosocial behaviors.[364] This span of research on consumption can be confusing, and the phenomena as well as the research approaches are quite complex. It is fundamental to this analysis to consider the proported assumption of marketers which is that consumers are rational beings making logical decisions about what and how they chose to consume. This is simply not true. The presupposition of rational consumption muddies the waters of ethical behavior making the first impediment to overcome is to recognize that most consumption is, in fact, irrational.

The inherent evil (not a casually chosen word) in capitalism is that it purports to merely supply what the consumer demands.[365] Marketers tout the belief that the

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[361] Ibid.
[362] Grant E. Donnelly, et al., "Buying to Blunt Negative Feelings: Materialistic Escape From the Self," *Review of General Psychology* 20, no. 3 (2016): 272-316.
[363] Ibid., 309.
[364] Steven Quartz and Anette Asp, *Cool: How the Brain's Hidden Quest for Cool Drives our Economy and Shapes Our World* (New York: Farar, Strauss and Giroux, 2015), 66-71. MRI scans conclude that being stimulated by images is just as powerful, as measured in brain activity, as when one "daydreams" about the same types of things. This supports both Carl Jung and D. W. Winnicott's theories about the inner fantasy life of the individual. Quartz and Asp conclude that consumption can be changed through "social norms" as if people can be presented with "healthier" options and they will automatically choose those options over other cheaper and even less healthy alternatives (p. 242-45). Their theories have little consideration for corporate power or the fact that poverty is a significant issue when considering consumerism.
[365] The word "evil" is used here in reliance on its basic definition: that which is malevolent or profoundly immoral. Evil also has a definition which includes an understanding of that which is supernatural, and while a pure supernatural character of evil is not asserted here, it is assumed that there operates an

consumer is in possession of all the facts concerning a particular product, as if their labeling and advertisements fully disclose all aspects of their product.[366] This is also not true. Rather, marketers apparently work from the assumption that consumers are flawed and most can be easily manipulated through triggering issues of self-esteem. They take advantage of inherent ontological woundedness, knowing they can easily exploit the desire for non-material needs to be met. It is certainly not a question of just consuming *the right stuff*.[367] Most environmentalists rightly argue against the notion that *changed consumption* will halt the degradation of the planet through the continued depletion of its resources, despite the claims of "greenwashed" product advertising. Additionally, even in the case of items which are purported to be organic, fair-trade, recycled, etc., there is still the inherent problem that those items are part of an economic system which is designed to benefit only a few.

The notion that people are free to choose what and when to consume is woven into the fabric of the modern American experience. Psychologist Rollo May writes that "[m]odern industrialism and capitalism were conditioned by many factors, but on the psychological side the new view of the *power of the free individual* was of central importance."[368] May draws on Erich Fromm's analysis of *freedom* as being contrary to human desires inasmuch as humans are much more willing to concede their individual

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understanding of "The Market" which is an entity unto itself, seemingly supernatural, whose demands must be heeded. See chapter two for a fuller discussion on The Market and "supply and demand."

[366] In just one example: In the State of California there is currently a battle in the legislature over whether food labeling should include information regarding the presence of GMOs in a given package. As of this writing, the anti-labeling lobby seems to be winning.

[367] Consuming "the right stuff" is conclusion reached by Quarts and Asp. Op cit.

[368] May, *The Meaning of Anxiety*, 172, emphasis added. While May was writing in the decades before modern globalization, he was addressing the growing consumerism of the era following the Second World War.

freedoms.[369] What this freedom means is that the individual is no longer tied to any obligations toward others, leaving ambitions and appetites not only unrestrained but completely acceptable. As May comments, "[t]he competitive individual could believe that the community was enhanced by his strivings for aggrandizement."[370] This accounts for the rapacious striving after consumer objects, and consecrates the tendency toward self-satisfaction through object accumulation, however fleeting that satisfaction might be. In the actual wake of consumption lies the often concealed devastation of both the planet and other creatures, not the least of which is the human population. This situation requires an ethical response, one that recognizes the multivalent lure of consumption while conceptualizing constructive methods for addressing the underlying urge to consume.

The Self and Moral Agency

The *self* is the center or hub of a matrix which radiates outward, connecting the emotional/inner self with the social/outer world.[371] The *self* is a receptacle which receives, interprets, and incorporates into its emotional/inner self data and cues from the social/outer world. Social psychologist Roy F. Baumeister describes the *self* as the "essential part of the interface between the animal body and the social system."[372] In classical Freudian terms, the ego might be used to describe the *self*, with the attendant id (internal drives and irrationality) and superego (the internalization of external social norms). Both of these theories depict what is essentially a two-way street. In current academic and psychoanalytic work the *self* is thought of as enmeshed in a reflexive and

[369] Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 1941/1965).
[370] May, 172.
[371] See chapter three for a fuller discussion of the creation and sustaining of the self.
[372] Roy F. Baumeister, "The Self." In *Advanced Social Psychology: The State of the Science,* ed. Roy F. Baumeister and Eli J. Finkel (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 139.

multidimensional reality.[373] Scholars are also recognizing the need to remove the obstructive and impractical disciplinary divisions which have led to incomplete theories, many of which have neglected spiritual experience, the influence of the unconscious (individual and collective), and the finer points and nuance of perception and experience.[374]

Peter Berger's foundational work in modern socialization explores the process of socialization and concludes that it is the result of the reflexive interaction and internalization of the *objective* world and that "[t]he processes that internalize the socially objectivated world are *the same* processes that internalize the socially assigned identities."[375] In other words, these identities are maintained by the nearly constant "conversation" both within the mind of the individual and with those significant others in the individual's life as well as with various social entities. Identity is inscribed and reinscribed by these conversations; thus, Berger recognizes that "the subjective reality of the world hangs on the thin thread of conversation."[376] It might be tempting to assume that the self can be changed by simply altering the conversation, but Berger theorizes that "once the individual is formed as a person, with an objectively and subjectively recognizable identity, he must continue to participate in the conversation that sustains him as a person in his ongoing biography."[377] Consequently, the self is the product of

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[373] Ibid., 142-43; see also Ernest S. Wolf, *Treating the Self: Elements of Clinical Self Psychology* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1988), 28-30.
[374] Terry Louise Terhaar, "Evolutionary Advantages of Intense Spiritual Experience in Nature," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 3, no. 3 (2009): 303-339, 308; Christopher Wright and Daniel Nyberg, "Working with Passion: Emotionology, Corporate Environmentalism and Climate Change," *Human Relations* 65, no. 12 (2012): 1561-1587, 1582-83; Paul Marcus, *Being for the Other: Emmanuel Levinas, Ethical Living and Psychoanalysis* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2008), 13-16.
[375] Peter L Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), 16.
[376] Ibid., 17.
[377] Ibid., 18.

externally imposed images of *who the self should be.* Such images have been appropriated and combined with internal drives and desires, all of which continues to be inscribed by the continuing internal conversation and social interactions.

From a systems viewpoint, the *self* is seen as enmeshed in a complex web of multiple relationships, all of which are influenced and colored by the individual's own psychological composition, individual history, social categories such as race and gender, physical ability, and even to a lesser extent by numerous seemingly innocuous phenomena such as the weather and what was eaten for breakfast. It is often assumed that one's engagement with the world is a result of free will and rational behavior. It can be quite shocking to find that this not the case. What is much closer to objective reality is that people are in a constant, reactive dialogue where the interlocutors are the *self*, which has its own complex intricacies, and the *other*, which is all else. This dialogue never stops, arguably not even when a person sleeps as the unconscious mind is actively interpreting symbols, bringing them to the conscious mind through dreams, which is also part of the internal dialogue.

In an historical trajectory, how the self is defined and how the self *defines itself* has become disconcerting. Sociologist Roy Baumeister recounts the development of perceptions of the self from the late medieval period to the late twentieth century.[378] Pertinent to this discussion are Baumeister's categorizations of the self in the current era. Self-knowledge and self-conception are derived through "belief in personal uniqueness" and there is a value placed on "self-exploration"; self-definition is determined by one's personality and socioeconomic status; fulfillment of the self is the result of "quest for

[378] Roy F. Baumeister, "How the Self Became a Problem: A Psychological Review of Historical Research," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 52, no. 1 (1987): 163-176.

celebrity" and "quest for means of self-actualization"; and the relation of the self to society is through means of "accommodation" and "myth-making."[379] Baumeister describes the modern relational self further by saying that in the absence of strong values (external or internal) which would guide the individual toward "making the choices that define the self," individuals are forced to "establish such inner criteria" by either "finding" it or "inventing" it.[380] "Accommodation" is defined as a vacillation between attempting to assert oneself and attempting to assimilate oneself in society; as Baumeister puts it, a "preference for life with compromise over perpetual and futile rebellion."[381] Alternatively, in "myth-making" people attempt to project their own meaning (finding it or inventing it) onto society while accepting that society is static in its function and systems; they rely instead on inner resources in order to provide their life with meaning and fulfillment.[382] Those "inner" resources are shaped, in part, by external messages gleaned from a consumerist society.

Ethicist Anna L. Peterson points to the ideology of Western exceptionalism, which has enjoyed centuries of self-aggrandizing by the statement "Man is the only animal who…" (fill in the blank), meaning that humans are set apart from other animals due to any number of attributes and behaviors.[383] While most of these statements, such as humans are the only animals to use tools, or to fear death, or have a sense of humor have been discredited by research and careful observation of other animals, there is still an overall striving for human exceptionalism. Some Christian theological perspectives claim

[379] Ibid., 164. This is a summary of a table Baumeister included in his article.
[380] Ibid., 170-73.
[381] Ibid., 170-71.
[382] Ibid., 171.
[383] Anna L. Peterson, *Being Animal: Beasts and Boundaries in Nature Ethics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 28.

uniqueness rests on the possession of a soul or being made in the image of God.[384] Based on these assertions, humans are therefore not defined in terms of their fleshiness which would link them to other animals, but rather as having an invisible quality linking them to an invisible God.[385] Defining the self in terms of these ineffable qualities has both positive and negative aspects. It is positive in the sense that it should lead to an embodiment of the Golden Rule, recognizing the inherent value in both the self and in others; it is negative in the sense that it might cause individuals to then view themselves as separate and superior, over and against the rest of creation.

Returning to the discussion in chapter three regarding the theories of fractured or bifurcated consciousness, it is in part the external pressures of society which have forced the cocooning or turtling of the self—where the self draws psychically or emotionally inward in an effort to protect itself—such that accommodation or myth-making are necessary. For example, when one achieves a raised consciousness, i.e., realizing that as a woman or objectified minority that one has inherent worth, this ultimately leads to discontent with societal norms, i.e., discrimination and subjugation. However, discontent is met with the reality that society is not soon to change. Therefore, one retreats into accommodation and myth-making. Baumeister suggests that "the recent trends suggest that the individual has accepted the state of being immersed in and dependent on society and is struggling to find meaning and fulfillment within those limitations."[386] Although expressed differently, this is what Dorothy Smith and W. E. B. Du Bois describe in their work, specifically that the individual, most times to their own detriment, bends their self-

[384] Ibid., 29. It could be argued that this is the ultimate myth made: that the one thing that sets humans apart from other animals as well as the created order is something which cannot be scientifically proven.
[385] Ibid., 30.
[386] Baumeister, 171.

identity to fit into society's demands. They can then use their own internal resources in an attempt to find contentment. Regrettably, this leads to a bifurcated or fractured consciousness because the "inner" consciousness of the individual does not correspond to the consciousness the individual is forced to develop in order to be a part of a given society.

In order to deal with bifurcation, people can avail themselves of the myth of uniqueness or accommodate themselves to society by "just getting along" and doing what they believe is required of them. But this is only a superficial solution. Psychologically, it simply does not work. Or, rather, it does not work for the individual but it works well for a capitalist economy because people then buy something which they believe will help assuage their discontent, even if only temporarily.[387] The individual's response to their ontological woundedness—attempting to have non-material needs met with material items—then becomes the site of the question of moral agency. In other words, if the individual is not able to experience the wholeness of self, as the self is already the locus of disconnection and uncertainty, they will lack the agency required to engage in more responsible modes of consumption.

A primary function of the self is how the individual engages with the social processes around them through the development and use of their own moral agency.[388] While "'[m]oral agency'…refers to moral-spiritual power to 'do and be' what we discern we ought," it requires much more than just knowing what the right thing is.[389] People can know what is right, but not act on it directly or take a less than sure stance on a particular

[387] Donnelly, et al., "Buying to Blunt Negative Feelings," 309.
[388] Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 19.
[389] Ibid.

ethical issue. In the case of consumption, Moe-Lobeda argues that even when systems of socialization aim toward ethical behavior, there is an inherent duplicity in the message being communicated.

> In Christian ethical terms, this process of socialization is considered a process of moral formation and mal-formation. To illustrate: parents in our society today commonly teach children to make money and make it grow in order to be "successful." Children strive for the material comforts sought by parents and paraded by public idols. Tacit communications teach that poverty or apparent poverty signifies failure. A life of voluntary "downward mobility" in terms of material consumption, if even imagined, would bear the hue of failure in the eyes of society. Thus we are morally mal-formed away from such choice. (63)

Children are, at some level, able to discern the hypocrisy inherent in capitalist socialization. Teaching ethical behaviors such as sharing come into direct conflict with attitudes towards possessions. A child's moral agency is shaped by placing the values born of the capitalist system into ethical categories, e.g., consuming less is seen as failure. Ethical categories reserved for responsible interaction with other humans, creatures, and planetary resources are inappropriately stretched to include things like The Market. In this situation, extricating emotions of care and compassion from the larger context of *how to do and be what we discern we ought* becomes nearly impossible. Ethical responsibility is confused, and even worse diluted, by consumerist strivings. When children are faced with consumer choices, their agency has already been compromised because of their ethical mal-formation.

Christian ethicist John Wall argues that human agency and human vulnerability are deeply intertwined. Vulnerability, that is to be susceptible to "wound or harm," provides a counter-claim to the assertion of Western philosophy and theology that the way to resist and overcome temptation or misfortune is "by the assertion of a more

forceful will or agency."[390] In many ways, the agency of children in their moral formation is determined by the machinations of consumerism. What adults fail to see, and hence act upon, is that children don't want *more*, they want a *complete experience*.[391] As Wall argues, "To live in relation to others and societies is never simply to act upon them. It is always also to make oneself vulnerable or open to being shaped by them."[392] This often means that it is the obligation of the adult to protect the child's moral agency from consumerism. The vulnerability of children, and even to some extent adults, in the formation of their moral agency is exploited by a consumerist society under the guise of *causing no harm*. The self in relation to society is fraught with complex and, at times, pathological realities which make recognizing the harm caused by consuming difficult at best.

Cognitive Dissonance and the Delusion of Consuming

What is it about consumption which makes it so difficult to first analyze and second, to overcome its power of control? Consumer behavior is conditioned by socialization and fueled by desire. Theories of cognitive dissonance help us understand why moral decisions in the realm of consumerism are so difficult.

Psychologist Leon Festinger pioneered the theory of cognitive dissonance, the basic tenant of which is that people are often confronted with two differing cognitions and in order to make a decision as to their own behavior or opinion of either of them, they work to reduce the dissonance between them. [393] Reduction comes in many forms but reducing the dissonance is critical. Ultimately, Festinger argues individuals cannot

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[390] John Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 39.
[391] Winnicott, *The Child, The Family, and the Outside World*, 75-78.
[392] Wall, 39.
[393] Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957), 3.

hold two (or more) divergent ideas, e.g., that something is both good and bad, without working to make those two things fit together.[394]

> In short, I am proposing that dissonance, that is, the existence of nonfitting relations among cognitions, is a motivating factor in its own right. By the term *cognition*…I mean any knowledge, opinion, or belief about the environment, about oneself, or about one's behavior. Cognitive dissonance can be seen as an antecedent condition which leads to activity oriented toward dissonance reduction just as hunger leads to activity oriented toward hunger reduction. (3, italics in original)

The activity required to reduce dissonance, similar to the reduction of hunger, is directed at reducing the discomfort of contradiction. Typically, people rely on their own perception of reality as a means to discern and effectively prioritize cognitions. For example, if someone thought they saw a UFO flying through the sky they would experience cognitive dissonance. In order to reduce that dissonance, the person may try to give a rational explanation for what they believe they saw, or seek others who might confirm the seemingly non-rational explanation. Depending on the individual's knowledge and experience, the perceived UFO can be deemed a *real* experience, or otherwise categorized as a misunderstanding of an explainable phenomenon, such as an experimental aircraft.

Reduction of dissonance becomes problematic when cognitions are seemingly more subtle. For instance with regard to issues of racism, sexism, and other prejudiced opinions, dissonance reduction would tend to favor those opinions which are held as "reality." In other words, prejudice is the strong opinion where one has conviction that certain attributes about individuals or groups of people are based *in fact* and therefore

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[394] An argument could be made that there are several instances in our daily lives which are both good and bad, but this is more an issue of pessimism versus optimism. For instance, you experience a car accident but no one was injured. That could be considered both a good thing. Ultimately, however, an accident is always a bad thing. We often condition ourselves to be grateful for the fortunate outcome of otherwise negative events.

correspond to reality. When one encounters something contrary to their prejudice creates dissonance, but it is typically the case that they will dismiss that secondary cognition in order to maintain the reality (with its inherent prejudices) already established. As Festinger theorizes, a given (perceived) reality is a formidable force.

> Consequently, the major point to be made is that *the reality which impinges on a person will exert pressures in the direction of bringing the appropriate cognitive elements into correspondence with that reality*. This does not mean that the existing cognitive elements will *always* correspond. Indeed, one of the important consequences of the theory of dissonance is that it will help us understand some circumstance where the cognitive elements do not correspond to reality. (11, emphasis in original)

The pressure exerted on differing cognitions comes in many forms. Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection is one form of pressure: casting away, with greater or lesser violence, that which we find disgusting or noxious.[395] Sigmund Freud's theory of repression is another form of pressure: forcing down (or away) those cognitions which make us uncomfortable or which cause *unpleasure*.[396] Other forms of pressure include fantasy. Carl Jung theorized that through fantasy the conventional meaning of objects is affected by subconscious material, morphing the meaning of those objects into something else, quite outside of our conscious recognition.[397] As Freud has argued, we are able to recreate our world in our own mind where it conforms to our own wish fulfillment.[398]

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[395] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,* (Leon S. Roudiez, trans., New York: Columbia University Press, 1980/1982), 2-3.
[396] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents,* (James Strachey, trans. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1930/1961/2010), 43.
[397] Carl G. Jung and Marie-Luise von Franz, eds., *Man and His Symbols*, (New York: Dell Publishing, 1964), 27.
[398] "It regards reality as the sole enemy and as the source of all suffering, with which it is impossible to live, so that one must break off all relations with it if one is to be in any way happy. The hermit turns his back on the world and will have no truck with it. But one can do more than that; one can try to re-create the world, to build up in its stead another world in which its most unbearable features are eliminated and replaced by others that are in conformity with one's own wishes." Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents,* (James Strachey, trans. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1930/1961/2010), 50.

Compounding issues regarding an individual's given reality is what Festinger describes as the "magnitude of dissonance" between two cognitions or groups of cognitions.[399] Magnitude is determined by the relative importance of given cognitions. For example, choosing to not greet a stranger on the street has relatively low importance and therefore carries a lesser magnitude; conversely, not greeting a good friend has a relatively high importance and therefore has a greater magnitude of dissonance. This concept of magnitude is significant to our understanding of how dissonance gets resolved. Key to the equation of dissonance and magnitude is "what is considered important." To use Festinger's metaphor quoted above, specifically how hunger leads to action toward the reduction of hunger; he presents a "no fault" situation as if satisfying one's hunger is a very rational action. However, to complicate the dissonance and thus increase its magnitude, what if you were forced to take food from someone else in order to satisfy your hunger? In such a case, you would either have to remain hungry or prioritize your own hunger over and against the hunger of the other person. If your hunger were great enough, your method of resolving the dissonance would be to dismiss the needs of the other person. Conversely, what if the other person, the one with the food, was also in possession of a weapon which could be used to hurt you if you attempted to take their food? The resolution of the dissonance would be in favor of the other person and to your own perpetuated hunger.[400] Festinger argues that people will often consider the cognition which contradicts their reality as irrelevant.[401] This automatically assigns a

[399] Festinger, 16.
[400] Taking food from someone who is in a position of lesser power than yourself is typically how we find ourselves here in the US in a system of global capitalism. We have developed systems which conceal the fact that we are taking from those others in the world who have less power than us. We have no idea that we are taking food (or other resources) from others, and quite frankly, we don't ever want to know.
[401] Festinger, 11-12.

lesser position to the contradictory cognition. However, in the case where a contradictory cognition comes from a place where there is the power to harm, as in the case of attempting to take food from someone with a weapon, then the contradictory cognition is assigned greater value, or a greater magnitude, and is instilled accordingly.

The complicating element of magnitude is that people also have perception about what is ultimately important. That perception is often skewed. This is due in part because cognitions are rarely as overt as the example of being hungry and attempting to take food from someone with a weapon. Regardless, that does not stop the feeling that bodily harm can be visited upon us. Recalling the discussion of anxiety in chapter three: anxiety is the basic reaction to a feeling of helplessness.[402] Additionally, anxiety is also the result of violating social or religious taboos of a given culture.[403] In the case of cognitive dissonance, anxiety acts as a primary indicator of the magnitude of the dissonance. Taking Karen Horney's theories of anxiety and Festinger's theories of dissonance together, we find that there is significant cultural influence on what is determined by the individual to be the magnitude of a given dissonance. One of the examples given by Festinger is whether someone would choose not to study for an important college exam.[404] Writing in 1957, Festinger assumed that anyone going to college would take studying for exams seriously, having based that assumption on his own experience as a professor and on what he observed as the social pressure on students to do well. Shifting social norms change the magnitude of cognitive dissonance. In modern higher education, if an individual student does not experience anxiety when anticipating not getting good grades, then the impetus to study is significantly less.

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[402] Karen Horney, *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 42.
[403] Ibid.
[404] Festinger, 16.

The primary significance of cognitive dissonance is that it allows justification of decisions, even bad decisions. Social psychologists Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson chronicle several aspects of how cognitive dissonance is resolved. For purposes of this discussion, just three of these will be discussed.[405] First is the competing theory in the realm of behaviorism. Behaviorism basically holds that human behavior can be modified and controlled with the application of positive or negative reinforcement. As Tavris and Aronson point out, however, there is a significant body of evidence which shows that humans do not react predictably to positive or negative reinforcement. On the contrary, it seems that people are much more likely to change how they feel about a lifestyle choice, e.g., a job, a relationship, or a significant purchase like a house or a car, if they were forced to go through significant discomfort, pain, embarrassment, or effort in order to get it.[406] People are much more likely to say that their job is great (when it is not), that their relationship is wonderful (when it is not), and that whatever they bought is both useful and necessary (when it is neither) because of the need for self-justification. People want to consider themselves rational and intelligent, and therefore, they limit their perception of their own life choices to that which automatically reflects that belief. Admitting to yourself or to others that a particular choice involved embarrassment or pain would be the same as admitting that you are not rational.[407] This would present a significant problem for the ongoing internal conversation about who we think we are.[408]

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[405] Aronson was a student of Leon Festinger at Stanford in the mid-1950s. Carol Tarvis and Elliot Aronson, *Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts* (Boston: Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2007/2015.), 17.
[406] Ibid., 18.
[407] There are those instances where the discomfort or arduous effort invested in obtaining some object or attaining a position is socially glorified, which then also goes to show one's "rationality" because one is willing to accept justifiable suffering.
[408] See Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 5.

The second theory examined by Tavris and Aronson is "confirmation bias."[409] This is the tendency of people to interpret new data regarding a given topic in a way which confirms their existing opinion(s). Confirmation bias applies to any number of opinions, but is of particular interest for this discussion of consumerism. As mentioned in chapter two, brand loyalty can seem to wax and wane, but there are particular consumer attitudes which are driven by confirmation bias and can account for a significant portion of brand loyalty.[410] Applying the theory of confirmation bias to consumption, loyalty to a particular brand of automobile is much stronger than loyalty to a particular brand of soda due to issues of self-justification. In most cases, the commitment to an automobile is much more significant than to a type of soda. Therefore it follows that information regarding other cars which refute your chosen car in terms of safety or other amenities would be attributed to another's lack of intelligence or insight.[411] Some people might hold passionate views of soda brand, but because of the relatively lower commitment involved in the purchase of soda, it is more likely that people will attribute soda choice to individual "taste" as opposed to other signification, but will still be unlikely to change their mind about their own soda choice.[412]

The third and final theory of Tarvis and Aronson's analysis of cognitive dissonance is what they call "the pyramid of choice."[413] The image of a pyramid is meant to engender the idea that two people can hold the same opinion on a particular topic and

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[409] Op. cit., 22.
[410] Arjun Chaudhuri and Morris B. Holbrook. "The Chain of Effects from Brand Trust and Brand Affect to Brand Performance: The Role of Brand Loyalty." *Journal of Marketing* 65, no. 2 (2001): 81-93. Writing to a marketing audience, Chaudhuri and Holbrook did not categorize "brand loyalty" as a function of "confirmation bias" because to do so would undermine their own positions as marketing scholars. Rather, they see brand loyalty as a function of the rational choice of the consumer.
[411] Tarvis and Aronson, 27-28.
[412] Something relatively innocuous, like soda, can be categorized as "to each their own." Whereas an automobile, because of the significance of its purchase and use, holds very serious consequences.
[413] Ibid., 42-43.

can then make a series of choices or shifts in their individual opinions and end up at the opposite bottom corners of the pyramid, very far apart from each other. It is a figurative "slippery slope" which leads to the far point. Each of the decisions along this slope is reinforced by self-justification and bolstered by confirmation bias. This takes one of two forms. One is that people's beliefs and attitudes go through a series of slight shifts (sometimes very slight) which ultimately lead to an entrenched opinion. Second is how a series of actions leads to an action or actions which are ultimately dishonorable or unethical. The hypothetical end of the "pyramid of choice" is engrained in the perceived reality of the individual. One believes they are correct due to "naïve realism," the "inescapable conviction that we perceive objects and events clearly" and that "[w]e assume that other reasonable people see things the same way we do."[414] Consequently, if someone agrees with us, they must be a reasonable person; if they disagree, they are unreasonable. The concept of reasonableness is a powerful motivating factor in consumerism: all consumption can, in one way or another, be categorized as reasonable. Even in the case of someone who hoards, that person has resolved contradicting cognitions in the light of their own reality. At the opposite end of the spectrum (or pyramid base) is the person who staves-off consumption, who likewise considers themselves to be reasonable.[415] Both people believe they are making the best choice to consume or hoard, i.e., being reasonable, given their circumstances.

What is delusional about consuming is thinking that people have the freedom of choice. As has been discussed, what is perceived as *freedom* of choice, that is making

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[414] Ibid., 54.

[415] See Juliet B. Schor's chapter "The Downshifter Next Door" in *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 112-42. However, the irony of "downshifting" in terms of consumerism is not that people spend less money, they just choose to live life differently. (Ibid., 142) This concept of "downshifting" will be discussed in more detail in chapter five.

decisions about one's behavior, is often a conditioned response. As discussed in chapter three, freedom is a "metacognition" not to be confused with some sort of resolve to command the mind/body to proceed in a certain direction.[416] Ethical mal-formation also impedes the freedom to make the right choices. As shown by Tavris and Aronson's analysis, the perception of freedom is simply a combination of confirmation bias and a "pyramid of choice" which leads people to believe that they always have the freedom to choose differently.

Another concept of freedom is ultimately tied to the encounter with the Other. Paul Marcus, in his discussion of Levinas and psychoanalysis, states that, "[w]ithout the Other, freedom is without meaning or foundation. In the face-to-face encounter, the Other provides my freedom with purpose because I am confronted with the often tough choices between, on the one hand, responsibility and obligation toward the Other, and, on the other, contempt and violent rejection or indifference."[417] Making the right decisions when presented with tough choices assumes an open space. Moreover, some people would rather deal with the crushing guilt of inaction (or bad action) than to "face the awful burden of freedom" and assume responsibility for the Other.[418]

Given the somewhat optimistic view of the self as a moral agent who has the freedom to make choices and control their own destiny, the meta-ethical stance should be the work of striving toward providing just such opportunities for freedom to flourish. There is, however, a slight problem with regard to the reality of the *actual* versus the *ideal* society. It should be expressly stated that in our ethical behavior we strive toward

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[416] Mazis, *Humans, Animals, Machines*, 158.
[417] Paul Marcus, *Being for the Other: Emmanuel Levinas, Ethical Living and Psychoanalysis* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2008), 43.
[418] Ibid., 60.

the ideal while living in the actual. This is more complex than it first appears as what is perceived as "reality" is often distorted through cognitive dissonance and the perception of the Other.

The Other, the Third, and the "Eco-Third"

In the struggle to understand the self, replete with consciousness bifurcation and inherent ontological woundedness, people ultimately struggle to understand the Other. Robert Corrington elucidates this conflict:

> Natural communities live out their archetypal projections in a blind and unthinking manner. They abject the unconscious and cut off all prospects of creatively integrating unconscious material. As we have noted, this is an explosive situation ripe for violence and sadism. *The Other gets clothed with shadow material and sooner or later may (or will) become the object of brutal attack—or, at least, some form of economic constraint and control.* The community of interpreters recognizes the Other in its own midst, not to mention in other communities outside of itself. And the community of interpreters recognizes the most important Other of all; namely the unconscious. (Corrington, *Nature's Sublime,* 134, emphasis added)

Corrington is calling for the deconstruction of assumptions of otherness and the acknowledgement that the Other is, in fact, deeply entwined with the unconscious. The abjection of the unconscious can be seen in the ways in which we attempt to sequester or even imprison those parts of our memories, thoughts, and fantasy life which we find uncomfortable, unacceptable, or embarrassing. As discussed in chapter three, Freud theorized that conscious thoughts remained so for a brief period but then became latent and that the psychic material in the unconscious could be drawn out only by adept psychoanalysis.[419] Similarly, Jung's theory premises the fluidity of psychic material, specifically that it passes mostly unhindered from the conscious to the unconscious and

[419] Freud, *New Introductory Lectures,* 100.

back again.[420] The problem is that any attempt to disavow this uncomfortable psychic material supports the development of a neurosis which manifests in any number of ways, including (but not limited to) the ways that the Other is treated. Similar to the attempts to sequester the unconscious, the goal is to be free from any sort of harassment which the Other might impose. As Slavoj Žižek argues, "In short, the Other is just fine, but only insofar as his presence is not intrusive, insofar as this Other is not really other…"[421] Žižek argues that being able to distance oneself from the Other is seen as a right: "What increasingly emerges as the central human right in late-capitalist society is *the right not to be harassed,* which is a right to remain at a safe distance from others."[422] There is a cunning paradox here: the vulnerability of moral agency which inherently requires engaging the Other versus the desire to keep the Other at a safe distance where calls for compassion cannot be perceived.

Julia Kristeva, a primary interlocutor of Corrington in the theoretical foundations of his work, draws attention to the fact that an individual will continue to fail to embrace the Other, i.e., the foreigner, because they cannot (or will not) recognize (or embrace) the foreignness that is within their own selves.

> With the Freudian notion of the unconscious the involution of the strange in the psyche loses its pathological aspect and integrates within the assumed unity of human beings an *otherness* that is both biological *and* symbolic and becomes an integral part of the *same*. Henceforth the foreigner is neither a race nor a nation. The foreigner is neither glorified as a secret *Volksgeist* [, "spirit of the people" or "national identity",] nor banished as disruptive of rationalist urbanity. Uncanny, foreignness is within us: <u>we are our own foreigners, we are divided</u>…My discontent in living with the other—my strangeness, his strangeness—rests on the perturbed logic that governs this strange bundle of drive and language, of nature and symbol, constituted by the unconscious, always already shaped

[420] Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, 27.
[421] Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), 41.
[422] Ibid.

> by the other…Psychoanalysis is then experienced as a journey into the strangeness of the other and of oneself, toward an ethics of respect for the irreconcilable. How could one tolerate a foreigner if one did not know one was a stranger to oneself? (Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 181, italics in original, underlining added)

The "involution of the strange," the strangeness which Kristeva argues is integrated into the self, can be reconstituted by psychoanalysis through a re-experience of "the strangeness of the other and of oneself." Rightly, Kristeva maintains that it is within the context of our embrace of our own dividedness that we move "toward an ethics of respect of the irreconcilable."[423] In the same way that we cannot possibly remove from our own bodies those tasks which might be categorized as filth, e.g., vomiting, urinating, defecating, we cannot attempt to remove those aspects of our psychic material which might be considered otherwise unacceptable. To do so will only result in pathology. Repression, in its most basic form, is an attempt to eradicate incongruent aspects of the psyche. Respecting the irreconcilable parts of the self moves the individual to a place of not only accepting the Other, but of protecting, celebrating, and loving the Other.

The perception and treatment of the other is the foundation of Emmanuel Levinas' philosophical ethics and can be summed up with the phrase "radical hospitality." Even though Levinas rarely used the word hospitality,[424] Levinas emphasizes that it is, in fact, the *welcome* that is given to the *other* that is the prime substance of all ethics.[425] In what Levinas calls "pure ethics" the *self* lives for the *other*.[426] The French philosopher Jacques Derrida, a close friend and mentee of Levinas, interprets, exegetes, and distills Levinas' work on hospitality and welcome:

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[423] Ibid.
[424] Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 25.
[425] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1961/1991), 29.
[426] Ibid., 261: "To be for the Oher is to be good….The fact that in existing for another I exist otherwise than in existing for me is morality itself."

> The word "hospitality" here translates, brings to the fore, re-produces, the two words preceding it, "attention" and "welcome." An internal paraphrase, a sort of periphrasis, a series of metonymies that bespeak hospitality, the face, welcome: tending toward the other, attentive intention, intentional attention, *yes* to the other. Intentionality, attention to speech, welcome of the face, hospitality—all these are the same, but the same as the welcoming of the other, there where the other withdraws from the theme. This movement without movement effaces itself in the welcoming of the other, and since it opens itself to the infinity of the other, an infinity that, as other, in some sense precedes it, the welcoming *of* the other (objective genitive) will already be a response: the *yes to* the other will already be responding to the welcoming *of* the other (subjective genitive), to the *yes* of the other. (p. 22-23, emphasis in original)

To answer always and everywhere in the affirmative, the constant *yes*, the intentionality, is the kind of radical hospitality upon which Levinas bases his ethic. The concept of *infinity* signifies the boundless and eternal characteristics of welcoming the other, as opposed to limits of conditional or exclusionary experience of the other.[427] The other's essence is portrayed in the face, which is both the literal and figurative phenomenological presence of the other, wherein "[e]verything that takes place here 'between us' *concerns everyone*…even if I draw back from it to seek with the interlocutor the complicity of a private relation and a clandestinity."[428] However, the other is not constrained by just *one* other — the "between us" now "concerns everyone." Levinas enlarges the *one*-ness to include a *we*-ness. The "I-Thou" relationship is transformed to an "I-We" relationship. "To be *we* is not to 'jostle' one another…[it is the] presence of a third party (that is, of the whole of humanity which looks at us)…"[429] Subsequently, it is not only a matter of discourse or relation between just two, because even when there are two there is already, always, and everywhere more, symbolized both mathematically and philosophically as *the third*.

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[427] Levinas, 26 and 194.
[428] Ibid., 212, emphasis added.
[429] Ibid., 213, emphasis in the original.

Derrida quotes Levinas' expansion of the notion of the third as a concept of justice:

> *The third is other than the neighbor, but also another neighbor, and also a neighbor of the other, and not simply his fellow*. When then are the other and the third for one another? What have they done to one another? Which passes before the other?...The other and the third, my neighbors, contemporaries of one another, put distance between me and the other and the third. 'Peace, peace to the neighbor and the one far-off' (Isaiah 57:19)—we now understand the point of this apparent rhetoric. The third introduces a contradiction in the Saying….It is of itself the limit of responsibility and the birth of the question: *What do I have to do with justice?* A question of conscience, of consciousness. Justice is necessary, that is, comparison, coexistence, contemporaneousness, assembling… (Derrida, *Adieu*, 30, emphasis added)[430]

Hence, the *I* and the *other* are not alone, and the *third* is not limited to the understanding of neighbor, neither in a biblical nor a political sense, but in a much larger sense. It is the very quintessence of justice, giving "birth" to the question: "What do I have to do with justice?" The question is there already, always and everywhere. It is the substance of the spectrum of justice spanning quotidian to prodigious — in the welcoming of the other there is the third, and in that greeting, in the *yes*, there is the question of justice.

Justice is paramount in the foundational theories of liberation theologian Leonardo Boff, who links issues of environmental degradation with poverty.[431] Boff deconstructs many of the so-called *eternal truths* of global market economics to show their undue burden on particular humans and ecosystems. He argues that "ecological justice has to go hand in hand with social justice" and that future generations (of humans) "have a right to a society of fairness, justice, and participation, and to a healthy environment."[432] In this way, the third (*à la* Levinas) is not just a human, but the entire

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[430] This quote is taken from *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, where Derrida quoted from one of Levinas' lectures given at the Sorbonne in Paris.
[431] Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997).
[432] Ibid., 5.

environs of that/those human/s. Therefore, the welcoming of the other, for the welcome is the language of justice, should include humans as well as the air, water, soil, flora, and fauna of the other. It is the case that the third is *eco* in the deepest sense in that humans cannot survive without their ecological environs.

In returning to the understanding of self, it is critical to include this idea of the other and the third which includes the environs, what I term the *eco-third*. What is problematic is that most westernized individuals do not typically see themselves as intricately linked with their outdoor environment in any *real* way.[433] Susan Clayton and Susan Upotow point out, "…environmental scholarship has given insufficient consideration to the deep connections between identity and the natural environment."[434] Thus, when individuals are consciously considering themselves in a reflexive manner, does the answer to "Who am I?" include an ecological understanding of place? When they think of the other, does their imagination include the other's ecological place? Place means everything from weather to food to flora and fauna to cultural custom. It could be argued that without imagining and understanding of place, it is easier to extract resources and pollute other people's land. Polluted communities are almost always hidden from view and the voices of those who live there are diluted or even silenced.[435] It is difficult to imagine what others, especially those in abject poverty, are required to go through to obtain food and what is the inadequate nature of that food.[436] Due to global capitalism and the conquest of multinational agri-business corporations, communities in the

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[433] Susan Clayton and Susan Opotow, "Introduction: Identity and the Natural Environment," in *Identity and the Natural Environment: The Psychological Significance of Nature*, ed. Susan Clayton and Susan Opotow, (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), 3.
[434] Ibid.
[435] Robert D. Bullard, "Environmental Justice in the Twenty-first Century," in *The Quest for Environmental Justice: Human Rights and the Politics of Pollution*, ed. Robert D. Bullard (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2005), 29.
[436] Robert Gottleib and Anupama Joshi, *Food Justice* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 59-73.

developing world have trouble accessing traditional foods or traditional livelihoods.[437] And although we may identify with aspects of nature, such as the love of trees, rivers, or mountains, that does not necessarily translate into environmental responsibility.[438] Our relationship to the other, the third, and the eco-third seems to be hopelessly fractured.

Recalling Corrington's analysis of the other, it is not the case that we do not recognize the other (or the third or the eco-third), but that we attempt an attack, or at the very least some form of constraint or oppression. This leads to the conclusion that we are not in any way connected to the other, let alone the third or the eco-third. This lie we tell ourselves serves to our own detriment. Boff argues that the root of the environmental crisis is "the disruption of universal connectedness," and is ongoing.[439] Boff relates this disconnection to *original sin*:

> *Original* here does not refer to the historic origins of this negative phenomenon and hence to bygone times; rather, it has to do with origins in human beings, their grounding and radical sense of being, today and always. Nor may *sin* be reduced to mere moral dimensions or to an isolated act of the human being. It has to do with an overall stance and hence an overturning of all the relationships in which the human being is placed. This is an ontological dimension that has to do with the human being understood as a node of relationships in all directions. Sin therefore has to do with the human condition today. (81, italics in original, underlining added)

Boff is arguing that humans tend toward willful disconnection from both the planet and the Creator. Our grounding and sense of being is disrupted or destroyed by our own choice, our sin. In other words, our sin is ignoring the multi-directional relationship matrix of the self which in turn destroys our grounding, our ontology. Yes, all humans suffer from ontological woundedness, but it is difficult to extricate which part of the

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[437] Vandana Shiva, *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000), 21-33.
[438] Susan Clayton, "Environmental Identity: A Conceptual and Operational Definition," in *Identity and the Natural Environment: The Psychological Significance of Nature*, ed. Susan Clayton and Susan Opotow, (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), 60.
[439] Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 81.

woundedness is caused by a psychological and philosophical separation from others and which part is caused by intentionality. Recalling what Baumeister said about myth-making as a form of self-definition, part of the ultimately detrimental myth we have created is that we are not connected to the other, to the third, or to the eco-third. Our *sin* is, in fact, *original*.

Christian ethicist Willis Jenkins contends that we are held to a doctrine of responsibility because of our involvement (willingly or unwillingly) in the "globalizing structures of relation," namely global market capitalism.[440] This responsibility includes redress for what is called "slow violence," the type of hostility visited on both people and the planet which usually goes unnoticed because it is the violence of attrition, meted out in incremental ways and dispersed across time and place. This is one of the problems with recognizing both climate change and poverty: the systems of relation among people obscure the violence that they do.[441] Jenkins comments that, "Continued concealment and collective irresponsibility is supported by the ignorance of participants, by indifference to the evils we participate in making, by laziness in the face of practical difficulties, and by fear of acknowledging shared relations with strangers."[442] What is our relation to the stranger, to the other? Is that relationship too easily diminished or dismissed? Are we just lazy?

The Christian biblical parable of the Good Samaritan poses the question, "Who is my neighbor?"[443] The parable tells of a man who is robbed, beaten, and left "half-dead" on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. First a priest saw the traveler, but passed by on the

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[440] Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 113.
[441] Ibid., 113-14.
[442] Ibid., 114.
[443] The Gospel of Luke 10:25-37.

other side. Second, a Levite saw the traveler and also passed by on the other side. Finally, a Samaritan saw the traveler and had compassion for him. The Samaritan dressed the traveler's wounds and took him to a nearby inn and paid for the traveler's lodgings. The rhetorical question posed by Jesus, "Who is a neighbor to the traveler?" is answered with the response, "The one who showed mercy." This parable's surprise twist is the fact that the Samaritan, an enemy of the Jews, is held up as the champion of the story. The story, on its face, is rather one-dimensional: the hated foreigner (the Samaritan) showed mercy to a stranger while the supposed upstanding citizens (the priest and the Levite) avoided responsibility and were therefore accessories to the crime. This parable questions the ethical response of those who *should* bear the burden of showing mercy. Obviously, the priest and the Levite had a limited view of neighborliness. While the story is meant to be illustrative, there is inference that the priest and the Levite experienced cognitive dissonance in their encounter with the man on the road. It is apparent that their perception of the Other did not include a *welcome* and they excluded themselves from the question of justice. In the case of the road to Jerico, the Samaritan practiced mercy, but no one addressed the overarching problem of the acts of violence in the first place which is a question of justice. In order to begin to answer the question, "What do I have to do with justice?" we must begin by addressing issues of active ignorance, indifference, laziness, and fear, as well as attending to the *original sin* of assumed disconnection from each other and the earth.

Compassion and Consumerism

Compassion is a loving response to the other. The Golden Rule of treating others as you would have them treat you is, as ethicist John Wall writes, "love's greatest test."[444] The empathic response to the suffering of others—to love others the same as one loves the self—is difficult to sustain. Some might argue that people do not recognize what *real* love is nor can we even effectively love ourselves.[445] In other words, a fractured *self* equates a broken *otherness*. Perhaps it is not so much that people fail to *see* others or to recognize them as neighbors, but that the ontological woundedness of the self is such that ignoring the chasm within oneself is definitively paralyzing. Responding to the call for compassion requires vulnerability born of acknowledging one's ontological woundedness.

Political philosopher and ethicist Martha C. Nussbaum's work centers around deconstructing political meta-structures, e.g., the social contract, in order to raise issues of justice and ethical inclusion. Her methodology addresses the function of emotions in social structures. Nussbaum provides us with a useful definition of compassion: "a painful emotion directed at the serious suffering of another creature or creatures."[446] Compassion, according to Nussbaum, has four main components: (1) *Seriousness*, meaning "suffering in some way that is important and nontrivial"; (2) *Nonfault*, meaning that we can see that "the person's predicament is [not] chosen or self-inflicted." The concept of nonfault is a problematic component in that often people are confused or unwilling to see that some suffering is, in fact, not chosen or self-inflicted, such as some

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[444] Wall, 107.
[445] Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (Marion Hausner Pauck, trans., New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics 1956/2006), 75-76.
[446] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 142.

Americans believing that the poor have chosen their poverty or have been subjected to poverty due to sloth, stupidity, or bad choices; (3) *Similar possibilities*, where a person might see themselves in that same situation of suffering, or that the person suffering is similar to themselves; and (4) *Eudaimonistic thought*, which "is a judgment or thought that places the suffering person or persons among the important parts of life of the person who feels the emotion."[447] Unfortunately, eudaimonistic thought is easily dismissed or conveniently diminished, for example when one learns of a terrible tragedy in another part of the world or even another part of one's region, empathy for the unrelated *other* soon fades and thoughts quickly return to the immediate surroundings. Nussbaum comments that, "one task of any political use of compassion will be to create stable structures of concern that extends compassion broadly; but, eudemonism tells us, this will require creating a bridge between our current concerns and a broader circle of concerns that is still recognizably 'us' and 'ours.'"[448] Regrettably, these bridges are quite difficult to build due to vacillating or waning concern, and capitalism's constant efforts to redirect our attention to consuming. To push the metaphor a bit further, these bridges often have a considerable amount of traffic crossing them in the form of multiple calls for compassion, which makes maintenance span from cumbersome to impossible.

Returning to Levinas and the understanding of the self, seeing the other as the center of our own universe would be "pure ethics," however, there are boundaries built by the first three components of Nussbaum's analysis of compassion: *seriousness*, *nonfault*, and *similar possibilities*. Each of these factors is susceptible to one's own ambivalence, doubt, and competing claims, e.g., contradictory facts of the situation or

[447] Ibid., 142-44.
[448] Ibid., 145.

limited resources available for relief efforts. Regarding eudemonism, if one arrives at their own self-perception by defining themselves in a typical binary fashion by what they are not, it is easier to be convinced that *those people* are not *my people*.

In addressing the problem of culture and how compassion is translated and acted upon, Nussbaum argues that there are other limitations which "make compassionate concern imperfectly correlated with what any reasonable morality would require."[449] Moreover, concern cannot be sustained for any significant amount of time which means that the effort required to tackle larger, chronic problems fails due to waning concern.[450] It could be argued that apathy and ambivalence rush in to ease a most uncomfortable emotion: helplessness. We often feel helpless when we cannot respond to a plea for compassion. Feelings of helplessness are compounded by the realization that active participation in a solution will demand a reordering of self-perception, especially in the cases where we discover that our consumption is directly related to the suffering of others. In the wake of the anxiety created by feelings of helplessness, the goal is reduce discomfort even if that means directing one's attention elsewhere.

Nussbaum argues that often people attempt to shield or insulate themselves from the plight of others and what they might perceive to be a demand made for help. In these cases, people often blame the victim, e.g., blaming the poor for their poverty (Nussbaum's example), or blaming those living in environmentally polluted areas for their own situation, as if they created it themselves or deserve it in some way.[451] The discomfort felt as a result of a call for compassion creates dissonance because people

[449] Ibid., 156.
[450] Ibid., 157.
[451] Nussbaum, 158. Nussbaum is not focusing on the environment or ecosystems in her project, even though she does find these to be important topics of focus (p. 121).

typically imagine themselves as compassionate. In order to resolve that dissonance individuals must reinterpret the data of one of those two cognitions. Rather than think of ourselves as unfeeling, it is easier to think that a situation is not serious, that those suffering are at fault, that you cannot imagine yourself in a similar situation, or that those suffering are not that important. Rather than the other (and the third and the eco-third) drawing close, they are relegated back to a comfortable distance so as not to pose as a harassing power. Ironically, when people find themselves to be the victim of a lack of compassion, it does not make them more likely to be compassionate in the future.[452] "It's as if there is a brick wall between those two sets of experiences, blocking our ability to see the other side."[453] A person's self-perception is of primary importance.

> When we construct narratives that "make sense," however, we do so in a self-serving way. Perpetrators are motivated to reduce their moral culpability; victims are motivated to maximize their moral blamelessness. Depending on which side of the wall we are on, *we systematically distort our memories and account of the event to produce the maximum consonance between what happened and how we see ourselves*. (Tarvis and Aronson, 149, emphasis added)

Because of the way in which cognitive dissonance functions, one can deny moral culpability when they learn of the destruction consuming causes while at the same time claim status as a victim of the system of global capitalism. As Tarvis and Aronson argue, there is no mingling or fusion between these opposing cognitions. However, neither position of perpetrator or victim can be sustained for very long. Apathy and ambivalence are homeostasis-inducing emotions which rush in to fill the anxious void. The feeling of a lack of concern, as in apathy, dismisses the opposing cognition; mixed opinions, as in ambivalence, leads to tabling an opposing cognition where it is sequestered and then most likely forgotten.

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[452] Tarvis and Aronson, 147.
[453] Ibid.

Environmental activist and systems theory scholar Joanna Macy argues that apathy "stems from a fear of the despair that lurks beneath the tenor of life-as-usual."[454] Recalling the discussion of ontological trust from chapter three, reflexivity in light of modern technology undermines the confidence we might otherwise have about the information we gather about the world around us. A predictable response to the breakdown of ontological trust is apathy. Macy goes on to say that, "The refusal to feel takes a heavy toll. It not only impoverishes our emotional and sensory life—flowers are dimmer and less fragrant, our loves less ecstatic—but also impedes our capacity to process and respond to information."[455] This resembles depression. The crucial difference, however, is *choice*. *Choosing* to *ignore* feelings of compassion or *divert* them into channels of victim-blaming or zones of disconnection, causes the other positive emotions people are accustomed to feeling to be diminished. Even more damaging and dangerous is that the rationalizations necessary for victim-blaming or disconnection typically requires a much more negative emotion like anger or hate. The desperation to create consonance comes at a high price.

One of the least helpful emotional responses to the suffering of another, in addition to hate and anger of course, is guilt. In his clinical work, psychologist Paul Marcus often has to assist his patients to navigate the emotional morass of guilt and shame:

> One of the least psychoanalytically explored aspects of guilt is the tendency to avoid taking responsibility for the destructive consequences of even well-intentioned actions, at least well-intentioned for the actor. Such a destructive potential is most prevalent and dangerous when one is lodged in a mainly for-the-self mode of being. That is, "the road to hell is paved with good intentions" when

[454] Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self: Courage for Global Justice and Ecological Renewal* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2007), 92.
[455] Ibid., 93.

> one's main reference point and priority is satisfying oneself before the other. (*Being for the Other*, 67)

Marcus' argument connects to what Nussbaum is suggesting: people often act in destructive ways when attempting to redress injury. Marcus is referring to the pathological ways in which a father and husband vacillated between over-protection and indifference with regard to his family due to his guilt for spending too much time on his career. However, it is not too far a leap to equate a father's indifference/apathy or over-protection/control with an individual's own reactions to those situations which demand compassion. These reactions are the result of selfishness and the need to satisfy one's own needs of reducing cognitive dissonance before addressing the needs of others. People often respond to guilt by ignoring the problem, which never fixes it, or wanting to fix the problem *so perfectly* that it will never be a problem again. In either case, the other's moral agency is ultimately destroyed.

John Wall uses the perspective of children, the most vulnerable of the human species, as the context of his work.[456] Wall proposes an ethical "circular" mode where the individual is creative, the aim is narrative expansion, and the obligation is responding to otherness.[457] Wall uses Levinas' concept of the "other" to say "that each 'other' demands that selves and societies respond creatively to them by decentering as far as possible their own horizons of meaning and activity."[458] Imagining the radius of a circle, decentering the center causes the circumference of the circle to shift and increase. This continual decentering destabilizes self-justification. Willingness to be disrupted by the other consequentially makes one's self-image more pliable; a pliable self-image means there is

[456] John Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010).
[457] Ibid., 31.
[458] Ibid., 88.

less dissonance between the cognitions encountered from the encounter with the other. The "disruption of the other" is a challenge to face those parts of the self which would otherwise be abjected.[459] Allowing disruption is the same as allowing the bloom of unconscious material into the conscious mind. Rather than repression or abjection, the *other* within and the *other* without garner attention in a way which makes a compassionate response possible.

There are benefits to be reaped by patiently tending to the needs of the *other* as the *self* is recreated in the process.[460] Wall comments that, "As children particularly show, what is ethically obliged from me is not *no* self but a *new* self."[461] As Wall argues, the moral self is in the perpetual act of decentering the self, however the act of decentering is at minimum inconvenient, uncomfortable, and is thwarted on every side with options which alleviate the perceived need for decentering in the first place. Wall critiques Levinas' engagement of the biblical phrase "here I am" in that it does not include children and that it reduces the "I" to a position of utter passivity.[462] Wall argues that in effective ethical engagement the "I" remains active in a continual relationship with the other. Wall says, "The kind of love a child commands, morally, is not *any* response, but *my* response."[463] *My* response is the co-creative engagement which effectively shapes and sustains the moral agency of the other. Wall maintains that a child calls on others to use their rational self to decenter the self to include them, in all of their vulnerability. A decentered, malleable self is much more apt to think eudomistically. The objective of our ethics needs to be shifted in order to recognize that all *others* are vulnerable and that their

[459] Ibid., 90-91.
[460] Ibid., 91.
[461] Ibid., emphasis in original.
[462] Ibid., 95.
[463] Ibid., 108

request is the same as ours: not just any response, but a response which recognizes the inherent value of the *self*, of the *other*, of the *third*, and of the *eco-third*.

Conclusion

The current branding slogan for Walmart is, "Save Money, Live Better."[464] Walmart has survived numerous impugns including illegal employment practices, accusations of bribing foreign manufacturers, and the discovery of their nefarious expansion into nearly every small town in America in order to capture the consumers in a given area thereby putting independent stores out of business. Despite some continuing questions regarding Walmart's ethical practices, they are the number one retailer in the US with annual sales in 2014 of $343 billion.[465] For the sake of context, the second top retailer in the US is The Kroger Co. (a national grocery company) with annual sales in 2014 of $103 billion. Walmart is effectively ubiquitous across the US. Their retail credo has been established by Walmart's founder, Sam Walton (1918-1992):

> The secret of successful retailing is to *give your customers what they want*. And really, if you think about it from your point of view as a customer, *you want everything*: a wide assortment of good-quality merchandise; the lowest possible prices; guaranteed satisfaction with what you buy; friendly, knowledgeable service; convenient hours; free parking; a pleasant shopping experience. (https://help.walmart.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/6, accessed February 28, 2017, emphasis added)

Walmart abides (and thrives) on the assumption that people know *what they want* and that they *want everything*. Their goal is to convince the consumer that wanting everything is not a bad thing, but rather paying too much makes life worse. "Save Money, Live

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[464] "Here's to the Weeknight." Walmart Grocery. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQfKUQXKj80, accessed February 28, 2017.

[465] Ashley Lutz and Marina Nazario, "The top 100 retailers in America," *BusinessInsider.com*, December 19, 2015, accessed February 28. 2017, http://www.businessinsider.com/top-100-retailers-in-america-2015-12. The sales for 2014 of $343 billion equates $1,058 for each man, woman, and child in the US. Walmart currently has 4,672 stores in the US (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walmart#Walmart_U.S., accessed February 28, 2017).

Better." Basically, you can have your cake and eat it too. In the end, however, there is never enough cake. Walmart has been able to convince people that they are justified in their egotism of wanting more stuff for less money, all the while attributing that desire to an aspiration to do good for one's family and friends. They are attempting to transform egotism into altruism. As Žižek argues, "[t]he true opposite of egotist self-love is not altruism, a concern for common good, but envy, *ressentiment*, which makes me act *against* my own interests….The true evil…involves self-sabotage."[466] But a new pair of shoes does not feel evil or even like self-sabotage, at least not until the *newness* has worn off.

Humans are no more evil now than they were in past generations and centuries, even in the realm of self-sabotage. Rather, as technology has advanced, humans have become much more efficient at systems of extraction and consumption. The fast-pace of advancing technology has exceeded the pace at which questions of moral agency and ethical response can be addressed. As Willis Jenkins argues, "[e]thics is imperiled by the difficulties of interpreting and taking responsibility for the complex and ambiguous story of humanity's social intelligence growing into a geophysical force."[467] Convincing ourselves that we are a collective geophysical force is generally difficult; it is the problem of the commons. Nevertheless, the more our ethical awareness increases, so does the span of situations to which we owe a moral obligation.

The self is formed by the continuous conversation in the individual's mind, shaping self-perception reflexively in conjunction with social forces and the outside world. Because that conversation includes the understandings that *more is better*, or *save*

[466] Žižek, *Violence*, 87.
[467] Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics*, 2.

money, live better, those concepts ultimately become part of who the individual actually is. Their socially constructed reality is thusly shaped. Additionally, the modern mode of self-definition includes the concept that *we are what we have*; that people build the meaning of their lives through finding and adapting phenomenological aspects of their lives in a way that gives *pleasure* and avoids *unpleasure*.

The vulnerability of children as moral agents is eventually replaced through socialization in a consumerist society by a more impervious character, one that is less vulnerable and more self-serving. Is it that our ontological woundedness is calcified in the process of growing older, and that after having inculcated the messages that we are nothing more than so-called empowered consumers? In other words, the malleability of children, their vulnerability to shape and be shaped by the world, is transformed through socialization into durable disconnection. The temporary *rush* of getting the new toy or treat is so distracting that the child is conditioned toward it. Rather than learning to be content, especially when objects lose their appeal or situations become boring or uncomfortable, the child develops an expectation that something novel is just around the corner. The excitement of the *new* combined with learning to consider the tenets of capitalism as worthwhile objectives causes the moral agency of the individual to be mal-formed. Because of our society's veneration of capitalism, we are less likely to be influenced by the cognitive dissonance of our consuming choices. The process of consumerist decision making over time, the "pyramid of choice," allows us to more easily believe that it is not up to us to "love our neighbors."

Cognitive dissonance might be experienced in the acquisition of a consumer object, but the dissonant cognition is dismissed because it contradicts the reality of the

individual. The individual's reality is shaped by an understanding of not only unlimited consumer goods, but of entitlement and perceived need. The dissonance of limitation or even harm caused by a given object is relegated to a category of *not important* due to the competition stemming from the given reality. The concept of the magnitude of dissonance impacts how we view consumerism in two ways. First, it is the cause of a bifurcated consciousness, and second, it is responsible for the collective schizophrenic distortion of the planetary limits of consumption. Bifurcated consciousness is the result of both subtle and overt social cues. As W. E. B. Du Bois and Dorothy Smith conclude: we experience cognitive dissonance as a result of the conflicting cognitions of what we know for ourselves and what is being told to us about ourselves by socialization. Consequently, bifurcation of consciousness is the only defense against total transformation into who *society is telling us we should be*. The result is an endless struggle about who we really are and who Others are around us. There is a failure to truly love one another because we have a defectively formed sense of what love is as well as who is considered to be a worthy Other.

The second aspect of the magnitude of dissonance is the way in which the prevalence of abundance is ubiquitous: it is the foundation of the consumer's reality. The expectation that one can go to a store and basically get whatever they want, and even a few things they didn't realize they wanted, is the underlying premise of the US retail system. Sam Walton built the largest retail company in the US on the adage that the customer *wants everything*. Any inkling that there is a shortage of a given product, e.g., "Tickle Me Elmo," creates a panic among consumers. But shortage is an anomaly. The current mode of product supply in retailing is such that products are available for

purchase at the same time that the desire for said products is being generated by advertising. While cognitive dissonance should be the small "nudge" which would help us to make better consuming decisions, it is nearly impossible to overcome certain aspects of our socialization in a consumerist society. Additionally, the concept of freedom with regard to behavior, i.e., being able to make substantive consuming choices, is tempered by the knowledge that there are several suppositions regarding freedom of choice. There is a kind of terror in imagining the world to be different than what one assumes is true, and therefore freedom is a metacognition which essentially exists in theory, but not in practice. Moreover, the function of capitalism essentially constricts the open space required for making difficult decisions through advertising's constant attack on the consumer's self-image.

In the construction of the self, there emerges the concept of the Other. Similar to the unconscious mind of the individual, the Other cannot be abjected as it is constitutive of the self. Giving *welcome* to the Other is engaging in radical hospitality. Regrettably, we often mistake *real* hospitality with the giving of consumer goods, e.g., Christmas and birthdays.[468] The welcome of the Other also includes the *Others* of that other, i.e., the third. The third is different than the neighbor I welcome, but is at the same time a neighbor. Embracing the other and the third also means extending that hospitality to the

[468] As anecdotal observations, I have received gifts from several Korean friends which are impeccably wrapped but the gift itself is relatively inexpensive. It impressed upon me the thoughtfulness of those people. Conversely, I was at a birthday party for the child of a friend who was turning seven years old. The gifts presented were lavishly wrapped in gift bags or with paper and ribbon. My gift was not wrapped as I believe that wrapping paper, etc., is a waste of both money and resources. In a conversation with one of the other adults who noticed my unwrapped gift I said, "What does [she] care whether it's wrapped? She's still surprised and still happy to have the gift. Plus, I spent more money on the gift because I didn't have to buy wrapping paper." I give these two examples to illustrate the ways in which gifts, while a function of hospitality, are culturally construed to represent generosity and care. My own counter-cultural refusal to wrap gifts might not catch on, but it is one way I can work against the consumerist edict regarding how gifts should be given.

environment of those neighbors, the *eco-third*. This expands the circle of responsibility, in an ethical and moral sense, to Earth. There is co-creativeness in engaging the other—they are helping us, necessitating the continued action of our own self-creation—such that if we don't engage the other, the third, and the eco-third, we are ultimately less than we could and should be.

Compassion is the call to love the neighbor, but ontological woundedness makes responding to that call difficult. The inherent separation felt in the self is nearly impossible to overcome. In assessing a call for compassion, we judge such a call by its seriousness, the non-fault of the victim(s), whether we can imagine ourselves in a similar situation, and on a eudemonistical level whether *those people* are *my people*. A compassionate response is often thwarted by cognitive dissonance, even if we have been similarly victimized. In other words, it matters not where the individuals find themselves in a given situation, they will most often minimize their moral culpability as a perpetrator of violence or will maximize their blamelessness as a victim.

In the wake of calls for compassion, apathy rushes in to facilitate the reduction of dissonance. That is to say, apathy naturally mutes the dissonant cognition, which in the case of consumerism, comes in the form of learning that consumer products are causing harm to the other, the third, and the eco-third. Apathy acts as a cancer, transforming the impetus for compassion into victim blaming and indifference. Overcoming issues related to the cognitive dissonance and apathy of consumerism might begin with an adaptation of the Buddhist greeting, "Namaste." Namaste is the acknowledgement of the divine spark in the other. In the reality of modern consumerism, perhaps the greeting should be, "The ontological woundedness in me recognizes the ontological woundedness in you." The

recognition of our own brokenness and bifurcation could redirect our reaction to calls for compassion away from victim-blaming and apathy.

In considering the moral agency of consumers and the ethical response to those who/which are harmed by that consumption, we should ask: What does compassionate consuming look like? Is there even such a thing? Or, is it just a mythical hybrid of two incongruent ideologies? Chapter five will explore some of the antidotes offered by philosophers, ethicists, economists, and sociologists.

Now that you're *here, the word of the Lorax seems*
perfectly clear. UNLESS someone like you cares
a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not.
~ Dr. Seuss's The Lorax

V. Conclusion

In setting forth the final chapter of this project, I feel the need to disclose that I find myself with very little hope in simplistic, surface-level, or partial answers to the crisis created by consumerism. If over 150 years ago, Karl Marx, the proverbial father of socialism, cannot bring himself to pay a tailor to make a pair of trousers, but instead buys them from a bourgeois haberdasher, then how can I have hope in the face of modern global market capitalism and manic consumerism? The current US presidential administration is moving at a break-neck speed to roll-back environmental protections, to institute lower standards for manufacturing, pass tax breaks for the rich, and increase military spending in order to, in their opinion, boost the economy. Despite the continued deification of the economy, where the almighty dollar is the interminable ruler, it is clear we need to utilize practices that are more sustainable.[469] The current scholarship on the dominant consumerist ethos is divided between recounting the need for hope, and even the momentary triumph of optimism over despair and the incremental successes of moderation and generosity over greed and voracity[470] and the sounding of the alarms of the ultimate destruction of the planet because of an unwavering adherence to the tenets of

[469] See, *inter alia*, Robert H. Nelson, *The New Holy Wars: Economic Religion Versus Environmental Religion in Contemporary America* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010); Larry Witham, *Marketplace of the Gods: How Economics Explains Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2010); and Robert B. Reich, *Beyond Outrage: What Has Gone Wrong with Our Economy and Our Democracy, and How to Fix It* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012).
[470] Of particular note is Paul Hawken's *Blessed Unrest* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), Sarah McFarland Taylor's *Green Sisters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), and Joanna Macy's *World as Lover, World as Self: Courage for Global Justice and Ecological Renewal* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2007). I find it interesting that all of these books were published the same year.

global market capitalism.[471] In retrospect, I imagined the scope of this project to be one of analyzing the deeper problems leading to consumerism and then presenting a solution, albeit a small or partial solution. Of course, any solution offered in a single dissertation or book will be partial as systemic consumerism is a foundational piece of Western culture and a transformational edict being emulated across much of the developing world. In order to avoid immobilizing capitulation we must take the admonition of the Once-ler to heart: *I am here and I care a whole awful lot*.[472]

Stepping into this concluding chapter, I recognize that the contextual metaphysics of Western society is integral in understanding this current crisis. There are consumer desires, even if they are generated by advertisements or other media, which will not be easily denied. The seductive lure of Cartesian duality and Baconian empiricism has given license to westernized societies to transform all that the world has to offer into a commodity.[473] Consequently, rather than proposing a solution to consumerism akin to *just consume less*, I believe that it is necessary to have a radical overhaul of the metaphysical categories which both support and perpetuate consumerism. I am aware that this is not a simple task nor will it provide instantaneous results.

The system of global market capitalism is designed to propagate a species, as it were, of consumers. It is apparently quite successful. In the world of consumerism, most people are seeking a true nature of the self, unhindered by the strains of being a

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[471] See Joel Bakan, *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power* (New York: Free Press, a division of Simon & Schuster Inc., 2004); Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 2014); Chellis Glendinning, *Off the Map: An Expedition Deep into Empire and the Global Economy* (British Columbia: New Society Publishers, 2002); and Donella H. Meadows, Jørgen Randers, Dennis L. Meadows, *Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2004).

[472] Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax*, (New York: Random House, 1971). The Once-ler is the narrator of the story and the receiver of the story is drawn as a small boy, although I see the boy as just a placeholder for the reader.

[473] David W. Orr, "Love It or Lose It: The Coming Biophilia Revolution", in *The Biolphilia Hypothesis*, ed. Stephen R. Kellert and Edward O. Wilson, (Washington, DC: A Shearwater Book/Island Press, 1993), 418.

consumer. Robert Corrington's conception of involution is particularly useful as a concept of hope in that involution "…works internally to open up spaces for semiotic growth within the individual organism, and sometimes, under the right conditions, the social self."[474] Involution is a phenomenological description of those specific breaks or shifts in awareness where the *self* encounters the spiritual (or what might be recognized as a deity) creating an awakening and ultimately a shift in selfhood.[475] There are prospects of transforming the concepts of ethics, justice, and love from abstractions to verbs which can be used to conceptualize the transformation of self's need for consumption.

A Useful Metaphor

The Once-ler, the greedy and impetuous main character in Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax*, attempts to make restitution for the utter destruction of an entire ecosystem by presenting the last seed of the Truffula Tree to his confessor.[476] Even though *The Lorax* is categorized as children's literature, it is addressing issues of rampant manufacturing and environmental destruction in the late 1960s. Strangely enough, this is still the situation in which we find ourselves today. Although our planet has not been utterly destroyed, there are significant shifts which have ruined ecosystems and pushed some species to extinction.[477] We are directly implicated in this destruction. In the words of journalist and

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[474] Robert S. Corrington, *Nature's Sublime: An Essay in Aesthetic Naturalism*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), 114.
[475] Ibid., 115.
[476] Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax*.
[477] In June 2016, it was reported that the first extinction of mammalian species due to global climate change had occurred. The Bramble Cay melomys was a small mouse-like animal which was found on only one small island of the Torres Strait of the Great Barrier Reef. The ecological niche of the tiny mammal has been overtaken by rising sea levels which apparently drowned the vegetative undergrowth of their habitat. Brian Clark Howard, "First Mammal Species Goes Extinct Due to Climate Change," *NationalGeographic.com*, http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/06/first-mammal-extinct-climate-change-bramble-cay-melomys/, June 14, 2016, accessed March 9, 2017.

environmental activist Elizabeth Kolbert, "If you want to think about why humans are so dangerous to other species, you can picture a poacher in Africa carrying an AK-47 or a logger in the Amazon gripping an ax, or, better still, you can picture yourself, holding a book in your lap."[478] Picturing ourselves holding books can be easily dismissed, especially if the books are printed on recycled paper and are written about important topics. But can this high moral ground be extended to everything we consume? Do we, or can we, parse-out every aspect of an object to address the ethical questions related to it? Maybe this is why most people are so accepting of the obscuring of extraction, production, distribution, consumption, and disposal. It is all too much. It is more pleasurable, hence avoiding *unpleasure,* to think it is all an effortless process, i.e., magic.

In *The Lorax,* it is important to note that the consumers, those who purchased and used the Thneeds created by the Once-ler, are not implicated by Seuss. This is also the failing of Marx: to allow the consumer to be absolved of their responsibility as participants in a capitalist system.[479] The Once-ler was merely taking advantage of the magical properties of the Truffula Trees, and getting rich in the process. The Once-ler does not change his basic intention: The Boy has to pay to hear the story of confession of how he destroyed the ecosystem of the Truffula Trees and how the Lorax disappeared as a consequence.

When the Once-ler "discovered" the Truffula Trees, he was overcome with joy.[480] The Once-ler's joy, and perhaps the desire for money, caused the rapacious use of the

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[478] Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*, (New York: Picador Books, a division of Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 2014), 266.
[479] See chapter two herein. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1* (trans. Ben Fowkes, New York: Penguin Books, 1867/1976/1990), 125.
[480] The word discovered is in quotation marks to draw attention to the fact that it is the same kind of "discovery" of an existing object (or subject) which is turned into a resource by The Market. Colonial and

Truffula Trees. The Once-ler says, "I meant no harm. I most truly did not."[481] The intentionality of harm notwithstanding, the Once-ler "had to grow [the business] bigger."[482] The Once-ler went right on "biggering…selling more Thneeds."[483] The Lorax, who speaks for the trees, implores the Once-ler to halt production because of its destructive aspects. The Once-ler refuses because he [*sic*] is convinced that everyone needs a Thneed.[484] The production of Thneeds ends only after the very last Truffula Tree is chopped down.

Relating the properties of extraction, production, distribution, consumption, and disposal of Thneeds to this discussion, while somewhat oversimplified, illustrates how the capitalist system generates the consumer while at the same time generating the product to sell to the consumer. The chopping of the Truffula Trees, the knitting of the Thneeds, and the waste created by the production of the Thneeds happens outside of the customer's purview. The first customer to purchase the first Thneed appeared as if by magic, just as is the case with any product offered for sale. The second through the millionth customer to purchase a Thneed were victims, in a certain way, of the advertising of the Once-ler which claims that "everyone needs a Thneed." The moral agency of those customers is obliterated by the imposition of that claim. Those customers are enmeshed in a complex reflexivity where their own identity is contingent upon whether they have a Thneed. They know about Thneeds because their friends have them and because they are being advertised around town by the distributors of Thneeds. They

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neocolonial attitudes toward the "discovery" of natural resources and laborers in "discovered" lands function here.

[481] *The Lorax*, 323.

[482] Ibid.

[483] Ibid.

[484] The gender of the Once-ler is never revealed.

are led to believe that there is an endless (or hyper) supply of *the one thing everyone needs*.

The fact that Thneed production is destroying an ecosystem is not known to the customers, but we are left to wonder that if they knew, would they have altered their desire-driven behavior? The beseeching of the Lorax does nothing to hamper the Once-ler's zeal for making even more Thneeds. Can it be assumed that if customers ran out before the Truffula Trees were all chopped down that the Once-ler would stop production? As has been discussed, consumer choice, i.e., buying or not buying a particular product, has some impact, but it is neither lasting nor powerful enough to effect significant change in global market capitalism. A timely example of consumer choice in global market capitalism is the crisis of peak oil. The oil industry knows that there is a finite amount of crude oil which can be extracted. Rather than shifting completely to alternative energy industries, oil companies are working to extract fossil fuels in increasingly dangerous and harmful ways, e.g., hydraulic fracturing and tar sands. Even though consumers can choose to buy/use more fuel-efficient vehicles, there are a multitude of reasons for car choice, not the least of which is trust in a particular car manufacturer. Inefficient cars will still be a first choice for some people until that option no longer exists. Apparently, when the Thneeds ran out people were forced to move on to another option.

The Consumerism Backlash

As has been discussed, it is impossible to discern which consumer objects are acquired, used, and discarded for sustenance purposes and which are superfluous or simply not necessary. It is impossible to predict, ahead of time and with any level of

accuracy, which of those things can be *not* consumed and the individual to still feel nurtured, affirmed, and self-actualized. Dichotomously, there is the antithesis of desire which is abjection. There is some theory, such as what Heinz Kohut and D. W. Winnicott say about transitional objects, that desire is a natural outgrowth of curiosity and necessary for learning, but how can that be measured in any real way? Additionally, there is the problem of repressing desire (either through external forces such as poverty, or internal forces such as seeming self-control). Repressed desire for consumer objects, like all other repression, cannot be sustained. Satisfaction of desire is eventually demanded, over and against ostensive controls. In this conflict, the individual's moral agency struggles for sure footing. The *ought* of consuming less is squelched by the desire *to be* the one who is satisfied.

In examining the stratified reality of classes and subcultures across the US, there is evidence that as much as people might want to exercise restraint there is a push toward *getting my share*. Some people are unwilling to allow the systems of global capitalism to not swing in their direction, to their benefit. This idealism of eventual benefit is the central nugget of the American Dream: if I work hard enough, I can achieve my "dreams," which almost always involves the benefit of material pleasures. Upon reflection, Heinrich Heine's saying "that one should value above everything else 'freedom, equality, and crab soup,'" links esoteric ideals of equality and freedom with material pleasures, like crab soup.[485] Heine is arguing that it is the small pleasures of life which sustain relatively pleasant human behavior and social interaction. The "purity of the principle" that ideals like freedom and equality can be sustained is in fact sustained

[485] Heine is quoted by Žižek without citation. Slavoj Žižek, *Event: A Philosophical Journey through a Concept* [Brooklyn: Melville House, 2014(b)], 33-34.

by the particularity (and quality) of the crab soup.[486] It is the small things which preserve the larger social structures. This exhortation by Heine starts to lose its shine when it is realized that there are radically different levels in the quality of crab soup. The crab soup of one social class is not the same as another; and some classes might not even have access to crab soup. The very thing which is meant to define and hold social structures in their place, i.e., crab soup, is the very thing which instigates their undoing.

The material pleasure of something like crab soup, when applied equally, inures to the benefit of the whole society. The epiphany of inequity comes in the consideration of Aristotle's adage, as discussed in chapter two, that "there is nothing more unequal than the equal treatment of unequals."[487] The machinations of capitalism are such that the advantages are amplified and the disadvantages are akin to a millstone around one's neck. The ideals of freedom and equality are "true" in the sense that of course the individual is free to engage in the market and exchange their labor for wages, but they are still forced to sell their labor in order to survive.[488] The complicating factor is that the proletariat has become awakened to this reality, but rather than try to overthrow the bourgeois, they want to become the bourgeois.[489] The proletariat knows there is crab soup, actually the best crab soup, and rather than create a situation of labor and production where everyone gets maybe not crab soup but some other kind of soup, they instead want the best crab soup for themselves. Without great crab soup they feel as if the American Dream, as projected by and through the capitalist system, has somehow failed them. Consequently,

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[486] Ibid., 34.
[487] Aristotle is quoted by David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's* Capital (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2010), 290.
[488] Ibid.
[489] I am using Marx's generalizing terms in order to simply demarcate the difference between the "haves" and the "have nots."

the fabric of society is pulled and stretched resulting in divisions and strife which makes evident the already entrenched class system.

In the milieu of striving after possessions, and everything those possessions represent, issues of the morality of consumerism are pushed back into the background for the simple reason that an ethical response to issues of consumerism would ultimately affect how I consume. I would be forced to choose against consuming, forced to choose against participating in the capitalist economy, the result of which would endanger my social and physical self. Because of the presupposition that possessions define one as *being a better, more loved person* is socially constructed, making a choice against consuming is antithetical to one's own good. This works on a larger scale because with the hope of acquiring wealth (and hence possessions) people are even less motivated to protest the rights of the privileged. Any movement toward protecting the lower and middle classes means accepting the fact that the capitalist economy creates the stratification of classes. It also means that people can cling to notions that the lower classes are guilty of sloth while holding the illusion that their own "blessing" of economic boon is just around the corner.

The imperialistic oppression in the current mode of capitalism in the US has created contention within the lower and middle classes. People who have been denied consumer goods because of the restraints of poverty or other impediments will fight to get what they want. People who are already in a position of privilege may try to consume less or consume "green" products, but that is an option for them only because of their relative privilege. There are those others who will remain militantly ignorant of the impact of their consumption out of fear or simply because they cannot imagine not using

consumables such as hand sanitizer and paper towels. All three of these reactions of consumers make it possible for people in positions of power, i.e., those who own the means of production to use a Marxian phrase, to do whatever it takes to grab the money and run. The "fresh rounds of primitive accumulation" within the current capitalist economy continues to separate people from the means to provide for themselves and continues to condemn them to a life in which their labor is exchanged for a consumable object for someone else's profit.[490] The injury added to this insult is that the environment is destroyed in the process.

In consideration of the above, the connections and similarities between consumerism and racism and sexism in the US become more apparent. The dominant forces create the social structures which perpetuate a given *ism*. Ethical categories are distorted through moral mal-formation; prejudices are reinforced due to the functions of cognitive dissonance; and individual consciousness is bifurcated or fractured as a result of the competing messages of the external versus the internal self. Similar to racism and sexism, consumerism adapts and morphs into a new iteration which defies efforts to resist its nefarious pressures to conform.

Involution and Love

As a means of a partial solution to the problem of consumerism, let us turn to the concepts of involution and love. In the realm of human physiology involution is defined as the shrinking of an organ due to age or when the organ is no longer useful. In the realm of philosophy, specifically aesthetic naturalism, involution is contrasted with evolution in that evolution is the process of adaptation of the organism to its ecological niche while

[490] David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's* Capital (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2010), 305.

involution is the process of opening new vistas of semiotic development.[491] Robert Corrington describes involution as:

> The moment of involution is felt to be a potency of an opening that has its sources in something larger than human, something divine or religious. The ingression is felt to be of a true sacred power that opens out the evolutionary matrix to an opening and a clearing that creates a space for a different kind of adaptation for the organism. (115)

Like the withering of an unused organ, part of the self is set aside, either unknowingly or through significant effort, the result of which is the experience of an ingression. What follows is an adaptation within the organism which allows for the expansion of semiotics. Corrington describes this process: "Rather [than some form of supernatural energy], [involution] is like a pulsation or microburst of pure expanding energy that cracks encrusted semiotic shells and clears a space for the rapid unfolding of novel semiosis."[492] One example of an experience of involution is the transformation of someone who falls in love. The experience of that other person is such that previously held beliefs and understandings are utterly transformed. The condition of being in love alters both self-perception and the perception of the outside world. Falling in love (or being in love) is, of course, not limited to human-to-human relationships.

Eco-philosopher Joanna Macy paints eloquent, poetic insights of what it means to transform the vision of how we see the world from classically engrained metaphorical images of the world as a battleground, i.e., a fight between good and evil, and the world as a trap, i.e., like a prison where escape is the goal.[493] Macy speaks to the chasm most humans experience between themselves and the planet due to these damaging

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[491] Corrington, *Nature's Sublime*, 114.
[492] Corrington, *Nature's Self*, 122.
[493] Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self: Courage for Global Justice and Ecological Renewal* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2007), 19-22.

epistemological tropes. In terms of ecstatic naturalism, this chasm can be understood in terms of the ontological wound. A third concept which Macy proposes is to see the world as a lover, as "an essential and life-giving partner," where even the atoms and the cosmos perform "a dance of mutual allurement."[494] Through the vision of world as lover, the individual's imagination draws them into recognizing that each and every observation of the world is recognized as an "erotic impulse" from the world toward the individual in an ongoing courtship and wooing.[495] From the evolving metaphor of seeing the world as a lover, Macy offers a fourth and final view and that is seeing the world as self.[496] There is an elegant, teleological progression from lover to oneness: "Just as lovers seek union, we are apt, when we fall in love with our world, to fall into oneness with it as well. We begin to see the world as ourselves."[497] The experience of oneness with the world does not somehow subsume or erase the self as an individual, but rather in our experience of oneness with the world, the world comes to know itself.[498]

In order to see the world as lover and as self, older and maladaptive traits and epistemologies must be shed. This shedding opens the self to the prospects of accelerated "spiritual evolution."[499] The instances of involution are rare due to the fact that it requires "enough surplus energy and free semiotic space for a quickening of evolutionary possibilities on the *spiritual* level."[500] The impediment for this required energy and space is that of ontological woundedness, or as Macy argues it is the pernicious worldviews of

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[494] Ibid., 23.
[495] Ibid., 27.
[496] Ibid.
[497] Ibid.
[498] Ibid., 28.
[499] Corrington, *Nature's Subline*, 120.
[500] Ibid., italics in the original.

western development which impair the ontology of the individual.[501] But once the obstruction is overcome, involution creates new semiosis which affects the material reality. As Corrington writes: "Involution can be indirectly adaptive [in an evolutionary sense] when the spiritual level arches backwards as it were and affects more material conditions of the organism."[502] There is an experience of euphoria when encountering another on a deep level, even when that other is the planet itself. In that experience of true connection, there is a bridging or filling of the ontological wound. What is transformative is that the material conditions are affected by involution; the self is experienced as *a oneness* with the world. Involution is such a powerful phenomenological experience that are all things perceived as better. Previous semiotic categories are shifted or undone such that the individual is newly empowered to advocate on behalf of all *Other* (in the created order), loving that Other/Neighbor as oneself.

The problem is that involution is rare. Involution is impeded by the fact that, as Corrington argues, "[m]ost selves have little or no room to experience these pulsations or microbursts because they are totally ensnared in practical and narcissistic tasks."[503] The category of practical tasks encompasses the *everydayness* of things ranging from showering to driving to falling asleep at night, things that might otherwise be considered mindless. Narcissistic tasks, on the other hand, have a particularly selfish and self-serving quality to them. The problem is that consumerism is a combination of the practical and narcissistic; consumerism is the practical task of buying food and clothing, and it is the narcissistic experience of attempting to acquire love and affirmation from consumable objects. One cannot hope to experience involution when one's whole life is a series of

[501] Macy, 28.
[502] Ibid.
[503] Ibid., 122.

events and behaviors which are antithetical to the process of growth through reconstruction of both semiotic categories and social and emotional constructs. This is not to say that the responsibility for experiencing involution lies at the feet of the individual. Rather, there are some individuals who either possess or are able to acquire a kind of emotional privilege. There are some who are at an advantage with regard to involution. The narcissist is at a psychological and sociological disadvantage and is therefore unlikely to ever experience involution. There are varying degrees of ontological woundedness or epistemological conditions which, similar to narcissism, are an impediment to the experience of involution.

As has been discussed, ontological woundedness finds its genesis at birth. As the child develops into adolescence and then into adulthood, there are varying degrees of developmental stages wherein the breadth and depth of the ontological wound is experienced.[504] This is to say that there are particular developmental experiences, such as puberty and middle age, as well as life experiences, e.g., the premature death of a parent or the death of a child, where people are more likely to feel the intense separation and loss of connection with others. In these developmental stages and successful navigation of challenging events, an individual experiences a range of emotional phases, which in a relatively healthy person are beneficial to both the self and to others. As discussed in chapter three, the individual employs various coping mechanisms in order to address their own ontological woundedness. A danger is that it is common to pathologically adapt behaviors and attitudes of previous developmental phases, sometimes called regression.

In the case of healthy "mirroring" of adults as idealized self-objects, as discussed in chapter three, Heinz Kohut theorizes that some psychic structures are co-operational in

[504] See chapter three for discussion of ontological woundedness.

that previous phases exist alongside more "mature" phases. For example, Kohut argues that babies have what he calls "primary" or "original narcissism" which is likened to the baby's own understanding of their omnipotence—the baby cries and they get fed/changed/held—the parent/caregiver is seen as an extension of themselves.[505] Kohut theorizes that as the child grows, this narcissism turns into self-esteem, however the individual's self-esteem carries with it an "imprint of the relevant characteristics and attitudes of the imagoes…of the persons against whom the child's grandiose self had been reflected or whom the child had accepted as extensions of [their] own greatness."[506] In Kohut's opinion, "the old, limitless narcissism functions alongside with the new, tamed, and realistic structures."[507] Essentially, there are two *selves* operating within the individual: one that is narcissistic and one that is imbued with self-esteem. In many ways, whichever of the two receives recompense for their interactions with the outside world is the *self* which typically prevails. Unfortunately, negative recompense is still a reward.

From another perspective, some researchers argue that self-esteem by itself devolves into narcissism because self-esteem is the product of previous competencies.[508] When an individual's self-esteem is bolstered through positive comments without evidence of better actual performance, that individual tends to perform worse but surprisingly feels better about their bad performance.[509] In their analysis of human

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[505] Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971/2009), 107-8.
[506] Ibid., 108.
[507] Ibid.
[508] Roy F. Baumeister and John Tierney, *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 190.
[509] Donelson R. Forsyth, *et al*. "Attempting to Improve the Academic Performance of Struggling College Students by Bolstering Their Self-Esteem: An Intervention that Backfired." *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 26, no. 4 (2007): 447-459.

willpower, Roy Baumeister and John Tierney cite the phenomenon of the fact that IQ does not account for success, especially in specialized professional jobs like doctors and lawyers.[510] In their evaluation, they turn to a few notable experiences by Asian-Americans where the building of self-esteem was not a function of the parents affirming the child as "good" or "capable." Rather, the parents in these examples taught delayed gratification which resulted in self-control and gave rewards which were designed to motivate their children toward focused achievement.[511] Their achievement results in self-confidence which, in turn, reinforces their appreciation of delayed gratification and self-control. Self-confidence is what is required for achievement which then results in self-esteem. Unfortunately, the literature in this area tends to conflate self-esteem (defined as the approval of the self, which is only slightly different from narcissism which is the exclusionary love of self) with self-confidence (defined as assurance of one's abilities). This conflation could be what led researchers to incorrectly hypothesize that boosting a student's self-esteem would result in better grades.[512]

In the realm of consumerism, consumption is a function of a pathological shortcut to artificial self-esteem. The understanding of "the love of self" is taken as license to reward the self with tangible forms of "love" such as new shoes. Self-control in a consumerist society is undermined because there is really no impetus for delayed gratification. If anything, consumerism is the very opposite of delay, there is no requirement for self-control. Consequently, without self-control, self-confidence suffers.

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[510] Op. cit., 194-95

[511] Ibid., 195-97. Baumeister and Tierney are citing, *inter alia*, James R. Flynn, *Asian Americans: Achievement Beyond IQ* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1991), and Soo Kim Abboud and Jane Kim, *Top of the Class: How Asian Parents Raise High Achievers – and How You Can Too* (New York: Berkley Books, 2005).

[512] Forsyth, et al.

The second element of the problem created by consumerism is that issues of self-esteem are constantly aroused by advertisements, television shows, and movies. When the self is regarded against the *ideal* proffered by the media, one's self-approval, self-admiration, or self-appreciation (all synonyms for esteem), the self is found to be lacking. The requisite approval of the self (by the self) means that the self is attaining a given criteria or benchmark. According to the prescription offered by US society, when we approve of ourselves, or *esteem ourselves*, it shows in the way we consume; consumption automatically requires a refusal to delay gratification and ultimately a decrease in self-confidence leading to a reduced chance that we will achieve our larger life goals. Because the message is that we need to consume to feel better about ourselves, it becomes the prevailing acted-upon message. The self's original narcissism is being accommodated and reinvigorated by consumerism over and against the more "tamed, realistic structures" of a healthy self-image.

One of the critical required elements for involution is what I am calling love. In the words of psychoanalyst Erich Fromm, love is "the answer to the problem of human existence."[513] Seems simple enough, on the surface. Upon further investigation, we discover that love is not a simple answer because love in its truest sense is paradoxical. Just as ethics and justice contain elements of hatred, i.e., hate what is evil, corrupt, or immoral, love contains much deeper notions which do not fit neatly into *feel-good* categories. John Wall says that love imbues an "infinite creative tension" in the self/other relationship.[514] However, is there then a tendency to "snap-back" into place, like a rubber band, when one is stretched by creative tension? In other words, if we are uncomfortable

[513] Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (Marion Hausner Pauck, trans. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 1956/2006), 7.
[514] Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood*, 108.

with the reflexive relationship with a self-object, i.e., the imago parental caregiver, we have the option to withdraw from engaging that other. Recalling the discussion in chapter three, when an individual engages a more demanding self-object, one which would require the individual to adjust their self, the path of least resistance is typically chosen. There is seemingly too much anxiety generated by the prospect of engaging the new.[515]

In addition to anxiety, the experience of engaging fully with the planet often leads to profound grief. In addressing the profound issue of grief, Joanna Macy writes that the individual can be overcome with profound anguish when the destruction of the biosphere reaches the conscious mind.[516] From Macy's perspective, the breaking open of the heart in response to the devastating practices inflicted upon the world is when "there will be room to heal."[517] She writes that "[p]lanentary anguish lifts us onto another systemic level where we open to collective experience. It enables us to recognize our profound interconnectedness with all beings."[518] I equate this kind of breaking open or empathic heartbreak with the breaking open of semiotic closure which enables involution. The innate involutionary response of empathy directed toward the planet turns then to self-empathy in the relational selfhood in the oneness of the planetary/individual.

The problem is that there is confusion between the love of self, i.e., pathological narcissism, with love as an active engagement with the world and others. As Fromm argues, people are more concerned with making themselves lovable rather than engaging in love as an act of self-efficacy.[519] Love, in its unadulterated form, should be a motivating factor for creating a psychic clearing within the self such that involution is

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[515] Corrington, *Nature's Sublime*, 63.
[516] Macy, *World as Lover*, 151.
[517] Ibid., 152.
[518] Ibid., 152.
[519] Fromm, 1.

possible. (It is also possible that psychic clearing can be created by grief.) In the space created, there is a modification of the internal monologue of the self where one is able to move to a psychic space where the self can be defined in terms of oneness with the planet and where self-control and self-confidence is sought after rather than seeking after self-esteem.

Like the conflated meaning of self-esteem, it is important to address the conflated meaning of *love.* Erich Fromm is not alone in his argument that love is what is needed, but the approach to demonstrating love is what is lacking. Popular culture can be blamed for much of the misunderstanding. There are many damning clichés and grossly distorted definitions under which love suffers. *Love makes the world go round,* only metaphorically. *All you need is love,* as proclaimed the Beatles is a nice thought but it won't pay the rent. One can love chocolate, love a sale at Target, or love their spouse. The same word is often conflated in meaning. Consequently, cynicism is a natural reaction to a discussion of love as a motivational process. This does not mean that people are unable to discern the difference in the types of love, i.e., between loving their car and loving their mother. Too often, ideas of love and the resulting behaviors are not adequately distinguished from each other resulting in misunderstandings of the value of a healthy love of self and self-confidence. Concepts of love often conflict with notions of "rugged individualism" (e.g., I am tough, I don't need love) and stereotypes of the way people should express love (e.g., images of romance in media that dictate dominant and submissive roles, and material goods as expressions of love). This has a complicating effect on the variety of tools we have in our emotional toolbox when we find ourselves confronted by the suffering of another or with the suffering of the planet.

If compassion or empathy is our primary emotion, what will be our secondary emotion? As evidenced by the discussion above, there is a significant chance that our secondary reaction will not be love, especially when habitually negative emotional patterns are very difficult to break. As discussed in chapter four, compassion and empathy are usually fleeting emotional responses. In order to act on those emotions, the individual has to overcome pessimistic assumptions of how others might deserve their suffering due to sloth or circumstance. Redefining love as a verb rather than an emotion is necessary for moral action.

Martha Nussbaum asserts the need for a polyamorous love.[520] Nussbaum defines polyamory as all forms of love between people, between people and non-people (animals), and between people and country (patriotism as opposed to nationalism). "How much greater is this variety in a nation—and yet all are forms of love, and all efficacious, in different ways, in prompting cooperative and unselfish behavior."[521] Nussbaum's argument here is supported by the psychological research and philosophical theory cited herein as well as her previous work in which she deconstructs the ethics of the "social contact."[522] The social contract in the US is essentially the understanding that political society values the worth of persons as equal and that each participates in reciprocity. But this is limited in our political society to those with able bodies (as opposed to those with disabilities), acceptable gender (as opposed to women), acceptable race, class, and religious persuasion. Nussbaum argues that the issues of justice in the US are the result of

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[520] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013).
[521] Ibid., 382. Nussbaum's polyamorous love could easily be extended to the natural world. Nussbaum is already extending love as a form of political justice to animals, so the stretch to include the rest of the created order is not too taxing.
[522] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

the inequitable social contract which does not include all of its citizens. She maintains that compassion is fundamental to the necessary shift of consciousness, i.e., involution. Nussbaum imagines a new kind of citizen acting out of a place of compassion and connectedness: "Thus, when other people suffer capability failure, the citizen I imagine will not simply feel the sentiments required by moral impartiality, viewed as a constraint on her own pursuit of self-interest. Instead, she will feel compassion for them *as part of her own good.*"[523] The tenor of Nussbaum's argument is slightly different than Macy's, but the result is the same: a call for compassion from both the other and the planet is met with action-oriented love as a means of ultimately nourishing the self. In attempting to answer Levinas's question of "what do I have to do with justice?" we find that engaging the other should originate from a place where love functions individually and collective as a means of engagement in compassionate response.

"Justice is What Love Looks Like in Public"

Philosopher and political agitator Cornell West writes in his autobiography that the reason he started studying philosophy is because he wanted to analyze theories and systems of justice. He concludes that "justice is what love looks like in public."[524] How I publicly employ the ideal of love is what justice is. How actively and effectively I am able to accomplish this task is an issue of both consciousness, e.g., the oneness I feel with others and the planet, as well as my ability to maintain a particular course of action, e.g., exercising my willpower over and against forces opposing justice. In the most tangible ways, justice looks like love when laws and systems promote the wellbeing of all persons, not just citizens, and all nature, not just the parts of the natural world which

[523] Ibid., 91, emphasis in original.
[524] Cite.

garner warm and fuzzy feelings. In the US, it is obvious that we have not quite arrived at a place of true justice. Most laws in the US privilege heteronormative, Christian, white, upper class humans. While there are exceptions to this statement, those exceptions are hard-won, e.g., the Fourteenth Amendment and Title IX, and are not always applied evenly across individual states and geographic areas.

There is often a false security in believing that justice is being enacted or carried out. Like love, justice suffers under conflated and distorted meaning, amalgamating partial concepts of democracy and liberty with other understandings of the right to the pursuit of happiness. Marketing mogul Victor Lebow entwined concepts of "freedom and democracy," "love of liberty," and the American "way of life" with so-called free-market capitalism.[525] Lebow is hardly the only one to draw a correlation between ideals of patriotism and capitalism; for most, capitalism is regularly viewed as a right guaranteed by democracy. The representative democracy of the US is sometimes misconstrued for three main reasons. First, the reality of "one person one vote" functions inadequately because a significant number of people do not vote.[526] Second, once a person is elected to a particular house of government, they are pressured by the influence of their political party even if a particular piece of legislation goes against the best interests of their constituents. Third, and most relevant to this discussion, is the influence of lobbying efforts over elected officials. The promise of financial support from lobbying groups for reelection campaign efforts is more times than not the deciding factor in legislative vote casting. This is just one way of how capitalism directly affects our democracy. There are global capitalistic structures whose power comes to bear on both federal and local

[525] Victor Lebow. "Our Changing Channels of Distribution," *Journal of Marketing*, 13 no. 1 (1948): 12-22.
[526] Approximately 52% of the people registered to vote voted in the last presidential election.

governments in the US. As Cynthia Moe-Lobeda argues: "Globalization removes from more or less democratically constituted and accountable political bodies the power to influence decisions that shape common life and places that power into the hands of relatively few unaccountable economic players."[527] The systems to hold these players accountable exist in the form of government regulations but many of those are subverted through alternative channels of trade agreements and lobbying. When assessing justice as enacted and enforced through the capitalist democracy of the US, it is not difficult to see how concepts of justice are confused and even cynically dismissed.

Not all is lost. There can be justice in the way in which public spaces are treated. In research sponsored by the USDA Forest Service, Robert Sommer discovered surprising details about how people identify with their natural environment and how this shapes their sense of self.[528] The respondents were quite emotive about the trees in their neighborhoods or on their property, and used personal pronouns and terms of endearment when commenting on "their" trees.[529] Clearly, the trees are a significant part of the environs, receiving care and attention from humans in a manner reminiscent of Levinas's *pure ethic*, where the self lives for the other. In this case, the others are trees.[530] Sommer discusses several theories regarding the "psychological significance of trees," noting Carl Jung's work in depth psychology where "the tree is seen as an archetype in the human collective unconscious."[531,532] Sommer's research concludes with an admonition that

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[527] Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, 30.
[528] Robert Sommer, "Trees and Human Identity," in *Identity and the Natural Environment: The Psychological Significance of Nature*, eds. Susan Clayton and Susan Opotow, (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003).
[529] Ibid., 179.
[530] See chapter four for the discussion of Levinas's concept of a pure ethic.
[531] Op cit., 191, summarized in Table 9.2.
[532] "Trees in particular were mysterious and seemed to me direct embodiments of the incomprehensible meaning of life. For that reason, the woods were the places where I felt closest to its deepest meaning and

future research regarding humans and nature needs to focus special attention on the role that trees have in fostering community and individual identity and overall health. Sommer's research induces hope, but the love of trees in our immediate environs must be expanded to include the trees valued by the Other, both human and more-than-human.

In public spaces justice often requires the implementation of oversight and protection by government entities. In the State of California, both the California Oak and the Joshua Tree are protected by law.[533] In other parts of the world, natural features are given even higher status. For instance, the Whanganui River in New Zealand was recently granted full human status by the government because it is considered sacred to the Maori people.[534] Similarly, dolphins were granted human status by the Indian government.[535] All three of these statutory mechanisms are excellent examples of philosopher Bruno Latour's argument in favor of a "radical democracy" in which all creatures and natural features would have a "voice" in the democratic process.[536] Another way in which governments function to protect public spaces and natural features is through policing and other forms of control. For instance, the authority of park rangers in the US is incredibly high compared to that allowed to park rangers in Kenya.[537] The importance of particular spaces is evidenced by the protection they are afforded. This

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to its awe-inspiring workings." Carl Jung as quoted by Meredith Sabini. [Meredith Sabini, ed., *The Earth Has a Soul: G.G. Jung on Nature, Technology & Modern Life* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2002), 29.]

[533] These trees are not allowed to be cut down or transplanted without a special permit.

[534] Eleanor Ainge Roy. "New Zealand River Granted Same Legal Rights as Human Being." *The Guardian*, March 16, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/16/new-zealand-river-granted-same-legal-rights-as-human-being.

[535] Jason Hackman. "India Declares Dolphins 'Non-Human Persons', Dolphin Shows Banned." *The Daily Kos*, July 30, 2013. https://m.dailykos.com/stories/2013/7/30/1226634/-India-Declares-Dolphins-Non-Human-Persons-Dolphin-shows-BANNED.

[536] Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[537] This is a personal observation. I have visited many state and national parks in the US and have engaged park rangers with regularity. I visited Hells Gate National Park in Kenya in 2009. I requested a tour of the park by one of the park rangers. When I asked him about the amount of graffiti and trash in the park, he told me that he had no authority whatsoever to instruct or deter the park guests about their actions. He told me that there were separate park rangers armed with guns whose only job was to deter poachers.

discussion is pertinent when one considers the perennial battle over whether resource extraction will be allowed in US National Parks. The form and implementation of protection as well as the elevated "human" status given to certain parts of the environs begins to apply West's adage of justice as a form of love in the public sphere. Government protection may not *feel* like love, but in order for the larger aspects of justice to be carried out, the government is the best and most effect means of doing so.

Next Questions and Future Directions

In responding to the rhetorical question "will consuming less wreck the economy?", Juliet Schor argues that it won't.[538] Schor concedes that an extreme reaction, e.g., everyone in the US cutting up their credit cards, would send the US economy into a recession.[539] This level of opting-out by the entire US population, or even a large segment of the population, would be the result of a catastrophic economic depression rather than its cause. The US is currently focused on the short-term gains of profit over and against long-term growth of an educated citizenry and environment-protective infrastructure.[540] Can we be like the Lorax and attempt to speak for those others, both human and non-human, who suffer as a result of capitalism? Or, also like the Lorax, will we despair of the enormity of the task and remove ourselves from the situation altogether? The Lorax has the wherewithal to withdraw, just as those of certain socio-economic classes in the US are able to either remove themselves or insulate themselves from the ravages of consumerism. Unfortunately, the majority do not have such options.

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[538] Schor, *The Overspent American*, 169-73.
[539] Ibid., 169.
[540] Ibid., 172-73.

It is a common illusion that all that is required of us is to consume less. It is difficult to accept that all of our understandings of capitalism have to be reworked in order to include the fact that consumerism is a parasitic system that feeds off the soft underbelly of our conscious and unconscious desires to be loved and accepted. We have been socialized such that most people will never believe that consuming is anything but good. In the face of this, I remain optimistic. I agree with Schor that "[i]t can hardly be possible that the dumbing-down of America has proceeded so far that it's either consumerism or nothing. We remain a creative, resourceful, and caring nation. There's still time to find our way out of the mall."[541] We can start finding our way out by relearning perceptions of self-esteem and self-control, compassion and empathy, love and justice. As Jenkins argues, moral agency is at risk because the very concepts and practices which support and propagate moral behavior are at risk.[542] While my hope sometimes waivers, it is irrefutable that it is often the small but persistent moral acts which change both the self and the world. Our compassionate response to those who flail in a consumerist culture and a planet in peril should be to engage the self, the Other, and the eco-third with our best efforts to live into what love really should be.

[541] Ibid., 168.
[542] Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics*, 4.

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