STILLBORN;
THE LIBIDINAL ECONOMY OF GADGETIZED MEDIATION IN THE ERA OF SOCIALIZATION FOR CONSUMPTION;
AN EXPLANATORY POLITICAL PROJECT

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHT
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

APRIL 2015

ABSTRACT

This project captures an attempt to politicize one aspect of Western middle class youth's everyday experience growing up and living in postindustrial consumer society—the replacement of experiential, material, and libidinal gratification with that of ideological satisfaction. The dissertation takes up problematic adolescent gaming as a site to interrogate the ways and means of technologically-backed consumer socialization, and draw out the implications for subject-formation and possibility of self-determination. Developing new ways to conceptualize politics of youth, the project re-reads existing academic research on youth and gaming. Its main goal is to create a theoretical framework that can sustain an understanding of the importance of consumerizing gadget-mediated self-self cultivation across the dimensions of political economy and its strict materiality, psycho-sociality and its relational concreteness, and the realm of the mind in which ideology meets consciousness. Under the guise of critiquing the banality of gaming studies, the project excavates ideas from various critical theory, phenomenological and psychoanalytic traditions to raise political questions of social reproduction and clarify a concretely political path beyond the present circumstances.

I am interested in exploring how it is that generation after generation young people born in the compromised consumption-rendered centers of global capital do not revolt against the seemingly repressive institutions shaping their lives. In this question, there is an intergenerational politics, a politics in which the question of youth and their otherness is crashed into the structuration of political economy and social reproduction within it. This is ultimately the theme of my inquiry. The present work is a study of gaming as a site where we should expect to see the manifestations of this kind of intersection, but instead what we see is a single-minded preference for celebrating the gaming industry and securing the ideologically soothing reproduction. I want to address the politics signaled by the changing role of play in advanced consumer economy, where in the site of gaming, through controlled bursts of traumatization and regularization, prediction of subjective experience is commodified into the global capitalistic circuits.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not be possible without the generosity and attentiveness of my supervisor, Shannon Bell. She gave me reason to believe in the project every time that I needed a critical reminder. I would also like to thank Asher Horowitz for his support in connecting me with Shannon Bell at a critical juncture in my work. I would also like to thank Gad Horowitz for his support in crafting the ideas. The early theoretical work of this project was done under the supervision of Deborah Britzman. I am grateful for her guidance in conceptualizing my own interdisciplinary understanding of subjectivity and subject-formation. Thanks also goes to the Graduate Program in Social and Political Thought at York University for providing generous funding for this foundational work. I am also grateful for my readers, who, no matter how overworked they were, always found a time to discuss my work with me. Mario DiPaolantonio, Detlev Zwick, Jay Goulding—I am forever indebted to you. I am also thankful for my students and other young people who agreed to meditate on the questions with me. Your input directly affected the scope and direction of this work—it is your alliance that fundamentally shaped its political mission. I would also like to thank my family for their unrelenting belief in my ability to see this project to its finality—I couldn't have done this without you all.

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INTRODUCTION

The political thrust behind my dissertation research is supplied by a reoccurring observation: while gaming continues to play an increasingly normalized part in youth socialization in the metropoles, its critical academic literature continues to wane in the breadth of its scope. To this day I am shocked that there is no psycho-technological considerations of gaming, let alone any political readings of some such engagements between the not-yet-people (the minoritized, the youth[1]) and consumption-geared apparatuses of the capitalist political economy.[2] This problem is further exaggerated by the fact that critical theory seems to have long abandoned the project of theorizing the libidinal economy. There is no coherent, explanatory or even descriptive political framework for considering psycho-sociality[3] (as captured in discourses like object relations[4]), socialization, and the very real, existential price of subject constitution for any one person. This I will envisage as a politics of youth, where consciousness is a determinant central category, because I believe that without such a historical material and psycho-socially concrete treatment of the political-ideological-libidinal economy, we inevitably continue to be

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[1] Youth: Other than deeply structurally incorporated or accounted for, not yet matured, not yet extensively complicit to the ways of the world.

[2] The Invisible Committee's *the Coming Insurrection* (2009) by far comes closest to a critical politics of youth under advanced capitalism.

[3] Psycho-social: This designation is meant to signal the consideration of the relational dimension of subject-object engagement.

[4] Object-relations: A theory of how the psychological life is constituted, the psychoanalytic theory of object relations argues that the opequeness of subjective psychic constructions can be offset by attending to the relationality between the subject as self-constituted and self-understood and the object of fixation (which can be either imaginary or real). The real point is that object relations overcomes mystifications particular to the Freudian psychoanalysis by focusing on the most elementary analytic categories of the subject/object relation. Even more importantly this theoretical framework lends itself to being linked to social and political dimensions of subject formation (such as interpellation and commodification). The concepts such as projective identification and internalization, which stem from this theory, frame the dynamic relationship between subject and object in a way that lends itself to extending the trace of the process into higher realms of human existence.

stuck with the surface treatment of applying critical theory to the historical materiality of the human condition.

The First Day of the Hunting Season, November 2014

Consider the following picture as a means to situate the subject matter and the major moving parts. *You*[5] have spent months, numbering in the teens, in some remote part of the United States, in intensive special forces sniper training school. Part of the training is internalization of all the necessary muscle memory and reflex reactions as well as ideological complementarity of libidinal repression[6] which invariably result when the body is disciplined by military industrialization. Another part of the training is to learn to crave the mark, to desire, to fantasize about the target and the release of the hit.[7] Then, *you* are deployed; you spend months guarding outposts, sweating in the desert, learning to manage breathing despite all the dust…without a single target. Then, either your tour ends and being so phantasmagorically traumatized, you call it quits. Or, your tour is cut short by an improvised explosive device. You spend the next year to three years in rehab. Then, you return to the metropole, the everyday American life—back to normality.

Now imagine two of these snipers; two prematurely retired young veterans, over-trained and under-valued, the pride and joy of the American special forces; two boys —two adolescents-

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[5] The italicized "you" is meant to signify the subject-in-interpellation.

[6] Repression: This concept originates in Freud's theory of psychic life, but my usage of it largely stems from how critical theory has used it. Repression states that desires and fantasies, which encounter resistance and/or appear incompatible with the psychosocial reality of the subject, are drawn inward to prevent them from becoming directly expressed. Repression is thus twofold: in the first instance it is a "natural armoring" (see Reich 1965) that comes about during early childhood development; in the second instance, repression is the price of sociality, the direct consequence of historical social conditioning of the human in the process of forming a subjectivity.

[7] Desire: Desire stands in for the libido, Eros, and Phantasy. The intention behind a binding to an object, the mobilization behind valorization. Separate but not property; me and my own otherness; me and my others, my futurity and my historicity.

at-heart, in their early thirties. After a night of reminiscing over various chemical consumption, they decide to turn on the Xbox 360 and play a mini-game in *Call of Duty: World at War*, called "Nazi Zombies."[8] From the start the scenario invited familiar orientations—they talk as "we" in the same way that they would talk as "we" in watching football, those popular sports interpellation[9] between fans and their favored teams.

In this scenario multiplayer ("split screen", meaning the television screen is divided into two smaller instances) first person shooter, players are on a team of soldiers (fashioned after American infantry from the late 1945s) fortified in a two-story building, windows and doors all boarded up. The objective is simple, never-changing: to survive the increasingly difficult mobs of Nazi zombies, who are all trying to break through the barricades and swarm *you*. The young veterans tell me they enjoy the game because it involves increasingly complicated higher strategizing—it is not all just about the endless slaughter. The game allows the young veterans to desublimate[10], but also to play out their fantasy of being in the director's chair, to play the part of the commanding class in their labor-libidinal economy shaped by extensive and exhaustive military training—it is finally their turn to command themselves! The fact that the objective is to kill swarms of Nazi zombies, the worst of two worlds—both forms of historically inexcusable

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[8] Activision. *Call of Duty: World at War*. Xbox 360 Platinum Hits edition. Mod. "Nazi Zombies." 2008.

[9] Interpellation: The self-self location in a historically enforced political economy; private dealing with social structures deemed unmovable. Interpellation is the domain of projection and identification as well as other object-relations with political and economic clout.

[10] Repressive desublimation: This is a concept developed by Marcuse (1964) to account for the ways advanced capitalist society is able to infiltrate and mobilize psychic energy for its social reproductive (productive and consumptive) processes. The concept suggests a historical political economy in which a person is subjected not only to social and filial regulation (the primary scenes of socialization—repression and desublimation), but also to historical economic institutionalization of psychosocial processes where the psychic flow is directed not just for release, but for release with future-attachment potential.

sociality and subjectivity—further motivates the immersion into the fantasy. It offers total vindication, purifying, authorizing what you have been trained to become.

This event, this playing out of a fantasy as a game, exists not only on the psycho-social level. It is also deeply inculcated within the circuits of postindustrial, consumer capitalism, especially in the realm of consumer technological gadgetry. It utilizes the likely libidinal registers of historical social experience to immerse users into a reduced state of consciousness in which their self-awareness (and the burden of it all) is traded in for rationality limited to problem-solving and an elaborate semiconscious or unconscious auto-stimulation (self-satisfying through the body) mechanism. The totality of the experience is an instance in the extent of the advancement of technologically supported capitalist social relations and economy that spans from the political material to the libidinal and emotional dimensions of subjective experience. On the level of auto-stimulation, the cycles of varying intensity of focus and multi-tasking simulates pleasure in its immersiveness. The game makes the horrifying hallmark of postindustrial metropolitan[11] life— predictability and repetition—thus enjoyable. When deep fantasies of satisfaction become commodified, all that is left for anyone to do is find a way to sustain the feeling, to return to the source of the experience, to repeat.[12]

This vignette captures the major themes of my dissertation. The sight of the *adolescent-soldier-gamer* is a more readily legible instance in the historical material situation of

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[11] Metropolitan: The western historical centers of capital where usually the capitalist classes reside as well as the many levels of middle classes who run and live off of neo-colonialism, neo-slavery, imperialism, global capitalism. The innermost urban territories of the domestic sphere of the empire.

[12] Commodification: The life of the subject-object spans from conception to reification to instrumentalization to commodification. Commodification means the appropriation or accounting for dynamics and objects that originate in the social world of humans and end up in the realm of capitalist economy. For this to happen, the intent has to be singularly exploitative.

metropolitan adolescents[13], who are caught in the position of reproducing economically valuable consumption all the while satisfying their material and ideological needs. In this project I will study adolescent gaming as a way to clarify the political issues at the intersection of social reproduction, capitalist political economic exploitation, psycho-social relationality, and the concrete (embodied) experience of libidinal economy and subject-formation.

This is the political economy of this consumer subjectivity. The adolescent after all is borne out of consumer capitalism (Tiqqun 2001). In focusing on the metropolitan youth, my project privileges the subject position of the young. The subject position of a person who is subjected to institutionalization, libidinal subjugation to the political economy, in which self-consciousness and autonomy, self-direction and its self-satisfying confirmation, are traded for and substituted by a consciousness-obliterating attentional immersion. The realm in which this process is seen as politically formative I call the politics of youth.[14] Throughout my dissertation, I explore how thinking about the consumer-socialization-based political economy from a perspective of existential solidarity with youth opens up to a conceptualization of youth as a category that especially highlights what happens to the possibility of autonomy and self-consciousness as essential political categories[15]. In this sense this is both a social and political theoretical project.

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[13] Adolescence: Adolescence is a historically-constructed ideological conception for self-conscious human beings whose agency is rationalized as being in need of limitation, regulation, repression, and direction.

[14] My conception of the politics of youth is based on Levinas's (1998) concept of the face. For Levinas, accepting an irreducibly self/other relationship with everything that lies beyond the cover of the conceptual surface is symbolically represented in the Face. This conceptual limitation of knowing also constitutes a basic ethical and political lesson for Adorno according to Horowitz (2008). This concept serves as the base for politicality in the case of youth as a subject position in the complex of social reproductive institutions and capitalist political economy.

[15] Ownness: The other side of the Face taken from the perspective of the subject-in-their-otherness.

I am interested in exploring situatedly how it is that generation after generation young people born in the compromised consumption-rendered centers of global capital do not revolt against the seemingly repressive institutions shaping their lives. Besides the few glimmers in the night sky marked by the riots in Parisian suburbs and Zucotti Park, the American youth don't burn the house down! What is marked as adolescent revolt, below its ideology of naturalization, could very well be the outcry of a newly arrived self-consciousness. In this question, there is an intergenerational politics, a politics in which the question of youth and their otherness is crashed into the structuration of political economy and social reproduction within it. This is ultimately the theme of my inquiry. The present work is a study of gaming as a site where we should expect to see the manifestations of this kind of intersection, but instead what we see is a single-minded preference for celebrating the gaming industry and securing the ideologically soothing reproduction. I want to address the politics signaled by the changing role of play in advanced consumer economy, where in the site of gaming, through controlled bursts of traumatization and regularization, prediction of subjective experience is commodified into the global capitalistic circuits.

Overview of Chapters

The first chapter elaborates the theoretical and political premises. It specifies adolescence as a subject position, consumption-reproducing ideological subjectivity as a class position, and the metropolitan consumer society as a territory and economy. The chapter also explains why the project focuses on gaming as the consumption-friendly liberalization of what passes respectively as interpellation and object-relations.

The second chapter takes up the massively multiplayer online role-playing games (popularly known as MMORPGs or MMOs for short), particularly *World of Warcraft* as an interpellative consumer apparatus. It outlines how the video game commodifies interpellation and subject-formation for its profit-generating intent.

The third chapter focuses more intensely on the materiality, the concrete experience of gaming. Specifically the chapter deals with consumer technology as mediative technology in the reign of consumer-socialization of the libidinal economy through processes of repressive interpellation. The chapter addresses how video games are different than older interpellative mechanisms, because of their gadgetized[16] mediation[17] and surplus-extractive purpose.[18]

The fourth chapter focuses directly on the nature of the repressive interpellative apparatus through the ideological differentiation of labor and play (as gaming) for metropolitan adolescents. The chapter critiques various theories of play, which the contemporary theorists of video games readily take up as their basic assumptions, for avoiding the question of labor. Returning to the discourse on immaterial labor, the chapter concludes with singling out

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[16] Gadgetized: Tying of psycho-sociality to technological commodities; the tying of self-relating object-relations to technological objects; the growing presumption of mediational neutrality of consumer technology.

[17] Mediation: This concept is meant to highlight the fact that activities such as reading texts, listening to music, watching a film, composing an email, playing a video game, all require that the user accepts his or her experience to be mediated by consumer technological gadgets that, in return, reduce and represent signs, sounds, and images of historical sociality.

[18] Surplus: The left-over, the spill-over, the remainder, the unaccounted-for. The surplus, in its ephemera, gives value to the dead object.

valorization[19] as the psycho-social register of what passes for play or labor to raise the question of what kind of surplus is being extracted in this psycho-political[20] economy.

The fifth chapter returns to the larger theme of gaming to draw out the underlying economy of psychic surplus that emerges in the converge of the libidinal economy of adolescence, the historical material conceptualization of gadget-mediated consumer-subjectivity formation, and the ideological needs and apparatuses of embodying such a stance.

Finally, in the conclusion, I bring all of these chapters together. I return to the question of youth politics, and read the gaming libidinal economy and subject formation through those political lenses. The conclusion meditates on the changing nature of rule-breaking—the fact that one cannot confront the choice of whether to follow the rule or not. Video games erase this historical possibility by removing that possibility. The conclusion also addresses the familiar paradox of consumer subjectivity in which video games substitute real freedom with closed-circuit, alienated agency.

My goal is to propose how youth studies can benefit from critical theory, away from ideological presumptions of the normative. After all, gaming is a structure of youth culture. I want to address the problematic assumptions in contemporary critical theory of socialization which institutionalization and economizing of libidinal life is viewed as inevitably natural

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[19] Valorization: Below the surface of activity (as in Arendt's (1958) conception) or laboring (in Marx's conception), there is the psychosocial, object-relational dimension of valorizing an experience; the very experience of psychic investment.

[20] Psychopolitic/al: A recognition of the political dimension in the reification of descriptive concepts; that any claim to a truth in the psychological realm is bound to be wrapped up in reigning and suitable ideology. Some historical examples of this happening are in Lacan's (1977) gendering of most inner world, Derrida's (1995) final words on the inescapability of consumption, Freud's (1997) mechanism of cathexis and libido, Butler's (1997) conclusiveness of primary identification, Marx's (2011) fixation on labor, Marcuse's (1974) reification of sexuality. The point is that in any case, the system defines value and decides the hierarchy of valuation, privileging of some psychic energies over others, essentially deciding on the sought after character of the not-yet-grown.

occurrences framed by fragmented interpellative systems—gaming deploys total interpellation and consolidates the interests of social reproduction and political economic reproduction.

How is it that culture[21] is repurposed as capital in postindustrial, consumer society's Western (post)colonial centers—the metropoles? In the case of metropolitan youth and gaming, we get to study exactly this, that is, where idealism meets dialectical materialism (autonomy, political of consciousness in theory of subject formation). But, we also get to see how culture is commodified, how it gives content and shape to interpellation, and how interpellation is commodified as avatar-subject relationality. Further, we get to see how gaming functions as an interpellative apparatus which depoliticizes revolutionary potential in youth as a world-historical class.

Let's get beyond the ideology of the immediately exploitable. This dissertation attempts to address a glaring lack of critical analysis in the emerging field of gaming studies. The premise is that gaming studies requires a framework that can handle its multidimensional interaction with people. Gaming is *just* fun so long we do not identify the subject as that of a minor. There is a different valance to Galloway's saying that "we love being fragmented, interlinked...enjoying games" (2006: 27). Simply put, how do we decide whether a repression or sublimation[22] is repressive or not? This question strikes me as most important as we enter the age of commercial and industrial manipulation of object relations. Whether it is getting worse in comparison to an earlier time is irrelevant, the question of critiquing the means of what has passed as social reproduction is what is at stake.

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[21] Culture as social and object relations in which youth insurgency is usurped.

[22] Sublimation: The redirection of a desire/drive/potential/initiative into socially manageable, innocuous, or productive expressions and objects.

CHAPTER ONE: POLITICAL PREMISES: SUBJECT, CLASS, ECONOMY, TERRITORY; CONSCIOUSNESS, YOUTH, REPRODUCTION, POLITICS

Psycho-politics: the Politics of Socialization

In this chapter I will argue that the critical arc in youth studies, and particularly subject-object oriented studies of technology, emerges when we have emancipatory goals in mind. Treating gaming as a site of socialization and subject formation can challenge the existing social research on youth experience of advanced consumer society. The clarification as to the means and terms of co-optation can have the effect of propelling a dialectical response to the psycho-social conditions that already unconsciously exist. As a more tamed goal, my thesis will conclude when the structures around the subject and subject-formation as cultivated in mediated relations of gaming become clear in terms of what is being commodified and to what end.

Creating critical dialectical engagement, the way we constitute the subjectivity of these adolescents, in terms of their socio-historical placement and their developmental relationship with economic exploitation, will directly affect how we construe their political subjectivity. To give you a sense of where this work is heading, by the end of this dissertation, I will suggest an alternate perspective on socialization that guards against the normalized subjugation of the radical newness of young people's consciousness. The point is not to make youth studies more utopian. I will argue that the critical psycho-social theory of liberation requires a historically contextualized human subject. The metropolitan adolescent gamer is one such subject position. In this project I frame the case of the psychological lives of adolescents born and raised in the metropoles, the post-industrial market-nexuses of global capitalism. Due to the efficacy with which digital recording and popular self-representation have merged to document developmental

instances in the lives of these metropolitan youth, social theory can renew its efforts in understanding the social experience and relevant politics, and take advantage of the opportunity to think about a living, politically relevant group caught amidst economized transgenerational, psycho-dynamic shifts. A political critique of academic research around youth, specifically adolescents and adolescence, is fundamental to discipline youth studies away from ideological confirmation towards responding to historically-situated problems facing young subjects.

This chapter will lay out the central premises, themes, and questions of this project. This chapter will also set out many of my basic assumptions in orienting myself to this project. I will argue that a politics and a notion of subjectivity as well as an ethics of theoretical conception are necessarily the grounds on which an engaged critical theory of consumer youth socialization and the political economy that surrounds that process is ultimately dependent. Here are four arguments you will encounter throughout this chapter that mark the premises and directions of the larger dissertation:

- Critical theory must deal with the historical materiality of the subject. In my case I will offer the adolescent gamer already the subject of most social research as one such subject.
- Socialization is a collection of structures under a larger banner of social reproduction; as such it is a transgenerational reproductive economy. This point will be important to distinguish the familial from the political economy, and thus to be able to use the object-relations theoretical lenses (which I believe are best suited for talking about the politics of interpersonal relations and self-constitution) appropriately according to context.

- There is a politics to social reproduction. It is best understood in terms of economy and agency, consciousness and ideology, self-determination and relationality. The bulk of this chapter will be spent outlining this position.
- Means of economization (vulgarly observed in commodification) such as rationalization, exploitation, and co-optation that socialization as well as organization relies upon are forms of psycho-technologies. This point will emerge from the discussion on socialization.

This chapter is organized thematically, although the themes and concepts are most sensible when they are interrelated. It is meant to introduce the general theoretical concepts, ways of asking questions, and social and political concerns. The argument consists of two major parts. The first explicates the subject, defines the political parameters of its dominant discourses, and identifies relevant critical theoretical language for the study at hand. The second part describes the economy in which the political subject (as conceived in the first part) figures in. The chapter concludes with foreshadowing the chapters that will come, and offers gaming as one particular territory where the themes intersect, and which offers us a place to contemplate its social-political meaning.

Subject Location and Politics

Locating the Subject: the Adolescents

Critical youth studies, which contemporarily is still mainly an amalgamation of disciplinary niches, has the potential to pose a political challenge to disciplinary, compartmentalized studies of the human condition: it can take into account the mutually-constituting, dialectical relationship between structure and subject. My intention is to set up a conceptual framework that can handle: 1) the question of political subjectivity; 2) the prospect or the possibility of political self-consciousness; 3) and the critique of industry and ideology in the contexts of subjects and gaming. In order to see the structures more clearly, it is imperative to specify the subject across multiple institutionalized dimensions of positionality—to think about the political economic life of a person on the home base (that is, on the interior of the globalized consumer economy), and situate the qualitative experience of a typical person who resides within the walls of the empire to then immerse into gaming—an adolescent. In the contemporary political economy of the metropolis, the adolescent embodies the markers of the reigning mode of production—his sense of self is caught in a psycho-social machinery that supplies the larger economy with new value and much-needed ideological stability. He is a consumer, whose ability to produce value is publicly denied precisely because (in social media) it is the source of profitability; he is a self-conscious subject who suffers from the maladies of commodity life, yet he is disciplined by the culture to think himself alone in this suffering and interpellate himself accordingly. The very process of subject-formation for the metropolitan adolescent is laden with immediate political economic consequence—it is through his identity construction that the social structures are confirmed and reproduced.

An adolescent is a specific, existing subject—a human being with a historically-situated consciousness and relation with other subjects in the social structure. This social category functions to structurally locate this person in relation to social reproduction (as well as in dialectically contradictory manners). In that structural groundedness, his[23] self-consciousness is contingent on the historical materiality. His capacity for self-actualization and self-awareness develop out of (and during) his experiences of socialization. As such, the status of the adolescent subject is paradigmatic of the relation between agency and subjugation at the heart of bourgeois subjectivity (more so perhaps because of his social, political, and economic dependence on adults). Therefore, I will treat "adolescence" as a class, in the sense that Marx conceptualizes the proletariat, because it is the specific and historically-determined structural position of the adolescent which enables his unique experience of the tension inherent in bourgeois subjectivity.

There is a political dimension to the psycho-social study of youth, and it becomes visible in the authorial choices to define the subject (especially the idiosyncratic and ideological underpinnings of those choices). For example, Adorno (1973), who contextualizes cultural transmission even as he upsets normative conceptions of development and civilization by reminding us of the power of intergenerationality and ideology, offers the following:[24] under the

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[23] More generally, youth is a structural position, which also intersects with other structural-identity positions such as race, class, and gender. Without erasing female subjects who play WoW (and who perhaps therefore, in some measure, reproduce an image of "femaleness" through their role-play), more male-identified people play WoW than do female; thus, the next several paragraphs will deal explicitly with male subjects (Bainbridge 2010). The development of a theory of masculinity and masculine performance in the ideational space of WoW is necessary, but beyond the scope of this project. (Also see: http://kotaku.com/5598679/what-i-discovered-from-gaming-like-a-girl)

[24] Here is the full quote from Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* (1973):

> A child, friend of an innkeeper named Adam, watched him club the rats pouring out of holes in the courtyard. It was in his image that the child made its own image of the first man. That this has been forgotten—that we no longer know what we used to feel before the dogcatcher's van—is both the triumph of culture and its failure. Culture, which keeps emulating the old Adam, cannot bear to be reminded of that zone, and precisely this is not to be reconciled with the conception that culture has of itself. It abhors stench because it stinks—because, as Brecht put it in a magnificent line, its mansion is built of dogshit (Adorno 1973: 366).

guise of socialization, the child is only a subject-to-be: from the moment of birth, he will be subjugated, even to an idea of being a subject. But first it will begin with a shock akin to a child watching a grown man beat animals —a familial childhood trauma caused (in the least) by the incommunicability of early childhood (Adorno 1973: 366). We, too, shriek at the horrific possibility—that socialization is socialization always into a life of violence, but quickly naturalize it (cf. Freud 1997).

The Psycho-social Framework

I would like to take a moment to talk about the general psycho-social approach of my study. By addressing psycho-social issues, I synthesize the offerings of the psychoanalytic and critical theory, which enables me to pick up on the way in which historical traumas and cultural relational shifts in object relations affect the everyday psycho-social relations and the development of the young person;[25] how intergenerational relations lead to unconscious amalgamation (or the "body without organs" as Deleuze and Guatarri would have it), those historical residues of transgression and object-relations (the two in turn leave their mark on the people who fail to resolve the push for reflection and meaning-making in history). It is not my intention to limit the possibilities of empowerment in and working through transgenerational issues. Instead, I would like to think about the openings that would go beyond the historical and imagine the radical empowerment that comes out of a critical study of socialization and culture, its institutional relation to adolescent subject positions, and the terms of the transgenerational (cultural) order (as it is expressed in sightings of regulated engagement, administered

[25] We have to keep in mind that these relations, are theoretical abstractions of particular historical materiality, which as a structure and a system, is multi-tiered, hierarchized according to race, class, family, age, gender, sensitivity to affect, willingness to dominate/be dominated, aesthetic choices, etc.

desublimation, complicity in social injustice across all tiers and dimensions of the historical hierarchy, etc.).

In the context of the psycho-social life of the subject, my thinking about the project changed dramatically when I realized that I was quite uncomfortable with the fact that the subject, the human, becomes less visible the more visible the extent of commodification. In other words, I was running into the problem of imagining the ramifications of existing theory about the subjective experience, precisely because existing critical theory does not center on a specific subject. But, tripartite concepts such as sublimation, desublimation, and repressive desublimation require a subject in order to gain their optimal political value. I will ground the discussion on the historical adolescent subject position. By doing so, I will gain a certain critical edge from the material contextualization and the specific terms of psycho-social and physical engagement between subject and society. I decided to ground the discussion in the historically material case of Western, metropolitan (that is, urban, post-industrial, primarily consumer) youth. Countering the movement of extra-human abstraction, I will situate the discussion of these complicated dynamics around the historical young subject who finds himself in the moment of a constant societal reconstitution caused by the recirculation of signs in the consumer economy. In this movement, what becomes evident is that the terms of the psycho-social context of the youth's experience—namely, pervasive social alienation—come to the foreground as agents that contest the authority of prior institutionalizations (Riesman 2001).

With the designation the psycho-social my intention is to highlight the subordination of subject-formation to the vagaries of social reproduction. To call this process psycho-social and not psychological-and-social points up the fundamental embeddedness of the individual subject

in the historic conditions that have made his subjectivity possible. Immediately, we can perceive the overlap of three dimensions of subjectivity: the psychic, the relational, and the ideational, because they correspond to the dimensions of subjectivity in which ideological subjugation is historically substantiated. The psychic dimension corresponds to the psychological and affective structure of the individual. The relational corresponds to intersubjective, and the ideational corresponds to conscious self-conception. These three conceptual parameters delineate the processes through which external ideology becomes integrated into the subject. In this section, I will provide a series of outlining theoretical exercises on a critical theory of psycho-politics; and they will be carried by two orienting perspectives: Freud is a vehicle for the traditional/normative conception of basic repression and culturally-dictated (de)sublimation practices; and Marcuse provides the critical dialectical response through a critique of Freudian worldview.

According to psychoanalysis, under the guise of socialization the child-subject born into the modern society is subjugated by a familial childhood trauma that appropriates the infantile psychosis caused by the incommunicability of early childhood (Rank 1929; Klein 1975; Butler 1997). This appropriation, put to instrumental ends, results in a psychology of (commodified) object relations (Adorno 1974). In fact, there is a close relationship between the historical narrative of a culture and the trauma to which children are subjected as they become members of the social organization (Erikson 1993). Indeed, I believe that we simply cannot think about the critical political importance of psycho-social dynamics between the subject and society without recognizing the heavy dependence of such dynamics on trauma. Trauma also brings us to the dialectic of sublimation as it is an experience of the unsublimated that encourages repression. Horowitz (1971) speaks to the societal (Culture and Law) reliance on traumatization for

repressive socialization. In terms of normative development, the structuring of the tripartite inner life is linked with the promise of avoiding trauma by accepting the terms of repression (21). This normative conception offers no commentary on the historical scenario that recognizes the resistance of the marginalized youth or the failure of the political economy to reintegrate the older generations' disavowal of the social as is the case with the postwar American consumer society (see Riesman 2001). In turn they cling to their idealizations of the past - a time when they felt to be recognized authorities. Ricoeur speaks to the hallucinatory quality of a memory-focused resistance to the present. He frames reactionary attentiveness to memory in terms of trauma affectation. Ricoeur states the following: "hauntedness is to collective memory what hallucination is to private memory, a pathological modality of the incrustation of the past at the heart of the present, which acts as a counterweight to the innocent habit-memory, which also inhibits the present, but in order to "act it"...not to haunt it or torment it (2004: 54). The hallucinatory living-in-the-past justifies the adults' stubbornness to accept the terms of the postwar performative principle, and supports their narcissistic willingness to sacrifice the youth for their emotional situation. They choose inebriation on the past, and resist intergenerational recognition that would signal a working-through. The hauntedness closes the circle of intergenerationality by spiraling in and out of personal memory. This introversion directs the psychic surplus to the inside – effectively de-socializing desires for self-satisfaction. The psycho-politics of the human condition are thus revealed in the realm of the discourse under which socialization occurs. In this way the psycho-social situation of adolescents raises questions about the social construction of identity, political subjectivity and the possibility of a humanizing revolution that proactively moves beyond the master/slave splitting of the internal universe. Here

I wanted to draw attention to the fact that contemporary critical theory still naturalizes the socially and historically constructed formative experience. For example, Butler (1997) argues that the psychic life of power is necessarily dictated by the existing social relations, but Butler still singles out primary identification, more so the moment in which primary identification is coercively established by the dominant dominating the powerless, as the decisive moment subject formation that cannot be avoided or adjusted in some way (see Butler's introduction to the book). From the vantage of psychoanalysis, Anna Freud as well as Jacques Lacan posited primary identification as the constitutive, subjective process that underpinned the development of a child's own agency (Freud 1966; Lacan 1954). This primary identification is the process through which a child recognizes and internalizes the power of her parental unit. Because the unconscious is explicitly structured through the experience of language (Lacan 1954: 37-38), we can begin to ask what primary identification has to tell us about ideology. Under this approach to subjectivity, to identify as a subject is to access the self through language, which of necessity happens within the ideology of a dominant power structure. For example, Klein (1975) argues that socialization and subject-formation are co-constitutive: subjects become both themselves and themselves-for-others through their entanglements of guilt and attachment to their parents as authorities and love-objects. The point is that phenomenological experiences of early socialization produce the subject itself—the necessary grounds for autonomy and agency (one cannot have agency if one is not a subject)—even as socialization is a process of the subjugation of the subject to the group.

In fact, as I will argue shortly, there is a set of psycho-social complications in transgenerational relations that occur in a consumer society and overdetermine the psycho-social

dynamics of social reproduction, turning the surplus-extractive spirit (the dynamo of social and cultural self-perpetuation) of the Oedipal against itself. This shock does not only cause a violence on the imaginative that results in antisocial regression, but also an emergence of self-awareness as memory exposes the repeating limit of historical thinking, pushing for the alternative, for something more.

Youth is meant to desire the perpetuation of the spiral of social reproduction by contributing their psychic surplus through participation in its rituals that further cultural repressive conditioning. This notion of surplus is a way for me to track the very important question of the accounted/unaccounted; as the cultural allocations of psychical energy naturally results in spill-over (let us posit one as between the inner desire for mimesis and the cultural space for such a desire), whether and how the culture directs the potential remainder of what it is not able to account for determines its hold over the psyche of the young. Precisely because there is a spilling over, the call of the self-reflective dialectic is to dislocate the established concepts which have lost their footing on the nature and social power of the surplus. After all, we create surplus all the time. In the psycho-political context, the significance of psychic surplus brings us to this simple question: who dictates where it goes? I will begin the discussion with what we know: things spill over the concepts that we assign them. The social reproductive tendency is tied to administering the expenditure of this surplus. We spill over the categories we assign ourselves, and the perpetual motion of cultural (familial ideology) reproduction across generations depends on successful regulation of this spilling over of psychic surplus.[26] I think that Adorno's critique brings us to this precise point: the language of conceptualization is tied to

[26] I will explore this concept in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, but it will return most forcefully in the conclusion of the dissertation.

the project of domination, therefore we should be critical of the categories we use to build imaginings of the human in terms of whether they dissect a human out of possible empowerment (against a defense of subjectivity). After all, the involvement youth grow into serves a psycho-social transgenerational function. As the reality fails to meet the demands of the desiring subject, it conjures up rituals to promise the eventual fulfillment. In real life this process boils down to balancing existential anxiety with generational self-awareness. As Erikson (1963) would remind us, children are supposed to abide by intra-tribal codes. As a prize for their submission, they become increasingly incorporated into the psycho-social matrix through their personal negotiation between their desires and the codes, which serves to socialize their inner lives by legitimizing and deepening the value of the codes in their processes of sublimation and (increasingly repressive) desublimation (Bion 1938).[27]

But youth are continually pressured to accept the secondary in place of their primary desires, as introduced objects pressure interjection and affect their libidinal development. The way that the libidinal economies of contemporary metropolitan youth operate involves the socio-historical consideration of the 1980s, the capitalist society's preparation of the population for the digital consumer markets.[28] This effort is marked by Western children's consumer culture and the universe of commodities tied to them (cf. Watkins 1993; Schor 2000; Barber 2005). Years later, this effort would prove to be the prototypical psycho-social preparation of the new generation for

[27] A matter of crystallization - the talking about "something" fits the issues around the establishment of the one dynamic, and the concept that stands for the dynamics:

> Philosophical thinking has for its content neither the remainder after the cancellation of space and time, nor general findings about what is spatio-temporal. It crystallizes in the particular, in what is determined in space and time. The concept of the existent pure and simple is merely the shadow of the false one of being (Adorno, 1964: 142).

[28] Reading texts belonging to the cultural studies movement enabled me to extract snapshots of instances in which consumer culture met youth engagement. Particularly the works of Willis (1979), Gilroy (1984), and McRobbie (1992) were particularly useful for their subject-specificity.

secondary-narcissistic consumption (see Watkins 1993). In the language of Marcuse's (1964) repressive desublimation, the new performance principle (of how to function in modern society) rushes to fill the vacuum left by the dislocation of the transitional reality principle produced by economic exploitation of parental laboring patterns. In the absence of a public language to address private knowledge about the meaninglessness of subject-object correspondence, alienation becomes a quotidian experience. The widespread helplessness, loneliness, and political defeatism in youth culture today no doubt stem from profound dissatisfaction with the new terms of sublimation. I will offer the recent works of Boyd (2014) and Gardner (2013) to make this point in a later chapter. To those that must now live within the reign of this kind of economic exploitation, secondary narcissistic consumer socialization does not have the same effect as it does on the youngest populations of the West—in moments of lucidity, even though they seldom find the language to articulate their private convictions motivated by their sensuous recognition of their own flows of psychic surplus, what the youth express is a sense that their humanity is being reduced. But, their clarity and resilience, gained through painful tribulations, are dismissed as counter-productive and unimportant (Gardner 2013).

For my purposes, it is more critical to note that the momentum of commodification stems from a borrowed instinct, a desire to reproduce the model of authority that their parents and older generations represent (Horowitz 1971). The way that social reproduction utilizes psychic surplus is meant to guarantee a process of conditioning youth, carrying over the surplus of their imaginative (desiring) inner processes into ever more expanding socially-interconnected ones. I would like to acknowledge that under a different historical material societal reign over the young subjectivity, the sociality of human desire could be nurtured and allowed to grow in ways that are

radically different than the situation in which youth find themselves in this historical moment. In other words, the antisociality or at least the asociality of desire that this statement implies is strictly grounded in the Freudian reading of the situation, while I do wish that I had the space in this paper to talk about the Marcusian counterargument. The result of this process is a certain internalization of the common cultural experience of growing up in the world, which, although it captures the young subject by denying him the authority to direct his internal remainders, also humanizes the experiences of his predecessors in the eyes of the young. As I will argue in Chapter 3, the contemporary consumer society now appropriates a created situation in which the youth cannot find any ideals that would justify buying-in. In this way, the authority never softens for the psycho-socially marginalized youth; and in turn the youth are not able to perpetually become the compassionate witnesses to the hardening of the older generations. They instead seek solace for their disgruntled consciousness in consumer objects, and more specifically, what I will call interpellative consumer-object relations.

Youth as Class

In order to politicize socialization and developmental theories, I will treat metropolitan adolescents as a class. Theories of socialization appear to be beyond the realm of immediately-accessible politics, because they are theories of how human development is genealogically (that is, trans-generationally and historically) complimented by a reproductive (libidinal, object-relational) economy; generationality becomes the presumed state of nature. Observed relationally and materially, the reality is that personalities, those bedrocks of culture, are molded by social relations, which in themselves are also reproduced in the subjective processes of habituation and conception. Such differentiation across generations also goes by the name of socialization, the

process which looks more like a technology, a structural means of reproduction than a natural event.

One of my questions is: what is political when we actively recognize youth on their own terms? I will construct a place in which we can think critically about the young person as she lives in this historical moment, considering the historical psycho-social as well as the political-economic terms of his subjectivity. My argument is that academic works theorizing youth and youth culture must stay present to the difference between the capitalist system that must continually produce "victims" (in this case, youth), and actual youth, which is a subject position, which exists, concretely and on its own, interacting with but distinct from the structural conditions which situate and produce it as an effect.

This is because the consumer political economy fosters another level of dissent and psycho-political frustration that makes these youth feel inadequate, imbalanced, abnormal, and eventually existentially depressed and apolitical. But, this dissent is also the grounds of alienation. Today, as the numbers of youth dropping-out and succumbing to the failed attempts at the Great Refusal through transitory pleasures of illicit sedation rise, the young generations across the metropole seem to perform their initial responses from psycho-politics of their socialization: the only way to fulfillment really is to refuse to feed the machine by obeying the rules of the repressive order. Re-reading Kristeva (2007), this so-called “ideality syndrome" looks more like a protest, an attempt to hold on to the real objects of human investment. The politicalness of youth, even if only the mere fact that the adolescents protest commodification with bouts of “ideality,” requires that we focus on opening spaces beyond the ideological for possible utterance. In order to come to a place of such possibility, we have to begin from

allegiance with youth and their existential status. This is much more complicated than a statement about being pro-youth—acting in their interest—because it requires recognizing youth as class. And every class needs social space, even if only in literature, to lay out and cultivate its consciousness.

Youth have claim to the status of a political-economic class from the moment that the economy begins to squeeze surplus out of having subjugated him or her to social-reproduction. In this recognition I find the opportunity to expose the possibility of a politics hiding beneath what passes for the dominant ideology of what is socially valuable. My argument is that youth politics necessitates a political conception of "newness": newcomers possess the potential for radical social critique that is a very function of having been excluded from the prior (in this case, by mere fact of not having yet been born). Those of my readers who are intimate with Marx will recognize in this formulation a resonance with the concept of the proletariat as both the product, and the absolute negation (outside) of capitalism; those of my readers intimate with queer theory will recognize a similar rejection of the (liberal) politics of the amplification of the social as a corrective to exclusion (cf. Edelman 2004). If youth are seen as a class, and their subject formation, alas the naturalized structural processes effecting the everyday subject-economy, then aspects of socialization will begin to look like political economic structures. There are a set of questions that arise when we consider adolescents as a class. What sort of a political economy encapsulates their experience? What are the ideological and material forms of this experience?

I use class in the sense that denotes the same social, cultural, and economic positionality of persons, who also share the same structural positions in terms of intergenerationality (their place in the cycle of social reproduction) and its complimentary cultural rationalizations of

authority and subjugation (see Friedenberg 1970; Cooper 1971; O'Neill 1994; Young-Bruehl 2012). In this sense youth as class has a psycho-social valiance as the similarities across subject-positions raise questions about subject-formation and everyday interpellation as a youth as decisively political processes. My conception of youth as class is indebted to Marx's (1942) concept of class in the *German Ideology*. It might appear unfitting to apply the notion of class to a group tied together only by their age (or more so the amount of time they have spent in the world). Marx found the proletariat to be a class that critiques the fundamental principles of the capitalist mode of (re)production in their very social positionality. In his reasoning we can see the grounds for considering that youth, in their general and most broadly applicable human and social condition, embody the same potential for critiquing contemporary capitalist processes of commodification of the qualitatively human.

Marx recognized the inherent subjugation of the human that happens in the context of social reproduction, but chose to ground his analysis on the more immediately contestable territory—that of the larger political economy. When Marx talks about the proletariat as a world-revolutionary class, there is an opening to considering how this applies to youth politics:

> The contradiction between individuality of each separate proletarian and labour, the condition of life forced upon him, becomes evident to him himself, for he is sacrificed from youth upwards and, within his own class, has no chance of arriving at the conditions which would place him in the other class (1942: 78).

In the opening of *German Ideology* Marx evokes that the beginnings of the social constitution of division of labor originates within the family, where the children and the wife are slaves to the husband (1942: 21). There is a dormant critique of socialization as a political

constitutive process in this proposition as Marx bases his argument on the nature of property relations as originating from such familial alienation (22, 46). Following this logic to its conclusion, and sharpening it with the anti-socially-reproductive arguments of Laing, Cooper, Deleuze, and others, youth as class offers a timely critique of the banality of reproduction under consumer capitalism. Before moving onto the other points I would also like to point out that in Marx's critique of labor, there is also a sign of a larger critique of political economy that harkens to the way I would like to use youth as class to mean a negation of the regime of work and to refer to work-as-play under postindustrial capitalism. Through this qualification, this analytic project concerning the everyday immaterial labor of postindustrial metropolitan adolescents adheres to the political argument in Marx's theory of labor—that is, labor is "power over individuals," "as the subjection of the individual which makes a man into a restricted town-animal" (44).

Adolescents of postindustrial capital are a group that embodies the interests of all the other classes and cannot fight for its procurement—this holds especially in the current era of digital entertainment technologies that readily redirect any and all subjective means to social and self-recognition toward commodification (1942: 41). In Marx's words, "the struggle to be waged…aims at a more decided and radical negation of the previous conditions of society than could all previous classes which sought to rule" (41). It is also a group whose subject position and life activity is commodified as in the case of the commodification of play and fantasy as well as self-self and self-other relations. Also, in light of infantilization of adults and the capitalist accounting for valorization and investment with nullifying ready-made ideologies, youth also represent the interests of all the other classes to critique the very mode of production in the

interest of their humanity, as their plight represents the internal move of capital to colonize interiority. In Marx's words, youth of postindustrial capitalism constitute a class because capital has moved to take over the very live-activity that would have been the grounds for the alienated workers to recognize their alienation by commodification (68). Youth, that is children and adolescents in any context of social reproductive necessity are a proto-class in the principled Marxist sense of their subject position critiquing the whole of the capitalist system. Youth are a class,

> which has to bear all the burdens of society without enjoying its advantages, which, ousted from society, is forced into the most decided antagonism to all other class; a class which forms the majority of all members of society, and from which emanates the consciousness of the necessity of a fundamental revolution (1942: 69).

Youth as class fits Marx's description the moment we realize the immensity of the problem of transforming postindustrial capital: the investment and complicity of adult generations in the reproduction of dehumanizing commodification, and the conditioning of personality and political consciousness that inevitably occurs under division of labor and social relationships. In light of these political and transgenerational issues, postindustrial youth are the only class that have no "particular class interest to assert against the ruling class" as their humanity stands in abject opposition to the so-called civilizing commodification and self-alienation requisite to the global capital (76).

Youth, definitionally, refers to prior-to-adulthood: it is a temporal designation. In fact, this prior always returns as the rationale for why the adult world must correct, protect, direct, educate, or heal youth away from their present subjectivity. Youth's speech is regulated; they are

considered inept, confused, underdeveloped, self-destructively narcissistic, neurotic, impulsive, and melodramatic—unable to even conceive of themselves without the help of adult self-reflection (Young-Bruehl, 2012). But even in the face of the most righteous proclamation about young subjects' ineptness, the possibility of youth's own politics survives in youth themselves. Young subjects are generally defined as between birth and adulthood, as resting in this liminal gulf between two definite temporal signs. The authoritative forces under which young people's subject-formation unfolds are naturalized and de-temporalized (as long as these forces are ideologically "good enough"). As Lyotard (1988) argues, scripts are pre-formed for subjects: the young subject is always-already defined by markers imprinted on her body, language, and thinking. The opportunities for a young subject to be recognized on his own terms are scarce. Either he speaks (in the language provided to him by adults) or he is reduced to a number. Youth's politicalness is pre-formed, because the popular political discourse recognizes only voices reflecting the established, race, class, and gender specific, adult values and structures. The question is not merely of "access" to language (e.g., who has a right to speak), but how language itself corresponds with certain subject-experiences (and narratives) (and not others). A subject who intends to communicate must do so within a symbolic system already bound to a certain social order; a subject who wishes her subjectivity confirmed must narrate herself appropriately, according to specific historic and cultural patterns. Thus self-understanding comes to correspond with ideology.

Even when theorists have recognize the historical nature of subjectivity, youth has been viewed as a time when false (ideological and class) self-consciousness is established (by an authoritarian force) and reproduced (by the self). In instances in which the constrained nature of

young people's lives appear to offer a "case study" in political-economic reproduction, theorists seemed to presume that the "formative" aspects of youth subject-sociality are mere pieces of the yet-to-be-fully-formed complex that is the "subject." Thus, youth appears as a time in which ideology is implanted and becomes unshakable. Youth-as-political-subjects are therefore rendered impossible, for youth is nothing but a time of complete and seamless ideological conformity.

Further, in an effort to preserve social-scientific and "rational" "objectivity," these studies forgo a political critique of the given social circumstances. Ethnographies of young people's social experience of class, race, and gender emphasized these historical-structuring external forces in young people's lives. For example, Paul Willis (1981) worked with white-male-working-class; Angela McRobbie (2000) shifted the focus onto the sacrificed fates of white-female-working-class youth, who are tied to social reproduction through transgenerational ideologies of domesticity and femininity; Daniel Yon (2000) explored the radical fragmentation of identity-production in a contemporary high school to critique the erasure of complexity by multiculturalism. The dominant ideology reigning youth studies has preferred an a-historical mode of analysis as if the fate of youth was always already sealed—perhaps because the category of youth has tended to be a tool in authors' own existential confirmations. For Willis (1981) and Hall (1993), class is the predictor; for Aichhorn (1935) and Freud (1966), it is the historical definition of delinquency and patterns in family culture; for Erikson (1993), it is the establishment of idealization versus ambivalent feelings towards the primary socializing parental authority figure. And Kristeva (2007) uses the term "ideality" as a developmental marker of adolescence, arguing that the primary psychological identifier of an adolescent is her belief in the

absolute. Thus, the study of youth undertaken by adults is prone to ideological reproduction: blind to qualitative generational difference, it presumes structural stability and developmental continuity (young people always become adults).

Self-Consciousness and Self-Determination

The very notion of responsibility itself ought to be troubled. Youth are represented as desiring of responsibility—that young subjects both crave and need the discipline of 'caring for' (oneself, an object, or someone else) in order to become free. But to whom is obligation and responsibility owed? Responsibility binds young people to a social realm not of their choosing; it exacts a penalty even as it liberates the young into the autonomous adults of 'responsibility'. The manner in which responsibility is defined also carves out its limits—those subjects, thoughts, or politics to whom no responsibility is due, but who owe responsibility to the normative standards of the given social order. As postcolonial theorists (Bhabha 1994; Chakrabarty 2000; Spivak 1999) have done for universalism as a response to the political and strategic challenges faced by cultural particularism and (absolute) alterity, I think it might be useful to (carefully) rehabilitate 'responsibility,' as that which is owed to and desired from young subjects in a dialectical relation which binds them to older generations. In other words, social theory might need to rehabilitate the notion of responsibility as a discourse of intergenerationality and natality in the manner that (some) postcolonial theorists have rehabilitated the previously-rejected modernist concept of universalism in their attempts to develop a relevant postcolonial politics.

In a "good enough" society, natality refreshens the circularity of social reproduction (Rustin 1991). As Arendt (1958) would argue, "the constant influx of newcomers who are born into the world as strangers" presents the opportunity of "beginning something anew, that is, of

acting" (9). The healthy society is supposed to be hospitable/tolerable to the newcomers. When society-wide fragmentation and commodification become the norm, the society ceases to be "good enough" (Rustin 1991; O'Neill 1994). Under consumer capitalism, the primitive accumulation reinvents its capacity for decoupling, deterritorializing, and fragmentation, and as such proves the inability of the law of the family and culture to provide any attainable substance to offset the deceit of a consumer society. Immediately social research on contemporary youth stands for the consciousness of transgenerational problems that arise in consumer society, because neither the familial/cultural tradition nor the communal law firmly hold the definitive authority in the psychic development in the young children's lives. The issue here is that there is no special consideration for the psycho-social conditions and circumstances in the post-industrial metropolitan society that warrant regulation of market-oriented aesthetic and libidinally-connected introductions, guided identifications, introjections, etc. Furthermore, it helps us to look at the situation through the lenses of psychic surplus extraction (to be developed throughout this project, but most prominently in Chapter 5), because it focuses the critique of post-industrial capital incursion on the psyche of the metropolitan adolescent subject. Children are left largely defenseless as their parents (and their grandparents) continue to be preoccupied with the repetition of what they experienced during the years of their own political-economically-situated development, and how that experience has influenced their reading of the world dialectically (Riesman 2001; Stiegler 2010). Children end up being raised by the consumer economy, whose agents have developed ways of controlling the flow of psychic surplus (which is emerging as precisely the remainder that orients the whole) to conditionally socialize the youth by the most up-to-date schemas of repressive desublimation, that is, administered secondary narcissism,

utilizing the young's propensity to believe in the promise of repression without ever delivering that self-satisfaction or lasting empowerment (the theme of Chapter 4).

One of the goals of my project is to think about the contradictions within post-industrial consumer consciousness. In the context of politics of self-awareness and commodification under consumer capitalism, consciousness is trivialized—autonomy and consciousness easily become undesirable. An all-normalizing gust ideology of normality and banal accumulation then fills the deliberated vacuum of awareness without ever bringing to fore the politics of redirecting culturally reproduced neurosis into continually expanding chains of commodification (this will be the topic of Chapter 3).

Politics of youth, where youth is conceived of as a class that desires self-determination, poses a direct challenge to the historical conditions of human subjectivity, because, as politics of liberation qua youth, it addresses the young human before (but also on the way) to adulthood and incorporation. Such a theory requires a foundation; my hypothesis is that it will emerge by unpacking the relation between young subjectivity and history. In the relation between a young subject and history the question regards the power of the young subject to negotiate historicity and materiality (as political-economically and physically conceived). Implied in the question of power is a principle of self-consciousness, a claim to determine one's own being in the world over one's lifespan in the face of the imposed material and ideational limits. Like a litmus test, self-consciousness is politicized by an ideal of self-determination.

All of us are born at the mercy of people who have lived (just) long enough to carve out a space in the political-economy for themselves (and often at the expense of their youthful, other-worldly desires). In our contemporary moment, this political-economy is deeply structured by

global capitalism, whose brutality lies in its desire for perpetuation of a fantasy of its own totality. In light of this time of highly structured social engagement, in light of the rationality of the organized society which, to function, requires the sterilization of life, which assumes the universality of the “longview” (the end of history), which prioritizes the institutionalized life, the perseverance of the society, and the political economic "chains" of adulthood in the form of property, predictability, stability, the political for youth amounts to, on the grounds of her “newness”, a complete rejection of her “future”. All phantasies of empowerment which rely upon the current ideology doom the child to a future not of her own making. As Marx (1948) put it, “the tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living” (37). In yet other words, I am interested in a conception of politics indebted to Marcuse’s politico-ethical law of liberation. In his words, “to give freedom by freedom is the universal law. Freedom must give way to more freedom, the only rightful repression is one that enables freedom from blossoming in its heterodox, multivalent, nonidentical and unexpected ways” (Marcuse 1972: 48).

Emancipation and genuine empowerment are always constrained by hidden and coercive domination. We cannot theorize about the empowerment of the individual in society, and also argue its pedagogy, through a rationale based on “knowledge” of the subject’s psychical makeup. As a critique of domination-rationality, the psycho-political framework is an attempt to begin a counter-discourse. Even in the most critical way, the dominant theoretical discourses on child subjectivity speak about the child-subject in a dissecting manner, where the psychical world of the child is laid out in front of the theorist; where the child is most commodifiable, behaviorized, and thus manipulatable—and by extension, not wholly human. A serious consideration for the

psychical empowerment of a child-subject requires us to look at the way in which the society interestedly engages with and takes advantage of the child's development, its attempts to understand the world and to live within it.

Furthermore, if we do accept the call to political conceptualization of the psyche, then we need psycho-political concepts that will decisively speak to the agency of the adolescent-subject. Marcuse argues the need to regress the rationalization of the psyche to the point where the sensuous has as legitimate claims on the project of subjectivity as the rational one (Marcuse 1974: 198). Seen from the outside, this is self-consciousness; and as an orienting concept, it allows us to theorize the notion of the adolescent-subject, without falling into the conceptual trap of speaking without giving the subject the sense of ownness necessary to any post-domination political discourse. It is also productive to speak of self-consciousness in terms of being a private establishment or patternization of relations: a psychical bridge between emotional relationality and the iconoclastic symbols of the culturally formatted unconscious. Self-consciousness is the realization and the structural evidence of the politically-intentioned, social formation of the child's psyche. It captures the cultural and familial imprint in the principles of relationality that the child forms not only with future external objects but also its savored internal ones, the processes of socialization and socio-cultural indoctrination, while acknowledging in spatial material terms the agency of the child separate from the world.

On the spectrum of relations between youth and power, self-determination marks the measure as well as the ideal end point. By defining the geometric parameters of young subjects' relation to existential, political consciousness, we beget a guiding principle outside of the dominant ideological understanding of sociality (and thus outside of the pressures of social

reproduction and indoctrination). We can have clarity on young subjectivity and the nature (and politics and ethics) of its relation to exploitation and domination in historically contingent society. This is a perspective on intergenerational political responsibility: we can ask whether or not something benefits the young subject, not in the sense of becoming healthy or productive (which are categories that serve ideologically conceived sociality, and the interest of something external to the subject), but in the sense of empowering the subject to do what he will with his own body, self, and existence—to realize his own multidimensional material liberation. Without the dramatic effect of economic exploitation on the psycho-politics of self-consciousness, the young could ideally make sense of the world in alternatively imagined relations. This is precisely what I mean by "emancipation" of self-consciousness: when the adolescent is first conscious of communication between parent and self, and when, secondarily, the adolescent resists the smooth cultural implementation of meaning, unlike his parents who were socialized smoothly in a 'stable' time, the adolescent no longer accept external definitions and meanings for its private imaginary objects. The adolescent comes to own his own self-consciousness, tragically, in most cases, because he does not have the capacity on his own to deal with this reality, nor someone cognizant of this fact to assist him, in this process of claiming ownership over subject-formation. This political consideration of subjectivity goes beyond notions of rights or representation beyond the socioeconomic, and is able to stand the test of inter-dimensionality of human experience.

Self-consciousness embodies the limits of potential self-empowerment as the desire for exploration outside of the primary social relations becomes fused with the emotionally imprinted terms of relation. In terms of psychoanalytic object relations theory, self-consciousness captures

the libidinal structure in the relationships formed with internalized objects, relationships which secure the survival of personal historical meanings by preserving the emotional imprint of a given relationality to an object of attachment (Lyotard 1988). This is an act of social compromise in which the trauma of early childhood socialization is soothed by that relational preservation (Rank 1929). Surviving the mechanism of sublimation in which the original object of the nurturer is repressed while the desire itself is preserved, the phantasy-imprinted self-consciousness becomes an expression of the meaning of that specific relationality (Klein 1963). Clearly there are at least two types of self-consciousness languages: an actual, progressively expanding capacity to symbolize objects and fragments of objects within a specific social and cultural matrix; and a second one, a sensuous register, a way that the emotional universe registers and conducts relations with objects and fragments. This distinction will be important as the discussion progresses, because consumer capitalism governs dually through the sensuous (or the affective) as well as the ideological (or the symbolic). Structurally, the way in which this principal relationality is established hypostatizes the desires that have been allowed to find expression within the matrixes of rules and priorities of culture (Horkheimer 1971). Those matrixes—the rules of engagement, negotiation, and satisfaction—are stable as long as there are not too many disjunctions between the culturally-regulated dictations for self-consciousness or private language development and the common experiences of the emotional everyday life. In fact Adorno (2001) makes a remarkably fitting point:

> To those who have had the undeserved good fortune to not be completely adjusted in their inner intellectual composition to the prevailing norms – a stroke of luck, which they often enough have to pay for in terms of their relationship to the immediate environment

> – it is incumbent to make the moralistic and, as it were, representative effort to express what the majority, for whom they say it, are not capable of seeing or, to do justice to reality, will not allow themselves to see (51).

Self-consciousness can put reproduction at risk, because it disturbs the limits of such experience and upsets the balance between the individually-internal and the outside-social status-quo stability.

Castoriadis (1987) offers a concept that helps situate the significance of self-consciousness: what he calls the "imaginary institution of society" (imaginary meaning: in the psyche, in the imagination) (1987: xxxi), captures the inter-relational dynamic between society and the individual in a socio-historical manner: society totalizes itself inside a person's mind through the complexes of socialization and familial emotional indoctrination in order to create a certain economic harmony between itself and the newborn subject of its agency. I want to set out this process Castoriadis identifies from the perspective of the adolescent-subject, imaginary social intrusion, meant to socialize him into the economies, is affective, emotional, libidinal, and aesthetic; it is qualitative, experiential. This seems to be precisely the point Marcuse (1974) makes when he says that the political quest is grounded in "liberation of man from inhuman existential conditions" (192).[29] As in the colonial situation, the child's language (for the lack of a better term for the substance of a relation) by which it conceives of its imaginary objects comes to be dominated by external definitions. For psycho-political schemas, this language defines the outline of the political in the libido-cognitive life. As Adorno (2001) points out:

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[29] Holman's (2011) paper on Castoriadis and Marcuse was tremendously helpful in making this point. Holman observes Castoriadis as essentially possessing a conservative view of political possibilities and object heterodoxy. He argues Marcuse to be the more capable theorist, who wrestled with the same political questions as Castoriadis.

> Yet even in the most extreme efforts to express the history congealed in the things in language, the words used for this remain concepts. Their precision is a surrogate of the selfness of the thing, never wholly present; a gap yawns between it and what it wants to conjure...The determinate failure of all concepts necessitates the citation of others; therein originate those constellations, into which alone something of the hope of the Name has passed...What it criticizes in words, its claim to immediate truth, is almost always the ideology of the positive, existing identity of the word and the thing. Even the insistence on the specific word and concept, as the iron gate to be unlocked, is solely a moment of such, though an indispensable one. In order to be cognized, that which is internalized, which the cognition clings to in the expression, always needs something external to it (62).

Self-consciousness is a psycho-political dynamic within the subject and is a primary communicative device for the subject and its own inner objects. The child's inner "language" connotes not a linguistic parallel to psychic objects, but a multi-dimensional relation and feel of relationality to an object of desire (that is characterized in terms of its nature of stimulus - does it cause anxiety, what color of pleasure does it have, etc.). Every time a parental figure asserts dominance over the elements of the stories that give the child greater insight into the workings of the world or of its surroundings, whether this dominance is exclaimed through physical and psychological coercion or simply out of exercising their mastery over language and rhetoric, the child's ability to explore the emotional weight and the corresponding language (even if it is entirely invented) continues to close as it ages. In this sense, the imaginary institution of society means the social order's domination, and specifically in the post-industrial age, it means the

regulation and repressive desublimation of self-consciousness through commodification of the flows of psychic surplus (I will return to this point in Part Two of this chapter).

A psycho-political consideration of what is shared and exchanged between the public and the private from birth brings us to a radical political realization that self-consciousness—even the narrative (the terms by which or the lack thereof) of one's understanding of one's own subjectivity—is inherently political, because the terms of its formation directly influence the possibilities of empowerment, what Marcuse would specify as qualitative liberation, that is, sensuousness and imagination dictating the terms of self-awareness and self-reflexivity—and not economic exploitation or even reproductive consideration (Marcuse 1972). In terms of psychic surplus, connections between culturally-validated symbolizations and the fragments of imaginative cognitions allow the subject to be functional in the social realm, relegating the surplus, the spill-over beyond the available concepts and categories, to the realm of aesthetics (most of the time, this is merely folklore and kitsch). This point goes far in elaborating the consequences of psychodynamic changes brought about by the experience and the perspective of different generations. The way that any preceding generation nurtures its descendants is always already bound up with the socio-historical and cultural lexicon that is partly made up of its own inheritance and the history of its existential education (Marcuse 1974: 225). Thus this lexicon prepares the young for acknowledgment and fitting into the establishment, but not necessarily the heterodox affect of new historical experiences.

This kind of self-consciousness has its alliance with the libidinal, the 'drive' and 'instinctual' underpinnings of the child's most own conception of selfhood (i.e. the Id). As in psychoanalytic theory, The Ego (the conscious or the rational aspect of the psyche) actually

serves the purpose of socializing the private, as it filters and forces the self to either abandon its self-consciousness completely or to find ways to augment/substitute/translate its meanings. This reading compliments Marcuse's uncovering that Freud's treatment of the Id is at best incomplete: Instead of the Ego ascending to the primacy of subjectivity—as the entity in the psyche that knows "I"—it is the libidinally-based aspect of the psyche which appears as the kernel of selfhood (which, as the reader will shortly experience for themselves, is a point that also carries weight in the context of Althusserian conception of ideology). Adorno also has a complimentary thought: preserving the subjectivity of the psychical through private language formations of self-consciousness, giving it a something, "the indissolubly ontic as the something" (2001: 140):

> No being without existents. The Something as the necessary substrate of the concept in thinking, also that of being, is the utmost abstraction—not to be abolished by any further thought-process—of what is substantive, which is not identical with thought; without the Something, formal logic cannot be thought…Constitutive to what is substantive for the form is above all the substantial experience of what is substantive. Correlatively, the pure concept, the function of thought, is not to be radically separated at the subjective counter-pole from the existent "I" (Adorno 2001: 139)

Since it has its self-consciousness, what is signified by the Id also has its structures, its order, and therefore is not simply a must-be-controlled volatile substance in the mind. This development provides a certain reclaiming of the child's original (Id-based) subjectivity from a 'primitive' or 'asocial' or even 'anti-social' taint that it has been traditionally given in order to justify mistreatment and abuse.

The point is that a subject always has his own representations of the external reality in its possession. We do not have to approach the adolescent as always already lacking in order to theorize about his subjectivity, instead we are enabled to consider how its adaptive and interpersonal processes are cultivated, manipulated, transformed, inaugurated and muted. Refusing the inquisitive framework that justifies socially-reproductive violence without critical engagement, the adolescent psyche is not a terrain that we can understand, that we have access into. So, what can we know? The answer to this question is grounded in the purpose of the inquiry. If the project is not one of domination but liberation, then the concepts through which we elaborate on our political and ethical convictions about the treatment of the other will be framed within that responsibility. The term I have relied on for this purpose is private language or self-consciousness: basically a sign for a dialectic process between the growing subject and the world, a way of symbolizing, a placeholder for the person's narrative of meaning-making. Self-consciousness is meant to avoid falling into the trap of prefiguring the psychical make-up of a young (developing) subject that in its descriptiveness hides its constructions. Viewed strictly on the level of process, and never a matter of content, the appropriate concerns are critically limited to the notions of space, continuity, source of affectation, social-dictate, historical and material disruption, de-habituation, and (un)socializing disillusionment. In this way, we can theorize the impact of intergenerational dynamics on the child-subject without having to pretend to dissect its insides.

Economy and Territory

Transgenerational Reproductive Economy

In what follows, I want to deploy the political concepts that I introduced in Part I. In other words, I want to return to the process of socialization now that we have a way of politicizing its processes. In this second part of the chapter, the subject of my dissertation project will become fully visible.

I would like to present a composite of the child at the center of trans-generational socialization schemas, inexorable socio-historical mechanism only concerned with efficiency of incorporation. This collage introduces the necessary theoretical categories that ground the psycho-political importance of commodification incurring into the domain of subject-formation via object-relations. The fact of the matter is that every person, as a political subject, is born at the mercy of a preceding generation. And the case remains even for the stable societies that the adult world consciously (self-interestedly) and unconsciously (reproductively, and more residually) chooses to engage in ideological (relational) indoctrination: to manipulate the formative psychic narratives of young through the implantation or omission of certain sensitivities and defenses in order to make up for the cues that social reality lacks and, direct the flow of engagement between the subject and society.

One of the main contributions of psychoanalytic theory is a historical-emotional recognition of the impact of social reproduction (on all of its levels) on the human beings involved. Psychoanalysis contends that people are raised towards consciousness, conscientiousness, and unconscious reproduction (by means of libidinal and affective motivations) to distinguish morally (unconsciously and emotionally) between folk and family,

and internalize the law of community in the form of an unconscious directive—an ideal value such as that of internalizing the rule of the law so much so that one feels a taboo viscerally (Freud 1923; Kristeva 2001). For Klein (1975) socialization and subject-formation are co-constitutive: subjects become both themselves and themselves-for-others through their entanglements of guilt and attachment to their parents as authorities and love-objects. The point is that phenomenological experiences of early socialization produce the subject itself—the necessary grounds for autonomy and agency (one cannot have agency if one is not a subject)—even as socialization is a process of the subjugation of the subject to the group.

Under the logic of necessity, the dialectical structure that results from the work of political economy and ideology prioritizes the perpetuation of the society, and every person who is considered a productive, functioning member of a socio-economic cultural cell, has externally-imposed psychic agents that regulate and (re)produce communicably acceptable and meaningful experience in the individual subject. In *Negative Dialectics* as well as *Eros and Civilization*, the society produces the necessary means by which it can reproduce itself independent of human reason or the individual's conscious action to contribute to the whole's well-being. In the same logic, in the psychoanalytic tradition to which Otto Rank and Wilhelm Reich belong, the establishment of the Ego's mastery is read in terms of the social system's need for a dominance over the inner domain (see Horowitz (1971) on Reich and Rank). The terms of comprehensibility (or concepts by which one will ascertain to think his own self-awareness) are tied to both the cultural character at the center of the socialization patterns as well as the accidentally constituted subjective experience, which is also mediated by objects and constituted in relation to their affectivity. In this way, the filters and sensors for social affectation are programmed (a process

psychoanalysis captures as Ego-development), and the emotional memory, which supports the authenticity of the subject's drive for life, is refined and developed by social experience (Freud 1965).

In the modern compromise between private and public psychical interests, self-consciousness accommodates the human subject by psychically (affectively, emotionally, embodyingly) preserving the consciously inaccessible emotional meaning.[30] The concept of self-consciousness embodies the Marcusian critique of ego-primacy in psycho-social theory by refusing to hide the libidinal basis of rational processes. In other words, the made-inaccessible emotional meaning is made up of emotional imprints of object relations established during formative moments of early childhood, which make up the unconscious, and effectively provide stability—not only upholding the person's livelihood, but also the productivity of the person according to the socio-economic and cultural standards. Therefore, the psychoanalytic lesson about socialization is that it is a process of the external redirection of narcissistic emotionality. This means that there is a creation and solidification of (inter-)dependence on the social-external in an effort to socially-organize the persona (social character) of an individual (Lacan 1954: 22-24). By controlling the development of subjectivity, socialization functions to guide the development of a person's social performativity, or how that person views himself and performs himself in the world (Butler 1997). Freud (1966) and Lacan (1954) (among others) posited primary identification as the constitutive, subjective process that underpinned the development of the child's own agency. The concept captures the subjective experience of a child recognizing and internalizing the power of her parental unit. Lacan (1954) argues that the unconscious is

[30] Marcuse's (1974) radical reconceptualization of rationality in terms of its libidinal and sensuous basis reinforces this proposition (228).

explicitly structured through the experience of language (37-38). This relates to the question of ideology. Under certain approaches to subjectivity, identifying as a subject is to access the self through language, which of necessity happens within the ideology of a dominant power structure. For example, in critical theory, Horkheimer (1972) held the position that class-consciousness was both constrained by the prevailing ideological conditions and of necessity would create its own ideology as its means of political articulation.

It is in this particular subtext that I find the kernel of the defining psycho-political principle, the founding possibility of liberation: the flows of psychic surplus, under the reign of normative socialization according to Culture and Law (only meant as referents for the structural relations and processes of intersubjective relationality that I just outlined), crystallize in terms of the child-subject's self-consciousness. Such recognition of the pre-formation of the subject has caused many political theorists to situate young subjects in the processes of structural reproduction (cf. Arendt 1958). Although instructive for those of us seeking to understand the conditions under which "men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please" (Marx 1948: 5), these studies have tended to be incomplete, because they left no space for the young subject, as something always just beyond the grip of totalizing socialization, nor could they conceptualize an alternative mode of socialization which was not subordinating.

The work of R.D. Laing (2011) and David Cooper (1971) are amongst those who viewed traditional institutions of socialization as 'faulty' precisely along these lines of reproducing psychic dis-agency. Long before this anarchic turn in mid-20th century, we can find glimpses of this line of thinking in Rousseau's *Emile*, where he lays out an alternative to traditional socialization and education that would empower instead of fragment a person's existential

prowess. Socialization secures the long term productivity and service of the person towards the effort of social reproduction. And, if it were not a process that guaranteed the perpetuation of a society, socialization would be more readily critiqued for being an institutionalized instance of the establishment of compulsory and repetitive projection, identification, and objectification; it would be seen as a process of habituation and addiction-creation (see Young-Bruehl 1996). This mechanism of social reproduction works with and through ideology. In other words, since the power disequilibrium at the center of bourgeois family relations (father at the disciplinary head, mother at the emotional center, siblings as primary competitors) could not be resolved, because it guaranteed the reproduction of necessary character types for the perpetuation of class interest, the only resolution came in the form of perpetual displacement of the power disequilibrium onto the social realms of experience beyond the threshold of the family home. In this way, the person on the way to being fully socialized by the political economy never attains critical consciousness of the biting power, because its structure is reflected by others on all walks of life, passively communicating itself as being natural, and thus an unavoidable occurrence after all.

The accomplishment of psychoanalytic theory, and object-relations theory more specifically, was limited to the individual ideologies of its theorists, and in its bourgeois spirit, disciplined away from radical conclusions by the productive ideologies of individualism and autonomy that reproduced that culture and economy (see Deleuze and Guattari 2009: 94, 113). This much is clear from a psycho-social analysis of normative socialization. In the stable, ideological, hallucinatory past of the social regime, there is little to no space for conceptions of psycho-political resistance (after all, what makes a neurotic a neurotic is his subjective experience of sociality delineating from the norms). Typical of the society's appropriation of the

child-subject, the patterns of social reproduction presented as such leave no openings that would empower one's political development (of an ongoing self-reflexivity as to defining the order of one's internal objects). Without a way to actively access internal dynamics, the individual remains a manipulated subject of the social system. This portends the possibility of a new education. As Marcuse (1974) succinctly captures the sentiment:

> The distinction between rational and irrational authority, between repression and surplus-repression, can be made and verified by the individuals themselves. That they cannot make this distinction now does not mean that they cannot learn to make it once they are given the opportunity to do so (223).

In new educational possibilities Marcuse rereads the inevitable effect of the social-psychological alienation that (although remarkably pathologically if guided by profit-extracting interests alone) the child, who is socialized by consumer society through modes such as gaming and televisual mediation, experiences formatively. As an alienation, the commodification is a distancing from the social indoctrination processes, and becomes the first ethics in the constitution of the liberation to come. In Marcuse's (1964) words:

> Massive socialization begins at home and arrests the development of consciousness and conscience. The attainment of autonomy demands conditions in which the repressed dimensions of experience can come to life again; their liberation demands repression of the heteronomous needs and satisfactions which organize life in this society. The more they have become the individual's own needs and satisfactions, the more would their repression appear to be an all but fatal deprivation. But precisely by virtue of this fatal

> character, it may create the primary subjective prerequisite for qualitative change—namely, the redefinition of needs (250).

The perspective of ideology allows us to think this out beyond mere subjection. Socialization covers up the fact that with every newborn, the gears of the economy of social reproduction turn. In fact there is a timeless truth about the transgenerationality of political economy: the youth, the newly arrived weaklings, are always the scarified—they are the means to replenish the existing social order by providing a fresh source of surplus. After all, it is in youth that the idiosyncrasies of object-relationally cultivated narcissisms align with the political economic interests as concretized interpellations. The political economic role of youth is that they are subjected to authority and mediation for self-conception. In this way the terms of power relations in socialization (read: social-reproduction) come to mirror the patterns of relations of a given political economy (see Horkheimer 1972).

Theories of human psycho-social development and subject-formation point to the ideological rationalization of the subject's progressive subjugation to dominant (familial and social) forces. It is at this level that the double-bind, which can be argued to be the grounds of youth politics, operates: every person, in seeing themselves as subjects, must also see themselves as workers (and various institutionalized functionaries) (Althusser 1984: 54). Therefore, when studying youth, families (as units of social reproduction) must be seen as functioning (with increasing complicity) within a system organized for material-production. In other words, we ought to attempt to theorize autonomy outside ideologically-reproductive conceptualizations of human personhood. Social reproductive interpellation in terms of filialization or hierarchization of people within a given community, the fact that younger people are interpellated as children or

adolescents while the older are licensed as adults, all of this also needs to be layered on top of the political economy. Socialization is already a socialized libidinal economy. My intention remains to situate the libidinal economy within the larger existing historical structures. In this effort, I am thinking of Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy*, Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, as well as their predecessors of Marx and Freud on the question of internal economies of regulation and motivation, and their sense of social extension. Persons, as subjects under domination, choose ideology as a means to an end while they are also interpellated. This means that both consciousness and unconsciousness are involved in the process—there is a libidinal rationality of sorts; ideology enables every person to live with themselves despite inevitable limitations on their self-consciousness disciplined by social relations of the political economy.

Althusser (1999) suggests that Lacan would argue that ideology's political economic value is that it reproduces common social scenarios (and their stable resolutions) arising from a universalized familial triangulation of the dominant and dominated (98-100). In his text on Lacanian psychoanalysis, Althusser (1999) was wrestling with a realization of the nature of the potential radical-political latent in Freudian psychoanalysis. He had seen how a social method of self-conscious education had been reduced to bourgeois social reproduction, and tried to argue that the inkling of a different path was visible in the deconstructive steps that Lacan was taking in his theoretical premises.

I have found Althusser's questions relevant, because they address the psychological and political conceptions of subjectivity and the political consequences of their assumption that the present manifestation of sociality is an ahistorical universal. To what extent particular concepts of subjectivity are biological or unchanging is up for debate, but the point stands that

withholding the judgment that asserts perfect knowledge of the make up of the internal universe will open up the critical space for unanticipated alterity. The point is not a utopian, but a theoretically responsible one. By forestalling the naturalization of this process, we can begin to reflect upon psycho-politics—that is, the politics of the psycho-social development of the human condition. I hold that the critical value of contemporary youth studies lies in the possibility of youth's claims to critical political consciousness against a system attuned to treating the human as an object. But, the problem is that young subjectivity is most often talked about in terms of development; a trajectory established from corrective clinical motivations, such as understanding various pathologies, which are approached "realistically," that is, "scientifically," and not historically. The development framework owns the language around health and well-being: normative development schema always-already dictate the best (that is, the "only") outcome: normative adulthood (in historically-contingent world capitalism). Well-being tied to development is limited in its scope, because it operates within the parameters that establish youth as a transitory subject position on the way to maturity of an adult human being (whose subjectivity is defined functionally as an ability to meet the minimum standards of capitalist-oriented productivity).

Socialization as Psychotechnological Complex

It is in the context of habituation that the politics of socialization as I have been trying to frame can finally be situated: habits of self-conception are historically grounded in culture, which exists within structures and institutions of political orders and economies. In this sense, socialization and trans-generational social reproduction (as mechanisms of habituation) are forms of technology that reach across the psychological and the social domains. In this sense, David

Riesman's (2001) critique of American culture at the dawn of the culture industry is particularly attuned to noting the changing authorities over the domains of socializing institutions. While it remains a work of classical conservatism, Riesman's *Lonely Crowd* presents an analytic framework which denaturalizes socialization along the lines I am currently attempting. What Riesman does is to abstract socialization processes down to their participants and their roles in order to argue that the makeup of socialization was changing as the role of socializing shifted from the parental circle to the peer group and consumer society. In other words, Riesman presents socialization as an interpersonal technology for future-social-actor training.

Psychoanalytic theory recognizes socialization as the reproduction of culturally-patterned relations between parents and their offspring, and more importantly that socialization initially frames and structures self-conception; it is a technology[31], even though, especially in the works of youth-socialization oriented psychoanalytic theory (Aichhorn 1932; Erikson 1958; Freud 1965), we can see how psychoanalysis redeploys alienation and identification as psycho-social technologies to redirect the affectation (or cathexis to use Freud's (1924) term) initially framed by primary socialization. This alienation occurs on the level of the interpersonal. It reduces the proto-social experience within the family to that of an exchange-oriented performance, wherein the child realizes early on that the parents are not truthful (Klein 1963). More than merely withholding insight into the workings of the world, the parents were exposed to be unreliable for the task of transferring accurate information about the reality, given possibility the parents were not aware of their mis-projections. As the child develops its sensitivity to the parental

[31] See Erikson's (1963) work on youth, and Aichhorn's (1935) work on youth delinquency for examples of the psychoanalytic thought explicitly focused on the question of reigning in the young for the sake of social reproduction.

(misconceived) psychic messages, it continues to be further alienated, and the psychic development of its own self-awareness and its own subjectivity taking on unexpected terms. Object relations theory implies that the early established and later sustained patterns of habitual reproduction (seeking out and fulfillment from attainment) of self-relating make up the course of human development: to draw a singular line from which one looks at other people as social authorities mirrored emotionally through the mark of his parents. Both Anna Freud (1965) and Erikson (1958) argue that social problems in early childhood and later adolescent development stem from inadequate trans-generational communication regarding the systems of power, that is, the coming of authority for those youth who accept to be subjugated to its reign (68; 78). In this sense socialization serves to (re)distribute symbolic value by ranking its participant population into manageable enclaves (even the children get to be recognized as on-the-way-to-power, or older-than-before, or attaining a higher class, marks, etc.). And I have been arguing that as far as has been theorized, social reproduction in capitalist society only deals with the bourgeois family as the normative, which is important because it explains why subject-formation and exploitation of object-relations subjectively and interpersonally in the family come to be treated as natural. To treat socialization as a technology would mean to read guilt (and the general experience of primary identification) as a moment when regulation is created (Butler 1997), but not lose sight of the fact that guilt is formed from interpersonal social experience, and thus, in talking about generations and reproduction of labor, guilt becomes a manipulatable affect (in the same sense that awe or trauma can be conceptualized as a structure).

Under contemporary socialization practices, the child does not develop on her own terms (these terms are an impossibility): children are socialized in conformity with the needs of the

given reality principle (cf. Marcuse 1974). Moreover, the child's attempts to understand and live within the world on his own terms are blocked; the society of necessity produces "bad faith" (Sartre 2001). Instrumental social ends (the conformity of the individual with his world) justify the reproduction of repeat intergenerational relations, with the inevitable result of a psychology of predetermined (and, in contemporary society, highly commodified) object relations (Klein 1975). In fact, there is a close relationship between the historical narrative of a culture and the trauma to which children are subjected as they become members of the social organization (Cooper 1971; Rank 1929; Reich 1983). This psychoanalytic conception of trauma is of an affective experience that becomes a manipulatable social object. In formative childhood, trauma affects object relations, affectively loading objects with meaning and attachment, and complicating the person's relations to desire, secession, life and death. It is rather difficult to speak of the type of trauma that is genealogized as a psychotechnique of social reproduction and socialization. It is difficult, because the process of identifying the traumatic (i.e. stunning for the sake of cooptation) is interpretive. But, if trauma, as a psychodynamic developmental experience, boils down to being a direct experience of the real—in the least bit about the unsublimated—then, for any generation typically destined for social construction, trauma breaks the prototypical socially-reproductive self-consciousness formulas. In this sense, trauma, given the right socio-historical conditions can act as a force of politico-ethical transformation. Unfortunately, since the post-industrial society offers no progressive reconsiderations of the human condition, these youth become conflicted on the psycho-political level. In the postindustrial consumerist present the youth are disappointed to realize time and again that they are being sold secondary fulfillment with the promise of fulfilling the primary lack. Gardner's

(2013) *App Generation*, Boyd's (2014) *It's Complicated,* as well as Boellstroff's (2010) *Coming of Age in Second Life* all dance around these themes, but in the end minimize the role of digital consumer technology in shaping the everyday lives of adolescents, because they lack political lenses akin to the ones I presented in the first part of this chapter. The lack of which I speak, of course, is in the realm of the social relational: the desire to feel recognized and connected to the lives of others. Instead of therapy, consumer capitalism 'thingifies' relations to trauma and creates bonded relations.

Foucault instead argues that culturally and historically specific habits of self-narrativizing are methods for particular production of the self within an already existing political economy. The technology of socialization, which psychoanalytic theory could not see as such, Foucault (1988) terms *technologies of the self* as daily habits of a person's relation with objects that frame the way he approaches thinking of himself (his everyday self-consciousness). In his words:

> As a context, we must understand that there are four major types of these "technologies," each a matrix of practical reason: (1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification; (3) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject; (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform I themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (1988: 14).

Foucault's notion of self-producing technology goes as far as the formation of the habit to think about oneself in a particular matter. He provides a mode of understanding the ways in which popular historical practices of relating to one's body and one's sense of being a body result in specific conceptions of the subject. The cultural habit of journal keeping in Roman culture served Foucault as one of his primary examples, because this habit reinforced a notion of subjecthood by drawing habitual attention to the state of the body's health. In this way the private moments of daily reflection were culturally habituated to be channeled to reflections on the state of the body, which rationalized the reduction of the possibility of self-conception to the body, that is, property, by the mere fact of taking up the space of another possible reflection (24). Foucault's theory of how self-consciousness is socially mediated is useful as a way to draw out where the political economic touches the structural, the relational. Our analysis is therefore returned to familiar and familial objects, now with a critical edge: how does the comportment of the body itself become a sign (and a limit) of socialization? In some manner, the body is an effect of symbolic communication; under my analysis, the symbolic system is the system of socialization and subjectification. The body—a "private place"—is in fact laden with social meaning; historical power structures working in and through bodies legitimate and authorize persons as public (and private) subjects.

Adorno's (1983) concern for the fate of the mimetic experience under the reign of the culture industry takes us into the realm of the idea-formation, the realm of consciousness and ideology. For Adorno, the concept (what becomes the commodity form as soon as it enters history) is in itself a historically grounded technology. As a concept, a word (or a representation) is a technology, because it enables a person to deal with an object in an alienated manner

(Adorno 1983: 37-42). The distance from the object allows for cultivation of agency. Subjecthood (self-awareness or consciousness) is deeply invested in the very life of the concept. For Adorno this concept is also a problem. Having a tendency towards perpetual colonization of experience, conception gets in the way of the qualitative relation to experience by merely continuing to serve as a representational mediator, which, in its accidentalness, (re)produces consciousness (79).

Stiegler's (2010) concept of psycho-technology situates the politics of technology in the context of industrial and consumer capitalism. By focusing on attention-formation as technology (by which he extends a concept akin to Foucault's notion of technology), Stiegler offers both reading and playing as examples of how attention-formation has a dual function in the life of the person: in the first instance it cultivates the person's ability to narrativize himself, that is, to think of himself as a coherent subject, at the same time that it draws the person's attention to specific socially-valuable (ethical or even nationalistic) narratives (10-12). And secondly, the process captures the immediate focus of the person, which allows for more immediately-educational priming (41-43). The first acts along the ways that journal-keeping operates for Foucault's journal-keeping Roman, while the second act, that of playing with others, allows for smuggling of generational relation-formation that train the person to be an (read: "socially responsible") ethical social actor (18). What makes habituation into narrativizing oneself daily into journals (or developing the habit of following another's line of thought line by line in a book) a technology is that a person's attention is directed towards a stable goal—which until now has largely been presumed to be socially-valuable (12). This direction is socially valuable, if it provides social lessons to be smuggled into the person's habitual mode of social operation without his explicit

knowledge and without the complication of his outright consent, thus preparing him to become a member of society that can be entrusted with (re)productive responsibility—he must reproduce despite his consent.

Towards the Role of Gaming in the Techno-Consumer Libidinal Economy

For the contest of the televisual, and particularly the dawn of gaming, in this chapter I have been building a comprehensive theoretical framework that encompasses socialization, subject-formation, and self-consciousness. This was an effort to prime the grounds for considering the role of gaming in metropolitan youth's subject-formation; how gaming looks as a gadget in the contemporary consumer political economy requires material and ideological understanding, because fragments of present and future social and object relations of young people have already become valuable markets in the political economy (the topic of Chapter 2 and Chapter 3).

The name of this game is fostering commercial feelings and behavior—becoming predictable desirers, habitual consumers, repeat costumers. Among many other such 'gadgets,' the 'social network' is far from being a disinterested enterprise; like the internet, it is borne of capitalism, which is driven in the organization of value-extractive means towards increasing efficiency, extracting value from life and, as an even more profitable side-effect, soliciting active participation in commodification. Pariser (2011) talks about the feedback loop and self-referentiality that inevitably emerge in the commercialization of the televisual medium, in particular the 2008 change to Google search algorithms, which would track and collate your search results, radically personalizing your search results. In other words, televisual commercialization (as social-media and video-gaming) needs to be fully considered as an apparatus of socialization in order for its political structures to become visible. As Schor (2000) and many others have pointed out, children's socialscape is commercial. This is partly because children do not have the requisite for cultural reproduction—peers who self-reflexively make

things for their peers. Adults have this, teens to some extent, too, but children are handed down their 'equivalent' (since in liberal consumerism, every milieu is supposed to have its own version of the same).

For a considerable portion of consumer-society youth, networked computer games, as sites of digital mediation, have become a means of socialization and part of their every-day. (Bissel 2011; Bradford 2012; Brzezinksi 2008). Therefore, contemporary critical engagement in youth studies needs to interrogate the sites of digital mediation. As an example, I will be offering the most popular massively-multiplayer, online, role-playing game (MMO) in the world—The *World of Warcraft* (WoW), but beyond WoW and role-playing games alike, I will discuss gaming more broadly as deploying interpellations as a kind of avatar-gamer relational container.

Gaming is benign when the subject is deterritorialized; the avatar and its limited in-game agency can appear as the signs of digitally-sponsored liberation as long as we are not reminded that real people (with real political economic and cultural structural positionalities) occupy subject-positions (but cf. Castranova 2008). As soon as we localize the subject as a young person in the process of learning about the world, games can be seen as taking part in socialization and subject-formation. I intend to focus on the adolescent subject on the home front, because it strikes me that adolescence as a subject position is especially reified for the purpose of legitimizing particular social relations between the person and the society. Tiqqun (2012) argues that adolescence is created by consumer capitalism. Klein (1984), Anna Freud (1965), and Aicchorn (1935) individually argue that the modern society produces the necessary neurosis that create adolescents.

Whatever we say the limits or behaviorisms (i.e. unavoidable natural developmental stage) of adolescents are, those limits in fact define what we as a society allow to be done to persons interpellated as such. We say they are prone to be immersed in fantasy, so selling them fantasy becomes socially acceptable. Understanding this process is critical in proposing a political reading of youth in idea and subjectivity. The ways in which a society totalizes itself inside a person's mind (through the complexes of socialization and familial emotional indoctrination) shape the youth's own experience of subjectivity. At the same time, this process harmonizes the subject's self and social world, in a manner in accordance with the particular form of social relationality determined by social-historical and political-economic structures (cf. Althusser 1984). Because the adolescent person holds a subject position in the status quo of the dominant economy, the position must be theorized simultaneously within two economies: 1) a libidinal economy in which the adolescent's psycho-social experience is crafted to facilitate the development of productive habits, subjugation, and exploitation; and 2) an ideological economy of political standardization within which a young person develops both an image of himself as a subject and a particular embodied orientation to his subjective experience (that is, the materiality of experience). Materiality as a concept is meant to suggest that if something is happening, it has a materiality (a qualitative content). And that materiality means that things might be occurring despite and outside of consciousness. The way that I have organized the discussion among the chapters that follow reflects the dialectical complexity.

At this point I would like to point towards the main question of my thesis: what is the nature of economic exploitation of youth socialization via media technology and programming? In the chapters that follow I will return to this question from a few different contexts (such as

from the position of labor, affective stimulation, and political consciousness). For now I would like to offer what I think the theory I have laid out up until this point would speculate would take place.

Most of the time what goes by the name of socialization is repetition, behavior modification by impulse control, and productive habit formation (that is, sublimation). For a time children are given treats and explicitly told to differentiate them as exotic objects. To this exoticized object their attention and access are externally allocated, and then gradually the treats are directed (or socially-valued) towards a productivity (cf. Stromberg 2009). In other words, the stake of social reproduction is instilled into a child despite their developing consciousness. In this sense the transgenerational, transhistorical political economy deals with regulation and limitation of consciousness for the sake of the political economy (as a sense of social reproduction). This line of thinking is relevant to the generational experiential difference amongst the subjects of technological consumerism: growing up with gadgets is different than having learned to used them in the course of one's lifetime (see Chapter 3). In the latter instance the person comes to find out that there are quicker ways of doing things, having been socialized according to the object-relations of their traditional psycho-social (psycho-economic) economies. The former, the so-called digital native, experiences simulations, the virtual, and all of its prosthesis as parts of its psycho-social structure of subjectivity (cf. Dunlap 2013).

As for the political reading of psychical violence of commodification and its transformation (not simply contamination—the effect is always dialectical) of cultural, and especially familial relations, self-consciousness takes on a particularly sharp political valiance: as the child is alienated from the parents, who were initially the direct suppliers of object relations

towards bourgeois self-consciousness, the child not only begins to observe and formulate concepts in a vacuum of parental (psychical) authority, the child also adopts the industrially prefigured object relation into his own trajectory towards a self-consciousness (cf. Klein 1984). For the children of consumer society, their parents supply the ideological concepts to develop their own internal object relations and emotional languages. Nonetheless, since the responsibility for the "definition"—once it has entered self-consciousness—is actually with the child, not with the parent, the problem of self-consciousness shows up as the apparent lack of agency of the child to protect or guide the formation of his object relational flows from commodification.

In other words, the economic exploitation of gaming in the lives of youth shows up in the process of socialization and indoctrination through administered processes that construct self-consciousness of inner life. It gains a particularly critical dimension in the context of repressive desublimation and post-industrial capitalism. Marcuse (1964) argues that post-industrial consumer-orientation of capitalist surplus-extraction forestalls the individual's ability to cope with the new terms of existence and preservation, and consequently cannot provide socially sustainable outlets for individual frustration (202).

Additionally, as the proverbial map always already precludes the terrain, the consumerist economy drives the pressure for limit-expansion of self-consciousness to the point where one is always already situated in a world of repressive desublimation, where the flexibility of inner object relations is so plastic it can mold to provide itself with repressively desublimated satisfaction from any number of objects, inadvertently causing the complete depoliticization of the subject's private conceptions. This I call liberalization of object relations (a concept that will become most clearly valuable in the last two chapters): through economized mediation,

televisual consumer culture, and culture industry it plays a key role in the techno-consumerism of today. Historically the advent has been associated with the dissolution of the middle class family (cf. Cooper 1971; Friedenberg 1970), but I think of it as alienation of that which was culturally patterned to occur at certain periods in the young child's life, which, now re-territorialized by means of technological mediation and commodification, occur at an industrially chosen time. Within the interdisciplinary situating of the adolescent subject in the socialization process, it is not hard to imagine that in societies conditioned to regularly undergoing the process of object-relational reconstitution/transformation as the consequence of commodification (Baudrillard 1998), the commodification spills over into the familial sphere, causing transformation of relations in the formative scenes. The child's sense of self develops in isolation from his parents as the child comes to conceive of the world not through a gradated, partial exposure to the world of their genealogical predecessors but traumatically on their own, in the comfort of commodities deemed appropriate emotional objects from afar.

Gaming and the Liberalization of Object-Relations

The starting point has to be that capitalism ought not to be assumed to stand for all of present human society, nor ideality for justice, nor extractive ideological indoctrination for socialization. A politics of youth can allow us to see that adult culture is unable to pose an immanent political critique of such deep commercialization. This current moment of advanced capitalism has brought an unprecedented level of commercially-geared repression and manipulation of the social circumstances of the young. We know it by names too familiar; it impedes aesthetic and social development by marketing military-handed-down technology as a 'pharmakon' for the alienation that its own commodification of the human has caused. The larger point is that no authority or socialization model is ahistorical; authority always serves the stabilizing needs of a given political economy. Socialization, then, at best dictates the ideology of what is then relegated as the dominant reality principle (cf. Marcuse 1974: 218-220). Thus, rather than conceptualizing the new 'consumer-techno' socialization trends as a lack (of parental authority, of tradition) I will ask: what does it mobilize; what subjects does it form and promote? How is the adolescent incorporated in the mechanism of consumption/prosumption? Prosumption is a term recently deployed in marketing literature on gamification (that is, transforming everyday banal processes like online-banking and online-shopping into game-like experiences that bring about their own experiential satisfaction), and is meant to capture the fact that the act of consumption is the same as the bedrock of production when it comes to the kind of value created and extracted in circuits of social media and other online commercial contexts (see Bogost 2007).

I propose to treat gaming (in terms of how it is tied to consumer economy) as a concrete agreement among the dominant industrial interests of the consumer society. Doing so exposes social stability as being closely tied to the the perpetuation of stability, which is historically situated in perpetuation of circulation, that is profit-making. In turn, profit is dependent on surplus extraction. In our day and age, for the metropolitan subjects, this profit extraction can be observed in gaming to involve the use of mediative technology to take control over object-relational formations and thus control the formation of particular moments of subjecthood. In other words, I will explore how profit extraction in the specific case of the metropolitan consumers depends in part on the recirculation of ideological residues (those particular regimes of object-relations, structural identities, and interpellations) into techniques that perpetuate its linkage between subjects and objects—not unlike bourgeois family institutions and their mechanical reliance on guilt. My goal is to counter the fact that the political consequence of such reinstitutionalization remain only vaguely ascertained, while it is true that the intensification of commodity production, that inescapable reality of modern capitalism, creates an increasingly antisocial repressive political economy.

I will argue that, in its interactivity, the technique of gaming taps into repetition and habituation—two concepts that become central to the technique of gadget-mediated self-relation. Even as a mere amalgamation of psychological techniques, gaming becomes the means of particular social reproduction, one which also guarantees that the commodification will continue by having been replenished from within. But there are unforeseeable consequences to the commodification and alienation, a newer consciousness, a newer politics. For example, gaming is a capitalist enterprise, and the under-theorized fact is that this process of subject-avatar relation

is shaped by profit-seeking interest. But, researchers have only alluded to the implications of gaming impinging upon youth development (see Brzezinski 2008; Castranova 2007; Galloway 2006). An adolescent might adopt an avatar for his own subjective purposes, but this activity takes place within a venture that generates profits, and arguably reflects the tendency of advanced capitalism to extend itself into new domains of human life: in this case, searching for the extraction of psychological surplus value (see also Lind 2012; Newman 2008). Because it is increasingly likely that activities of self- and social-development take place in this virtual world, it is also likely that gaming plays a decisive role in subject-formation and socialization.

My sense is that gaming has become an ideological, political-economic, and subject-formative institution for youth, especially male youth, in contemporary Western society. In the next chapter I will specify a massively-online multiplayer role-playing game (MMO), *the World of Warcraft* (WoW), as a historical site of coalescence of the adolescents' subjective experience, at which we can interrogate the reproduction of subjects. Gaming envelops historical experiences of the social and interactive. More specifically, MMOs are played "in real time" with other human subjects (cf. Ito 2009; Turkle 2012); the mode of interaction is "role-play," meaning that players are engaging in performative interactions with other players (cf. Crawford 2011). In essence, I will argue that WoW enforces its own version of the subject. Allow me to elaborate by applying Althusser's theory of ideology to WoW: interpellation works to the extent that a person thinks of himself as a self-directed and self-realizing subject. To be a WoW player, one must adopt a digital avatar, "hailing" himself as an embodied subject while simultaneously following a projection of "himself" on the digital screen. Preliminarily I suggest that we should posit this phenomenon as a second interpellation. Thus, there are two questions at the outset: (1) does

WoW, as an institution of socialization, differ from other modes of so-called traditional socialization (the family, the factory, etc.); and (2) how does interacting with virtual reality (re)produce forms of subjectivity? In other words, what are the political implications of reading the subject-avatar across the three dimensions of psycho-sociality described in the introduction (the psychic, the relational, and ideational), and in relation to the already-existing primary interpellation? It is the task of social theory to determine how this historically-specific ideological apparatus enforces its vision of subjectivity, and what this regime of enforcement means for youth.

CHAPTER TWO: *WORLD OF WARCRAFT* AS AN INTERPELLATIVE CONSUMER APPARATUS

Introduction

Allow me to begin with a passage from *Preliminary Material for the Theory of the Young-Girl* (Tiqqun 2012):

> Among its many signs, we recognize that the new physiognomy of Capital, only an inkling in the interwar years, has now attained perfection. "Once its fictive character is generalized, the 'anthropomophosis' of Capital becomes a fait-accompli. Then the mysterious spell is revealed, thanks to which the generalized credit that rules every exchange (from banknotes to mortgage payments, from labor or marriage contracts to 'human' and familial relations, from education and the diplomas and careers that follow, to the promises of all ideologies: all exchanges are now exchanges of dilatory appearance) strikes with the image of its uniform emptiness the 'heart of darkness' of every 'personality' and every 'character.' This is how Capital's people increase, just when every ancestral distinction seems to be disappearing and every specificity of class or ethnicity. It's a fact that doesn't cease to amaze the naive, who still 'think' with their gaze lost in the past" (Giorgio Cesarano, *Chronicle of a Masked Ball*). The Young-Girl appears as the culminating point of this anthropomorphosis of Capital. The process of valorization, in the imperial phase, is no longer simply capitalist: IT COINCIDES WITH THE SOCIAL. Integration into this process, which is no longer distinct from integration into imperial "society" and which no longer rests on any "objective" base, requires that every person permanently self-valorize…Society's final moment of socialization, Empire,

> is thus also the moment when each person is called upon to relate to themselves as value, that is, according to the central mediation of a serial of controlled abstractions. The Young-Girl would thus be the being that no longer has any intimacy with herself except as value, and whose every activity, in every detail, is directed to self-valorization. At each moment, she affirms herself as the sovereign subject of her own reification. The unquestionable character of her power, all of the crushing assurance of this flattened being, woven exclusively by the conventions, codes, and representations fleetingly in effect, all the authority that the least of her gestures incarnates, all of this is immediately indexed to her absolute transparency to "society"…Precisely because of her nothingness, each of her judgments carries the imperative weight of the entire social order, and she knows it (9-10).

With these words, the writers of Tiqqun announce that the exploitative drive of capitalism has realized its model of subjectivity, one which "self-valorizes" into commodification on its own accord. This chapter concerns the incorporative mechanisms used by the contemporary consumer economy to create the suitable subjectivities that are also necessary for capitalism's ongoing reproduction. Being a political project to understand capitalism from the vantage point of the people deemed consumers, the question is: if a person reacts to the political structures of his world by imagining a subjecthood, then of what consequence is the subject, which is produced to consume? I will argue that video games (particularly in this chapter, the massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMOs)) are a particular site of subject-production in contemporary capitalism. The MMO is a site of intentional subject-creation to socialize a particular orientation towards consumption. Starting from a peculiar resemblance between the

model neoliberal subject and the gamer, I will focus on the relation between the person and the game as a consumer capitalist extractive mechanism. What is popularly known as *ludocapitalism*, I want to treat as a mechanism that conceptualizes the existence of massively popular digital gaming industry within contemporary global capitalism and its relation to modern modes of labor and value. Ludocapitalism is the term used by contemporary critical gaming theorists to signify the kind of capitalist social relations in which one plays a game for work. I would like to spend a moment and note the difference between a few of these theorists: Savat (2013), Boutang (2011), Stiegler (2010), and Baudrillard (1970): For Savat, a Deleuzian framework is most useful. For Boutang it is one by Hardt and Negri. For Stiegler it is Heiddegger and Simondon. And for Baudrillard it is a structural Marxist one of Debord and Althusser. In other words, the notion of ludocapitalism shifts according to the theoretical framework in which it is brought up (see Lopes 2008). Put rather bluntly, according to ludocapitalist analysis, as Galloway (2006) put it in a remarkably representative tone, "We are all players now." I will show that surprisingly it is not commonly held that ludocapitalism poses a new theoretical challenge to the study of capitalism, even though theories of consumption in capitalist political economy are still highly contested.

The concept of ideology is central for this chapter, because it offers a refreshing way into consumerizing technics. Capitalism as a political economy sustains an ideology—thus a notion of a culture and a subjecthood—a notion of the person and his sense of self, which together work for and within the economic system. Ideology surfaces whenever individual persons think of themselves and narrate their place in the world or rationalize the larger power structures operating in the society. In other words, ideology, studied as a structure and a materiality, is a

symbiotic relationship (or at least a compossibility) between the larger system and a person's self-constitution. I have singled out Althusser's theory of interpellation, because it offers a useful way into the psycho-social dimension of subject-formation—the emotional and symbolic[32] symbiosis between the person and the political economy. The existing literature on the MMO phenomenon (and the so-called digital culture more generally) focuses on "psychological" categories like motivation and addiction (the topic of the following chapter). But, it fails to offer any substantive meditation on the political consequences of the phenomenon under observation. Both motivation and addiction are emotional involvements, and as such, when read through the lens of interpellation-for-extraction, the phenomena are exposed as having a role in perpetuating 'voluntary' participation within the extractive and consumptive mechanisms. The very process of ideology can be operationalized to train a person to self-commodify.

Exploitation of Subjectivity under Ludocapitalism

Dyer-Witherford and de Peuter (2009) present us with a comprehensive materialist situating of commercial gaming, its many relational dimensions of materiality such as the workers and labor involved, the consoles mass-produced, industries that govern, and the global political economy that encompasses it. The authors employ the critique of capital as supplied by Hardt and Negri's work on immaterial labor, Foucault's notion of biopower and governmentality, and Deleuze and Guattari's mechanic subjectivities. In their words,

> The game industry has pioneered methods of accumulation based on intellectual property rights, cognitive exploitation, cultural hybridization, transcontinentally subcontracted

[32] Throughout the paper I use the term "symbolic" to signify the terms through which the historical economic processes solidify themselves into codes and rules for the individual to follow. As Althusser (1968), Lacan (1973) and Lyotard (1974) all argue, the symbolic processes are structural processes that make themselves apparent in the nature of the operative (ideological) rationality.

> dirty work, and world-marketed commodities. Game making blurs the lines between work and play, production and consumption, voluntary activity and precarious exploitation, in a way that typifies the boundless exercise of biopower (xxix).

I found *Games of Empire* to be a very useful introduction to the sites where gaming is seen to procure new reterritorializations for postindustrial capital. The authors offer a critique of the Italian autonomists' conception of immaterial labor with their own consideration of gaming labor (2009: 18-20); they argue that "the video game console was part of the 'grand offensive,' the perfect latchkey-kid-care techno-device for the world of working women, double-income families, and single-parent households" (19). But, at the same time, the authors draw a limit on their critique by drawing a circle around gaming as the "mechanization of unpaid domestic labor" (19). Furthermore, even in considering the way gamers have participated in the creation of new "mods" of their favorite titles ("mods" are modified scenarios within specific game engines), the authors merely cite the way that gamers participate in such reproduction, but do not consider the reasons for their investment in so-called "playbor" (25, 221).

The most glaring consequence of this strict definition of what activity constitutes labor comes up in the chapter on *World of Warcraft*, where the authors recognize only the gold-farmers as laborers, because they are directly employed in the circuits of turning in-game gold into real world exchange value (142-144). In dismissing what the supposedly Western gamers do as "futuristic accumulation" (126), what the authors miss is an opportunity to consider how the terms of gaming biopower-governmentality that has to keep to certain simulation of the real

political economic logic of scarcity not only disciplines the potential global workers in its economy but also convinces the paying gamers to valorize their labor as play.[33]

Most interesting for my research was the authors' use of Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the human-machine assemblages. In the authors' words:

> Guided by Deleuze and Guattari's machine studies, we open up the Xbox and its console rivals as state-of-the-art *technical machines* made of chips and circuits; as components of giant corporate machines; as *time machine* for profitably using up software and other virtual commodities; as generators of *mechanic subjects*, mobilizing the passions and practices of hard-core gamers; as contenders in the competitive *machine wars* of video game capital, but also at the same time of the transgressive, subversive *war machines* of nomadic gamer hacking and piracy; and last, through all these preceding machine moments, as part of the *global biopolitical machine* of Empire (71).

Dyer-Witherford and de Peuter recognize the assemblage of "player-console-television" (72). They also note that Microsoft pioneered the deterritorialization of gaming as a countercultural activity of the military-industrial-complex workers of the computer age and reterritorialization of gaming's allure within its console (74-75). They even recognize the fact that *Empire* requires the socialization of its subject masses to "endure and endorse…banalized war" (100). In their chapter on *Full Spectrum Warrior*, Dyer-Witherford and Peuter also mention Massumi's affective circulation, but, in my opinion, miss the opportunity to integrate the weight of that point about the libidinal economy into their discussion about the political economic value of a military

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[33] Dyer-Witherford and de Peuter note:

> Corporate publishers must stimulate player activity from below, for this is precisely what gives the game life, makes it interesting, and bestows the "persistence" or longevity vital to commercial success…But publishes must also ensure that players' biopolitical production of game life does not transgress the limits of profit maximization, disciplining and interdicting all sorts of demands, desires and infractions (2009: 127).

simulator doubling as a consumer gaming product when they reduce it to mere identification with the soldier one is to play in the military scenario (2009: 106, 112, 118). The fact that networked play has to be paid for, they consider the grounds for "machinic subjection" (78), and build on that by explaining how Microsoft engages in surplus extraction by requiring increasing amounts of micro transactions to improve scores in games (79). They even recognize that gaming employs some specific kind of "desiring machination" (80). But, this is where they draw the line as their theorizing does not go beyond their stating that "hard-core players identify with a specific subject position: *the man of action*" (81). Here they simply conclude:

> By affirming that a machine for youthful male players should be a black box with a huge, complex controller, providing a virtual imaginary of racing cars and cyborg warriors, embedded in aggressive put-downs and trash talk, Microsoft circularly corroborated presuppositions about youth, masculinity, and digital play: it reproduced hard-core subjects (84).

What the work lacks is consideration of subjective experience as a constitutive part in understanding why gaming works, how it motivates the gamer to continue to participate within its many circuits of surplus-extraction.[34] In other words the work does not apply the traditional concepts of political economy to the more complex processes of gaming, but reserves discussion to the conventionally recognized. *Games of Empire* is a great introduction to the lay of the land, but needs to be critiqued for not recognizing what happens within games as labor activity, and does not think of the surplus extraction that comes from within. My sense is that without the

[34] At one point, the authors talk about pleasure and its usurpation within the circuits of gaming, but seemingly dismiss the obstetric moment by saying that "to say that consoles are enslaving is not to deny that they are pleasurable; it is to say that pleasure itself channels power" (2009: 92).

consideration of the subjective and more specifically subject formation we cannot see what exactly is happening when persons begin working to construct their own sense of ideological syncing by holding up gaming subjectivities.

Stallabrass's (1993) "Just Gaming: Allegory and Economy in Computer Games" offers a few useful starting points that raise the incorporation of ideology in gaming. Conceptualizing what gaming represents as allegory, he alludes to the importance of considering the subjective experience of gaming in situating the whole apparatus within the historical political economy by offering a reading of gaming as fitting within Benjamin's theory of the arcades and phantasmagoria and as constituting the basis of Adorno's critique of culture industry. In his words, "the distinctiveness of games lies in interaction: the passivity of cinema and television is replaced by an environment in which the player's actions have a direct, immediate consequence on the world depicted" (1993: 1). Stallabrass points out that the objective of the game is chimerical, that is, "in most games there is a striving towards ever greater illusion and the envelopment of the player to provide an immediate, visceral experience…[in which] one plays at being a self" (1).

Stallabrass argues that games build their affective palpability on constructing an identification between the avatar on screen and the player (2) just as in cinema the audience is immersed into the action of the film by identifying with the protagonist. In his words:

> The computer game enforces on players a mechanization of the body in which their movements and their self-image as alter-ego provide both a physical and a simulated picture of the fragmented, allegorized and reified self under the conditions of capital (3).

But, Stallabrass draws a line between the kind of labor that the gamer engages in to identify with the on-screen alter-ego, as the game is only considered an allegory of the larger political economy: "the labour forced on the player is not real, the instrumentalism not really consequential, nothing (except time) is really consumed" (4). For Stallabrass what happens in the realm of gaming is nothing but a simulation of production that harkens back to the real-world circuits of capital.

Furthermore, Stallabrass captures some of the important questions that I will return to in my own study of gaming in light of the lives of postindustrial adolescents. He talks about the ideal, Utopian space created within game fantasies where exchange value and use value once again come together (4). He also talks about the way in which the plot of a game camouflages the base similarity of all actions within its realm, and even offers the affective self-stimulation that gamers reproduce as a means to misrecognize repetition as pleasurable (5). Stallabrass sees the computer game as a simulation of work under postmodern terms of capitalism:

> Computer games perform simulated acts of reification where slices of immaterial code act as living beings arranged and treated as objects. Even the brutal simplification of digital figures is a register of objectification (6).

Most exciting for me was discovering Stallabrass's consideration of Benjamin's gambler, who roams the labyrinthian arcades (7), and for whom, the ability to empathize with the betting parallels his empathy with the exchange value (12). In his words, "Especially with arcade games, the computer produces in the player a simulacrum of industrial work: the autonomy of each action, its repetition, precise timing and rare completion are all reminiscent of Benjamin's analysis of the gambler's action" (7). He acknowledges that "the emotional attachment to the

game is established through labour," but concludes that "the activity is entirely unproductive" (8). My sense is that this is possibly because Stallabrass does not have an operative theory of subject-formation in his analysis, without which one is unable to see that what is being produced is a subjectivity, an affectively-constructed sense of self. This is perhaps because Stallabrass has a rather simple conception of desire, or the libidinal economy that operates with/in the gaming apparatus. In his words:

> The operation of desire in these games is simply an acute form of the normal procedure of the market in fashion-driven culture: there is always a sense of something beyond the present experience, of some unused potential within the machine, of a task never quite finished, of a realism not quite complete (11).

Gaming accomplishes "mental conformity" by enabling the real-world worker to entertain a real fantasy of the ideal, Utopian version of political economy (13).

Games of Empire offers a survey of the major themes in critical gaming studies. It looks at the notion of being a gaming worker, that is a person working in the industry directly or by extension. It looks at the gaming companies and their hold on global capital, as monopolies and vested interests. It also considers the consequences of the collusion between gaming and the military-industrial complex. And it also looks at gaming as an allegory such as in the case of *Grand Theft Auto* series. But, in this sense, the work also presents the endemic limits of gaming studies. Stallabrass's work serves as a fitting compliment to *Games of Empire* as it brings us closer to the more complex questions about the psycho-social incursions of the gaming apparatus. But, much like the work of Dyer-Witherford and de Peuter, "Just Gaming" also suffers

from an endemic limitation: the work is limited by its lack of precise definition when it comes to the subject who games in the circuits of postmodernity.

A person's experience with video games exists in a world already saturated by an ideology of consumer entertainment. And in order for the notion of "new-media entertainment" to make sense, we would have to assume that there is nothing alarming about deriving satisfaction from images and sounds without concrete materiality. In the background of digital technology and contemporary ludocapitalism, there is the pretext of televisual mediation, which marks an important assumption in drawing a line between pleasure and semiotics: deriving pleasure (or another kind of affect) from an event (or an object) no longer needs to have a concrete stimulant. Take Pavlov's classical conditioning as a technological discovery: pleasure can come from a tailored repetition, that is, a mere satisfactory illusion of attainment (Bernays 1952; Cialdini 1993). Thus, it can be simulated, which means that the subjective reproduction of libidinal attachments to symbols and images, those societally arranged concepts of meaning, still takes place. People are placated to terms of the political economic "game" through a process, in which they involve themselves with simulations of historically established ways of desiring and satisfaction—ways of psycho-social valuation that fit familiar formulas of correspondence between intensity of work and the pleasure of attainment (Deleuze and Guatarri 1972; Lyotard 1974; Armenti 2013; Whitson 2013; Vanderhoef 2013).[35] In theories of audience labor, identification as a vehicle for guided-interpellation has long served as the bedrock of commodification (see Chapter 4). Take for example the role of commercial music in consumer spaces: the tune bypasses the consciousness and interacts with the listener's affective situation;

[35] In the following chapters, I will go into this notion of libidinal economy and valorization in depth.

identification with the lyrics, the "I" or "we" or "you, “ happens in hearing *in* an uttering a familiar emotional statement (see Negri 1999). Geared for identification, commercial music prepares the person for the smuggling of commodification that is to come—it is purposeful symbiosis of commercialized affect, which says, ‘now that you identify, you are safe at home, so draw down your defenses and buy that something that says you’re worth it.’ The capacity to manipulate the psycho-social ties, like the ever-present "I"-identification in commercial media, is a form of technology.

Interpellation enables us to dig below the surface distinction between the social, the economic, and the psychological—beyond the libidinal and the symbolic—into the fuzzy terrain of the psycho-social. In Althusser's reading, interpellation synchronizes the needs of the individual with the political economy. It has a structural function in the psychosocial historical and existential reality of being a person in a society. This is how Althusser explains the co-existence of guiding interpellation and self-determination:

> The interpellation of the individual as subject, which makes him an ideological subject, is realized not on the basis of a single ideology, but of several ideologies at once, under which the individual lives and acts his practice…What results is a play and a space of multiple interpellations in which the subject is caught up, but which (as contradictory play and as space) constitutes the ‘freedom’ of the individual subject, who is simultaneously interpellated by several ideologies that are neither of the same kind nor at the same level; this multiplicity explains the ‘free’ development of the positions adopted by the subject-individual. Thus the individual has at his disposal a ‘play of maneouvre’ between several positions, between which he can ‘develop,’ or even, if you insist,

> ‘choose,’ determine his course, although this determination is itself determined, but in the play of the plurality of interpellations (2006: 242).

In this framework, ideology is reproduced actively (and compulsively) by state apparatuses (that is, the functionary structures of social institutions) and the political economy. But, there is a historical particularity, which hinges on unconscious processes, to this view of ideology: it is a reaction to a historical situation of subjection and domination.

In *For Marx* and *Ideological State Apparatus*, Althusser is concerned with technology only in the way that it intersects with industrial production. Most notably in *the Philosophy of the Encounter*, Althusser’s concern for technology is relegated to the capitalist mode of production and the basic exploitation of the proletariat. In other words, Althusser does not contemplate the existence of mass-communication technologies in his theory. Had he one, his theory of ideology would have led to a theory of the technological apparatus that guarantees the interactivity between the symbolic and the libidinal—a psycho-social corollary to political economic structures.

The Frankfurt School could only speculate on the historical consequences of the merging of power and technology in industrial capitalism as it was restructuring itself and consolidating power in the wake of the Second World War. But, Marcuse’s repressive desublimation (1964) still rings true: originating from a regime of modern capitalism where monopoly capital develops state controls and perpetuates an increasingly monopolized experience of humanity in which something previously accessible to more people is replaced by a simulation of a controlled dosage of the original. There is a hidden territory of desire-commodification in approaching interpellation as a psycho-technological mechanism: it is the person himself who subconsciously

identifies with pieces of interpellation and (re)constructs an ideological subject in his own mind. As Althusser (1999) says, “In order for the individual to be constituted as an interpellated subject, it must recognize itself as a subject in ideological discourse, must figure in it: whence a first speculary relation, thanks to which the interpellated subject can see itself in the discourse of interpellation” (52). In this way the subject on the inside comes to be synchronized with the dominant subject model. And the way by which the subject is built determines the way that the subject is to be replenished.

The concept of psycho-technology enables us to theorize the consumerist appropriation of interpellation: the exploitative apparatus relies on technology-enabled, micro-management of ideas and the quality of experience. Psycho-technology is developed by Stiegler (2010), who uses it to represent micro-regulation of attention, which he observes in the consumerization of intergenerational habitus and the replacement of intergenerational relations (in instances such as imitation and facilitation of sublimation and anxiety-tolerance) by televisual guidance. In the early 1980s, Foucault (1984) used the term “technologies of the self” to suggest something very similar—although, characteristic of Foucault’s approach, his interlocuting subject matter was Greek and Roman cultural practices of writing about one’s self. More importantly, Foucault’s conceptual limitation is the fact that he focuses on the middle-ground, the governmentality in which both the political economy and the subject participate in shaping the situation. The theory of psycho-technology points to techniques that regulate the qualitative experience of people relying on popular technology for social and economic mediation. Because it affects the attention processes in the structural (unconscious) dimension of the psyche, the theory questions the qualitative impact of psycho-pharmacological and attention-management processes of being

‘plugged-in.’ In other words, the concept offers a framework to incorporate the psycho-social realm of experience—the grounds of socialization and social-reproductive processes, which have traditionally been outside the theoretical scope of capitalist extraction.

I would like to additionally propose that Deleuze and Guattari (1972) can facilitate the conceptual situating of psycho-technology. Deleuze and Guattari’s (1983) work exemplifies the way in which a libidinal-economic understanding of the historical-material human condition can enable immanent critique of capitalist society. I see my thesis as contributing to their consideration of human desire as the source of production (instead of accepting the assumption of an ‘orienting-lack’ (Lacan, 1977)), as I argue that the psycho-social is becoming employed towards extraction prior to finding its way into material representations. For a specific class of the contemporary global capitalist structure, the digital medium led to the mimetic re-coding and transplantation of consciousness and social knowledge.

The works of Deleuze and Guattari (1983) and Foucault (1988) suggest that the political-economic incorporation of the subject requires the standardization of signification and identification practices. To offer a contemporary example: the scenario of an adolescent person’s anticipation of what is new on the frontage of Facebook, as a substantive experience or a hallucination of an expected experience on Facebook, expands on this point: this hallucination or mental image is a mimetic object, which is summoned by an object, a consumer-technology object, in the external world. As socially-constructed mimesis, theory would suggest that it is repressive in character, because representation is not only bound to the activity of the imaginary, but also to the selective-operationalization on the part of the societal (Adorno, 1998; Marcuse, 1964; Baudrillard, 1998). The crucial pivot-point is that the socialized imaginary (Castoriadis,

1987) is the psychical agent of incorporation that serves economizing and ideological functions (Horkheimer, 1972; Althusser, 1984).

Baudrillard (1998) argues that the economy of consumption secures circulation by employing misrecognition, which underlies ideology and the distance between representations and their consummating intent. This notion of necessary misrecognition for the circulation of commodification of the psychological (or the imaginary), in the case of video games and social media, suggests that the emotional anticipation of new images tunes the psychic to expecting the formatted images from those sites of production. Stiegler (2010) suggests this much, but arguably this is only a speculation. Nonetheless, there are signs in contemporary research, at least on the side of consumer research, that this idea has already been employed: for example, Cottrell and Rajecki (1974) offer a theory of the profit-potential in users' emotional investment in performance of repetitive, "irrelevant" tasks; Zwick (2006), on the other hand, directly theorizes the commercial application of Bionian object-relations theory (1963) in his conception of post-consumption object relations.

This has been a roundabout way to arrive at the following question: how does psycho-technology (the development of increasingly interactive televisual media) figure into the process of ideological interpellation? While, in general, it is not hard to point to ideology (after all the Church still exists!), where can it be observed in concrete experience of daily life under consumer capitalism?

In order to find a viable answer to this question, we need to turn to terms usually deployed to make sense of how persons become entangled in the formation and sustainment of each others' lives. The so-called "object-relations" have an explicit function in operationalizing a

given ideology as conditioning the inner life of a person to suit the political economy. Put in the context of consumer experience, identifying with movie characters (people and ideas popularly celebrated as being powerful) is a form of a kind of consumer-socialization by interpellation. Commercials as commodified film (the now-classic example of televisually transmitted affect-technology) is what critical theory worried about (in terms of what it does for ideology becoming more directed, intentionalized) (Adorno and Horkheimer 1995; Fromm 1960; Marcuse 1968). In the experience of watching films, the audience enjoys as long as the film can capture a proximal signal to what its producers intended to convey. Now we have video games that allow role-playing in scenarios from those films—in first-person shooter games like Battlefront players re-enact the most cathartic scenes of Hollywood war cinema (namely *Saving Private Ryan* and *the Band of Brothers*) by having their view, range of motion, and capacity for self-help vulgarly predetermined to bridge the experience of being a film audience to being a gamer.

If ideology is framed in reaction to subjection to power, then under the terms of "digitized" capitalism, agency can become a commodity. And in ludocapitalism, that commodification surfaces in the relation between the ideological subject and the in-game avatar, where the psycho-social processes from prior forms of socialization (ideology to integrate the family, the community, and the state) are appropriated for newer forms of socialization (ideology to perpetuate consumption). There is an economy of believability governing interpellation in film and video games. I find that Bakhtin (1991), in his analysis of Dostoyevsky's prose, captures the key to this when he suggests that the success of a work of fiction rests in how well the author can simulate each character as having their own autonomous subjectivity, which for Bakhtin means, the sole access to their own particular, self-confirming ideology. The more opaque the better a

character can simulate multi-dimensionality, the more self-explaining that it contain, the more 'desirable' it will becomes, warranting an interpellation. In other words, ideology can become a tool of technology. I am using technology in the sense that Heiddegger (2008) and Simondon (1969) used it, that is, a technique, an enabling of control over a domain of life that did not exist beforehand. I think that these authors ultimately have an apolitical conception of technology, which creates more problems than resolves them. Therefore, I only define technology in their terms at onset, but problematize its social history from that point onwards, because, after all, technology in consumer society emerges from the industrial militarization. Consumer technology can appropriate the ideology-production mechanism in the effort to make the person feel in control while directing its subjectivity towards exploitation (by offering up an avatar for interpellation, a simulation of an empowered subjectivity).

From their scenario to their rules and basic engineering, video games rely on ideology to create their play. What a game demands from players to win, what kind labor its code values are decisions which stem from (al)ready-made ideological assumptions. Aupers (2011) argues that the gaming industry relies on commodified agency to secure its ongoing profits from consumers' participation:

> To accomplish its goals of keeping gamers playing, the game industry directs much of its production budget and its technical expertise towards the engineering of 'immersion'. Immersion entails amnesia: it makes gamers forget the offline social, technological and commodified environment of the game and makes them identify with the game world...They have experiences of being in the virtual world, living their virtual lives as

heroes, whereas they forget about real life and the technological, commodified nature of the game (67).

The game scenario might ask that one accept a subject-position of a colonial settler on the way to the New World (like in the Real Time Strategy game Empire: Total War), or a newly minted human "paladin" (game-speak for a religious knight) with self-righteousness reminiscent of the Christian crusaders (as in the MMO the *World of Warcraft*). In the context of the game, these interpellations are justified axiomatically. After all, the player, as the subject in the game, must be justified in the actions he must take to win no matter how unethical the premise of the game's scenario might be (see also Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter 2007).

But, for the current exploration, it is the technique of subjection, rather than the implications of such content-based depoliticization, which is of interest. According to Althusser, part of the process of interpellation is the imposition of the ideological context which the person reads and constitutes in his head in the process of imagining his own subjection (1970: 56). Whereas real-time strategy and first-person shooter games are only partially realized worlds and so only partially-realize ideology, massively multiplayer online games make interpellation a more complete process, because they possess more of the characteristics of whole-worlds. With no ability to cheat the total system, all player action abides by the programmed discipline of how long a task will take, and how that in-game action will be valued. In these "worlds," a person can "live" through an avatar provided that it accept the rules of the game through which it is hailed as a subject in/to the game. This time/value economy in an MMO operates in compliance to its lore (its ideology) that sustains the rational consumer interest in the game to perform within its created economy (Castranova 2005; Dyer-Witheford 2007; Yee 2005).

Allow me to present a basic primer of the experience of playing an MMO game. At the very beginning of the game, a player is instructed to create an avatar, which will be its conduit in the game for the remainder of the time. This avatar is full-bodied—it has all the characteristics of what a person might look like, and the player can customize the shape of the avatar's features from a catalogue of variation. After the initial choosing of avatar's race and gender, the player must choose the avatar's in-game "fighting" class, that is, whether this character will prefer hand-to-hand over distance combat, armor and steel over magic, etc. At the beginning of the game, the avatar is dropped in at the common location of new-player-insertion (every race has its own starting-location). From that point onward, the player interacts with the avatar by means of his keyboard and mouse, where he will literally follow the avatar on screen, directing its actions, which are predetermined by the game-engine. As for how the game is organized, the game-engine values the player's kills (as experience points), which continually add up to level up the avatar's in-game standing. This standing in turn enables the player to have access to a larger part of a predetermined catalogue of fighting capabilities and in-game commodities for his avatar. The game progresses as the avatar-player travels from place to place and picks up missions from non-player entities (Non-Playable Characters or NPCs). He may choose to do the missions with other avatar-players. These missions educate the player of the game-world's lore, and act at first as training missions, and later as means to experience the arc of the game's larger storyline, which in the least serve to justify repetitive activities (see Bissel 2011 for an in-depth discussion of the importance of the game tutorial).

By and large, the social research dealing with the subjective experience of an MMO approaches its subject matter rather uncritically. Some research focuses on the nature of

attention-formation in MMOs, but fails to realize any relevance of deeper consequence—it fixates on the findings' relevance to institutionalized educational concerns (see Formsma 2013; Fromme and Unger 2012; Khoo 2012). Other research focuses on the question of addiction, positing that addiction to MMO-play is related to psycho-social histories, and that it results in weakening social relations. But this research only extends its concern to the way in which more time in the game takes away from the traditional social investments (see Antonius et al. 2010; Beranuy et al. 2013; Herodotou et al. 2012; Yee 2006). Still other research looks at the nature of diverse participant motivation and behavior in an MMO, such as what motivates them to stay, why and how they participate, and what this means for identity formation (see Cheong and Grey 2011; Gotterbarn 2013; Kowert et al. 2012; Li et al. 2011; Papastylianou 2013; Steinkuehler and Williams 2006). But, as in the other two groups, these researchers limit their conclusions to observations of heterogeneity as a phenomenon to be documented and described. Take for example what Yee (2007) has called the "Proteus effect" of immersing oneself in an MMO (see also Fox et al. 2013). Yee suggests that the creation of an avatar with certain characteristics can change the behavior and self-perceptions of the individual. This article and the literature which follows in its path often fixate on allegedly positive psycho-social impacts such as empowerment through gender selection and increased self-confidence through the creation of a desired 3D body (Corneiliussen and Rettberg 2008). All of these approaches assume an uncritical liberal relativism towards the subject of their analysis. More importantly, they accept consumer technology as playing the part of an uninterested mediator.

It remains to be acknowledged that such empowering effects of identifying with an avatar still operate in a capitalist economy, where both the technical means of mediation and the

program underwriting the avatar-subject identification are both implicated in an exploitative business enterprise. Deeper concerns over the nature of the mediation and its effects on the popular trends in subject-formation are absented from the discussion. And this absence might be explained by the fact that such deeper concerns would question the nature of subjectivity or consciousness sustained and promoted by the MMO environment. Because such line of thinking would mean asking for a psycho-political discourse on the MMO, it would, in turn, bring up the structurally "dangerous" questions on the reality of the "colonization of experience"[36] by and for commodification and exploitation. In Marcuse's words:

> Massive socialization begins at home and arrests the development of consciousness and conscience. The attainment of autonomy demands conditions in which the repressed dimensions of experience can come to life again; their liberation demands repression of the heteronomous needs and satisfactions which organize life in this society. The more they have become the individual's own needs and satisfactions, the more would their repression appear to be an all but fatal deprivation. But precisely by virtue of this fatal character, it may create the primary subjective prerequisite for qualitative change—namely, the redefinition of needs" (2001: 250).

The discourse with consumer technology is still in its infancy, because technology still remains idealized (this is a point I will take up explicitly in Chapter 3); when technology makes a showing in public discourse, it is in its sanitized, future-oriented form that distracts away from any signs of its present profit-extracting utility, because the capitalist interest is assumed to be ever-present and unchanging. The point is not that scholars are prevented from having politics,

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[36] This is a phrase Jerry Mander uses for the phenomenon from *Four Arguments For The Elimination Of Television* (2001).

but that they do not have them because they, too, are ideologically-constituted subject. In this light I would like to ask: what sorts of psycho-social consequences results from game-mechanics' design choices?

Mechanism of Interpellation in the Context of MMOs

Considering the role of ideology in technology-mediated subject-formation can greatly deepen the discourse. By recognizing a psycho-social process (that of interpellation), we can turn to locating what it is of socially-reproductive mechanisms that consumerization commodifies. Interestingly enough even in many instances in which social theory touches upon the concept of technology, the concept is idealized, or in the least, a sense in which the technology exists outside of its historical political economy is preserved. But here I am explicitly thinking about two instances in popular game studies, which seem to ignore the ideology within which they operate. Castranova's *Exodus to the Virtual World* (2007) and Bainbridge's *the World of Warcraft Civilization* (2010) individually attempt to theorize the social future in which socialization is wholly transplanted into the digital realm. While Castranova entertained a semblance of critical engagement in his earlier work (2005), in this later work, he admits to be engaging in "speculative nonfiction" (xi). Bainbridge's work, on the other hand, does not venture out of logical positivism, with the consistent result of attending to arguments which merely read WoW as a phenomenon to be read and rationalized as a given. Let us begin from the argument that the process of commodification is repressive. Baudrillard (1998) argues that the economy of consumption sacrifices the quality of experience, because it derives its symbols from a finite, historical culture, and therefore, must recycle its symbols over the course of perpetual circulation of production and consumption (24-25). Commodifying reduction is repressive, because it is an

experience limited to what can be televisually captured, affectively loaded, and then transmitted through the medium (see Mander 1976). In this sense the televisual becomes the filter—the regular affective participant in the definition of the experience. It is repressive, because that which cannot be qualitatively translated into a televisual form from the real experience is either cast aside to be forgotten, or, in the more likely scenario, transformed to a reduced form fitting the televisual's, in this case, an MMO's, operational common denominator—the reduction of experience to what can be technologically reproducible (by code and corresponding keystrokes). Reproducibility is also a central factor in the tailoring of the MMO experience because of its considerable atomic weight in the capitalist economy. Reproducibility normalizes equalization, regulation, and horizontalization of experience. It qualifies the folly of reductive mediation, which is repressive because it defines the parameters and quality of social relations in the interest of (not societal) capitalist exploitation.

As for the capitalist logic, Marcuse (1968), in his conception of surplus repression[37], adds that this repression acts as a container that enables "thingification" or commodification of human activity and the very pieces of object-valorization (see Chapter 4). I think we can find the lasting relevance of these speculations in the MMO-play process. For example, if we track the aesthetics of the experience of coming to relate to an avatar as a MMO gamer and the course of changes and its patterns in the longer course of avatar-development in the *World of Warcraft* (WoW), what we will encounter is a drawn-out, tedious process of habituating the gamer to a specific form of commodity-fetishism: fetishizing very small differences in televisually symbolized and

[37] Marcuse (1968) differentiates between primary and secondary repression. In the primary instance, repression is unavoidable as it primes the young subject for the process of socialization. In the case of surplus repression, this is repression that does not have to exist, but does so for the sake of exploitation in the political economy (81).

wholly-created value (see also Bergqvist 2013). The repetition and regularity are not limited to the game's beginning and end; all of the interactive features within the MMO environment are regulated; they repeat beyond the semblance of their aesthetic forms, which, in turn, fosters repetition, which is also repurposed and circulated (see Carroll, 1999; Christou 2013). The MMO is a consumer technological response to the need to perpetuate demand-creation. It utilizes the "magic" of habituation to create the habits for the fetishizing of small aesthetic differences necessary for continued symbolic consumption, and represents an industrial effort to control the flow of consumer demand and immersion.

It is no surprise that many scholars have picked up on the fact that nationalism, racism, and sexism, to point out a few historical violent patterns of social interaction and affectation, are reproduced in the MMO environment (Turkle 2002; Dyer-Witherford 2010; Hartmann 2011; Jockel et al. 2012). On the surface, an MMO relies on emulating scenarios of popular historical experience to create its lasting "consumer interest." But, because of the essential reductivism of (mediative) technology it relies upon, the MMO also replaces and homogenizes, and redirects (directs and controls) the quality of the experience.[38] For this much more complicated task, an MMO operationalizes the psycho-social mechanism of ideology, that is, interpellation. Interpellation takes on a more visible form when we realize that projective identification, that is, the subjective identification based on an emotional situation, which a person immersed in MMO-gaming experience involuntarily experiences (Yee 2006; 2008), is also a form of interpellation. In fact my claim is that all processes involving the conversion (and unavoidable reduction) of the qualitative by way of signs, symbols, or representations (such as sublimating an affect and

[38] What Adorno would call the qualitatively non-identitarian as opposed to "subjectless rationality" or "perpetual sameness" (2005: 41)—the experience which was not yet digested and translated into the digital realm.

then releasing it through a counter-act) are shapes ideological interpellation takes in the concrete experience of a person's subjection.

The problem with the existing literature on MMO-experience lies dormant in the researchers' operating assumptions. Whether genocidal, racist or sexist, blatantly entertaining any other kind of reactionary violence, they treat fantasy as being harmlessly without consequence (maybe even therapeutic). As technology studies continue to wallow in the crevices of the consumer economy, the primary consequence is that fantasy-commodification goes unexposed in its already ideologically purified form; participating in the game is then merely the continuation of the modern streams of consumption (electricity, computer products, software, in-game objects, subscription, labor economy, domestic economy, gender politics, race and class politics, object-relations and scarcity, etc.). But what if the role of consumerizing of desire is to (affectively) allow the interpellated person to have a deterritorialized experience of the social—to get as close to reality as possible without its being the real world of repercussions and consequences (Deleuze and Guattari 1972; Savat 2010). Online discussion forums on popular computer games are riddled with fitting examples. Most recently I came across a set of screenshots of a person playing the latest Grand Theft Auto V game, which this person titled "selfies in GTA V" (a selfie is a photo of oneself that a person takes using their cell phone camera). In the first screenshot, the player's avatar is standing by a computer-controlled avatar taking a selfie, and in the second screenshot, the player has apparently shot the selfie-taking other;[39] a realm of action without consequence, where one can finally kill that person engaging in the most annoying social taboo. To state it directly, my intention is to explore the connection

[39] See the anonymously posted image on the social media site, Imgur: http://i.imgur.com/24mOPlx.jpg

between modern consumer capitalism and the dawn of the game-subjects. Considering the MMO in the context of ideology and political subjugation is fitting, because the capitalist economy of commodity consumption requires not merely efficient and cost-effective production, but anticipation, cultivation, and prolonging the demand for its commodities. In fact *Forbes* magazine quoted Larry Summers (one of the chief architects of contemporary capitalist economy) as saying that "[the U.S. production] "lacks demand" sufficient enough for consumers to drive the economic growth at a faster pace" (Sept. 15, 2013).

Interpellation and Subject-Formation in World of Warcraft

World of Warcraft (WoW) has been one of the most popular MMO games in the world since its creation in 2003. Additionally, WoW in particular has been the subject of a large body of social research as a phenomenon of "new sociality" (see generally Bainbridge 2010; Castranova 2007; Nardi 2010). But, contrary to popular perception, my contention is that WoW does not offer a new world, but instead distorts and reorganizes the already existing, familiar historical-political reality in order to seduce the attentiveness of the players. In WoW, every gamer is simply a neoliberal subject; neoliberalism offers consumerism (that is, choice of commodities) in place of qualitatively personal ways to social life, and it relies on a technological apparatus to monitor and analyze the worth of individuals. In turn, individuals, now reduced to apolitical interpellation of being consumers, find refuge in WoW's "world," where the basic neoliberal contradiction between structure (that is, predictability) and personal freedom are virtually resolved (Houtmann and Aupers 2011). WoW designers deploy a characterology of the capitalist subject most briskly captured in the image of the Ayn-Randian hero: a subject that embodies a self-interestedness of the most strictly economic nature, whose self-interestedness stands at the

nexus of his existential matrix[40]—essentially defining it entirely by its vacuous but ideological gravity (see Dolgov 2014). In fact the only remaining and still-growing section of WoW-related literature is solely dedicated to tales of fame and riches gathered in the game, self-help and how-to guides to accumulating the most loot and turning it into real-world money (see Dibbel 2006).

If WoW, as an instance of a much-wider MMO paradigm, is viewed as a psycho-technological apparatus, then, because ideology serves to satisfy the person in their inescapable subjugation to the political economy, so can WoW be seen to operate on the level of players' fantasy and desire. How does WoW, as a commodity and an experience of simulation, relate to ideology and socialization? What does it mean for critical theory that an ideologically-bound subject might enter another sphere of economic performativity (as yet another subject)? Is there a social and political importance to this avatar-subject relation?

In WoW, interpellation performs in the background as the player thinks itself a self-directed and self-realizing subject. To be a WoW player, one must adopt a digital avatar, "hailing" itself as an embodied subject while simultaneously following a projection of "itself" on the digital screen. I posit this phenomenon as a second interpellation, because this is (at least initially) an intentional effort in the life of the person who already interpellates himself as an amalgam of political-economically reconciled subjects. Mirroring the foundations of the first, the success of this secondary interpellation rests on the indesctructibility of the avatar's existence; this avatar-subject will always be there, and it does not need to be thought of in order to exist (unlike self-consciousness, which is emotionally exhaustive). Furthermore, if a person allows

[40] Young-Bruehl (1996) offers a psycho-social theory of the way in which historical trends in neurosis and psychosis correlate with the dominant political economic history.

himself[41] to be immersed in an MMO experience, then it fundamentally means he has accepted the terms of the structural mediation. That is, he has accepted to operate within an in-game economy of attention. He has also accepted the unquestionable prescription of value-defining objective; he has accepted that his in-game time will be more valuable if he puts care into what he is doing in the game in every moment. But most importantly, by submitting his attention and care to the same mediated experience, he has accepted to build emotional bonds to the televisual objects in the experience. As Boellstorff (2008) observes, there is a point at which the player begins to orient his choices based on what is best for the game avatar-subject and its in-game record, and it is at this moment that secondary interpellation can be seen. This is where self-consciousness (beyond the limits of the avatar-subject) only gets in the way of performing the tasks needed to efficiently keep up with the avatar-subject's needs.

The operating interpellation begins to surface at the moment that the avatar character gains its own integrity. In this schema, one spends time developing a character; all the players one meets know that person solely through and because of this character and its standing in the game. Those other players express gratitude (or even merely recognize the player) solely because of the status (the achieved in-game level and power), the grandeur, of that character—how powerful it is in the game and what it can do to help other players achieve in return; in-game sociality boils down to means-ends rationality shared across individual player's singular goals. Since the social activity exists in WoW in a wholly intentional enterprise, only what is intentionally communicated is acknowledged and possibly responded to by other game participants. What the coding of WoW does not account for simply does not make it to the realm

[41] A note on the gendered pronoun: consumer research, and media studies alike, contends that the "hard core" of the global gaming population is made up of 16-35 year old males (Beranuy et al. 2013; Crogan 2011).

of players' interaction. Therefore there evolves also a false sense of stability and continuity, because the player might have his difficult feelings of reacting to the endless repetition and repression all to himself, but others will only interact with his avatar, which communicates its own integrity despite the player's actual feelings.

In every facet of the in-game experience, a player is behaviorally conditioned to identify with the avatar: the longer one plays, the more invested in the character one becomes, partly because of the time and effort needed to spend in the game (the avatar becomes an embodied virtual record of that inescapability), but partly also because of the small jolts of satisfaction gained from surprises of attaining an unanticipated achievement or valuable loot in a post-skirmish gamble or a new "skill" (see Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2013). The better one is able to technically understand and mechanically act according to his avatar-subject's place in the game economy, the better that one can timely perform the micro-economic actions that will have a rewarding result. The game is tailored to fostering this kind of close-attentiveness—the production-orientation to the in-game experience can mean spending a lot more time on the less-desirable "mining" tasks such as gathering ingredients for a craft, or the more likely, never-ceasing activity of participating in virtual genocide of NPCs to gather more experience (see also Alloway and Gilbert 1998). The more the player monitors where he "belongs" at his avatar-subject's level, the more that he prioritizes developing the skills "belonging" to his class of avatar-subjects, the quicker and stronger the avatar-subject he has invested his efforts into becomes.

Gaining the experience to level up his character takes a lot of time. Over the course of 90 levels, the amount of time spent gathering experience through repetitive tasks (only differentiated

by their aesthetic) grows exponentially to where in the last quarter of the leveling, one is spending anywhere from three days to a week's time accumulating experience (which the gamers have appropriately terms "grinding") (see also Yee 2006; Gamevault 2013). The gameplay is surprisingly boring. Hirsh, Mayeda, and McIver (2013) have even noted that the WoW players find it to be boring, but they failed to provide a deeper analysis beyond merely offering that the boredom stems from social factors, the challenging nature of the game, and its repetition (9). Moreover, over the years, hackers (who, interestingly, want to be a part of the MMO play despite their digital-technology prowess) have invented modifying software (mods) that can automatically perform any one of the myriad of required tasks in the upkeep of the avatar-subject (see Trammell 2013). In fact, Blizzard-Activision, paid a record setting €650,000 to a freelance programmer (self-described "hacker") to stop sales of a bot in Germany (Ubergizmo 2013), which would allow players to hand over the task of the repetitive actions to a computer program. In the words of the article's author: "Some games like WoW require you to farm and spend many hours trying to find specific items that can be sold. It is tedious and boring, so many gamers use bots to do it. However, for many games, the use of bots is against the terms of use and companies like Blizzard have banned accounts for using bots" (Ubergizmo 2013). Immediately, there are contextually related questions: why do WoW players tolerate a boring game? And, why would WoW-makers pay such a high price to outlaw the only way for the players to get around the play becoming another site of labor?

It might well be the case that Blizzard-Activision knows that the players tolerate the mindless repetition, because of the emotional value of their labor: in their emotional economies, work has an affective "atomic" weight—its valorization requires no consciousness to make itself

meaningful. And it is this mechanism of valorization, which propels the players towards ever deeper identification with the avatar-subject the longer that they submit to the in-game regime of work. In a world where "cheating" is bought off, the only course of action for a player is that he religiously abides by the call of the avatar-subject's in-game position. The player becomes only the supplier of the body, which presses all the right keys in all the right combinations, and goes through the motions determined by the game. In such a strict economy of attentiveness, time is the central conduit of valorization in the player's interpellation with the avatar-subject.

This is where the literature on addiction connects well (a point I will discuss in some detail in the next chapter), because the interpellation is strictly habitual, emotional in nature. Put rather shortly, developing on Marcuse's secondary narcissism and repressive desublimation arguments (the way they are jointly co-opted by consumer capitalism), secondary interpellation commodifies those mechanisms' repressiveness by channeling it into its own notions of productivity. I contend that this explains why addiction is seen wherever there are users of avatar-subjects (see also Cheong 2013). The capture of commodified interpellation is in the identification with an object. An object is one-dimensional; an object, in stasis, has no memory, no feelings, no depth, no qualities of being a subject. And as long as the emotional fixation is sustained, as long as the perspective of the person is fixed, the subject feeds on the fixed assured stance of the object-subject, and can thus ignore the shaky foundations of his own subjectivity. In this way the subject chooses to ignore the concrete reality, for the always-fleeting object-subject. This is at once the allure and the addictive core of the interpellated object(subject): it needs to be fed, refreshed and repeated, in order to sustain its 'life' in the subject's attention and imagination.

In this fashion, attending to the avatar-subject becomes a job in a virtual economy (Castranova 2005; Galloway 2012). In this economy, some players are self-conscious of their job-subjecthood (Dibbell 2006)—they mine the most sought-after in-game materials and sell them on the in-game market for coins, which they then turn into dollars and euros in secondary currency exchange markets (see generally Castranova 2005). Others take the laboring as an inescapable given, and approach the in-game economy as any good ideologue would—they justify it on its merits as a disciplining mechanism (Bombace 2013). Still others blindly reproduce their proletarian subjection by nature of their ongoing position as subjects in the economy (Nardi 2010). The diversity of perspectives on the in-game economy goes to underscore the way in which the virtual labor supplies the consumer capitalist economy by reproducing the players' necessary ideological consciousness as subjects. Obviously, it is the game designers and the makers of the games who materially profit from the players' ongoing dedication to the game. But, in this equation, the players have to keep each other interested and convince themselves that their time is well spent—and that in fact they are having a good time, that their time and their attention spent is well worth it (Nardi 2010). This, in turn, guarantees that the political economy of class relations is reproduced in the game. Interestingly enough, as long as the players act in their interest, they all continue to stay plugged-in; they will accept the terms of in-game habituation and continue to pay the monthly fees, which will supply the game makers with the present and future profits.[42] In some cases, most notably in WoW, the game-makers will enact "quality control" mechanisms in the game that surveil the players' communications for potential dissenting disgruntlement against the game-engine. In a growing

[42] I intend to discuss the psychic valorization of labor in Chapter 4.

trend, they have hired social scientists to do that research for them. In fact one of the first researchers to take on the interactive trends on WoW, Nick Yee, was hired by Blizzard-Activision, the gaming industry giant which own WoW, in 2010 to continue doing what he had done as an academic researcher in the years prior (Yee 2007). WoW, as an exploitative enterprise, is cognizant of its interests, and the steps its makers take in sustaining its exploitative rationality lead to a feedback mechanism that perpetuates circulation and reproduction under the guise of protecting the system's longevity (see generally Pariser 2009).

CHAPTER THREE: THE ROLE OF MEDIATIVE TECHNOLOGY IN THE REIGN OF REPRESSIVE INTERPELLATION

Introduction

As Baudrillard puts it, the challenge for consumer techno-capitalism is the exploitation of the process of desiring, one of those elemental ways in which ideological unconsciousness of social reproduction serves an economic function.

> It is necessary to overcome the ideological understanding of consumption as a process of craving and pleasure, as an extended metaphor on the digestive functions—where the whole issue is naturalized according to the primary scheme of the oral drive. It is necessary to surpass this powerful imaginary preconception in order to define consumption not only structurally as a system of exchange and of signs, but strategically as a mechanism of power. Now, the question of consumption is not clarified by the concept of needs, nor by theories of their qualitative transformation, or their massive extension: these phenomena are no more than the characteristic effect, at the individual level, of a certain monopolistic productivity, of a totalitarian economy (capitalist or socialist) driven to conjuring up leisure, comfort, luxury, etc.; briefly, they are the ultimate realization of the private individual as a productive force. The system of needs must wring liberty and pleasure from him as so many functional elements of the reproduction of the system of production and the relations of power that sanction it. It gives rise to these private functions according to the same principle of abstraction and radical "alienation" that was formerly (and still today) the case for his labor power. In this system, the "liberation" of needs, of consumers, of women, of the young, the body,

> etc., is always really the mobilization of needs, consumers, the body...it is never an explosive liberation, but a controlled emancipation, a mobilization whose end is competitive exploitation (Baudrillard 1998: 85, italics in the original).

The subject position of the person living within the home fortress advanced capital shares in the reproduction of the system by being a consumer—a person who would ideologically or habitually reproduce himself as always already middle-class-aspiring materialists, who wants nothing more than to go through life raising a family, working on a career, and enjoying a drip of foretold (recycled) satisfaction. Real life is disappointing for him, in the least bit because of finality and temporality, but games are not, and as such, they offer therapeutic-equivalent bursts of self-direction and determination (which, in the consumerist matrix, double as a political economic institution). Gaming opens up a very interesting way of looking at the global Western (psycho-social dimension of) political economy. This is the terrain where capital disciplines ideologically despite the possibility of consciousness. It disciplines the libidinal economy by manufacturing and prefiguring the objects of its attachment, by appropriating the means for object relations. Its approach is figured by its technology: interpellation. The constructed amalgam of an avatar-subject serves as a carrier container for the necessary (re)orienting of subjectness.

Gaming begets its own institutionalizing socialization as ideology-as-an-apparatus draws its power from the motion in subject formation. The ideologue is thus tasked with embodying the subject as a gamer—someone who confides himself to the limited self-awareness of a gamer (always proportionate to maximizing the pleasures within the boundaries of the game). Wark (2007) offers a theory of the subject as gamer in *Gamer Theory*. Wark's work is politically

motivated—to provide a dialectical response to the emergence of the gamer subject. In his book, the gamer is a subject who lives his life with a mentality of a gamer—not only does he think of himself as a gamer, he treats himself as a gaming character, conceiving of his own ideology in terms of a game. Wark offers reflections on how bits and pieces of this understanding are picked up along the way of experiencing various video game genres—a first person shooter teaches something different than a real-time strategy game. In the end I found that the text lacked a systematic, thorough analysis to tie the individual vignettes together under a theory of subjectivity under gaming. Fantasy-role playing games in which the player is assigned an avatar can be viewed as training grounds for people to internalize the subjects necessary to fit the modes of relations under the reigning capital models. In fact there are many instances in popular culture where we can see avatarization as training technology. Across the board, such consumerist profitability links with the historical experience of computerization in the sense that the interaction has been gradually shifting from the directly conscious to the increasingly more complex and unconscious. It is in the unconsciousness, in the assumption of the platform's disinterested mediation, in its habituation, that the opportunity for smuggling and exploitation emerge.

In fact, consumer technology is not a disinterested affair of interfacing (see generally Nusselder 2009). Contrary to the popular assumptions (see Cohen and Schmidt 2013), this technology cannot pass for a mediator of already-existing needs, because it functions as an apparatus of interpellation, which imposes its own standards to be reproduced. In this frame the process is not a transhistorical fact of social reproduction, but a specific form of subject production in an instance of the historical political economy. In other words there is a psycho-

social compromise stricken by the consumer society to appease its subjects—which it also creates—and it appears to be rather sinister. Operating on a psychic level where basic processes of object-relations (those of psychology of valorization) take place, the consumerizing interpellation offers an immersive libidinal economy of lack and a complimenting political economy of indebtedness (this will be the topic of the last two chapters).[43] In such a project the populations of the home fronts of global capital are subject to observable ideological exploitation of their libidinal lives. Because, after all, the terms of their subjectivity, object relations are social in origin, and whoever controls the likely points of origins has some power to predict the likely flow and how to exploit its predictability. In this chapter, I intend to break down the notion that object-relations are liberalized or deterritorialized as a result of commodification through interpellative relations with consumer technology gadgets. I will argue that this specific gadgetized deployment of object-relations liberalization leads to desiring lack, a form of commodified alienation.

One site where this discussion can be said to crystallize in a form of popular culture is the short-lived TV show called *Video Game High School* (VGHS), which was geared to Canadian teens, and ran for two seasons in 2009.[44] The producers of the show could have merely intended to update the familiar high school sitcom format for contemporary "digital native" audiences.[45] But, the show reveals ideological fantasies that help normalize the digital mediative regiment. This is what Shaviro (2010) was picking up on in reflecting on the audience engagement with the

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[43] After all, the generation gamer and the generation liquid-credit are one and the same.

[44] "VGHS." Television show. 2009-2011. Canada.

[45] This much the production team says in the documentary released about the making of the show (see *The Making of VGHS—Behind the Scenes* 2010).

film *Gamer* (Chapter 5). In this chapter Shaviro contemplates how the film Gamer captures a political critique of consumer technology, particularly the dawn of *Second Life* and the normalization of MMOs as a lifestyle. According to Shaviro, it is the fact that Gamer is a film, and not a video game, which allows it to efface a critique of technological mediation, asking questions about what kind of a world sits in the background of such deliberate immersion. In the future-present VGHS universe, the high school is an elite educational institution. The world in which it exists is organized by the popularity of video games so much so that professional video game players, who "earn millions," have long become icons of intramural competition. There is a sense in which the ideology of competition justifies and promotes immersion in the many mediations in the hallways of the VGHS: it is by total dedication that one gets to win; it is how you get to make millions and move up the class chain—all perfectly symbolized by shots of an actual scoreboard. No matter the chosen path, competition is a given, and it is unavoidable—you are expelled if your overall score falls beneath a certain level.

In the introductory scenes of the series' pilot episode, news television shows have become gaming review shows, which merely provide updates about the never-ending competition—the anchorman informs the audience of an ongoing first-person-shooter (FPS) battle in a generically war-torn Middle-East scenario. In this world the culture seemingly whimsically defines the objectives of social-reproductive institutions; the gaming industry runs the school, and seems to have directly produced the curricula. Therefore, there is no observable contradiction in consumption being readily presented as the only incentive in tolerating instruction and examination. Otherwise the Althusserian state or any such social institution does not exist (neither does parenthood for that matter). Interestingly enough even in this context

transgenerationality shows up as the perspectival difference between adults and teens. The parents are represented as either nihilistic and misanthropic, addicted to MMOs (it is implied that this is a result of their not being "natives" to the technological regime), or crazed by a lifetime of competition. There is no mathematics, no humanities or fine arts courses. The school work is still repetitive, but the rewards are immediately social, because good grades is good gaming, which is 'cool;' and when it is not, gaming is still justified with future economic value—the peer-driven social justifies the laboring in either case (after all the adults might be watching, and it is obvious to the interpellated that games are valuable because they are fun, a point that needs no embellishment). From the beginning students are portrayed as totally immersed in various genres of gaming (and if they are not, they are identified with characterological goals and personas). The various gaming genres seem to naturally correspond to the existing character types of the students (which, I presume, the clique-nature of institutionalized education guarantees). The geeks are into strategy games, the spastic into fighting and racing, and the 'cool' kids, whose lives provide the main narrative thrust in the series, are into first person shooters (FPSs).

There is more that situating the classic experience of the televisual can tell us about the psycho-social and subject-formative economy, especially in the instances when mediation comes in the form of multiple gadgets. For example, sitcoms deploy the basic identification by social relational familiarity (see Hearn 2010). The guided interpellation keeps audiences away from questioning the formulaic repetition situated at the center of the whole apparatus—the fact that the world of the sitcom cannot fall apart, those friends have to always be there, and the only variables in question are the periodized challenges that are assumed to be resolvable in the course of an episode or a few. This is an important point to consider, because of the fact that at

the beginning of the 2000s, researchers were dumbfounded by the allegations from the younger generations at the time that they were "multitaskers" (see Gu et al. 2010; Mantymki and Riemer 2014). By the mid 2000s, researchers also realized that what was going by the name of successful multitasking was in fact a deriving of pleasure from immersion (see generally Yee 2006).

The extension and folding of audience labor into gaming has already grown into popular phenomena observable in internet culture—YouTube has many monetized channels for viewers to watch someone else (that is, a professional gamer) play a video game.[46] The popularity of passive audiencing of gameplay is not surprising. It reflects the continuation of an already established interpellation, which in passivity, becomes relaxing as opposed to the immersive demands of a game world (see McIlwraith 1998). In watching someone else play a video game, the passive interpellation works as a vehicle for auto-stimulation. What is of central importance is that the audience experiences this fluidity between the traditionally televisual experience as pleasurable in the downtime of one's own gaming—in those moment when the gamer is perhaps cognitively exhausted. In this way labor is can be doubled as simulation, thus replaying as satisfaction. I will discuss this concept of auto-stimulation in the following pages. For now, it is merely important to define this concept as differentiating between social and psychical stimulation, the fact that there is a difference between stimulation in which the thrust of affect stems from the external world in contrast to regimes of televisual affectation in which a subject participates in stimulating himself by participating in the internalization and identification with

[46] On the topic of the YouTube gameplay video economy, academic research is still in its infancy, but I was able to find enough evidence from various internet forums on the topic. For instance, there is a "Reddit AMA" discussion on one such person who regularly participates in the monetization of audiences on YouTube from March 4th, 2014 (see http://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/1zitdw/im_a_full_time_youtuber_ama/).

the symbolically represented on-screen stimuli (see generally Mander 2001). Since the game-playing subject is behind the veil of the avatar, it is easy for the audiencing subject (who is otherwise also a gamer) to identify with the gameplay of another. In this way watching the gameplay becomes a way of extending the moment in which one is present, passively watching oneself continue to partake in a task interpellated as satisfying.

There is another confluence that seems to mirror this process, and as such offer us a way into the psycho-social construction of audience and gaming mediations. Take for example the role of identification in the audience reproducing itself as an audience of a reality-TV competition show, and specifically how this process of pleasurable identification is nurtured by all the parties involved in the production of the show (see also Alison 2011). Hailing itself as 'reality,' there is a presumption that a social event is being documented (with only slight edits for the sake of narrativizing) (see Baudrillard 2011). In reality, the gaze of the viewer is fixed via the camera, hence any representation can at best be understandable. Similarly, the competition is work not only for the producers and the actors, but also for the audiences. In this instance, the audience, the participants, and the production team work together to reproduce a direct link between the reigning ideology of competition and that of personal, embodied habits of identification and object-relation. In the show, the participants are self-selected as competitors—each one of them wants to 'win.' As such, they are willing to perform themselves knowing that their chances of winning not only lie in their trade-skills, but also in their identificatory value as actors in a relation with the audience. The audience, then, converts this projective identification into libidinal value, that is, being entertained. The question I would like to entertain in this chapter is this: can we imagine the effect that occurs when this reality-TV show becomes a

regular substitute for socializing for the presumed-to-be-entertained audiences on the home front of the gadget-mediated economic relation? In other words, can we think about social reproduction more meaningfully as a process resting on subject formation as a technology, and what happens when capitalism commodifies its interpersonal and intrapersonal processes across subject positions and class? After all, the televisual dampens the violence of exploitation by reproducing domination in ideology. In the way that the audience identifies with the competitors of a competition show, what is promoted is the formation of the subject away from consciousness-encouraging positionality towards stimulating-but-deterritorialized cross-identification. As such the interpellation that the technology provides applies to persons according to the political economic (and psycho-social) positioning of a given subjecthood.

Technology and Mediation

In the case of Adorno (1974) and Marcuse (1974), the passivity propagated by televisual technology is historically operationalized by a nation-state-bound, industrial capitalism of the postwar era. The television is an object of consumer technology that has played a role in shaping the phenomenological experience of that political economy, because its televisual mediation psychologically and ideologically supported the economically necessary alteration of the collective quality of subjectivity (see Marcuse 1964; McLuhan 1970). Similarly for our generation, I read the digital "social" media in the way that postwar psychoanalytic and critical theory read the emerging consumer culture and the television: as constitutive forces in common subject-formation, and ideological collaborators of capitalist power.

In contemporary Western society, technology is (mostly) a concept that functions within the ideological confines of consumer capitalism. On the surface, technology is the guarantor of

increasing efficiency and productivity; it is presumed to be pure, its value only dependent on how and by whom it is used. But, as tasked within political economy, technology defines how a society reproduces itself, how it guarantees its own perpetuation. It enables the access to otherwise uncontrollable realms of private experience for commodification. In this section, I would like to trace a lineage of thinking about technology as a (re)mediative capacity. My goal is to overcome the separation of social-economic and psychological treatments of technology, and offer an alternative reading of technology that enhances the legibility of the impact of consumerization across those realms of experience.

Preceding definitions of technology waver between the technology of language, its impact on the psychological, and the technology of industry. This lineage originates with Husserl and Heidegger. It almost entirely fixates on the phenomenological experience in pursuit of 'objective' knowledge, which means that the immanent political critique is deferred. Evident in the political views of mid-century theorists, best represented in my opinion by Arendt's (1958) work, this group held that technology is intimately involved in reproduction of consciousness and subjectivity. Arendt's distinction between labor and activity in the initial chapters of *the Human Condition* has the effect of naturalizing otherwise social and political relations between individuals, particularly through the way that Arendt treats the question of industrial technology in the molding of the productive social relation. That being said, they presumed a similar neutrality of history marked by a certain scientific-stripping of historically residual affect. The problematic unintended consequence of this lineage of analysis was that it contributed to the commodification-friendly eroding of the human (and its potential politics) in the process (see Marcuse 1955; Lyotard 1993; Deleuze and Guattari 2003).

While this lineage has contributed greatly to the modern theory of existential phenomenology, the lesson I drew from the authors' consistent historical limiting of politics is this: in a context in which the goal is to do a political analysis of psycho-social trends taken as both descriptive and normative, science or philosophy without political considerations becomes vulnerable to being solely directed by the dominant economic powers. In other words, a theory of technology devoid of most far-fetched political considerations (its possible repercussions on a subject and subjects) is prone to serving the reproduction of the historical economic interests, whether those be in service to or against the interest of its subject humanity. What happens to the human as it is led through the chronologically overlaid domains of socialization? What is the effect of standardization on the nature of subjectivity? What happens in the particular context of consumer capitalism when the individual is ever more so systematically contained that he is increasingly more predictable and thus controllable? An unpoliticized theory of technology cannot offer an answer to any one of these questions, because it views technology as only a tool of humanity where humanity is historically relative, but essentially unchanging. In the sense I would like to use it, technology is a mediation, which means that it enables the manipulation of historically inaccessible (psychological and social) processes. Unlike the mediation by the human body (that is, the fact that the body is also a mediator between the person as self-constituted and the world), gadgetized mediation is between the person and the structures of the political economy.

More specifically, technology enables economic redirection of ideological processes. Technology can serve the consumer capitalist political economy by manipulating already-existing historical processes toward extraction of value-creative substance from individual

consumers. There is an immediate political consequence to the fact that consumer capitalism utilizes technology to 'befriend' psycho-social processes (meant for social-reproduction) towards furthering its need for deepening consumption. How we decide to frame this psychology of ideology has deeply political consequences: the extent of the "engineering of consent," the possibility of the technological co-optation of socialization, or the mere prospect of individual autonomy. Ideology, conceived as a mitigating apparatus procuring continual (re)production of subject-position, opens up to a notion of the political in the psycho-social and psychologically-constitutive dimension. This notion of the political is necessary to distinguish between socialization and commodification within the reign of a capitalist political economy—a point meant to clarify the stakes in social scientific research on ludocapitalism.

The psycho-social dimensions of experience of gameplay involves an avatar-subject relation. This fact needs to be treated in light of the fact that the gameplay experience also exists within a business indebted both to digital technological development and commodification. Video games are a means for vulgar profit-extraction under consumer capitalism as well as ideological-subject (and ways of commodity-desiring) reproduction under techno-liberalism. As extractive apparati video games appropriate social laboring from traditional socialization, and commodify the social in an effort to fight against the tendency of their profitability to fall (cf. Sweezy 1942).[47] I am going to suggest that video games (and interactive digital mediation writ more broadly) enable the commodification of psycho-sociality: the modification of object relations through new technologies for habit-formation of 'prosumptive' or self-commodifying and predictably consumptive behavior.

[47] Here I was struck by a parallel between Sweezey's falling rate of profit theory and the fact that gaming companies cannot justify pricing an expansion the way they would a brand new game.

These are two psycho-social concepts, which I use to capture the psychological realm over which gaming commodification takes place. As primarily discussed in Chapter One, object relations as a concept and theory originates in the British school of psychoanalysis with the work of Klein (1975; 1984) and Bion (1963; 1970), who posited that a person develops emotional relations with internalized representations of real (both emotionally real and concrete) objects. The person proceeds to then construct a sense of being in the world through relating to those objects, and relating to the world through those mental relations to idealized objects.

Habituation, on the other hand, signals to a more 'Pavlovian,' basic psychological process. With habituation, I mean to draw attention to the oldest psycho-technology of habit-formation by repetition, and its 'atomic-weight' in terms of desire/affect intensity (see Hartmann and Vorderer 2012). Throughout the chapter I use these concepts as coordinates to locate the commodification of social relations in terms of securing future (habitual) consumption-orientation at the point of contact between the way in which the makers decide to prolong the players' immersion in the game and the how that affects the already existing psycho-social structures they mobilize for their cause. In other words, I am interested in focusing on the tightening effect of this televisual commodification: with the decrease in obvious means of profiting, I argue capital has crystallized gaming as an emerging means of exploiting the ways in which persons relate to objects in their lives—a process that goes by different names, but is generally distinguished as belonging to the realm of ideology (that is, the story people tell themselves in order to tolerate the world they have to live in) or socialization (how they are trained to reproduce the social). Thus, a video game is an instance of a particular model of interpellation for consumption; it is only one aspect of a much larger structural trend in consumer

capitalism in which televisual mediation and its technical interactivity take center stage in the perpetuation of the consumer-side of the global political economy.

In other words, we can uncover a common ground in which no matter what the intended dimension of experience (whether that be social or psychological) or the direction or intent of mediation (exploitation or cultivation), we can treat technology as that which enables a particular (ideologically-constituted, productive) syncing of the subjective with the economic structures of social production and reproduction. In this sense, technology is not uninterested; it is intimately interconnected with the processes of the dominant historical political economy whether or not its interconnection (and dependency) are conscious. In other words, we need to look at technology as a tool for manipulation and psychological molding in a way that acknowledges that education and socialization are both forms of social technology for reproduction and direction of human development towards fulfilling the needs of a given historical society (cf. Marx 1970; Riesman 2001; Reich 1983).

Interpellation as Mediative Technology

Consumer technology is generally celebrated as the harbinger of a "new digital age," promising a new historical era of efficiency of information collection and dissemination, ease, and connectivity. While technology is celebrated as heralding a new age of peace and cooperation (see Schmidt and Cohen 2013; Castranova 2007), only when young persons' interaction with the consumer-disseminated technology is placed in focus does the discourse recognize contradictions between consumer-technological-mediation and psycho-sociality. When addressing adolescents and their 'problematic' relationship with sociality and attention, video games are talked about as creating regimes of addiction, transforming what it means to be and

interact socially—to be socialized as a consumer who thinks only towards how to best consume. In other words, it is only in the particular case of the adolescent that a semblance of critical engagement with gadgetized mediation receives a spotlight in popular discourses on the topic.

Socialization also always plays a central role in the reproduction of the adolescent in the political economy. That much is not contested. What I argue is that the method of reproduction, particularly those identifiable social-relational or psycho-structural processes (that coalesce into identification, sublimation, and interpellation) offer a point where we can observe the various social and economic systems reproducing themselves around the same point that the social and historical institutions are also reproducing themselves. And all of it turns around the fate of the subject already formed and perpetually being (re)formed. In this present instance, consumerizing takes away even more from the self-determination realizable under the pre-digital historical sociality, because it competes with the historically existing (residual) social reproductive institution. Because, even though the mechanisms of social reproduction on their own have no preference for the quality for the person either—since they are not living things but structures, concretizations, regularizations by way of transgenerational transmission of repetition and object-relation—nonetheless they coalesce around the idea of sociality, intersubjectivity, and interdependent self-conception.

Mediative technology and its consumer cultural appropriation of historically existing ideology enable game-makers to appropriate processes of incorporation and standardization that would otherwise have fallen under the banner of socialization. What gaming accesses in order to create gamer motivation is not a borrowing, but in fact a transformation of the historical structures of psycho-social institutionalization (see generally Stiegler 2010). The consumer

apparatus does not fill in a vacuum. Its recipe for fueling the cathectic costs of attention-capture rests on already structured psychical territory—one in which ideology, that is, the colonized interiority[48] or the socialized self, functions to (re)territorialize a person's existential capacity to the given historical political economy. The language of territorialization harkens back to Deleuze and Guattari, where in *Anti-Oedipus* (1983) they argued that capitalism "liberates" affect from its carrier-object, meaning that the function of object-relations as cultivated in the bourgeois family are lifted from this original context and transcribed onto the capitalist political economic dominion (99-104). The game-engine has to qualitatively replace ways of being in the world, which can only be achieved if the game-makers tune their in-game designs to the qualitative standards to which the person, who already thinks of himself as some political economic amalgam of a subject, is already accustomed. In other words, it is not enough that the MMO succeeds in accounting for the potential desires of motion and expression, the game-engine also has to make sure that the participant's agency is simulated in proportion to how he might value his agency in his wider historical political economic subjecthood.

Interpellation is what enables this exploitation. It is the source of surplus (discussed in the following two chapters), which by its transience, defines profit and capital after the fact (see Kordela 2012).[49] Treated as such, we have to address the fact that in gaming the motivation is much more complicated than just a matter of attention cultivation or negative dissociation, because the mechanism of surplus-extraction performs its functions on the back of interpellation,

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[48] Contemporary critical theory offers critiques of consumer capitalism through this concept of interiority (see Binkley 2011), which interestingly enough, refuses to acknowledge the construction of subjecthood or that of the structures of ideology.

[49] Kordela (2012) discusses the power of surplus to act as a semiological locator of capitalist extraction—it defines the territory.

the process of the person effectively losing self-consciousness. After all, why does one play video games? What motivates a person to identify as a gamer? The question of motivation brings up the question of social environment (habitus, and thus socialization). But even deeper than that, motivation raises the question of the libidinal/psycho-social economy existing beneath the surface. The televisual regime historically amounted to unconsciousness of affective reproduction of already existing political economic subject positionalities. In the next section I will explain this further. The way the consumer culture has normalized and extended the mediation through consumer-grade gadgets gives rise to the possibility that the once opaque processes such as interpellation, believed to be beyond manipulation of class relations[50], have in fact become tools of reproducing regimes of commodification.

I want to focus on the terms of auto-stimulation that come to rise as the dominant form of object relations because of the establishment of televisual mediation (as the mode of subject/ object-relation production). In Chapter Two I argued that when the theory of interpellation can be productively applied to the metropolitan adolescent focused study of gaming—that gaming incorporates young people's attention and investment by offering small gusts of psycho-social satisfaction, via technological capture of psychological processes of interpellation. By the end of this chapter, I will argue that the commodification-orientation in the production of the mediation gadget technology (what I call its technicity) is repressive in character (see Marcuse 1964). The televisual is a political economic technology (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002; Stiegler 2010). I want to look at the grounds of its technicity, that is, its relationship to the subject and how that is mediated via the technical organization of the medium. My sense is that what is political about

[50] This I mean in the sense that both psychoanalytic and phenomenological traditions (Lacan and Heidegger's students) found it important to center the place of interjection somewhere else besides the political.

the technicity of the televisual can come into focus by connecting the ideological to the psycho-social.

The concrete gadget mediates the relation between a person and his construction of subjectivity on the screen. As a mediator, the gadget directs and shapes the relation. And as a commodity within the circuits of consumer capitalism, the gadget comes to secure the commodification and profitability in the process of representation. Interpellation is reduced when mediated by gadgets. And it is this reduction of ideology, which I will argue in the final section of this chapter that is the domain of affective auto-stimulation. Then, repressive interpellation is the technological redirection of what had passed as ideology and its subject formative role to create consumer socialization for the purpose of socializing consumer subjectivity. Its repressive character stems from its reduction of iconographic identification with social authority (as traditional interpellation) in the process of commodification: reducing consciousness to attention for immersion and other-directed attention-formation, and reducing satisfaction to bodily-affected sensation.

The digital-apparatus provides the necessary technology of mediation for the kind of consumer interpellation (read: the form of contemporary socialization primary to the global West) cultivated in gaming. This apparatus works in concert with gaming's deployment of a psycho-social technology of enabling the modification of behavior towards industrial ends. Take for example the basics of televisual mediation and the reduction of experience in the process of qualitative translation: when a computer-mediated MMO acts as a mediator for socializing experience, no matter how advanced, its mediation rests on a reductive platform. This medium is engineered, and in order to successfully account for social desires, it has to map out potential

desired activities onto its own medium. If a person wants to run in a virtual forest set in WoW, he thinks of his desire to run, visualizes it (already within the existing game-space), but then uses the assigned keys on his computer keyboard to make the action happen on the monitor's screen. This mapping-out defines the initial commodification of player's fantasies by the game-engine. The more activities that the game-engine can account for, the more likely it is that the player will continue to invest his time and effort into the game, the better the outcome for the goal of deepening the interpellating dynamic between the player and the avatar-subject, which will translate in continual subscriptions and continued reproduction of secondary markets (auction websites, in-game currency exchanges, and game-related forums).

Gaming needs to be an indispensable site of analysis of contemporary capitalism, because it relies on the historically existing social valuation mechanism employed by the rest of consumer capitalism. These mechanisms tie the personal to the political economy. The MMO game's structuring of experience abides by an internal (ideological) logic, which means that even though gaming is supposed to be a readily available escape from reality, it nonetheless must reproduce the ways one valorizes his experiences in the existing political economy (see also Chapter Four): the person has to keep his finger on the arrow-key for as long as he wants to see his avatar running (or it might be the case that he has to hold down a combination of keys in order to make this action happen on the screen)—there has to be a realistic correlation between time and action. In this way the MMO mechanism of incorporation exploits the already existing psychological value of labor in order to create its televisual and identificatory impetus for participant-immersion. The modification works beneath consciousness, and molds agency to get

the desired result: getting the subject to act predictably, in sync with the needs of the larger system of consumption (cf. Baudrillard 1998).

In the final section of this chapter I would like to talk about the affective terms of repressive interpellation in the context of gaming.

Repressive Interpellation and Affective Control

> "I think that what we'll look back on now in Second Life will have been the beginning of a proof…that…Things are real because they're there with us, and we believe in them… and if they're simulated on a digital computer versus sort of simulated by atoms and molecules, it doesn't make any difference to us." (A quote from the founder of Lindenlabs, the company behind *Second Life*, Shroeder 2009)

Blizzard-Activision, the company behind the *World of Warcraft* (WoW), has periodically released expansion packs that add new content to the original game. These expansions represent the company's attempt to extend the game's profitability, which often means incorporating more of the historically existing popular culture into its game content (Pressnell 2013). The first of the two expansions to WoW in 2013 featured the addition of a new in-game territory called Pandaria, which introduced playable panda-like character-types.[51] These avatar types embody all Western stereotypes of the 'Oriental' or the 'Asiatic'—Pandarians practice Kung-Fu, engage in Chi- and Tao-speak, and wear Kimonos. This content expansion marks only the surface, the visual bits, of the larger campaign to prolong the players' immersive play. The marketing move represents a popular trend in the way the gaming industry approaches the endless need for commodification

[51] There were two expansions to the game in the 2013, which for Blizzard-Activision is historically an unprecedented move. The change-up of the content release comes at a time of record subscription losses (Makuch 2013).

of satisfaction in the digital consumer economy. It is an example of contemporary capitalist reflex: subjects-as-players-as-consumers need to propel the sustainment of social and psycho-social relations that reproduce the circulation of consumption by perpetually identifying with the chosen relics of the real in the virtual.

The motivation is what gets a person to identify with an objectified and idealized subject. And the contents of this motivation is that which offers ideological satisfaction (even if it is ultimately Pavlovian, that is, affective, in nature). I contend that the satisfaction is strictly ideological, because of the nature of televisual (re)presentation and simulation. The consumerizing interpellative mechanism, observed as functioning in the player-avatar relation in an MMO, reappropriates an already existing psycho-social mechanism of valorization. The MMO's immersiveness depends on its technology of valuation, and whether it is comparable in effect to its psycho-social predecessors' (that is the television, the radio, or the printed text's) accomplishments in alienation, commodification, and recirculation (cf. Nusselder 2009). The MMO affectively (qualitatively) replaces the original fantasy (which is most likely a familially internalized one), offering its own objectified and reproducible version. Commodified interpellation works by employing the socialized desire for satisfaction to create the motivation for the continuation of engagement in the process consumption, which, after a period of initial runs, comes to be seen as a structure of production on its own to warrant being called productive consumption or "prosumption."

From one perspective, immersive gaming in MMOs invites a praxis of fetishizing small aesthetic differences. For Fromm (1994) and Marcuse (1964) respectively, first commodity fetishism, and then fetishism of small difference, is a symptom of a person's internalization of

the reigns of commodification. Both of these authors think that the foreclosure of self-determined qualitative definition of social experience is met by such a praxis. The game-expansions mirror the economic necessity of the game-engine to perpetually keep the player working, or "leveling up" in game-speak. The game accomplishes this by creating sustained interest whether through strength of televisual affect or what comes of habituation. On the level of the gamer's experience, the change in content interjects where a player is most likely to begin losing interest in the game. Gaming culture research points out that the areas where players begin to lose interest are the ones that are turned into spaces of domesticity in the virtual world such as the unchanging spawning pools, the market places, the look-and-feel of the interface. In all these instances it is the aesthetics of the game that always need a new facelift (see Horodotou 2012; Kirby, Jones and Copello 2013; Snodgras et. al 2013). This proposal also fits the (re)marketing models of many other successful gaming industry ventures such as the WoW predecessor Everquest, and Grand Theft Auto. In the latter's case, there have been fifteen expansions since the original release of the game title. And while the game-engine has remained virtually the same, it is the expansion of the in-game catalogue of objects ready for manipulation that has justified calling each new expansion a new game in the eyes of the players.

Newness thus becomes a commodity in this market, because in the course of the game-play, as a player is surely desensitized to the encounters with in-game objects, scenarios and environments, a player's attention is slowly shifted to tracking the small aesthetic variations in environments and characters. The affecting begins with the noticeable changes in the aesthetic refinement of one's own avatar. On the lower levels of the gameplay, the colors of the items (or gear) accessible to the avatar-subject are more crudely textured, less colorful, and lacking in

refined detail. Substantively within the in-game economy these items are less valuable (both in terms of the in-game experience and the in-game marketplace). And, they are not "cool" looking, as in, the gear does not recall a strong cultural attachment (Boellstroff 2010). In contrast, on the higher levels, the players can acquire items for their avatar-subjects that make it look stronger (for example, bulkier gear with flames and spikes—in fact much of the aesthetic-progression is attuned to pop-culture identifications), and add to the avatar-subjects' abilities and in-game attributes such as strength and agility.

Repressive interpellation offers a regiment of affective satisfaction, which ties subject formation to enjoyment (cf. Aurel and Griffiths 2013). The player is satisfied by interpellating the feelings corresponding to what would culturally valorize the time and attention. He reacts pleasurably to the minute changes interspersed in a landscape of repetitive (boring!) labor. As a player continues to invest his time and attention into gathering the experience necessary to reach higher levels, the game-engine rewards his effort by unlocking more enticing gear for his avatar-subject. The actual avatar never changes (he is forever young), but the aesthetics attached on it change in microscopically noticeably ways, which in the process prolong the immersive affecting. A player becomes increasingly accustomed to anticipating the planned aesthetic changes, and relies on that projection to mobilize his in-game work (see Snodgras 2013; Xu, Ofir and Yufei 2013; Yee 2006). What is important to note is that the game-engine does not reward the player for working and leveling up by giving him the items so desired. No, as an ideological consumer apparatus, it only enables the player to buy these items by giving him access to the sources of experience and coins, which he can accumulate through his in-game labor anew. In this way the player enacts his own avatar-aestheticization, and that gratification distracts him

away from the reality that the endless repetition of the same basic gameplay hides covered by the false awakening of cosmetic changes.

Interpellation is an especially important process for the reproduction of the political economy in the postcolonial metropols, because capitalism mitigates the problem of the falling rate of profit with increasing reliance on mediative technologies to guarantee re-consumption (or "prosumption"). And in contemporary society, we see how interpellation technology makes sense as playing a role in the reproduction of the necessary subject of a consumer society, that of the most suitable consumer—the one who self-commodifies, and nulls himself with televisually triggered auto-stimulation. Platforming mediation is about reproducing the consumer: the person, who will seek consumption, internalize its real historical regime, and reproduce by his regiment of self-valorizing—in this particular case, by accepting to play in fantasy according to the political economy of consumption (within the totality of the reigning order). Fantasy is traditionally the realm of the unsublimated or the 'return of the repressed,' but as such it is already the realm of ideology. In classical theory, ideological apparatuses serve the function of reproducing the relations of domination. And if gaming has a function in the political economy of consumer capitalism, it is an ideological function. Interpellation is a technology of political economic socialization, the reproduction of historically necessary subjects. In the consumer society, repressive interpellation enables the profit-extracting to continue by recapture of otherwise irrelevant social relational processes. Video games cannot supply the physical component of an experience of touch, sight, and sound beyond the scope of its gadgets. Instead they have to rely on feeling and affect. First, the affect hails in the subject that this is the feeling (through televisual location and interpellation). And then the person embodyingly reproduces

stress or relief (at the prospect or because of lacking anticipated actions). The consumer commodity wins just by repetition potential.

There is yet another way of talking about the difference between affect as traditionally conceived and the televisually generated affect that interpellates a person into gaming satisfaction. Originating within confines of the global order of capitalist accumulation, gaming is indebted to the historical "amusement" industry (see generally Brown 1996). I believe in that containment is the limit of the utopian capacity of gaming (Castranova 2006). Proponents of the gaming culture dismiss critique on the grounds that gaming is caught in the parallel contradiction of postindustrial bourgeois subjectivity—it offers a bit of gambling and a little role-playing of the historically material political economy. But, the truth of the matter is that rewards in a game are nothing like sweepstakes and gambling in real life. The whole endeavor is set up within a predictable framework. Therefore, beyond the chance desublimation, rewards have a repressive function, a regulative function in the game of libidinal economization. It is this systemic accounting that I want to take up seriously.

From gambling studies one conclusion is that the risk fulfills an existential yearning (see Auer and Griffiths 2013). Each one of the extractions is not comprehensive on its own. This is why a subject can remain socially-recognizable as a historical subject; he is not fragmented absolutely, but aspects of his self-awareness are traded-in for bits of ideological satisfaction in consumptive exchanges. Such a control of interpellation by means of mediation allows the creation and proliferation of compatible and complicit libidinal economies to sustain and perpetuate the existing political economy, which effectively neutralize the possibility of diverging (pre)consciousness (see Chapter Five).

Losing oneself is not new, but it has been commodified and accounted for in the reproduction of consumer political economy. In relating with the gadget in front of him, one ceases to be able to notice the world around him. This is not a good or bad determinant. I am very much sympathetic towards the reading of games as allowing people even if only momentary escape from reality, a soothing libidinal compromise. But that's not what is going on here in these games. This withdrawal (looking into one's own lap) is ultimately political. To put it another way, the subject, cultivated as a nomad, craves non-presence—a desire for immersion and loss of consciousness. I decided to stick with the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari even though the way I am deploying "nomadism" is not in line with their speculation on the future of capitalism (see Deleuze and Guattari 1986). While Deleuze and Guattari view nomadism as a liberation, a kind of postmodern anarchism, I am treating their once-liberatory deterritorialization as only that, a divorcing from any single territory or referent-loyalty. In fact the nomad subject is not interested in liberation; he is a gambler, dependent on the system of reproduction for the instances of auto-stimulation that comfort by repetition.

Video games are there to provide emotional and affective stabilization by a predetermined reasoning, where all roads lead to predictability and affective responsiveness. There is an immersive effect of what happens when the gratifying points of repressive interpellation of each intersect or overlap with another. It leads to experience of non-presence of subjecthood, a deliberate de-conscious-ing comparable in libidinal economic weight with that of subjectivity (weight based on libidinal affective value). Gaming historically begins from gambling theorists in the amusement industry (see generally Ashton 1988), tied to their ideological preoccupation and participatory creation of exploitative immersiveness. And it seems

that gaming fulfills its historical ideological role through its capacity for reproducing immersion: gaming perpetuates domination by creating the means for subjectification at the cost of self-determination. After all, to perpetuate itself, capitalism must recycle itself. And it does this around the reproduction of the secondary-narcissistic ego, which is too bound to the dominant regime of valorization—the people of the home front metropolis give up self-determination on the level of mimesis, simulation, and reduction, in exchange for the "gambler's high." The traditionally social is denied as no longer stimulating enough to keep up the dynamo of the psyche at the same time that the people living on the home front have been relegated to the role of ideological, semiological, and affective reproduction of capitalism.

The fact that players become addicted to the game is a mark of the constructs' power to (re)train persons to identify with its structural order and libidinal economy (see Schull 2012). The gambler, the most widely deployed persona of addiction studies (King, Ejova and Delfabbro 2012) is marked by a nomadic desire of "returning" to a time before alienation from repetition. In fact, chance is an example of the regularizing effect of commodification in digital: digital luck is algorithmized, and people still perceive it as random, fulfilling their gambler's high. But in fact it is predicated on profitability. A desire to return to a timelessness, a loss of consciousness, is also a time of singularity and losing oneself in the play (Russell 2008). This is a desire that gets kindled by mimesis as well as repetition.

Repetition libidinally offers a way to get lost in the repetitive task, to lose sense of time. In this sense repetition is a key psycho-technological tool. It plays a significant role in the desirability of the gameplay. Often, the question emerges as to why players continue to play when the gameplay is so repetitive (see generally Czerny, Koenig and Turner 2008; King, Ejova

and Delfabbro 2012), but this question overlooks the possibility that the repetition itself is part of the libidinal economy at play. Repetition and libidinal satisfaction are tied in commodification, as commodification territorializes conception and libidinally loads it (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1983; Lyotard 1993). Because affect overtakes consciousness by the level of its immersiveness (see Massumi 2002), it signals a retreat from consciousness, which is enabled through interpellation (which allows the syncronization of libidinal to symbolic via televisual, resulting in auto-stimulation).

Reduction of consciousness to (anticipatory) reaction formation is the goal of gaming as sought after by the ideological subjects seeking entertainment. Gamification turns the body into a vessel, within an ideology of timeless repetition. And because it works within a system of problem solutions, it deploys rationality, attention (the will!) without consciousness. Awareness of gameplay as gameplay ultimately does not benefit the gamer in his attempt to find a way to game the game. It satisfies in micro-transactions which never allow for a constitutive regathering, thus sidestepping the critical consciousness potential in every consumer (see generally van Drumpt 2013). The historical content of non-presence (under the sign of the goal of the political economy for the consumer subject) results in the reduction of consciousness to moment-based interpretation of symbols into affect. Immersion into games can be alternatively viewed as a translocation of consciousness. In gaming it is the content for which the player is paying. He is paying to ideologically substitute for his political economic quality of life; he is paying not to be there in the real world.

Political economic reproduction comes with an ideological component, the habit formed libidinal cathexitation (momentary territorialization), which makes self-conscious response

impossible to arise. This technological relation does not allow people to attain more autonomous or self-serving agency, but instead fragments experience, and attempts to sell ways around the terms of in-game reality principle back to the player. In gaming, there is a political economic capture of subject (re)formation that takes place between the following two affective states: auto-stimulation and loss of consciousness. Repetition creates a regiment of auto-stimulation by promoting identificatory immersion, which satisfies by creating timeless (transcendent) egoism. It is here that a politics and economy of presence (that is, self-consciousness) emerges. The problem arises when auto-stimulation (as affective-preoccupation and immersion into non-presence) becomes habituated and normalized to be sought after in the course of the everyday. It leads to something other than political subjectivity because it is privatizing and individualizing. Ideology and products of the ideal and unreal do not pleasure or satisfy. Instead they invite auto-stimulation, which is the loss of awareness of subjectivity amidst repetition. On the level of the state and such social structures, only meaningful time is that of habit-formation, because social control is realized when the originally occurring is tricked into replaying itself within the exploitative confines (controlled environment). As far as social research has been able to catalogue, what the repetition engine captures is the desire to grow (to change, to surprise oneself with new bouts of subjectivity), which is the auto-stimulation pleasure that arises from the experience of thriving—this is something that video games in their gameness simulate. But, as it is only a simulation, gamers are enslaved to reproduce conditions, motions, stats, which will trigger the stimulation.

In the next chapter I will turn to the political economy of in-game laboring. I will be looking at the in-game mediated relation from the perspective of the labor theory of value. Doing

so will enable me to draw out the distinction between the traditional notion of labor and what is going on in-game for a gamer. I will argue that repressive interpellation points to a different version of immaterial labor that does not align well with the existing theoretical concepts. The notion of surplus will enable me to make that differentiation.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE REPRESSIVE INTERPELLATIVE APPARATUS, LABOR AND ADOLESCENT GAMING

Introduction

At the dawn of the culture industry consolidating fascist tendencies in capitalism with the dominant postwar ideology, critical social theorists argued that the future value of commodification was already consumed in the present, and particularly that this was of most consequence to the fate of bourgeois subjectivity (see Adorno 1974; Marcuse 1972). But what exactly has been the lasting effect of the culture industry on how we think of labor in postindustrial society? In the preceding chapters, my goal has been to elaborate a theoretical perspective capable of reading video games, and more generally televisual technology, as playing a structural role in social reproduction (this is necessary for the political economy domestic to the global North). This chapter is dedicated to situating the primary questions of my project in terms of the general categories of political economy. My focus has been on what can be called the social technologies of transgenerational reproduction and subject-formation. In this chapter I want to situate that discussion in the context of consumer capitalism as a way to position the metropolitan adolescent as a historical instance of subjectivity in relation to a particular global capitalist class, and its encapsulating structures of commodifying social relations, subject-formation, and object relations.

This argument will begin from the grounds that commodification moves to exploit ideology and object relations. I will present the instance of video game playing that doubles as a site of directly economic labor to isolate valorization as the basic process in the psychology of labor and play. In the later sections of the chapter I will argue that interpellation once again

appears as an explanatory category, and enables us to identify self-investment in interpellation as a developing form of labor, with its corollary of interpellation-engendered surplus (the topic of the next chapter).

Beginning in Commodification…

Consumer capitalism (and its complimentary, the consumer society) offers a specific instance of the expansive search for commodification; globalization of capital leads to consolidation and reclassification of the domestic political economy of the home base of capital (that is, what I will simply call the metropole). Since the perpetual search for profits is tied to the history of the deterritorialization of labor (beginning with de-nationalization) (see Harvey 2010). In other words, when the industries of mass production left the shores of the United States, the increasing primary role of the imperial domestic political economy and its subject population became reproducing the most-widely-employable ideology and most stable consumption (see Molesworth 2009). When the globe is mapped, commodification retraces to move inward (Sloterdjik 2013); ideology becomes a more pronounced, more vulgar presence in the political economy; it is further commodified even though it always exists in the organized structure of social relations, historical culture, identificatory inheritance, and other second natures. The more the system succeeds in perpetuating itself, the more one group is tasked with consuming and producing perpetual consumptive orientation to sociality, while others are relegated to the task of reproducing the means for the continual gadgetized mediation and commodity-fetishism.

In the context of the capitalist historical complicity, the home base populations and their ideology of the middle class consumerism have a special role in the political economy. After all, the ideological promise imbedded in middle class ideology is the same as that of consumer

ideology; in Marcuse's words, consumerism allows for repressive desublimation, the reconciled (denatured) satisfaction under the reign of class society, at the expense of fulfilling the technological capacity to create human autonomy and self-determination (Marcuse 1964; Baudrillard 1998). Marcuse's theory of repressive desublimation comes from his critique of Freud's theory of repression, where Marcuse argues that Freud does not apply the same primary/ secondary leveling to his theory of sublimation—i.e. that sublimation also has a primary and secondary instantiation (see Marcuse 1964). Secondary sublimation is the sublimation undertaken over the course of the everyday, in the process of moving between new and old internal objects. Repressive desublimation is the shape secondary desublimation takes in the consumer society; it is the desublimation on the way to releasing the regulatively internalized commercial affects that the cycle completes itself and the subject returns the surplus into circulation at the same time that he returns to the well for another go. This is the realm of televisual "culture" and video games. They represent an effort at political economic consolidation that also serves as a dialectical solution to the problem at the center of the liberal capitalist order—that of (re)creating agency for citizenry on the home front without giving rise to the sensibility for autonomy and self-determination.

Baudrillard (1998) argues that the economy of consumption sacrifices the quality of experience, because it derives its symbols from a finite, historical culture, and therefore, can only recycle its symbols. In other words, it matters that conception happens in a commodified environment, because from that point onward the commodification means that the drive/ directive/energy can be directed, manipulated towards attachment to control symbols, or symbols already floating in greater political economy. Adorno and Horkheimer (1945) argue that this

process, which defines the parameters and quality of social relations, is a repressive one, also because its interest is not of societal origin but one of capitalist exploitation. Under the capitalist logic, Marcuse (1968), in his conception of surplus repression, adds that this repression acts as a container that enables thingification or commodification of human activity and the very pieces of object-valorization. The repetition and regularity are not limited to the points of access; all the interactive features within the commercial environment become regulated, fostering repetition, which in turn effectuates alienation, which is also then repurposed and circulated.

Specificity of Metropolitan Adolescent Subject Position

The home front population is reclassified as consumers (or agents tasked with conjuring up new ways of prolonging consumption) by continual ideological repositioning, which is carried out on subjects' own volition via personalizing technology of self-discipline (see Pariser 2011). The fantasy of the creative industry covers over the grimy consumer lay of the land (see Florida 2002)—that in a high-tech economy (which is still liberal capitalist) remedial work would be replaced by intelligent (yet unavoidably repetitive) labor such as programming and designing in an otherwise networked and gamified society. One could site two decades worth of celebratory uncritical texts that fit this mold. Most interesting are the texts that deal with the "blessing" of becoming networked: cognitive surplus, some sort of singularized meta-consciousness able to consolidate individuation without effect on the individual. Where the norm is service and entertainment, creative industry is the best fantasy consumer technology can offer; the creative industry, the making of software and software platforms, the using of technology as a means of cognitivization of labor are all fantasies that justify the normalization of mediative and extractive objectification of everyday life for the whole of society—particularly those who

cannot dream of becoming a programmer, a software designer, a professional gamer, or a professional YouTube personality. I mention these particular emerging occupations, because ideologically confirming literature readily conjures them (see Boyd 2014; Gardner 2013).

What the emergent system needs from the home front is mere consumption of the material and reproduction of the economic traffic for continued exploitation. Computerization and its extensions through digitization come to secure social mediation via gamification to achieve ideological control of the way the world is perceived, and what the materiality is thought of being (ideology is in the historical materiality of consciousness).[52] In this way, the people of the metropole (those key cities in the political economy of the US) come to substantiate their relations under a dominant ideology and social-organization through commodities. Adorno and Horkheimer's (2002) famous thesis on the culture industry under capitalist monopoly is once again useful here as it points to the immaterial power structure in the form of industry-serving ideology, which comes to mediate the relation of the subject to his world and thus mediates processes of subject-formation and self-consciousness. In turn, this mediation stabilizes structural tendencies in the circulation by tying production to consumption of value (Marcuse 1968; Adorno 1974).

My thinking in this chapter relies heavily on Marcuse (1941; 1968), Mandel (1975), and Baudrillard (1998), along with a number of contemporary theorists, for a conception of advanced capitalism, in which the industrial base of the capitalist mode of production sustains itself through an economy of commodity-consumption—commodification of the 'qualitatively human'. Mandel offers financial capital as a case of parasitic capitalist extraction, to which

[52] See technicity in Chapter Three as well as the following section on valorization.

Marcuse contributes a general theory of qualitative transformation of personhood as extraction feeds on the remaining 'untapped' humanity for the surplus. The resulting 'feedback-loop' is situated by Baudrillard, who asserts that the consumption economy appears in advanced capitalism as a way of extracting surplus from processes that historically served to further social and cultural reproduction; Marcuse focuses on the psycho-dynamic, Baudrillard considers the symbolic and semiotic homogenization of quality. In this chapter I intend to interrogate a new elusive vestige of advanced capitalism in this historical moment: the psycho-social economy of consumer society as it manifests itself in political view of the lives of metropolitan youth. As I previously discuss in Chapter One and Three, from object-relations theory, I define the psycho-social as sociality (Klein, 1963; Bion, 1967), self- and other-relations (or self-reflexivity) (Bion, 1963; Freud, 1997; Laing, 1968), and intergenerational responsibility and politics (Klein, 1984; Erikson, 1963). I will argue that the consideration of young subjects' experience advances the critical theory of contemporary society, because it challenges the assumptions about the substance of life-quality under advanced capitalism.

Now let us turn to the adolescent specificity. As theory speculates, if adolescents are in fact sold commodified pieces of their own imaginations, then the substance of their subjectivity[53], which is defined by years of dramatic growth and socialization, is caught in circuits of surplus-extraction and regulation (by psycho-technological means). To tie back to the discussion in Chapter One: psycho-technology is a term Stiegler (2010) uses to represent micro-regulation of attention, which he observes in the consumerization of intergenerational habitus or the replacement of intergenerational relations (imitation and facilitation of sublimation and

[53] Stiegler (2010) argues that this 'something qualitative' is the substance of intergenerational transmission of processes and forms of valorization.

anxiety-tolerance) by televisual guidance. In the early 1980s, Foucault (1988) used the term to suggest something very similar—although, characteristically Foucaltian, the direct subject matter is Greek and Roman cultural practices of writing about one's self. The existing critical theory also speculates that the ready-made takes the place of idiosyncratic conception by means of 'applied' mimesis. The works of Deleuze and Guattari (1983) and Foucault (1988) suggest that the political-economic incorporation of the subject requires the standardization of signification and identification practices. But, research in this area is sparse and disjointed; the ethnographic research that does exist only offers general (moralistic) critiques of 'digital culture' (see Jamaludin 2011; Thompson 2010; John 2006; Marlin 2009). In fact, it tends to rely on Hardt and Negri's (2004) affective labor and digital capitalism theories (discussed in a later section of this chapter), which seems incapable of addressing the incorporation of the psycho-social dimension —in my reading, because their focus is general and social, Hardt and Negri's theory cannot recognize the unique case of adolescents caught in these circuits.

As I have argued previously, the special nature of adolescent consumer interpellation is that it relies on affective incorporation. For Baudrillard (1998), the economy of consumption secures circulation by employing misrecognition, which underlies ideology (Althusser, 1984) and the distance between representations and their consummating intent. This notion of necessary misrecognition for the circulation of commodification of the psychological (or the imaginary), in the case of Facebook, suggests that the emotional anticipation of new messages (exaggerated by social and semiotic misrecognition, which is enhanced by the sheer force of external definition of the container-symbols) tunes the psychic to the format of the site (see Cote and Pybus 2010). Nonetheless, there are signs in contemporary research, at least on the side of

consumer research, that this idea has already been employed: for example, Cottrell and Rajecki (1974) theorized the profit-potential in users' emotional investment in performance of repetitive, "irrelevant" tasks; Zwick (2006), on the other hand, directly theorizes the commercial application of Bionian object-relations theory (1963) in his conception of a consumer-object theory.

The scenario of an adolescent person's anticipation of what might be news on the Facebook front page, as a substantive experience or a hallucination of an expected experience on Facebook, says something on this point: this hallucination or mental image is a mimetic object, which is summoned by a consumer-technology object in the external world. As mimesis, theory would suggest that it is repressive in character, because representation is not only bound to the activity of the imaginary, but also to the selective-operationalization on the part of the social object (Adorno 1998; Marcuse 1964; Baudrillard, 1998). The crucial pivot-point is that the socialized imaginary is the psychical (not only structural in the sense of drives or mechanics, but the sensuous-being agent of incorporation that serves economizing and ideological functions (cf. Castoriadis 1987; Horkheimer 1972; Althusser 1984). It remains to be explored how, beyond marketing and consumerism, this laborious activity-which-is-also-socialization syncs with adolescent subject position. More specifically, what is the substance of adolescent subjectivity that is commodified as commercialization enters their socialization?

I hope to show that considering the concrete case of young persons' lives brings a new focus to these critical problems. Theirs is a psycho-social experience increasingly regulated by the markets for consumption while also being socially treated as a stage for complex psycho-social formation. The subject-conditions of the metropole's adolescents is what enables the focus of my research. Adolescence is a structural identification of a human being (see Butler 1990;

Hall, 1993). As such, it is determined by a subject's relation to group-defined social roles such as "age grades" in societies organized on kinship relations; it is defined from the outside, which implicates ideological and material definition of value, and, by extension, the structures of the dominant socially-productive exploitation. I will argue that the political nature of the psycho-social becomes visible in the case of youth, because their subjectivity is already subjected to documentation (or dissection); development and socialization (as structural identity of youth-subjectivity) are outside the historical experience of youth, and as such they carry a qualitative critique to historical standards. For adolescents, as they are 'growing into their own,' the future (as becoming) is part of their structural identity. They are required to embody this futurity, because the future of the social organization itself rests upon the incorporation of the young (see Erikson 1963; Edelman 2004). My hypothesis is that this element of futurity is connected to this new psycho-social incorporation under advanced capitalism.

New Forms of Adolescent Labor

In the consumer society (that is, the society within the confines of the historical capitalist metropoles), the commodity competes with social-reality for psycho-social attention. Like reality, the MMO works to find a way to be taken seriously (affectively). To be effective, it must be immersive; to be so, it must be affective, even if only momentarily. WoW has to make the player work for the development of his avatar's agency, not simply in an effort to perpetuate its capture of the participant's attention (and thus its domain over the player's behavioral habits) (see Van Looy 2012). The in-game labor-value economy is not explained away merely by its role in the extractive intentions of the game-makers, because the gaming logic of an MMO is imbedded in the larger all-encompassing political economy that ideologically never gives away agency.

This is the weakness of analyses of contemporary capitalism that draw current from Hardt and Negri. While much work has been done in the realm of mapping out the abstraction of labor under increasingly digitized capitalist flows, cognitive labor has not been successfully consolidated with the traditionally under-thought realm, that of the domestic (see generally Peters and Bulut 2011; Boutang and Emery 2011; Galloway 2006; Manovich 2013). While such oversight historically might have been criticized as merely anti-feminist, presently the oversight is a giant blind spot in terms of perceiving consumer capitalism's operation in the global West. The role of subject-formation, or that of the subject, in the political economy remains a fog.

In 2007, McKenzie Funk, a reporter for Harper's magazine, traveled to South Korea and China to document the public concern over internet addiction amongst adolescents (Funk 2007). In a memorable scene, he observed Chinese youth, packed in overcrowded internet-cafes, immersed in MMOs in pursuit of real-life income. They spent working-day equivalent amount of hours engaging in repetitive keystrokes, completing mindless in-game tasks that would earn them the in-game coins and goods, which they could then sell to their Western counterparts (see also Cao 2007). Funk's description is not the only sighting of this phenomenon. In fact, by current standards, all MMOs have internal markets, where players can use real-life currency to buy in-game currency from either the other players or the game-providers in exchange for putting in the time and attention to perform the repetitive tasks, which would otherwise amount to amassing in-game money (see Cao 2007; Dyer-Witherford 2009; Melinda 2006). This in-game currency is then used to purchase in-game commodities and utilities for the players' in-game characters. Aside from the internal market that exists within these games, the mirroring of the

capitalist technological organization is also visible in the time-expenditure/game-advancement/ monthly-subscription-fee accounting of the whole game structure (see Samuel 2011).

The extent of vertical alignment of social and economic dynamics glimpsed in this example is a key characteristic of the landscape of the advanced capitalism under investigation. But, it is the irony of this play-to-work site, which offers a glimpse of the emerging political economic conditions for youth living under advanced capitalism: the Chinese youth are working —the repetitive labor of mouse-clicks and keystrokes is kept up for hours under exhaustive hand-eye coordination that would rival those of a work-day, and their 'play' generates in-game exchange-value. Then, youth, largely from the US, purchase this game-money with US currency (Melinda 2006; Samuel 2011). Interpellated as players, the American youth play the same repetitive game—performing the same tasks as their Chinese counterparts. But, in a contradiction that exposes the political economy tying the two groups, the Chinese youth are working and the American youth are playing, even though both are doing exactly the same thing. To distinguish my own approach, it is useful to note the work of Hall (1993) and Willis (1981), which links play with "learning to work" under capitalism. My idea in this chapter, on the other hand, is to attempt to theorize play not as preparation for work, but play as it becomes its substitute; or rather, as work substitutes play.

My focus is on the American youth of this twisted political economy. As exploited activity turned into labor, the case seems qualitatively different in contrast to the historically studied types; these young American 'laborers' (except the Chinese game players) are not laboring for the 'universal equivalent' (money or the exchange-value), they are laboring for a use-value, i.e. they are hoping to consume what they produce (Marlin 2009). Are use-values

themselves becoming alienated in this digital dimension of advanced capitalism? The classic use-value/exchange-value distinction (Marx 1990) allows me to theorize the use-value of WoW and Facebook for its users (whether in Marcuse's (1968) sense of satisfying a socially-produced, consumerist need or in a more psychoanalytic conception of mimesis (Lacan 1977) and identity formation (Freud 1966; Kristeva 2009)), alongside the "exchange value" of the "commodity" being produced (Jim 2006) (which is somehow also the individual himself, in digital form (Sunden, 2002)). The point is: labor produces both.

'Social media' illustrates the other crucial dimension of this kind of labor, because it seems to employ the affective habits of young users in its processes (see Pybus 2011). My working definition of this kind of labor is psychic labor, which is a synthetic one; it attempts to address thinking and self-reflexivity as the target of commodification, the substance which becomes commercialized through commercial mediation (such as Facebook). Labor, in this sense, is an activity of value-creation on the way to circulation. Contemporary research on this kind of labor has primarily attended to the alienating effect of its repetition (see generally Rangan 2011). The more cycles of extraction, the more regular and more particularly defined the labor; its repetitiveness is defined by the capitalist extractors, who become increasingly specialized in the particular substance of their extraction over the lifespan of the 'social media' (see Dyer-Whiteford 1999; Kerr 2003; Zwick 2006; Peters 2010).

An elaborating example is found in the news that Facebook planned to buy a software development company because of its hold on a user base through its free-to-use application, whatsapp (see Curwen 2014). As parts of the financial circulation of surplus value, persons as users of social media are already parceled and traded between corporations of the emergent

social relational markets (see Flath 2014). In this example, Facebook, having become a publicly traded firm, must keep growing to survive, and thus it must prove it is growing by doing more of what made it seem monetizable (valuable): increase its user base. Thus, the prospect of the falling profits is swept under the carpet by expanding and immediately subsuming the projected future surplus into maintaining the order of the present. It already seems to be the accepted case that the value of the self-reproductive consumer already crudely figures into the price (in terms of markets and financialization). The fact of the matter is that an adolescent user accessing her Facebook account has to accept the commercial backdrop of the medium; the prospect of any socializing is behind the log-in and always on a 'page.' For critical and commercial theorists alike, the dawn of Facebook as 'social media' (or web 2.0) signals a period of capitalism in which a solution to capitalism's crisis, or that of an exciting new market, is found in new dimensions of psycho-social integration by digital technological mediation (see generally Dyer-Witheford 2001; Hubert 2001; Fuchs 2008). When this capitalist-controlled social medium provides the grounds for the everyday-socialization for adolescents (the activity of social-relation, social-recognition, and self-narration), the commercial format mediates social-relationality. If Facebook is an adolescent person's primary medium for socialization (following the after-hours of the traditionally institutional form) (Boyd 2014; Gardner 2013), then the mere fact that the medium is a glorified website already comes to impose experiential limits on the scope of the mediated interaction and its quality. Some theorists have argued that those social conditions change the quality of being a human being—socialized and developing sense of self not through familial alienation attuned to the historical culture (Arendt 1958), but commodification (Marcuse 1968; Stiegler 2010; Caraway 2011). But, that is not all; if the

venture is profitable, and all indicators point to the affirmative (see Cote 2010; Jon 2011), the investors would continue to demand profitability. The net result is a continuing increase of pressure for higher affective incorporation, which, for the young subject, means more repression in the form of increasingly aggressive extraction.

Personal data, social interactions, and cognitive labor are increasingly subject to commodification. But, as the medium shapes the social experience, young people are also subject to extractive regulation, because the format establishes and guides social behavior as commercial intent directs the mediated experience of imagining the social through symbolic representation (see Michaela 2006; Micky 2011). This scenario's importance to social theory is that it returns us to the familiar concerns about autonomy—the quality of subjective experience: for the adolescents, the future is always a matter of political empowerment; because the structure identifies youth by their developing bodies, the future also represents the concrete quality of that empowerment. In this sense futurity captures the discourse at the intersection of socialization, extraction, and development. I have wondered if this futurity can ground a study of historical valorization as it connects to concrete (yet still psycho-social) relationality and the intergenerational historicity of those relations (cf. Freud 1966; Fanon 1991; Stiegler 2010). My central question is this: what of young people's life-activity becomes this new labor—the source of value and surplus? What is the nature of the surplus extracted in this economy; what is the substance of this surplus futures, imagination, or the capacity to define value based on non-commodified social relations? (The latter question will be explored in the following chapter.)

There are some dated ideas in response to the question, but what has survived the test of history is the clue that it is something 'qualitative,' in which imagination and identification,

future and predictability engage in dialectical relationships. Nietzsche (1967) offers the aristocratic political autonomy; Bataille (1944) suggests that the answer is in the rupture and its risk at the center of affectation; Freud (1963) and Lacan (1977) argue that the difference is in the nature of the psycho-dynamic structuring of the lack; Marcuse (1964), Adorno (1974), and Horkheimer (1972) argue that the answer is connected to the disappearance of sublimation practices which underpin historical culture; Deleuze and Guattari (1983; 1988) find their answers in the interconnections between internal and external processes. Then, what does this extraction —mean in terms of contemporary technologies of power?

What I think remains to be theorized is this psychological and relational dimension; for the adolescent, who engages in labor unconsciously (in the process of this mediated 'socializing'), WoW or Facebook seems to fine-tune the mechanisms that keep the adolescent's experience of their own subjectivity within its circulation to prolong and maximize extraction (Pariser 2011). Extraction is the concrete historical process by which value is reified and appropriated as the qualitative substance of surplus-power for the circulation of capital (Marx, 1973; Marx, 1975). I intend to explore how this relationship manifests itself in the specific case of laboring and one's sense of his labor: how a sense of psycho-social dependency is tailored by the televisual mediating apparatus and also inferred by the adolescent; whether the format produces and perpetuates self-conceptual identification; and, most critically what the developmental and social-relational implications are of these commercial ventures securing profits by conditioning behavior that not only underpins the consumption but also substantiates teen-life.

Critique of Materiality in Immaterial Labor

I would like to distance my work from "physicalist" interpretations of labor, which I would argue come out of reductive readings of Marx. In *Grundrisse*, Marx (1973) points to a social interpretation of labor/production beyond the making of commodities. When it comes to the traces of this spirit, the most exciting theoretical work I have been able to uncover is a recent edited volume by Peters and Bulut (2011), because the volume synthesizes the various traditions of immaterial labor and advanced capitalism—even considering the implications of Facebook (or web 2.0). But, it identifies with Foucaultian biopower (1973) and Hardt and Negri's affective labor (2000) to conceptualize digital capitalism and digital labor; in doing so, it mirrors the limits of their progenitors; there is a physicality to the conception of labor, where even a psychic process like cognition is an activity conceived under the rubric of physical (manual) labor—psychological and psycho-social (relational) implications are not explored.

There are a number of qualified conceptions of immaterial labor, but, in all of these instances, the theory of labor is limited to a notion grounded in manual (physical) labor. This critique extends to the more recent theories, which reproduce the commodity-fixation of the originating theoretical works by Smythe (1980) and Hochschild (1978) in this area: emotional labor is what people in the service industry must do (Tonkens 2012); cognitive labor is the immaterial labor done when crunching numbers, researching, or writing on the computer (Atzert 2006; Boutang 2011; Dale 2000; Peters 2011); affective labor is the corollary to cognitive labor on Internet 2.0 ('social media'), where users must narrate their own affective characteristics to participate in social networks (Hochschild 2003; Hardt 2001); ethical labor is what happens to the social-relational activity when it is translated into the digital medium (O'Neill 1991; Stiegler

2010); domestic labor is the labor done by women and children in the household; performativity is necessary social labor to counterbalance historical ideology (Butler 1991; Gerard 2004); audience labor is the work that persons consuming televisual media do in the activity of viewing as well as in reacting to advertising (Smythe 1998; Bauman 2002).

Without a consideration of psychological theory, immaterial labor is inadequate to grasp the quality of the youth-labor's immateriality, where the immaterial is not extra-material, but psychic. It is not a thing like information (Peters 2011) or the tailoring of an affective response (Hardt and Negri 2004), but an instance in the process of object-relations (Bion 1963), the shaping of internal diversification (Lacan 1977) and the experiential quality of social relations (Laing 1968). Audience labor (Adorno 1998; Caraway 2011) and affective labor theories (Hochschild 2003; Hardt and Negri 2004) are the closest historical materialist conception of capitalist-extraction. Yet they seem unable to adequately address the development of the second-worldly digital consumer medium, let alone the prevalence of large portions of the public living with a dimension of social interaction within digital capitalist ventures. It is my sense that the historical limitation of this theoretical work rests in its fixity on the material definition of labor, in which the human activity that is converted into labor has a basic physical or bodily substance —whether that might be the work one does when watching television or the cognition one employs in working on the computer. A second limitation seems to come about in the scarce instances in which digital capitalism theory touches upon the intergenerational dimension; the tendency is a loss of sight of the concrete politics by becoming distracted by moralizing and valorizing of the past (Baumann 2000; Gregg 2004; Stiegler 2010).

I postulate that the theory's limited scope for new kinds of extraction is tied to a historically limited conception of value; the case of adolescents could propel beyond this conception by shifting focus onto the psycho-social 'derivatives' on their own—the relational as substance. Existing theoretical work seems to be limited by a 'vulgar materiality', partly because it rests on an ambiguous conception of a person as an individual or a worker. Individual implies acceptance of atomism; an individual might have a gender (as in the case of the invisibility of domestic labor (Fortunati 2011; Evelien 2012) or the misconception of performativity (Irigaray 2004; Butler 2009), but no structurally locatable subjective (or experiential) personhood that could be situated historically. Aside from this social dimension, there is also the political-economic situation of the person and the person in light of the political economy. Partly, because its conception of human activity turned into labor is limited to a physicality, which focuses on 'who owns' the body (see O'Neill 1991). The contemporary psycho-social theory of subjectivity seems to concern only the substitution in which the role previously occupied by generational object-relations is taken over by consumerizing interest (cf. Arendt 1958; Cote 2007; Cvijanovic 2010; Stiegler 2010). But, the critical point remains; the political economic situation of young people in the metropole of advanced capitalism employs their experience in its circuits, shaping their ways of valuing in mediated spaces created by and for extractive purposes (Boyd 2006; Caraway 2011). The possibility of the quality of psychological experience or the psycho-social process of valorization (or valuing, or value-adding) becoming the substance that enters circulation thus remains invisible.

Apparent even in the classical critique by reification (Marx 1967; Marcuse 1968) and mimesis (Marcuse 1964; Adorno 2001), society requires the incorporation, the employment of

persons' energies—a kind of exploitation, in which something originally and authentically human is specified, reified, and regulated into predictability to be sold-off (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1983; Foucault 1988; Butler 1990; Stiegler 2010). If the qualitative can be auctioned off, in terms of regulating development towards maximizing future-profitability, then this is basically a 'futures' market. In the first instance, and until the subject protests, this resembles the structure of the period of primitive accumulation (Marx 1990)—taking all and leaving nothing—when capital painfully learns that diminishing returns (Caraway 2011) and proneness to speculative crisis have to be dampened by making extraction sustainable—to at least allow for the time of regeneration. For example, in one of the consumer-research articles (Zwick 2006), the authors theorize how to direct the micro-socially cultivated desire for praise or punishment, through sites and conceptual frames, towards extraction.

Whatever Happened to Play?

Before I turn to the question of existing theories of immaterial labor, I want to address the ideological treatment of play in gaming research. Play is an important category in the study of gaming, because gaming often shares the basic assumptions of modern theories of why humans play. In all the instances the theorists were citing the same theory of play as one of their grounding basic assumptions. This is Huizinga's (1955) famous theory of play, which posits an absolute difference between work and play (interestingly paralleling Arendt's similar distinction between labor and activity, which she posited around the same time). Huizinga makes this distinction on the basis of play's libidinal engagement. From there he goes on to study the structures of play and their many anthropological and sociological characteristics without revisiting his primary assumption.

Let us also consider the work of Wark (2004; 2007; 2012), because his work not only plays out the problems with Huizinga's beginnings, but also exemplifies the kind of conceptual political problems gaming-as-play theorists have run across. The major problem with Wark, reflected in the larger postmodern tradition of media studies to which he belongs, is that he does not specify the subject, and therefore, reproduces the lack of historical materiality of his theory. This is an understandable move, since it makes for ideologically friendly academe. But, Wark (2007) also focuses on the utopian, and directs his critical inquiry towards strictly universal and existential questions. But, most problematic of all is Wark's (2012) treatment of the idea of play, because he uncritically equates video games to social historical concepts of play. Like Huizinga, Wark argues that play is elemental; games are systems that incorporate or run on play, with the worst that can happen being the commodification of play into repetition (Wark 2012: 92-94).

I want to go back to the critical interjection of Situationism, their critique of consumerization-geared technological manipulation of object relations, tailoring of experience to produce new ways of consumption and thus immersion. Therefore, I want to emphasize the importance of the fact that the video game's play is mediated by a gaming console; the fact that the play also occurs within games as particular instances of console-mediation; and lastly, the fact that each of these mediations is economically tailored. The problem is not with the game, but the social and historical circumstance in which gaming is taking place. When games are situated in a consumerist context, they become tools of standardization and manipulation. Gamification seems to be more of reimagining of laboring by engineering of experience.

MMOs and sandbox games[54] demonstrate this principle. Investment into games leads to forcing oneself to reproduce immersion. Take the regular activity of a player in *Minecraft* for example. A player is thrust into a wild (read imperial definition of empty) world, with the action of digging as his only tool. Using this tool, the player accumulates various samples of elements (tree, dirt, stone, silver, etc.) with which he builds (recreates) a world. Now, if he wants to experiment with importing more of the traditionally social into the game (that is, parts of his reality principle that stick around as affective residues), he has to do the in-game laboring that the game requires—creation, even in the game, costs effort. In other words, a player is dropped into an empty world reminiscent of the state of nature which he then populates with his constructions, but, what is telling about the psycho-social apparatus of the game is this: while a player can choose to turn off the onslaught of monsters which come at the end of every in-game day, he cannot avoid the block-by-block construction that constitutes the basic mode of game-

[54] Sandbox games could be defined as games in which the player is given a relative free-reign over an environment and a set of object.

play in *Minecraft*. It is the repetition, the habituation of repetition, that secures the on-going valorization—the player's continued investment in staying in the game. This is precisely because its apparatus is an ideological one; *Minecraft* must make itself pleasurable according to the already existing psycho-social economy of valorization. In sandbox games, a player has to labor to play.

Play seems to remain a largely unexplored territory for the critiques of contemporary political economy, because the reigning views of technology will not recognize its psycho-social effect on the human, let alone mediative technology as a form of interpellation. Instead many theorists seem to be worried with commodities replacing human relations or the televisual medium fragmenting individuals' capacity for responsible attentiveness to others, which are age-old problems of consumer society and the culture industry. Barber's condemnation of marketing imbeddedness in the production of consumer culture (2008) is an example of this latter popular stance in critique. Turkle's (2013) work represents this popular trend in what has been called "digital humanities." Turkle's primary focus is on the changing cultural landscape in which human relations are replaced by commodity relations—robots taking the place of humans to produce the feelings of safety and comfort. Turkle's critique of this trend is primarily that the ease and simplicity of relations with objects diminishes people's ability to empathize with others, and makes individuals less able to tolerate their own emotional situations.

On the occasions that play appears non-ideologically, play is treated as a piece of real estate in the geopolitics of the psyche even though the theorists are capable of recognizing the role of play in the psychology of subject-formation (Stiegler 2010). The problem with Stiegler's (2010) argument is that despite his operationalizing of the term "psycho-technology" to

deconstruct the socialization apparatus, in the end, he does not de-naturalize the process of socialization. Instead, Stiegler argues that what is necessary is a socialization of socializing-institutions, that is, a deliberate social policy to create and protect social institutions for "caring" for the human.

For my work play is important as interactivity, because it remains under-theorized in critical theory even though it is readily deployed as the panacea against the maladies of consumerized populations. Playing as interactivity brings it in the realm of laboring for a purpose. After all according to Winnicott (1971), play is a part of the general therapeutic drive to cope with the repression of the reality principle—in Freud's classic example of a child playing with a ball while saying "Fort-da," the child is thought to be working on libidinally transforming his reaction to separation from his sources of satisfaction. Games could be one site of desublimation of such processes, but the problem arises with the profit making interest of commodification which by anticipating a desublimatory role makes the process not liberatory but repressive, not therapeutic but addictive. Marcuse's (1972) return of the repressed makes for a clear warning: people still want a life free of dehumanizing labor and capitalism; knowing this appropriates and commodifies the fantasy, which is then sold back to its producer, the people. Games fulfill the fantasy of a life earned another way than by labor; the real cost is that instead of self-determination what they get is an alternative libidinal relation to labor under a guise of guided agency (30).

Returning to Valorization for A Working Theory of Psychic Labor

I seek the conceptual means for concrete political application of a synthesized theory of psychic value. In my preliminary reading, the concept of psychic value goes through a number of developments in the course of the 20th century—from stimulus/reflex parallel of libido-cathexis (Freud 1997), to desire as a mobilizing lack (Freud 1966), to object-relations (Klein 1984; Bion 1963), to primary-identification and the unconscious as its imprint (Lacan 1977), to the desiring-machine (Laing 1968; Deleuze and Guattari 1983). For this reason I find it necessary to consider where the political economy meets the experience of subjectivity—the terms of subjective valorization. The rationale for the choice of political economic lenses lies in commodification, which is the advanced capitalism equivalent of commodity fetishism in Marx (which is the kernel of reification, alienation, and thus consciousness), and the critique of historical society (or regulation for the purpose of building expectation and excitation for commodification). Labor is the economization of activity. In other words, in order to become historically-applicable, a theory of psychic value needs a theory of psychic labor—an immaterial corollary to labor as an economized, extractive activity, which is still in concrete reality, but much more dynamic than a single stream of activity like cognition.

I have tried to gather up the substantive from the theories of ideational (Lacan 1977; Freud 1966), emotional (Freud 1963; Klein 1984), and relational investment (Bion 1963; Althusser 1996). My rationale has been that these three dimension align with those of immaterial labor theories; they capture the qualitative basis of value-adding in embodied dimensions of thought (or representation), feeling (or affect), and social-relations (or intersubjectivity). The main purpose of looking for a theory of psychic labor is because it puts contemporary structural

conditions of youth in question. Adolescent development and socialization happen in historical, political context. This has been usually theorized broadly as ever-changing, but always a version of industrial, socially-productive historical processes 'cooperating' with personal interests (Freud 1997; Castoriadis 1987; Foucault 1988). It implies a timeless, arguably depoliticizing spectrum marked by exploitation and support. But, the case of youth demands a more explicit conception of the historical form of these 'processes of cooperation' (see Friedenberg 1970; Fromm 1961), because the terms of the relations between a person and a social system are not only interested or historically determined (Arendt 1958), but, in our specific context, political, and profit-(accumulation and domination)-driven.

I want to focus on laboring as a container for the psychological process of valorization. Marx (1975) offers a basic definition of valorization; it is a humanist definition of value-adding: human beings engage in the process of investing themselves into the objects of their concrete reality. This activity of valorizing is emotional, ideational, and practical. What allows Marx to conceive of these complex dimensions of valorization is the fact that he approaches it from a post-capitalist perspective (which avoids defining these internal human processes of value-adding according to the commodity) and the necessary means for autonomy (see Althusser 1969; Jim 2006).

Valorization's libidinal affective value is in deploying repetition and disciplining it with desublimation to make work pleasurable. There is a loss of self in the repetition of work; this process also employs a directing of desire towards non-presence (alleviation of presence, immediate cognitive attentiveness, or consciousness). In other words, valorization consists of a combination of laboring and non-presence of desire as they operate on the same level. In fact it

could be argued that non-presence is the libidinal benefactor of laboring (why an activity is valorizing, significant on its own). In consumer society the institutions of socialization (TV, social media, video games and gamification) each take a piece of the valorizing process. Television (or its replacement, Netflix and other video-streaming services) take care of identification; social media takes care of tweaking the performativity; gaming incorporates investment, valorizing and laboring. In this way, a consumer subject attains a consumer libidinal economy.

What I want to call psychic labor is a stand-in for what results in the following sequence: play is subjectively valuable, because one independently and libidinally valorizes through narrativizing, recognizing, objectifying. Play is also socially-manipulatable, and in consumer society, it is highly profitable, because everyone wants to play. Technology enables attention-direction via the televisual gadgetry. And gaming captures play, using the technology of identification to secure its link to what satisfies the subjective. In the end, the person works to sustain the link of valorization in gaming, because it is pleasurable, which result in the inevitable shift in terms of profitability. Looking at this amalgamation, interpellation offers a way to deepen the analysis as it suggests the nature of the underlying psychic surplus. Interpellation is an activity of self-projection and identification, which carries on an activity very much paralleling the kind of valorizing that becomes labor. In the context of the historical subject, the activity of interpellating is the repetition of the act that had led to the satisfying valorization in the historical moment; what seems to be happening in gaming is that the pleasure of play is replaced by the satisfaction of interpellation—which is a repetition of an earlier valorization, and as such, is repressive.

In the following chapter, I will explore what kind of surplus repressive interpellation extracts. This task requires synthesizing the whole array of concepts developed throughout this project.

CHAPTER FIVE: GAMING AND THE ECONOMY OF PSYCHIC SURPLUS

Introduction

The critical edge of this chapter addresses the structural and material grounds of contemporary youth studies, in which it seems that the question of consumer-socialization is withheld by a dominant (market-friendly) ideology in which commercial technology is readily normalized to secure exploitation and surplus extraction. In such a climate social control readily masquerades as banal reality (Boyd's popular work (2006) is a case and point), forestalling critical questions about the historically-concrete quality of younger generations' object relations as a marker of how political self-awareness is qualitatively shaped.

There are predecessors to this line of thinking; a contingent of theorists, who have come as close as affective theory; as I discussed in the previous chapters, these are the digital-capital theorists (Simondon 2012; Betancourt 2007; Hardt and Negri 2004; Stiegler 2010). The limitation of these works seems to be a common one: they lay out what they view as symptoms of 'something gone wrong.' Then, instead of elaborating their general critique through their initial analytic concepts, they retreat to traditional European tropes of Enlightenment values. For example, Simondon (2012) begins with an ontological critique of behavioral psychology by pointing to the misrecognition at the point of 'ontogenesis,' but then goes off to his own version of a metaphysical pseudo-science; Bentacourt (2007) situates distraction, but then turns to state-level politics for an argument about responsibility; Stiegler (2010) theorizes fragmentation of attention as a problem for intergenerational psycho-social relations, but then collapses the fragmentation as a problem of "classic" personality.

Instead, for the specific case of metropolitan youth, I think that psycho-social theory can provide the much needed spirit of mobilization to politicize the critical theory of advanced capitalism. The theoretical approach that I have been trying to lay out (crossing the psycho-social with politics of autonomy and self-determination) can re-energize the relevance of critical theory in the contemporary world, because it puts focus on the *substance,* the *concreteness* or the *materiality* of psycho-social experience (or at least, what seems to be the formative psycho-social dynamics, which envelope it). Althusser (2008) offers a fitting point to support this idea of concreteness:

> Of course, the material existence of the ideology in an apparatus and its practices does not have the same modality as the material existence of a paving-stone or a rifle. But, at the risk of being taken for a Neo-Aristotelian (NB Marx had a very high regard for Aristotle), I shall say that 'matter is discussed in many senses', or rather that it exists in different modalities, all rooted in the last instance in 'physical' matter.
>
> Having said this, let me move straight on and see what happens to the 'individuals' who live in ideology, i.e. in a determinate (religious, ethical, etc.) representation of the world whose imaginary distortion depends on their imaginary relation to their conditions of existence, in other words, in the last instance, to the relations of production and to class relations (ideology = an imaginary relation to real relations). I shall say that this imaginary relation is itself endowed with a material existence (40). As suggested in previous chapters, this occurring needs to be theorized as new labor or under new surplus-extraction. Deleuze and Guattari's work (1983; 1988) exemplifies the way in which a libidinal-economic narrative of the historical-material

human condition can enable immanent critique of capitalist society. I see my thesis as contributing to their consideration of psycho-social activity—desire, or the relating in object-relations—as the source of production (instead of accepting the assumption of an 'orienting-lack' as in Lacan (1977)), as I argue that the psycho-social is becoming employed towards extraction prior to finding its way into consciousness or material representations.

Political economic understanding of labor and surplus, and psychoanalytic understanding of psycho-social development require a historically-specific supplement that speaks to the historical subject-condition of contemporary youth. This is because the psychoanalytic tradition addresses the question of quality in terms of personhood (Klein 1984; Lacan 1877; Laing 1968), the major fault lines of psycho-social reality (Freud 1997; Klein 1963; Erikson 1963), and the toll (or compromise) of socialization (Freud 1963; Freud 1966; Bion 1970). As Aichhorn (1932) points out, psychological theory is, by its clinical nature, fixated on the historical intergenerational and interpersonal (historically-specific) values. Additionally, the well-documented tendency in youth studies has been to misrecognize a structural identity as the definitive youth identity (Willis 1981; Hall 1993; Yon 2000; Young-Bruehl, 2012), and view them already as the offspring, clients, or patients (Griffin 1993; McRobbie 1988) in need of 'correction.' This is why I have tried to argue that the reality of psycho-technology can serve as the historical bridge between psychic value theory and psychic labor theory.

At the precipice of the two, psycho-technology addresses the consumerist-extractive intent of contemporary consumer economy in the form of technology-enabled, micro-management of ideas, but more importantly that of managing the quality of experience. The

theory of psycho-technology points to techniques that regulate the qualitative experience as a person uses consumer technology for social and economic mediation. Because it affects the attention processes in the structural dimension of the psyche, the theory questions the qualitative impact of psycho-pharmacological and attention-micro-management processes of being 'plugged-in' (Stiegler 2010). In other words, it offers a framework to approach the psycho-social, already the grounds of socialization and social-reproductive processes, which have arguably been outside the extractive scope of capitalism until this point. In this chapter I will focus on the question of the surplus, which has been waiting since the first chapter. Considering what kind of surplus value interpellative extraction siphons will not only clarify the ways in which metropolitan adolescent consumer subjectivity is *affectively* governed, but also point towards the ways of grasping the whole of liberatory psycho-politics.

On Adolescent Addiction

The political intervention I would like to make concerns the concept of *presence*. Presence is best described as own-ness, an existential kind of presence—self-consciousness in which the libidinal and existential concerns of a person are within reach for himself or herself—presence is the present instance of consciousness. What makes a person self-determining is that this person can (through his many subjects) take over the role of regulating himself towards his own goals; self-consciousness means that one takes a role in establishing the means of secondary (de)sublimation and repression—a goal alluded to in the works of Laing (1968) and Cooper (1971) as well as Reich (1983), Althusser (1984) and Marcuse (1972). Given the problem of conception, I will only define the critical pivot of this chapter, *self-determination*, negatively: it is not a repressively desublimated experience of formative and operative subjectivity, in which

the libidinal connections (that is, the object relations) are affectively micro-managed for extractive or other guises of social-productive purposes (see Marcuse 1972). Presence and self-determination are important concepts as they remind that the larger quality of subjectivity is structured by processes of subject formation—a process which happens through moment-to-moment affecting, that is, through socialization, habituation, and repetition (within the bounds of a person's self-regulative capacity as well as the various parties with the power for affective stimulation).

Now to turn to the topic of addiction, and more specifically that of adolescent addiction. Social science tends to treat addiction as a normative problem, whereas I would like to treat addiction as an ideological concept that signals the affective tying of the person's habits to a particular libidinal economic machine. Consumer object relations hide the fact that the behavioral relational pattern is nothing but addictive (or speaking to addiction as the normative). It is the psychology of addiction, which defines the mechanism used by consumer socialization, or the experience and direction of socialization in an increasingly privatized commodity-object world. Addiction means something important in terms of self-determination—qualitatively it means non-presence, or being transfixed into a hypnotic state of timeless immersion. In this context, *presence* serves to critique immersion, because immersion is an attempt to affect the economic compromise being performed through technology to replace self-consciousness with encapsulating, phantasmagoric, immersive stimulation (encroaching on the traditionally held social as exterior definition). Because my concern is about the consumer-technological subject-formation (of one who self-commodifies), I hold on to the value of self-determination as an orienting concept. With autonomy as a point of reference, what is happening in the socialization

of the young is very much a process of affective incorporation through guidance of object relations.

I have collated a decade of social scientific research on the question of youth and addiction. According to the various discourses, adolescents become addicted because: they are prone to becoming maladjusted narcissists (where the definition of maladjustment invariably rests on social productivity, and not self-self relationality) (Nabi and John 2014); they have a history of lacking experience in social relations, which makes them prone to further alienation (Newcomb and Harlowe 1986); they have grown up with television, which makes them predictable subjects of culture (Nije Bijvank, Konijn and Bushman 2012). These same adolescents are: emotionally immature (Larson, Csikszentmihalyi and Graef 1980), and have an overt need for audiovisual stimulation (Siomos 2012; Smolak 2004). They are depressives; substance users; ADHD kids (Tejeiro 2012; Usmiani and Daniluk 1997; van Holst 2012). Their sociality is being formed in gaming space, and because of this they come to depend on the medium (Subrahmanyam and Greenfield 2008). They play with gender and sexuality but mostly reproduce existing gender regimes (Yeh 2008; Hjorth and Richardson 2009). They use internet games to fight off boredom (Hirsh 2013). They are motivated to stay immersed because of the feelings attached to gaming competition (Schiebener 2006); this immersion satisfies a craving for social recognition (Christou 2013). Adolescents are also drawn to gaming like gambling (Delfabbro and King 2013); they exhibit physical symptoms of addiction (Elliot 2012). Partly why they are prone to addictive behavior stems from their not yet knowing how to think, to be logical (Karapetsas 2014). They are predominantly located in the American middle class or at least ones that can afford that consumptive lifestyle (Boyd 2014; Gardner 2013). These are

medical diagnoses with social good always already a stable given. This is all fine and well, but it is curious that in none of these cases, the social structural is problematized in any concrete manner. How does this amalgamation of symptoms and locations make sense in light of the libidinal economies metropolitan adolescents are subjected to?

As things stand, the conciliatory thought is that the maladies of this ideological subjecthood are resolved in gaming subjectivity and the extension of the subject-avatar interaction into the wider world through *gamification* of social-productive practices (see Arenas and Stricker 2009). The video game operationalizes interpellation to the effect of horizontalizing the view of the political economic (recall the reality-TV competition show). In gaming, the sociality of competition and the labor/reward algorithms resolve the problem of compensation for subjecting oneself to institutionalized repression/desublimation—effectively all instances where repression could lead to unwanted alienation are inoculated against. In instances that I encountered researchers who consider the reasons for which people find solace in games, it was especially interesting when this rationalization came up in the context of the game called *Minecraft* (Mojang 2009). This is a game for which there is a dearth of academic research even though the game has become a part of the everyday economies of middle-class (and still aspiring) households. *Minecraft* successfully captures free-flowing attention, and dispenses an affect of satisfying calm as it enables control over building blocks unparalleled by any such attempt in reality—the closest to which could be considered playing with building blocks or Legos. I would tie the playing with building blocks to the problem of material accumulation and clutter in consumer society. Clutter is a consequence of consumerization because of its dictum of endless consumption. In such an economy, the person as an individual consumer must find ways

of disciplining himself into caring for the vastness of the consumption, and this shows up in the quality of the feelings attached to the sight of clutter (see Bogost 2007).

In *Minecraft* a player can see all of his creations in one place; there is a calming effect of this sort of deterioration-free preservation; there is no dust, no discoloring, no sign of deterioration because of repetitive use. In this sense, in gaming, there is no experience of the Other—we do not have to be human (that is, bodily, natured, self-reflexive and ethical) with the elements, let alone each other (see Hou 2011). And this is also connected to the larger loss of qualitative depth of experience as it is reduced in perspective to singularity, interestedness, playerness (see Bulut 2009). This reduction becomes a problem the more it swallows the social world outside itself. Immersion into video games and their own cultures thus results in further misdevelopment in terms of traditional sociality—his self, body, subject are misshaped, affectively-molded, consciously misrecognized, repeatedly interpellated, self-aware but limitedly so.

The Interpellation of A Gamer As A Young Man[55]

As capitalism continues to discipline social relations, the global West is bound to become a place where social structures micromanage and dictate consciousness as the exclusive domain of political economic directive. In Marcuse's words:

> The means of communication, the irresistible output of the entertainment and information industry carry with them prescribed attitudes and habits, certain intellectual and emotional reactions which bind the consumers to the producers and, through the latter to

[55] I wanted to keep it "a young man" only for the sake of gender pronoun consistency in the overall project. Instead, I would have liked to make a larger sign towards the "young girl" as laid out in Tiqqun's *the Preliminary Materials for the Theory of the Young-Girl* (2012).

> the whole social system. The products indoctrinate and manipulate; they promote a false consciousness which is immune against its falsehood…Thus emerges a pattern of one-dimensional thought and behavior (1967: 12).

In other words, it can be sensible how gaming resolves for capitalism the problem of class consciousness: middle class as consumer class does not need a consciousness of itself (even more than the threat of working class consciousness) as long as larger economic apparatuses can supply directives for its individuated drive.

Gaming as a repressive means for regulating the political economy of presence (read: consciousness) is deployed according to different class ideologies, because the differentiation is based on the range of needs from interpellation. The gamer needs to be theorized as being a member of a very specific group, which has identified with mediated (repressive) interpellation. This is a subject that already accepts the very peculiar terms of commodified emotional engagement—he desires tuning out, logging off from his own life while still being affectively present. The Wall St. day-trader, who comes home wired from cognitive labor and its commodified attention, games to deal with his own alienation, not to see his mental activity as laboring any longer, and instead perceive it as leisuring. This is his ultimate expression of hedonism (coupled with its own cocktail of psychotropic chemicals) in a world in which the libidinal life of the subject has become more and more ideologically and symbolically satisfied. And then there is the case of the unemployed reserve army of middle class laborers, who must stand by, and thus whose only consoling thought as to their future job aspirations lie within a gamified ethic (see Jeffrey 2010). In both cases, the subjects' desire for immediacy and objectification overrides the impetus for politicizing subjectification. All the while beyond the

walls of the imperial metropole's furthest borders, other youth see gaming for what it is as they engage in the cerebral repetitions for in-game gold, yet in their case the problem of unanticipated critical consciousness also comes to be resolved through radically splitting alienation (Mackenzie 2007).

I would like to specify the subject ideologically. In the metropolitan context, video games hail adolescent subjectivity as the *adolescent* is a subject of techno-capitalism (see Tiqqun 2012). This is the subject hailed through social media paradigms, gamification, video games, and audience-identification. This adolescent is not a young person. It is the *sign* for the ideologically co-opted subject, whose state of political consciousness is characterized by limited self-awareness, narcissism, possessiveness, submission to totalized authority, and a latent but unrealizable androgynous sexuality. Adolescence is ideological subjectivity—a historical instance of naturalization of ideological consciousness. In this sense, adolescence is a sign of primary political subjectification as ideology forms and limits consciousness. That is, to be an adolescent is to be a de-historicized subject, overdetermined by periodization and institutionalization. This definition of adolescence stems from where the psychical meets ideology in the instance of what Kristeva (2007) calls "the ideality syndrome"—the belief in the reality of an essentially pure idea, an ideology. Kristeva's notion of adolescence as ideology is interesting because it underscores that what is gratifying to the person for undertaking this sort of interpellation is in his own self-sacrifice to the idea. Nonetheless, the term *adolescent* socially locates a subject. As such it is deployed under the developmental conception of humanity (strictly apolitical), in which adolescence only pertains to an ahistorical developmental stage. I treat this structure as an ideology. One is hailed as an adolescent affectively. That is, particularly

in the context of transgenerational communication of necessary social participation, affect (the materiality of object relations) guarantees the transmission of what is essential for social (ideological) reproduction.

It is crucial to keep in mind that the *adolescent* is a discursively produced figure, an empirical composite character. For the typified adolescent (that home-front subject read and produced as an adolescent) stuck in the institutions of social reproduction in a typical American metropole, social life is highly over-determined, prison-like. He is likely to be overweight, malnourished, narcissistically maladjusted (Larson et al. 1980; Ge et al. 2001). At home, his parents are in control; in school, adults are in control; at his part-time job, it is his boss; in the public, it is the sanctioned state authorities or anyone above his social standing (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000; Barber, Eccles and Stone 2001). He is thirsty for pleasurable social allocation of desires for recognition (see Friedenberg 1970; Adamson and Bjorn 1999). He has poor self-image, because of the role of popular culture and its misogyny in the formative scenes of his social exploration (Usmani and Daniluk 1997; Smolak 2004). He is likely depressed and feels alienated. In his leftover self-reflexivity he cannot muster up the energy to take up space and partake in social activities that do exist because those are also inscribed into embodied class positions (Muris et al. 2001; Newcomb and Harlow 1986). He has cultivated a sense of sexuality through televisually mediated pornography and lack of experience with real humanity (Haggstrom-Nordin, Hanson and Tyden 2005; Ybarra 2005). In the same vein he has grown up with television, which teaches him the ideological speak he has to deploy to connect with others (Gerbner et al. 1986; Hoffman and Thomson 2009). Not to mention the problem of intergenerational relations and communication that marks the adolescent as not yet valuable, not

yet worthy of rights, still a body of complexes transitioning into a subjectivity (Dalhouse and Frideres 1996; Vollebergh, Iedema and Raakimakers 2001).

All of this alienation prepares the grounds for his feeling the gadget-mediated on-screen as the proper choice. In this caricature we can see how his personal inadequacies (or interpellated feelings thereof) play into motivating him libidinally to immerse himself into the digital mediation. This person might have a social future in an avatar-mediated environment. It is reasonable that in his free time, he turns to video games, because this is where he is in control to (at least) work for adventure. Gaming is also justified to his commanding social-handlers; the choice is sold to his parents as the promise of a productive future, which doubles as harmless fun more safe than the real historical alternatives of playing in the street.

What is politically important about viewing adolescence in this way becomes clearer in the context of contemporary psycho-social studies pertaining to video games (MMOs in particular) and social media. Critical theory viewed the dawn of consumer technology, particularly the effect of televisuality and mass-production on aesthetics and psychology, as problems of capitalist incursion on the subject-formative basis of subject-object mediation. Contemporary studies of televisual mediation seem to have made a calculated move away from attending to this problematic. And when the same literature that finds space to consider the affective states of consumer televisual experience (that is, immersion and addiction), it singles out the adolescents as the only subject of social concern. If the same technology affects adults and adolescents, and only in the case of the adolescents we have a sense of the darker political side of the impact of such technological mediation, then the question is whether the so-called adults are not already being unconsciously interpellated as adolescent subjects, since they are

also exploited and unconsciously manipulated to align their consumption patterns with the guidelines of the reigning consumer capital monopolies (Baudrillard 1998). In the 1990s and early 2000s, popular culture reflected on this possibility (at least subconsciously) by claiming that consumer industries were engaging in purposeful infantilization of adult subjectivity (see Barber 2008; Postman 2011). Initially the introjection suffered from its own ideological presumption about adulthood, individualism, and maturity. But I think that an unfortunate consequence of this attempt at analysis was that it led to dismissal of such a provocation. It was found to be too insulting to presumably autonomous and self-aware adult persons, when in reality, it was really just too insultingly obvious to bypass the defenses of the (adolescent) narcissistic self-conception of a well-refined consumer subject.

After all, the *second* life is culturally valued because it is supposed to be the life without real life prices as much as play is supposed to be a dialectic partner to work. Ideally mediative technology could allow persons to control their own flow of affectation by being the ones determining the sources. This would be my utopian fantasy for mediative technology. But, such a subjectivity requires education in self-conception (see Marcuse 1972). This could be the salvageable part of Rousseauan education of Emile: setting up the goal of socialization to be self-determinacy. But, in the historical present, it is not the case that technology supports adolescents' self-determination. Instead, adolescents are trained for the political economy despite their own subjecthoods.

What happens when interpellation as subject-formative technology is commodified? The privatization of the ideological state apparatus that is interpellation, enables the deployment of ideology as a means of socializing political economically necessary subjects (Althusser 1984).

Gaming functions on this level of institutionalization. People struggle to cope with the different values of gaming and real life. One is affective and deeply interpellative, and the other is a complex that necessitates very deep self-conceptions (repression, realization, liberation). Ideology becomes a tool of technology of social reproduction from the moment that technology becomes a mediating structure between individuals and social relationality. In this sense, gaming enables the experience of both limited and unleashed interpellations as a person participates in the construction of interpellation (see Li, Kien and Khoo 2013). Affectively, gaming uses interpellation and other (smaller) affective techniques of auto-stimulation, to shape and operationalize its necessary subjects. Social research has only pointed out how this takes the form of addiction.

The direction in which I would like to take this discussion will become clearer with the following example of Disney Corporation's entry into the MMO business: *Disney Infinity* (Avalanche 2013). Here is how commodification of habituated interpellation is conceived in Disney Infinity: first, a child (Disney knows!) has already been habituated to internal realization of value of televisual affect—chances are he has been watching his favorite heroes (of identification) on the Disney Channel. In this personal history, advertisements were already regularly interrupting his cartoon-time; in a moment an ad introduces the already gaze-fixed child to a gaming console that extends the mediation of the televisually-guided experience by promising a "live-action" experience of the previously audienced. This is a gaming console which will utilize his toy action-figure of his favorite hero. In the commercial, the child is interpellated with an actor instructing him to physically insert the favorite figurine into a platform in the game console, which makes the figurine first appear on the screen, and then

become visually immersed into the virtual world of *Disney Infinity* on the screen. Thus, from the toy to the avatar, the child has been led from commodified identification (with the hero-toy) to the realm of commodified interpellation (with the hero-toyyed-avatar).

In this example, the psychological process of synchronization serves the capitalist objective of attempting to provide more efficient (productive) consumption. The process is punctuated by a physical act of confirmation: real-world play is transitioned into digital "play" as the child physically places the totem of his fantasy into the game console. Not only is an avatar version of a (toy) subject (that the child has already identified with) submerged into a virtual world, but the child is not allowed to actually satisfy his basic fantasy of becoming that particular favored cartoon hero—which until this new relation was in fact something that the child was able to do for himself through imaginative projection of his private (unmediated) role-play (see Winnicott 1971). Instead, even in the virtual world, which comes after so much physical preparation, the child only gets to "become" the toy version of his on-screen hero. At once confirming and repressive, this is a telling development in the context of consumer interpellation. It offers an ideological resolution to the reproduction-value problem of consumer capitalism in a way that ultimately sacrifices the experience of the subject. Reproducibility contradicts capitalist value (which is based on a psychology of scarcity), but here the child comes to experientially learn that he can never be his beloved Captain Buzz Lightyear, but that he can get as close to being "him" as possible by buying the figurine, setting it into the game console, and renting out a duration of interpellation which satisfies by being immersive.

In order to make sense of what might be going on in the apparatus of Disney Infinity, we need to take a few steps back to consider the concrete technics involved in the process. In this

example, we have a young child interacting with the machine, and his ways of imagining and play carefully channeled towards the commodity mediation. But, imagining also plays a large role in the child's development of self-conception, his development of subjectivity and consciousness. And furthermore, imagination as such serves a role in the psycho-social development of the child into an autonomous individual. There is an overlaying of intentions here: on the one hand consumer capital intervenes in the child's play by introducing a mediation that will train him to find a mediating commodity (that is, a toy) in order to play with his own imagination. On the other hand, play and imagining-through-objects have a developmental role in the child's life, where their immediate consideration within the socius makes them agents of socialization (see Winnicott 1971; Piaget 2013; Vygotsky 2012). In order to make sense of what might be going on here, we need to see the political economic dimension of the psycho-social developmental processes. I have tried to argue that overlaying technology over socialization does not support the popular view that this is a benevolent process, but in fact the opposite; as it is realized within the age of consumer capitalism, digital technology is not a neutral tool, but in its very structure, embodies its historical political economic role reaching back to the television and audience labor at the dawn of the postwar culture industry. Economic value on this level is basic: self-determination, or not.

I want to argue that perhaps it is not hyperbolic to suggest that gaming is the realization of the Hayekian fantasy, the realization of an autonomous regulative system based on competition and performance maximization—to which, one still must voluntarily find his own way. It is interesting to note that just like its traditionally conservative liberal capitalistic ideology, the Hayekian fantasy only applies to the managerial and the owning classes in the

global political economy, which makes for some interesting suggestions: the ideology of perfect competition is meant to discipline the middle class in keeping their political economic positions in the general exploitative processes of the capitalist economy. The autonomy it realizes is only ideological in the same vein that the system is purposed by the demands of consumption. When capitalism defines the modes and operative goals of socialization, the operation of its processes look like those of video games (and gamification more broadly). Gamification of socialization gets set to occur as all generations (and their corresponding milieus) beget their own version of the general consumer affect. This affect is structurally identical so as to prolong and desensitize, to naturalize by composition. We can easily observe how this regime takes over from within the confines of the middle class family. Auto-stimulating, children are kept busy (and perhaps do not even need a exchange-value costing baby-sitter); auto-stimulation technology enables adults to have space for their own interpellative narcissism as children are libidinally regulated by consumer gadgets.

The processes are subliminal, microscopic fragments of psycho-social relations. They fully bypass the person, focusing on training for economic reproduction despite their presence. Viewed in this way, what is gaming but an alternative to therapy where the goal of social cohesion is the same but the means are different—in other words the subject is left out of the process. Because it works so well, and because its goal of profit extraction is too sacred to be left to subjects, gaming provides consumer capitalism's institutionalized idea of subjectivity. The structures provide agency without a real consequence; it provides the illusion of freedom; it simulates subjectively meaningful stimulation (i.e. auto-stimulation). It provides a subjectivity

within an unsurmountable totality in the overdetermined social world, in which a perpetual anti-presence becomes desirable—where rationality exists to perpetuate the avoidance of presence.

In the remainder of this chapter I will argue that the game reasserts the ideologically material existence of invisible authority, coherence, and totality. It conditions or perpetuates the commodity-identification on the libidinal level by satisfying the desire of lack, that is, immersion, non-presence, libidinal stimulation into timelessness. Here it only has limited capacity for exploitation; it is good and sounds stable as long as there are territories to take over. Effectively the consumer subject interpellated as a gamer becomes immersively incapable (more so, uninterested) in political self-awareness. This is because a libidinal economy of repetition of auto-stimulation immersed in commodity fetishism can only result in a pornographic relation to objects and experience (see Shaughenessy 2013 as example of recent research that ties autism as pleasure of repetition and object relations of the digital realm). Emotionality has a materiality, in which extensive suspension of self-consciousness leads to sensually pleasurable subjugation. The site of reproduction is in the subject; the commodity is the object in this relationship, so only the subject can produce, by laboring, the origins of what becomes a commodity affect—this is the *auto* of auto-stimulation. In gaming, through personalized interpellation of identifying with an avatar and its accompanying audiovisual structuring, a gamer accepts to work in order to get the feeling (that of a desired object) through the satisfaction of watching and hearing. In this mediation, in this watching, there is a materiality to this gaming-consumer political economy, and it is tied up with affect, as it is the feel of labor that valorizes the repetitive task.

In what follows I argue that through re-reading the documented affective states tied to the experience of televisual mediation, particularly in gaming, we can grasp the new terms of

consumer interpellation that serve as the basis of consumer socialization. By reflecting on the existing literature on digital gadgets, addiction, video-game-play motivation, self-portrayal, and politics, we can also see how affect is weaponized in the realm of psycho-sociality.

Interpellative Commodification of the Subject on the Metropolitan Home Front

In the contemporary picture of capitalist socialization, the psycho-social effect (and affect) of video games emerges in terms of mediative gadgetization, interpellative technology, and socializing experience. It can be observed in the normative discourses around the problem of adolescents and their social and mental health—the discourse of adolescent addiction and anti-sociality. Cultural studies movement in Britain widely documented the extent to which the social preoccupation with adolescents in public discourse was mainly to discipline and act out on the black inner city teenager, the politically deemed public enemy (see Griffin 1993). Commodification of socialization becomes particularly observable in the biomedicalized discourse of addiction to gadgets, video games, and particularly the MMOs. When this theme is contextualized around the adolescent home front subject, we are enabled to view a subject both in the context of losing oneself in consumerist nomadism and the commodification of socialization mechanism.

In some cases, WoW has been conceptualized as an important new domain of youth culture by a number of theorists (see Ess 2011; Galloway 2006; Houtman 2011). Their shared concern is that the more space WoW takes up in the lives of adolescent subjects, the more the medium might encroach onto the territory of the subject-formative processes dominated by traditional authority figures and institutions (that is, the family, the peer group, and the school). But, the limits of this research are clear: they suppose that the old models of socialization are

superior to the new consumer-driven mode; that in opposition to traditional (read: natural) and banal forms of authority and social organization, youth are now subjected to interested, economically driven, and corrupting modes of socialization. Instead of treating video game and various digital addictions as margins of otherwise normal (harmless) experience with televisual mediation, I argue that the affective states that are hailed by these mental and social "health" discourses are in fact describing the forms that socialization (defined as subject formation both socially and self-relatedly) takes when capitalism specializes a class population to the role of consumers and ideological reproducers.

In part, commodification is able to appropriate the means of socialization, because socialization justifies its subjugation of the human by claiming authorship of the process of becoming a person—becoming a subject, a person who speaks for himself. It would not be far-fetched at this point to suggest that the gaming technology allows a person to have a virtual[56] experience of the reigning (prescribed, engineered, tailored) ideological conceptions of the dominant political economy. Commodification, since it is essentially a profit-extraction-oriented exploitative process, creates a problem for social reproduction, because its exploitative mandate rationalizes a careless approach to the well-being of the subject under its reign, his agency and means for self-perpetuation.

It is when primary socializing lessons are experienced in a conditioned environment like an MMO that commodification as socialization rears its head. In one sense the basic psychological technology operationalized by consumer socialization is repetition (that all-too-familiar magic of habituation). Here, the elaboration is hidden in the minute elements of the total

[56] That is, an aesthetic, mentally-constituted affect without the real-world materiality behind its value originating in representation.

phenomenology of engaging with an MMO. Every microscopic mapping contributes to the composite that will become how sociality is contained and redeployed and commodified in an MMO. Does the gamer constantly engage with the medium, or does he set up a semi-automated system for involvement that needs less constant attention (does the participant use a mouse to point-click movements, or does he engage in constant identification with his avatar and uses the keyboard to direct movements)? Does the MMO become a simulation or does it qualitatively replace that which would have taken place in the real world? I think that these are the questions that, when subjected to WoW, for example, would determine the nature of commodification, its impact on subject and ideology-formations, and disciplining self-consciousness within the consumerizing gaming environment.

Taking the discourse of MMO addiction as an example, what emerges is a treatment of an extractive machine as if it were an unchallenged force, an endless repetition of limited, stock conclusions. Yes, habituation of MMO-immersion takes time away from the social (see Snodgras 2013). And, yes, this has wide-ranging, reasonable consequences from physiological to psychological and social "health" concerns (Wan and Wen-bin 2006). What is missing is a wider, political recognition—something akin to considering that what is engendered as addiction is a process of libidinal integration by means of aesthetic lure to identify with a process that habituates—a process or relation that increasingly mirrors the process otherwisely relegated for socialization.

After all, commodification stems from capitalist colonization of socialization's processes such as object-relations. For the effort of crudely demarcating the difference, socialization is a process of becoming a subject for a given community (for membership and for others), and at the

same time, a process of being educated to become a subject for oneself. In this sense, socialization has an element of taking-care, or responsibility for, historical sociality (see Stiegler 2010). As I mentioned earlier, Stiegler argues that the cultivation of responsibility in intergenerational (reproductive) relations is the process to critically attend to in socialization. According to Stiegler, reigns of attention-formation, grounded and operationalized by a society's communications technology (in his example, books), function to dictate the way in which essential socially-reproductive attention will be cultivated in intergenerational relations under the banner of "maturity," deeming the persons living through a subjection to the process as responsible enough to oversee social reproduction (2008: 13). In fact the radical margins of psychoanalytic theory proposed this precise argument. Both Reich (1967) and Rank (1938) spoke of child-rearing as a habituation to social dependence, which sacrifices the (arguably idealistic) well-being of the child to the perpetuation of social-necessity. Later on, Laing (1954) and Cooper (1970) also singled out the process of social reproduction as the cause of mental distress. In contrast, commodification characterizes the process of how the human (always wrapped in its potential sociality) is objectified, and becomes regulated by the power of capitalist operationalization (Baudrillard 1981: 140). And most importantly its goal is profit. Therefore, commodification, by default, seeks to steal, replace, and then guide subjective choice-making towards motivating production, but also creating circuits of demand-production by augmenting desire.

What makes the establishment of the exploitative socialization most effective is its cover that “these are merely games” and that “games are harmless.” Films become propaganda by how they deploy audience and on-screen identification and to what purposes; when it comes to the

question, how is it exactly that televisual technology interacts with ideology, we need not look beyond the immediate fact that identification is sanctified in film by controlling the location of "I"-perspectives—which on-screen character deploys "I"-statements (see Hoffman, Tiffany and Thomson 2009). Similarly video games can and do function to influence and direct participants' involvement. Only they do not do it for traditional ideological reasons such as fatherland/ motherland nationalism for the sake of military industrial apparatus support, but for much more immediate and short-sighted intentions of extraction and exploitation in the form of attention-formation and consciousness-direction.

Technology enables the economic redirection of psycho-social processes while self-conception remains dependent on the forms of existing technology. What makes digital technology different from its psycho-social predecessors (say, the concept, or the book) is that it expands mediative capture by a centralized televisual experience (Mander 2001). It enables interactivity with this televisual representation, which means that it captures the socializing process of play, and other forms of interpellative interaction. We also have to contend with the added dimension of commodity-mediation, and particularly, televisual mediation as a form of consumer-commodity mediation, while keeping in mind the problem of profit-orientation within the capitalist political economy. And this was consolidated within an industrial capitalist mode of production long ago! Born out of the idealistic protection and defense of imperialism, guarding industrial capitalism from within its base of the military industrial complex, today's technology is far from being neutral. It is propelled by the needs of capitalism to counter the falling rate of profit. What I am after here is to argue the importance of having a political and psychological theory of the consumer (capitalist) society—and not just the economy. Consumer capitalism as

we know it is multi-stratified, geographically organized, and highly specialized. And ever since its industrial beginnings, it also rests on applied science to maximize its yields and anticipate the dialectical possibilities of reaction and reversion (Marcuse 1964: 49). In such an economy, the libidinal tugs and the calls to the collective unconscious (in terms of familiarity with histories of cultural repression) play a determining role in how capital manufactures and reproduces demand for what it commodifies. The problems of socializing the young, which much of popular social science is predisposed to commenting upon (Gardner 2013; Stiegler 2010), stems from the fact that the profit-extraction base, which views a society as an amalgamation of individual consumers, reduces the complexity of self-social entanglement to where value and valuation are legitimated and justified by the bottom line, that of the exchange value.

So far, I have only dealt with a reading of the social-construction of everyday life of a person as already involving technologies that secure the reproduction of socially necessary subjectivity. Mechanisms relegated to social reproduction, and tasked with guaranteeing the continual systemic value of the subject populations take place on the following levels:

- the emotional (the strictly personal);
- the social-libidinal (distinguished from the emotional by being socially-compartmentalized in the form of “object-relations");
- the cognitive (ideological universalism often corresponding with ideological rationality);
- the existential (ideology as metaphysical conception of life);
- the economic (ideologues justify their own necessity to suffer and labor);
- the political (ideologues also justify their own subjection).

Stated differently, when we lay out all the potential levels of political-economic subject/object relationality, situating ideology in the context of contemporary consumer capitalism enables us to recognize the potential for technological mediation on each level, and the role of technology in incorporating and consolidating political-economic stability if and when present at each level—a mediative mechanism of control and regulation.

In consumer-oriented ethics, it is the power-to-buy that structures access and capacity-building on all levels: within consumer-driven structures, social-necessity is collapsed into economic necessity with the ideological mantra—if you can afford it, you can have it. And the contemporary academic discourse around the legacy of the consumer-feedback loop serves as an interesting example of the way in which commodification can become naturalized (Pariser 2010). I am thinking of the concept of "prosumption," appropriately meant to symbolize the "productive" consumption. In this universe, only player-controlled avatars are people, all others are non-persons ("NPCs"). One is rewarded for every action taken towards the universalized in-game objectives of growth and accumulation. Labor is inescapable in this world, cheating wholly impossible. Collaboration evades the contradiction of self-interestedness; selfishness is the sole grounds of sociality. Interestedness and sharing are not mutually exclusive. Intimacy requires only the performance and the semblance of presence of an other. Everyone can be beautiful. Everyone has the means to reach that next level if they are willing to pay for it. Horizons are just a matter of access, and access is relative to time or pay. Interpellation satisfies materially.

Gamified Libidinal Economy

Digital technology, which serves as the medium for immersive gaming, operates by manipulating the psycho-social structure of human experience that can only be called ideological

(in the sense that Althusser meant it). There is an enormous development lurking in this proposition. In the past, the political economy and ideology functioned in sync by means of a few social structures and institutions guaranteeing the synchronization, which nonetheless meant that the ideal universes and the dominant political economy were meant to be compatible but could not be guaranteed to perform in sync. In fact, narratives of revolutionary dissent usually fantasize about disillusionment and revolt against the social structures that begins from an ideologically prompted subject-position (see Adorno 1998; Marcuse 1972; Illich 1970). In comparison, in the MMO era, the game universe allows a person to have a virtual experience of the ideological experience—an experience of the world according to the political economy's self-justifying narration of the lay of the land.

In what is to follow I consider a number of concepts that can be most succinctly described as affective states— boredom, immersion, self-presence. Considering gaming within consumer capitalism allows us to answer the essential political question of how one becomes convinced to treat their life as if it was one of many, or in the least, not as significant and valuable and unique as it existentially is. It is only in this way that one can submit to repressively desublimated periodization of experience, libidinal economy, and relationality. We can think of the libidinal economy as defined by how the subject comes to relate to concepts of labor, valorization, habituation, and satisfaction. In its relation to political economy, I will hold that there is a correspondence between the libidinal and the political economic: the mode of production plays a determining role in superstructural ordering, which takes form as ideology, and it is ideology that serves as the ties between the subjective and the structural.

A subject is constructed through libidinal reactions of pleasure or displeasure in the process of playing a video game, such as that of an MMO avatar-relational game. The game structure conditions the player to its equations of object relations by dispensing satisfaction through performance-based rewards, but also through small calculations of luck-simulated games. Players attain small bits of pleasure from winning a loot lottery or reaching a further-empowering level (Karlsen 2011). As such the relation goes to strengthen the formation of the subject in the mind of the playing person. This speaks to why a person cannot simply break the ties with the game and give it up when it becomes unpleasurable on the conscious level. The repetition compulsion is built into what is marketed as enjoyable about the game, where the enjoyable is the affective instance (and then the memory of that satisfying linkage) of being stimulated by the game. The person is re-interpellated to form attention as a subject every time that he responds to another hailing originating from a prior identification with an element of the initial interpellation. The paradoxical relation which reconciles the contradiction between subjugation and subjection is found here in the consummating act of agency on the part of the person in building their own relation to the subject and the interpellation. This is done affectively in the form of auto-stimulation precisely in the places where formerly ideology would have made up for the limits of possibilities in light of material scarcity. The mention of the affective is particularly important. We can begin to get a sense of this in what is signaled by boredom, being bored, being boring in contemporary discourses.

Boredom is an especially rich phenomenological concept as an affective state encapsulating consciousness. Boredom becomes increasingly tied to commodity-regimented televisual interpellation and consumer object relations. Boredom is specifically important in the

structural context of the politics of presence, where those psycho-social object relations come to discipline the conditions for self-consciousness, that is, presence. Boredom can be described as a state of consciousness divorced from existential purpose (Hirsh 2012); Phillips (1994) argues that boredom is about waiting for oneself. It is a waiting for the confirming interpellation, that is, an authority that authorizes self-satisfaction. In earlier eras boredom has even been treated as a critical refusal, even if only latently so (Freud 1997; Winnicott 1971; Phillips 1994). Some theorists have even treated it as a mark of alienation and even commodification (see Adorno 1998), building upon a sense that boredom also signals a loneliness, a substitute for the missing 'real.' Yet others have even treated boredom as a marker of time outside of stimulation. In the case of Hirsh (2012), the sheer way that this research finding is articulated implies an assumption that the marker is on the level of auto-stimulation already—that in the case of auto-stimulation, there exists no possible cognitive competitor precisely because auto-stimulation negates consciousness in its present.

The affective enclosure that boredom signals over consciousness fits well with the structural terms of a video game: the game is not about having or not having, but about the world of rules that surrounds material scarcity. After all, in the context of consumer socialization, (thanks to habituated gadgetized mediation) all of the regulative roles need to be prefigured since capitalism reproduces them for the sake of profit-extraction (Marcuse 1972; Baudrillard 1998). It is here that the subject could be said to be reduced to a libidinal object-subject, an avatar subject. Boredom comes to symbolize the regiment of commodification or alienation of fantasy to the extent that one begins to view attention, presence, and self-consciousness as laborious (even elective) tasks.

Boredom as an organizing principle is dormant in many pathological discourses surrounding adolescent psycho-sociality. According to the researchers, in one instance, drunkenness and immersion have the same root cause in the minds of the interpellated adolescent subjects (Griffin 2009). It stands for a particular nihilism, a desire to refuse the regime of commodification and recording by immersion into non-presence—subjectlessness through attentionally fixed projective syncing of identificatory processes (cf. Kroker 2004). The side effect of this regime is perpetual depression when recognition and satisfaction are rolled into one reward for winning or being the best (see Lanningham-Foster 2009). But this is an economically productive affective position of the subject, since depressive positions in object relations are still suitable to consumerism's needs for a subject population. In the *second* world, you can satisfy your (manufactured) desire to embody a kind of personality.

In ethnographic research that touches on the lives of home front youth, where boredom as a theme surfaces, it is in relation to the question of how youth organize their libidinal economies —how they navigate being tired after school and outside of their institutionally required attention-formation and participations (see Iso-Ahola, Seppo and Crowley 1991; Hirsh 2012). Adolescents are observed filling up their free time with binging on Netflix, social media, and video games; they are quickly associated to the historical desire of the gambler, which is to say they develop emotional and therapeutic relations to experience and objects (Ito 2009). But even in the example of "chasing the nomadic self," there is an instance in which commodification can be seen to manipulate the reproductive power of habituation and repetition in socialization of a given process. The nomad-self is similar to the not-yet-self traumatized into subjectivity, the recording surface in Deleuze and Guattari (1983). But, my critique would be that there is a

romanticization; the nomad-self covers up the fact that what is being tugged at is a desire to not be present. The nomad is an affectively regularized subject, deployed for consumer reproductive ends through processes of interpellation and its related object-relational psycho-social processes. The nomad captures a desire, a longing for the kind of reconciled or non-oppositional subjectivity, a sync between consciousness and being without contradiction, static, residue, or feedback. This is really a desire to have a consciously reduced affective subjectivity and instrumental rationality (see Livingstone and Woolley 2007).

What is being played out is a generational foregone conclusion:[57] one cannot escape institutional regulation or repressive domination, so the best course is to use technology as a means to 'log out' of one's own life. There is a politics of psycho-sociality lying dormant in the vicissitudes of this cultivated capacity to zone out and choose non-presence. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with people wanting to live out their deepest fantasies of becoming and recognition. The problem comes into focus when we ask about the quality of what is meant by consumerising socialization, or, the socialization and condition for self-reproducing consumerism: you can enjoy and embody as long as you can sustain the mediation which is directly plugged into the already existing political economy. The question that orients the rest of the discussion is this: what is the surplus here? I will venture to suggest that it is the existent, the self-determined being, suppressed for the sake of profit.

Affective Terms of Gaming Surplus-Extraction

[57] What comes to mind is Marcuse's (1974) cautionary speculations in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* that the consumer capitalist industrial military complex will organize its own structural response to the rising tide of subjective protest at the dissatisfying quality of postindustrial life.

The grounds of reading interpellative technology as a psycho-socially commodifying apparatus lies in instances when social relational problems are resolved through gaming, social media, and gadgetization—under a regime of repressive interpellation. In video games, ideology is deployed by political economy, and in this sense the valorization (carried through an intermediary of an avatar) is commodified. In *Minecraft* the avatar is a reduction of you, the player, reduced to the economy of the game with proportional agency. Sandbox games like *Minecraft* do not have a story line they impose on the player. The player is himself, and this lack opens up to identification, which is then guided towards valued ends (hidden beneath achievements and rewards). Since people within the walls of the empire must identify with the position of consumers as their primary mode of economic participation, and also, that of imperial agents, being a gamer or more specifically an avatar-subject allows them to assume their political economically necessary role with pleasure. Dedication has a weight of its own, which is guided by a loyal identification with the object as a continual source of subject stability. It is as if the avatar subject dictates by its being what is good, what is valuable, what is important to continue to chase, and what are the points of bodily exhaustion that need to be repressed. Gaming becomes a political economic project in social engineered control of agency and subjectivity, because it creates subjectivity around ideological role-playing: ideology says it could be you, even though society today does not ask that we reconcile the positions of domination but only that we tolerate and live with each other. In this idea class and role are reduced to signifying the same value.

Technology can provide a simulation of genuineness. More specifically, in what it lacks (that is, genuine human affect), it simplifies, reifies, lending to commodification. This is where

the failures and complexities of interpersonal relations on the familial and otherwise institutional level are exploited by commodification. It is an alternative to therapy in the same way that interpellation is an alternative to self-consciousness. Construction of ideological materiality is what creates consciousness. This materiality is class-based, but immanently it is also affective, gendering, subjectivizing. Avatar-interpellation is not so much a vehicle for historical conciliation as much as it is one for libidinal and cultural extension. Interpellation provides the script for the acting subject. Digital technology, by means of mediation control, is able to offer a customized experience of interpellation. In this view, gaming becomes a repressive means for the regulation of deployed interpellations. Individually we all have subject positions which are irreconcilable with the dominant machines because of class ideological contradictions on the level of subjective experience. This misfitting is resolved by the materiality of interpellation (that is, the embodied affect and consciousness of experience): in the end we end up producing the order that represses all of us because we cannot let go of all own narcissism—or, 'in the end I will end up doing what will be best for me.'

Repetition, alienation and valorization are intimately important processes for social reproduction. Each one is put to purpose in socialization and political economy. Socialization provides an affective (material) primer for ideological syncing of present historical materiality with the symbolic, thus tying the subject to the economy; the political economy secures the suitable (socially productive) exploitation. In order to deprive the human of its naturalized sociality and socially created capacity, the human needs to be convinced to become subject to an extractive interpellation—an interpellation that in its fiction makes the subject predictable, thus

regularizable or directable. The way to sustain a predictable relation would be to zero in on the predictable or moldable structure and maximize its course-directive value (see Kohlberg 1994).

Labor is dependent on the reification of humanity into an economically viewed value. Ideology defines that territory of symbolic meaning, because it mediates between those symbolic orders and the libidinal realm of the human materiality. That materiality, in turn, affects the self to create consciousness ordinarily perpendicular. On the subjective level, alienation enables repetition, which makes the valorization of laboring commodifiable as political economic labor. That alienation stems from the difference between the first time one does an activity (inexperience, newness) and how one does the same activity after however much it takes to have "learned" the activities in the experience. At this latter point the original experience has become a source of value, a raw resource in the repetitive mining for what it can (or, is perceived to be able to) provide.

In an equation of play being commodified through games for surplus-value, where surplus value is not directly the source of exchange value but the perpetuation of the object relation practice (read: self-commodification), the substance is not a material commodity but is psychic and deeply subject-formative in nature. Interpellation is deeply intertwined with the kind of surplus-value it is posed to extract. The former defines the form and extent of the latter, and by co-composition, makes the initially existing as both valued, and then transformed (or value-loaded) as capital (see Kordela 2012). This means that every time the surplus is defined, the territory of the original shrinks proportionately. What shrinks every time is what increasingly comes to be defined as “being able to do for oneself” as it is excised from “having to pay to get it

done by someone else" (see Gardner 2013). This is what the commodification means in the psychic realm when read through interpellation.

Interpellation turns the person (more so the persona that the person accepts as subject in interpellation) into capital. It dehumanizes materially by turning the constitutively psycho-socially human into a cog of exploitation (cf. Stiegler 2010). The televisual enables the commodification of signs and signification, and then the interactive technology enables the deployment of interpellation, which builds its edifices upon the affective apparatuses of the televisual—in case of consumerization this means that you continue to have a profitable consumer synced up between the presumably different realms of consumer experience.

On this level the surplus is self-conception and future capacity for that sort of valiance or dimension or form of self-conception. It is wrapped up with self determination, agency, all through the self-conceptualizing production of subject and concept, persona, idealization and identification, mirroring and mimesis, imitation, and avatarization. In this sense the person's potential self consciousness is continually decreased for the continual extraction of surplus value. Surplus is where consciousness could have been; the constitutive part of the political economy of attention formation. This is surplus value in psychic economy. The realm of materiality of domination in its most vulgar and basic terms.

Accounting for the surplus happens through regulating and controlling the larger processes of subject/object relations. Each partial gamer-interpellation is able to define a surplus —that is its *techne*. And each surplus is layered on a previous in terms of replacing the originary with a persona that suits the system and also can simulate that which was excised to be turned

into surplus value. Simplification or reduction is a byproduct and not a direct intent of the process of commodification precisely because surplus extraction is profit driven.

The surplus is equal to the subjective, the qualitative, which is redirected to fuel the continual functioning of the mediation that commodifies and simplifies (in the least, the mediation offers only a partial mirroring and circulation). But, almost immediately, there is the problem of qualitative repression as this initially identified and this subject-re-constitutive surplus is recirculated. What is the impact of a continual recirculation of the initial human surplus-value? Recall the Adorno (1998) side of the experience: mimesis in being subjective affects the subject towards a conception, but that being is singular, and not a one-to-one copy of an already exiting; in this way it is a ground for politics of sustaining self-determination amidst all the processes that would fall under the culture industry.

The political economy in which psychic surplus is the primary value is arguably still around the corner. But, games do come before the laborization of digital technology—they are a primer just like play is a primer in laboring in society. So, what does it mean that games prime for exploitation? In the banal instances of televisual experience such as the fetishism of high definition viewing, we become content to be fascinated by the intricacy of the detailing of the televisual objects. What I have called auto-stimulation is given as the drug to null unrestful consciousness, as if we were closing an autistic boy into a room and giving him media that will simulate talking to him all under the familiar guise of education. Imagine the wider use of this phenomena, the way in which this exaggerated idea shows up in every day life. Pleasure (limited to self-stimulated kind) becomes the conciliatory object traded for unconsciousness/ agentlessness (or ideological consciousness). This is one-dimensionality. And in a different

realm, that of the primary, in our historical moment, for this specific historical group of youth, it is being further defined, reified, and commodified in the sense of physical, most material form of consciousness, that of attention-formation and identification. Get high, feel distracted, avoid paying attention—all parts of a complex form of pleasure. This is a catastrophe in the historical material reality of the consumer-youth-class libidinal economy. Gaming ultimately displaces the problem of reification in labor, where consciousness is compromised to underwrite production and consumption, by substituting attention (that is, fixation, identification, and focus) for consciousness.

This is an act of sacrifice on the part of consumer capitalism—the desperate attempt to prolong the life of a system of valorization, reproduction and redistribution; justification for the subjugation of humanity for just a bit longer, for extending survival of the system of consumerist repression day in and day out. Give up the spirit, and replace it with bodily satisfaction and ideological consciousness. As such, the metropolitan society is a self-devouring society—ouroboros. This is reminiscent of the role of gaming in the ideological lives of the metropolitan adolescents. They are ideologically sacrificed and raised on a deficit of consciousness. Gaming, the preoccupying of the conscious by stimulating attention formation through ideological identification (projection and introjection), takes form as prescribed fantasy, and replaces the possibility of pre-standardized, uninstitutionalized subjecthood. The surplus which would have informed their self-consciousness is thus turned into an already surplus, accounted for in the circuits of consumerization.

CONCLUSION

The intervention of my project is largely borne out of a reoccurring puzzlement about a seeming disconnect between the quality of the research and the phenomenological and political economic readings of historically specific sites of commodification, institutionalization, or socialization of the consumer side of advanced capitalism such as that of gaming. Gaming is important, because in its interactivity, its phenomenological terms of experience, it contributes to commodifying some processes of ideological identification and auto-stimulation (which, as I argued in Chapter 2, simply belong to the concept of interpellation). A reading of *gadgetized techno-interpellation* enables us to critically consider gaming as a *machine* that enables surplus-extraction to traverse and exploit across the domains of ideology (imagination and Phantasy), the mechanical psyche (its neural and cognitive behaviorized structures and patterns), the emotional life as interconnected to both real and imagined stimulus, and the world of semiotic reproduction (that is, the world of symbols, displaced and/or deterritorialized objects and ideological place-holders). In this closing chapter, I hope to weave all of these dimensions towards an understanding of the requisite political discourse.

Of course, my presentation suffers from exaggeration, but in the least, as it regards the political complicity of gaming, whether gaming studies could ever become self-critical and deeply political in the sense of asking questions of its own conceiving technology, I attempted to raise questions that try to create critical potential by crossing ideological, material, and psycho-social realms for its idea of politics—that of human autonomy, self-determination, and ethics that arise from considering surplus-extraction as a definitive site in the course of this determination.

In the course of my study I learned the shape that the exploitative mechanism takes in the specific instance of gaming as ideological apparatus. A continually immediately-accessible site of

this surplus-extraction is where and when immersion and non-presence show up—at sites such as "grinding" in WoW while watching someone else play on YouTube while "binging" on Netflix TV shows, the person is hypnotized by the sensational combination of physical and psychical stimulation. In light of what is signaled by gaming, what is alarming is that capitalism seems to have resolved the problem of singularity and consumption. There is no longer the need for a territorializing subject as interpellation is guaranteed by affect and auto-stimulation.

The modulation seems to be still largely done "unconsciously;" even the capitalists are largely concerned with immediately-capitalizable surplus-extraction. When the capitalist interests become self-conscious about the nature of the avatar-subject technology which they have been underutilizing, the consumer classes in the metropoles will begin to directly participate in persona-(re)production, preparing people to sell ever new personas to themselves and their other counterparts. By then, they will all be so alienated from their labor, that they will not recognize what is happening. In the few instances that the consciousness arises, it gets swept up by the exploitative value; this is a way of saying that we are living in a transitional period between an old and a new governmentality. As I have discussed in earlier chapters, certainly Foucault and Stiegler have already said this, but they have also pointed to the already existing as the new limit. I think that their notion of the politically-feasible is limited. The problem seems to be with surplus-extraction, and not one that somehow evades clarity and easily slips into mythologizing.

In the remainder of this first section, I want to offer a summary of how the dissertation project brings together the disjointed theories relevant to the study—I was able to synthesize the theories by territorializing them to the same scope, addressing the same historically-constituted subject experience and ideology, that of an adolescent metropolitan self-proclaimed gamer

subject. I hope that my dissertation has proven that critical theory, psychoanalytic theory, and various other cultural theory traditions offer politically relevant theoretical innovations. But, these theoretical discourses are often incomplete, partial, and disjointed, which is why I have wanted to offer to synthesize them anew around an established ideological subject (the metropolitan adolescent), and follow out the implications into the political realm. I want to reinvigorate critical theory by disrupting the direction of its analysis.

In the Domain of Ideology, Imagination and Phantasy

This direct industrial use of interpellation is novel. For one, the apparatus differs from Althusser's conception primarily in being directly industrially conceived. In the case of Althusser's theory, since he did not have a theory of technology, interpellation serves to locate a subject-constitutive historical material regime of object relations in a political economy. I thought the theory of interpellation needed to be extended to be relevant to the everyday experience of and within consumer culture. My contribution was to add to the mix the fact of gadgets that can mediate and thus contain bits informing interpellation. This resulted in a sharpening of the political discourse surrounding the avatar-subject relation as real not only within the self-formative object relations discourse but also the consumer-creating psycho-technological ones.

When gaming is read as an instrumentalization of already existing psycho-social patterns of relations open to politically structuring manipulation, what we begin to see is how technology can enable the exploitation of such standards. Consumer technology, that is the means of televisuality (communicative and otherwise), serves the structural role of positioning the metropolitan publics to increasingly specialized forms of ideological reproduction. This subjugation serves to perpetuate consumption by commodifiable-object dependence.

In the chapter I address affective, audience, and cognitive labor (Chapter Four), I also suggested that we politicize the potential others that might fall under the banner of immaterial labor, that of investment, or valorization of relation or object. Audiences work to construct themselves as audiences, which works to both perpetuate consumption as well as guarantee to prolong engagement with commodity. Audiences actively participate in constructing themselves as audiences, because of their labors of valorization, which secure the consumptive practice—the fact that people are invested by having worked to represent themselves.

In the Domain of the Mechanical Psyche

Read in the context of object relations, because of its consideration of the particular experience of material-imaginary relations (and the role of subjectivity in consciousness and historical-subject-formation), the ideological reproduction that takes place does so on a substantive, qualitative, or material level. That is its allure for persons to participate in their own commodification. In this view smart phones, gaming consoles, computers, laptops, tablets, televisions, radios, all fit on a medium as technologies to *liberalize*[58] object relations; the more that the televisual technologies mediate and *gadgetize* social and self-relationalities, the more that that technology enables potentially commodifiable exploitation.

A critical insight into the functioning of consumer libidinal economy in gaming is its bodily, substantive psycho-social basis. The substitute satisfaction that gaming provides does so through bodily stimulation being habituated to align with a constructed ideology of sociality. In other words, the substitutive satisfaction satisfies *mechanically*; it can do it consciously and unconsciously (both affectively or interpellatively). After all ideology is the complex of imaginary relations to real relations.

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[58] Meant in the neoliberal sense, to deregulate, to disinvest public interest on the subject, to allow capitalism to commodify and marketize

In the Domain of Semiotic Reproduction

Immediately, as concerns the stability of archetypal reproductions, as technology interrupts the social reproduction within families under technological capitalism, what happens is that the younger generations, who are meant to be subjects to the transference and identification of the parents towards an idealized idea of adult future, are exposed to increasingly larger sets of images and icons that refract off of the familially established regiment of object relations, drawing its directive or pedagogical power from the fact of the structure of relationality and securing surplus extraction from thereabouts. The problem rests with the fact that these other-worldly experiences do not come disinterested or naively—the very means of its combined spectacle come drenched in various ideologies of efficiency, productivity, futurity, individualism, aesthetization, apolitics; as such this is a sighting of a real structure of ideological reproduction on the central (metropolitan) circle of the consumption-tasked classes of global capitalism.

In the Domain of Emotional Life

I chose to politicize object-relations as a discourse on socialization through an excavation of the kind of surplus that is being directed away from the immediate life of the person towards some profitability and reproduction. This is where the initial consideration of *youth as class* returns; when object relations are politicized, and addiction to gadgetized mediations is shown to be just the very visible tip of a seriously exploitative economic tool for perpetuating consumption with direct implications for a person's capacity to cultivate self-consciousness as it leads to self-determination, the situation of metropolitan adolescents (both young and adult) becomes one of a

particular ideological subjectivity, which carries many of the structural imprints of its economic necessity, and interestingly enough only remains inert as long as it is medically[59] treated.

Psycho-Politics

When the four domains are crossed, what becomes clear is the necessity of youth politics of social reproduction, because the commodification of ideology and its psycho-technical apparatuses only bring about economization without regards for the fate of the subjugated. A politics of socialization or social reproduction requires that we ask questions such as what is the point of subjugation, of the choices made in particular subject-formation. How is it that alien young generations are usurped and neutralized into becoming agents of reproduction themselves regardless of the historical material political economy? How is it that this keeps happening even in light of arguably most extensive commodification-geared liberalization of object relations? To put it another way, the task requires considering that the following might be true; that people have been deliberately subjected to the socializing by technology with the assumption that commodity fetishism is a productive, social good; that capitalist colonization of the semiotic and techno-libidinal is agreeable—in fact a productive good; that some might even have utopian aspirations—even though it actually turns out that those apologists often mean that they are trying to create perfect intelligent machines (see Cohen and Schmidt 2013), which in turn confirms all other ideological convictions (such as self-interestedness and the gain/loss algorithmization) necessary to perpetuate the misrecognition of psycho-technology, and enable unconscious social reproduction of the classes of metropolitan consumer society.

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[59] This term is meant to allude to major critique of critical theory over psychoanalytic conclusions—that the resolution to the subject's embodiment of modern capitalism's contradictions comes in the form of individual therapy, and not a transformation of social relations (see Adorno 1974: 60-65).

This is where I have tried to define a perspective of *psycho-politics* as a political consideration of object-relations reproduction or transmission with specific ideological and political-economically relevant consistencies—politics of social reproduction from the perspective of the person with all his potential for consciousness and autonomy. What I am talking about is processes such as gaming-interpellation that contribute to the upholding of particular ideological structuring—generationalization of political economic participation or reproduction, sedimentation of laboring types and characters—or streamlining of the libidinal economies into the larger political economies.

In the case of metropolitan youth, we can see that particular neurotic-alignment to economy happens in institutional space and time; that, habituation, that is traumatization and repetition, is how the reproduction comes about. This amounts to a particular institutionalization of a self-interpellating subject in the gadgetized mediation of the adolescent gamer's object relations. After all the only thing that the player wants, what he ultimately accepts subjugation and mediation for, is captured in the time-control of games—pause, fail, try again, know what is coming, exploit the seeming predictabilities of the game engine. In the age of digital technologies which should be liberating humanity beyond the confines of immediacy and strict conventional materiality, what we get instead is the replacement of the territory with a simulated one, in which perfect freedom is actually its complete opposite. In this way, these isolated, kinetic-stimulation-based ideological supplants satisfy and thus justify what essentially amounts to a displacement of consciousness. Gaming, via televisual valorization practices, creates and satisfies the lack of consciousness. It sublimates the desire for recognition, and desublimates it as an opportunity for attention capturing identification. Further, this interpellation remains highly political, because as interpellation, it makes up for something crucially missing in the lives of

people who habituated gaming as part of their everyday libidinal diets. As it turns out, the affective terms of consumer libidinal economy are the materialization of ideological value in the life of the producer/consumer.

What emerges is a picture of a carefully attuned socially-constructed subjectivity. In gaming, autonomy and self-determination, guided by healthy primary narcissism, come to be slowly but surely subsumed and replaced by subjection and subjugation. This is where the libidinal economy is tied to the political economy via lessons of ideological logic, which utilizes lessons traced from the development of personhood and various subjectivities, the formation of the subject and the development of self-awareness. Most critically, perhaps, are the sites where this redirection is set to occur—sites where the person's sense of self and the world is mediated, such as the body and idea, the affect and symbol.

In short, the liberalization of object relations leads to the re-appropriation of the means of socialization as political institutionalization to train consciousness via ideology (as both bodily technology and attention-gathering psycho-technology) to motivate the person into cultivating consumption-friendly presence in the world. How is it possible for the unanticipated overflow of surplus to still occur? How do we hold onto a theory of human liberation in light of this complex of subjugation? In light of this complex of ideological technology in mass-cultivations of economically necessary subjectivities, in the concluding section, I would like to explore what an addressing politics might look like.

On Youth Liberation and Generational Revolt

I have worked to describe the problem in the most consequential and extensive terms against either theory that self-idolizes (and thus loses sight of its politics), or social research that pretends it is not political (addiction studies, health studies, ethnographies in gaming studies) in

what seem to be paralleling self-interest. But, I think that the work of critical description and explanation of the structures and relations (ideological, object, and social) to be lacking in contemporary critical theory. The case of gaming studies is exemplary, with the added clarity about this being the case precisely because to treat the matter of addiction in gaming in terms of its effects on psychosocial development (and by extension the formation of consciousness and politics of self and desire) would be to demystify the consequences of this particular kind of object-relational or meta-psychological commodification. Anything as such would result in the substantiation of what "the war of youth" really means. This would hurt industry interests, so the dots remain unconnected. There is already too much unprocessed, fragmented understanding about our condition.

What happens to children in the process of socialization, especially its primary (childhood and adolescent) stages, is a perpetually proto-political site that has been waiting for critical recognition. After all it is a formative treatment that decides a person's future possibilities and directions. It would be one thing to dismiss the pains of primary socialization as the cost of social reproduction. But, when the process becomes so overlaid with the needs of the reigning political economy that the imaginary must be increasingly prefigured in the reproduction of the system, then the costs of that process no longer look so innocent, as just a tragedy of human reproduction. The kind of processes to which we subject youth in order to justify social reproduction have gone politically uncritiqued for too long.

My concern over commodification is specific and explanatory in a way that I believe does enable us to think constructively—to enable us to clear the fog towards a political direction. Commodification implies exploitation, and in the realm of psycho-politics, the unequal exchange of consciousness for ideology. It is not merely thingification or objectification. It is a concrete

historical occurrence, and therefore, a basic factor determining political empowerment. I think somewhere by implication we can begin to see a new direction for youth rights and substantive youth politics. It is a matter of how we conceptualize the relationship between society and youth —the newcomer, the radical by nature, the unhabituated, the still-yet, the unaccustomed, the unprepared, the unexpecting, the surprisable consciousness. I have tried to offer a thought experiment capable of politically positioning the question of how hospitable the society is towards its youth, or more critically put, how youth are treated in the very centers of the global capital—what of theirs is explained away in such a way as to justify unconsciousness, subjugation, and sacrifice.

I also have some serious thoughts about what the other side looks like, but I have also encountered serious disagreement with thinkers who have a view on the matter (on topics such as what do we do materially, do the older generations needs to sacrifice their class standing in order to propel the younger generations into better conditions for self-determination, as well as around the question of the place/fate of the existing community). I think the critical, psycho-political directive makes sense ultimately in terms of liberation of youth from the conditions of unconscious identification and self-objectification towards consciousness and self-determination *despite* what that might mean for the rest of the society. This aspect of my conclusions has been hard for many to stomach, especially because it suggests that the only ethical political action on the part of the adult world would be self-sacrifice. Not that that has stopped me from following through to imagining what real politics of consciousness in the democratic spirit would look like; in the end, following through such a stark position has allowed me to push the boundaries of existing theories of libidinal economies to realize that what is still lacking is a direct politics of

socialization—social reproduction, subject-formation, self-consciousness. I hope that my dissertation work can contribute to advancement in this realm.

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