INVESTIGATING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SOCIAL PHENOMENON OF *FACEBOOK* AND NARCISSISTIC SOCIO-CULTURAL TENDENCIES

By

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DECLARATION:

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Abstract

Narcissism is increasingly being regarded as one of the biggest socio-cultural problems of the contemporary era. Indeed, recent studies by Baldwin and Stroman (2007) and Buffardi and Campbell (2008), among others, have advanced that new media technologies – in particular social networking websites – have significantly exacerbated the rise and spread of narcissism in contemporary society. Based on this premise, namely that social media provide the perfect platform for the promotion of self-infatuation, this research project will provide a critical analysis of the potential influence of social media in the development of a widespread narcissistic socio-cultural condition. In this regard, claims that increasingly consumerist, individualist and media-saturated societies are nurturing a culture of extreme narcissism, vanity and entitlement, will be examined in relation to an increase in the use of consumer-orientated new media technologies. In particular, by examining the structural components of the popular social networking site, *Facebook*, this treatise will highlight the connection between the use of this form of new media and the engenderment of an acutely consumerist and narcissistic subjectivity – namely, commodity narcissism. That is, by examining the growth of narcissism from the 1940s through to the new millennium, the role of the media, and most recently new media technologies, in the promotion of commodity narcissism will be examined as factors of particular significance in the formation of contemporary subjectivity. In relation to this, the impact of commodity narcissism on the perpetuation and propagation of capitalist isolation, alienation and insecurity will be investigated with a view to exploring the potential impact of such narcissism on the efficacy of the democratic process. Finally, some remedial measures, which co-opt rather than negate such social media, will be proposed.

Keywords: Facebook, narcissism, security, isolation, alienation, consumerism, social media

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Chapter One

Introduction

According to various cultural theorists, the rise of narcissism as a socio-cultural condition was a direct consequence of the post-World War Two economic boom of the late 1940s and early 1950s, in which the surplus wealth of an increasingly secular, affluent and capitalist society created the ideal conditions for the growth of such self-absorption (Wolfe 1976, Lasch, 1980). However, this increasingly capitalistic orientation, together with the augmenting influence of the mass media, soon came under fire, with critics such as Adorno (1947), Horkheimer (1947) and Marcuse (1964), identifying these two developments as promoting individualistic and egotistical ideals that are antithetical to democracy. Nevertheless, capitalism and the mass media continued to grow unabated – only momentarily challenged by the emergence of a brief countercultural movement away from their imperatives in the late 1960s. This countercultural movement was, however, short lived. Indeed, after the student revolts of the late 1960s, the 1970s – commonly referred to as the 'Me Decade' – saw the intense re-emergence of "an era of narcissism, selfishness and personal rather than political awareness" (Schulman 2001:145). This focus on the self as a means to subdue growing economic insecurities, resulted in an increased emphasis on materialism and focus on self-promotion. The legacy of such individualism, in turn, has been the emergence of increasingly consumer-orientated and media-saturated cultures in the contemporary era. And these cultures have engendered the exponential proliferation of narcissistic tendencies around the world (Twenge 2006, Twenge and Campbell 2009).

Thus, analysed in relation to 'consumer culture,' 'celebrity culture' and 'new media,' narcissism has been referred to as "the fastest developing social disease of the peoples of the West," with instances of vanity, self-aggrandisement and self-promotion evident in all aspects of cultural interaction (McLuhan and Powers 1992:100). "Seen to be at the root of everything from the ill-fated romance with violent revolution, to the enthralled mass consumption of state-of-the-art products, and [infatuation with] the 'lifestyles of the rich and the famous'" (Tyler 2007:343), arguably, the most recent manifestation of this growth of narcissism has been society's use of, and reliance upon, new media technologies (Baldwin and Stroman, 2007; Orlet, 2007; Buffardi and Campbell, 2008). Social media, in particular, has been criticized for actively fostering the growth of narcissism, by encouraging an extreme

fixation on the self, an exaggerated sense of self-importance, hyperbolic egotism, and pronounced feelings of entitlement. Accordingly, as prominent media theorist Lev Manovich points out, "most new media activates a 'narcissistic condition,'" whereby the promotion of the self becomes a ubiquitous endeavour (2001:235).

In relation to this, this treatise aims to examine the role of the popular social networking site *Facebook* in the promotion of an acutely narcissistic subjectivity among those individuals which utilise this medium. By investigating the promotion of narcissism as a means to escape the isolation and anxiety commonly experienced in contemporary capitalist society, this study will explore the potential of *Facebook* to engender cultural and commodity narcissism. Furthermore, this study will advance that by encouraging a movement away from direct interpersonal interaction, towards more mediated forms of social connection, new media technologies – such as *Facebook* – not only promote an environment in which self-absorption takes precedence, but also encourage a withdrawal from the community and democratic citizenship. Arguably, this withdrawal stands to be particularly problematic for the contemporary era, insofar as it exacerbates experiences of loneliness and isolation, and militates against the direct social connectedness that is one of the primary requisites for the democratic process to be effective.

In the interest of exploring the above issues in more detail, in the following chapters, the role of new media in the engenderment of commodity narcissism and the subsequent promotion of capitalistic insecurity, will be investigated. To begin with, chapter two will examine issues of capitalist alienation with reference to the ideas of the Frankfurt School, with particular focus on Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer's 1947 work, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In doing so, the aim of this chapter is to discuss the 'culture industry' of late/advanced capitalism as something akin to a demagogue and, as such, to consider the role of the mass media in contemporary passivity, repression and exploitation. After this, the type of narcissism that is associated with the socio-economic conditions of late/advanced capitalism will be examined with a view to highlighting its relationship to the 1940s and 1950s conservative acceptance of the status quo.

Next, chapter three will examine the effects of late/advanced capitalism on the individual through the theoretical lens of Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* (1964). In this regard, the advancement of social repression, media control and the decline of revolutionary potential in the West will be investigated in relation to the rise of the 1960s counterculture and New Left political movements. Hereafter, the economic downturn of the late 1960s/early 1970s will be discussed with a view to elaborating on the movement away

from revolt and community, towards a greater focus on the self, which occurred around this time. In particular, Tom Wolfe's article 'The Me Decade,' (1976) and Christopher Lasch's book *The Culture of Narcissism* (1980) will form the basis of this discussion.

In turn, chapter four will elaborate on the growth of this focus on the self through the nineteen seventies, eighties and nineties, by examining the psychological, spiritual, political, economic, generational and cultural anatomies of narcissism, together with the characteristics of new millennium narcissism. In doing so, Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell's *The Narcissism Epidemic* (2009), Manual Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (2002) and Sherry Turkle's *Life on the Screen* (1995) will be discussed in relation to the role of the media – in particular new media technologies – in the hyperbolic growth of individualism and a promotion of the grandiose self, to the exclusion of almost everything else.

Following on from this, chapter five will provide an analysis of the popular, new media social networking site, *Facebook,* with a view to examining its potential to promote narcissism through a focus on contemporary ideals of identity and security, identity and the mass media, and identity and new media consumerist fantasy. In short, this analysis will elaborate on the various ways in which this website can be used, and will offer evidence of the potential of the site to engender commodity narcissism.

Finally, in the conclusion, the role of *Facebook* in the promotion of commodity narcissism in contemporary society, and the subsequent impact of this on the formation of identity and the experience of profound insecurity, will be discussed in relation to democracy. That is, the negative impact of these media on the efficacy of democracy will be elaborated upon, after which possible remedial measures that co-opt – rather than negate – such social media will be proffered.

In terms of methodology, this study is based on information obtained from both primary and secondary academic sources, and from the *Facebook* 'Home' and 'Profile' pages. As such, this treatise takes an interpretative approach using qualitative data. Creswell defines this approach in the following way: "Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem" (1998:1). Henning elaborates on this when he explains that qualitative studies usually aim for depth rather than "quantity of understanding" (2003:3). This study will therefore be an in-depth analysis of the investigated data; primarily, a discourse analysis of texts related to the topic will be undertaken. According to Fowler, "discourse is speech or writing seen from the point of view of the beliefs, values and categories which it embodies: these beliefs… constitute a way of looking at the world, an organisation or representation of

experience – ideology in the neutral, non-pejorative sense" (cited in Deacon et al 2008:152). Hence, this research attempts to analyse the role of the mass media in the emergence of narcissism in mainstream culture. In effect, Norman Fairclough's (1995:16-17) explanation of discourse analysis "as an attempt to show systematic links between texts, discourse practices, and socio-cultural practices," constitutes the methodological point of departure of this treatise (cited in Decon et al 2008:152).

In this regard, this research will investigate how the structural features of the social media phenomenon *Facebook* – which are indissociable from the broader economic and socio-cultural developments of late/advanced capitalism – have the potential to engender the development of an acutely narcissistic subjectivity among those individuals who utilize this medium, in a way that stands to problematize the efficacy of the democratic process.

Chapter Two

Adorno, the Culture Industry, and Negative Dialectics

2.1 The Frankfurt School and issues of alienation

An offshoot of Frankfurt University's Institute of Social Change, the Frankfurt School first appeared under the leadership of Carl Grünberg in 1923, and later, in 1930, became more widely recognised as a school of philosophical thought under the directorship of Max Horkheimer. As proponents of neo-Marxist interdisciplinary theory, Horkheimer, together with the other members of the Frankfurt School, aimed at establishing a theory of society based on Marxist and Hegelian philosophies, which at the same time incorporated, among other perspectives, those of sociology, psychoanalysis, and existential philosophy. That is, the Frankfurt School's standpoint, although a variant of Marxism, tended to move away from a sole emphasis on the role of the political economy in the shaping of societies interactions, and instead, highlighted the various socio-cultural factors that determine and influence interactions within contemporary capitalistic society (Strinati 2004:48). In this regard, because of the power of consumer culture within capitalist society, the members of the Frankfurt school became progressively more cynical about the possibility of a socialist, working-class revolution in the West. In short, they argued that modern capitalism has managed to prevail over the many contradictions and crises initially thematized by Marx, and that, "insofar as capitalist societies can provide higher levels of economic well-being for large sections of their populations, including their working classes, their eventual overthrow and [the] rise of socialism appear less likely to occur" (Strinati 2004:48). In relation to this, one of the main objectives of the Frankfurt School was to provide an explanation for why such a revolution had not yet occurred, and, indeed, why it was unlikely that it would occur in the near future.

One of these explanations can be seen in the School's critique of the rationalism of the Enlightenment. The Frankfurt School argued that the extension of human freedom promised by the Enlightenment had been misleading, in that the introduction of rational and scientific progress had, instead, resulted in the destruction of such freedoms. Indeed, the destruction of these freedoms, they claim, resulted in the negation of the possibility of a socialist revolution. This critique of the Enlightenment and the concomitant assertion that the working class had been largely pacified into accepting capitalism, is therefore linked to the

Frankfurt School's theory of development of modern capitalism and the culture industry, which is more commonly known as 'critical theory.' First referred to by Horkheimer in his article 'Traditional and Critical Theory' (1937), critical theory can be defined as "self-conscious social critique that is aimed at change and emancipation through enlightenment, and does not cling dogmatically to its own doctrinal assumptions" (Geuss 1981:58). This theory, which aimed to "seek 'human emancipation' in circumstances of domination and oppression" resulted in the emergence of significant critiques of the role of technology in modern society, the industrialization of modern culture, the near-hegemonic power of large corporations and monopolies, and the decline of individual critical capacity and political involvement (Bohman 2005:1).

During his directorship, Horkheimer recruited a number of prominent intellectuals, including the illustrious philosopher, sociologist and musicologist, Theodore. W. Adorno, into the ranks of the Frankfurt School. Recognised as one of the most influential intellectuals in Germany after World War Two, Adorno published extensively and made an immense impact on academic dialogue via his *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), *the Authoritarian Personality* (1950) and *Negative Dialects* (1966). In particular Adorno spent much of his career focused on examining the following set of questions,

> What is the relationship between power and rationality? Can there ever be a kind of thinking which does not live off the suffering of others, or which does not suppress or conceal the injustice which it lives off? Can we imagine a world in which one's joy does not depend on another's woe, or are we inescapably locked into a life in which every pleasure is bought at the cost of someone else's suffering…? (cited in Jarvis, 1998:2)

As such, the study of the social, cultural and economic implications of the rise of advanced capitalism, together with the alienation that they engender among subjects, forms a considerable part of Adorno's work. Such alienation refers to the estrangement suggested by Marx; that is, "the condition to which human beings are reduced in capitalism as a result of its constitutive economic institutions preventing the actualisation of the distinctly human potentialities" (Conway 1987:34).

In short, for Marx, the human essence refers to the actualisation of the potentialities unique to human beings; these include the potentiality for autonomous action, the potentiality for sociality and the potentiality for aesthetic enjoyment. On the one hand, Marx argued that the greater the actualisation of these potentialities the greater the chances for members of

society to become 'fully' human. However, on the other hand, he claimed that the prevention of the actualisation of these potentialities – as a result of capitalist social and economic conditions – would result in the dehumanisation of those members (Conway 1987:30-31). For Marx, private ownership of the means of production, production for profit, and wage-labour all established the conditions for human alienation and estrangement. In this regard, he suggests various ways in which the autonomy, sociality and aesthetic enjoyment of humans are vetoed by capitalism. In terms of autonomy, Marx suggests that because capitalism is a market economy, "reliance upon the market as a mechanism for determining what gets produced and how it gets produced causes the productive activity of members of capitalist societies to be governed by factors other than their own conscious decisions about what to produce and how to produce it" (Conway 1987:35-36). To this end, all the people of capitalist societies become slaves to the market, doing exactly what it tells them to do, which dissolves their autonomy and limits their freedom. The second way in which capitalism undermines human autonomy is related, according to Marx, to the nature of the work demanded by the economy. For Marx, the division of labour and the mechanization of industry laid the foundations for the "impoverishment of the character of work" insofar as it led to its orientation around "monotonous and soul-destroying activities" and the destruction of the autonomyso intrinsically connected to the human essence (Conway 1987: 36-37). In his book, *Capital: A critique of political economy* (1976), Marx wrote;

> Within the capitalist system of production all methods for raising the social productivity of labour are put into effect at the cost of the individual worker[;]…they distort the worker into a fragment of a man, [and] alienate him from the potentialities of the labour process. (Marx 1976:799 cited in Carver 1991:269)

With regard to the human potentiality for sociality, Marx affirms that humans are inherently social beings and that this social nature is indeed found in capitalism; however, he goes on to assert that the social bonds that unite individuals in capitalism are ones of "mutual self interest" (Conway 1987:38). That is, according to Marx, capitalistic individuals only regard each other as a means to achieve their private ends, and, as such, positive relationships of authentic union and support between people are replaced by resentment and hostility. Finally, Marx contends that the potential for aesthetic enjoyment is also negated by capitalism. He suggests that, "private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only ours [to enjoy] when we have it" (Marx 1844, cited in Cazeaux 2000:214), with

the consequence that our ability to be passionate about, and actively take part in, aesthetic pleasure, is prevented. Furthermore, the constant burden of, and preoccupation with, the need to make a living, undermines any form of aesthetic feelings or enjoyment (Conway 1987:39-40).

Adorno, along with others of the Frankfurt School, based his ideas of alienation on those of Marx, and similarly believed that the consumerist and materialist tendencies encouraged by capitalism were responsible for this alienation. However, Marx's above assertions were adjusted by Adorno when he related alienation to the idea of wholeness. That is, Marx maintained that the means to overcome the form of alienation induced by capitalism were to be found in the practices of communism. He argued that only communism allowed for the realisation of the human essence and, as such, the reconciliation of human beings with their nature. However, for Adorno, Marx's ideas on communism – since the emergence of late/advanced capitalism – no longer seemed adequate. As such, Adorno, together with other members of the Frankfurt school, argued that the type of alienation currently experienced by modern society is a result of man's concomitant domination of nature and diminution of reason.

2.2 The *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

These ideas on nature and reason are particularly prevalent in Adorno and Horkheimer's 1947 work, *Dialectic of Enlightenment.* In their attempt to explain the development of fascism in a nation believed to be the embodiment of the Enlightenment, Adorno and Horkheimer trace the vulnerability of the ideals of the Enlightenment to a flaw at the core of Western reason (Alford 1988:105). This flaw, they propose, can be found in the inability of Western reason to create a balance between idealism and materialism. In relation to this, Adorno advanced that reason can be divided into two separate areas. The first part of reason, he suggests, is made up of abstract ideals, values and ethics, which are seen to be an expression of our 'higher' selves, and, as such, separated from everyday life. The part of reason which is said to form part of our everyday life is referred to by Adorno as 'crass materialism.' Consequently, the 'dialectic of enlightenment' can be seen as the "division of reason into abstract idealism and crass materialism" (Alford 1988:105). According to the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the disregard of idealistic reason has resulted in the extraction of human existence from nature. Adorno uses Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey* to illustrate this argument. *The Odyssey* tells of the journey home to Ithaca of the Greek hero Odysseus, after the end of the ten year Trojan War. According to Adorno, although Odysseus manages to

outsmart nature and return home safely, he is only able to do this by denying certain aspects of his own nature. That is, "the subjective spirit which cancels the animation of nature can master a despiritualized nature only by imitating its rigidity and despiritualizing itself in turn" (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972:57). In this regard, Odysseus's experience with the Sirens serves as a good example: Odysseus is aware that he will be unable to resist the temptation of the Siren's call, and the subsequent "desire to abandon the self for the sake of fusion with the all" (Alford 1988:106). As such, he has himself tied to the mast of his ship to ensure that he does not respond to his own authentic nature. This, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, neatly illustrates that in order for man to dominate nature, like Odysseus, means that he

> can never have everything; he has always to wait, to be patient, to do without; he may not taste the lotus or eat the cattle of the sun god Hyperion, and when he steers between the rocks he must count on the loss of the men whom Scylla plucks from the boat. He just pulls through; struggle is his survival; and all the fame that he and the others win in the process serves merely to confirm that the title of hero is only gained at the price of the abasement and mortification of the instinct for complete, universal and undivided happiness. (1972:57)

Reason, in the form of crass materialism, Adorno contends, has resulted in the gradual movement of man towards the scientific domination of nature, at the expense of his own nature. As such, "he must subject himself to a terrible discipline, under which he is forced to reject those facets of human nature that are incompatible with the controls of a scientific experiment" (Alford 1988:106). According to Adorno and Horkheimer, this type of disciplinary movement occurs most saliently in the industrial system of late/advanced capitalism, as the "latest stage in the scientific conquest of nature" (cited in Alford 1988:107). Of course, this conquest of nature can also be seen in relation to Marx's idea of alienation, and the capitalist rejection of the human essence. However, in the Frankfurt School's critique of the Enlightenment and its destructive tendencies toward natural human freedoms, such alienation becomes more nuanced and its ideological parameters become extended far back in history; indeed, right back to one of the very founding texts of Western culture.

Related to this, man's rejection of idealistic reason, and his consequent domination of nature, has, according to Adorno, resulted in the attenuation of the concept of reason itself. In other words, the rejection of idealism has resulted in the adoption of the form of reason which promises calm and endurance in an increasingly antagonistic world, namely crass materialism or instrumental reason. Thus, "originating in human weakness, instrumental reason overcomes nature only by renouncing the Dionysian aspects of human nature as well as the

potential of reason itself" (Alford 1988:107). Subsequently, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, instrumental reason becomes increasingly powerful in virtue of its status as an instrument that can be used for determining the best or most efficient means to achieve a given end (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972:39-42). Thus, due to reason becoming an instrument, it can no longer be seen as an objective principle, but rather as a purely human attribute, utilized primarily by the cunning thinker to advance his personal agenda (Alford 1988:107). Horkheimer alludes to this transformation of reason when he states that,

> reason has become completely harnessed to the social process. Its operational value, its role in
> the domination of men and nature has been made the sole criterion…it is as if thinking itself
> has been reduced to the level of industrial processes, subjected to a close schedule – in short,
> made parcel of production. (Horkheimer 1947:15)

Yet, despite its promise to provide comfort and safety, instrumental reason does little to give the individual the sense of security that they so greatly desire. Instead, unlike objective reason, which deals with universal truths, instrumental reason is unable to speak to the human need for meaning and purpose, and, as such, perpetuates and propagates humans' increasingly painful feelings of insecurity. To this end, modern capitalist society's rejection of idealistic reason, together with the emergence of the consumer-orientated individual and their domination of nature via instrumental reason, has resulted in an increased state of deep uncertainty, isolation and alienation. In turn, this increasing isolation, according to Erich Fromm, forces the individual to seek meaning, inclusion and unity elsewhere, and thereby makes the individual highly susceptible to "mass movements that speak to his[/her] needs for security[,] via unity with a power greater than himself" (cited in Alford 1988:107). In relation to this, Fromm asserts that this need to unify and identify with a power outside of the self is the first mechanism of 'escape' from freedom. For Fromm, the more man gains freedom, in terms of his thoughts, responsibilities, conscience and feelings, the more he becomes an individual and, subsequently, the more he becomes isolated from the world around him. As such, freedom is not always the easiest thing to have and as suggested by Boeree, "when we can we tend to flee from it" (2006:2). According to Fromm, there are three ways in which we can escape freedom, namely, authoritarianism, destructiveness and automaton conformity. The first mechanism of escape, *authoritarianism*, refers to the "tendency to give up the independence of one's own individual self and to fuse one's self with somebody or something outside of one's self in order to acquire the strength that the individual self is lacking" (Fromm 1941:141). Fromm divides this mechanism into two parts, namely the striving for

either submission or domination, or in other words, masochistic and sadist strivings. The most common forms of *masochistic* strivings for submission and escape include feelings of inferiority, insignificance and powerlessness. Consequently, on the opposite side of the spectrum, (yet within the same arena), *sadistic* trends also tend to focus on three things. These include the need to make other people dependent, the exploitation of others, and the need to make or see others suffer (Fromm 1941: 144). These tendencies, of both the sadist and the masochist, illustrate, according to Fromm, the dependence that many individuals develop on a person or people outside of the self in an attempt to escape the unbearable loneliness of the world around them. To this end, the authoritarian mechanism suggests that we seek to evade freedom by becoming a part of an authoritarian system and joining ourselves with others in one of two ways. Either by submitting to the power of others – hence, becoming passive and compliant – or by becoming an authority figure who arranges structure for others. The second mechanism suggested by Fromm is related to the idea of *destructiveness*. Destructiveness, like authoritarianism is linked to the unbearable feelings of individual powerlessness and isolation. Fromm explains this mechanism by suggesting that one can escape the feeling of one's powerlessness, in relation with the world outside of oneself by destroying it (1941:179). Boeree insists that unlike authoritarians, who tend to strike out against themselves, "others respond to pain by striking out against the world," and he maintains that it is this form of escape from freedom that accounts for much of the "indiscriminate nastiness of life [–] brutality, vandalism, humiliation, crime, [and] terrorism" (2006:2).

The final mechanism described by Fromm is *automation conformity*. This, he suggests, is the most common escape mechanism of normal individuals in everyday modern life. In short, Fromm asserts that within this mechanism,

> the individual ceases to be himself; he adopts entirely the kind of personality offered to him
> by cultural patterns; and therefore becomes exactly as all others are and expect him to be. The
> discrepancy between "I" and the world disappears and with it the conscious fear of aloneness
> and powerlessness. (1941:185-186)

This rejection of the individual self, for the sake of cultural conformity with the masses, may indeed reduce the feelings of isolation and anxiety, but at the same time it results in the loss of the self. Understandably, within the post-WW1 German context, a time of "economic and social crisis[,] such an isolated, powerless individual [was] all too likely to respond to a

demagogue like Hitler, who pander[ed] to the most regressive narcissistic needs for fusion" (Alford 1988:107). This demagogue fits perfectly into the authoritarian mechanism of escape in which individuals seek guidance and unity from an authority figure outside of the self. Indeed, Fromm argues that "for great parts of the lower middle class in Germany and other European countries, the sado-masochistic character is typical" and that it was to this character type that the "Nazi ideology had its strongest appeal" (1941:141).

2.3 Hitler as a demagogue

After serving in the German army during World War One, Hitler's first entry into politics came soon after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles (Geary 2000:2). Impressed by the anti-Semitic, anti-capitalist, nationalist and anti-Marxist ideas of the German Workers Party (DAP), Hitler joined the party in September 1919 (Stackelberg 2007:9). Following this, after being discharged from the army in 1920, Hitler began to participate full-time in its activities; at this point it was renamed the National Socialist German Workers' Party. Strongly critical of Jews, the economic crisis facing the Weimar Republic, and the suffering of the German people, Hitler soon managed to gain increasing support from the German people, many of whom agreed with his claims that Jewish wealth together with the Treaty of Versailles were the cause of the victimisation and alienation experienced by the German people. After a failed coup in 1923, Hitler was imprisoned; however, following an early release, he (together with his party) continued to grow in popularity. Appealing to the sense of offended national pride, Hitler used the resentment caused by the numerous economic, territorial and colonial losses, imposed on Germany by the Treaty of Versailles, as an instrument to gain support for the Nazi party.

In short, according to Fred Weinstein, Hitler recognized and exploited the struggles faced by Germany, hammering away at the ideas of "weakness, passivity, humiliation, defencelessness, promising an immediate reversal, active mastery rather than passive submission" (1980:57). After World War One, many German people lived with a feeling of failure and weakness. Doomed to be victims of forces beyond their control, many Germans "were afraid they would not be able to achieve goals, aims, and ideals (e.g., to be competent and competitive, to be active, masculine, admirable)" all of which were very important to German identity and consciousness (Weinstein 1980:58). Hitler used these insecurities and feelings of impotence as a means to gain not only the attention of the Germans, but also their outright political support. Weinstein suggests that, although Hitler beguiled gullible and politically naïve people, "a gullible person after all, is one who interprets the world in terms

of his need for safety and security without adequate regard for what is realistically possible or plausible" (1980:59). As such, in relation to this, the Nazis realised that they were able to provide "all kinds of people with a sense of integration and purpose that was otherwise missing" (Weinstein 1980:59). They offered genuine and instant support, while simultaneously restoring dignity and inspiring confidence through a strong leadership. Furthermore, "against the feared experience of further loss, the Nazis provided a sense of protection, comradeship, and the right to belong" (Weinstein 1980:59). These feelings of belonging, camaraderie and safety, acted to excite a diverse range of German people; all of whom were captivated by Hitler's promise to re-unite, rebuild and reinvigorate Germany.

Due to its broad appeal, the Nazi movement became particularly varied in composition where the "very diversity of the *narcissistically* valued aspirations that appeared …guaranteed the heterogeneous composition of the movement" [My Italics] (Weinstein 1980:59-60). According to Weinstein, "the disruption of culturally valued standards and expectations, the threatened or actual inability to realise ambitions or employ valued skills gave rise to unusual and unwelcomed intensities of feelings and wishfulness" (1980:60). As a result, in relation to these feelings, people began to scan their environments looking for ways to satisfy their everyday needs, while at the same time bringing a sense of order and control to the world around them (1980:63-64). In effect, "they sought out ideological and organisational ties" which could provide them with a sense of what was important and valued, thereby strengthening "their ties to reality" (Weinstein 1980:64). The subsequent appointment of Hitler as the Chancellor of Germany in 1933 led to the creation of a Nazi led state under his dictatorship (Spielvogel 2008:840). The establishment of this new ideology, namely Nazism, offered a new national experience which promised to recover traditional ideals, while at the same time bringing forth a new sphere of experience. These ideas of a movement away from the humiliation of World War One are neatly reflected by John Steiner, in his book, *Power Politics and Social Change* (1977), where he sums them up in the following way:

> Tomorrow has now become today; the mood of the end of the world has changed to one of new beginning: the final goal becomes visible in our time… Deep down in our nation all the forces of the past longing have come alive, and the dream images in which the past indulged have been drawn into the light of day… The new Reich has been created. The Führer longed for and prophetically predicted, is now here. (cited in Weinstein 1980:67)

According to Weinstein, these feelings of excitement for the future illustrate that not only had the "bitterly disruptive crisis…been resolved, but the loss had been turned into gain" (1980:67). Hitler was fulfilling his promises, and Nazism was seen as the dawn of a new era – the German people were no longer uncertain and afraid of the future, nor did they feel a growing sense of alienation. Instead, they were confidant and energized by the power and promises of their new leader. For many, Hitler was seen as "German nature incarnate, the most wonderful personality of all time, a saviour, a man whose acts could not be judged by the living because they transcended their own time" (Weinstein 1980:68). Indeed, Hitler was seen as identical to (or greater than) Christ, Napoleon, Demosthenes, Caesar, Luther, Bismarck and Socrates. Yet, importantly, these grandiose ideas of the Nazis and the power of Hitler, were arguably a result of "affect-dominated responses to the environment…in confirmation of the narrowed gap between narcissistic aspirations and the capacity to realize them" (Weinstein 1980:68). In other words, Hitler's successful manipulation of the fears and anxieties of the German people, via his appeal to their desires of renewal, rejuvenation and belonging, relied heavily on a child-like trust in, and pursuit of, wholeness. This was not only uncritical of the possibilities of realising such an end, but also became all the more so as the limitations of such promises became apparent.

Hitler's strategy is a prime example of demagoguery, in that he used rhetoric and propaganda as a means to appeal to the nationalist and ethnic prejudices of the German people. According to Fromm, he was a malignant narcissist, who used the creation of an in-group/out-group system to appeal to the narcissistic tendencies of German society (1971:136). That is, by propagating the idea of an all-important, pure, dominant and superior in-group, Hitler was able to appeal to the German peoples' feelings of self-importance and entitlement, and thereby, encourage them to join and support this superior group. At the same time, the creation of an unhygienic, evil, inferior out-group – which encompassed the Jews, the physically and mentally disabled, and all opponents of the Nazi party – further endorsed the parameters of the in-group and made membership highly desirable. According to Patricia Roberts-Miller, "demagoguery is polarizing propaganda that motivates members of an in-group to hate and scapegoat some outgroup(s), largely by promising certainty, stability, and what Erich Fromm famously called 'an escape from freedom'" (2005:462). This promise of stability, certainty and unity was the biggest draw card for Hitler during Germany's period of socio-economic hardship; therefore, just as suggested earlier by Alford (1988:107), the existence of a period of meaninglessness and purposelessness created a platform for the rise

of a demagogue and the establishment of his absolute power and control in the interest of pandering to narcissism.

2.4 The Culture Industry

Arguably, the aforementioned adoration of Hitler by the German people can also be seen at the level of mass culture in the adoration of commodities and pop culture icons by the 'dehumanised' masses. That is, it is plausible to suggest that Adorno's ideas of the culture industry communicate a suspicion that it is, in many ways, a similar form of demagoguery; one which gains power and promotes totalitarianism and pseudo-individualism within late/advanced capitalist society. In relation to this, the Frankfurt School's critique of the Enlightenment, and the failure of scientific and rational progress to extend human freedom, has already been linked to Adorno's criticism of the culture industry which he developed in the 1930s and 1940s (Strinati 2004:48). That is, Adorno declared the advertisement and distribution of cultural commodities through the mass media as the reason for contemporary social passivity, and maintained that the 'easy' pleasures offered by popular culture make people submissive and content, and therefore, easily exploitable.

According to the Frankfurt School, the culture industry reproduces "the consolidation of commodity fetishism, the domination of exchange value and the ascendency of state monopoly capitalism" (Strinati 2004:54-55). Thus, it has been suggested that the culture industry is responsible for shaping the tastes and preferences of the masses, thereby moulding their consciousness by instilling in them the desire for various products and the tendency to consume them uncritically. In their book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), Adorno and Horkheimer argue that,

> the unprecedented increase in the forces of production in modern times had an effect opposite from that anticipated by Marx. Rather than being an explosive force conductive to revolution, the expansion of technology had culminated in barbarism, mass deception, and instinctual repression. (cited in Andrae 1979:35)

In particular, in the chapter entitled, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,' Adorno and Horkheimer claim that the cultural production and mass consumption of the culture industry have become an aspect of this deception and repression, and, as such, a feature of the dialectic of enlightenment. In this regard, the culture industry is neatly defined by them when they advance that,

in all its branches, products which are tailored for consumption by masses, and which to a great extent determine the nature of that consumption, are manufactured more or less according to plan…This is made possible by contemporary technical capabilities as well as by economic and administrative concentration. The culture industry intentionally integrates its consumers from above. To the detriment of both it forces together the spheres of high and low art, separated for thousands of years. The seriousness of high art is destroyed in the speculation about its efficacy; the seriousness of the lower perishes with the civilizational constraints imposed on the rebellious resistance inherent within it as long as social control was not yet total. Thus, although the culture industry undeniably speculates on the conscious and unconscious state of the millions towards which it is directed, the masses are not primary but secondary, they are an object of calculation, an appendage of the machinery. The customer is not king, as the culture industry would have us believe, not its subject but its object. (Adorno 1991:85)

The dynamics of the culture industry, Adorno maintains, are often explained in technological terms. That is, due to millions of people participating in culture it becomes inevitable that "identical needs in innumerable places need to be satisfied by identical goods" (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972:121). As such, because production points are limited in comparison to the distribution and consumption points, management of this culture is needed. Furthermore, it is claimed that, since the standards of production were in the first place based on what consumers demanded, it is no surprise that society as a whole has accepted mass culture with little or no resistance. However, as Adorno points out, this technological explanation of the culture industry neglects to mention the fact that "the basis on which technology acquires power over society is the power of those whose economic hold over society is greatest" (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972:121). That is, those who own and control the technology needed to run the culture industry, ultimately 'own' and 'control' society itself. Based on this revelation, Adorno suggests that the technological rationale of the culture industry can be seen as the "rationale of domination itself" (1972:121), insofar as it is "the coercive nature of society alienated from itself." Krysa and Lewin explain this when they assert that,

the account proposed by Adorno and Horkheimer suggests that consumers in late capitalism are deprived of free-choice, and that use-value has been brought under the control of producers due to the power of mass media and advertising in particular. This places the consumer in an awkward if not passive position, and characterises electronic media technologies as necessarily authoritarian. (2010:1)

To this end, Adorno, together with other members of the Frankfurt school, argue that the rise in the conformity and passivity of the individual in modern capitalistic society, through mass culture, makes the latter the "seedbed of political totalitarianism" (Andrae 1979:35). Defined by Robert Conquest in his book, *Reflections on a Ravaged Century* (2000), totalitarianism is a political system where the state recognises no limits to its authority and where it strives to regulate every aspect of public and private life wherever feasible (2000:74). Similarly, totalitarianism, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, is actively promoted by the culture industry; indeed, they assert that

> the progressive technical domination of nature, becomes mass deception and is turned into a means of fettering consciousness. It impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves. (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997:29)

This manipulation of consciousness, like the manipulation of consciousness under other forms of totalitarianism, is monotonous and conformist, and often results in a broad recognition of the power of the capitalist discourse. In relation to this, Adorno asserts that the "concepts of order" which the culture industry forces upon society, "are always those of the status quo" (1991:90). As such, he insists that the effects of the culture industry must not be overlooked because "the power of [its] ideology is such that conformity has replaced consciousness" (Adorno 1991:90). According to Strinati, such conformity "tolerates no deviation from, or opposition to, nor an alternative vision of, the existing social order (2004:57). Again, analogously, just as 'political' totalitarian systems strive for absolute control, so too does the 'economic' totalitarian system of the culture industry. In this regard, as the power of the culture industry begins to spread and as its ideology becomes internalised within human consciousness, the development of alternative ways of thinking and feeling become increasingly impossible. Adorno illustrates this point when he discusses the influence of cinema on human consciousness. He writes,

> real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies. The sound film, far surpassing the theatre of illusion, leaves no room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience, who is unable to respond within the structure of the film, yet deviates from its precise detail without losing from the thread of the story; hence the film forces its victims to equate it directly with reality. (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972:126)

Interestingly, a similar account of the socio-cultural effect of cinema is advanced by the American anthropologist, Hortense Powdermaker. Her examination of the film making industry in Hollywood led her to conclude that "the industry's social system and overriding profit motive 'mechanises' creativity, resulting in dehumanised formulaic films that lull audiences into aesthetic conformity" (Powdermaker 1950:318). She further argued that "totalitarianism within the industry's social structure radiates outwards from the silver screen to impose empty, distracting dreams on passive audiences" (cited in Askew & Wilk 2002:4). As such, Powdermaker's ideas on Hollywood as a representation of totalitarianism lend significant support to the claims of Adorno. That is, just as Adorno claims that the culture industry sees man as a creature to be manipulated and controlled, so too does Powdermaker when she emphasises the way in which the industry limits freedom and choice. Thus, although the basis of the culture industry is "economic rather than political," arguably, its philosophy is overwhelmingly similar to that of a totalitarian state (Powdermaker 1950:327). As a result, it may be advanced that the loss of the power of the masses, due to the increasing power of the culture industry, has resulted in the troubling hegemony of the capitalist system.

This idea of the totalitarian ideology of the culture industry is further brought to the fore in Adorno's examination of cultural production as a method of standardisation, "whereby the products acquire the form common to all commodities," while at the same time adopting an air of individuality (Strinati 2004:56). This endowing of mass produced commodities with a false impression of individuality, Adorno argued, "obscures the standardisation and manipulation of consciousness practiced by the culture industry" (Adorno 1991:86-87). That is, as the standardisation of cultural products increases, so too does the appearance of individualisation. This illusion of individuality is what Adorno called *pseudo-individuation*. In an article on popular music, Adorno discusses this idea at length and defines it as follows,

> by pseudo-individuation we mean endowing cultural mass production with the halo of free choice or open market on the basis of standardization itself. Standardization of song hits keeps the customers in line doing their thinking for them, as it were. Pseudo-individuation, for its part, keeps them in line by making them forget that what they listen to is wholly intended for them or pre-digested. (cited in Andrae 1979: 36)

As such, pseudo-individuation offers consumers the appearance of choice (Cook 1996:42). Thus, although they may look and sound different, these commodities are, structurally and purposefully speaking, identical. As such, the promise of uniqueness offered by the culture

industry can never be achieved. Consequently, Adorno argues that the culture industry "gratifies desires only to frustrate them at the same time" (cited in Bronner & Kellner 1989:204). That is, as Adorno insists in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,

> the culture industry perpetually cheats its customers of what it perpetually promises. The promissory note which, with its plots and staging, draws on pleasure is endlessly prolonged; the promise, which is actually all the spectacle consists of, is illusory; all it actually confirms is that the real point will never be reached, that the diner must be satisfied with the menu. (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972:139)

As discussed already, according to the Frankfurt School, every human being has a set of true or real needs, which include the need to be autonomous, social, and creative, related to the need to be free, to live and to think for oneself. They argue, however, that these true needs cannot be realized within modern capitalist society, because they are constantly being overshadowed by the false needs imposed by the economic system. Consequently, although theorists like Adorno suggest that these false needs – which are created by consumerism and as such work to suppress true needs – can be fulfilled, they qualify this by declaring such fulfilment to be only temporary, and at the *expense* of true needs which remain unfulfilled. As such, because people think that they can purchase what they want, they do not realise that their true needs – or what Marx called their human essence – remain unsatisfied. Strinati explains this idea when he discusses freedom within capitalistic societies. He asserts that people within capitalist society who think they are free, are not actively free in terms of being an autonomous, independent and consciously thinking human being. Rather, he argues, "their freedom is restricted to the freedom to choose between different consumer goods and different brands of the same goods" (2004:54).

This pseudo-individualism and the corresponding suppression of true needs, together with the promotion of forms of manipulation and control similar to those employed by totalitarian states, makes it plausible to suggest that the culture industry can indeed be seen as something akin to a demagogue. In short, by (creating and) appealing to the false needs of capitalist society, the culture industry is able to exert a considerable amount of influence and control over the individuals within its reach. As such, while providing society with the commodities needed to temporarily sedate their burgeoning feelings of isolation and alienation, the culture industry is able to ensure the stability of the capitalist system. Thus, by temporarily satisfying the alienation identified by Marx, Adorno suggests that capitalism is

able to use the mass consumption of cultural products as a means to ensure both the passivity of the masses and the production of profit. With this in mind, it is important to examine the extent to which the narcissistic needs of individuals for fusion play a role in society's acceptance of the culture industry.

According to Adorno, "narcissism is the reason for the mass acceptance of the status quo" (Bernstein 1994:141). He suggests that, "narcissism is a weakness of the ego, a diminution of its conscious cognitive side which replaces internalisation as the cause of compliance" (Bernstein 1994:141). In this regard it has been suggested that the sociological roots of narcissism can be traced to the development of capitalism (Cook 2004:44). Adorno concurs with this assertion when he argues that "narcissistic afflictions of the ego are characteristic of the period [of advanced capitalism] due to socio-economic conditions and the decline of the individual" (cited in Bernstein 1994:141). This idea of the 'decline of the individual' – what Adorno referred to as pseudo-individuation and standardisation – together with the socio-economic structures of capitalism, are therefore seen to be the root cause of narcissism and, at the same time, mass compliance. As such, Adorno maintains that narcissism is the reason for the totally administered world (cited in Cook 1996:16). This ego weakness, Adorno argues, has become so pervasive that [it] impedes direct relationships between people (Cook 1996:26-27) and thereby undermines any organization of resistance to the capitalist status quo. In this regard, Cook assert that,

> along with the negative effects of the transformation of individuals into agents and bearers of exchange, the asocial and anomic traits characteristic of narcissism have also made interpersonal relationships – intimate relationships, friendships and relations with members of the community – much more difficult to initiate and maintain. (Cook 1996:27)

Based on this reduced ability to commence and preserve social and interpersonal relationships, Adorno suggests that "the individual is compelled to direct his unused instinctual energy against himself," and, as such, further exacerbates the narcissistic condition (Cook 2004:44). Furthermore, this increasing focus on the self may result in an increased sense of isolation and alienation and, as such, forces the individual to seek solace in the unity and belonging promised by the culture industry.

In relation to this, as mentioned earlier, Alford asserts that in times of economic and social crisis, society is compelled to support whoever appeals directly to their narcissistic need for unity and fusion (1988:107). On the one hand, as in the context of Germany, a

demagogue can offer an escape from these feelings of alienation through the promise of unity and certainty that is not capitalist in orientation. On the other hand, however, within the context of capitalist society, by appealing to feelings of self-importance, individualism and vanity, the culture industry is able to offer people temporary fulfilment. As such, these people rely on the products of the culture industry to satisfy their need for fusion.

Yet, within capitalistic society, the existence of both social and economic stability can never be continuously guaranteed. This insecurity, together with the inability of consumer products to satisfy true needs, can lead to the development of feelings of deep isolation and powerlessness which, in turn, fuel further consumption and commodity reification.

Within capitalist society, it may be said, that people who abide by or follow the individualistic, materialistic and consumerist ideologies of the politico-economic system, form part of the capitalistic 'in-group.' That is, to have the latest music, the newest range of fashion and the biggest television, is to prove your membership of this group. To this end, it is therefore the aim of the culture industry to marginalise and denigrate the non-conformist 'out-group,' while at the same time appealing to the narcissistic need of individuals to form part of the 'in-group.' According to Deborah Cook, "negative emotions towards out-groups provide a narcissistic gain for followers of the in-group because followers believe that simply through belonging to the in-group they are better, higher and purer than those excluded" (2004:44). As such, it becomes overwhelmingly clear that the culture industry is indeed something akin to a demagogue, appealing to the narcissist needs of society – namely, the need to be part of the socially acceptable 'in-group' – and promising fusion and wholeness in this regard.

2.5 Negative Dialectics

In relation to this, Adorno offers a possible solution to the narcissistic human reliance on the culture industry as a means of addressing feelings of isolation and alienation. In his book *Negative Dialectics* (1973), Adorno examines the way in which society can return to a state of freedom, knowledge and autonomy; all of which have been lost due to the failure of the Enlightenment. In this regard, he suggests that a reconciliation with nature – through the practice of a system of 'negative dialectics' – is the only way in which people can become emancipated from the alienation and isolation of the capitalist order. That is, Adorno argues that, "to the isolated, isolation seems an indubitable certainty; they are bewitched on pain of losing their existence, not to perceive how mediated their isolation is" (1990: 312). In other

words, society is unaware that the isolation that they are experiencing is a result of man's attempt to wholly dominate nature through instrumental reason. According to Fagan, this "attempt to fully dominate nature culminates in the institution of a social and political order over which we have lost control" (2005:3). In turn, in order to survive in this political order, (namely capitalism,) the adoption and utilization of instrumental reason becomes increasingly imperative and inevitable, respectively, and is accompanied by a proportional increase in feelings of isolation, alienation and insecurity within late/advanced capitalist societies. Based on this idea, Adorno suggests that in order to overcome these increasing feelings of isolation (and the narcissistic tendencies that come with them,) people should practice a form of negative dialectics in an attempt to reconnect or reconcile with nature.

For Adorno, unlike positive dialectics, which he asserts cannot bring about unequivocal fulfilment, because they simply result in the "reproduction of [a] socioeconomic system that requires critical transformation" (Nuckolls 1996:xxxvii), negative dialectics is "structurally the experience of contradiction, the recognition of guilt, the need for reparation, and the reflective activity of reparation" (Huhn 2004:37). As such, by applying a method of positive dialectics, Adorno suggests that in accepting the totality of the ideas imposed by the capitalist system and the culture industry, individuals lose their ability to think critically and, through this, become isolated and alienated from those around them, from nature, and, most importantly, from the inner nature of the self. In order to prevent this isolation, Adorno suggests that adopting a form of negative dialectics – forever questioning and never assuming, looking constantly for inconsistencies and searching for an affinity with human nature – should be adopted. Susan Buck-Morss explains negative dialectics in terms of the structure of domination. She asserts that the

> structure [of domination], which in turn converged with the structure of commodities, emerged whenever one side of a polarity gained the upper hand, thereby duplicating the social structure and enabling the structure to continue: If in thinking about reality the (reified) object was allowed to dominate the subject, the result was the reification of consciousness and the passive acceptance of the status quo; if the subject dominated the object, the result was domination of nature and the ideological justification of the status quo. (1977:186)

Therefore she explains that, "only by keeping the argument circling in perpetual motion could thought escape compromising with its revolutionary goal" (Buck-Morss 1977:187). As such, Adorno suggests that society should resist the domination of nature by constantly questioning

the positive dialectics of capitalism, consumerism and the culture industry. To this end, it can be suggested that instead of the domination *of* nature, an identification *with* nature will allow for the dispersal of an individual's needs to dominate and manipulate, since, through the latter process of identification, self-interest becomes indistinguishable from the interests of nature. This 'reconciliation' with nature, Adorno maintains, will both result in the breaking of the illusions of totality and perfection promised by the positive dialectics of the culture industry, and will allow for a movement away from the concomitant narcissistic condition of the isolated self – a self which is measured by the prospect of attaining such wholeness and totality – towards true knowledge, freedom, autonomy and, indeed, happiness. Based on the idea of "negative dialectics as thought's awareness of its own inadequacy, deflecting the temptation to mastery in opposition as well as domination" (Vishmidt 2009:5), the movement towards empathy or kinship with nature, Adorno asserts, will allow the late/advanced capitalist world to question their need to dominate and control both inner and outer nature, and will thus allow them to think critically about the world around them. Indeed, this form of negative dialectics, Adorno suggests, is the simplest means of escaping the alienation of capitalism and, as such, domination by narcissism.

In his book, *The Philosophy of Revolt* (1975), Eduard Batalov observes Adorno's notion of negative dialectics and examines man's need for unity and wholeness. He highlights societies use of 'positive dialectics' when he states that

> man always feels the need for an ideal reproduction in his mind of the world around him as an integral whole, within whose framework he might find his own place, lend his activity and existence meaning and purpose and glean confidence in the expediency and effectiveness of his activity. Moreover the more alienated and divided the world appears to him, the stronger is his spontaneous urge to reproduce that integrated whole. After deliberately rejecting the approach to the world as an integral whole and finding himself left with nothing but a collection of 'factors' while at the same time feeling an inner compulsion to create an integrated concept of the world, the individual constructs his own arbitrary picture of the world which can easily lead him astray into a world of grotesque fantasy or utopian illusions. (Batalov 1975:84 - 91)

In relation to this psychological dynamic, Adorno asserts that the idea that human existence is reduced to a world of 'fantasy' and 'illusion,' is encouraged and promoted by the positive dialectics of capitalism and the culture industry. Indeed, the capitalist conception that individuals can 'do anything they want to do,' be 'anything they want to be' and 'have

anything they want to have' (through consumerism), has led to an increase in a false sense of individuality, power and freedom, and as Batalov suggests, has resulted in an attempt to move away from the alienation of reality towards a realm of capitalistic 'fantasy.' The problem with this, however, is that although capitalism is seen by many (through positive dialectics) as an escape from the isolation and alienation that they feel, many people are unaware that the culture industry's and capital's domination and manipulation of society is a major contributing factor to the growth of such feelings of alienation (Kellner 2002:96). Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, Adorno, among others, have blamed the positive dialectics of capitalism and the culture industry for the emergence of excessive narcissism in contemporary society. In this regard, the individual's focus on the self as a means to gain fusion with the whole (through and encouraged by positive dialectics, consumerism and materialism) has resulted in the promotion of narcissism and, as such, a further perpetuation and propagation of narcissistic and capitalistic domination of nature – thus resulting in further alienation.

Following on from these ideas concerning the culture industry, capitalism, alienation and narcissism, the next chapter will provide an analysis of the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and will examine the subsequent emergence of what Christopher Lasch refers to as 'a culture of narcissism.'

Chapter Three

One dimensional man, the 1960s counterculture and the rise of a culture of narcissism

3.1 Marcuse and one dimensional thought

Although the ideas of Adorno and the Frankfurt School provide an interesting account of the politico-economic and socio-cultural structures of post-war capitalistic society, Adorno's philosophy, in particular his negative dialectics, has often been criticized for being 'perplexing.' Frequently seen as "notoriously difficult to understand"(O'Neill 2003:1), Alex Thomson asserts that "the philosophical and critical works of Theodor Adorno…are some of the most challenging produced in the twentieth century" (2006:1). Indeed, it has been suggested that Adorno "refused to simplify his ideas into the conversational form of everyday language" (O'Neill 2003:1) and required of his reader "not mere contemplation but praxis" (Jay 1984:11). As a result, the accessibility of Adorno's work to the general population has come under question. Thomson addresses these limitations when he discusses the two major challenges of Adorno's work. Firstly, he suggests that Adorno's writing "present[s] formidable difficulties of understanding and interpretation to the reader"; secondly, he suggests that "they seek to force us to rethink many things we take for granted, and to make us question the very possibility of philosophy, of art, and of moral life in the contemporary world" (Thomson 2006:1).

Admittedly Adorno's ideas' on the exploitation and manipulation of people within advanced/late capitalist society, as well as the need for dialectical criticism of the culture industry, did gain considerable influence in the years following World War Two. However, by the beginning of the 1960s, due to Adorno's growing intricacy and inaccessibility to the general public, people began to turn their attention to another member of the Frankfurt School, namely Herbert Marcuse. Echoing many of the ideas of Adorno in a more simplistic form, Marcuse offered an examination of the effects of advanced industrial society on the individual, and of the control and oppressive power of the capitalist system. Following Adorno's lead, Douglas Kellner suggests that,

> by the 1950s, Marcuse...perceived that the unparalleled affluence of the consumer society and
> the apparatus of planning and management in advanced capitalism had produced new forms of

social administration and a 'society without opposition' that threatened individuality and that closed off possibilities of radical social change. (1991:xxv)

In relation to this, in his book *One Dimensional Man* (1964), Marcuse builds on the ideas of the Frankfurt School concerning the role of technology, the capitalist state, administration and bureaucracy, consumerism, the mass media and new modes of social control, and offers a critique of contemporary capitalism – highlighting the advancement of social repression and the decline of revolutionary potential in the West. Focusing on the argument that "advanced industrial society create[s]…false needs, which integrate…individuals into the existing system of production and consumption via mass media, advertising, industrial management, and contemporary modes of thought" (Kellner 1991:xi), Marcuse maintained that because the "advanced industrial society has become 'one-dimensional,' that is, uncritical of itself, these false needs appear to be true needs, a conflation which has devastating ramifications for the development of the individuals within such a society" (Smith 2009:31). As such, he asserts that the absence of critical thought results in the development of a 'one dimensional society' and, in addition, a 'one-dimensional individual' whose "autonomy has been minimized and…whose freedom for open ended development has become artificially constrained and ultimately stagnated" (Smith 2009:31). Marcuse believed that under advanced forms of capitalism, "commodities, consumerism, and marketing behave as a psychological economy, which produces and administers the needs demanded by the system – even the instinctive needs" (Skinner 2005). As such, Skinner explains that "individuals are subjected to the production and marketing of objects, fashions and lifestyles – all of which create in the general population a form of mass ideology" (2005). Consequently, society learns to view life through the lenses of material possessions, and, as Marcuse holds, "the people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split level home, [and] kitchen equipment" (Marcuse 1991:11). Indeed, Marcuse argues that within advanced industrial societies, individuals often allow themselves to be shaped by the 'things' in their society, rather than consciously acting to 'shape' themselves. As such, he asserts that "if the individuals find themselves in the things which shape their life, they do so, not by giving, but by accepting the law of things – not the law of physics but the law of their society" (1991:13). In relation to this, Marcuse explains the difference between true and false needs when he states that,

false are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery and injustice. Their satisfaction might be more gratifying to the individual, but this happiness is not a condition which has to be maintained and protected if it serves to arrest the development of the ability (his own and others) to recognize the disease of the whole and grasp the chances of curing the disease. The result then is euphoria in unhappiness. (1991:7)

As such, Marcuse asserts that "most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false needs" (1991:7). Therefore, Marcuse argues that "no matter how much such needs may have become the individual's own; no matter how much he identifies himself with them, they continue to be what they were from the beginning – products of a society whose dominant interest demands repression" (1991:7). Consequently, Smith notes that "if our needs, our desires, our very instincts are superimposed upon us, and this superimposition is actively perpetrated by a structured society bent on perpetuating itself, the individual loses his freedom of autonomous self-development" (2009:33). This loss of freedom, or what Adorno referred to as 'pseudo-individuation' can be illustrated by Marcuse's idea that,

each person's genuine needs and interests, or "true class consciousness," are homogenized when the proletariat enjoy the same television program and visit the same resort places as the bosses. The proletariat forget that society is built on unequal social relations, that mass exploitation is a prerequisite for the existence of the truly affluent few. The needs and satisfactions that serve the preservation of the Establishment are acquiesced to by all members of society, thus becoming their false class consciousness, which blind the masses to the possibilities of a better life. (cited in Skinner 2005)

This false consciousness, Marcuse suggests, results in the emergence of a pattern of one-dimensional thought and behaviour and reduces individuals to 'willing subjects'; subjects of the technological and cultural proliferation that has granted them immeasurable (inconsequential) pleasures in the satisfaction of needs created by the culture industry and technology itself (cited in Smith 2009:39). Indeed, it can be suggested that the establishment of such a totalising, insular system, focused on the satisfaction of personal needs and desires, resulted in a "one-dimensional universe of thought and behaviour in which the very aptitude and ability for critical thinking and oppositional behaviour was withering away" (Kellner 1998). Such critical and oppositional thinking and behaviour is referred to by Marcuse as

'negative thinking.' Similar to Adorno's idea of 'negative dialectics,' negative thinking refers to the ability to envision entirely different ways of living and entirely alternative modes of discourse; that is, as Kellner notes, "negative thinking negates existing forms of thought and reality from the perspective of higher possibilities" (1991:xv). As such, Marcuse maintains that due to 'one-dimensional man's' preoccupation with the fulfilment of the false needs created and provided for by the technology of advanced capitalistic societies, his ability to participate in the critical act of 'negative thinking' is eradicated. In relation to this, Smith suggests that

> the eradication of negative thinking is a paradigmatic symptom of one-dimensional thought. Without the ability to envision alternative discourses, perhaps even without the will to do so, the advanced industrial society effectively negates the possibility of negation, killing the potential to refute the current status quo and strive towards a potential alternative discourse. (2009:39)

Based on this idea, Marcuse insists that without the practice of negative thinking, the possibility of revolutionary action or a 'Great Refusal' of oppression and domination, becomes increasingly diminished.

3.2 One dimensional society

Because of his ideas concerning the need to oppose and revolt against the prevailing system and discourses of the time, the 1960s saw the ascension of Marcuse to the unlikely role of Guru of the 'New Left,' a political movement of educators, activists and campaigners. In short, the New Left distinguished themselves from orthodox Marxists or the communist 'Old Left,' which had taken a vanguard approach to social justice by focusing mostly on social class issues and labour unionization (Kaufman 2003:272-273). Kellner maintains that, "for Marcuse, the New Left at its best united spontaneity with organization, combining strong anti-authoritarian and libratory tendencies with the development of new forms of political struggle and organisation" (2005:2). Anti-war, ecological, feminist, communal and countercultural movements became synonymous with the 'fight' for "more humane values, institutions and ways of life," and Marcuse, who was seen to embody the "defining impulses of the New Left" became the political and theoretical guide for many emerging political activists (Kellner 2005:2). Indeed, unlike Adorno's antifascism, which "expressed itself in a more formal theoretical register," Marcuse's critical theory emerged as a highly accessible

exploration of the one-dimensional society of the United States, which encouraged "students to attempt to further develop the emancipatory promise of the German philosophical tradition" (Davis 2005:ix). As such, Kellner suggests that,

> disgusted by the excessive affluence of the advanced industrial societies and the violence of neo-imperialist intervention against developing societies in what was then called the "Third World," the generation that would produce a New Left found theoretical and political inspiration and support in Marcuse's writings. (2005:2)

As mentioned above, Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* addressed the decline of revolutionary potential among the working class of late/advanced capitalist societies, and accused this politico-economic system of reducing individuals to mere parts of capitalistic production and consumption, through the creation of consumer and conformist needs. In it, Marcuse argued that "domination in institutions of labor, schooling, the family, the state, social relations, culture, and contemporary modes of thought all reproduced the existing system and attempted to eliminate negativity, critique and opposition" (cited in Kellner 2005:4). Indeed, Marcuse claims that,

> not only had capitalism integrated the working class, the source of potential revolutionary opposition, but also the current capitalist system had developed new techniques of stabilization through state and corporate policies and the development of new forms of social control. (cited in Kellner 2005:5)

These new types of social control are discussed at length by Marxist philosopher Louis Pierre Althusser. In his highly influential essay, 'Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation),' Althusser identifies a variety of 'Ideological State Apparatuses' (ISAs) that function to propagate a preferred ideology within capitalist society. Indeed, Althusser asserts ideology operates to interpellate people into definite subject positions; that is, through ISAs, society is encouraged to willingly comply with the ideals of the ruling class or dominant elite. He therefore suggests that ISAs are controlled and manipulated by the dominant elite, (whose subjectivity is also informed by them), in order for them to exert their power over society. In particular, Althusser mentions eight types of ISAs, namely the religious, educational, family, legal, political, trade union, communication and cultural ISAs (Althusser 1994: 110). These ISAs can be clearly linked to the abovementioned examples, identified by Marcuse, of the domination and control exerted in advanced industrial society.

Based on the idea of such capitalist control, Marcuse, at the beginning of the 1960s, believed that advanced capitalism was so totalitarian and "pleasantly repressive" in nature, that the possibility for internal social revolution was no longer present, and he suggested that only "absolute refusal" will allow for a "truly revolutionary mode of opposition" (cited in Kellner 2005:8). However, by 1964, Marcuse expressed his hope that a slight possibility for social change may indeed exist, when he stated that,

> underneath the conservative popular base is the substratum of the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colours, the unemployed and the unemployable. They exist outside the democratic process; their life is the most immediate and the most real need for ending intolerable conditions and institutions. Thus their opposition is revolutionary even if their consciousness is not. Their opposition hits the system from without and is therefore not deflected by the system; it is an elementary force which violates the rules of the game and, in doing so, reveals it as a rigged game. When they get together and go out into the streets, without arms, without protection, in order to ask for the most primitive civil rights, they know they face dogs, stones and bombs, jail, concentration camps and even death. Their force is behind every political demonstration for the victims of law and order. The fact that they start refusing to play the game may be the fact which marks the beginning of the end of a period. (Marcuse 1991:260)

3.3 Counterculture, anti-establishment perspectives and the New Left

The above ideas, it has been suggested, played a significant role in the establishment of a new form of political awareness, and the emergence of the counterculture of the late 1960s. Developing in reaction to the conformity and conservatism of the 1950s, the 1960s counterculture emerged as a result of growing political, cultural and social dissent. As tensions relating to issues surrounding the Vietnam war, women's rights, racial inequalities, sexual freedom, government control and authority, psychedelic drugs, and the growing influence of consumerism began to grow, a variety of groups opposed to the existing values and establishments of American society were formed (Olson 1999:24). These groups began to move away from the materialism and mainstream liberalism, popularised by the conditions of the post-war triumphalism, towards a cultural form of 'anti-establishment' and cultural freedom. Anti-establishment – an idea synonymous with the 1960s – was used to describe antiwar activists who campaigned against the war in Vietnam, the countercultural group known as 'hippies' who opposed the social and religious views of the time, and left wing political groups – such as the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) – who resisted the "prevailing corporate, capitalist system in the United States" (Olson 1999:24).

Unlike a subculture, which according to Yinger "generates those characteristics that are considered normative primarily through an internally directed process of socialization and interaction," a counterculture "represents a full-fledged oppositional movement with a distinctively separate set of norms and values that are produced dialectically out of sharply delineated conflict with the dominant society" (cited in Braunstein and Doyle 2002:7). As such, a counterculture aims to change the values and traditions of the prevailing culture, in the hope that it will soon become the dominant culture (Braunstein and Doyle 2002:7). Subsequently, along with the newly created anti-establishment movements, the counterculture further attempted to endorse a number of cultural freedoms. According to social anthropologist, Jentri Anders, these freedoms included the "freedom to explore one's potential, freedom to create one's Self, freedom of personal expression, freedom from scheduling, [and the] freedom from rigidly defined roles and hierarchical statuses," among others (Anders 1990:289).

Historically, the 1960s counterculture of the United States can be divided into two main phases. The first phase was dominated by the rise of a new political left, led by the SDS (Braunstien and Doyle 2002:11). Embracing a wide range of issues "including civil rights, welfare reform, opposition to the war in Vietnam, and students' rights," the SDS, gaining inspiration from Marcuse among other intellectuals, attempted to bring to attention the inequality and exploitation encouraged by the advanced capitalist system (Klatch 1999:16). They strongly criticized the lack of individual freedom in advanced industrial society and rejected the power of administration in government, corporations and universities. The mission statement of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) expressed their disquiet: "We are the people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit" (Miller 1994:329). This discomfort, Skinner asserts, "stemmed from the belief that modern economic and technological achievements were betraying their initial utopian promises," and that "goals of social and economic equality and individual fulfilment were being replaced with those of material consumption and individual accumulation" (2005).

In another rejection of the capitalist system of the time, a similar yet less political youth based cultural movement also emerged. Commonly referred to as the 'hippies,' this movement opposed the social and economic structures of conservative capitalist America, and promoted instead a movement away from war, materialism and conformity, towards peace, love and unity. Initially based on a rejection of the domination of the elite, the hippie movement soon became synonymous with psychedelic rock music, the sexual revolution and

the use of drugs, such as marijuana and LSD. Braunstein and Doyle suggest that their utopian ideals of free love and peace, together with their non-materialistic and communal orientation, owed a great deal to "the full-employment prosperity of the era and the optimistic economic prognostications it engendered" (2002:11). Indeed, the existence of a prolonged post-war boom, accompanied by the belief that the United States was entering a phase of "automation, industrial development, agricultural productivity and economic growth," incited the prospect of an "imminent postscarcity society" where the need to work would be drastically reduced and possibly even eradicated altogether (Braunstein and Doyle 2002:11). For Braunstein and Doyle, this "end of work would herald the onset of a vast leisure society in which human pursuits, liberated from the drudgery of alienating, soul-slaying labor, might be redirected to self-actualization involving the cultivation of each individuals creative talents," along with comparable community development and reciprocity (2002:11). This coming leisure society, many believed, would result in the corroding of the limitations of capitalism and materialism, and would ultimately transcend this confining economic system. According the Gann and Duignan (1995:22) this youth culture of the 1960s – which strongly echoed the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution of communist China – made a profound impression on the United States, Western Europe, and Japan, and its impact on the promotion of civil rights and peace were immense.

3.4 Stagflation, OPEC, and a move towards a focus on the self

Despite these achievements, however, this period of unity and uprising was short lived, as the utopian phase of the counterculture, together with its "race based assumptions of material plenitudes," began to decline in late 1969 and early 1970 (Braunstein and Doyle 2002:12). After two decades of opulence and the longest period of economic expansion, the United States was thrown into a state of economic downturn, where "the unprecedented combination of lagging economic growth and inflation gave birth to the term *stagflation*" *(*Encyclopaedia of the Nations 2010). This economic downturn, together with rising foreign manufacturing competition as well as Nixon's election into office "on a 'law and order' anti-counterculture platform[,] dealt the Sixties utopians a…dose of harsh reality" (Braunstein and Doyle 2002:12). Indeed, "most [political] student revolutionaries were reabsorbed by the 'system' that they had professed to hate," and the ideals of unity, anti-materialism and revolt soon became replaced with rampant individualism (Skinner 2005).

Following this economic decline, the United States, together with the majority of the Western countries, was further plunged into turmoil when oil embargos implemented by the

Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) led to the 1970s energy crises. The first oil crisis emerged in 1973, as a result of the United States's decision to re-supply Israel's military during the Yom Kippur war. During this crisis the OPEC nations imposed an oil embargo, limiting the supply of oil to the United States and any other nations that supported Israel. This embargo drastically reduced the availability of oil. This crisis, which initiated the fall of the U.S. stock market, as well as the first U.S. recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s, lasted until March 1974. Nineteen-seventy-nine saw further oil woes when the price of oil was drastically increased. These increases had a global impact and ultimately led to a full blown, world-wide, economic crisis. Clapp and Dauvergne (2005) discuss the 1970s oil crises in their book, *Paths to a Green World,* and they assert that,

> as a result of an excess of dollars in international markets linked to the OPEC oil-price rises and rising inflation, developing nations were encouraged to borrow at flexible interest rates with few conditions from banks and governments. High inflation meant that real interest rates were quite low, making borrowing appear to be cost free for many countries. Official debt – in other words, loans from governments and multilateral institutions – affected all parts of the developing world. Lenders at the time made the assumption that countries would not default and were aggressive in offering them loans…However, changes in the global economy made the loans increasingly difficult for poor countries to repay. In 1979, OPEC nations doubled the price of oil, and in response in 1981 the U.S Federal Reserve raised U.S. interest rates above 20 percent to fight inflation. International interest rates rose as well sparking a worldwide recession. (Clapp and Dauvergne 2005:194)

The OPEC oil crises and the ensuing global recession arguably led to a movement away from the ideals of the New Left and the hippie movement, such as community, cooperation and a focus on politics and social justice, towards self-preservation, individual well-being and personal economic survival. This new preoccupation with the self and the "collective retreat from history, community, and human reciprocity" (Kennedy 1994) led novelist Tom Wolfe to argue that the 1970s were characterised by 'a considerable narcissism,' and to label these years as 'the Me Decade' (1976:144,116). The term, which was coined by Wolfe in his New York Magazine article 'The Me Decade and the Third Great Awakening' (1976), has been used to describe the self-absorption and political passivity of the 1970s, and, according to historian Bruce Schulman, "the prevailing concept of the Seventies remains the idea of the "Me Decade" – an era of narcissism, selfishness [and] personal rather than political awareness" (2001:145). Imogen Tyler maintains that "Wolfe's foundational premise…is that

the rise of narcissism is a consequence of the post-war economic boom" (2007:349). Indeed, Wolfe suggested that "surplus wealth…had created the conditions in which narcissism flourished, as ordinary working-class Americans unashamedly used their newly acquired leisure time and excess income to pursue self-fulfilment" (Tyler 2007:349). Yet, this focus on the self only gained momentum when economic instabilities, marked by a primary need for survival, resulted in a disregard for large-scale societal issues. According to Wolfe, unlike

> the husband and wife who sacrifice their own ambition and their material assets in order to provide a 'better future' for their children[,]…the soldier, who risks his life… or sacrifices it… in battle[,]…the man who devotes his life to some struggles for 'his people' that cannot possibly be won in a lifetime, (1976:145)

the new narcissist cares only about 'self gratification now' (cited in Tyler 2007:349). Subsequently, a 'therapeutic culture,' which focused on the attainment of self-fulfilment and gratification through an examination of individual truths, emerged and further propelled the self-indulgence and self-orientation of the seventies. Indeed, instead of trying to perfect the world, people turned towards trying to perfect themselves. Kennedy suggests that

> Americans turned from street theater to self-therapy, from political activism to psychological analysis. Everyone, it seemed, had an analyst, adviser, guru, genie, prophet, priest, or spirit. In the 1970s the only way many Americans could relate to one another was as members of a national therapy group. (1994)

Apart from a culture of therapy and spiritual fulfilment, the seventies saw the development of a number of additional cultural dynamics. One of the most important promoters of this change was the growing prevalence of colour television in American society. Music also played a role in fostering a number of lifestyle changes, with the evolution of 'rock and roll' into punk, heavy metal and new wave, as well as the emergence of funk and disco – the music that started the dance craze. For many, the 1970s were seen as a decade of 'fads' and 'crazes,' from fashions such as bell-bottoms, hot-pants, leisure suits and mood rings, to 'in vogue' exercise trends and disco dance, the 1970s and their 'Saturday Night Feveresque' cultural features provided the perfect platform for a focus on 'Me.' Indeed, it is even possible to suggest that the mirrored disco ball, and its 'thousand and one' reflections, epitomises the hedonism of the 1970s and points towards a growing, all encompassing 'culture of narcissism.'

3.5 The 'Culture of Narcissism'

This concept was introduced by University of Rochester professor of History, Christopher Lasch, in his book, *The Culture of Narcissism* (1980). In this work he follows on from Wolfe's argument and suggests that "American prosperity has given rise to an unprecedented narcissistic individualism;" indeed, he asserts that "an increasing liberal, secular, affluent and consumer-orientated post-war American society had led to the development of a new narcissistic personality type" (Tyler 2007:352, 346). Answering the question of "how…the radical changes in American economic and social arrangements since the 19th century [have] affected the individual" (Siegel 2010), the book describes a "culture of competitive individualism, which in its decadence has carried the logic of individualism to the extreme of a war of all against all, the pursuit of happiness to the dead end of a narcissistic preoccupation with the self" (Lasch 1980: xv). Indeed, Lasch asserts that

> self-absorption defines the moral climate of contemporary society. The conquest of nature and the search for new frontiers has given way to the search for self-fulfilment. Narcissism has become one of the central themes of American culture. (1980:25)

This emergence of narcissism to the level of a psychiatric pathology, Lasch contends, is a result of specific changes in culture and society, including "bureaucracy, the proliferation of images, therapeutic ideologies, the rationalisation of the inner self, the cult of consumption… changes in family life and changes in patterns of socialisation" (1980:32).

According to clinical literature, the social and cultural phenomenon of contemporary narcissism can be seen as less a simple metaphor for self-absorption, and more "a psychic formation in which 'love rejected turns back to the self as hatred'" (Lasch 1980:35). Based on Freud's well known essay, 'On Narcissism: An Introduction' (1914), the concept of narcissism can be divided into two types, namely primary and secondary narcissism. Primary narcissism is seen as something possessed by every infant and is in essence the "symbiotic fusion with the mother" (Lasch 1984:245). According to Freud, "the newborn infant does not yet perceive his mother as having an existence separate from his own, and he therefore mistakes dependence on the mother, who satisfies his needs as soon as they arise, with his own omnipotence" (cited in Lasch 1980:36). In relation to this, Fromm maintains that the infant only focuses on the self, and has no interest in the external world, which it is yet to discover. (1970:118). Thus, it has been suggested that the merging of the parents' affection together with the infant's conceptions of power, results in the infant acquiring an image of the

grandiose self (Lasch 1980:37). In contrast to primary narcissism, Freud asserts that secondary narcissism is mostly pathological. That is, secondary narcissism "tries to compensate for the emptiness that results when love is not returned, and implements grandiosity to ward off guilt and weakness" (Lasch 1980:36, cited in Bayer 2010). Indeed, Adams states that the unceasing self-aggrandizement of a pathological narcissist is more than 'mere' vanity in that it acts as a "defence against an otherwise overwhelming fear of engulfment" (2007:110). As such, the main role of the grandiose self is "the maintenance of a defensive fantasy" (Adams 2007:110), through which it tries "to be perfect[,]…to achieve approbation, to never be dependent, and never to feel lacking in any way (Bromberg 1982:440, cited in Adams 2007:110). Consequently, for Fromm, the difference between primary and secondary narcissism is that, while, for the infant, the external world "has not yet emerged as real," for the person who has a pathological narcissistic condition, the external world "has ceased to be real" (1970:119).

Following numerous studies on primary libidinal narcissism, the 1940s and 1950s saw a movement towards ego psychology and the study of secondary or pathological narcissism. As such, in relation to this, a new theory of narcissism (based on Freud's ideas), developed, and ideas of a 'new narcissist' emerged. Despite these developments, Tyler comments that "before the 1970s the term narcissism was still confined to the disciplines of psychology and psychoanalysis and had no currency or meaning outside this 'expert' literature" (2007:345). However, this changed when Heinz Kohut and Otto Kernberg published their studies on narcissistic personality disorders. Kohut's *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorder* (1971), and Kernberg's *Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism* (1975), illustrated the shift towards a focus on the "study and treatment of pathological forms of narcissism: the excessive and debilitating forms of self-love exhibited symptomatically as megalomania, egoism, emotional detachment, lack of empathy and feelings of emptiness" (Tyler 2007:346). Based on these new studies, the new narcissist can be defined as seeing "the world as a mirror, more particularly as a projection of one's own fears and desires – not because it makes [him] grasping and self-assertive[,] but because it makes [him] weak and dependent" (Lasch 1984:33). He seeks to resolve or avoid conflict with the external world, but instead of conforming himself to reality, he creates a new reality that conforms to him (Lasch 1984:19). Lasch asserts that the new narcissist

depends on others to validate his self esteem. His apparent freedom from family ties and institutional constraints does not free him to stand alone or to glory in his individuality. On the contrary, it contributes to his insecurity, which he can overcome only by seeing his "grandiose self" reflected in the attentions of others or by attracting himself to those who radiate celebrity, power and charisma. (1980:10)

In relation to this, Lasch asserts that, "every age develops its own peculiar form of pathology, which expresses in exaggerated form its underlying character structure" (1980:41). In the 1970s, he suggests, "new social forms require[d] new forms of personality…[and] narcissism appear[ed] realistically to represent the best way of coping with the tensions and anxieties of modern life" (1980:50). As such, he asserts that the "prevailing social conditions therefore tend[ed] to bring out narcissistic traits that [were] present, in varying degrees, in everyone" (1980:50). Indeed, he argues that

a society that fears it has no future is not likely to give much attention to the needs of the next generation…[T]he modern parent's attempt to make children feel loved and wanted does not conceal the underlying coolness – the remoteness of those who have little to pass on to the next generation and who in any case give priority to their own right to self-fulfilment. (Lasch 1980:50)

As such, parents' attempts to convince a child of his power, importance and favoured position, together with their growing emotional detachment, Lasch explains, creates the desirable conditions for the advancement of a narcissistic personality structure. This personality, namely, the new narcissist, "demands immediate gratification, lives in a state of restless, perpetually unsatisfied desire" (1980:xvi) and is characterised by "his or her fear of aging, fear of competition, emotional detachment, self-obsession, anxiety, depression, emptiness, boredom, inadequacy, self-aggrandizement and low self-esteem" (Kernberg 1975, cited in Tyler 2007:353). The abovementioned reference to unsatisfied desires is linked to the needs and desires manufactured and promoted, but never truly fulfilled, by late/advanced capitalist society and the culture industry, referred to by Marcuse and Adorno of the Frankfurt School. Indeed, in relation to this, Lasch argues that changes in the structures of capitalism have "fundamentally reshaped the personality [and culture] of Americans" (cited in Tyler 2007:352). In this regard, Lasch maintains that "until recently, the Protestant work ethic stood as one of the most important underpinnings of American culture" (1980:52). That is, Lasch asserts that

> the self made man, archetypical embodiment of the American dream, owed his advancement
> to habits of industry, sobriety, moderation, self-discipline and avoidance of debt. He lived for
> the future, shunning self-indulgence. (1980:52-53)

However, these goals of self-preservation, Lasch argues, have been replaced by a new goal of self-improvement. In the ensuing age of 'diminishing expectations,' Lasch maintains that

> protestant work ethics no longer excite enthusiasm. Inflation erodes investments and savings.
> Advertising undermines the horror of indebtedness, exhorting the consumer to buy now and
> pay later. As the future becomes menacing and uncertain, only fools put off until tomorrow
> the fun that they can have today. (1980:53)

As such, Lasch argues that the new narcissist identifies "not with the work ethic and responsibilities of wealth, but with an ethic of leisure, hedonism and self-fulfilment (1980:221). Thus, the new narcissists "wish to be not so much esteemed as admired. They crave not fame but the glamour and excitement of celebrity. They want to be envied rather than respected" and, as a result, "pride and acquisitiveness, the sins of an ascendant capitalism, have given way to vanity" (Lasch 1980:59).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, capitalism has been accused of promoting and engendering the narcissistic condition, and the criticisms of the Frankfurt School continue to echo in the contemporary era in Lasch's idea of the 'propaganda of commodities' (1980:71). Lasch contends that the propaganda of commodities serves a twofold function; firstly, he suggests that "it upholds consumption as an alternative to protest or rebellion." As such, "the tired worker, instead of attempting to change the conditions of his work, seeks renewal in brightening his immediate surroundings with goods and services" (1980:73). Secondly, Lasch maintains that the propaganda of consumption transforms alienation into a commodity. That is, "it addresses itself to the spiritual desolation of modern life and proposes itself as the cure" (1980:73). This propaganda, Lasch asserts, is spread through the media and advertising industry which constitute the "servant[s] to the status quo" and the creators of "pseudo-events," pseudo-desires and "quasi information" (1980:73-75). As such, it has been argued that

> mass consumerism glorifies a concern for self image, and encourages the identification of the
> self with various consumption-orientated 'lifestyle' packages, whilst eliminating or

marginalising any alternative: "they reduce choice to a matter of style and taste, as their preoccupation with 'lifestyle' indicates. (Lasch 1984:34, cited in Adams 2007:118)

Adams further asserts that "the 'culture of consumption' encourages a view of the 'world of objects' as an 'extension or projection of the self': 'the consumer lives surrounded not so much by things as fantasies" (2007:117). In relation to this, Lasch suggests that the consumer "lives in a world that has no objective or independent existence and seems to exist only to gratify or thwart his desires" (1984:31). In relation to the influence of advertising in the promotion of 'commodity narcissism,' Lasch argues that

the mass media, with their cult of celebrity and their attempt to surround it with glamour and excitement, have made Americans a nation of fans, moviegoers. The media give substance to and thus intensify narcissistic dreams of fame and glory, encourage the common man to identify himself with the stars and to hate the 'herd,' and make it more difficult for him to accept the banality of everyday existence. (1980:21)

According to Kernberg, narcissistic patients "are afraid of not belonging to the company of the great, rich and powerful, and of belonging instead to the 'mediocre,' by which they mean worthless and despicable" (1975:51). As such, the media, which has the potential to manifest idealistic hopes of fame, therefore provides the new narcissist with a belief that these desires for fame and glory are achievable and expected. Thus, commercialization and its 'media propaganda' justify the 'need' to satisfy every desire, and therefore limit the possibility of feeling guilty for splurging and indulging. However, as Lasch explains, mass culture and advertising do not provide rational, valid or achievable goals; instead "mass culture encourages the ordinary man to cultivate extraordinary tastes…Yet the propaganda of commodities makes him acutely unhappy with his lot." As such "by fostering grandiose aspirations, it also fosters self denigration and self-contempt" (1984:181). In relation to this, Adams asserts that the individual is thus "further encouraged to harbour feelings of dependence and worthlessness with fleeting promises of omnipotence" (2007:119). This dependence on commodities and consumerism to fulfil the needs and desires of the individual, even if only temporarily, Adams suggests, "contributes to object relations which can undermine both a firm sense of self, and of the reality of external objects, including other people; a key tenet of narcissistic disorders and the defensive creation of a 'grandiose self'" (2007:119).

After an examination of Lasch's ideas on the culture of narcissism, it becomes increasingly apparent that his focus on the repressive and alienating impact that late/advanced capitalism can have on the individual ties in neatly with Marcuse's idea that capitalism – as a politico-economic system – reduces the individual to a one-dimensional entity, namely a 'commodity narcissist,' and eliminates the ability for individuals to think negatively, to criticize and to resist.

As mentioned earlier, the counterculture and New Left movements of the 1960s attempted to overcome the power and control of the established system of commoditisation and materialism. However, their 'break-up' in the early 1970s led Lasch to argue that the New Left was practicing a "politics of theatre, of dramatic gestures of style without substance – a mirror image of the politics of unreality which it should have been the purpose of the left to unmask" (1980:82). Thus, Lasch's critique of the counterculture and New Left of the 1960s for being a form of 'radical street theatre,' points towards the failure of the counterculture to revolt against the oppression of the capitalist system, and towards its ultimate inability to bring about lasting radical cultural change. In relation to this, after the initial promotion and growth of the 1960s countercultural movements and the New Left, the ensuing economic and political events resulted in the collapse of these 'revolutionary' movements and a return to positivity, passivity, and what Adorno and Marcuse (along with Lasch) believed to be the successful oppression and exploitation of the people by the capitalist system. This 1970s return to passivity, as Wolfe and Lasch point out, resulted in a deepening sense of alienation and isolation, and encouraged a self-preservational and self-indulgent 'lifestyle.' Ultimately, the emergence of this lifestyle of the mirror and image, they assert, resulted in the development of an era synonymous with the self – the 'Me Decade' – and the growing prevalence of increasingly narcissistic societies.

Following his critique of the culture of narcissism, Lasch "proposed a return to basics: self-reliance, the family, *nature*, the community, and the Protestant work ethic" as a means to escape the alienation and despair associated with late/advanced capitalist societies [My Italics](cited in Vaknin 1995:9). This 'return to basics,' importantly, coincides with Adorno's suggestion of a reconciliation with nature and a movement towards negative dialectics, as well as with Marcuse's insistence that negative thinking will allow for an escape from the manipulation of the capitalist system. In relation to this 'reconciliation with nature,' it may be suggested that the resistance of the New Left and the counterculture of the 1960s can be seen as a form of what Habermas refers to as "snuggling with nature," in that although their initial intention may indeed have been to resist the oppressing control of the capitalist system, their

resistance seemed to transgress into a self-satisfying rather than revolutionary struggle (cited in Alford 1988:111). Tom Hayden highlights the various movements' malfunction in this regard when he asks "We ended a war, toppled two Presidents, desegregated the South, [and] broke other barriers of discrimination…How could we accomplish so much and have so little in the end?" (Findley 1972, cited in Skinner 2005). That is, although the counterculture managed to snuggle up to nature and bring about some changes in the social order, its inability to 'reconcile' or 'identify' with nature in a profound way left it unable to ensure lasting change. Thus, despite the seriousness and undeniable achievements of the anti-war, peace and civil rights movements associated with the New Left, the counterculture of the hippie movement – although resistant at first – may be seen as more of an apolitical rejection of the system; a rejection which was rendered a form of 'pseudo-resistance' because it was undertaken in the interest of pursuing narcissistic needs for fusion and hedonistic desires. Indeed, this pseudo-resistance is alluded to by Jacob Skinner when he advances that

> the so-called 'radical 1960s' are largely remembered for massive global protests, civil rights activism, and counter-cultural movements, all of which gave the appearance of genuinely threatening the predominating social order. Today, we recognize this description as a bit more idealistic than realistic. [Indeed, t]he generation that once loudly marched in the streets, rejected the dream of material consumption, and abided by the rule of everything homemade, now seems to occupy those streets in SUVs and drools over the latest styles from GAP. One could even say, perhaps with some accuracy, that these rebellions of the youth had more to do with hedonistic pleasure than with social reform. (2005)

Following on from the above discussion of the growth of narcissism in the 1970s, the next chapter will examine the various anatomies of such a culture of narcissism, with a view to exploring its growth from the eighties through nineties, into the new millennium.

Chapter Four

The anatomies of narcissism

4.1 The psychological and spiritual anatomy of narcissism: The 1970s

As discussed in the previous chapter, the prominence of self-admiration became increasingly evident in the 1960s through protests for individual rights and liberties. Although these "movements were at first very group-orientated, with mass demonstrations aimed to gain rights for entire groups of people," these ideas of collective goals and communal protest soon began to wane (Twenge and Campbell 2009:60). In their wake, the rise of the human potential movement, and its emphasis on introspection and self-improvement, soon resulted in the promotion of self-admiration. One of the key features of the human potential movement was its focus on Abraham Maslow's idea of individualism and self-actualisation (Twenge and Campbell 2009:62). Maslow's psychology was constructed on the principles of positive motivation towards a healthy realisation of human potential. At the top of his famous hierarchy of needs, Maslow links self-actualisation to the idea that "what a man can be, he must be" (1954:91). As such, self-actualisation can be defined as the practice of reaching one's full potential, namely, 'being all that one can be.' Just under self-actualisation on Maslow's hierarchy of needs is self-esteem. The importance of self-esteem was first highlighted by psychologist Nathanial Branden in his book *The Psychology of Self-Esteem* (1969). Here Brandon insists that

> there is no value judgment more important to man – no factor more decisive in his psychological development and motivation – than the estimate he passes on himself…The nature of his self-evaluation has profound effects on a man's thinking processes, emotions, desires values and goals. It is the single most significant key to his behaviour. (cited in Singer 2006:135)

Although these ideas of self-actualisation and self-esteem are not in themselves narcissistic, their promotion of a focus on the self is often seen as a catalyst for the rise of narcissism in the seventies. And the promotion of this self-esteem, the 'need' that according to Maslow is easier to attain than self-actualisation, has received subsequent censure despite its ostensibly benign status. Indeed, Carrette and King criticize Maslow's ideas on self-esteem when they argue that

like inflation and deflation of the markets, people could reach 'growth' motivation in the realisation of love and self-esteem, but much of this echoed the privileges of a wealthy culture, and his famous 'hierarchy of needs' was more a hierarchy of capitalist wants. (2005:76)

In relation to this, Carrette and King go on to suggest, in their 2005 book, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion,* that his ideas of 'self-actualisation,' 'peak experience,' 'being cognition' and 'transpersonal psychology' all played a role in the creation of capitalist individualism and spirituality of the self (2005:74). This spirituality of the self soon gained popularity as a 'private religion' that celebrated freedom and individual expression. Moreover this privatised spirituality, Carrette and King suggest, emerged as "the new cultural Prozac bringing transitory feelings of ecstatic happiness and thoughts of self-affirmation, but never addressing sufficiently the underlying problems of social isolation and injustice" (2005:77). As such, the irony of Maslow's work is that, "the rejection of religion and the appeal to private religion relied upon the adoption of another authority and another system of constraint. In short, in the very act of "freeing the mind from the dogma of religion, consumers now entered the thought-control of individualism" (Carrette and King 2005:77).

Following on from Maslow's ideas, the concept of popular psychology in western culture began to grow. For example, in his 1978 book, *The Road Less Travelled,* M. Scott Peck delivered optimism to a disillusioned generation of western consumers, by addressing the ideas of personal development, well-being and self-discovery. By reworking ancient religious insights into new psychological tenets of the self, Peck encouraged people to develop their own private religion as a means to experience the 'authenticity' of individual spirituality. As mentioned earlier, this turn towards the individual became a key component of the 1970s and, as Lasch asserts,

after the political turmoil of the sixties, Americans have retreated to purely personal preoccupations. Having no hope of improving their lives in any of the ways that matter, people have convinced themselves that what matters is psychic self-improvement, getting in touch with their feelings, eating health food, taking lessons in ballet or belly-dancing, immersing themselves in the wisdom of the east, jogging, learning how to 'relate,' overcoming the 'fear of pleasure.' Harmless in themselves, these pursuits, elevated to a program and wrapped in the rhetoric of authenticity and awareness, signify a retreat from politics and a repudiation of the recent past. (1980:4)

In relation to this, Carrette and King suggest that although a focus on self-awareness and esteem may indeed provide nourishment and relief in a disillusioned world, it is also "palliative to the ills of consumer society, rather than addressing the underlying social problems" that called for such a focus in the first place (2005:54). Furthermore they argue that among others, Peck's encouragement and celebration of "self-styled answers to the challenges of life" fall directly into the hands of modern capitalism (2005:54). Indeed, they assert that "psychology as a modern discipline of the self is a political apparatus of modern society to develop and sustain consumers" (2005:54). In terms of this, they argue that psychology of the self helps to sustain the dogma of individuality that is essential for capitalism and consumerism to operate (Carrette and King 2005:58). This ideology of individualism and privatisation "breaks the social self and conceals the collective manipulation of 'isolated individuals' in the language of free will and choice," and, according to Carrette and King, acts to alienate members of society from one another and from the responsibility of the collective good (2005:80-81).

In relation to this, the significance and impact of self-esteem on the individual, together with the importance of self-expression, self-promotion, individuality and the subsequent consumerism promoted in the seventies, can be seen as the main facilitators in the growth of narcissism during this period. As mentioned earlier, the seventies are often recognised for their role in the engenderment of the psychological trends in narcissism, with empirical and observational research pointing towards the emergence in the 1970s of a culture of narcissism. That is, while Lasch and Wolfe document the cultural shift towards a focus on the individual and the growth of self-absorption, materialism and narcissism in the seventies, Twenge and Campbell highlight other aspects of this phenomenon. In particular, they point out that "while '60s gatherings aimed for group goals, '70s group meetings like [EST] (short for Erhard Seminars Training, one of the many self-exploration turned self-expression fads of the decade) trumpeted individual self-discovery and success" (2009:62). This movement towards individualism is especially evident in changes in music and entertainment, insofar as the group orientated experiences of the 1960s such as Woodstock, were replaced by the individual experiences of the seventies such as disco.

4.2 The political and economic anatomy of narcissism: The 1980s

Arguably, the growth of narcissism did not simply begin and end in the self-indulgence and *malaise* of the seventies. Instead, once the new narcissistic values of self-centeredness, consumerism and hedonism took hold in the 1980s, a far "more extroverted, shallow and

materialistic form of narcissism" began to emerge (Twenge and Campbell 2009:68). Indeed, the eighties, which were synonymous with the rise of neoliberal capitalism, may be summed up in the statement made by the character Gordan Gekko in the 1987 film *Wallstreet*, "Greed is good." This character, played by Michael Douglas, in many ways symbolizes the unrestrained greed which thoroughly informed the popular culture of the 1980s, and which was indissociable from the new economic orientation which dominated the era. According to Steger and Roy, the term neoliberalism was first introduced in post-World War One Germany "by a small circle of economists and legal scholars affiliated with the 'Freiburg School,' to refer to their moderate programme of reviving classical neoliberalism" (2010:ix). Moreover, for a long time, neoliberalism remained a relatively academic concept, only being applied in isolated cases, such as the 1970s adoption of the term *neoliberalismo* by a group of Latin American economists, to explain their pro-market economic model (Steger and Roy 2010:x). By the 1980s however, these market related economic principles began to gain increasing support, with Robert McChesney explaining contemporary neoliberalism as

> the defining political economic paradigm of our time – it refers to the policies and processes whereby a relative handful of private interests are permitted to control as much as possible of social life in order to maximise their personal profit…Neoliberalism has for the past two decades been the dominant global political economic trend adopted by political parties of the centre, much of the traditional left and the right. These parties and the policies they enact represent the immediate interests of extremely wealthy investors and less than 1000 large corporations. (1999:8)

The rise of neoliberalism in the West is most markedly associated with the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the U.S. president Ronald Reagan. In July 1979 Paul Volcker's instatement as the head of the U.S. Federal Reserve resulted in the introduction of a new monetary policy and a renewed fight against inflation. In Britain, Margret Thatcher, who had been elected Prime Minister in May of the same year, promised to reduce trade union power and eliminate the 'inflation stagnation' that had been prominent in the country for the previous 10 years. In a similar development, 1980 saw the election of Ronald Regan as president of the U.S. His acceptance of Volcker's new policies, with the addition of policies to "curb the power of labour, deregulate industry, agriculture, and resource extraction, and to liberate the powers of finance both internally and on the world stage," set in motion the neoliberal transformation of the global politico-economic spectrum (Harvey

2007:1). The acceptance and adoption of these new policies around the world is explained by Harvey in terms of discourse. He asserts that,

> for any way of thought to become dominant, a conceptual apparatus has to be advanced that appeals to our institutions and instincts, to our values and our desires, as well as to the possibilities inherent in the social world we inhabit. If successful, this conceptual apparatus becomes so embedded in common sense as to be taken for granted and not open to question. The founding figures of neoliberal thought took political ideals of human dignity and individual freedom as fundamental, as 'the central values of civilisation.' In so doing they chose wisely, for these are indeed compelling and seductive ideals. (Harvey 2007:5)

The term neoliberalism has also been used in cultural studies to define an internationally recognised social, cultural, and political ideological agenda that is based on the language of markets, consumer choice, transactional thinking, efficiency and individual autonomy (Singh 2010:10). In this regard, Barry Smart asserts that "our way of life is one in which emphasis is placed on the calculating, rational self-interested subject and a commercialized competitive individualism that is increasingly constitutive of thought and conduct in private and public life" (2003:7). Indeed, he further notes Bourdieu's (1993:18) contention that "the extent to which our culture has become economized is exemplified by the degree to which existence has been 'accommodated to division of labour, class, commodification and instrumental rationality' and homo capitalisticus has become universal" (cited in Smart 2003:8). In short, accordingly, the market deregulation of the Thatcher and Reagan era, and the ensuing rise of neoliberalism as the global economic ideology, led to the commodification of all forms of cultural activities.

This new political and economic 'tenet,' Carrette and King argue, "puts profits before people, promotes privatisation of public utilities, services and resources and is in the process of eroding many…civil liberties" (2005:7). As such, this neoliberal discourse which focuses on individual freedom allows for the corporatisation of everything from health to education, from transport to the media, and ultimately reduces everything in the world to commodities that can be bought or sold (Carrette and King 2005:7). This increase in commodification and consumer freedom can be seen as the overarching promoter of the 1980s focus on the self as a consumer, and as such sanctioned and solidified the trend of commodity narcissism evident today.

4.3 The generational anatomy of narcissism: The 1990s

Often criticised as a "postmodern version of quaint 18th century 'laissez-faire talk' glorifying individual self-interest, economic efficiency, and unbridled competition" (Steger and Roy 2010:x), neoliberalism, which emerged as the dominant economic discourse of the West in the late 20th century, is arguably strongly connected to the powerful expansion of cultural narcissism from the eighties to the nineties. As such, in the three decades since the studies of Lasch and Wolfe brought cultural narcissism to our attention, this social trend has grown in ways that even these authors could not have imagined. Indeed, in their book, *The Narcissism Epidemic* (2009), which documents the rise of cultural narcissism, Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell argue that "the fight for the greater good of the 1960s became looking out for number one by the 1980s. Parenting became more indulgent, celebrity worship grew and reality TV became a showcase of narcissistic people" (2009:4). One of the reasons for the continual increase in these narcissistic trends is the transition of the seventies generation of 'Baby Boomers' into what Twenge refers to as the real generation of the self – 'Generation Me.' Indeed, she asserts that "for the Boomers, who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, self-focus was a new concept, individualism an uncharted territory[;]…they had to reinvent their way of thinking when already grown and thus [saw] self-focus as a 'process'" (Twenge 2006 46-49).

However, unlike the Boomers who only started to focus on the self later in life, today's 'Generation Me' (GenMe) has been born into a world that already celebrates the individual, where the self is already at the top of the agenda. In her book, *Generation Me* (2006) Jean Twenge suggests that GenMe does not need to "polish" the self (as suggested by Tom Wolfe) because they take for granted that it is already shiny. Indeed, the importance of self-esteem and loving oneself has become an everyday aspect of GenMe life, with children being taught from an early age to always put themselves first (Twenge 2006:49). Although self-esteem is not a negative attribute, the constant focus and promotion thereof, so evident in today's generation, can result in the movement beyond self-esteem towards self-importance and the darker side of the focus on the self, namely, narcissism. In this regard, in an article entitled 'All about Me: Are We Developing Our Children's Self Esteem or Their Narcissism,' Lilian Katz, a professor of early childhood development argues that, "many of the practices advocated in pursuit of [high self-esteem] may instead inadvertently develop narcissism in the form of excessive preoccupation with oneself" (2003:178). In relation to this, Twenge goes on to explain that "narcissism is one of the few personality traits that psychologists agree is almost completely negative" (cited in Hilton 2010). Indeed, unlike pathological

narcissism which can often be a debilitating disorder, cultural narcissism is regularly linked to functioning members of society who have a lack of empathy, feelings of entitlement, hostility, and anxiety, and practice risky and antisocial behaviours – none of which have a positive impact on the lives of those affected. Since the 1970s these personality traits have been on the increase with numerous studies pointing towards significant rises in narcissism. Indeed, psychologist Harrison Gough (1991) discovered consistent increases in narcissistic personality traits among students interviewed between 1960 and 1990. One example he refers to is that "college students in the 1990s were far more likely than those in the 1960s to support narcissistic statements like 'I have often met people who were supposed to be experts who were no better than I'" (cited in Halpern 2007:37). Moreover, a further study by Konrath, Campbell, Foster, Twenge and Bushman found definite evidence of a rise in narcissism after analysing 15234 college student responses to the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (the most popular and valid measure of narcissism) completed between 1987 and 2006. Based on their findings, "the average college student in 2006 scored higher in narcissism than 65% of students just nineteen years before in 1987" (2007). According to Twenge and Campbell, examples of this rise in narcissism are not difficult to find, from people hiring fake paparazzi to take photos of them when they are out at night, to reality TV shows where "a girl planning her sixteenth birthday party wants a major road blocked off so a marching band can precede her grand entrance on a red carpet" (2009:1). Indeed, "not only are there more narcissists than ever" they assert, "but non-narcissistic people are [also] being seduced by the… emphasis on material wealth, physical appearance, celebrity worship, and attention seeking" so apparent in today's society (Twenge and Campbell 2009:1-2). This increase in self-admiration and cultural and commodity narcissism has resulted, as Adams pointed out in the previous chapter, in society's movement away from a world based in social reality, to one based in grandiose idiosyncratic fantasy, where false needs flourish at the expense of true happiness. Freud asserts that this type of fantasy is all the more seductive because it brings with it instant gratification or pleasure. The problem, however, is that this gratification/pleasure does not last very long, because the fantasy does not match reality. As such, the original urge soon reasserts itself and is replaced by displeasure, until it is appeased through ever more extravagant means. Thus, the primary process "seeks immediate gratification through hallucination, but the end result is always disillusionment and unpleasure" (Silverman 1983:67), which fuels the fires of self-delusion even further.

4.4 The cultural anatomy of narcissism: The new millennium

Of the numerous traits connected to narcissism, today's culture of vanity, materialism, entitlement and anti-social behaviour tend to stand out because of their exaggerated parameters. Indeed, these characteristics have become an increasing aspect of society, each one adding to the narcissism of the next generation. To begin with, vanity, as a form of excessive pride in one's appearance, abilities, talents and accomplishments, and focus on appearance, are becoming more and more evident. The increasing popularity of plastic surgery highlights this vanity, and according to Twenge and Campbell, "over…11.7 million people in the United States had cosmetic surgery and procedures in 2007, an 8% increase from 2006 and more than 5 times as many as in 1997 (2009:148). According to Twenge and Campbell, "much of today's desire for physical beauty springs from the fountain of self-admiration. For narcissistic people, "good looks are just another way of gaining attention, status and popularity" (2009:153). One of the most telling examples of this is a MTV program titled 'I want a famous face.' According to the website of the program, 'I want a famous face' "follow[s] the transformations of twelve young people who have chosen to use plastic surgery to look like their celebrity idols" (cited in Twenge and Campbell 2009: 150-151). In relation to this, such a growing obsession with beauty and appearance is often promoted and encouraged by cultural pressures to be attractive.

Secondly, with regard to materialism, according to a report by the Pew Centre for Research (2007), 81% of people between the ages of 18 and 25 stated that "becoming rich" was the most important goal of their generation (cited in Jayson 2007). To be sure, 'financial comfort' has been at the top of the social agenda since 1985 (Twenge and Campbell 2009:163); however, the media, internet and advertising of the past decade have brought particular attention to the importance of materialism and consumerism, so that this idea of 'comfort' has constantly been redefined. In particular, it has been linked to the neoliberal capitalist tenet or message to "work more, make more money, and spend more" (Gruba-McAlister 2007:184). In relation to this, messages concerning the value of materialism and spending money can be found everywhere, from celebrity endorsements on television adverts to magazine articles that discuss the latest fashion trends. Consequently, in the early to mid-2000s, Americans spent more on shoes, jewellery and watches ($100 billion) than on higher education ($99 billion), indicating a particularly warped value placement (De Graaf et al. 2005:13). In their book *Affluenza* (2005), De Graaf et al. discuss the current pattern of materialism and its impact on society. They define 'affluenza' as "a painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety, and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more" (De Graaf et al. 2005:2). The growth of this materialism and consumption is

further qualified by De Graaf et al. when they suggest that "during the last half century, it has been spreading faster than ever before, as cultural values that once kept it in check have eroded under modern commercial pressures and technological changes" (2005:121). This shift in cultural values is explained well by Lasch when he advances that,

> in a simpler time, advertising merely called attention to the product and extolled its advantage. Now it manufactures a product of its own: the consumer, perpetually unsatisfied, restless, anxious, and bored. Advertising serves not so much to advertise products as to promote consumption as a way of life. (1980:137)

In relation to this, Twenge and Campbell suggest that "advertising slogans shamelessly promote materialistic entitlement as a virtue," with catchphrases such as 'your worth it,' or 'you deserve the best,' encouraging people to buy things they don't really need (2009:161). These changes in cultural values and the growth in materialism in contemporary society can be directly related to the advancement of narcissism and the grandiose fantasies of a society increasingly more focused on the self.

Thirdly, another important characteristic of the narcissism epidemic of the new millennium is the notion of entitlement. Commonly seen as the pervasive belief that one deserves special treatment, success and more material things, entitlement is one of the key components of narcissism. According to Twenge and Campbell, contemporary people who feel entitled live in a fantasy in which they believe the world owes them more than they contribute (2009:230). Indeed, they argue that entitlement means that,

> you can feel entitled to a flat-screen TV without earning the money to pay for it. You can park in the handicapped space because you are in a rush. You can graduate from college and expect to get a fulfilling job with a six figure salary right away. (Twenge and Campbell 2009:231)

In relation to this, entitlement and the belief that you are *better* than those around you can be clearly linked to narcissism and the conviction that 'the self is more important than anything else.'

The forth aspect of the current narcissism epidemic that warrants particular attention is the growing propensity towards anti-social behaviour exhibited by so many people. With the rise of materialism, consumerism and individualism, the historical values of community and interrelatedness are becoming more and more eclipsed. The growing focus on the individual and the need to attain private consumerist fantasies have resulted in an

increasingly 'isolated' individual. Notwithstanding the anxiety that comes along with such isolation, related anti-social behaviour has increased to the point where it has become a serious social concern. Aggressive, insincere and previously unacceptable behaviour seems to have become the norm in contemporary society, with physical and verbal aggression and violence being linked to the personality traits of narcissism. Although not always aggressive, narcissists tend to become antagonistic when they feel threatened or provoked. Indeed, Twenge and Campbell assert that aggression and violence in narcissists are usually exuded in response to blows to self-esteem, power or not getting what they want, or feel that they deserve (2009 197-199). According to Domash and Balter,

> the narcissistic…conscience is guided by wants rather than ideals. When his feeling of omnipotence is challenged, he may resort to exploitative actions which symbolically heal the sense of injury. These actions help him gain control over (and thus reunite with) the all-powerful object, while at the same time permit the expression of spiteful revenge. (1979:375)

These types of exploitative actions may include both physical and verbal aggression, lying and other antisocial behaviours.

At this point, having looked at the psychological and spiritual, the political and economic, the generational and the cultural anatomies of narcissism, it is important to consider in more detail the characteristics of new millennium narcissism, as a precursor to examining, in the next chapter, how such narcissism is linked to the social networking site, Facebook. In particular, in what follows, new millennium narcissism will be considered as an issue of identity in relation to security, the mass-media, and new media consumerist fantasy.

4.5 Characteristics of new millennium narcissism:

4.5.1   Identity and security

According to Lasch, the growth of narcissism in the 1970s was largely connected to the way in which society dealt with the mounting tensions and anxieties of modern life (1980:50). Indeed, the uncertainty and discontent following the stagflation and oil crises of the seventies acted to increase disquiet and uncertainty. As such, he asserts that the prevailing social conditions tended to bring to the fore existing narcissistic personality traits already present in everybody (Lasch 1980:50). That is, those traits which focused on satisfying and bolstering the self. Unlike the tensions experienced in the seventies, however, societal conditions for GenMe (those born between 1970 and 1990) have been relatively free of traumatic historical

events. Notwithstanding a few recessions there has been general economic stability, there have been no world wars, and GenMe has never been drafted. That is, although the threat of terrorism after 9/11 and the 2008 economic recession are important issues, they cannot really be compared to the trauma and uncertainty faced by Vietnam war recruits, nor to the economic instability brought on by the OPEC oil crisis. Despite this however, anxiety and depression have continued to grow and are often considered commonplace in contemporary society. In this regard, in a study of data collected from 40192 college students, Twenge found that "the average student in the 1990s was more anxious than 85 % of students in the 1950s and 71% of students in the 1970s" (2000 1007-1021 cited in Twenge 2006:107). Similarly, Renee Goodwin asserts that "twice as many people reported symptoms of panic attacks in 1995 compared to 1980" (2003 cited in Twenge 2006:107), and Swindle et al. reported a 40% increase in the amount of people that said they had felt an impending nervous breakdown in 1996 compared to 1957 (2000:746-749 cited in Twenge 2006:107). Following this, analogous surveys in the new millennium posed the question that if there is no better time than now to be alive, then why does today's society seem to be increasingly unhappy? One part of the answer relates to the growth of neoliberalism as the "political economy of insecurity" (Smart 2003:32), while another points to the growth of narcissism. Indeed, with cultural narcissism at an all-time high (Twenge 2006:70) society's focus on the self may actually be perpetuating the growth of anxiety. In relation to this, Twenge argues that society's "growing tendency to put the self first leads to unparalleled [economic] freedom, but it also creates an enormous amount of pressure on us to stand alone" (2006:109). In other words, pressure to make it on our own and focus on the self can often lead to loneliness and isolation. The sadness that frequently comes with being alone is often the flip side of freedom and putting ourselves first (2006:115), and according to scientific evidence loneliness can often be responsible for negative mental health outcomes (Johnson 2004:329). Another downside to this increased focus on the self is that although society is increasingly independent and hyper-specialized, personal disappointments can become all-encompassing since we have nothing else to focus on. Furthermore, high expectations, often instilled in childhood and promoted through the media in relation to the false needs of the culture industry, have become increasingly difficult to obtain, and becoming 'anything you want to be,' and 'having everything you want to have' is not always possible to achieve. As such, the focus on the self and the all-encompassing need to fulfil narcissistic designs, informed by neoliberalism, together with the immense obstacles that often stand in the way of such fulfilment, may indeed be adding to the anxiety and depression increasingly experienced in

contemporary society. Thus, by pursuing narcissism as a means to relieve the pressures of contemporary life, today's generation may instead be unwittingly exacerbating their levels of anxiety. And in a vicious circle, the more anxious they become, the more they pursue narcissism in the hope of finding security.

4.5.2   Identity and the mass media

Of course, the role of the mass media (and the cult of celebrity that it engenders) in the promotion of narcissistic fantasy, identity and security cannot be overlooked. Indeed, Biressi and Nunn assert that

> to understand narcissism as a contemporary malaise rather than pathology, is to understand the desire to consolidate a sense of one's self in a culture seemingly devoid of meaning and of objects and relations providing self-affirmation. Consequently identity is affirmed through the luxury of a consolatory mirror image afforded by the ubiquitous presence of the media in our lives. (2005:100)

This constant presence of the media results in a dependence of the self on the consumption of media images. As such, according to Biressi and Nunn "the media image becomes both the de-realisation of reality and – through reality TV, game shows, talk shows…and so on – the source for unhindered observation and detailed monitoring of real people" (2005:100). In this new 'economy of attention,' to appear on television is to assume cultural capital. As such, "social distinction becomes dependent on media performance and even simply on media presence" (2005:100). This growing desire to gain fame and celebrity status, together with the influence of media celebrities, and their impact on the promotion and glorification of narcissistic needs and attitudes, have all become particularly powerful over the past few decades. Consequently, Twenge and Campbell argue that "celebrities and the media they dominate are the *superspreaders* of narcissism" [My Italics] (2009:91). As such, from magazines and advertisements to reality television and the internet, the media and the celebrity culture that it endorses is often regarded as the major contributor towards the spread of narcissism. Indeed, according to Atkinson, contemporary society stands at the

> intersection of everyday life and the innumerable media messages pervading into their lives. At this intersection, spectacular images in the media coalesce together to form a mediascape where [society] can engage in narcissistic performance. (2010:31)

In relation to this, in a study of the connection between celebrity and narcissism in the U.S., Pinsky et al., found that celebrities have a considerably high score on the Narcissism Personality Inventory, and have a significantly higher rate of narcissism when compared to that of the general population (2006:7). Thus, because Americans tend to be obsessed with people who are obsessed with themselves, society's growing belief that being famous and narcissistic is 'cool,' results in yet another vicious circle; the more they try to relate to mass mediated images of fame and celebrity, the more narcissistic they become. In relation to this, a study by the Pew Research Centre entitled 'How young people view their lives, futures, and politics: A portrait of "Generation Next,"' found that around half of the 18 to 25 year olds interviewed claimed that "becoming famous" was an important goal of their generation (2007:4). In a similar survey, which asked British children to name the "very best thing in the world," being a celebrity, good looks and being rich were at number one, two and three on the list.

These types of celebrity worship, narcissism and self-involvement are increasingly rampant in television advertising, programming and recently popularised 'reality TV shows.' According to Gaitanidis and Curk, "in our tele-visual culture it is perhaps commonplace to announce self-absorption as a founding motif in any discussion of contemporary popular culture" (2007:127). Advertising and marketing soon caught on to the rising trends in self-admiration and narcissism, and have targeted these trends, resulting in the further promotion of these personality traits. With slogans such as "The Power of You" and "You Deserve It" among others, advertisers have made a concerted effort to ensure that you focus on the most important person in your world, namely 'you.' Many television programs also promote narcissism as conventional behaviour. This normalisation of narcissism is particularly evident in reality television. Indeed, Gaitanidis and Curk suggest that the prominence of reality based celebrity and the ubiquity of programming has created an instant index for fame in the media (2007:127). Although reality-based television is not completely new, the current trend in this type of programming is one that "hinges itself to a format that is essentially unscripted, though highly edited, a format that involves nonprofessional casts of interactants, and focuses explicitly on group communication" (Pecora 2002, cited in Brundidge 2008:3). Indeed, in relation to this Frohne argues that

> Andy Warhol's promise that everyone could be a star for fifteen minutes has become the component of collective self-confidence and the standard of personal self-esteem, which postmodern individuals openly pay homage to in their technological self-marketing whether as

contestants on *Face 2000*, or as participants in the 'community of shared destiny' in *Big Brother's* container, or as criminals on death row fighting for the right to have their executions broadcast. (2002:261)

This obsession with celebrity, fame and the need to gain attention can be directly related to narcissism and the incessant need to enhance, bolster and glorify the self. According to Biressi and Nunn, these desires to gain attention and celebrity status can be related to the idea that "our sense of self is guaranteed by the fantasy of an 'other' who observes us and whose gaze confirms the solidarity and worth of our existence" (2005:101). However, understandably, the fleeting fancies of the mass media can only ever provide the most unstable and transient of affirmations.

4.5.3 Identity and new media consumerist fantasy

For the most part, the above-mentioned reality television can be divided into two formats, namely instructional and competitive (Brundidge 2008:3). According to Brundidge,

the instructional format (e.g., Trading Spaces, Extreme Makeover) offers "expert" advice on how to transform one's identity through correct consume r [behaviour]. The competitive format (e.g., Survivor, The Apprentice) allow viewers to vicariously participate in and compare themselves in reference to the cast members' "survival of the fittest," capitalistic struggle, for a monetary or otherwise commodified reward. (2008:3)

As such, both of these formats provide a forum for audiences to build and restyle their identities around the progressively globalized principles of capitalism, and values entrenched in consumerism, individualism, and narcissism. Importantly, this idea of observation, attention and narcissism can *also* be related to online new media formats. Indeed, Kevin Robins argues that many people see new media as a means to escape from a dull everyday reality into a new, exciting, virtual reality (1996:39). This participation in and idealisation of new simulated online realities (which are made possible by new media technologies), he suggests, are "powerful expressions of fantasy and desire…articulated through the discourse of science and rationality (Robins 1996:39).

Consequently, the expression of such virtual fantasies, together with attention seeking activity, self-aggrandisement and consumerism have become common components of many new forms of online social media. Indeed, "internet domain names beginning with 'my' nearly tripled between 2005 and 2008," and trademark applications including the word 'my'

increased fivefold between 1998 and 2008 (Browne 2008, cited in Twenge and Campbell 2009:108). In relation to this focus on 'me,' Twenge and Campbell insist that, the internet post-2004, namely Web 2.0, works in collaboration with cultural narcissism as a feedback loop, "with narcissistic people seeking out ways to promote themselves on the Web and those same websites encouraging narcissism," along with the development of consumer based online identities (2009:107).

Although the internet has been around since the 1950s, this form of technology only really became accessible to the general population in the 1990s when personal computers first became affordable. From here on, Web 1.0 became the major source of online mediated communication and technology. According to Manuel Castells, the advent of the internet led to the development of a new digital communication system which "is both integrating globally the production and distribution of words, sounds and images of our culture, and customising them to the tastes of the identities and moods of the individuals" (2000:2). These identities have become an intrinsic part of this system and Castell asserts that "in a world of global flows of wealth, power, and images, the search for identity, collective or individual, ascribed or constructed, becomes the fundamental source of social meaning" (2000:3). This meaning, however, Castell insists is no longer organised around what people do and the contributions that they make to society, but rather around who they are, or rather who they 'believe' they are (2000:3). Consequently, Castells purports that the emergence of the 1970s technological paradigm led to the materialisation of a new way of living, producing and communicating. In relation to this, he asserts that the culture of freedom, individual innovation, and entrepreneurialism that grew out of the 1960s counterculture opened the door to this burgeoning technological shift (2000:5). Not only did this growing connection between society and technology impact on the identities and culture of society, but it also played a role in the restructuring of the western capitalist system. Indeed, Castells maintains that

> the information technology revolution was instrumental in allowing the implementation of a fundamental process of restructuring of the capitalist system from the 1980s onwards. In the process, this technological revolution was itself shaped, in its developments and manifestation, by the logic and interest of advanced capitalism. (Castells 2000:13)

As such, Castells ideas on the impact of the rise of information technology on the changes in the capitalist system – towards a more individualised, privatised economic system – as well

as the impact that it has had on the development of individual identities and social meaning, can readily be related to the ideas of Adorno, Marcuse, Lasch, Twenge and Campbell. Thus, since changes in both capitalism and identity formation have been linked to a growth in information networks and an increasingly computer mediated society, the engenderment of cultural and commodity narcissism in advanced capitalist society may also be linked to this technology. This can be seen particularly in the recent popularity and ubiquitous infiltration of new forms of interactive digital media.

In particular, following the dot.com crash of 2001, which saw the end of many web-based businesses, Web 2.0 emerged as the second generation of web based services and host communities (Creeber and Martin 2009:3). Web 2.0 differs from Web 1.0 in that it does not just allow for the retrieval of information, but also offers a digital and social element where "users can generate and distribute content, often with freedom to share and re-use" (Creeber and Martin 2009:3). In relation to these changes, Creeber and Martin argue that "New Media and the Digital Revolution is part of a global cultural transformation," where the way we think about our lives, our environment and ourselves has been completely altered. The impact of this 'new media' on society is discussed by Glen Creeber in his paper, 'Digital Theory: theorising New Media.' In it, he discusses the post-modernism of advanced capitalist society and the cultural and political changes that have occurred over the preceding decades. These cultural changes he suggests "can partly be understood as the inevitable by-product of a consumer society where consumption and leisure now determine our experiences rather than work and production (2009:15). Subsequently, he argues that "this means that 'consumer culture comes to dominate the cultural sphere, and that the market determines the texture and experiences of our everyday lives" (2009:15). These changes in society have emerged in reaction to the role that the media plays in contemporary society. Indeed, in reaction to the advent of new media technologies many critics have argued that the ability to distinguish between the media image and the real has become increasingly difficult, with McRobbie asserting that each "pair has become so deeply intertwined that it is difficult to draw the line between the two of them" (1994:17). As such, Creeber contends that "with the arrival of artificial intelligence, cyberculture, virtual communities and virtual reality, our sense of what is 'real' and what is 'unreal' is clearly undergoing a dramatic transformation" (2009:18). In this regard, it has been argued that "the increased interactivity of new media generally allows audience to play around with and make their own composite identities from various and sometimes even contradictory sources" (Creeber 2009:18). Hartley calls this process, and the notion that the media allows all of us the opportunity to create our own multifaceted, assorted

notions of personal identity, "DIY Citizenship" (1999:177-185). A well-known sociologist and author on this topic is MIT university professor Sherry Turkle. In her popular 1995 book *Life on the Screen,* Turkle examines how the internet has impacted on the way in which people have come to experience and identify themselves. In the opening line of her book she asserts that "we come to see ourselves differently as we catch sight of our image in the mirror of the machine" (1995:9). This can be related to her idea of the growing context of a "culture of simulation," in which "eroding boundaries between the real and the virtual, the animate and the inanimate, the unitary and the multiple self" have become prominent features of everyday life (Turkle 1995:9). Consequently, she argues that the "computer offers us both new models of mind and a new medium on which to project our ideas and fantasies" (1995:9). Turkle suggests that "when we step through the screen into virtual communities, we reconstruct our identities on the other side of the looking glass" (1995:177). This ability to create your own customised identity may encourage as well as promote the narcissistic inflation of consumerist fantasies and self-infatuated personality traits. Indeed, the ability of people to create an online persona that is different and often better than their real one, points towards a promotion of a focus on the advancement and elevation of the self, indicative of capitalist society's culture of narcissism. One of the most popular aspects of new media where this type of identity formation can be found is on online social networking sites. Indeed, since Turkle argues that "it is computer screens where we project ourselves into our own dramas, dramas in which we are producer, director and star" (1995:26), social media and social networking sites may provide a platform for the engenderment of this type of acute narcissism.

According to Buffardi and Campbell, social networking websites "offer individuals the abilities, among others, to (a) create an individual Web page, (b) post self-relevant information (e.g., self-descriptions, photos), (c) link to other members (e.g., friends lists), (d) and interact with other members" (2008:1303). This trend towards developing online social networks started in 1997 with the formation of SixDegrees.com, which was based on Frigyes Karinthy's 1923 theory that "anyone on earth can be connected to another through a chain of six acquaintances" (cited in Ryan and Traube 2006). Thirteen years later, social networking sites now proliferate through the internet to the extent that they are some of the most visited websites. In relation to the popularity of these websites, some researchers have begun to question this media's promotion of a focus on the self (Baldwin and Stroman 2007, Orlet 2007, Buffardi and Campbell 2008). Indeed, concern has been raised that these "[w]eb sites offer a gateway for self-promotion via self descriptions, vanity via photos, and large numbers

of shallow friendships (friends are counted – sometimes reaching the thousands – and in some cases ranked)," and as such may present a platform for a growth in trait narcissism (Buffardi and Campbell 2008:1303). Although many people use social networking sites as a mean to maintain friendship and family ties, gain updates to events and more recently conduct business, they may also offer the opportunity for narcissists to self-regulate via social linking. In particular, Buffardi and Campbell argue that social networking sites are "fertile grounds" for narcissism for two reasons. Firstly, they suggest that because "narcissists function well in shallow relationships," social networking sites may be attractive in that they are built on many superficial 'friendships,' with some people having thousands of 'friends' on the site (2008:1304). Secondly, since social networking sites are decidedly controlled environments (Vazire and Gosling 2004), they suggest that the ability of users to control practically all aspect of self-presentation and expression – by choosing attractive photos and writing self-promoting content – is very appealing to narcissistic personality types. As such, the potentiality for social networks to promote narcissistic values and attitudes may indeed be possible if not probable. In relation to this, Lavini and Kimmelman maintain that

> technologies and media theories show that we create, absorb and interiorise technology, even as technology creates, absorbs and interiorises us. Thus, in this reflexive, mutually constructive model of human-technology relations, social networking websites cannot help but absorb existing narcissism from users, and then create more, just as narcissistic users are creating narcissism within these modalities. (2007:2)

According to Kelsey, some of the messages that are created, absorbed and interiorised by and through social networking sites include: 'I Must Be Entertained All the Time,' 'If You've Got It, Flaunt It,' 'Success Means Being a Consumer' and 'Happiness is a Glamorous Adult' (2007). These messages can be related to the growing culture of narcissism and the values of vanity, materialism, entitlement and anti-social behaviour that it endorses.

The above discussion on the engenderment of narcissism through the 1980s, the 1990s, and the current decade illustrates that a considerable growth in this trend has become evident, particularly since the inception of new media technologies and social networking websites. In effect, with online communication portals available through computers and mobile phones, identity creation, elevation, and promotion is only a 'click' away, and the encroachment of what Adorno called the culture industry, into every aspect and minute of our lives, has become increasingly pronounced. This constant ability of contemporary society to

venture online and tell whoever is willing to listen, about their new favourite song, their latest trip to the gym, or how amazing their new car is, endorses the narcissistic belief that 'people actually care what you are doing every second of the day.' In addition, it also encourages a constant endeavour to fulfil false needs through a mirage of narcissistic security, self-promotion and consumption.

This engenderment of consumer orientated commodity narcissism can be found in a wide array of online social networking platforms. However, because it is the most popular, a discourse analysis of the popular social networking website Facebook – with its numerous consumer orientated applications – will be undertaken in the following chapter, in the interest of exploring this issue further.

Chapter Five

Analysis of the structural components of Facebook

5.1 Facebook - an abyss of self-love?

Coming second out of 927 483 websites in terms of user traffic, Facebook has become one of the most popular social networking sites available online to date. Founded in February 2004, Facebook was created by Harvard University student Mark Zuckerberg and his roommates and fellow computer science students Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes. The name of the site was based on printed handbooks known as 'face books,' which are given out to students at the beginning of the year to help match their fellow classmates' names with their faces. Thus, the idea behind the Facebook website was to create an online version of these directories, where students could produce, personalise and update their own profiles (Awl 2009:4). Initially available to college and then high school students, by 2006 the social networking site was open to anyone over the age of 13 who had a valid email address; today Facebook has over 500 million active users around the world. The popularity of Facebook arguably derives from the dynamic possibilities for social interaction that it affords its subscribers. In short, Facebook allows you to create a personal profile, list personal information, interests and contact details, invite friends, communicate using private or public messages and chat features, add photos, send gifts and join groups, among other things, and for these reasons it is the leading social networking website based on monthly unique users (www.facebook.com 2010). Indeed, logging on to Facebook has become part of many of these users' daily routines, with Facebook reporting that "half of its users log in everyday, 35 million update their status each day, and 'the average user spends more than 55 minutes per day on Facebook'" – adding up to "320 million hours spent on the platform worldwide on each single day" (cited in Aydurmus 2010:6).

Like most social networking sites, however, Facebook has also been connected to the promotion of the narcissistic self. Mueller maintains that "like that eternally distracting pool of Greek lore, the Facebook profile can become an abyss of self-love that consumes one entirely" (2008). Consequently, she goes on to suggest that "even the most socially competent among us tend to enjoy photo-documenting our social successes, so that those poor souls who are less gifted might at least witness our revelry" (Mueller 2008).

In the previous chapter the characteristics of new millennium narcissism were discussed in relation to identity formation. Following on from here, this chapter examines how each of these characteristics, namely, identity and security, identity and the mass media, and identity and new media consumerist fantasy, are expressed within the online parameters of the Facebook social networking site. In doing so, it will not only analyse the way in which Facebook panders to the associated narcissistic needs of each of these characteristics, but will also argue that it nevertheless ultimately fails to fulfil such needs; with the consequence that it comprises part of the problem of contemporary alienation, rather than a remedy for this social ill.

In the interest of doing so, this chapter firstly looks at the idea of identity and security in relation to the 'About Me,' 'Profile Picture,' 'Friends,' 'Photo albums,' 'What's on your mind,' 'News Feed' and 'Applications' sections of Facebook. Secondly, the 'Facedouble,' 'Compare People,' 'Compare Hotness,' 'Fancheck' and television series related applications form the basis of the examination of association of identity with the mass media. Finally, with regard to Facebook's relationship to identity and new media consumerist fantasy, the 'Likes and Interests,' 'Facebook Ads,' 'Marketplace' and gift related applications will be considered. In effect, in what follows, this chapter aims to present a discourse analysis of the structural components of the popular social networking site, Facebook, in an attempt to highlight the consumer orientated identities that it creates, and the cultural commodity narcissism – and subsequent insecurity – that it engenders.

According to Fowler, "discourse is speech or writing seen from the point of view of the beliefs, values and categories which it embodies: these beliefs…constitute a way of looking at the world, an organisation or representation of experience – ideology in the neutral, non-pejorative sense" (cited in Deacon et al 2008:152). Theo van Leeuwen builds on the work of Michel Foucault (1977) when he defines discourse as "socially constructed ways of knowing some aspect of reality which can be drawn upon when that aspect of reality has to be represented" or when "context-specific frameworks for making sense of things" (cited in Wodak and Meyer 2009:144) are required. Similarly, Norman Fairclough (1995:16-17) explains discourse analysis "as an attempt to show systematic links between texts, discourse practices, and socio-cultural practices" (cited in Decon et al 2008:152). Van Leeuwen clarifies the process of discourse analysis further when he suggests that

evidence of discourses will have to come from the similarity between what is said and written about a given aspect of reality in different texts that circulate in the same context. It is on the

basis of such similar statements, repeated or paraphrased in different texts, and dispersed among these texts in different ways, that we can put the puzzle back together and reconstruct the discourses texts draw on. (cited in Wodak and Meyer 2009:145)

Accordingly, in what follows, Facebook is understood as a textual manifestation of the discourse of commodity narcissism; a manifestation which, in turn, perpetuates and indeed propagates such discourse, particularly through the 'Home' and 'Profile' pages. As in the previous chapter, the issues which will be discussed are identity and security, identity and the mass media, and identity and new media consumerist fantasy.

5.2 Identity and security

In the following analysis, issues related to security are discussed in relation to Facebook's promotion of identity construction. By examining certain structural features of the social networking site, this section highlights the role of Facebook in the promotion of narcissistic identity formation, as a mean to gain security in an increasingly isolated world, along with its failure in this regard.

As discussed in chapter one, it has been suggested that contemporary capitalist society's adoption of instrumental reason (together with the emergence of consumer-orientated 'pseudo-individuals') has resulted in an increased state of deep uncertainty, isolation, alienation and insecurity. This uncertainty and insecurity is arguably increasingly evident today, as society attempts to find meaning, inclusion, unity and freedom amidst the ambiguity and self-interest of neoliberal capitalism. Indeed, Hall and Winlow refer to the problematic influence of instrumentalism and self-interest when they suggest that,

> perhaps unsurprising in an Anglo-American world dominated by neoliberal policies and culture for the past two decades, the commitment that …people once held to more traditional and communal ways of life has been supplanted to a large extent by instrumentalism and personal ambition, which, although they are constantly touted as the paths to freedom or prosperity, operate in a highly restrictive framework set by the logical demands of the consumer market place and have established themselves as norms in a climate of increased economic and cultural insecurity. (2005:33)

This focus on 'personal ambition,' and narcissistic self-expression and aggrandisement as a means to escape the isolation and alienation of contemporary capitalist society, and to gain feelings of security, is very apparent in the present use of Facebook. That is, the adoption of

narcissism in an attempt to relieve the anxiety and uncertainty of life can be found in a variety of activities, applications and structural components of this popular social networking site. In relation to identity and security, the 'About Me,' 'Profile Picture,' 'Friends,' 'Photo albums' and 'What's on your mind' sections of the Profile page, along with the 'News Feed' and 'Applications' sections of the Home page, are good cases in point.

In the 'About Me' section the user is given the opportunity to post his or her personal details, and information about themselves. By answering a questionnaire, the user is able to give details relating to their location, sex, date of birth, political and religious view, sexual orientation, and what they are "looking for" in terms of 'friendship, dating, a relationship networking' and so forth. They are also given the opportunity to write a biography of themselves and to draw attention to their favourite quote. This structural feature is available to every Facebook member and gives the user the opportunity to fabricate their identity, based on who they believe they are, and who they want other people to believe them to be. In the past, identity was formed either through a person simply fitting in with the culturally arranged roles that his or her parents and grandparents had assumed, or striking out on their own, in relation to their own interests. In either case, though, identity formed by default, indirectly, in the wake of their various involvements over time. Today however, this is not the case. Instead, identity in contemporary capitalist society is a discursive object that is created directly, as an end-in-itself, and in a way that is influenced by a number of politico-economic and socio-cultural factors, including the mass media (Côté and Levine 2002:1). Because identity is "constructed rather than socially imposed" (cited in Bosma 1994:70), the ability of users to construct an inflated virtual identity – one better than their actual identity in the 'real' world – becomes an enticing feature. This is because the feeling of power and control that the user is given in relation to the ability to project a particular image and self-styled identity through this structural feature, acts as an opiate that reduces the anxiety and uncertainty often associated with contemporary identity formation. However, at the same time, this ability to aggrandise aspects of one's identity and focus on the positive and appealing parts of one's self-image, points towards the promotion of narcissism within this online platform. Consequently, the adoption of narcissistic tendencies may be related to the user's need for acceptance, freedom of expression and security within this social construct.

The 'Profile Picture' is another feature of Facebook that is directly related to individual identity formation on the site. As the largest structural component of the 'Profile' page, the 'Profile Picture' says a great deal about who the person thinks they are in terms of visual identity. When uploading a 'Profile Picture' the user is able to choose exactly what

picture they want to present, and they are able to edit, cut, crop and manipulate the image in order to project the identity that they want their online friends and other Facebook users to see. This feature gives the user the opportunity to express the aspects of their physical identity that they deem most appealing. According to Buffardi, the use of glamorous, self-promoting photos as main profile pictures is indicative of a narcissistic means of identity construction (cited in Twenge and Campbell 2009:110). The use of such images also allows the user to reflect on their own image and identity while they are on their own Profile page. That is, they come to see themselves as the expression of their image in the "mirror of the machine" (Turkle 1995:9). This reflection results in the user seeing themselves in the same way that they hope other people see them (via Facebook), and as such may result in a progressive visual confirmation of the grandiose self. As such, the use of the 'Profile Picture' in the creation of an online persona 'feeds' contemporary capitalist societies' promotion of a culture of narcissism.

The 'Photo Albums' feature performs an analogous function. As an element of the user profile, the 'Photo Album' feature allows the user to upload photos to their profile. These photos are visible to both the user and other members of Facebook based on the privacy settings that the user applies. Once photos have been uploaded the user (as well as other Facebook members) is able to 'tag' (nametag) the people in the photo. For example, if you were to add a photo of yourself and your two sisters, you would be able to click on yourself and tag yourself as 'me.' You would also be able to tag your sisters by clicking on them in the photo. These 'tags' will show up under the photo and will be visible on your Profile page and as well as on the Profile page of the people that you have tagged. Adding photos to a Facebook profile not only gives the user the opportunity to show other people what they have been up to and where they have been, but also helps to establish a sense of social adequacy and popularity. Indeed, images of people going to the latest concerts, dressing in the newest fashions and visiting the most popular holiday destinations, among many other things, helps to solidify the user's identity as part of the 'capitalistic in-group,' and as such, acts to reduce the unease and disconnection experienced in contemporary society. This structural appeal to the narcissistic needs of individuals to be part of the better and more important 'in-group,' highlights the role that Facebook plays in the promotion of cultural and commodity narcissism, as a means to fulfil societies growing needs for unity and security – even if this fulfilment is only temporary.

One important aspect of Facebook, which is available on both the Home and the Profile pages, is the "What's on your mind" status update tool. This tool provides a constant

opportunity for the expression of thoughts, ideas, activities, beliefs, opinions and general day to day highlights of users' lives. This tool not only allows the user to deliver a continuous stream of information relating to what they are doing, where they are, and who they are with, but also allows for other members of Facebook to 'comment' on or 'like' their statuses. This ability of other members to comment on and like an individual user's status acts to confirm their interest in what they are doing, saying or who they are associating with, and may also help to fulfil the need for attention, so actively pursued by many Facebook users. As such, in the process of expressing aspects of their identity through the 'What's on your mind' tool, many users may gain a sense of recognition and importance insofar as their banal, everyday preoccupations become elevated to the level of grandiose proclamations. Furthermore, comments by other users may act to bolster these feelings of grandeur and enhance identification with the grandiose self. In this regard, the ability of the user to say what they want to say, when they want to say it, together with the realisation that people are reading and relating to what they are saying, may offer the recognition and related security that the user so deeply desires. This security may also derive from the self-censorship that is indissociable from such a process; that is, the parameters of what is acceptable and expected by one's group of friends emerges rapidly, and become implicitly instantiated, which provides guidelines for one's behaviour and speech.

Connected to the status update tool is the 'News Feed' feature on the Home page. According to the Facebook website 'News Feed' is the "center column of your home page" and "is a constantly updating list of stories from people and Pages that you follow on Facebook" (www.facebook.com 2010). In relation to the information that appears on the 'News Feed,' the site maintains that "in addition to posts from friends and Pages you follow, you'll see photo tags, friend requests, event RSVPs and group memberships in the Top News and Most Recent streams on your home page" (www.facebook.com 2010). Kelsey relates the 'News Feed' feature to watching the news. He suggests that

> a news show is made up of little segments that tell different stories about a variety of people. So when you log in to Facebook and view your Home page, the News Feed gives you a live update of what people are up to, with the most recent news first. (Kelsey 2010:38)

This constant update of information on the 'News Feed' allows the user to remain connected to what is going on in the lives of their online friends, keeps them knowledgeable of upcoming events, groups and important dates, and assists in the development of a sense of

community in this virtual space. Moreover, not only does the 'News Feed' wall provide the user with updates from other people on the network, but all changes and updates made by the users to their own profiles are also broadcast on this 'News Feed' wall. This means that while the user is able to gain an insight into the lives and activities of other members of the site, so too do the other members gain an insight into the life of the user. This sharing of data and information, and the users' perpetual connection to the lives of their online friends and acquaintances, may act to satisfy what Alford refers to as narcissistic needs for fusion (1988:107). That is, the need to feel part of a powerful and important in-group. As such, the feeling of unity, inclusion and fusion experienced within the constructs of this social networking site through the often narcissistic expression of identity, provides the user with feelings of acceptance and refuge that that crave.

The final feature that can be related to identity and security can be found in the role that 'Friends' play within the social structure. Making friends and attaining online acquaintances is the core purpose of the Facebook social network. Adding friends to their profile allows users to express their identity online. This means that the more friends the user has, the more they are able to communicate the ideals of the grandiose self. Without these friends, the whole act of identity formation and expression would be useless, and all attempts to engage in the fulfilment of narcissistic desires would be futile. In order to find friends on Facebook, the user can either search the network or search existing email contacts. Once the person the user is looking for is found, they send them a friend request and wait for their response. As people respond positively to these friend requests and accept the invitation of friendship, the number of friends the user gains is recorded. This record of the number of friends the user has is displayed on their Profile page, and is updated as the number of friends increase or decrease. Within the context of Facebook, the more friends you have, the more socially equipped and popular you tend to appear, and as such, many users have online friends which extend into the thousands. In relation to this, online communities (such as Facebook) and their support of the maintenance of large numbers of 'friendships,' may be particularly conducive to the engenderment of narcissism. According to Buffardi and Campbell, since "narcissists function well in the context of shallow…relationships," social networking websites provide the perfect platform for the expression of narcissistic tendencies, in that they "are built on the base of superficial 'friendships' with many individuals and 'sound-byte' driven communication between friends" (i.e. the News Feed and Wall posts) (2008:1304). In this regard, Buffardi and Campbell assert that

narcissists do not focus on personal intimacy, warmth, or other positive long-term relational outcomes, but they are very skilled at both initiating relationships and using relationships to look popular, successful and high in status. (2008:1304)

This dynamic of self construction via online relationships can act to affirm narcissistic esteem and endorse the validity of the grandiose self. That is, the attainment of online friends acts to legitimise the user's self-perception and identity. This validation of the grandiose self therefore results in the stabilisation of the user's self-image and, in turn, reduces feelings of anxiety and thereby gives the user an enhanced sense of security.

Based on this analysis of the 'About Me,' 'Profile Picture,' 'Photo Albums,' 'What's on your Mind,' 'News Feed' and 'Friends' features of Facebook, it is plausible to suggest that this social network may encourage and promote a narcissistic expression of the self, as a means to diminish the feelings of anxiety and isolation commonplace in contemporary society, and as a way to artificially bolster people's longing for individual identity, freedom and security. These needs, however, cannot be fulfilled since Facebook, as an element of the culture industry, does not satisfy the 'false' needs imposed on society by the capitalist system, but rather increases the urgency of such needs, indefinitely. Thus, since Facebook's "profit models…are based on the utilization of an efficient creation of value by an unpaid workforce," (Ritzer 2010:168) its promotion of such 'false' needs acts to safeguard the solidity of the ideology of which it is an expression.

This connection to the culture industry and the capitalist system can be seen in the invisible power and control that the site has over its users' identities and actions. In relation to this, although users are encouraged to express their self-identity, and although individuality seems to reign supreme, "the profiles that individuals create on Facebook…are clearly constrained by the structural features of the site" (Hesmondhalgh and Toynbee 2008:205). Arguably, since each user profile is limited to the specific structural features and components provided and controlled by Facebook, individuality on the site is not absolute, and instead a type of pseudo-individuality – similar to Adorno's pseudo-individuation – exists. George Ritzer explains this pseudo-individuality when he maintains that "identity is chosen from selecting from Facebook-determined options and checkboxes, with the result that the profile pages look very similar" (2010:168). As such, although each Facebook profile appears to offer a platform for the expression of uniqueness and individuality, structurally and purposefully they are exactly the same. To this end, since pseudo-individuality and standardisation have been adopted and enforced by Facebook, the desires for individuality

and freedom can never be achieved. Similarly, there can be no security insofar as one is always beholden to the whims of the capitalist market. Moreover, by appealing to the 'false' needs of capitalist society, Facebook, through its encouragement of narcissism, is able to exert a considerable amount of influence and control over the individuals within its reach. In this regard, Ritzer argues that

> Facebook…exerts control, and in fact constitutes an unprecedented intrusion of technology into socialising and selfhood, through the application of nonhuman technologies to these processes. Facebook, for instance, structures social networking through dictating the look and behaviour of the profiles. Interaction itself…follows preset and centrally controlled principles and structures. (2010:168)

This manipulation and control can also be related to the user's pursuit of narcissism in the hopes of finding freedom and, as such, security. As mentioned in chapter two, freedom in capitalist society is often restricted to the freedom to choose between varying options of the same thing (Strinati 2004:54). This type of 'pseudo-freedom' can be seen in the structural standardisation of Facebook and the concomitant pseudo-individuality that it engenders. Moreover, as discussed, this can lead to the development of feelings of profound isolation and powerlessness which, in turn, fuel further narcissistic expression on such social networking sites. Thus, by promoting narcissism as a means to relieve the pressures and anxieties of contemporary life, Facebook may instead be intensifying their user's levels of anxiety, resulting in an increase in feelings of alienation and isolation. Consequently, the more anxious they become and the more alienated they feel, the more they pursue Facebook's offer of narcissistic self-expression in the hopes of finding security. To this end, the constant reliance on Facebook to provide its users with a temporary sense of security, helps to ensure the instrumental passivity of contemporary society and, as such, the stability of the capitalist system.

5.3 Identity and the mass media

This section illustrates Facebook's use of the mass media and the cult of celebrity as a means to promote narcissistic identity construction. That is, it will be advanced that through utilizing contemporary capitalist society's fascination with the lifestyles and identity of celebrities, Facebook encourages the narcissistic desire for attention and recognition of its user's via the various features and applications available on the social networking site. Furthermore,

Facebook's promotion of a narcissistic identification with celebrity, as a means to bolster the grandiose self and increase feelings of belonging and acceptance, will be discussed, with a view to highlighting its failure to facilitate such belonging and acceptance.

The mass media has a ubiquitous presence in the life of contemporary society and affects the way we view our world. According to Croteau and Hoynes,

> our everyday lives are saturated by radio, television, newspapers, books, the Internet, movies, recorded music, magazines and more. In the twenty-first century, we navigate through a vast mass media environment unprecedented in human history. Yet our intimate familiarity with the media often allows us to take them for granted. They are like the air we breathe, ever present yet rarely considered. (Croteau and Hoynes 2003:3)

Despite this lack of consideration, the media plays an important, if somewhat invisible, role in many aspects of everyday life including identity formation. Singer and Singer allude to the role that the mass media play in identity formation when they argue that the enormous flow of "popular images, representations, and symbolic models" circulated by the media deeply "shape what people think about the world and how they perceive themselves in relation to it" (2001:309). One aspect of the media which has become particularly instrumental in the formation of identity is the increasing popularity of the cult of celebrity.

The idea of celebrity is not new and can be related to Leo Braudy's history of fame discourse, which looks at the history of individual's "ambition to stand out from the crowd, to be known by those not known to one [and] to make an impact on time" (cited in Gamson 1994:16). In relation to contemporary fame and celebrity, Anderson and Grey maintain that

> the faces, fashionable figures, and extravagant lifestyles of media celebrities have become part of audiences' everyday lives. Proliferating entertainment news shows, Web sites, and magazines have created levels of familiarity and intimacy previously only shared with those in our immediate social environments. (2008:76)

This familiarity and identification with celebrity has resulted in a culture where people actively imitate, discuss and contact celebrities, imagine themselves as part of celebrities' lives and as celebrities themselves (Giles 2002, in Spitzberg and Cupach 2008:4). This 'obsession' with fame and celebrity, together with the growing trend towards media presence and performance, as a determinant of social distinction, has resulted in a growing desire for fame and celebrity status in contemporary society. Daniel Boorstin provided a poignant

definition of celebrity, when he identified a celebrity as "a person who is known for his well-knowness" (cited in Nüesch 2007:10). Based on this definition, although fame associated with movie, music and sports stars remains synonymous with celebrity today, another version of celebrity – one not associated with any particular accomplishment – has begun to pervade contemporary culture. Anderson and Grey describe this celebrity when they suggest that the "inherent spiral of celebrity is unmasked in the recent rise of jet set – and reality television – celebrities, exemplified by Paris Hilton, whose celebrity status appears unrelated to any recognisable professional achievements" (2008:76). In order to define this type of celebrity, namely the "individual with no particular talents which might give them expectations of work in the entertainment industry, no specific career objectives beyond the achievement of media visibility, and an especially short lifecycle as a public figure" (Turner 2006:156), Chris Rojek developed the term 'celetoid.' According to Rojek,

> celetoids are the accessories of cultures organised around mass communication and staged authenticity. Example include lottery winners, one-hit wonders, stalkers, whistle blowers, sports areas stakeholders, have-a-go heroes, mistresses of public figures and the various other social types who command media attention for one day, and are forgotten the next. (2001:20-21)

According to Turner, the "accelerated commodity life cycle of the celetoid has emerged as an effective industrial solution" to satisfy society's demand and appetite for consuming celebrity (2010:14). However, this growing ability for anyone and everyone to obtain, what Andy Warhol called their '15 minutes of fame,' has resulted in the further exacerbation of society's craving not only for celebrity products, but also for their own 'celetodial' experience.

Furthermore, the advent of new media technologies has made way for a pervasive expression of these ever-changing identities. In this regard, Facebook offers the perfect platform for mass media orientated identity construction, expression and validation. Indeed, the fascination with celebrity identification and mass mediated fame can be seen in the variety of Facebook tools and application related to this topic. Based on what celebrity the user looks like, who the user compares to, and who the user wants to be related to, these tools and applications tend to focus on association under the auspice of the cult of celebrity.

One feature of Facebook that can immediately be connected to the cult of celebrity and celebrity status is the popular application titled 'Facedouble.' This application compares user faces to the physical profiles of celebrities, and tells them who they most look like. The

applications home page encourages users to "find [their] celebrity look alike using [their] Facebook photos or camera phone" (www.facebook.com 2010). It goes on to explain how the application works when it says that "facial matching will compare your face to thousands of today's top celebrities" (www.facebook.com 2010). The use of certain technologies to compare the user's features with thousands of celebrity features, allows this application to make good comparisons between the user's and the celebrity's profile. This opportunity for the user to find out which celebrity they most resemble contributes powerfully to the user's identity construction within this virtual space. This is because the connections that are made between the user and specific celebrities appeal to the user's vanity and fortifies their desires for celebrity status. This promotion of celebrity status may also encourage a narcissistic expression of this identity. In relation to this, Twenge and Campbell assert that celebrities and the media they dictate are the *superspreaders* of narcissism in contemporary society (2009:91). Since celebrities rank higher in narcissism than most people (Pinsky et al 2006:7), societies obsession with becoming a celebrity acts to encourage the adoption of narcissistic personality traits. Thus, the more society tries to relate to mass mediated images of fame and celebrity, and the more they try to construct their identity around celebrity status, the more narcissistic they become.

Two applications which are similar to 'Facedouble' and which also focus on association and comparison are the 'Compare People' and the 'Compare Hotness' applications. 'Compare People' allows users to compare themselves to other members of the Facebook network. This application works by rating each user according to various categories including cutest, sexiest, and smartest, among others. It then compares these ratings and indicates to the user where exactly they fit in. This type of application appeals to many user's desire to see where they stand amongst their peers, in terms of physical appearance, 'personality' and popularity, and thereby stimulates the desires for recognition and 'celebrity like' attention that they seek. Furthermore, this type of attention also validates or justifies their identification with a narcissistic self. This attention seeking can also be seen in the 'Compare Hotness' application. This application is described as a place where the user can compare, flirt and meet with the 'hottest' people in their areas. They are also able to find out what their rankings are and who rated them (www.facebook.com 2010). This idea of 'hotness' is referred to by Twenge and Campbell in their chapter on vanity, entitled 'Hell Yeah, I'm Hot.' In this discussion they allude to the idea that there is a new standard for vanity in contemporary society, one "where it's not enough to be beautiful: you have to be hot" (2009:142). This "pursuit of hotness" they suggest, is a clear symptom of a narcissistic

culture in love with its own reflection (2009:141). In relation to this, the 'Compare Hotness' application illustrates perfectly how image has become an ever more important aspect of contemporary identity formation, and how Facebook promotes such identification. Furthermore, the ability to rate your friends, find out who rated you and what your ranking is in terms of 'hotness,' points towards an adoption of status levels similar to that seen in the media's celebrity culture, where celebrities are in a constant struggle to be the 'hottest,' most important, and most popular.

'Fan Check' is another application related to celebrity status. This Facebook application ranks user's friends as 'fans,' based on how often those friends post, 'like' or comment on the user's profile wall. This transformation of friends into fans is indicative of contemporary society's fascination with celebrity and many people's desire to gain celebrity status. Therefore, with many people basing their identity on the celebrity culture endorsed by the mass media, this application appeals to the users' needs for attention and validation (through the fans that they can acquire). Society's fascination and preoccupation with celebrity lifestyles and fame, together with their growing desires to be more and more like celebrities themselves, is explained by Thompson as a form of identity formation particular to our era when he describes "an interest in given celebrities and the act of becoming a fan as a 'strategy of self,' a way to meaningfully build an identity in a mediated world" (cited in Andersen and Grey 2008:77).

A further promotion of this reliance on the mass media as an identity formation tool can be seen in the variety of applications which encourage users to determine which 'Desperate Housewives' character they are, or which 'Sex and the City' character they are, among others. The comparison of users to popular television program characters via this social network platform means that Facebook not only promotes the narcissistic expression of the self, through personal glorification and aggrandisement, but also encourages identification with other forms of mass mediated cultural products.

The above discussion on user-celebrity comparisons, relations and associations, points towards Facebook's engenderment and promotion of mass mediated ideas of celebrity and status. By appealing to users' desires for recognition, belonging and attention, Facebook inspires users to adopt narcissism as a key component of their identity in relation to mass media images – a kind of DIY celebrity. In this regard, Turner maintains that the internet offers the opportunity for the proliferation of a variety of DIY celebrities, and suggests that 'celebrification' has become a "familiar mode of cyber-self presentation" (2010:156). In short, apart from the above celebrity inspired identity construction and presentation, an

overall proliferation of mass mediated celebrity connections can be found on Facebook. These connections may be related to user's search for meaning and security. According to Redmond and Holmes,

> celebrities offer peculiarly powerful affirmations of belonging, recognition and meaning in the midst of the lives of their audiences, lives that may otherwise be poignantly experienced as under-performing, anti-climactic or sub-clinically depressing. (2007:172)

These celebrity affirmations, which suppress the feelings of anxiety and isolation experienced so often in capitalist society, often originate from what Horton and Wohl (1956) coined as 'parasocial interactions.' According to Horton and Wohl, parasocial interaction refers "in part to the ways in which media consumers might experience aspects of media characters [or celebrities] as a form of actual interaction and affiliation (cited in Spitzberg and Cupach 2008:4). According to Redmond and Holmes, the term parasocial interaction is used in contemporary society to refer to "relations of intimacy constructed through the mass media rather than direct experience and face to face meetings" (2007:171). They further assert that in "societies in which as many as 50 per cent of the population confess to sub-clinical feelings of isolation and loneliness, parasocial interaction is a significant aspect of the search for recognition and belonging" (Redmond and Holmes 2007:171-172). In relation to the impact of these interactions on isolation, Spitzberg and Cupach assert that, on the one hand, it can be argued that parasocial interaction "might be a salve for those who are otherwise isolated from society and human contact" (2008:4). On the other hand, however, Spitzberg and Cupach also suggest that "parasocial interaction might heighten the sensed acuteness of such isolation" (2008:4). This means that, by adopting and attending to an array of mediated parasocial interactions and relationships, a lonely person may neglect to form any 'real world' or interpersonal relationships, and as such, may subsequently exacerbate their isolation and loneliness.

This potential for an increased sense of isolation means that, although Facebook attempts to fulfil the needs of its users by allowing for celebrification, it cannot guarantee increased feelings of belonging or meaning, and as such cannot provide its users with the security they so desperately crave. Furthermore, since celebrity status is never long lasting (especially in the sense of a celetoid) and is constantly changing, it is impossible for society – including Facebook users – to keep up. Therefore, because the status of celebrities is constantly changing, Facebook users who base their identity on certain celebrities will

constantly be in an analogous state of flux; either, changing according to their favourite celebrity, or moving from one celebrity to the next as their popularity increases or decreases. These constant constructions and reconstructions of identity, mean that the users are constantly questioning their own identity, constantly searching for something more. In relation to this instability evident in contemporary identity construction, Kellner insists that

> one's identity is a construct, constituted out of the materials of one's life-situation and one can change and transform one's life according to one's projects, as Sartre, Foucault, and others remind us. But constituting a substantial identity is work which requires will, action, commitment, intelligence, and creativity, and many of the postmodern identities constructed out of media and consumer culture lack these features, being little more than a game someone plays, a pose, a style and look that one can dispose of tomorrow for a new look and image. (1995:260)

Arguably, this 'game' of identity construction based on celebrity status is promoted by Facebook, and although exciting and fulfilling in the moment, does not last long; consequently, as the turnover of celebrity increases, so too does the stress and anxiety felt by the users. Indeed, because the user is encouraged to present their identity in relation to celebrity, and because celebrity status is continually changing, they are never able to establish who they really are. This continual need to reinvent oneself, arguably, acts to increase stress and anxiety, and as such, negates any possibility of achieving lasting security.

5.4 Identity and new media consumerist fantasy

The following analysis examines the orientation of Facebook around consumerist fantasy. That is, through an examination of Facebook's promotion of narcissistic consumer culture, this section will illustrate the role of new media technologies in the creation of such new media consumerist fantasies. Furthermore, the concomitant promotion of consumption orientated identity formation will be analysed in relation to both Facebook's promotion of commodity narcissism, and the subsequent insecurities that accompany it.

Arguably, the abovementioned obsessions with celebrity are not simple aberrations, but rather fundamental aspects of the central social, economic and political force in Western culture, namely *consumerism.* Consumerism, and its methodical creation and promotion of the desire to purchase goods or services in perpetually increasing quantities, has assumed an overwhelming significance in modern day life – influencing the way society sees and experiences existence and the world. In contemporary society, technology has had a major

influence on the spread of consumerism, particularly within the virtual environment. According to Silverstone and Hirsh, technological developments have had "significant implications [on] the nature of contemporary forms of consumption and that, in particular, information and communication technologies are becoming a key component of household cultures of consumption" (cited in Miles 1998:70). As such, it can be argued that these new technologies, together with new forms of media, have come to generate and stimulate capitalist interests, while at the same time globalising the promotion of consumerist fantasy. This promotion of consumerist fantasy can readily be related to the promotion of consumer identity. As traditional forms of identity construction have been steadily eroded, the role of consumer culture and consumer products in the development of identity has increased. This means that 'who' a person is, and 'what' their social position is, is no longer inherited from their community, class, religion, family or nationality, but is something which they construct for themselves. An important element of such constructed identity, Dittmar asserts, "is the acquisition and consumption of material goods and wealth" (2008:12). As such, consumer culture and material goods have become modern means of obtaining, expressing and attempting to enhance identity: they indicate social status, express unique aspects of the person, and represent hoped for, better, or more ideal identities (Benson, 2000, 2006, Dittmar, 2004 cited in Dittmar 2008:12). According to Ditmar, "a significant aspect of the impact that consumer culture has on individuals is linked to the ideal identities that are portrayed and privileged in the mass media and advertising" (2008:12). These idealised images not only promote products for consumption, but also communicate lifestyle and identity instructions. This promotion of consumerism as a tool to express and enhance contemporary identities, can be seen in the consumer orientated structure and applications of Facebook. Since "interactive media are seen to herald the rise of individualised and privatised lifestyles increasingly dependent on the economics of global consumerism" (Livingstone 2002:2), Facebook provides a good example of how such lifestyles and identities are expressed through consumer focused online realities.

The first feature of Facebook that can be related to the construction of consumer identities, can be found in the 'Likes and Interests' segment of the 'About Me' section. This segment gives the user the opportunity to list their likes and interests, with a particular focus on their favourite music, books, movies and television shows. Each of these options refers to popular commercial products which have become the 'backbone' of contemporary consumerist culture. By encouraging members to identify themselves based on their consumer likes and interests, it becomes evident that Facebook not only promotes

identification with capitalist consumption, but also assists in the creation of an online consumerist fantasy. Indeed, by expressing their likes and interest in popular music, the latest movies, bestselling books and television programs, the users are able to illustrate their knowledge of consumer products and material goods and, as such, establish themselves in a particular economic sector. Furthermore, the appearance of these likes and interests on the wall of the user's profile, allows the user to feel as if they own the selected consumer products and, as such, may act to enhance their online identity and social status. Arguably, by encouraging this identification with constantly changing arrays of cultural consumer products, Facebook allows its users to fulfil, if only temporarily, materialistic and consumerist desires often associated with narcissism. Ewen and Lasch emphasise the restless narcissism of consumerism, when they argue that consumers flit "from one purchase to the next, losing the capacity to delay gratification, victims of their own unquenchable desires" (Seiter 1995:40).

Linked to the 'Likes and Interests' section of the Profile Page, is Facebook's promotion of consumer products through its advertising initiative – 'Facebook Ads.' According to the 'Facebook Ads' home page, this service allows advertisers to "connect with more than 500 million potential customers" and "choose…[their] audiences by location, age and interests" (www.facebook.com 2010). This ability for advertisers to obtain information about the consumer identity, interests and likes of various users, can be directly linked to Facebook's functioning as a promoter of consumerism. In relation to this, Dunay et al. comment that "Facebook is in a unique position," because unlike other advertising systems 'Facebook Ads' have access to a wealth of consumer information (2010:10). They assert that

> Facebook sits on a mountain of information about each of its users, from their profile information, to the discussion groups and other ads that each user clicks or fills out while using Facebook. New information is generated daily, and Facebook has figured out how to harness that information in a way that shields the privacy of each particular user's sensitive data, while providing a richer experience for the advertisers. (Dunay et al. 2010:16)

This ability of advertisers to tailor their adverts to address the needs and desires previously expressed by Facebook members, means that they are in the perfect position to encourage consumerist spending and endorse material gains as a mark of social distinction. 'Facebook Ads' appear on the right-hand side of the majority of profile, group, application and discussion pages and can advertise anything from cars and cellphones, to online shopping

websites, investment opportunities, and cosmetic surgery. Anyone can create an advert and the budgets can range from one dollar to $1 billion dollars. Since these adverts act specifically to promote and sell goods, services and brands, among other things, their connection to consumerism and the promotion of a consumer based identity is undeniable. The impact of these 'Facebook Ads' on commodity narcissism also becomes evident in their specific appeal to, and endorsement of, the materialistic interests, wants and needs of the users. According to Zarembka, commodity narcissism refers to "narcissism promoted in advanced societies by the production and consumption of the commodity" (2009:120). In relation to this, Zarembka asserts that the "world of the narcissist is made by the mirror" and "producers of commodities, as we know only too well, see with the aid of mirrors" (2009:121). As such, she asserts that "advertising, the promotion of celebrity, the personification of power…[in] the protagonist-hero, and the personification of evil, are all presented in the mass media as mirrors" (Zarembka 2009:121). This world of the mirror becomes even more evident in mass meditated forms of new media technologies. Sherry Turkle highlights the influence of these virtual 'looking glasses' on identity and narcissism when she states that "we come to see ourselves differently as we catch sight of our image in the mirror of the machine" (1995:9).

Vance Packard was the first person to draw attention to the powerful link between advertising and narcissism, when he argued that

> studies of narcissism indicated that nothing appeals more to people than themselves: so why not help people buy a projection of themselves? That way the images would preselect their audiences, select out of consuming public people with personalities having an affinity for the image….the image builders could spark off love affairs by the millions. (cited in Zarembka 2009:121)

This appeal to a projection of the self, is exactly what 'Facebook Ads' manage to achieve (through the use of individual user information), and as such they succeed in promoting and engendering commodity narcissism. These 'Facebook Ads,' furthermore act to promote the ideal identities of the users and thereby encourage consumer based identity construction.

Another aspect of Facebook which can be tied directly to consumerism is the Facebook 'Marketplace.' This feature – which allows users to buy or sell anything from concert tickets to property – illustrates another aspect of Facebook, namely its primary focus on commerce rather than social connections. In Short, the Facebook 'Marketplace' comprises

of a database of classified advertisements. According to Miller, the Facebook 'Marketplace' is very similar to Craigslist in that it simply provides a listing service for online classified ads (2010:273). He explains that "you don't actually purchase an item from the Facebook Marketplace; you contact a seller and arrange the purchase directly from him" (Miller 2010:273). This means that Facebook does not provide any buyer-seller protections nor does it get involved with shipping and payment. What this service does offer the user, however, is the ability to see who the person is who is selling or buying (either a friend or a friend of a friend) and to determine whether or not they would like to do business with them. This opportunity to 'know' the person you are trading with is not only seen in terms of risk reduction, but also adds to the enjoyment of the consumer experience. This promotion of user interaction in the market is therefore indicative of Facebook's connection to, and promotion of, consumerism in association with commodity narcissism.

The final element of Facebook that can be associated with consumerist fantasy is the variety of applications which are dedicated to sending virtual gifts. These applications which include 'Free Gifts,' 'Gifts Gallery,' 'My Gifts,' and 'Animated Gifts,' allow Facebook users to select gifts for a variety of occasions and send them to their online friends. This idea of 'buying' an online gift and sending it to a friend is arguably the apogee of the consumerist orientation of this social network. The ability of users to buy and receive gifts (even if they are only products of the online world) not only allows them to engage in a simulated market environment, but also, through doing so, contributes to the development of narcissism. This may be seen in the users' use of such 'gift giving' as a means to gain attention through the handing out of material products. Conversely, receiving these types of virtual gifts from other people affirms the user's sense of self-worth and self-importance, in a way that adds to their identification with the narcissistic self.

Based on the above features, structures and applications, it becomes apparent that Facebook acts to build and restyle its users' identities around the progressively globalizing principles of capitalism, and around values entrenched in consumerism, individualism, and narcissism. The promotion of consumer products and services, and the process of consumption is visible in the structure of almost all of the Facebook profile pages, discussion boards, groups and applications. All of these involve introducing users to goods and services, encouraging them to indicate what material products they like the most, and promoting material wealth as a sign of social distinction. Since consumer culture and material goods have become modern means of finding, communicating and attempting to enhance identity, Facebook's promotion of consumerism provides the perfect platform for users to create and

construct their ideal identities online. On the one hand, this freedom of contemporary Facebook users to embrace their individuality (even if it is pseudo-individuality) and create or construct an identity through consumer products, can be seen as another product of contemporary society designed to reduce feelings of alienation and to provide a sense of belonging and security. However, on the other hand, the freedom that comes along with such individuality is ironically indissociable from a loss of the very security which users of Facebook seek. Zukin and Maguire highlight this point when they assert that

> identity shifts from a fixed set of characteristics determined by birth and ascription to a reflexive, ongoing, individual project shaped by appearance and performance. This freedom, however, comes at the cost of security; without fixed rules, the individual is constantly at risk of getting it wrong, and anxiety attends each choice. (2004:180-181)

Indeed, since consumerism is always changing and constantly offering something more, the user is placed in a position where they need to ensure that they are constantly updating their profiles, and constantly changing their identity, in relation to consumer culture. This constant need to re-identify with consumer demands, however, does not facilitate feelings of stability and security, but rather acts to increase uncertainty and user anxiety. As such, Facebook's promotion of commodity narcissism, in the form of consumerist fantasies, as a means to pursue ideal identities and obtain security, results in increased feelings of alienation and disquiet. Consequently, the more isolated and anxious users begin to feel, the more they cling to Facebook's promise of narcissistic self-expression as a means to gain security, in an ever more vicious and self-defeating circle.

Chapter Six

Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

Based on the analysis of chapter five, it is plausible to assert that the social networking website Facebook is responsible for the promotion of an acutely narcissistic subjectivity among those individuals who utilise this medium. By investigating the promotion of narcissism as a means to escape the isolation and anxiety commonly experienced in contemporary capitalist society, this study illustrated Facebook's engenderment of cultural and commodity narcissism. Indeed, by examining issues related to identity and security, identity and the mass media and identity and new media consumerist fantasy, this research has illustrated a profound connection between capitalist insecurity, mass mediated identity construction and commodity narcissism. As such, it has been suggested that Facebook's promotion of the pursuit of narcissism as a means to reduce anxiety and isolation and to gain security, has instead resulted in increased anxiety and diminished security. Moreover, it has been argued that the more anxious and insecure people become, and the more alienated they feel, the more they chase narcissistic identity construction – as promoted by Facebook – in the hope of finding security. To this end, the constant reliance on Facebook by its users to provide them with a temporary sense of security – either through self-expression, mass mediated celebrity 'status' or consumerist fantasy – acts to ensure the instrumental passivity of contemporary society and, along with this, the stability of the capitalist system. However, what has also emerged into conspicuousness through the previous chapters, is that there is no easy way out of such a predicament, because the social ills bound up with Facebook are indissociable from a complex web of politico-economic and socio-cultural formation, which has occurred over the last half a century.

In sum, the role of the media in the engenderment of instrumental passivity and capitalist alienation was first alluded to in chapter one in the discussion of the ideas of the Frankfurt school. In particular, Adorno and Horkheimer's book, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) demonstrates the role of the culture industry in the promotion of instrumental reason and passivity. This instrumentality, they suggest, is unable to speak to human needs for purpose and meaning and, as such, is unable to give individuals the sense of security that they so greatly desire. This inability of the culture industry to satisfy security needs, they maintain,

has resulted in the development of a state of deep uncertainty, isolation and alienation. Following on from this line of thought, chapter two provided an in-depth analysis of the impact of mass culture on 1940s and 1950s capitalist society, through the lens of Adorno's ideas on standardisation, pseudo-individuation and the concomitant exercise of repression and control by the culture industry. Adorno, together with other members of the Frankfurt school, argued that the conformity and passivity of the individual in late/advanced capitalist society is a result of the system of the culture industry, which, although economic rather than political, nevertheless functions in a manner akin to a totalitarian regime. Based on these ideas, Adorno argues that while providing society with the commodities needed to temporarily sedate burgeoning feelings of isolation, anxiety and insecurity, the media, as part of the culture industry, is also able to ensure the solidity of the capitalist system. Adorno relates the reason for such mass compliance and acceptance of the status quo to narcissistic afflictions of the ego, which are rooted in the development of capitalism. The focus on the self, which compensates for capitalist loneliness and isolation, he suggests, results in the development of narcissistic individuals who become increasingly reliant on the culture industry for self-fulfilment.

In turn, chapter three provided further exploration on the effects of late/advanced capitalism on the individual, and of the control and oppressive power of the capitalist system. In this regard, Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* (1964), which highlights the advancement of social repression, media control and the decline of revolutionary potential in the West, was discussed in relation to the rise of the 1960s counterculture and New Left political movements. Marcuse argued that advanced industrial society has become 'one dimensional' – that is, uncritical of itself – and, as such, has developed a false consciousness which reduces individuals to willing subjects, focused purely on the satisfaction of personal needs and desires. This satisfaction of personal needs through consumer products, and the subsequent loss of critical thought, Marcuse asserts, results in the reduction of tendencies towards liberation and revolution, and thereby maintains the capitalist system. Despite brief signs of revolutionary activity evident during the counterculture of the 1960s, this period of uprising and critical thought was short lived, and the economic downturn of the 1970s – the first in two decades – soon acted to re-assert Marcuse's idea of a preoccupation with the self. After examining the work of Marcuse, this economic downturn of the late 1960s/early 1970s was discussed in relation to Tom Wolfe's article 'The Me Decade' (1976) and Christopher Lasch's book *The Culture of Narcissism* (1980). Tom Wolfe's article highlights the self-absorption and passivity of the 1970s and points towards the growing propensity towards

narcissism, selfishness and personal awareness which characterised this period. Lasch's book, *The Culture of Narcissism*, follows on from Wolfe's idea that the rise of narcissism was a result of the post-World War Two economic boom, and argues that an increasingly prosperous and consumer-orientated society resulted in a the development of a new narcissistic personality type. This personality type, which began to emerge in the late 1960s, he suggests, is focused on individual freedom and personal satisfaction. Constantly in search of instant gratifications through consumerism, Lasch advances that the new narcissist is anxious, insecure, empty and depressed, and as such, lives in a "state of perpetually unsatisfied desire" (1980:xvi). Based on the ideas of Marcuse, Wolfe and Lasch, this chapter elaborated on the progression of the impact of the media saturated capitalist system on the isolation and alienation experienced by contemporary individuals, and the subsequent narcissism that it has engendered.

Next, chapter four provided a detailed account of the various anatomies of narcissism evident from the 1970s though to the new millennium. This chapter illustrated the evolution of narcissism since the era focussed upon by Wolfe and Lasch, and highlighted the continuation of a culture of narcissism into the 21st century. Firstly, the psychological and spiritual anatomy of the 1970s – that is, the focus during this time on private spirituality, self-esteem, individual self-expression and self-promotion – along with the political and economic anatomy of the 1980s, namely the rapid increase in the growth of a more materialistic form of narcissism synonymous with the rise of neoliberal capitalism, were examined. Hereafter the generational anatomy of the 1990s, specifically the excessive preoccupation of the self characteristic of what Jean Twenge refers to as 'Generation Me,' along with the cultural anatomy of the 2000s, namely the narcissistic predisposition of societies around the world in the new millennium, were discussed. By focusing on the characteristics of new millennium narcissism, namely, identity and security, identity and the mass media, and identity and new media consumerist fantasy, this chapter explored the media's growing role in the promotion and spread of narcissism, along with the impact that new media technologies – in particular social media – have had on the engenderment of such narcissistic inclinations.

Finally, chapter five provided an analysis of the various structural components of the popular social networking site Facebook. Based on the characteristics of new millennium narcissism identified in chapter four, namely identity and security, identity and the mass media, and identity and new media consumerist fantasy, this chapter examined Facebook's promotion of commodity narcissism as a means to escape the isolation and anxieties experienced in capitalist society. In effect, it was advanced that this promotion of narcissism

through capitalist consumerism, not only acts to temporarily fulfil the 'false' needs created by Facebook (as part of the culture industry), but also acts to exacerbate the feelings of alienation that it was previously thought to relieve. Indeed, by promoting a narcissistic identification with mass mediated images of identity, celebrity status and consumerist fantasy – which are constantly changing and evolving – Facebook sets its users up for failure, by encouraging them to strive virtually for something that they can never actually have or achieve. As such, the users' inability to satisfy the desire for the stability that they so desperately seek, results in a renewed pursuit of narcissism in the hope of achieving such security, in an ever more vicious and self-defeating circle.

6.2 Recommendations

Yet it is not sufficient to leave things here, because despite the gargantuan proportions of the problem, some tentative solutions have been offered over the last half a century. Admittedly, these solutions each have their weaknesses. However, a careful consideration of them, with a view to developing upon their conceptual bases a solution that addresses the nuances of the problems that plague the contemporary era, remains one of the most important intellectual tasks to undertake. As such, in what follows, the solutions proffered by Adorno, Marcuse and Lasch will be reviewed, before a new remedial strategy for the future will be proposed.

In his book *Negative Dialectics* (1966), Adorno offers a possible solution to the narcissistic reliance on the culture industry as a means of addressing feelings of isolation and alienation. He suggests that a reconciliation with nature – through the practice of 'negative dialectics' – is the only way in which people can become liberated from the alienation and isolation endemic to the capitalist order. He argues that the tendency of individuals to apply a method of 'positive dialectics' results in their acceptance of the totality of the ideas imposed by the capitalist system and the culture industry, and the loss of their ability to think critically. Through this, he suggests, individuals become isolated and alienated from those around them, from nature, and, most importantly, from the inner nature of the self. In order to prevent this isolation, Adorno suggests adopting a practice of negative dialectics – the interminable practice of questioning and never assuming, of searching constantly for contradictions, and of looking for an affinity with human nature. To this end, Adorno suggests that society should resist the urge to dominate nature by constantly questioning the positive dialectics of capitalism, consumerism and the culture industry. As such, he suggests that increasing identification with nature will allow for the diffusion of the urge to dominate and manipulate nature, since through such a process of identification, self-interest becomes

indistinguishable from the interests of nature. This reconciliation with nature, he argues, will, on the one hand, lead to a breaking of the illusions of totality and perfection promised by the positive dialectics of the culture industry, and on the other hand, will allow for a movement away from the concomitant narcissistic condition of the isolated self. This form of negative dialectics, Adorno suggests, is the most effective means of escaping the alienation of capitalism and the domination of narcissism and, as such, the most effective way of gaining security.

Similar to Adorno's idea of negative dialectics, is Marcuse's idea of 'negative thinking,' in terms of which he argues that in order to escape the domination of capitalist alienation, society needs to adopt a type of critical and oppositional thinking and behaviour. Negative thinking refers to the ability to envision entirely different ways of living and entirely alternative modes of discourse; that is, as Kellner notes, "negative thinking negates existing forms of thought and reality from the perspective of higher possibilities" (1991: xv). Marcuse maintains that due to 'one-dimensional man's' preoccupation with the fulfilment of the false needs created and provided for by the technology of advanced capitalistic societies, his ability to participate in the critical act of 'negative thinking' is progressively being eradicated. As such, Marcuse asserts that unless society begins to practice negative thinking, security will never be achieved.

In turn, in relation to the culture of narcissism, that became so pervasive during the 1970s, Lasch "proposed a return to basics: self-reliance, the family, nature, the community, and the Protestant work ethic" as a means to escape the alienation and despair associated with late/advanced capitalist societies (cited in Vaknin 1995:9). This 'return to basics,' to a certain extent, coincides with Adorno's suggestion for a reconciliation with nature via negative dialectics, and comprises a manifestation of Marcuse's negative thinking – insofar as it involves an escape from the manipulation of the capitalist system through the imagination of an alternative situation.

All three of these solutions point towards a movement away from instrumental reason towards a more critical way of thinking and acting. That is, towards a rejection of the manipulation and control of the capitalist system through the practice of alternative thought, constant questioning, a (re-)connection with human nature, and a recognition of humankind's relationship with nature.

However, although pertinent to the politico-economic and socio-cultural dynamics of the eras in which they were articulated, these solutions do not, as they stand, comprise ready-made remedial measures for the technologically advanced 21st century. That is, because the

internet and social media have become such integral parts of everyday life, contemporary society arguably requires a contemporary version of these solutions; in other words, one which re-articulates them in a way that takes into account such technological developments and their effects on subjectivity and social interaction. Indeed, due to the current impact of social media and similar new media technologies on the lives and identities of individuals in contemporary society, it is for the most part unreasonable, if not impossible, to suggest that the use of this media be drastically reduced or rejected out-of-hand. However, recent research on the possible relationships between environmental involvement, democratic practice and the internet, indicates that social media may yet be co-opted for the betterment, rather than to the detriment, of society. Thus, in keeping with the argumentative trajectories of Adorno, Marcuse and Lasch, and with a view to developing on their ideas of reconciliation with nature, criticality, and a return to basics, a possible solution to contemporary isolation, alienation and insecurity may be found in such an alternative use of social media.

In short, instead of using social networking and social media as a means to bolster the needs and desires of the grandiose narcissistic self, this technology could be used as a means to achieve something akin to Adorno's 'negative dialectics,' Marcuse's 'negative thinking' and Lasch's return to 'community' and 'basics.' In this regard, Schlosberg et al. explore the use of social media and social networks in their article, 'Virtual Environmental Citizenship: Web-Based Public Participation in Rulemaking in the United States' (2006). Here they investigate the "move to online participation in environmental rulemaking with a particular emphasis on discursive democracy and citizenship" (Schlosberg et al. 2006:208). That is, by exploring the discursive benefits and dangers of virtual participation in the online rulemaking process, they consider "current uses of the Internet as a public participation mechanism…[for] expanding democratic practices" (2006:215).

Since the internet entered the public domain in the early 1990s, various opinions relating to the potential of this media to transform democracy and citizenship have emerged. On the one hand, some scholars argue that web based participation could be the answer to recent declines in interest in democratic citizenship. Indeed, it has been argued that the "emergence of computerised ICTs have prompted less hierarchical discourses, characterised by the prospect of more intense democratic participation, visible-ness, public-ness and open-ness" (cited in Malina 1999:23). In his book *The Virtual Community* (1993), Howard Rheingold promotes such a vision of the potentiality of digital democracy, and asserts that new media technologies, "if properly understood and defended by enough citizens, …[have] democratising potential in the way that alphabets and printing presses had democratising

potential" (1993:279). Similarly, Papacharissi suggests that online digital media, like the internet, could bring about a resurrection of contemporary citizenship" (2010:104).

On the other hand, however, a variety of academics have highlighted the possible dangers that accompany such online participation. While some claim that the internet is just as prone to elite domination and manipulation as other forms of traditional media (cited in Schlosberg et al. 2006:210), others argue that internet forms of participation act to widen the divide between the information and resource rich and the poor (Malina 1999:24). According to Schlosberg et al., "many [thinkers] are critical of the one-way nature of much existing Web communication, saying it deprives the public of the interactive potential of the Internet as well as the possibility of introducing more two-way, discursive deliberation into decision making" (2006:210). Moreover, some academics believe that the internet could lead to a disjointed, isolated and uncritical public, instead of an empowered citizenship (Alexander and Pal 1998; Schlosberg and Dryzek 2002; Sunstein 2001).

Schlosberg et al, however, approach things differently, insofar as they both concur with the above pessimists, and look forward to realizing the vision of the above optimists. In effect, although they examine the use of the internet and web-based participation within the context of virtual environmental citizenship, their findings are particularly pertinent within the context of virtual democracy and virtual citizenship in general.

On the one hand they concur with the above pessimists, insofar as, through their argument, it becomes increasingly evident that current uses of social media, such as Facebook, are dominated by positive dialectics and, as such, are conducive towards the engenderment of self-interest, isolation, and aggregative rather than discursive democracy. That is, at present, these types of media tend to encourage unreflective, selfish comment and participation, and unjustified preferences which are simply aggregated, such as in polling or voting (Schlosberg at al. 2006:217 and Gutmann and Thompson 2004:13). This form of aggregative democracy is unlike discursive or deliberative conceptions of democracy, which, in contrast, reflectively consider "the reasons that citizens…give for their expressed preferences." And therefore it has been argued that the practices of aggregative democracy "cannot serve as a principled basis for democratic decision making" (Gutmann and Thompson 2004:13).

According to Schlosberg et al., these current types of aggregative interactions and communications "do nothing to appeal to the shared public good…[and] actually encourage self-interested comment" (2006:224). As already discussed in relation to Facebook, this focus on the self, can result in the rejection of (human) nature and the development of deep feelings

of isolation, insecurity and alienation within capitalist society. Schlosberg et al. affirm this impact of the current use of Facebook when they suggest that "virtual…citizenship may be isolating rather than community-building citizenship" (2006:209). In this regard, they refer to Sunstein's (2001) thesis that, without some major guidance, "the Internet's use with regard to…the public realm will be isolating, and will not build any sort of public sphere or community life" (2006:229). That is, the extreme individualism that is evident within the current virtual realm means that the internet and social networking may encourage a withdrawal from, and the fragmentation of, communities, thereby perpetuating the "loss of democratic authenticity" (Schlosberg et al 2006:229).

This can further be seen in the prevalence of aggregative democracy in both online environmental groups and the variety of social, environmental, political and cultural groups found on Facebook. Indeed, Schlosberg et al. assert that "in the Action sections of many major environmental organisation Web-sites, action simply entails pushing a button to add one's name to an electronic petition or send an email to a member of Congress" (2006:228). In relation to this, they suggest that "while e-tactics of this sort demonstrate resistance to the process and might generate media coverage to expand the public debate, this type of electronic action may also simply be isolated, one-way and unthinking" (2006:228). Similarly, many of the groups on Facebook that are created to bring attention to certain issues, simply require members to select the 'join' link and add their name to the group's membership numbers. This means that besides fleeting moments of attention given to the various causes of problematic issues – via a click of the mouse – no further participation or action is expected or encouraged by the members of the group. As such, joining these groups as a means of online participation can simply be seen as a form of uncritical involvement in 'pseudo-citizenship' and, as such, a form of aggregative democracy.

However, on the other hand, Schlosberg et al. also look forward to realizing the vision of the above optimists. That is, they argue that media such as the internet should rather be used as a community platform which encourages discussion, reasoning, participation and engagement with local social, political and environmental issues. In effect, this type of media use would allow participants to "make proposals, attempt to persuade others, listen to the responses of those others and determine the best outcomes and policies based on the arguments and reasons fleshed out in public discourse" (Schlosberg et al. 2006:216). This form of discursive or deliberative participation in public discourse would thereby offer the opportunity for a movement away from involvement based on self-interest, towards participation based on discussions for the common good. Local environmental concerns are

particularly valuable in this regard, because unlike a problem such as global warming – which does not encourage involvement and social cohesion because of its enormity and generality – local environmental issues impact on the lives of community members in palpable ways, and can be directly addressed through group action (Schlosberg et al. 2006: 218, 225). As such, by using social networking as a means of bringing to light, and acting upon such local issues, users would be able to gain the sense of community and unity so greatly desired within contemporary capitalist society. In effect, this use of social media could assist people to detach themselves from the selfish individual consumerist needs and desires promoted by the capitalist system, and to focus instead on interests in alignment with the public good. Conceivably, this increase in participation for the public good via community centred online activity, could thereby contribute significantly to the dissolution of feelings of isolation and alienation, which are otherwise so prevalent and powerful in contemporary society. Moreover, if social networking sites such as Facebook were to be used in this way, they could contribute positively to the efficacy of the democratic process, by encouraging participation and the development of community ideals. And such an increased focus on issues related to public rather than personal wellbeing has the potential to instil a sense of criticality in contemporary society, in a way that encourages a progressive move towards Adorno's idea of negative dialectics and a reconciliation with nature, Marcuse's idea of negative thinking and the imagination of alternative ways of being, and Lasch's idea of a return to basics and community.

It is hoped that, at least in some small way, this treatise will engender such transformation of the current use of social media. Arguably, this is of immense importance, because the consequences of such transformation stand to be far-reaching, not only for individuals who are currently experiencing deep alienation, and for democracy which is currently floundering around the globe, but also for the environment – for nature – which is currently subject to increasing degradation, but without which nothing is possible.

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