Spontaneous Ideology, Social Media and Late Capitalism

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Abstract

Since the momentous political events of 2016 and the revelations of the Cambridge Analytica files, digital media giants such as Facebook are facing much public scrutiny, for allowing misinformation, fake news and propaganda to spread on platforms. Critics and policy makers are advocating for the regulation of these platforms, assuming that regulating content such as political advertising on the platforms will resolve permanently, the ongoing problems with social communication under late capitalism. Prior to 2016, the central mainstream discourses surrounding social media were largely positive. Marxist analysis of social media, on the other hand, primarily focussed on critically analysing the political economy of platforms by explaining how they partake in the drives of capitalism. What remains unanswered in these accounts, however, is what kind of subjectivity and concrete cultural practices are privileged on social media platforms to accrue the ideological reproduction of late capitalism. This thesis offers an account of the dialectical interactions between social media, as a dominant cultural phenomenon, and late capitalism, as the dominant mode of production today. It is argued that an Althusserian conception of spontaneous ideology or interpellation offers a nuanced understanding of how ideologies are not just ideas that exist in our heads but are part of a subjectivising process, often informed and mediated by socially signifying practices. To illustrate this, three distinct case studies are put forth, where some of the most popularized image-making trends like selfies, travel images, and Alt Right memes are analysed using a range of semiotic-psychoanalytic concepts. In all of the demands about regulating social media platforms one forgets that it is us after all, the subjects/users of social media, who (mis)recognize ourselves in one or another ideological strategy, whether its electing Donald Trump as president or denying the validity of climate change. A Lacanian account of subjectivity further helps in explaining that ideological interpellation is often a messy, contradictory affair.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

In his speech on November 21st, 2019, comedian and actor Sacha Baron Cohen condemned the various social media platforms, as "the greatest propaganda machine in history" (Cohen, 2019). Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the world wide web has similarly warned of a 'digital dystopia' of "continued spread of disinformation, entrenched inequalities and the abuse of rights" if we fail to make susbtantial changes (Lee, as cited in Sullivan, 2019). Both Cohen and Lee's statements are part of a growing debate since the election of Donald Trump in the U.S. and the Brexit vote in the U.K. (Grignois, 2018), discussing the role played by social media platforms in undermining democracy by allowing all kinds of content on platforms without any regulations. Many policy makers are increasingly critical of social media platforms that are allowing the spread of misinformation and online political polarization. Since the momentous political events of 2016 and the revelations of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, the debate has generally been focussed on some specific issues with social media platforms.

One of them is Facebook's no regulation policy for 'dark ads' on the platform that allows paid political campaigns to target their ads and misinformation to specific demographics, allowing campaigners to customise the spread of misinformation in an attempt to cajole the opinions of individual platform users (Grignois, 2018). Another issue that is being highlighted is the use of bots or automated user accounts on platforms like Twitter, which are being used to boost and garner support for certain ideological viewpoints and altering perceptions of political discourse (Wojcik, Messing, Smith, & Rainie, 2018). For instance, Twitter identified an operation on the platform involving hundreds of accounts linked to the Chinese government aiming to sow political discord around the Hong Kong protests (Ha, 2019). While Facebook usually gets all the flak for its inconsistencies on political advertising, Google also allows political advertising by tracking the user's browsing habits, such as what news websites they frequently use, making assumptions about whether the users are left, centre or right leaning and accordingly targeting users with matching adverts. In the US for instance, since May 2018, campaigns have spent $128m on Google ads and the largest amount of $8m has been spent by the "Trump Make America Great Again Committee" (Lee, 2019).

Amidst such mounting criticism, Twitter's CEO has in October, 2019, announced that the platform will ban political ads (Rajan, 2019), in an attempt to one-up Mark Zuckerberg's outright refusal to ban or even restrict any form of speech on Facebook. Let's deconstruct what has transpired here. While Twitter's decision has been lauded by progressive lawmakers, it works as a great PR strategy for the platform, against their rival, Facebook. Firstly, digital platforms do not struggle to categorise ads that are paid by political candidates and their direct campaigns, but rather with defining what should or should not be categorised as political speech, for instance, issues such as climate change, immigration, abortion rights and so on. Certainly, Twitter is not

going to ban Donald Trump himself for his own tweeting-on-the-toilet-seat political campaign that gets much more attention than anything else. In effect, regulations imposed by platforms themselves, gives them the authority and discretion to *define* what counts as political speech online, whereby they can arbitrarily decide and ban issues that do or do not suit their own interests. Secondly, with a remarkably lower number of users on the platform, political ads on Twitter are much smaller in scale and their impact as compared to those on Facebook or Google. As their chief financial officer has confirmed, Twitter's ban will have very little impact on the company's revenues (Rajan, 2019). And finally, policy makers are not even thinking about those ad campaigns run by non-political party organizations who are targeting users, such as the anti-Labour Fair Tax Campaign in the U.K. which runs ads critiquing Labour's tax plans on social media (Cellan-Jones, 2019).

The critics of social media platforms are advocating for the regulation of these platforms assuming that regulating content or policies around advertising on platforms would resolve, permanently, the immanent problems with social communication under late capitalism, where the various media technologies have been appropriated by this dominant ideology. The entirety of the digital communication ecosystem has already been taken over by five big tech companies, Alphabet/Google, Facebook, Amazon, Apple and Microsoft, who not only have monopolised the market but are now oligarchs controlling the digital world. Such an accumulation of not just wealth, but assets and more importantly, public data was made possible under the same system that bankrolled the 2008 financial crisis. These companies run on a business model that turns manipulation of public discourse into a profitable venture, and Murdoch has been able to build his entire media empire on this same model for at least the last five decades. It is no coincidence then, that Mark Zuckerberg, in refusing to restrict any form of political speech on Facebook, is attesting to a *laissez-faire* ideology that allows complete "freedom of expression and speech" without any government intervention (Constine, 2019). More importantly, how are we surprised that Facebook, a company that is expected to earn a revenue of $300 million to $400 million from political ads in 2020 (Constine, 2019), will even attempt to lose so much revenue for public good?

There is a similar rhetoric used by economists and political campaigns today to suggest that we need to "fix capitalism" by regulating it. Popular Democrat contender in the 2020 U.S. elections, Elizabeth Warren, is running her political campaign on the same notion, while economists are also increasingly publishing similar ideas in the mainstream news media about how we can fix the flaws of today's capitalism (Hubbard, 2019; Open Future Project, 2018). The idea of regulating capitalism in its current state disavows the very fact that the system is, in less than polite words, fucked, as suggested by the recent global inequality reports (Piketty, 2014). In both instances, of fixing bit tech and late capitalism, the argument runs short on why a problem exists in the first place that now needs to be 'fixed', or the fact that both monsters have the same origin.

With the invasive nature of social media and digital technologies, the way they have seeped into our everyday existence, the real subsumption of communication into the logic of the market is now complete (End Notes 2, 2010). Fredric Jameson (2012) was right to point out that one cannot separate ideology from reality as two different realms, but understand that, "the ideology of the market is unfortunately not some supplementary ideational or representational luxury or embellishment that can be removed from the economic problem and then sent over to some cultural superstructural morgue, to be dissected by specialists over there" (p.278). Social media companies are after all run on the same logic of the 'free market' and adhere to the same ideological project of late capitalism.

Jameson (1991) takes the notion of late capitalism from the economist Ernest Mandel, which represents a new turn in economic growth as an advanced phase in the development of capitalism since World War II. As Marx puts it, "All epochs of production have certain common traits, common characteristics" (Marx, 1973, p. 85). Culturally, however, Jameson (1991) argues that both the superstructure and infrastructure of late capitalism coagulated into a 'structure of feeling' only after the oil crisis of 1973, with the end of the international gold standard creating new kinds of cultural phenomena that correspond to the global financialization of the economy.

This conception of the latest stage of capitalism allows us to examine and historically place our current position in the economic alternations on a global scale with the growth of multinational corporations as qualitatively different from the earlier stages of capitalist expansion. A key instrument in facilitating these changes has been the growth of the World Wide Web. new media, information technologies, developments in transport and communication technologies have supported the process of financialization of economy, providing fast-paced transactions, facilitating global production, supply chains and a general acceleration in exchange and consumption (Harvey, 1992). Jameson (1991) in taking up Mandel's conception of late capitalism, argues that the interrelationship between culture and the economic need to be seen as a "continuous reciprocal interaction and a feedback loop" (p. xiv). And that is precisely the task taken up in this thesis in placing social media as the new forms of communication technology in an account of late capitalism, whereby such a feedback loop between the cultural, social, political and the economic is made possible.

This thesis examines how late capitalism as a system of social and economic ordering of society and an ideological structure, despite its many failures, continues to go on today. Nowhere are the paradoxes of extreme wealth and inexplicable poverty, made possible by this very economic system, more visible than in a city like Mumbai, where I grew up. The golden sheen of the Trump Tower that seems to infinitely rip through the skies, exists alongside the ever expanding Dharavi, one of the largest slums in Asia. Children sleep on the footpath, are often trafficked for begging, and can be seen chasing the most expensive of cars that the wealthy

buy only to stroke their fragile but megalomaniac egos. Despite such naked, explicit contradictions, the entirety of the neoliberal mythology of the 'trickling down of wealth', 'hard work' and everything that comes along with the neoliberal stage of capitalism, seems to be alive and well in urban India. The images of a 'shining India' reflect the sheen of tall glass buildings, the ubiquity of technology and technological innovations, and the frenzy of consumerism (Patnaik & Patnaik, 2019). Nowhere do these images transparently signify the growing urban poor, the stories of the countless who have lost their lands[1] to mining corporations or big 'development' projects that only advantage the local bourgeois, transnational capital and political classes, or the stories of those who have been forced to migrate to cities and condemned to a life of poverty (Adduci, 2012). Even where inequalities of material conditions are so explicitly *visible*, people in the city have somehow conditioned their field of vision - to look the other way, to pretend that the real 'success' in the last four decades of neoliberal policies can be *seen* in the glamourous malls, the I-phones and the Starbucks cafes, while everything else can be *unseen*. With the slowing of economic growth in recent years however, capital finds new ways of legitimizing its own existence by placing the blame for its failures onto the Other (Patnaik & Patnaik, 2019). In India, the targets of this process of Othering are often the Muslim minorities, Dalits, the indigenous tribes, the lower economic strata of society and other marginalised groups.

This same process can be seen manifested not just in the emerging economies like Brazil and India but also in the advanced capitalist nations. For people in the emerging economies, it creates an illusory conviction that the economic model of the advanced capitalist societies, if replicated, would create lives of comfort and affluence. At least on the surface, lives in advanced capitalist countries like Aotearoa New Zealand, seem to match those illusions, of lives of comfort, with clean, breathable air, access to space, water and everything that people from the other side of the world would want from living in the 'land of milk and honey'. Just as Rosalind Krauss describes, "the sea and the sky are a way of packaging "the world" as a totalized image, as a picture of completeness, as a field constituted by the logic of its own frame. But its frame is a frame of exclusions and its field is the work of ideological construction" (Krauss, 1996, p. 12). For Aotearoa New Zealand, such a totalized image is constituted in the pristine landscapes, the idyllic villages, or the lavish mountains of Frodo and Sam's journey to Mordor. And yet the same contradictions of tremendous inequalities of income and wealth exist here- one of the highest in OECD countries (Boston & Rashbrooke, 2015), except that they can be kept hidden or *made invisible* with rhetorical and material processes such as that of gentrification. Central Auckland suburbs such as Ponsonby, which once were home to the working classes, specifically for the

[1] What Harvey has called as accumulation by dispossession where "rentier extractions based on accumulation by dispossession, for example, by acquiring land or mineral resources illegally or at cut rates, have become more common because the rising mass of global capital is finding increasing difficulty in procuring productive users for surplus capital" (Harvey, 2019, p.246).

Pasifika migrant workers, are turned into swanky neighbourhoods with posh cafes and unaffordable eateries catered for the middle class (Friesen, 2009). The problem of escalating inequalities in New Zealand is often only known when one reads the statistics on it, whether it is about the growing reliance of working people on food banks to feed their families (Harris, 2017), or the 22.8 percent of children living in poverty (Cook & Hutton, 2019).

The triumph of neoliberal, late capitalist ideology can perhaps then be picked apart in discourses that offer a phantasmatic promise of 'achievable' goals- that wealth, prosperity, affluence is "for everyone" (Harvey, 2019). Wherever it goes, the neoliberal chimera successfully establishes a chain of signifiers between these very promises and the mythical idea of the free market. The global economic reports show us that these promises are a farce (of course not in those words), that the promises of the free market and the neoliberal project have failed everywhere, including in the advanced capitalist nations, to the extent that even the IMF has started questioning this wealth redistribution to the top 1% in the past decade alone (Dabla-Norris, Kochhar, Suphaphiphat, Ricka, & Tsounta, 2015). However, late capitalism is so naturalised as an economic system that we are even willing to give new and localized versions of fascisms a go at running our nations and demonizing anyone different to ourselves, rather than acknowledge the recurring failures of capitalism itself (Monibot, 2016). Capitalism, after all, is a variable system which adopts and morphs into localized versions so that its ideological edifice morphs itself, wherever it is implemented, by recruiting and forming ideological alliances with local power groups (based on class, race, ethnicity and so on), whereby already existing cultural, social and economic inequalities get reproduced in differing social formations.

In both of these cases discussed above, the role played by appearances, perception and imagery is emphasized in explaining the reproduction of the dominant ideology of late capitalism. Seeing something is not only a physiological operation but the way we see things is rooted in a social fact (Foster H. , 1988), in the cultural, historical, social and political context in which we are situated. We increasingly communicate through images in the age of smartphones and apps. Images here are perceived as a form of language with its own system of signification that represents reality for us, not as a transparent window of the world. How do images and our visuality then interpellate us into the ideological schema of late capitalist social order? Analysing the larger patterns of image sharing on social media, both in their content and form, allows us to locate the various manifestations of the dominant ideology in culture under contemporary capitalism.

This thesis then aims to offer a more nuanced understanding of visual culture under late capitalism as a global dominant economic system. The following section briefly delineates the current debates in understanding social media and how this thesis outlines a contrary examination of social media.

Social Media Studies: The Key Debates

In the last decade, we have seen an explosion of new media technologies that have remarkably altered not just the ways in which we communicate but have influenced global cultures at large. Globalization, along with the dominance of capitalism has greatly depended on the digital infrastructures where our connection to the digitized world is deemed paramount. The explosion of social media, their ubiquity and everyday use, can be seen as symptomatic of the entrenchment of late capitalism, reflecting its subsumption of all previously untouched domains of our everyday lives. Whether it is in the fetishization of new information technologies (Harvey, 2003) and what has been made possible due to technological innovations, whether we think of new electric cars, the new space race for finding ways to start mining for resources in space, the developments into AI and the algorithmic way of life through the internet-of-things, late capitalism has successfully established a chain of signifiers between human progress, technological innovation and the free market.

In studying digital media technologies and social media platforms, one of the dominant discourses have been those highlighting the new possibilities offered by these platforms to consumers/users allowing them to actively produce and share their own content (Jenkins, Li, Krauskopf, & Green, 2009). Mostly evolving in the nascent phase of the explosion of social media platforms, these discourses tended to overemphasize the capacities offered by emerging technologies for their promise of democratising a range of activities for users. Music-making, image-making, creating your own films, documentaries and all kinds of creative practices can now be done by anyone who has a smartphone and a computer. The affordability of new technologies offered a utopian vision for the future where everyone could be an artist. Not discounting the fact that technologies such as smartphones have in fact altered the way we communicate with each other, these celebratory discourses often fail to place technological innovations in the context of the existing, and dominant political-economic structures. For instance, these studies often fail to acknowledge how following the 2008 financial crisis, austerity was imposed on many of the advanced capitalist nations by creating a mythical narrative of its necessity to boost competition and innovation (Medeiros, 2019), and that many of the Silicon Valley giants, were able to take complete advantage of such discourses around tech innovators and entrepreneurs. Mazzucato (as cited in Medeiros, 2019), an influential economist, explains how free market ideology and associating big tech firms as the free market innovators, played a big part in the legitimation of cut backs on social services in the U.K. For instance, David Cameron, the Prime Minister of the U.K. in 2011, gave a speech hyping up entrepreneurs and deriding everyone else, arguing that Europe does not have its own Google and Facebooks since Europe doesn't subscribe to the Silicon Valley's free market approach. In her own research on *The Entrepreneurial State: Debunking Public vs. Private Sector Myths,* Mazzucato (2013) exposes this elaborate myth of an innovative private tech sector that grew out of a supposedly 'free market' economy without state

investment, revealing how I-Phones would not have been 'smart' without government funded research on the internet, touch screen displays, GPS and the voice activated command Siri.

There are also a range of studies which have used a Marxist theoretical framework to analyse digital technologies and new media. These studies have been significantly insightful in providing an understanding of the political economy of the digital and new media technologies (Dyer-Witheford, 2014; Fuchs, 2009), offering accounts of the new forms of paid and unpaid labour performed on social media in content production (Fuchs, 2016; Terranova, 2000), and in drawing attention to the ideological reproduction of consumerist drives on social media platforms (Pleios, 2016). Dean (2005), on the other hand, has offered an account of subjectivity and new media in what she calls communicative capitalism, whereby the market gets heralded as the site of democratic aspirations, and where "values heralded as central to democracy take material form in networked communications technologies and the ideals of access, inclusion, discussion and participation come to be realized in and through expansions, intensifications and interconnections of global telecommunications" (Dean, 2005, p. 55). What remains unanswered in these accounts, however, is what kind of subjectivity or concrete cultural practices are privileged on social media platforms to accrue an intensification of commodity culture and how do we as subjects come to recognize ourselves in the ideological representations that are produced outside of the social relations of production (Hall, 1985). It is us, after all, responsible for democratically electing authoritarian leaders, whether it's Trump, Bolsanaro, Modi or the Tories, who are campaigning on nationalist, xenophobic rhetoric, and are able to displace our economic anxieties on to the Other. The key contribution that this thesis aims to provide then, is an account of social media that illuminates how subjects today are ideologically interpellated into the systemic folds of late capitalism.

The Subject of Late Capitalism and Social Media

Revisiting Louis Althusser's conceptualisation of ideology allows us to examine ideology, not just in its 'material' form but also in its 'spontaneous' form. For Althusser (1973), the material form of ideology is rooted in the social institutions such as the education system, the cultural and communication systems that help produce ideology through social practices, rituals and discourses. While spontaneous ideology is where subjects identify themselves with or are inscribed by ideologies through their everyday practices, rituals or beliefs. Althusser (1973) further illustrates how in order for ideological discourses to gain legitimation, subjects need to identify with such discourses, and explicates how individual subjects make themselves ideological through the process of 'interpellation'. This spontaneous form of ideology emerges from the extra-institutional, everyday activities of individuals (Zizek, 2012, p. 18). In this process of 'hailing' or being called out by an ideology, it is the subject who recognizes himself/herself within the ideology and responds with a 'Yes, it's me!'; it is the 'I of the ideological statements' where subjects position themselves in relation to

ideology (Hall, 1985, p. 102). The notion of interpellation offers an account of subjectivity and subjectivisation, where ideology is not reduced to a simple layer of illusion that can be removed from the 'objective', economic and political reality (Morley, 2005). As emphasized by Althusser (1973) and later by Stuart Hall (1985), what subjects think or think they are doing is still articulated in the form of language, in the everyday signifying practices of using images, symbols, actions, signs, rituals and practices, which helps us get out of a reductive understanding of ideology as simply existing in our heads.

It is this 'spontaneous' form of ideology where any mode of production has historically come across its most dire internal contradictions, whereby the dominant ideas about the way the economic and political structures function or ought to function become inconsistent with the everyday realities of subjects. This only gets further intensified by the existing social antagonisms within a society. Althusser (1969, p. 10) identified and reaffirmed Marx's idea that there are various contradictions at work in any social formation at any given time, with their own specific historical modalities through which they operate such as it's past, the specific cultural traditions in a society, the internalization of certain values and so on.

Such contradictions of late capitalism can be seen erupting everywhere in the discrepancies between the ideological promises of neoliberalism and the material reality for subjects. A lack of understanding of the insidious nature of ideological interpellation, however, often results in assumptions that the failure of capital to deliver on its promises would inevitably result in a progressive political movement towards socialism, which fails to account for the existing and historical regressive tendencies in each social formation, and the often unconscious nature of ideological hailing. The concept of ideology helps us answer questions such as why is it that subjects chose to live in a system that is essentially working against them? Ideological hailing is a messy affair, full of internal contradictions and these contradictions must be acknowledged here (Szeman, 2017). Ideologies are not only socially reproduced through the Ideological State Apparatuses and their various epistemic or discursive mechanisms but also through the various desires and unconscious mechanisms by the subjects themselves.

This is where a Lacanian account of the subject of ideology proves to be extremely useful. While Althusser's work offered conceptual clarity on the notion of ideology and its contradictory nature, Jameson (2009) and Hall (1985) have both pointed out some of the shortcomings with it, which are necessary to acknowledge. These debates are further explained in Chapter 3 of this thesis. In Althusser's account, it is almost as if ideology always performs the function that is required of it, to reproduce the dominant capitalist ideology, and goes on performing this function without facing any countervailing tendencies (Hall, 1985, p. 99). The Lacanian Real, and the role of the unconscious mechanisms that play a part in ideological interpellation is largely ignored in Althusserian conception. Eagleton (2012, p.216) argues that Althusser's subject corresponds with the Lacanian

consciousness or ego, while the Lacanian subject, is not simply the ego but is a "split, lacking, desiring effect of the unconscious". And this emphasis on the unconscious nature of ideological interpellation using a Lacanian conception in addition to an Althusserian account of ideology, helps us further understand how subjects can often operate in accordance with passions and desires rather than with the economic rationality of their material realities.

As consumerist drives engulf the globe today, we can further start to unpack how capitalist ideology pervades our inner-most desires and shapes our very subjectivity. Both Slavoj Zizek (1991; 2012) and Todd McGowan (2016) have provided an understanding of how under late capitalism, there is a constant injunction to maximising one's enjoyment. Advertising discourses, films, popular culture, or the values that we cherish are all tied in with this notion of maximising our enjoyment. In an economy so reliant on consumption and entertainment, enjoyment is that ideological demand that sustains the economy. Whether it's in the form of advertising or the dystopian films of a post-apocalyptic world, or our own image-making practices on social media, images offer us a fantasy, sheltering us from the traumatic Real (in a Lacanian sense) of looming environmental or political destruction. Images operate at the level of ideology, in creating a space for the possibility of enjoyment through all kinds of consumption, while the reality of class relations are obscured. Examining social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram and the images shared on them, in conjunction with the larger political and economic structures, and the ways in which institutions and subjects assist in the reproduction of the dominant ideology of late capitalism in both, its material and spontaneous forms, gives a fuller account of culture and social life under contemporary capitalism.

To unpack this feedback loop between the material and the superstructural today and to understand how dominant culture involves a legitimization of the existing relations of production, as well as its contestation, this thesis chose to examine the large-scale image-sharing patterns that users share on social media. These patterns have been detected by identifying the most popularized or 'viral' hashtags on social media platforms such as #travel, #selfies or looking at trending political forms of imagery such as memes. The reason for analysing images for this purpose are multiple. First, as mentioned previously, images are not only a depiction of the physiological act of seeing, but are often constructed through socially, culturally informed visuality- how we see things, how we are able to see, or how we are made to see things (Foster H. , 1988). Images are thus, not a simple, neutral reflection of the world as it is (Rose, 2016). Second, by examining images, we can explicate how certain visual and textual discourses are normalized and become dominant (Bill, 1981). And third, images and the images-making practices are construed here as everyday symbolic practices which help us understand and unearth the interactions between the rhetorical mechanisms used to justify late capitalism and the ways in which subjects make sense of such rhetoric. For this purpose, in combining the two methodological approaches of semiotics and psychoanalysis, an attempt is made in this thesis to carve out a

way in which we can analyse visual culture on social media, not only as a superstructural element that is devoid of any economic or political ramifications but to reiterate its interconnections with late capitalism as the dominant mode of production.

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2 lays down a more contemporaneous Marxist conceptualisation of the mode of production. It maps out the totality of the social structure that reflects our current dominant mode of production today- late capitalism. Beginning with encapsulating the key changes that have taken place in the last thirty or forty years, following the global push towards a free market ideology, it discusses the disastrous consequences of the structural adjustment programs across the globe, and the resultant consequences in the changing nature of relations of production. It is further crucial to assess how there has been a global trend in deregulation, financialisaton and the 'informalisation' and 'flexiblisation' of labour, a delegitimization of collective strength of workers, which has had severe impact on workers capacity to fight back against their state of precarity. Simultaneously, it insists that the changes in the relations of production need to also acknowledge the role of the new forces of production such as new media technologies.

In the second part of this chapter, digital and information technologies are placed in the context of changing relations between capital and labour to examine their role in it. It begins with examining some of the discourses in sociological literature that had in the past attempted to conceptualise these changes with terminology such as 'post-industrial' or 'network society'. It is useful to critically examine some of the existing literature on social media that argues that social media platforms have democratized the process of cultural production as opposed to earlier media forms. In reviewing some of the discourses around new media which are often celebratory, it is finally argued that technologies exist and are created within societies, under the influence of dominant social, political and economic regimes. Hence, it is crucial to first establish an account of the dialectical interaction between technologies as forces of production, and the broader social relations that exist within the bounds of the dominant mode of production today. While adopting some key insights from the existing Marxist literature which currently focuses largely on the political economy of social media, it argues for a need to supplement this debate by including an analysis of culture and the ideological reproduction of late capitalism.

Chapter 3 begins by outlining an Althusserian conception of ideology. Using contemporary examples, from the media and the policies of social media companies such as Facebook, it substantiates why it is still relevant to use an Althusserian framework for analyses of visual culture today. Following this, it is argued that the Althusserian notion of interpellation offers a way of explicating how ideologies are not just ideas that exist in our heads but are part of a subjectivizing process. As explained in the beginning of this chapter, in all the criticisms around regulating political advertising on social media, we often forget that it is us, the users of

social media who are interpellated by, or recognize ourselves in certain discursive strategies used on social media. The issue is not simply about paid political adverts but about the fundamental nature of ideological reproduction, and that ideologies are informed and mediated by socially signifying practices.

The second part of the chapter offers an exegesis of the Lacanian subject to further clarify the functioning of ideology. A Lacanian understanding of the subject allows us to explain how we are born into the symbolic world of our parents (Lacan, 1977). It is through the language of our parents that we internalize the various discursive images, such as the various adjectives used by parents to address us. It is through such an internalization that words start to attain a libidinal value for the subject, words such as 'beautiful', 'chubby' and so on (Fink, 1995). A brief account of the mirror-stage as explained by Lacan is put forth to explain how ideology is not necessarily the subject's failure to know reality, but just as in the drama of the Lacanian mirror stage, the subject within ideology feels a sense of coherent, unified self 'mirrored' back in ideological discourse. It is fundamentally, a process of identification, a (mis)recognition, which is why we often feel so personally attacked when someone questions or challenges our ideology, as if they are questioning our very identity. Communication on social media platforms often reflects this form of identification, as platforms such as Facebook often track our 'Likes' and 'Shares' and show us content that already matches our existing ideological leanings. Facebook also gives us the option of 'hiding' content from people in our friend's list who we know are not on a similar ideological spectrum as us. These are just a few illustrations of how we find the social media space to be so polarized.

Chapter 4 puts forth a review of some of the existing methodologies used to study visual culture on social media. To begin with, a critical review of two methods – Digital methods and cultural analytics is outlined. Both of these methods use software tools such as open source software tools to gather large amounts of data and metadata (such as the number of likes, comments, shares and so on) attached to images. These methods are critically evaluated to identify that while they offer interesting insights, they end up ignoring the semantic meaning of images.

As an alternative, a semiotic-psychoanalytic method assists in filling out the gaps in visual culture analysis wherein the focus is largely placed on analysing images as forms of signification practices. Such a method allows us to systematically explore how ideology is reproduced on social media, not just through the platforms, the way that these platforms are designed, or partake in the economic drives of late capitalism, but also by users themselves. A psychoanalytic method and a range of Marxist-Lacanian conceptual tools thus offer a more nuanced understanding of ideology and its representation on social media, facilitating a connection between social relations and how subjectivity is constituted. A semiotic reading of visual culture further gives a parallel account of the way subjects/users reproduce the dominant codes in the form of images. The next three chapters

offer distinct case studies; where some of the most popularised image-making practices on social media are analysed using a range of semiotic-psychoanalytic concepts. They each correspond to the three ways in which subjects are interpellated into the ideology of late capitalism.

In Chapter 5, as one of the most 'liked' image-making trends on social media, 'selfies', are analysed in the context of an examination of neoliberal subjectivity today. The chapter begins by providing an overview of the ways in which existing academic literature discusses selfies. In these debates, selfies are categorized as the photographic vernacular of our times, as the new art form for the masses, where ordinary people pose in the most flattering way possible as a performance of the self as they hope to be seen by others (Mirzoeff, 2016). In these discourses, selfies are generally seen as democratizing the form of self-portraiture that was earlier only accessible to an elite few. As opposed to such discourses on selfies, it is argued that they need to first be understood in the context of what kind of image-making practices are encouraged and afforded on social media platforms. Platforms are designed to keep users engaged at all times, and their architecture is designed to steer our activities in a certain direction. By examining the design of platforms, we come to recognize the importance of the 'like' and 'share' buttons and how they have influenced the attention economy on social media, where the entire ecosystem is built on attracting eyeballs in an information saturated environment. In this context, it is also useful to focus not just on the *form* but also the *content* of selfies by categorizing different types of selfies to examine their differing semantic meanings. Further, three types of selfies are analysed placing them in the context of a predominantly neoliberal culture where the glamorisation of the gig economy, flexibilization of work, making oneself accountable for their own wellbeing and the promotion of self-perfection and self-development, leads to a subject who is constantly trying to perfect their self-image. These discourses are seen manifested in the ways in which not just our images are perfected using a myriad of photo-editing apps and effects but selfies often reflect an overwhelming desire to perfect our bodies, resulting into an explosion of body-dysmorphic disorders (Hill & Curran, 2017). It is thus contended that selfies are a manifestation or a symptom of the underlying problems of the reigning neoliberal ideology.

Chapter 6 analyses another common photographing trend on social media- travel photos. Travelling is foremost an act of consumption with a massive global tourism industry that markets, sells and makes travelling possible. To travel is not simply a subjective desire to experience something new or authentic, of course it may be that, but it invariably has several culturally mediated connotations attached to it, such as freedom, enjoyment, adventure and so on. It is a commodity, foremost, which is not financially accessible to everyone. While overtly, everyone is 'free' to travel wherever they please, and there is certainly an abundance of destinations that one can travel to, within a globalized world, travel or at least unrestricted travel, is contingent on one's financial/class status, nationality, sometimes racial, and ethnic positions. The places that we travel to themselves have connotative meanings attached to them, whether I travel to Vietnam or to Italy, something is

implied, with my choice of destination. This chapter begins by first explicating the notion of enjoyment as a reigning ideology under late capitalism as described by Slavoj Zizek and Todd McGowan. Within the current conjuncture of global capitalism where all parts of life have been subsumed by capital, subjects are constantly encouraged to seek enjoyment through consumption (McGowen, 2004). Consumption, however, is also an accumulation of signs of enjoyment where one obeys the social and collective logic of desire (Baudrillard, 1998). We don't just consume objects/commodities, but we also consume what these commodities signify, in their culturally and socially mediated value. Analysing the travel images shared by users on social media, it is explained how users often share their images based on what is perceived as enjoyment within their social media circles. By unpacking the semiotic meanings of image-making patterns related to travel, the fantasy of enjoyment and the injunction by the symbolic order on social media to display one's enjoyment, their ideological edifices are unveiled.

Chapter 7 examines the growing far right online movement known as the Alt Right, to explain the often-contradictory process of ideological interpellation. The chapter begins by enumerating a brief history of the Alt Right, its intellectual cannons, and the various strategies deployed by the movement's ideologues to leverage social media platforms with the goal of mainstreaming white nationalism as a political discourse. By examining an increasingly popular form of image-making social media – memes- this chapter illuminates the role played by memes as a tool for political mobilisation by the far right. A term coined by Richard Dawkins, memes are conceptualized by him as "a cultural unit that is spread from one person to another through copying and imitation" (Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2018, p. 295). Dawkins used the examples of cultural phenomenon like "catchy tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches" (1990, as cited in Onge, 2018, p. 187). More importantly, memes have increasingly become central to political participation and opinion sharing on social media. Different memes used by the Alt Right during the 2016 U.S. election campaign are scrutinized to show how far right discourse was mainstreamed on social media. Despite all the links suggesting that there was more to the election of Donald Trump than the revenge of an 'angry white working class' of voters, the media and political pundits were quick to claim otherwise. The second part of this chapter deconstructs this discourse, to explain how this reductive categorisation of a 'white working class' voter, actually lumps together a number of groups of voters who may have very little class affinity. As a consequence, the slippery slide of the association of 'working class' with being 'white' and being forgotten was an ideological manoeuvre for the campaign to divide the diverse working class in the U.S. along racial and ethnic lines. Ideology, as a legitimization of the power of this or that group of people exists in all societies and there is often an irrational, unconscious, passionate character to it. Both our language and bodies bear the signs of this 'spontaneous' form of ideology which is practiced and enacted by subjects in their everyday lives. But the point is to recognize that what we are seeing today as a resurrection of a fairly organized movement of

white supremacists is a result of the violent histories of the colonial, capitalist project constructed through global political, cultural and most of all economic structures imposed on societies. It is an attempt to reorganize and reproduce the relations of production along racial and ethnic lines, to cope with the *Real* of capitalism's systemic crisis and an imminent ecological collapse.

The concluding chapter of the thesis begins by highlighting how in the year 2019 alone, there have been several cases of state repression and violence in attempts to curb a growing number of protests. All of the protests this year, from Chile, Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan, Hong Kong, India have made use of internet and digital technologies to communicate with other protestors, to report state violence, and to organize massive protests. This thesis largely focuses on the spontaneous form of ideology that helps reproduce the edifice of late capitalism. However, it is important to point out that it is the spontaneous form of ideology where any mode of production has historically encountered its most dire internal contradictions, where the dominant ideas about the way the political, social and economic structures function or ought to function become inconsistent with the everyday lived realities of subjects. The increasing number of protests reflect these very contradictions. While, this thesis focuses on the ways in which we as subjects often reproduce the dominant cultural codes through our everyday social and cultural practices, beliefs, symbols and so on, it does not mean that there are no counter-veiling tendencies to such ideological rhetoric. The protests, in fact, suggest that interpellation does fail to recruit subjects for ideology. To that extent, it is suggested that social media need to be primarily seen as tools of communication, which can be used, by subjects who challenge dominant ideology and by those who inadvertently or knowingly reproduce it. Ideology is a much more contradictory affair and this needs to be kept in mind.

Chapter 2 Late Capitalism

Introduction

In his "Preface" to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx (1859, pp. 159-160) described a mode production in this way:

> In the social production of their lives men enter into relations that are specific, necessary and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a specific stage of development of their material productive forces. The totality of these relations of production forms the economic structure of society, the real basis from which rises a legal and political superstructure, and to which, correspond specific forms of social consciousness.

A Marxist conceptualisation of a mode of production consists of two aspects- the forces of production, which includes labour and technologies; and the relations between capital and labour in an existing economic structure which correspond to the political, social, cultural superstructure of society.

This chapter maps out the totality of the social structure that reflects our current dominant mode of production, late capitalism (Jameson F. , 1991). The economic changes that have ensued in the last three decades of global neoliberal economic reforms, have resulted in massive changes to not just the relations between capital and labour but the entire social structure itself. The chapter begins with an account of the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) since the 1980s that have contributed to enormous inequalities on a global scale. It maps out how the global expansion of capital has resulted in an opening up of all the spheres of human life to market speculation, commodification and financialization, simultaneously creating a global proletariat-precariat class. One cannot discuss late capitalism without also discussing how the information and digital revolution has supported its global viability. The second section dissects the arguments that fetishize the 'newness' of technologies, their elusive promise of progress and the society of the future. Lastly, a literature review is put forth of the prominent works in the field of digital and social media studies that have contributed to illuminating an understanding of digital media and capitalism.

Capitalism Today

This section of the chapter plays the role of a marker on the cartography of this research thesis. It locates the various historical and ongoing particularities that define the current stage of late capitalism. Late capitalism is a concept that Jameson (1991, pg.3) adopts from economist Ernest Mandel, which represents a new turn and further development in the previous monopoly stage of capitalism. In *Late Capitalism*, Mandel (1975) notes the

various traits that accompany the new phase of technological changes and innovations that allow for the global accumulation and concentration of capital in this phase of capitalism. The growth of information technologies, and the ready availability of the new media, have reinforced the commodification of cultural and communicational forms, so as to subsume within it, the previously "untouched domains of social activity" (Dyer-Witheford, 1999, p. 169). For Jameson (1991), it becomes essential to periodize these economic oscillations on a global scale with the growth of multinational and transnational corporations as qualitatively different from the earlier stages of capitalist expansion. In Jameson's view the use of the term "late" suggests a transformation of the life world which is more exhaustive and all-encompassing, suggesting that something has dramatically changed from the old form of industrialisation and modernisation (1991, p. xxi). The major economic shift from production-oriented economies to a structure predominantly dependent on consumption has had its effects on the whole of society, doubly so, with the integration and increasing inter-dependence of economies on a global scale and the establishment of a world capitalist system. A key instrument in facilitating this integration has been the significant developments in communication and transport technologies that have in turn facilitated globalized production, supply chains, acceleration in exchange and consumption (Harvey, 1992).

Much has been written about late capitalism as an economic system since the 2008 financial crisis. It is perhaps ironic that the very ideological framework of neoliberal, deterritorialized, financial capitalism that plunged the world into what is now known as a Great Recession in 2008 (Brooks & Manza, 2013) was subsequently used to legitimize its further entrenchment in the form of austerity politics in most advanced capitalist nations. The European Union's response to the crisis was a further push towards a 'free market' ideology through a relentless shrinking of welfare programs, tax cuts for the rich, further deregulation of the labour markets, in essence serving the interests of capital (Farnsworth & Irving, 2018).

After a decade of implementing austerity policies since the crisis, specifically in the Global North, these policies are now being questioned by major world economic institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank (Ostry, Loungani, & Furceri, 2016)- the same institutions that in the 1980s had pushed nations in the Global South towards Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) to adopt a neoliberal economic agenda. I want to briefly expand on the SAPs to bring attention to not just the 2008 crisis and its impact but to go further back in time and highlight the historical effects of neoliberal economic reforms.

By leveraging their economic debts, the SAPs were forced on many countries of the Global South in the 1980s by the international financial institutions. In the case of the Eastern-bloc countries, it was meant to 'help' them convert to the Western norm of capitalism (Amin, 1997). While countries such as the UK and New Zealand

were volitionally implementing the model of Structural Adjustment (Abouharb & Cingranelli, 2007) which became the hallmark of globalization or what can be also called as the neoliberal revolution.

Harvey (2005) in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism,* succinctly explains neoliberalism as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices" (p. 2). It was a structural shift in the economic, political and social apparatuses of many nations that involved a transfer of power from the state to the market towards market liberalization, deregulation of labour markets, privatization of state assets, a restructuring of welfare policies and largely, an individualisation of social issues (Farnsworth & Irving, 2018; Abouharb & Cingranelli, 2007)[2]. It is however, crucial to point out that neoliberalism doesn't imply a complete transfer of power from the state to the markets but a strategic, simultaneous abuse of the state's institutions to discipline a fragmented, precarious work force entailing punitive measures targeting the poor (Wacquant, 2010).

At the core of the Structural Adjustment reforms was the notion that all barriers to the mobility of capital had to be removed. Historically, the foremost barrier to this 'free' movement of capital has been the worker's collective organization, and the neoliberal reforms have been largely successful in removing this barrier.

In subsequent years since the 1980s, some important critiques of the SAPs were put forth by institutions such as the International People's Tribunal (IPT). In their report, the IPT specifically addressed the kneeling down of the International Financial Institutions to the whims of major G-7 nations, who were ignoring the sufferings endured by more than a billion people living in absolute poverty in the Global South. According to their Tokyo verdict against the G7 in 1993, some of the listed consequences of the SAPs on the countries of the Global South have been: an increase in unemployment, a fall in wages in exchange for work, an increased food dependency, deteriorating of the environment, deterioration of the healthcare systems, a decrease in the admissions to educational institutions, a decline in the productive capacity of many nations, the sabotage of democratic systems and the continued growth of external debt (Amin, 1997, p.13).

In another study based on the outcomes of the SAPs in 131 developing countries between the years 1981-2003, Abouharb & Cingranelli (2007) have shown that on average, this program led to a reduction in respect for the

[2] Certainly, this shift in the economy and the role of the state are concomitant with a massive shift in culture and society at large which will be further addressed and analysed in this thesis. As mentioned earlier, this chapter particularly aims to address the economic base of the capitalist mode of production while the superstructure is discussed in the next chapter. While this thesis largely focuses on the ideological reproduction of capitalism, the underlying theme is that of capitalism today as the dominant mode of production.

social and economic rights of citizens, specifically those concerning worker's rights. By putting an immense pressure on the leaders of the developing nations to reduce workers' protection, the SAPs led to a loss of some basic rights such as rights to freedom of association at the workplace, collective bargaining, and protection of children from exploitation (Abouharb & Cingranelli, 2007). Mike Davis (2006, pp. 150-152) in his book *Planet of Slums*, contends how the SAPs have violently immiserated millions of the urban populace in the Global South, displaced millions of rural poor to migrate to the cities in desperate search for work, while making slums the unavoidable future for these urban poor.

There has been an overarching "informalisation" of labour in both developed and developing countries (Chang, 2009). Informal employment by its very definition means the reduction of formal contracts, worker's rights, or collective bargaining power (Davis M. , 2006). In the post-war boom, workers in the Global North saw a strengthening of the trade unions, jobs were plentiful and more secure with benefits. But neoliberal economic reforms in the advanced capitalist nations meant a globally free moving capital resulting in a large-scale downsizing of the manufacturing heavy, industrial sectors accompanied by an increased economic dependence on finance capital and a subsequent shift to services and technical industries (Braverman, 1998). Capital movement and the outsourcing of jobs to the Global South in search of cheap labour meant heavy job losses for the low-skilled, factory workers in the North (Roman, 2004).

It can be argued that the investment in the Global South resulted in an overall growth in the economies of these nations. But the problems for workers were only compounded as states were pressured to create a more business-friendly environment for attracting investments. In neoliberal discourses, 'business friendly' often alluded to a reduction in labour market regulations and a free pass to avoid environmental regulations. Sweatshops became a new reality for labour in many countries of the developing world. It was subsequently recognized by the International Labour Organisation(ILO) that a rise in insecure, precarious jobs and reduction in the collective strength of workers is an indispensable component of global capitalism and is not exclusive to the developing or underdeveloped countries (Chang, 2009).

Understanding the crisis of 2008 in the backdrop of this global implementation of structural adjustment helps us make better sense of the soaring income and wealth inequalities that have been reported following the crisis (Piketty, 2014). In many ways, austerity politics post-2008 crisis only furthered the desire to shrink social welfare and with it, the state's power to regulate the markets: something that favoured the staunch adherents of the neoliberal doctrine (Farnsworth & Irving, 2018). In the US, between the years 2010-2012, statistics show a drastically increasing wealth gap between the 0.1% and the rest of the population (Timcke, 2017). And this trend has only further intensified across the globe since then. The World Inequality Report (2018) highlights

that despite an increase in economic growth in emerging nations in Asia, global income inequality has increased since the 1980s.

It is also important to acknowledge that the current inequalities are not only a result of decreasing wages but also because large transnational corporations are evading taxes. Cross border profits made by a transnational corporation allows them to systematically and legally avoid paying taxes in a country and shift all the profits to places with lower tax rates. The giants of digital infrastructures such as Facebook, Google and Amazon are known to pay the least possible amount of taxes in different countries where they operate (Hadzhieva, 2016). While these tech companies are not the only ones avoiding taxes in a range of countries, the digital business model (based on subscription, access and advertising) allows them to not have a physical presence in the market country and thereby legally avoid tax payments (Hadzhieva, 2016). For instance, Facebook paid less than 1% of its total UK sales as taxes in the year 2017-18, while its sales in the UK, increased by more than 50% (Neate, 2018). Facebook is not the only one. Other digital technology giants such as Amazon, Google, and Apple have all been accused of avoiding taxes on multiple occasions (Bailey & Durkin, 2019). Whenever states imply an increase in taxes, there is a bubbling threat of capital flight and huge losses to the national economy. For instance, recently, proposals have been made by the Labour government here in Aotearoa New Zealand to introduce a new tax on multinational companies such as Facebook, Google, and Uber making money out of online services and not paying their fair share of taxes. But the conservative National Party sought to block this arguing that it might lead these companies to move their businesses offshore in retaliation (Bramwell, 2019). The global dominance of capital results in a decrease in political power of the nation-states to regulate the flow of capital.

Despite the increasing gap between the rich and the poor (Piketty, 2014), capitalism finds a way out of each crisis. Our current global economic and political discord exemplifies how capitalism has historically found new ways to intensify exploitation, new things to commodify, new resources to accumulate and new wars to wage, both externally and through internal use of force against the working and proletariat classes to further entrench its hold on society- even if it means exhausting all the planetary resources or disavowing the validity of climate change. Meanwhile, all earlier forms of services and resources previously provided by the State or communally available to everyone are opened to privatisation and thereby the market, from drinkable water to breathable air. If we look at global capitalism in this context, an increase in the global movement of capital connected via global supply chain, financial markets and production processes has resulted in a complete reorganisation of the social relations between capital and labour.

In his work on *Culture and Finance Capital*, Jameson contended how capitalism's crisis "must be seen as discontinuous but expansive. With each crisis, it mutates into a larger sphere of activity and a wider field of

penetration, of control, investment, and transformation" (Jameson, 1997, p. 248). Jameson asserts that the resiliency of capitalism to come out of crisis such as after World War II and then again in the 1980s and 90s has often unsettled economists and scholars on the Left. The notion of *late capitalism* that Jameson takes from the work of Ernest Mandel is not a prediction of the end of capitalism but a term used for the most recent phase of multinational capitalism and the cultural changes that accompany it (Jameson, 1997). For Jameson, the relationship between the cultural and the economic is "a continuous reciprocal interaction and a feedback loop" (Jameson, 1991, p. xiii). This is precisely the central argument of this thesis, to locate and analyse this interaction between the economic and the cultural using social media as a point of intervention.

Forces of Production Today

Late capitalism cannot be discussed without also understanding how digital and information technologies have supported the entire global infrastructure of financialized capital. In the globalized world, the capitalist economic structure greatly depends on the digital economy where our connection to the digitized world is deemed paramount. From our bank accounts, to taxes, to the way we travel, or the way we see the world through our cameras, digitisation and network connectivity amount to a great part of our lives. A great deal of our public lives, such as our work is blurred with our private selves through constant networked connectivity; while our private selves are increasingly made more public through the social media explosion and surveillance mechanisms deployed by the state and corporations (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018).

In sociological literature, a range of concepts have been used to encapsulate our understanding of the changes taking place since the advancement of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Terms such as 'post-industrial' or 'information society' (Bell, 1976) have been used to suggest that we have been increasingly moving from manufacturing to a service- based economy and that information has become the central form of commodity. These works often allude to a new type of society and social organisation that is highly reliant on the new media technologies and networked connections that would not obey the laws of classical capitalism. Manuel Castells(2005), for instance, emphasizes how the emergence of a new "networked society" operated by ICTs enables the fragmentation of the labour force with increasing flexibilization of jobs where "the ability to work autonomously and be an active component of a network becomes paramount to the new economy" (Castells M. , 2005, pp. 34-35). Although Castells hints at the increasing contradiction between capital and the social relations of production in the network society, his discussion of the flexibilization of jobs is limited insofar as it doesn't account for the intrinsic historical tendencies of capitalism to drive down wages by displacing labour with new technologies. As Jameson suggests, there is a tendency in some of the sociological conceptualisation of this new type of society to argue that since this social formation no longer obeys the laws

of classical capitalism and industrial production, it marks the end of class struggle as during the previous stages of capitalism (Jameson , 1991, pp. 2-3).

In the field of digital media studies, another tendency has been towards largely celebratory discourses highlighting the various possibilities offered by digital media technologies allowing consumers to actively participate in the creation and sharing of content, which Henry Jenkins calls as participatory culture (Jenkins, 2009, p. 331). For Jenkins (2009), the use of a variety of media on new media sites such as YouTube in the form of video, images, text and so on, encourages users to actively collaborate and participate in the process of cultural production as opposed to earlier media forms. According to Jenkins, Li, Krauskopf & Green (2009) in their report on 'spreadable media' titled *If It Doesn't Spread, It's Dead*, the companies who use new media as part of their marketing strategies would gain long term benefits in the form of growing potential markets for their brand and gaining trust and loyalty of their consumers through more targeted advertising. The aim of this report was to answer the question from the perspective of the business owners- "Is it a good idea to allow or enable my consumers to spread my brand message or my copyrighted content?" (Jenkins, Li, Krauskopf, & Green, 2009). It is crucial to note here that this report was funded by GSD&M Advertising, MTV Networking and Turner Broadcasting, and it goes into details of how advertisers, marketers could use new media and create the right buzzwords for selling and branding their products. At the same time, they reiterate the idea that it is the consumers of the cultural content who are empowered by these new media technologies through their power to rate and review products, and by being part of the branding process of any product. Fisher (2010) argues that the popular discourses around new network technologies are often used as a tool for legitimating the emergence of a new form of socio-economic regime that corresponds with the needs of new form of capitalist accumulation. Just as during the Fordist stage of capitalism, the discourses around technology extolled the capacity of new technologies to enhance human life by offering more security, stability, the discourses accompanying the post-Fordist stage (or late capitalism) "lauds the capacity of new media technologies to augment the sense of individual empowerment, authenticity, and creativity by mitigating the alienating nature of capitalism" (Fisher, 2010, p. 219).

This is not to argue that technology has had no positive influences historically in shaping our societies. The allure of technologies and their newness is irresistible to us as consumers. The affordability of new technologies, their convenience and the promise that they help reduce intensive labour, are all luxuries once only accessible to the wealthy. The diffusion of digital technologies in the Global South in the past decade has, on many occasions, crossed the earlier class boundaries to allow for grass-roots communicative space for workers and activists. And this can be attributed to globalisation and the ensuing global exchange of technologies, labour, capital and intellect. In recounting an illustration of this, Qiu (2019) shows how migrant workers in Beijing came together to form a popular music band writing songs on the themes of labour and

alienation, formed a cooperative, adopted a Creative Commons license and by 2016, had published eight albums using the means of social media apps Welbo and QQ (Qiu, 2019, p. 4). So, there is certainly an aspect of co-operation that comes from our network connectivity.

Technology itself is not the point of contention here but the way it is incorporated to serve the needs of capital. The US-based tech giants such as Google/Alphabet, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft, and Amazon, priced as the world's wealthiest corporations, have a centralized control over the digital networks across the globe. The contention here rather is about the concentration of wealth, power and control over technology in the hands of a few. Kwet (2019) argues that this monopolisation of local digital and media industries by digital tech giants is akin to a new digital colonisation that is creating novel forms of economic and technological dependencies for the Global South. The digital infrastructure deployed by these companies is designed in a way to ensure their dominance in the local markets and "allows them to accumulate profits from revenues derived from rent (in the form of intellectual property or access to infrastructure) and surveillance (in the form of Big Data). It also empowers them to exercise control over the flow of information (such as the distribution of news and streaming services), social activities (like social networking and cultural exchange)" (Kwet, 2019, pp. 7-8).

Other service provider platforms that are enabling the gig economy, such as Uber, have tried to monopolize the transportation industry in countries such as South Africa and India but have faced multiple clashes and strikes from organized driver's unions. The gig economy is an increasingly common trend of hiring workers as independent contractors or consultants, hired for short term 'gigs' under flexible employment arrangements. While informal work, as discussed previously, is a key feature of neoliberalism, this trend is largely exasperated in the digital economy sector where it's marketed as 'flexible' work. Uber, for instance, in order to be competitive with local taxi services, offers artificially low fares to consumers for journeys and undercuts the local taxi drivers. At the same time, it pays low wages to Uber drivers and takes up 25 percent commission for each trip, adding to the hidden costs for the drivers (Kwet, 2019, pp. 6-7). In cities like Mumbai, Uber drivers have been on multiple strikes as the fuel prices have recently gone up in India by 20 percent, but the journey fares have remained at the same rate (Shah, 2018). These multiple arcs of exploitative conditions expanded by the digitalized economy, as discussed here, are not only limited to the Global South. Amazon's founder and CEO, Jeff Bezos, who is now the richest person in the world with a net worth of $140bn, has amassed his wealth by exploiting Amazon's workers. The company has repeatedly suppressed all efforts by the workers to unionize and keeps doing so, despite cases of atrocious working conditions and abuse in its British warehouses (Sainato, 2018).

In their most recent employment forecasts, the International Labour Organization's *World Employment and Social Outlook- Trends 2018* report confirmed that globally, there has been a rise in 'vulnerable employment'

with about 1.4 billion workers estimated to be in vulnerable employment in 2017, who will be joined by 35 million additional workers by 2019 (International Labour Organization, 2018). While there is a celebratory discourse in the mainstream media outlets such as The Financial Times, which suggests that world unemployment is decreasing (Johnson, 2018), there is a discursive omission of how in the emerging and developing countries 'working poverty' (where workers live on an income between US$ 1.90 and US$ 3.10 per day in PPP) affected 430 million workers in 2017. The ILO report also claims how there remains a high deficit of 'decent work' globally. The mainstream media are certainly selectively quoting the World Bank's Unemployment Data (World Unemployment: The World Bank, 2019) which suggests that the average global unemployment has decreased since 2016.[3]

Technologies exist and are created within societies, under the influence and often control of dominant social, political and economic regimes. It is crucial to establish an account of the dialectical interaction between technology and the social structures that exist within the bounds of late capitalism. New technologies and innovations do not necessarily lead to a utopian future because machines are appropriated, manipulated, owned, monopolized, produced and distributed through the existing political and economic structures. Despite having renewable energy at our disposal, along with the technology required to switch to a sustainable future, not even advanced capitalist nations such as Australia or Aotearoa New Zealand have found the political will to divest from fossil fuels. In fact, G20 nations have hugely increased their subsidies for coal power in the last few years (Carrington, 2019). We have all the medical and technological advancements at our disposal to be able to provide healthcare services to the citizens freely and yet, without the state's role in providing free health services, many people struggle to be able to afford medications that are necessary for their survival.

Another ideological cunning of this narrative of a new technological future is that it fetishizes technology in the Marxist sense. For Marx (1909, pp. 83-84), there is a peculiar way in which people relate to each other in a capitalist society, where all relationships assume the form of relations between things. Marx calls this fetishism because, in a very mystical sense, our relation to things or commodities has a fantastic character in so far as we fetishize these commodities or things as if they are not a product of human labour or intellect. In a similar way, we can discuss the fetishization of technologies in our everyday discourses where they are often endowed with mystical, magical powers to shape our world and solve our problems in distinct ways. As Harvey puts it, "the fetish arises because we endow technologies- mere things- with powers they do not have (e.g., the ability to solve social problems, to keep the economy vibrant, or to provide us with a superior life)" (Harvey, 2003, p. 3). At the consumption end, technologies are also commodities which are packaged in new and insatiable ways

[3] Marx (1973) was arguing in the *Grundrisse* how bourgeois economists in the hey-day of industrial capitalism sung songs of the successes of the capitalist economic system while downplaying its failures.

alluring consumers to buy the latest iPhones, the same way consumers queue up to buy Gucci bags (Gibbs, 2017). Often in discussions, there is an obscurity around this notion of 'new' technologies as if it is something out there, that will automatically result into progress; as if technologies are not commodities that need conflict minerals to produce them (McGrath, 2018), or require huge amounts of electricity to power them (Walsh, 2013), or an enormous exploited work force to assemble them (Temperton, 2018).

The internet and its monopolisation by a handful of companies, after almost two decades has proven that technologies don't necessarily or automatically lead to social change for the betterment of society (Herman & McChesney, 1997), but are often driven and designed largely in the service of the existing hegemonic practices. The process of social change brought about by technology is in no way a process without contradictions. We are seeing a renewed emphasis on technological fetishization in both, academic and mainstream media discourses with the exhilarating changes to come through Artificial Intelligence in the next few years. The next section elaborates and dissects these claims of a 'work-less' society to situate it within the account of late capitalism.

The 'Future of Work' is Precarious

> Through the continuous development of machinic labour, multiplied by the information revolution, productive forces can make available an increasing amount of time for potential human activity. But to what end? Unemployment, oppressive marginalization, loneliness, boredom, anxiety and neurosis?
>
> - Felix Guattari (2000), *The Three Ecologies*.

The internet-of-things (also known as IoT) is here to change the way we experience our everyday lives. From 3-D printers to Smart toasters, a web of inter-connected electronic devices will generate data and process information that will further feed in some more data into a self-generating Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI is nothing but a software that applies advanced statistical data gathering and processing techniques, and makes decisions based on them (Greenfield, 2017). A common example of the IoT and AI are Amazon's Alexa or Google Assistant which are only a nascent stage of IoT technology. These assistants connect different devices in your home such as the lights, television sets, heating or ventilation systems and are remotely accessible through your phone using a voice command. An advanced version of this technology, along with advanced robotics is predicted to replace workers in many industries including manufacturing, service sector, retail, transportation and administrative support workers (Frey & Osborne, 2013); to kick-start what has been declared as the *Fourth Industrial Revolution* (Schwab K. , 2016). It is expected to fundamentally alter the nature of work and employment with enormous consequences on the lives and jobs of large number of people. In a detailed study undertaken by Frey & Osborne (2013) about the impact of computerisation on jobs, they suggested that about 47% of total employment in the US was at a risk of being automated. The author of AI

superpowers, Kai-Fu Lee, contends that artificial intelligence will eliminate about 40 percent of the global jobs within the next 15 years in tandem with an astronomical accumulation of wealth by the digital giants (Lee K-F, 2018, pp. 139-141).

The dominant discourses in the mainstream media on this development in technology have centred on capital gains and productivity, with some references to the way in which it will displace human labour (Firdausi, 2018). Simultaneously, they have focussed on the issues of data privacy of individual consumers and how states can and have potentially been trying to use the data collected by these new technologies to spy on its citizens (Ackerman & Thielman, 2016). The documents released by *WikiLeaks* titled *Vault 7* reveal how the CIA has already been "developing security exploits for a connected Samsung TV" (Burgess, 2018). The US intelligence Chief acknowledged that agencies are using the new generation of smart devices "to increase their surveillance capabilities" (Ackerman & Thielman, 2016). Issues around governments' surveillance of its citizens through IoT technologies or even through our smart phones is a genuine concern and one that needs to be taken seriously[4]. Through surveillance mechanisms, states which are already working in tandem with and in the interests of global capital, find ways to suppress citizens. But for brevity's sake, I will restrict the argument here to discussing how these technologies have affected the nature of employment and labour.

In their discussions on these incoming technological changes, organizations such as the World Economic Forum (Ryder, 2018) have often been merely suggestive of how state policies should deal with a largely unemployed populace displaced by technology, by either, nurturing the right kind of 'human capital' and upskilling of labour which would lead to employment generation or to implement a basic income (Peters, 2017) (Kandavel, 2016) (Schwab K. , 2016). There have been some positive accounts suggesting that automation and the internet of things will result in a more collaborative economic structure whereby the cost of making goods and services will potentially approach zero, further enhancing people's capacity to use these technologies and becoming the producers (or prosumers) of things themselves (Rifkin, 2014). While it is certainly beneficial to ascertain the benefits of such technology and how everyone will be able to access the Internet of things, use big data analytics and develop algorithms, such claims are often dissociated with the lived realities of workers in both the Global North and South. So much so that even the IMF, an organization that stood as a beacon of free market ideology is now drawing attention to the dangers of technological unemployment that risks an

[4] One can think of how governments are already accessing private data of their citizen's private communications to further intensify the surveillance apparatus. One such case was reported here in New Zealand where the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) employees spied on beneficiaries who were suspected of being in an undeclared relationship. It was reported that the MSD had asked for some very personal details from telecommunication companies such as intimate photographs, text messages sent by beneficiaries to their partners (Fitzgerald & Paddy, 2019). Many of those on benefits are averse to declaring their partnership status as the current benefit rates are lower for those who are married when compared to the benefits that two individuals could receive. It is obvious that the state finds innumerable excuses to punish those who are already struggling under the neoliberal regime but let off the hook all of those big companies who get away with paying any taxes.

increasing income polarization (Forster, Kentikelenis, Reinsberg, Stubbs, & King, 2019) (Aiyar & Ebeke, 2019) (Peralta-Alva & Roitman, 2018).

Marx illustrated in detail, the strife between machinery and labour in Chapter xv of *Capital Vol.1* (Marx, 1909, pp. 405-406). He was reflecting on the constant struggle of the workers having to compete with machines that were throwing them out of work in the early years of the 19th Century, known as the Luddites. The unemployment caused by the power-loom in the English manufacturing districts in the early years of the 19th century had resulted in a large destruction of machinery by the Luddites. Prophetically Marx wrote, "It took both time and experience before the workpeople learnt to distinguish between machinery and its employment by capital, and to direct their attacks, not against the material instruments of production, but against the mode in which they were used" (Marx, 2010, pp. 441-442). Marx (2010) was similarly critiquing the bourgeois economists who were blaming the workers for protesting against the technologies that were taking away their jobs. Marx quotes Dr. Ure, a bourgeois economist, who straightforwardly puts his views as, "A creation destined to restore order among the industrious classes… This invention confirms the great doctrine already propounded, that when capital enlists science into her service, the refractory hand of labour will always be taught docility" (Marx, 2010, pp. 450-451). In his critique, Marx (2010) was clear that bourgeois political economists were not concerned with their so-called claims of 'betterment of humanity' but would rather see workers perish, being displaced by technology in their pursuit of profit. Capitalism has historically relied on technology and machines that can replace human labour, create surplus populations, drive down wages and assist in generating and accumulating surplus value (Pianta, 2018).

Consider a similar argument that was made in relation to social and digital media and how it would allow more 'prosumers' to freely produce content on it (Jenkins, 2009). It is undoubtedly true that due to the ubiquity of digital media and readily available technologies, the number of people who produce and share content digitally has dramatically increased. Media today is not just produced by employees working for wages but is created by people who are engaged in peer-production, or 'commons-based peer production' (Benkler, 2002) such as the digital commons, creative commons, information commons, cultural commons and so on. One could argue that creative workers are not bound by hierarchical and organized company structures, and they can now publish their own creative output online for minimal costs. But in fact, artists, film-makers, musicians have been reconstituted as 'content producers' for online media platforms such as YouTube (Huws, 2015). Users can showcase their creative abilities on platforms such as YouTube and Instagram, but this is in no way equivalent to having secure employment in the creative industry. Most regular YouTubers still need employment to sustain a living. This shift in the perception and organisation of creative industries has changed the nature of work and income for the workers involved with a removal of bargaining power. An example of this can be seen in the controversial 'Hobbit Law', officially called as the Employment Relations (Film Production Work)

Amendment Bill passed in Aotearoa New Zealand against the film worker's demands to provide better working conditions during the filming of *The Hobbit*. The uproar against Warner Bros and Peter Jackson during the filming led to the studio threatening to move the film production to another country. Eventually this resulted in a huge tax write off for the studio and passing of the Hobbit Law that barred film workers from collective bargaining in the country (Cowlishow, 2018). Creative industry workers in ANZ are often employed on casual contracts and get no Union representation. And this altercation in our social, political and economic imaginings has influenced most, if not all industries.

We are soon to experience another such displacement of labour by AI and advanced robotics. Lee (2018) an expert on AI technologies argues that a transition to an AI driven economy will be faster than any other previous technologically infused transformations. AI products are algorithms that can self-replicate and be instantly distributed across the globe. Algorithms are not restricted by slow progress in hardware technologies that marked the earlier technological revolutions. There are of course arguments made by economists which suggest that AI will not displace labour in all of the estimated 40% of jobs in the U.S but instead, new jobs will be created. In the early throes of the dot.com bubble in the advanced capitalist nations, similar arguments were made suggesting that computerization will result in an upsurge of precarious, 'flexible' work but not a displacement of workers (Aronowitz & DiFazio, 2010). At the time, the labour movement's response in the U.S. to the automation of work in industrial sections was deep scepticism despite the promises made by economists, political leaders and employers that the technologies will create new jobs (Aronowitz & DiFazio, 2010). And this scepticism was justified. The growth of the digital economy supported by the expansion of digital platform companies has only exasperated the exploitative conditions of workers by rendering many of their skills unemployable. The argument is not whether jobs are disappearing or that they will disappear altogether in the future but that meaningful long-term, secure employment with pensions and other benefits that assisted many people to enter the middle class are now disappearing. Lee (2018) argues that in the next two decades, out of the estimated 40% of the jobs that are likely to be automated in the U.S alone, the workers might not be outright replaced but automation is likely to make them more precarious than ever (p. 151). There is enough historical data to support the argument that capital investment in technology and the displacement of labour results in the creation of a reserve army of labour that can be exploited and easily dismissed without their collective organisation.

In our current scenario of automation and the increased reduction in the input of living labour, it is important for us to then differentiate between the notion of 'working class' and that of the 'proletariat'. The concept of wage-labour includes all those who receive a wage in exchange of their labour (Ramtin, 1991, p. 131). On the other hand, as Ramtin (1991) argues, the notion of the proletariat includes the large swathes of humanity who are not simply temporarily unemployed, as the reserve army of labour or pauperized but are increasingly

becoming unemployable due to the fast implementation of automation. It's not simply about a small percentage of unemployed population anymore but increasingly, a life time on welfare benefits for many. Individuals might still find small contracted jobs here and there, for a day in the week or two months in a year, but this massively alienates the younger generations of the proletariats made superfluous as it opens up the arena for further exploitative work (Ramtin, 1991, p. 131). The future of work is precarious.

Digital Media Studies

A considerable amount of attention has been placed on using a Marxist theoretical framework to analyse digital technologies and new media since the 2008 crisis (Fuchs, 2014). Many of these studies have offered some rich insights into: a) offering an account of the new forms of paid and unpaid labour performed on digital media, (Fuchs, 2016) (Terranova, 2000) (Wittel, 2016), and b) drawing attention to the consumerist ideological reproduction of capitalism on digital and social media (Murdock, 2014) (Pleios, 2016) and c) discussing the new form of communicative capitalism (Dean, 2005). A review of this literature will reveal some of its gaps and oversights.

Tiziana Terranova (2000) made the earliest contributions to illustrating in detail the kind of labour that is produced to suit the needs of the digital economy. She argued that in the early days of the rise of the internet, it needed a special kind of labour force that was willing to provide 'free labour'. She conceptualizes free labour as "simultaneously voluntarily given and unwaged, enjoyed and exploited" (Terranova, 2000, p.33). Following the Italian autonomists such as Maurizio Lazzarato who coined the term 'immaterial labour' she argues that the concept of 'free labour' instead of 'class' helps in making sense of the heterogeneity of the users online and at the same time allows for us to point out the commonalities between them. For Terranova (2000, p.34), the expansion of the internet supported and gave ideological sustenance and normalization to the increasing flexibility of the workforce, the culture of work from home, the continuous re-skilling of labour, freelancing, contract work and so on.

Wittel (2016) on the other hand, argues that this notion of 'free labour' confuses how we understand the categories of labour, surplus value and exploitation. He argues that unpaid labour has always existed in different forms such as domestic labour or other forms of creative, cultural labour, and that not all of it creates surplus value for the capitalists (p.85-86). And this remains an ongoing debate in the field to understand how to categorize our online activities. Srnicek (2017) for instance, argued that although social and digital media platforms rely on their user base to be able to increase their market value, all social interaction cannot be categorized as unwaged or 'free labour' for capitalism. Our online data generated through interactions is certainly something that produces profits for these platforms as it is sold to companies, but can we still classify our online interactions that become a source of profit for the platforms as 'free labour'? Perhaps, the discussion

needs to move away from a conceptualisation of user's online activity as 'free labour' as it only holds us back from a highlighting a more crucial aspect of Terranova's early intervention. Her early contribution helped in explicating how the digital economy assisted in creating an overarching culture of 'free' online work that blurs the boundaries between work and leisure. It helped understand the many ways in which the internet changed the way we work; from the constant back and forth of emails, to the increasing unpaid regimes of 'work from home' after paid hours, the maintenance of employee profiles on online websites and the general filtering of our social media profiles to showcase an image of perfection. Terranova's concern about the use of the concept of 'class' in the classical Marxist sense, in relation to analysing online users is legitimate. But while we cannot individually impose our assumptions about the class position of users online, we can nonetheless attempt to explain the reproduction of relations between capital and labour in the digital age.

Another central argument that is often made is how consumerist ideology is reproduced by large corporate interests on social networks. Murdock (2014) contends that on social and digital media, a consumerist ideology presents the marketplace as the primary place of freedom, where we can be ourselves and communicate our unique identities through the products we consume. It is further argued that consumers/users of social networks are no longer just spectators or shoppers but are "invited to become 'co-creators' of the products they buy," where, "basketball enthusiasts are invited to contribute ideas for modifying the sports shoes they wear, contributors to film and music cites run by fans are enlisted as viral marketers, promoting a new release by word of mouth" (p.139) and so on. For Murdock (2014) while the appeal to consumerism in the form of commodity fetishism, has been very much part of capitalism, digital technologies have further assisted in a concrete intensification of commodity culture. As corporate interests are increasingly devoting a great deal of interest and time in acquiring public networks, for promotion and accumulation of profits, this has far reaching implications for the users as friendship and everyday talk becomes commodified (Murdock, 2014, p.139).

What remains unanswered in this discussion though, is what kind of subjectivity and sociality, or concrete 'practices' are privileged on these digital and social media platforms to accrue such an intensification of commodity culture. In Murdock's account the users are not allowed any affective positionality from which they may be gaining something in exchange. Marx in his treatise *Grundrisse* noted how "production… produces not only the object but also the manner of consumption, not only objectively but also subjectively. Production thus creates the consumer. Production not only supplies a material for the need, but also supplies need for the material…Production thus not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object" (Marx, 1973, p.92). Objects are made desirable for consumption without which there would be no consumption, and hence no production. It is at the same time, significant to understand consumerist ideology as not only pertaining to the consumption of objects but also, the way we consume culture or participate in

politics and governance at large. It is not just labour that is reproduced through consumption but also our subjectivity.

Jodi Dean (2005) has provided useful insights into this aspect of how social networks and the feedback loop of online communication entraps contemporary subjects. She argues how the increasing proliferation of online content, its distribution at an accelerated rate and the intensity of messages itself hinders democratic governance, leading to what she calls as the post-political formation of communicative capitalism (Dean, 2005, p. 53). Dean (2005) argues that this not only means that communication and our everyday online messages are commodified, but also how our democratic aspirations are imagined through the marketplace. The proliferation of messages and content online creates a fantasy of abundance and a fantasy of activity and participation in democratic processes. The abundance of messages and the fact that everyone can contribute, participate and get their views heard, creates a fantasy of how our views matter. She states, "rather than actively organized in parties and unions, politics has become a domain of financially mediated and professionalised practices centred on advertising, public relations and the means of mass communication" (Dean, 2005, p. 55).

All these studies described above have significantly contributed in shaping my arguments around analysing digital and social media. A critical aspect of the argument that this thesis aims to put forth is: how do subjects come to recognize themselves in the ideological representations that are produced outside the social relations of production (Althusser, as cited in Hall, 1985), as Marx suggests, a subject that is created to willingly partake in both, the production and consumption processes. Louis Althusser's (1973) work furthered this assertion that labour wasn't just reproduced within the economic relations, that workers don't simply happen to agree with the changing nature of jobs and wages; but it requires a complex network of social and cultural institutions such as the media, political rhetoric, unions and so on, to justify and legitimize such changes. And when such legitimation didn't work in the past, workers went down to the streets to protest and got collectively organized, unionized to fight for their rights. In such scenarios, states have often used its repressive apparatuses to crack down and suppress any collective or individual response that grows out of capitalism's crisis (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978). The next chapter follows from this argument to explore the cultural and superstructural reproduction of labour.

Chapter 3 Late Capitalism and the Subject of Ideology

Introduction

The previous chapter elucidated the nature and structure of late capitalism, specifically, in the current historical conjuncture of neoliberalism.[5] It briefly explored how capital-labour relations have been altered owing to the economic and technological changes to facilitate the ascendance of 'friction-free capitalism' (Gates, Myhrvold & Rinearson, 1995) at a global stage.

As argued in the last chapter, within the Marxist studies of digital and social media, a large amount of emphasis is placed on the political economy, on the material and functional aspects of these new media technologies, or the way they are affecting capital-labour relations; but not on their influence in the ideological reproduction of capitalism itself (Pleios, 2016) (Wittel, 2016). This is not to critique those Marxist analyses which have provided critical and necessary insights to the changing relations of labour and capital due to the impact of digital technologies but to acknowledge the gaps in the existing studies; an account of the subject within the relations of production. The direction that this research thesis pursues is motivated by a lack of account of late capitalism in the field of social media studies that accounts for subjectivity, and the interpellation of subjects into the systemic folds of late capitalism. The central question that is put forth in this chapter is: how do we as subjects recognize ourselves within the language and desires produced through the varying ideological edifices of late capitalism?

A brief account of Althusser's notion of ideological reproduction of capitalism offers a necessary mediation between the economic and the social or cultural, between the objective, material reality and that which is considered as belonging to the private, subjective domain. It is argued that the changes in the functioning of capitalism brings about a transformation in the organization of the subjectivity produced within it. To further this argument, a Lacanian account of subjectivity is put forth in the proceeding section to unpack the subject's construction through language and desire. While Althusser and Lacan offer an entry point into the theorization of ideology, both Zizek (2008) and McGowan (2004) have argued that in our consumerist societies today it is the Lacanian notion of enjoyment that helps in understanding how late capitalism gains its ideological legitimation.

[5] Stuart Hall argues how 'neoliberalism' and the 2008 financial crisis can be termed as a conjunctural crisis. What he means by this is that a conjunctural crisis is never simply economic, following Gramsci, but that it is a coming together of a number of forces and contradictions which are at work in different sites and practices in a social formation, to form a rupture. While he agrees that the term 'neoliberalism' is not in itself a satisfactory term, it is still politically necessary to name it conceptually (Hall, 2011).

Althusser's 'Material' and 'Spontaneous' Ideology

In his treatise *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, Althusser (1973) reconceptualised how ideology is the means by which the inherent crisis of capitalism is stabilized. Ideology, for Althusser, helps reproduce the social relations of production, by constructing a subject or in other words 'cultivating' *labour* with certain cultural and moral values which suits the needs of capitalism (Hall, 1985).

Althusser (1973) conceptualized ideology in two ways; ideology in its 'material' form and in its more 'spontaneous' form. The 'material' form of ideology is rooted in the social institutions or the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) such as the Church, the education systems, cultural and communicational systems such as the media and so on, that produce ideology through social practices, rituals and discourses. While 'spontaneous' ideology is the way in which subjects themselves identify with or are inscribed by ideologies through their everyday practices, rituals and beliefs. The ISAs, which largely inhabit the private domain are different from what Althusser termed as the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs), such as the State and the judicial systems which have the power to physically control and coerce subjects (Althusser, 1973).

The concept of ISA's as bearers of ideology indicates how pervasive ideologies get reproduced under what we might term liberal democratic societies. One can think of the common place misconception about mainstream corporate news media in this context, and the notion that if the news media in Western liberal democracies are not under direct State control, they must be free of ideological biases (Hall, 1985). Althusser here reminds us that the ISAs can be privately owned institutions and although seem to be 'relatively autonomous', as it is often assumed in liberal democracies, they are perfectly capable of functioning as ideological tools for the reproduction of capitalism.

The systematic ideological legitimation and implementation of austerity policies achieved through a dissemination of information from various institutions since the 2008 financial crisis in advanced capitalist nations is a good illustration of how the global economic and political superstructures have contributed to the survival and even a robust replenishment of capitalism since then. In the subsequent years since 2008, the consistent decline in the rate of economic growth alongside increasing debts and rising inequalities (Busch, Hermann, Hinrichs, & Schulten, 2013) specifically in Europe was countered with huge cutbacks on public services, and largely blamed on the "publics who are living beyond their means and are dependent on society's 'common pools'" (Streeck, 2014, p.41). This was accompanied by a simultaneous *silencing* of the fact that this growing debt and lack of public finances is related to the declining rates of taxation of top incomes and increasing tax cuts for the top 1 percent (Streeck, 2014). These discourses were disseminated through many disparate 'relatively autonomous' institutions such as: the World Bank and the IMF (Elliott, Inman, & Smith, 2013), in many instances, the Economics and business school courses taught in many Universities through

think tanks (Pautz, 2018), or by the mainstream media (Papaioannou & Gupta, 2018), and finally implemented by nation-states to justify fiscal policies that are only leading to further income and wealth inequalities.

In a different yet relevant instance of how 'material' ideology operates on social media, in 2017 Facebook was reported to have deleted the accounts of many Palestinian activists and their related pages at the request of the U.S. and Israeli governments, on account of 'incitement to violence' (Greenwald, 2017). Israel's leader Benjamin Netanyahu, on the other hand, has himself often used social media to post things that are clearly an incitement to violence against Palestinians (Etehad, 2014) but certainly that is not Facebook's concern. The Director of the *Palestinian Centre for development and Media Freedom*, Musi Rimawi, said that "Israel doesn't want the Palestinian story about violations against them in the occupied territories to reach a worldwide audience" (Gostoli, 2016). Israeli authorities have been monitoring Palestinians on social media for their activities and imprisoning them for expressing their views (Strickland, 2015); Israeli citizens, on the other hand, get a free rein on hate speech against Palestinians with words such as 'kill' and 'burn' on Facebook without facing any censorship from the platform (Gostoli, 2016). Facebook is now explicitly saying that it intends to follow such censorship orders from the U.S. government.

Althusser (1973) identifies how the Repressive State Apparatuses often work in tandem with the Ideological State Apparatuses, as the state and the law help condense and legitimize the various ideological practices by systemically regulating or normalizing them. Isn't this precisely the case here? While hate speech on social media, including things such as doxing have serious consequences, the selection process of who gets censored and on what grounds, is open to questioning. In June 2017, Facebook published an article on its policy on counter terrorism, reasonably stating that they take a zero-tolerance approach to any terrorism-related content (Bickert & Fishman, 2017). The entire article goes on about ISIS and Al Qaeda, without once mentioning the words 'domestic' terrorism, white supremacists, or local extremist 'patriot' groups such as Oath Keepers and Three Percenters (Biddle, 2017). "The West itself is never terrorist," as Pilger (1998) concludes in his treatise on the West's imperialist interventions across the globe. And this has been the party-line that the western mainstream media are happy to repeat in a parrot-like fashion, for the most part. So, Facebook's following the footsteps of mainstream news media on this issue shouldn't come as a surprise. From these examples one can glean that platforms such as Facebook often engage in ideological practices but there is another question that needs to be addressed here. The question of the subjects (or users in the case of social media) who themselves speak on behalf of an ideology.

In the section *On Ideology*, Althusser (Althusser, 2014) illustrates how in order for ideological discourses to gain legitimation, *subjects* need to identify with such discourses, explicating how individual subjects make themselves ideological (Jameson, 2009) through the process of 'interpellation'. This spontaneous form of

ideology emerges from the extra-institutional, everyday activities of individuals (Zizek, 2012, p. 18). In this process of 'hailing' or being called out by an ideology, it is the subject who recognizes himself/herself within the ideology and responds with a 'Yes, it's me!'; it is the 'I of the ideological statements' where subjects position themselves in relation to ideology (Hall, 1985, p. 102). It is this 'spontaneous' form of ideology where any mode of production has historically come across its most dire internal contradictions whereby the dominant ideas about the way the economic and political structures function or ought to function become inconsistent with the everyday realities of subjects (Hall, 1985).

In the last decade, we have seen an array of disparate social movements get reinvigorated in response to the 2008 financial crisis, against exploitative working conditions, bank bailouts, welfare cuts, growing inequalities and so on, directly confronting and questioning the status quo of capitalism. While on the other end, we have seen a simultaneous political reinvigoration and popular support for far-right politics in the form of a revival of reactionary nationalist movements, scapegoating of migrants and minorities in response to the growing income and wealth inequalities, both in the more advanced capitalist nations and in the 'growing' capitalist economies such as India and Brazil.

Ideological hailing is a messy affair, full of internal contradictions and these contradictions must be acknowledged here (Szeman, 2017). Ideologies are not only socially reproduced through the ISAs and their various epistemic or discursive mechanisms but also through the various desires and unconscious mechanisms by the subjects themselves. Althusser (1969, p. 10) identified and reaffirmed Marx's idea that there are various contradictions at work in any social formation at any given time, with their own specific historical modalities through which they operate such as the national past, the specific cultural traditions in a society, the internalization of certain values and so on.

The notion of 'interpellation' offers a nuanced understanding of ideology which allows for an articulation of different, less homogenous (as restricted to one's class position) and contradictory subject positions, to which the same subject is or can be 'hailed'. The subject constituted in this way, in Althusser's conceptualisation is at least suggestive of a more active subject; it is something that the subject does himself/herself, while occasionally being constrained by limits from the outside, which in the analysis of social media, helps us get out of the "ideological double-bind of freedom and manipulation" (Jameson, 2009, p. 343). For instance, one can think of how there have been several accusations made about political adverts on Facebook, about how the platform has not kept any taps on who funds political adverts on the platform and so on. These accusations came about as news stories revealed that several thousands of pounds were spent on pro-Brexit adverts on Facebook (Waterson, 2019). But in the end, it is us, the users who are interpellated by, or recognize ourselves within certain discursive strategies used in these political adverts. There may be several ways in which subjects

can be hailed by multiple discourses, for instance, popularized discourses in the news media that throw undue light on 'nationalist' perspectives or by the ideological binds of our Facebook news feed, where we constantly see news stories that we already 'like' and agree with, which further reinforce our existing ideological views (Mitchell, Kiley, Gottfried, & Guskin, 2013)

Without an account of subjectivity and subjectivisation through interpellation, ideology is reduced to a simple embellishment that needs to be removed from the 'objective' economic and political problems (Morley, 2005). Ideology is a framework of ideas that people use to make sense of their reality, for the way things are and the way they relate to them or what they *do* in relation to them. But ideas don't simply exist in our heads, they are informed and mediated by socially signifying *practices*. This focus on *practice*, was one of the most crucial contributions of Althusser, because it changed the way in which ideology was previously thought of as simply existing in people's minds bringing it to the field of the social and cultural. As Althusser (1974) emphasized, what subjects think or think they are doing is still articulated in the form of language, in the various signifying practices using images, symbols, signs, actions, everyday rituals or practices. Language and behaviour are thus the 'material' register or the modality through which ideology works (Hall, 1985, p. 99). More importantly, we cannot understand ideology without understanding why and how it gets subjectivised, how it encourages subjects to act in a certain way, to do certain things.

In what follows, a Lacanian conceptualisation of subjectivity is put forth to further explicate the ideological constitution of the subject, without which Althusser's account of ideological interpellation remains incomplete.

The Lacanian Subject of Ideology

This section begins with an exegesis of the Lacanian subject to further understand how Lacan assists in clarifying the functioning of ideology[6]. Lacan (2004) following Freud, makes an important distinction between the three terms for the agency that propels a subject's actions. He calls them ideal ego, ego ideal and superego. The ideal ego stands for the idealized self-image of the subject (the way I see myself), the ego ideal is that agency whose gaze I try to impress and get a validation from (the way I think the Other[7] sees me). The superego is the agency that demands the suppression of our desires and at the same time, plagues us with guilt for suppressing them.

[6] I want to clarify here that Lacan's conceptualisation of the subject is extremely complex and often changed and evolved as he explored the various layers of subjectivity across the different seminars. What I am delving into here is a very brief account of the Lacanian subjectivity that will assist in explaining how ideology constitutes subjects.

[7] The Other with capitalized 'O' for Lacan is the other as symbolic law or that which lays down the rules and norms for the subject which corresponds with the superego, as Lacan calls it, simultaneously the Law and its destruction.

The ideal ego is formed by what the child sees in the mirror, during what Lacan calls as the 'mirror stage'. Lacan (2012) in his seminar on *The Mirror-Phase as Formative of the Function of the I*, describes this process whereby a child in the early time of six to eighteen months is quite uncoordinated and 'an unorganized jumble of senses' but the reflection in the mirror offers a more unified 'ideal' surface appearance, which Lacan calls as *the Ideal-I*. Such images then are internalized and charged with affect by the child, through the language or discourse used by the parental Other to identify him or her, by saying 'yes, that is you', or 'good girl' and so on (Fink, 1995).

We are born into the symbolic world of our parents. Fantasies and wants surround us when we are born, and flow into us through the discourse of our parents or those around us (Fink, 1995, p.50). It is due to the parent's language that our internalization of discursive images (even photographic images) such as the various adjectives often used by parents are charged with an affective value. The words 'beautiful', 'fat', 'adorable' start to attain a libidinal charge within the *imaginary* constitution of a child and his/her formation of a self-image. Imaginary here does not allude to being 'unreal' but an image. In the 1950s, Lacan's (2012) concept had changed to conclude that this ego-formation is in no way a deciding event that happens in the early years but an ongoing process throughout the subject's psychic life which constituted the *Imaginary* order. This imaginary sense of self signifies the *process* of ego formation or how the *conscious* subject thinks of himself or herself as I. But the subject is always embattled with this mirror image and what the Other thinks of her. While the Imaginary is this house of mirrors, the *Symbolic Order* is our relation to the big Other which can be our parents, language in general, or cultural norms, values, and so on whose gaze the subject feels the need to please (Lacan, 1978). The subject in this way is constituted in language as this image of the self that the subject recognizes cannot be adequately complete by the logic of the Imaginary by itself (Jameson, 2009, p. 342). Hence, the Lacanian phrase "the self is an other" (Fink, 1995, p.7).

For example, it is the same way in which our online images attain a libidinal charge when they are attached to signifiers such as the 'like' button or other such emoticons (this argument is further elaborated in Chapter 5). We often post these images on social media as much for our own pleasure, as for the pleasure of the 'likes' we get from the Others. To clarify, in the Lacanian account, the subject's self-image is not only restricted to actual images as seen in the mirror or photographic images (although, they are also that) but simply how we imagine ourselves to be as the *I* as the subject of statements. For instance, academics often like to talk about their publications or travels on social media. I might not be posting my selfies to appear a certain way (since I might have my work colleagues added on social media) or uploading regular image updates of what I eat, nonetheless*, I* am always present in what I post on my social media page; whether it's my own artwork, my music, or simply what I am doing right now or the pages I like and so on. They are all a part of the process of identification.

For Lacan, this unconscious fantasy of wholeness that the subject feels about oneself is a (*mis)recognition*. The previous section discussed how Althusser conceptualised interpellation or how subjects recognize themselves within ideological discourses. Althusser borrowed this notion of (mis)recognition from Lacan to answer - why is it that subjects "go all by themselves," without the need of a repressive authority standing on our heads and asking us to follow the orders? Why is it that subjects chose to live in a system that is essentially working against them, particularly at this day and age of the erosion of social securities in the form of austerity? For Althusser, ideology is not necessarily the subject's failure to know reality. But just like in the Lacanian mirror stage, the subject within ideology feels a sense of coherent, unified self 'mirrored' back in ideological discourse. Ideological interpellation is thus a process of identification, with our own image reflected in the discourse of the Other. This is why we often feel so passionate about ideology and take it so personally when someone questions or challenges our ideological beliefs, as if it's a challenge to our very identity.

Jameson (2009) has pointed out that although this Lacanian notion of the Imaginary and its relation to ideological interpellation is central to Althusser, the Symbolic order appears only implicitly in his account where the subject is called upon or 'hailed' by an authority offering him/her potential subject-positions. In his famous example of the police hailing a person on the street: 'Hey, you there!", and the subject turning to such a hailing and recognizing that the call was addressed to him/her, the subject plays an active role in the representational process, ready to assume the subject position assigned to him/her by the symbolic order. But what of the subjects who resist such subject-positions offered to them? In Althusser's account, it is almost as if ideology always performs the function that is required of it, to reproduce the dominant capitalist ideology, and goes on performing this function without facing any countervailing tendencies (Hall, 1985, p. 99). The Lacanian Real, and the role of the unconscious mechanisms that play a part in ideological interpellation is largely ignored in this conception.

Eagleton (2012, p.216) argues that Althusser's subject corresponds with the Lacanian consciousness or ego, while the Lacanian subject, is not simply the ego but is a "split, lacking, desiring effect of the unconscious". For Lacan (2004), the child who is entering the world of language learns to repress his/her unconscious desires that have been barred within the culture, morality, norms and so on. Lacan thus says that it is language which makes up the unconscious (Fink, 1995, p.8). Fink (1995) further argues that "insofar as desire inhabits language- and in a Lacanian framework, there is no such thing as desire, strictly speaking, without language- we can say that the unconscious is full of such foreign desires" (p. 9). Once the child enters the symbolic order, both the child's body, and the unconscious are overwritten with different signifiers and socially constructed desires (Fink, 1995, p. 24). 'Reality' in this sense, is always-already symbolized (Zizek, 2012). The political implications of this as Eagleton points out is that if Althusser's subject was as split, desiring and unstable, the

process of interpellation would be a much more contradictory affair than it appears to be in Althusser (Eagleton, 2012, p. 216).

What is missing to complete Althusser's account of ideology are then the Lacanian concepts of desire, lack and *jouissance*. For Lacan, desire is the central organizing characteristic of subjectivity (Lacan, 1958-59). At the root of desire, is the child's demand for the mother's attention, which is never fully attainable. When the child is still learning to separate itself from the mother's desire, understanding that the mother cannot devote her full attention to the child, the child gradually adapts and learns to cope with such separation from the mother. But the child continues to attempt to try and be the object of his/her parent's desires. As Lacan insists that the desire and motives of the parents continue to influence the child after his or her birth and are responsible to an extent for his or her entry into language. And so, Lacan (1958-59) posits, "Man's desire is the Other's desire," or "Man desires what the Other desires" (p. 54).

In Lacanian terms desire can be defined as the left-over remainder when the satisfaction of physiological needs is subtracted from the child's demands for the mother's attention (Kirshner, 2005). This play of desire and drive, the difference between the subject's physiological needs and the desires that go beyond this need, is what constitutes a lack at the core of human subjectivity. The subject in Lacanian terms, is constituted by a fundamental lack, which is constituted in relation to the Other's desire. Desire is a hit-and-miss process to attain *jouissance* (translated as enjoyment), a persistent yearning for total satisfaction. But what we desire never fully satisfies us, "the thing is never it" since the *jouissance* we unconsciously pursue is "beyond the pleasure principle" and can even be unbearable (Kirshner, 2005).

But, more importantly, how subjects come to desire or fantasize about specific objects? There is an intersubjective character to desire since an isolated individual subject, for instance, on its own wouldn't know what to fantasize about, or how it has come to desire a particular object (Zizek, 2008). We learn to see certain things as desirable only through a socially articulated game of desire (Bjerre & Lausten, 2010). Here cultural differences are to be accounted for. Every culture has its own mechanisms by which the symbolic order can influence the subject's desires. But as the consumerist drive pervades most cultures today almost everywhere across the globe, we can start to understand how capitalist ideology captures our inner-most desires and thus shapes our very subjectivity. We can state here that in varying degrees, capitalism is the *dominant cultural order* (Hall, 2005) today as it subsumes not just geographical territories and cultures through globalisation, but the subject's very psyche. With the personalized, targeted advertisements on social media, tailored to our personal needs and desires, this rings true more than ever.

Desires are constantly driven by socially articulated discourses through which things, objects or ideas are made desirable to us. This doesn't mean that the social construction of desire cannot be challenged or altered in

language, or that the subject's psyche is some inert, passive material on which the desires of the Other are directly imposed or manipulated (Jameson, 1982, pp. 277-288). But that there must be an exchange, something that the subject derives as a result of this process; a libidinal exchange whereby subjects are offered affective pleasures in return. Jameson (1982) contends, that if the texts of mass culture are seen as producing false consciousness, this process cannot be understood as that of sheer violence but that it necessarily means deploying persuasive rhetorical devices in which many incentives are offered to the subject in exchange for ideological adherence. As Eagleton (2012) puts it, "there are many different ways in which we can be 'hailed' and some cheery cries, whoops and whistles may strike us as more appealing than some others" (p. 217).

The Subject of Late Capitalism and the Ideology of Enjoyment

One of the ways for global capitalism to keep functioning and propagating itself, despite its failures as seen once again in the 2008 financial crisis, is to encourage subjects to constantly seek new forms of enjoyment through unrestrained consumption. Subjects under neoliberal global capitalism are suffused by their imaginary relationship to the ideology of the 'free market'. What we find in the neoliberal phase of capitalism is much more difficult to delineate as ideological under its schema of "freedom" and enjoyment. How can one argue that there is any sort of ideology at play at all when everything, from the market, to sexuality, to popular entertainment and culture is about 'free choice' and the 'freedom to enjoy'? A similar discourse (Jenkins, Li, Krauskopf, & Green, 2009) is often used to argue that, given it's free-access, social media is free from any ideological representations imposed from above, as in the case of other media such as advertising, film or mainstream news media. If the users of social media are free to click images and share or like them at will, how can this practice be inscribed by an ideology? It's easy to forget that ideology does not work through coercion, but rather through representation and subjects recognizing themselves within these representations (Althusser, 1973).

Marx (1973) in the *Grundrisse*, similarly remarked about the classical liberal political and economic notion of freedom and equality in relation to the market and the exchange system within the capitalist mode of production. Marx identified how within the capitalist a society, there is certainly a semblance of freedom and equality (Marx & Engels, 1987, p. 180). There is a display of equality between classes which does not materialise in the real economic exchange and social relations between subjects. The relation between subjects within capitalism, and those between labour and capital are those of a contract between 'free' individuals, each following their own interests. At least on the surface, there is no explicit form of domination or servitude, with an appearance of equality in the eyes of the law (Zizek, 2012, p. 309). But herein lies the ideological displacement of capitalism. To recall, previous relations of servitude, as in feudalism, are now disguised as 'relation between things', between different commodities and their exchange explained by Marx through the

notion of ‘commodity fetishism’. Labour, as Marx argued is itself turned into a commodity within the capitalist relations of production which can be bought and sold. It is a fetishistic relation since within capitalism, a commodity attains almost a mystical character that transcends its use-value (or utility), where as soon as it becomes a commodity on the market, it almost separates itself from the labour that produced it and the subject that consumes it. It is the commodity-form that mediates the relation between subjects within capitalism. The bourgeoisie and the working classes can all go to the same supermarket and are ‘free’ to buy the same commodity, but whether they can afford to buy the same product is another question. The question is rather whether the class that is forced to sell its labour can sustain itself on what the decided exchange value of their labour in the labour market is. The abundance of products and the display of affluence often seems equalizing until the inequalities start to be visible on the streets. Consumption in many ways in fact highlights the disparities produced by the system. Not being able to afford to buy a house for a large portion of the population in the more advanced capitalist economies is a real issue being discussed today. It is an issue that highlights the disparities contingent on one’s class and educational backgrounds. The paradox then of such a classical liberal conceptualisation of equating the ‘market’ with freedom is that someone is always excluded from effectively enjoying the freedoms afforded by it. The worker who ‘freely’ sells his/her labour effectively loses his/her freedom and is enslaved to capital (Zizek, 2012).

In his very succinct description of consumer objects, Baudrillard (1998) theorized and expanded on Marx’s notion of commodity fetishism in our current consumerist societies. For Baudrillard (1998), consumption offers a collective myth based on a miraculous thinking, almost a primitive collective mentality, and a belief in the omnipotence of signs. More importantly, its goal being the accumulation of collective signs of enjoyment. The abundance of commodities that flood the supermarkets, the fresh colourful produce that arrives to our locale imported from all over the globe, to the luxuriously cosy coffee shops, the magnificent shopping malls dedicated to commodities, or the gleaming advertising images that haunt us at every bus stop, every street, every website on the internet, all to stimulate our desires for objects.

Within late capitalism, the notion that consumerism and over production pervade our societies is nothing new. But the effects of our relations to commodities and their fetishization can be seen reverberating across the way we experience life and make sense of ourselves and relate to others. Jameson (1984) suggests that an increase in consumption became the necessary solution to resolving the inherent contradictions of the early capitalist mode of production. Here the question is not that of mere consumption as an act, because humans have always consumed, however the inducement to enjoy within late capitalism marks a shift from a restraint on enjoyment in early stages of capitalism to its promotion. McGowan (2004) argues that early capitalist ideology demanded a renunciation of enjoyment as a prerequisite for the functioning of the capitalist system imposing an ideal of a strong work ethic (the organization man, as Zizek suggests), in order to maximize productivity. Within late

capitalism, advertisements, our peers, films, the values that are cherished are those of maximizing our enjoyment with no requisite for dissatisfaction (McGowan, 2004). But in an economy so reliant on consumption and entertainment, enjoyment is that ideological demand that sustains the economy. Both Zizek (2002) and McGowan (2004) use the Lacanian conceptualisation of enjoyment or *jouissance* to understand the changes to the subject's constitution and social relations with this demand to consume and enjoy.

For Lacan (2004), to enjoy is not simply to follow one's desires but something of an ethical duty commanded by the superego. The Lacanian notion of 'enjoyment' is how we perceive the Freudian superego that places impossible demands on us and happily observes our failed attempts at achieving them; and the more we satisfy its demands the more obscene it gets (Žižek, 2002). Lacan was taking this notion of jouissance or enjoyment from Freud's categorization of the *pleasure principle* which acts like an economic speculator assessing potential gains and losses, by considering the possible outcomes of the various courses of action while seeking to minimize pain/dissatisfaction (Johnston, 2002). But there is a tendency in human subjects to act against our own self- interest what Freud calls 'beyond the pleasure principle'. Lacan characterizes jouissance as this 'beyond the pleasure principle'; a destructive pursuit of pleasure with disregard for the consequences (McGowan, 2004). Lacan, in *Seminar V,* highlights a crucial Freudian insight that subjects often act against their own self-interest in this pursuit of short-term pleasures. With the looming threats of environmental destruction as the very consequence of our consumption frenzy, isn't this precisely the case? The subject today is interpellated by the ideology of attaining impossible pleasures while at the same time disavows the known consequences of such actions. We don't want to know or be reminded of how all the waste produced in our cities is being exported to a developing country, because that would take away all the enjoyment from our consumption in everyday life. Or rather, as Žižek (2008) puts it, we know this fact very well but we pretend as if we don't know in a cynical embracing of the way things are. The subject is restrained into seeking change at the individual level- work hard, lose weight, find love, buy a car, while a wider scale politics or activism is too complex and out of our limited scope.

In an economy so reliant on consumption and entertainment, enjoyment is that ideological demand that sustains the economy. Images, whether it is in the form of advertising or the dystopian films of a post-apocalyptic world, or our own image-making practices on social media offer us a fantasy, sheltering us from the traumatic Real (in a Lacanian sense) of looming environmental or political destruction. Images operate at the level of ideology, in creating a space for the possibility of enjoyment through all kinds of consumption, while the reality of class relations are obscured. Our own images of enjoyment that we share so often form the fantasy that is consumed by the Other and at the same time signify a certain mythical belief in this enjoyment (Baudrillard, 1998). As long as the goal is this need for enjoyment, the processes of production and that of the waste created after unrestrained consumption become an unwanted glitch in the subject's psychical economy.

Capitalism, being well aware of this glitch introduces the idea of ethical consumption. In many ways, even when a renunciation is demanded in the form of ethical consumption, for environmental reasons or for the slave labour in sweatshops in some poor countries making commodities for our consumption, new consumer products are offered as a substitute; such as fair-trade products so that one can enjoy guilt-free consumption (Zizek, 2012). Marx (1964) was describing how the commodity, instead of reflecting the social characteristic of the labour that went into producing it, embodies these characteristics for itself. There is certainly nothing wrong with the notion of fair-trade, because in theory, it promotes fair wages to be paid to the labour that produced the commodity. The criticism is rather intended to highlight how these products cost double the price of the other products available in the market and remain largely inaccessible to the working and middle-income groups (Sylla, 2014). When we buy a product that is double the price of a normal, 'non-fair trade' product, the commodity itself includes the cost of our guilt. Moreover, Sylla (2014, p. 147) argues that in practice, the surplus money paid by the consumers in the global north which was intended to go towards paying fairer wages to the labour in the global south, ends up being absorbed by the economic intermediaries within the global north (such as distribution channels, agri-food industry actors and so on), so that the whole practice becomes that of a symbolic act.

On the other hand, there is the guilt induced in the form of donations and charity, by those very clothing outlets that engage in practices that exploit cheap labour in the global south. When I go shop for my clothes manufactured in a rickety garment factory employing child slave labour somewhere in India, or in Bangladesh, I'm asked to donate some money to (ironically, often a charity like 'Save the Children') a charity at the billing counter to rid me of the guilt of having consumed. The image used to induce my feeling of guilt is always that of an impoverished, hungry coloured child from a developing nation, but never a child working in one of these factories producing the same products I'm encouraged to buy. The guilt is induced only as an act of compensating for my consumption, not a guilt towards the exploitation of labour that hides the production process from me. Moreover, the consumption of images erases the reality of this production process by incorporating a range of significations to the image, thereby making it appear as a natural fact; telling us that these places are hopelessly mired by poverty. The historical reasons of these places being driven into poverty due to violent colonisation or even the new forms of ongoing imperialisms, the pillaging of lands and resources by global and local capitalist forces is almost forgotten or rather, deliberately flattened out. This use of signification through images offers us a distance from the Real (Lacanian) of how we are participants in this entire process. As Baudrillard (1998) suggests, "we live, sheltered by signs, in the denial of the real" (p. 34). At the level of everyday life, consumption seeks to resolve all conflicts and existing tensions that inform our existence. It is the images that help us resolve these tensions. Our consumption and the guilt thereof are validated by the images of consumption of others on social media. If everyone else is doing it, it must be fine.

The ideal subjects within late capitalism are those who can enjoy, while those who fail to enjoy are clearly not doing something right. Those who are under the sway of this commanded enjoyment constantly seek new products, newer experiences of enjoyment.

Chapter 4 Methodology: Analysing Visual Culture on Social Media

Introduction

Images have become one of the primary forms of cultural expression and communication in late capitalist societies, more so with the advent of social media. Images also embed our field of vision in certain ideologies so that what we see and perceive is separated by a layer of visuality (Foster, 1988). Foster (cited in Rose, 2016, p.2-3) describes visuality as how our vision is constructed based on how we see things, how they appear to us, how they are made to appear and how we are able to see them. In other words, images are not just a neutral rendering of the physical world as it is, but are displayed, represented and interpreted, in particular and historically specific ways (Rose, 2016). Since images are such a crucial part of our everyday communication, there has been a growing interest in visual culture and the different methodologies that can be used to understand how this visuality affects the way we view the world around us (Rose & Tolia-Kelly, 2012). This chapter offers a critical review of some of the existing and prominent methodologies that are being used to analyse digital technologies and visual culture on social media platforms. It contends that while analysing digital media and the images shared by users on social media, there is a need to redirect our focus on visuality as not only culturally constructed but constructed within the economic, political, and social constrains of late capitalism.

Fredric Jameson (1991) has emphasized how in late capitalist societies, the distinctions between base and superstructure, between things and concepts have been eclipsed to such an extent that we cannot speak of culture without also speaking of commodities or consumption, where the commodity form is more and more identified with its image. Jameson (1991) establishes a further crucial link that needs to be made about the ways in which consumption itself becomes a form of consumption of images. We not only consume commodities, but we also consume the whole of culture built upon the production, distribution and selling of these very images as commodities that permeates and subsumes culture at large. This subsumption of culture into the drives of late capitalism can be seen echoed in the dominant visuality spontaneously reproduced on social media. As argued in the previous Chapter, capitalism's need for superstructural justification for the way things are and its systemic legitimation of status quo can often be identified in language, in the textual and visual discourses that are normalized and become dominant (Nicholas, 1981). In combining the two methodological approaches of semiotics and psychoanalysis, an attempt is made here to demarcate a field of visual culture analysis in the context of studying digital and social media, that assists in putting together an analysis of superstructure, not as a separate realm that is devoid of any material or political ramifications, but to reiterate the interconnections between capitalism, culture, technology, media and communication.

Analysing Visual Culture

There are a number of ways in which visual culture can be analysed but the current methodologies used to analyse images shared on Facebook or on other social media platforms in general focus on two key approaches: digital methods and cultural analytics. Certainly, these are not the only two methods of analysing images at our disposal, but in the context of digital and social media studies, they have been predominantly used to explain the distinct ways in which digital images can be analysed.

The theoretical and methodological debates in analysing visual culture on social media have largely been driven by: "the site of production, which is where an image is made, the site of the image itself, which is its visual content; the site(s) of circulation, which is where it travels; and the site where the image encounters its spectators or users" (Rose, 2016, pp. 24-25). Simultaneously, it is also useful to take into consideration Gillian Rose's (2016) categorisation of analysing images in terms of the different modalities of an image. Rose (2016) suggests that there are three different modalities of an image to consider for analysing them: technological, compositional and social modalities (p. 13). Technological modality of an image is described by the technology used to make or circulate images and how the technical aspects influence the aesthetic features of images. Its compositional modality refers to the specific qualities; its colour, hues, spatiality and so on, largely interpreting the aesthetic dimension of images. While its social modality is the larger social, economic, or political practices that inform the making of the image and how it's used (Rose, 2016, p.25-26).

Based on these distinctions, both digital methods and cultural analytics offer ways in which it becomes possible to examine a large number of digital images, and place greater focus on the sites of production such as the platforms where these images are shared, their circulation on social media platforms, such as how often, when and where are these images circulating and the visual content itself, such as finding the larger patterns of colours, filters, compositional elements used in the images. Both methods while analysing the different modalities of the images, focus largely on the technological and compositional modalities, while the social modality of images is often left unexplored. The next section offers a critical review of digital methods and cultural analytics delineating the gaps in these approaches that need to be addressed.

A Critical Review of Digital Methods and Cultural Analytics

To start with, it needs to be clarified that there have been contentious debates regarding the use of online data for purposes of social research since the initial years of web and cyberspace development, due to the ephemeral, atemporal nature of web data. Richard Rogers (2015) in this context suggests that looking at web data historically, one needs to account for the changes that have shaped the current state of the web. From this early phase, as the nature of data have now matured into more stable structures and architectures (Rogers, 2015) there has been a recent growth in the field of social science research to utilize online pools of data. In

this regard, Rogers (2015) argues that digital methods are a part of the 'computational turn' (Rogers, 2015, p.4) in the field of social sciences and humanities and as such can be situated along with other trends such as cultural analytics, virtual methods and so on.

In defining what includes digital methods, one can first delineate its differences from virtual methods. Virtual methods use the same methods used in social sciences such as interviews, focussed group interviews and so on but moves them to the online medium. Digital methods, on the other hand attempt to understand existing 'natively' digital objects such as images, likes, shares, comments, tweets and so on, to map social, cultural, political changes using online tools such as open source codes to acquire data for the purpose of social research, specifically using "methods of the medium" (Rogers, 2017, p. 3)[8]. They can be used for two purposes; either to analyse the platform and its algorithmic philosophies or to collect and analyse different types of content shared and circulated on these platforms. Digital methods can help account for circulated visual content along with the metadata attached to it. Metadata can be defined as those digital objects attached to a particular visual content one is researching such as comments, links, hashtags, likes, other emoticons, and so on. So, the idea is to be able to collect a big data set of visual content and categorizing it according to different genres/themes using software tools such as *ImageSorter*. It also helps to be able to organize an image's metadata to use the most relevant metadata for a particular research study. The most commonly asked research questions here are, "What are the traceable patterns of usage here? What kind of sharing and liking practices are now normalized?" and so on. As an example, Google BigQuery can be used for two purposes, one is researching the medium (Google) or for collecting big pools of data on topics of concern. The former is oriented towards questions around, for instance, to understand Google's filter bubbles, while the latter is used to collect huge amounts of data from Google which would otherwise be filtered out by Google's search algorithms. Similar open source tools have been created to accumulate data from Facebook as well. Overarchingly, digital methods have been used to collect big data from social media platforms that simply becomes a way of reporting the numbers and metrics around online activities of users, such as the most mentioned content, the most liked content and so on (Highfield & Leaver, 2015).

Digital methods in this way, offer insights on the technological modality of images which helps in analysing the architecture and designs of digital platforms[9] and reveal information about their algorithmic drives, that one might have ignored relying solely on social research methods. The argument made by digital methods focuses

[8] Rogers (2017) argues that digital methods are different from other methods such as Cultural Analytics, as they study objects that are natively digital. This means that objects such as scanned copies of eighteenth-century portraits uploaded online are not part of digital methods. This is how Rogers distinguishes digital methods from cultural analytics (Rose, 2017, p.291).

[9] Taking from Nick Srnicek, platforms here are understood as "digital infrastructures that enable two or more groups to interact. They position themselves as intermediaries that bring together different users: customers, advertisers, service providers, producers, suppliers, and even physical objects" (Srnicek, 2017, p. 43).

on how we need to not just understand what people do with technologies but also analyse what the technologies themselves are doing (Rose, 2016, p. 291). Simultaneously, digital methods also can be deployed to explain the technological affordances of different platforms, in terms of what they offer and how they influence the *circulation* of these images and content. As an example of this, Highfield and Leaver (2015) have analysed the importance of hashtags on Instagram and suggest how tagging practices on Instagram can help researchers collate and find patterns of image-making practices on the platform. However, their study only suggests that researchers need to start combining these data-driven methods with more qualitative methods to be able to explain social and cultural phenomena of image-sharing on platforms. Digital methods, in this way, only locates the larger patterns in social communication on platforms, however, does not connect these patterns to larger social, economic or political issues. Further, there is also a need to problematize critical evaluations that assume the ideological neutrality of these platforms as if they do not partake in the drives of capitalism. The extent of critical evaluation offered by digital methods is at the level of the dominance of some of the platform monopolies such as Google that have managed to "introduce hierarchies" to a once free and democratizing web.

Helmond, Nieborg, and van der Vlist (2017), for instance, use digital methods to offer a critique of Facebook's partnerships with the digital marketing industry and its "gradual entrenchment as a dominant actor within the digital marketing eco-system" (Helmond, Nieborg, & van der Vlist, July 28-30, 2017). Their analysis is an attempt to examine the advertising-driven dominance of these platforms and how power relations are "operationalized through industry partnerships" (Helmond, Nieborg, & van der Vlist, July 28-30, 2017). The analysis offers a useful account of the historical development of Facebook as a major player in the advertising and marketing driven platforms. However, their argument follows a neutral discourse of how "platforms and third parties now compose the digital marketing eco-system" (Helmond, Nieborg, & van der Vlist, July 28-30, 2017).

Rose (2016) argues that digital methods have some interesting contributions in understanding how digital technologies are intervening in various aspects of everyday life but the method itself does not pay closer attention to images and looks at images in a limited way (p. 303). Subjectivity is almost non-existent in such analysis as though the images and content exist in an empty space. Relying mostly on a Latourian methodological paradigm of digital objects as having an agency of their own eventually becomes a barrier for further studies in this area as it restricts any critical outlook or contextualization of online visual culture to the larger social or economic spheres. Nonetheless, in the context of the ubiquity of images on social media platforms, digital methods can prove to be useful to make sense of wide-ranging patterns of social media usage. For instance, Chapter 7 of this thesis elaborates on a research project that I worked for, at the Digital Methods Summer School (2017) in Amsterdam, where researchers collaborated and gathered big data about the growing

online far right movement called the Alt Right. The initial observations gathered from the Alt Right's online activities and their social networks across different platforms have been useful in providing insights into this their global connections and ideological lineages (examined further in Chapter 7).

Another method that predominates the arguments in the field of social media studies is cultural analytics (Manovich, 2017). Cultural analytics uses computational analysis using software that can download large numbers of images and utilize facial recognition software to discern the demographic details of those in the images. As a method, it is similar to content analysis which enables researchers to find patterns in a large pool of image data available which might not be visible otherwise.

This method largely focuses on the compositional elements of images, such as the demographic details of the users, the colours used, the hues and so on. As an exemplar of this, one can look at Lev Manovich's project titled *Selfiecity* that draws upon extensive datasets of selfies posted on Instagram from several cities across the world to identify trends around aesthetic elements such as, common gestures and poses in these selfies (Losh, 2015; Manovich, 2017). One of the benefits of using software tools is that they enable researchers to work with large datasets, making it easier to categorize these large datasets of images into genres and themes. However, cultural analytics largely focuses on patterns in images based on their compositionality such as the hues, colours or the spatiality of images. It can also be used towards converting the images into statistical data sets which can then be visualized to discern larger patterns. For instance, the image metadata of hashtags or Likes can be converted to numerical datasets that can further be visualized to reveal information. The methodological imperative here is, how do social scientists deal with big data? As such this method relies on available image processing software that can render visible the compositional characteristics of images.

But by relying on the larger data sets to reveal some information becomes a significant flaw of this method as by doing so, it risks ignoring the semantic meanings of images. It ends up giving a descriptive account of images as isolated objects, devoid of any larger social or cultural context and analyses them solely by identifying patterns in very large numbers. Once again, what is missing from this method is an account of subjectivity of the users itself. And more importantly some of the works that do indeed find a relation between subjectivity and aesthetics or the compositionality of the images, fail to conceive of how the subjects and the visuality itself are imbued with the larger social, economic and political contexts.

Nick Srnicek (2017) makes an important argument against such narratives of digital media, for neglecting their historical and economic contexts as these giant digital media platform companies become a dominant force in the era of data driven *platform capitalism*. His work *Platform Capitalism* offers a critical historical account of platforms as an extension and an outcome of the expansion of capitalist forces, as the new business models and forerunners of the digital economy. Digital economy for Srnicek (2017) refers to the increasing reliance of

businesses on information technology, data and the internet. A key argument made in this work is how late capitalism is centred upon a new kind of raw material: *data* (Srnicek, 2017, p. 39). He categorizes Facebook and Google as Advertising platforms and not social media platforms considering that both these platforms are largely dependent on their advertising revenues. These platforms engage in the selling of user/consumer data to companies and simultaneously auctioning ad spaces to advertisers (Srnicek, 2017, p.56). This argument, however, departs from a critique proposed by Helmond, Nieborg, and van der Vlist (2017), as it does not de-link the historical and economic context of how platforms partake in the drives of late capitalism. Here following Jameson (1997), it can be argued that the abstraction of capital in the form of finance capital must also be understood in the form it takes within the superstructure (p. 252) and how subjects are placed within it, further reproducing the social relations of production. The dominance of platforms in some ways, represent their culmination of power in the speculative market economy that is marred by a constant flux and 'deterritorialization' of capital (Jameson, 1997) and this needs to be acknowledged while examining the dominant forms of visual culture on digital media.

While an analysis of images using digital methods might provide scholars with a range of information about the images, such as their metadata, number of likes, shares, comments and so on, it does not account for the ways in which subjects are placed within the ideological drives of late capitalism. By extending Srnicek's argument to an analysis of visual culture (not only the architecture of platforms and their merger with the drives of capital), there is a need to start mapping the effects of this abstraction in the cultural sphere. This can be done precisely by using a theoretical and methodological vantage point of ideology critique which brings together both the level of the political economic structures of the digital platforms which form the central axis of late capitalist economies, and the subject's interpellation into the ideological legitimation for the late capitalist project.

Why Ideology Critique?

Apart from a heavy reliance on data-driven methods, social media and the images shared by users on it are often conflated with this sense of freedom from ideological representations imposed from above. The old model of communication, whereby the sender of a message may be a capitalist, the message might be some form of an advertisement, or propaganda for consumerist drives or a communist state, and the receiver would be a passive audience, quietly taking in the ideological messages is considered to be invalid while discussing digital and social media (Hartley, 2012, p. 2). Some, such as Hartley (2012), have argued that we need to rethink this model of communication in the context of new media, where it is no longer relevant to talk about audiences as 'consumers' and must be reconceptualised as users or 'producers' of content; and digital media as spaces where meaningful social relations and networks are built through innovation, self-expression and so on.

In such a model, there is a tendency to separate the distinct but linked moments, in the process of communication itself. While we can argue that consumers/audiences on digital media produce their own content, we forget that this content is simultaneously consumed by other users, distributed through platforms and limited by the architectural drives of platforms. At the same time, whether the users get any monetary value in exchange for their content creation (such as Instagram influencers, for example) is dependent on the businesses who think such content will in turn profit them. As Stuart Hall puts it, " the process thus requires, at the production end, its material instruments- its 'means'- as well as its own assets of social (production) relations- the organization and combination of practices within media apparatuses" (Hall, 2005, p. 117). While there are not many restrictions on who can create and share their content on social media, digital media technologies create new forms of social relations creating wealth out of an entire apparatus of casualized work, creating new classes such as the 'cybertariat' (Huws, 2003 as cited in Dyer-Witheford, (2014) as new forms of precarious workers in the tech industry and even newer forms of immaterial labour (Dyer-Witheford, 2015), as argued in Chapter 2. At the same time, the users of digital media, are not only consuming content, but often reproduce the dominant discourses through such content. So here, if one only focuses on the fact that users create their own content, the questions about the naturalisation of certain discourses, and codes (visual and textual) are ignored. In the model of communication, it is not simply about who is producing and who is consuming but also, what are the more common practices of production and whether these practices can be delineated as reflecting a dominant social, political and economic order.

As discussed above, the discourses around social media are often positive, celebratory, or at times, paranoid and critical of the influence of big data around issues of privacy. They rely on methodological approaches that engage in a fetishization of big data and emphasize a reliance on collecting online data, to the extent of claiming that a 'computational turn' in the field of social science research is the new way forward. From the early days of cyber-utopianism and the dot-com bubble to the current stage of web 2.0 era, what we have predominantly witnessed is the pervasive triumph of neoliberal ideology. Following the discourse that users are now also producers of content and are "free to do as they please", ideology or hegemony are assumed to be outmoded concepts to understand social reality today. A similar notion of 'consumer freedom' is used as a counter-argument to any criticism aimed at the failures of the current late capitalist economic system. Laclau and Mouffe (2001) have discussed this at length with relation to a lack of discourse of any anti-capitalist arguments as a possible alternative to the current economic order in mainstream politics of social democracy. As Caren Irr (2017) argues, there has been a tendency in the social sciences and humanities to restrict the "political" to a narrow understanding of national political themes, separating them from the material basis of politics. Often this separation of the political from the social, cultural and the economic, is reflected in the field of social media and visual culture studies where the social modality of images is not explored. Beyond the

enumerating of images and their circulation as 'facts', one needs to acknowledge that images are a discursive medium and assist in establishing signifying chains that orient a discourse in specific ways.

While massive income and wealth disparities have emerged, specifically since the 2008 financial crisis and the following austerity, along with large scale precariatisation of the work force, the discourses around understanding social media remain largely neutral and barred from these overarching discussions. There are however, a number of studies in recent years exploring the economic crisis and how capital adapts itself to the crisis and morphs into newer forms of productive systems such as a platform-based system of accumulation (Srnicek, 2017). For instance, a range of Marxist studies have come out in recent years (Fuchs, 2009) (Fuchs, 2016) (Wittel, 2016) (Pleios, 2016) (Dyer-Witheford, 1999) (Dyer-Witheford, 2015), exploring late capitalism in relation to social and digital media technologies. However, they are largely focussed on the political economy of digital technologies in their relation to the late capitalist system.

There is a lot of catching up to do in the field of social and digital media studies, specifically with regards to the study of online cultures and the constitution of subjectivity through the subject's imaginary identification with the relations of production. What are the unconscious processes by which subjects recognize themselves in the ideological significations that allows them to make sense of their reality? There have seldom been any systematic explorations of ideology and social media since the recent years of growth of Facebook and other social media giants. Although Althusser's concept of interpellation was essential to understanding the hegemonic nature of earlier forms of media production and viewership, social media has been kept out of this thread of conceptualisation owing to the nature of its content; of audiences/users as being able to not just view but produce content.

Georg Lukacs (1972) argued in *History and Class Consciousness* (directing his criticism at orthodox, revisionist Marxist literature at the time), that there are methodological implications where there is an extensive reliance on an empiricist collection of data. He states that,

> The blinkered empiricist will of course deny that facts can only become facts within the framework of a system-which will vary with the knowledge desired. He believes that every piece of data from economic life, every statistic, every raw event already constitutes an important fact. In so doing, he forgets that however simple an enumeration of 'facts' maybe, however lacking in commentary, it already implies an interpretation. Already at this stage, the facts have been comprehended by a theory, a method; they have been wrenched from their living context and filled into a theory (p.6).

A reliance on big data and the political economy of new digital technologies, their production, distribution and consumption are certainly insightful for a Marxist analytical project. But at the same time, we cannot discard the vitality of an ideological analysis that answers a whole range of political, economic, social and cultural

questions that cannot be answered by a political economic analysis alone. I mentioned my own research using Digital Methods in the previous section, where we analysed the activities of the far-right online group called the Alt Right, using big data analysis and a range of open source software. At the end of the process of digging out the data, we had so much information at our disposal that someone needed to sit down and interpret and make sense of all this data. While in my project report, I had used a theoretical and methodological lens of Althusserian ideology critique, my peers analysed the data from a Latourian perspective. The point being that in the end, the theoretical lens does influence the way that data and 'facts' are interpreted, and this practice is itself unavoidable in research.

A Psychoanalytic-Semiotic Method for Studying Visual Culture on Social Media

Both semiotics and psychoanalysis offer a way to situate the subject within digital cultures, without isolating subjective positions and the structures that enclose them. Slavoj Žižek (2002) in *For They Know What They Do*, reinvigorates the Marxist notion of ideology using the Lacanian notion of enjoyment and offers a contemporaneous analysis of the functioning of ideology today. For Žižek, what makes ideology function in late capitalist societies is primarily the fantasy of enjoyment that supports and sustains it. What this Lacanian reworking of the notion of ideology does is help us get out of the perception of ideology and its connotation of false consciousness in Marxist theory. What has been a problem with a Marxist use of the term ideology is situating certain subjects as more enlightened and standing outside of the ideological edifices, while it is others, the commoners, the masses who are duped (Hall, 1985). Further, it assumes that each class has a prescribed ideology that forms a screen which restricts subjects in that class from seeing the real relations in which they are placed (Hall, 1985). More importantly, it is always others who are duped by ideology and not us.

But Žižek's notion of enjoyment as ideology in late capitalist societies, offers a critique of such a conception. A Lacanian conception of fantasy and how we as subjects are interpellated through the fantasy of enjoyment in not just what we know, but what we do despite what we know, which involves our everyday actions and practices. Theoretically, Hall (2018) argues that there is a close affinity between Lacanian psychoanalysis and the fields of semiotics and Marxist cultural theory. The affinity does not only lie in the opening up of questions about the relationship between the psychic and the social terrains but rather, in recognizing the centrality of the unconscious as paramount to a Lacanian theoretical view and that Lacan specifically emphasizes the pre-eminence of language in the formation of the subject's inner life. For Hall (2018), within cultural studies, this offered a notion of ideology that could be understood as a system of representation located in the question of language, doing away with the older notions of false consciousness where the subject's place in the socio-economic order, directly matched their corresponding ideological position.

For Lacan (2004) and Zizek (1991), the Imaginary register offers a safe outlet for an imagined enjoyment, where subjects can visualize, fantasize the enjoyment they lack within the Symbolic order. The Symbolic order constitutes our social reality, the norms and values, while the Real is that point of suture, that which escapes symbolization and posits a threat to this Symbolic order. Contrary to the Freudian notion of the superego, for Lacan (2004), superego is an anti-ethical agency. It punishes us with feelings of guilt for betraying our desires. As Lacan (1998) suggests the superego is at once, the law and its destruction. As Žižek (2002) suggests the Lacanian notion of 'enjoyment' relates to this superegoic agency that places impossible demands on us and happily observes our failed attempts at achieving them. The inducement to enjoy within late capitalism marks a shift from a restrain on enjoyment within the earlier stages of capitalist expansion to its promotion (McGowan, 2004).

Despite this transformation of the social order with the superegoic injunction to enjoy in late capitalism, it does not produce actual enjoyment but only allows the subjects to *visualize* the enjoyment they lack (McGowan, 2004). So, in answering the previously posed questions on how subjects recognize themselves within certain systems of representations, one can now try and understand this. Žižek calls this process symbolic identification, whereby it is the gaze of the ego ideal (the Other that we idealize, this can be a discourse, idea, a group of people or another subject) that we as subjects try to please. It is this gaze that we are performing our actions for. The symbolic order on social media (which is our friends, followers on social media) demand that I go out every now and then and enjoy myself. Often, we find users sharing their image of "fun" and not those of sadness. Capitalism demands a happy consciousness (Marcuse, 1964) to keep the economy going, no matter if your mortgage or debts are too high- you deserve a holiday. Depression is the Real that threatens capital's smooth functioning (Fisher, 2009). For Lacan, the Real is what is suppressed by reality- the traumatic kernel that escapes symbolization and threatens to reveal the inconsistencies of apparent reality. A depressive social media is the Real, which is that disruptive kernel that might interrupt the reality of social media or if we are able to make this necessary connection, between the epidemic of depression in late capitalist societies as a symptom of the failures of neoliberal capitalism and the constant neoliberal tendency to make subjects responsible for their situation. Neoliberal "freedoms" very much coincide here with the injunction to enjoy. This is not to say that no countervailing tendencies exist. More and more young people are now engaging in political discourses on social media through memes, creating images, videos and so on. However, a discursive engagement on social media cannot be seen as supplanting substantive political engagement. Even the online engagement in the form of memes is being appropriated for the purpose of political propaganda and campaigning (this is further discussed in Chapter 7). Following the Žižekian explanation of enjoyment as ideology one can begin to explain how we as subjects recognize ourselves in the dominant ideological imperatives under late capitalism. A psychoanalytic method and a range of Marxist-Lacanian conceptual tools

thus offer a more nuanced understanding of ideology and its representation on social media, facilitating a connection between social relations and how subjectivity is constituted.

Further, a semiotic reading of visual culture, offers a parallel account of the way subjects/users identify with the dominant code in the form of images. Clicking and sharing of images is an act of communication and to that intent it is a signifying act. Subjects/users while sharing their images or memes partake in an act of representation. Methodologically, the task then is to identify what representations are now normalized and for what reason. How is the neoliberal, consumerist myth constructed and reproduced in everyday discourse and practices? A semiotic analysis of online images offers us a way to make political speech possible (Barthes, 2000). While a psychoanalytic method helps in identifying the subjectivizing practices, of how subjectivity is constructed, a semiotic approach identifies precisely which social signifying practices make this subjectivisation possible.

To recount Barthes' understanding of a myth, it is first and foremost, a system of communication. A myth is not any object, idea or a concept but the way in which these are conveyed in a discourse. In that sense, anything can take form of a myth. Using Saussure's exemplary analysis of language, Barthes (2000) uses the relationship between the three terms, signifiers, signified and sign to understand how myths are constructed. The signified is a concept, the signifier is a mental image, while the sign is a relation between the concept and the image which is a concrete entity (Barthes, 2000, p 113).

For instance, if we pick apart 'enjoyment' as a myth in late capitalist societies, as constructed in everyday discourse, simply as a signifier, it is empty. For the subject, enjoyment could mean any number of things we do/experience. Barthes notes that the relationship between the signifier, that which is signified, and the sign can be discerned only in their existing relationship within the current semiotic system as the meaning of objects, ideas, concepts are likely to change over the course of time. However, as Barthes argues, in a myth, the relation between the signifier and the signified is not just a sign, but *signification* (Barthes, 2000). Myth is not just speech but a message (Barthes, 2000, p. 110). It can be represented in the *form* of images, cinema, writing, and other discursive forms.

In contemporary culture, enjoyment entails such a second order signification- a myth. There are a number of significations in culture in late capitalism which collate to form the myth of enjoyment. A naturalization of enjoyment or an enjoyment that we all must attain is experienced as innocent speech by being normalized. It is at this stage that bourgeois ideology becomes public philosophy, which helps us withstand everyday life (Barthes, 2000). By naturalizing the notion of enjoyment and disseminating its representations in culture as a form of lifestyle and status that a huge class of people cannot live up to but only fantasize about, the bourgeois successfully create an illusion of the absence of class distinctions; as if class differences don't exist anymore.

The same discourses are often used in the case of images created and shared on social media platforms. The fact that millions of people have access to smartphones and can create and share their own content on social media is used to ascertain that new technologies and their ubiquity is assisting in transcending older class barriers. Since everyone can afford a commodity, the system must be working! In some ways, the affordability and accessibility of technologies are used as an ideological tool to assert that capitalism is generous, while people are finding it harder to access basic necessities such as health, food, education and housing. Advertising discourses further support a mystification of class relations. Myth does not hide or flaunt anything, it only distorts, it naturalizes (Barthes, 2000, p. 129). As in a Freudian understanding of dreams, manifest meaning is distorted by its latent meaning (Barthes, 2000, p. 122), so is the meaning distorted by its *form* in a myth. Enjoyment interpellates subjects into ideology when it takes the form of a myth, or the point at which it becomes interpellant speech (Barthes, 2000, p.125). The subject for whom the myth is naturalized, reads it not as a motive but as a reason.

This is how Barthes suggests bourgeois ideology seeps down to everyday existence, from the clothes we wear, to the films, to the food we post images of, is dependent on the representations of the naturalized bourgeois culture. So that there is nothing but a prevailing bourgeois ideology. Barthes (2000) makes another important point about the disappearance of the words 'bourgeois', 'capitalist' from public political discourse (p.138). What we see in it is the disappearance of a politics of antagonism itself. This is how Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk are not capitalists but youth icons, the ideal-ego for all the young techno-fetishists. "*Myth is depoliticized speech*," Barthes (2000, p.143) contends. Its nature of depoliticization of discourses makes it possible for it to speak of things as matter of fact, without any depth, doing away with dialectics.

In elaborating such a conception of ideology and ideological interpellation and in utilizing a psychoanalytic-semiotic method, this project attempts to analyse some of the most popular image-making and sharing practices on social media today. The images for case study in the following chapters can all be coded as different genres that are found to be most popularly shared on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and sometimes Twitter. Image-sharing patterns here refer to the most commonly recurring trends of genres of images that are generally clicked using a smart phone camera and shared or created (images such as memes) and uploaded on social networking sites. These can be grouped under broad genres using hashtags such as #travel, #selfie, #foodporn and so on. Such a coding of the most popular genres of images can be done by following hashtags used on social media (Highfield & Leaver, 2015). The analysis itself is not restricted to just one platform such as Facebook, because that does not allow us to explore the multiplicity of sites at which these images travel online and are shared. However, each chapter does reflect on the most prominent platforms used for a specific genre of image-making that enable and disable certain types of communicative and image-making practices. Instagram, for instance, is discussed in the next chapter, in the context of studying selfies. Coding different

genres of images by their popularity, the three case studies in the following chapters reflect the multiple ways in which subjects on social media can be interpellated by dominant ideological discourses.

The Subject is Always Within Ideology- A Note

"Ideological commitment is not first and foremost a matter of moral choice but of the taking of sides in a struggle between embattled groups" – Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (1982, p.280).

The theory of ideology has been often contested and debated within and outside Marxist theoretical circles for a myriad of reasons.[10] I agree with Jameson (2005) that one of the reasons for an aversion to the theory of ideology is perhaps that people are more predisposed to using the term 'ideological' as an adjective, which almost has an invective connotation to it, rather than it being a matter of *positioning* oneself. This connotation is indicative specifically of the Fukuyamaist 'end of ideology' thesis after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and phase of neoliberalism in global restructuring of economies, which sees an adherence to Marxism as a theoretical framework and a praxis, as a problem and a barrier to the ideology of the 'free market'. More importantly, as soon as one denounces something as 'ideological' one can be sure that its inversion is no less ideological (Žižek, 2012, p.4). Providing a 'neutral' account of the different ideological positions can itself be an ideological project, since one is always already representing the various ideas and their histories by *selecting* what to represent and *silencing* the rest.

Further, it is ironic that mainstream news media advocates are increasingly critical of how digital media platforms are swaying political opinions and feeding into populist (left or right wing) rhetoric in the era of 'fake news', 'alternative facts', Trump and the Cambridge Analytica controversy (Sabbagh, 2018). While Big Data and its use for propaganda on digital media platforms is certainly worrying, one should be at least a little sceptical in accepting the argument that mainstream media supplies the audiences with unbiased, 'objective', 'non-partisan' and hence reliable news stories. Or as Althusser states, "Ideology never says, 'I am ideological'" (Althusser, 2012, p. 131).

Here, as an example, it can be pointed out how independent journalism that takes up a tiny corner of the internet on websites such as wikileaks.org, consortiumnews.com, medialens.org, globalresearch.org, counterpunch.org and some others (Pilger, 2018), has been helpful in the meticulous dismantling of such myths of neutrality or 'objectivity' of discourses often claimed by mainstream news media like the *BBC*. For instance, in Britain, the debt owned by the banks post-2008 crisis is being paid back by cutting down on public resources

[10] A few debates such as those put forth by Slavoj Zizek in *The Spectre of Ideology* (2012), Fredric Jameson's *Ideological Analysis: A Handbook* (2005), and Terry Eagleton's *Ideology and its vicissitudes* (2012) have offered rich accounts of the way ideology and ideological analysis has been theorized by Marxist scholars in the past and its relevance today. These have been paramount in informing this Chapter and remain crucial to this thesis.

such as the National Health Service (NHS), what is commonly known as austerity. Yet, the BBC's coverage of the very dismantling of such public resources, hides behind a language of corporate euphemisms such as 'efficiency savings' (BBC's term for cutting down of public expenditure) and 'hard choices' (Edwards & Cromwell, 2013). While claiming to inform the public on matter of public policy, the BBC in effect silenced what should have been rigorously covered and made known to the people: the 2012 Health and Social Care Act which ends the legal obligations of the British government to provide universal free health care to its citizens. It was two independent journalists, David Edwards and David Cromwell (2013) who on their website medialens.org outright questioned the BBC's 'objectivity' over underreporting this issue.

Althusser (2012) clearly states that the Ideological State Apparatuses such as the media are often not only at stake in but are the very sites of class struggle. In a similar vein, Stuart Hall (1985) concludes in relation to media messages that any 'event' can only be signified, and that the moment any event passes under the regularities and absences of a discourse, it is also subjected to ideological rhetoric. There is no outside of ideology for the subject (Zizek, 1994). Althusser (1973) identifies how subjects are always already interpellated by some ideology as we enter the symbolic order through already existing language and signifiers; the alternative or the outside of language and symbolic order would result in psychosis (Eagleton, 2012, p. 217). Hence, the Althusserian statement, 'man is an ideological animal by nature' (Althusser, 1973, p. 129).

It is more difficult to make claims about ideology on social media since it is us, the users who create, share, produce the content online, although within the framework of what is afforded on the platforms. On social media subjects are relatively autonomous, as they are not just recipients/audiences of representations but also creators of media, which is repeatedly argued by those analysing web cultures today such as Henry Jenkins et al. (2009), departing from the arguments about ideology, celebrating our entry into a post-ideological era. This is where Althusser's notion of the more 'spontaneous' ideology becomes central to an understanding of ideology on social media. Hall (1985) suggests that there are practises that can be demarcated as representations that are purposefully ideological, such as ideologies that are largely reproduced by the mainstream news media. As well as, material practices, where subjects themselves produce commodities, services, or media, cultures, which are not directly ideological but nonetheless can be inscribed by ideology (Hall, 1985). Users creating and sharing content on social media is in itself not an ideological practice but nonetheless it can be inscribed by different ideological practices. 'Liking' the brands we love on our social media pages or sharing images of a newly bought car is not in itself an ideological practice, but it is inscribed by our fetishistic relation to commodities.

At the same time, there are a myriad of ways in which those subordinated, *practice* a resistance to the dominant ideology and disrupt its smooth functioning, although this varies historically. As Jameson (2005) rightly

suggests, I as a subject can be the opposite of what is demanded or expected of me, for instance, a criminal, a rioter, a rebel or a naughty child, (or a communist) because in the end, it is the subject who plays a constitutive part in the functioning of ideology.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the paradox of these social and digital media networks is that while they are largely part of the new forces of production, radically transforming our way of life; nonetheless, they have simultaneously served a tactical function in organizing mass social movements across the globe against the very capitalist system that sustains them. Paulo Gerbaudo's (2012) study of the 'tweets and the streets' of the 2011 social movements occurring in Egypt, Spain and the U.S.A, showed that mobile devices and social media platforms played an important role in the organization of these mobilisations, in the large scale coordination of their demonstrations (as cited in Dyer-Witheford, 2014, p. 174).

In response to this though, the crucial lesson of Althusserian discussion has been that ideology and the process of interpellation be considered as an active, rather than a passive process, as something that we as subjects actively do in our everyday practices, breaking through the double bind of freedom and manipulation (Jameson, 2005, p. 343). Methodologically, it is useful to clarify that as someone who is writing about ideology, I do not presume to stand outside of ideology. Ideological analysis is used here as an interpretative operation, which offers conceptual strength to the Marxist theorization of capitalism and its reproduction, by mediating between those phenomena that are often separated as economic (material or objective) and cultural (social or subjective).

Chapter 5 The Self Image

> Those very pre-capitalist enclaves (Nature and the Unconscious) which offered extraterritorial and Archimedean footholds for critical effectivity are colonised, and the individual is submerged in the ubiquitous logic of a capitalist culture.
>
> -Fredric Jameson (1991, p. 49, as cited in End Notes 2, 2010).
>
> 'The Slaves of the ancient world' have been replaced by men who have been reduced to the status of 'products': 'products […] that can be consumed like other products'.
>
> -Jacques Lacan (2007, p. 35).

Introduction

Neoliberalism as an ideological structure involves the systematic displacement of a myriad of our everyday social, political and economic issues to the individual self. As Mrs. Thatcher famously proclaimed, "society does not exist"; under neoliberalism we must all be made individually responsible for our own welfare submitting to competitive discipline, espousing entrepreneurial values (Hall, 2011, p. 714). Market determines everything and everything comes with a price-tag. It is not just that labour is commodified, but it is increasingly harder to pinpoint which part of our lives are spared from this commodification process (Jameson, 2012). This is accompanied by a simultaneous process of individualising the social, economic, political problems where the subject is constantly told- "it must be you", "you're not working hard enough", "you need to work on yourself" and so on. Such discourses are often reflected in the perpetuation of a subject that displaces her anxieties by seeking everyday escapism; from finding some solace in buying commodities, to following self-perfecting regimes such as intense workouts at the gym, or diets to achieve that perfect body and a plethora of self-help books, or even self-help, DIY YouTube videos. Moreover, each of these attempts to escape the anxieties have a market value insofar as they signify a certain lifestyle choice.

Concomitantly, with the ubiquity of digital technologies and social media platforms such as Facebook, what we have seen in the last few years is a visual culture that is largely fixated on creating and perfecting one's image. Dominant visual culture image-making practices often reflect the existing cultural, political, social and economic anxieties- the dreams, desires and fears that capture the subject's imagination. One such popularized visual culture trend on social media is the 'selfie' or the digital version of self-portraits shared on social media platforms. Everyone clicks them, but for some reason, we tend to look down upon others who click them. This chapter examines this trend of image-making, contextualizing it in the attention-based economy of gaining likes on social media. It contends that image making practices such as 'selfies' signify, reproduce and are

symptomatic of the dominant form of subjectivity in our precarious lives under neoliberalism.[11] Connecting neoliberal subjectivity with selfies clarifies the ways in which social media users are firstly, steered in a certain direction to connect with other users in specific ways afforded by the design and architecture of the different online platforms, and secondly, it helps explain how the pervasive ideological structures of neoliberal stage of late capitalism produce specific forms of social relations, subjectivity and thereby visual culture on social media.

Self and the Selfie

A selfie is a photograph that one clicks of oneself, typically using a smart phone camera or webcam and is uploaded to a social media platform (Mirzoeff, 2016, p. 29). Users had uploaded 24 billion selfies to the Google photos app in the year 2015 alone (Gray, 2016), and this isn't counting those uploaded to all the other image-sharing platforms and apps such as Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat. Platforms such as Instagram that now boast nearly one billion monthly active users, are specifically designed and used for sharing images, selfies and self-portraits being the most popular of such images (Iqbal, 2019). New add-on technologies are regularly introduced in the market assisting smartphone users to click the best selfies possible; from the iconic selfie-sticks to smart phone cameras that are specially designed and marketed for an avid selfie-enthusiast. Or even apps that automatically edit and filter your selfies to give you the flawless, doll-like features previously seen in advertisements where models' faces were photoshopped for that painstakingly perfected look. There are different types of selfies that one can click and add hashtags to while sharing them online such as #gymselfie, #groupselfie, or #mirrorselfie and so on.

Since its popularization, different approaches have been used to make sense of the selfie phenomenon. Countless articles have been written about selfies specifically in the media that often depict outrage and scorn over how supposedly self-obsessed and narcissistic we are (Gray, 2016). Some, on the other hand, have argued that selfies are a new form of art for the masses, a photographic vernacular of our times, where everyone can be an artist (Tifentale, 2014). Others, such as Nicholas Mirzoeff (2016), have contextualized the selfie as an image-making practice in the long history of self-portraiture in painting and photography, contesting the popular claims of our selfie-induced obsession. In carefully drawing out the connections between the earlier practices of self-portraiture and our own selfie-making practice today, Mirzoeff argues that "when ordinary people pose for a selfie in the most flattering way possible, they take over the role of the artist-as-hero. Each selfie is a performance of a person as they hope to be seen by others" (Mirzoeff, 2016, p. 62). For Mirzoeff, the ability to see oneself and being able to create one's self image has historically been limited to the wealthy and

[11] As stated in Chapter 2, 'neoliberalism' can be used as marker which allows us to coagulate a range of ideological discourses that are specific to the current stage of capitalism. It is sometimes used interchangeably with the concept of 'late capitalism' in this thesis.

powerful, which was challenged with the invention of affordable Kodak cameras that made image-making accessible to most working people in the industrialized nations. Selfies then, are an extension of such technological advancements such as a front camera on the smart phone, that have made self-portraiture accessible to many people across the globe.

Following a similar train of argument, Jodi Dean has argued that "selfies are a communist form of expression" (Dean, 2016). In Dean's view, we need to look at selfies as part of the larger online culture of imitating one another and participating in a common, shared practice of image-making. She invokes Walter Benjamin's notion of photography as a form of mechanical reproduction, whereby "the mechanically reproduced object (like a photograph or audio record) can be inserted into different contexts, associated with different objects, read from the perspective of varying discursive frameworks […] It no longer has a unique existence in a particular time and space but plural existence, I would even say *common* existence"[12] (Dean, 2016). Further, a selfie is not just a self-portrait "where one is unique and irreplaceable but an instance of how one is like many, equal to any other" (Dean, 2016). For Dean (2016), emojis, hashtags, memes, selfies are all ways in which people try to produce meanings where capitalism has turned their social interactions into a mineable resource.

Art historian Derek Murray contends that selfies need to be examined in the context of self-portraits by artists such as Cindy Sherman where fiercely feminist values have been historically been associated with the art form (Murray, 2015). In her essay interrogating Cindy Sherman's photographic self-portrait series *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-1980), Laura Mulvey observes how Sherman's images offer a parodying account of the 'male gaze', where the viewer is often uncomfortably entrapped and at the same time, invited to be a voyeur (Mulvey, 1991). But while Sherman was challenging the dominant constructions of femininity at the time through her self-portraits, can one assume the same nuances apply to the digital trend of clicking and sharing one's selfies? More importantly, selfies are not simply an individual practice of making one's image but also a social practice which involves sharing them on social media platforms to make oneself visible to others (Tifentale, 2014). The instant sharing and distribution of images to others in our social media networks along with the affirmation we get in the form of likes, shares and hearts from others is what distinguishes selfies from the earlier photographic or artist's self-portraits. Even if one assumes that selfies allow for the subjects to represent themselves through a performative creation of the self-image, it cannot be assumed that this representation itself is free from any ideological edifices. As discussed in Chapter 3, this was precisely Althusser's insight on ideological reproduction of capitalism whereby it is the subjects themselves who partake in reproducing capitalist ideology. Certainly, the argument here is not that selfies are an ideological practice,

[12] Author's emphasis.

just as producing and consuming commodities is not a purposefully ideological act, but that they can be nonetheless, inscribed by an ideology (Hall, 1985).

Another such dominant argument on selfies, largely coming from the field of psychology has been focussed on narcissistic personality disorders and the selfie phenomenon (Cassella, 2019) (March & McBean, 2018). There is a range of literature that posits a correlation between posting selfies online and increasing narcissistic traits, such as low self-esteem, exhibitionism and so on (Carpenter, 2012). Such discourses tend to individualise a phenomenon that is predominantly rooted in social, political and economic issues. Such an understanding of an individualized subjectivity is often reduced to the Lacanian Imaginary, as if the issue is simply about the subject's behaviour and social media platforms, in which traits such as narcissism are construed as behavioural oddities, devoid of any surrounding cultural, social or political economic influences. And in many ways, it also reflects the triumph of neoliberal ideology in assuming that "society does not exist".

There are many ways in which we can perceive online visual culture trends such as selfies. The ubiquitous nature of technology and its global accessibility and affordability is by no means a small feat and should not be underestimated in its capacity to empower us in unimaginable ways. Images are a powerful discursive and affective tool and that billions of us can now freely make them is something to be appreciative of. The awe-inspiring images shared by people of the various protests in 2019, from Chile, Haiti, Hong Kong, Algeria, France and many more, are being globally spread and these generate feelings of hope and solidarity. There is something extremely empowering about images of struggle shared by those at the barricades.

But as seen in the discussion above, academic discourse on selfies and self-portraits shared on social media tend to be focussed on what the technologies have allowed us to do; that technology has largely democratized the *form* of self-portraiture and image-making that was earlier accessible only to an elite few. Portraiture was already made accessible to many people when Kodak cameras were made affordable, whether it was in the form of family portraits or our own images (Berger, 2001, p. 18). For Sontag (2005) the democratization of image-making was inherent to photography and was subsequently carried out with the industrialisation of camera technology (Sontag, 2005, p. 5). Nevertheless, beyond an understanding of selfies as a *form* of image-making that focuses on the aesthetics and the technologies used, image-making trends such as selfies need to be first seen in the overarching context of social media platforms and how they have influenced and changed visual culture today. As argued in Chapter 2, we fetishize and are fascinated by new technologies (Jameson, 2016) and their impact on our everyday lives to a point that such a celebration often serves as an ideological legitimation for how technology, just like wealth under capitalism, trickles down from a few to the many (Fisher, 2010, p. 19). Jameson (2012, p. 293) similarly pointed out that in legitimizing the rule of the market,

conservatives in America often use the rhetoric that 'the presence of television in worker's households' suggests that the market is indeed working.

Further, it is no coincidence that in predominantly late capitalist, consumerist societies where so much emphasis is placed on improving oneself, where a pervasive culture of cut-throat competition exists, and the self-interested subject is celebrated and lauded, that we find ourselves not just clicking but perfecting our own images in the form of selfies. Such dominant forms of visual culture often are reflective of a subject that aligns and is symptomatic of the ideological structures of the dominant mode of production- late capitalism. The next section provides a contextual backdrop of the popularization of selfies in discussing the political economy of the profit-driven social media ecosystem which encourages certain types of user engagement on the platforms.

Selfies and the Attention Economy on Social media

Enthusiasm for selfies is so pronounced that selfie related deaths and injuries have been reported in different parts of the world (The BBC, 2018) (Cherian, 2019). In various countries like India and Vietnam, governments and local policy makers have had to demarcate 'selfie-free' zones on cliffs, waterfalls and other such tourist spots for safety reasons (Schetzer, 2019) (Agence France-Presse in Hanoi, 2019). Part of the reason for my interest in writing a thesis on image-making and visual culture was driven by the obsession that we seemed to have with selfies and clicking pictures of everything. Once I had witnessed a number of people posing and clicking a selfie outside a building on fire, close to where I lived at the time in Mumbai. In one of the most populated cities in the world, a fire accident is bound to have people trapped inside, with a very high possibility of deaths. And yet, in that moment while some people were rushing around to get help, many others from different walks of life, were all taking pictures including selfies. In that instance, I had assumed that people around me were seeing the same thing as me in the way that I was seeing it: a building on fire where people might be hurt. Perhaps, the urge to press the click button in such instances comes from seeing a rare event unfold and simply an impulse to record it. Photographs are often used as evidence, of an event or occurrence; so perhaps the impulse comes from proving to someone that "I was there, I saw it".

The accessibility of smartphones with high-quality built-in cameras along with the use of social media platforms have made it almost habitual to reach out for our phones to click and share everyday life events (Araujo, et al., 2014). As millions of images are clicked and shared every day on social media, the selfie perhaps fulfils the need to say, "it was *I* who saw this", when shared on our profiles. In many ways, cameras and images also offer a distance from the Real, and can be used as a mediation or a shield (Debord, 1970) to help us deal with the madness of our everyday lives. Susan Sontag has argued that, "To take a picture is to have an interest in things as they are, in the status quo remaining unchanged (at least for as long as it takes to get a "good" picture), to be in complicity with whatever makes the subject interesting, worth photographing-

including, when that is the interest, another person's pain or misfortune" (Sontag, 2005, p. 9). It is this complicity and the turning of the *subjects* in our field of vision into an *object* of an interesting image, that makes us click images. With the same impulse to find interesting objects for their images, often tourists from outside of India come to Mumbai and want to click images of people living in the slums. These slums have become such a popular local tourist attraction that NGOs have been organizing walking tours through them, where tourists can comfortably take pictures of people's poverty. Visual culture, our relation to images, subjectivity and affect are quite complex to grasp and yet, in such instances, can help us understand the functioning of ideology. Images are discursive and they often tell us about ideology not only through the photograph itself, but by asking a myriad of questions: Why do we choose to click certain images or events? What does that tell us about the social and cultural milieu at large? Why do we choose not to click images of certain things?

Therefore, an analysis of selfies first needs to be placed in the larger context of social networks and the kind of communication that is afforded and encouraged by social media platforms and the overall changes in culture and social relations that have ensued since the advent of social media platforms such as Facebook. For instance, van Dijck (2012) argues that every social media platform's architecture (its interface, algorithms and code) is designed in a way to steer its users' activities in a certain direction (p.144). When Facebook was still growing, it encouraged a sense of 'connectivity' by asking users to add more friends and strangers to their network. Although the owners of social media platforms claimed that platforms are about allowing users to actively participate in creative and sharing practices (Zuckerberg, 2010), this emphasis downplayed the ways in which user's information was being used and sold to businesses for a myriad of purposes. While Facebook may encourage users to expand their networks, an increase in the number of connections made by its users, in turn surges the platform's monetary value and generates advertising revenue (van Dijck J. , 2012, p. 147). Additionally, the introduction of social buttons by Facebook such as 'Like' and 'Share' allows external websites to link and track Facebook users, creating a closed infrastructure based on what is called the Like economy (as discussed in Chapter 4) (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013). In defining the Like economy, Gerlitz and Helmond (2013) argue that Facebook's push towards connecting the entirety of the web through these social plug-in buttons introduced an economic value to user's social interactions on the web. Subsequently, marketeers and advertisers, could also buy Likes from external resellers to show an increase in their fan base and followers on business pages on social media, further engaging in an economic exchange based on Likes (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013). The Like button and displaying the number of 'Likes' for everything shared on the platform and on other websites has turned user's affective engagement on platforms into a metric that strategically urges users to engage in a give and take of Likes. As an illustration, we can note how on platforms

like Instagram, the hashtag 'followforfollow' is popularized to say 'I'll follow you if you follow me' (Marwick, 2015), as a give and take of followership on the platform.

In their documentary *Generation Like*, Koughan & Rushkoff (2014) interviewed teenagers in the U.S. from various backgrounds to talk about their social media content sharing and activities. Interviewed teenagers were not just well-aware of but were actively engaging in content production that got them more Likes and engagement, whether it was the right profile pictures, to images of them doing 'cool' things, and so on. And the trend of carefully filtering your content, building a brand page for yourself, posting things that get Likes has only intensified since then. As a result, we today have a pervasive culture of brand influencers and microcelebrities who work towards gaining thousands of Likes and hearts on social media platforms. Certainly, this is not to assume that everyone who uses social media is there to be an influencer or even manages to gain thousands of followers, but that new forms of social bonds and relations that permeate culture are encouraged through social media platforms.[13] Advertising discourse invades our personal spaces and our very psyche through social media so thoroughly that subjects willingly and with excitement turn themselves into objects of consumption (Xavier, 2016). Here is an instance of how business interests are investing in online influencers to advertise for their brands and products:

> Sanders Kennedy, a popular YouTuber with over 200,000 subscribers and known for chronicling the drama within the influencer community, was once offered a couple of thousand dollars to leave a particular beverage on his desk while filming. He does not recall the brand but says a representative told him he only needed to make sure the drink appeared within the frame to get his pay-check. And he would not need to tell his audience that he was being paid for the placement, Kennedy says the rep told him (Martineau, 2018).

Marketing and advertising firms offer money and free consumer products to those users with a huge following on social media. In an economy so dependent and structured around digital media, information is abundant, but attention is a scarcity, which intensifies the fight for audience attention. Goldhaber (as cited in Terranova, 2012, p.2) explains the attention-focussed economy as "the system that revolves primarily around paying, receiving, and seeking what is most intrinsically limited and not replaceable by anything else, namely the attention of other human beings." The entire social media ecosystem is built on deriving value from attracting "eyeballs" in an information-saturated environment. Arguments for audience attention as a commodity have previously been made in the context of television advertising whereby audience attention is something that

[13] This is also not the case for all the social media platforms or apps as some such as Snapchat are very different in their layout and design than Facebook and Instagram. A larger focus here is placed on Instagram since it is a very visual, image-focussed platform with more emphasis on images and videos than on textual content.

advertisers actively seek (Fuchs, 2016). The difference on social media is that it isn't just the advertisers who are fighting for audience's attention, but users are also encouraged to do the same to increase their own engagement on platforms. For users, getting attention becomes just as valuable to attain social capital through their profiles.

Although it cannot be said that all images shared by users on social media are *intended* to garner attention and gain Likes, it is the default mode of sharing content on platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Perhaps it is relevant then to distinguish between the different types of selfies created and shared on social media, which signify multiple ways in which users engage on social media platforms. Popular trends such as #groupselfie, for instance, are quite similar in their form to some of the older photographic genres such as family or group holiday portraits.

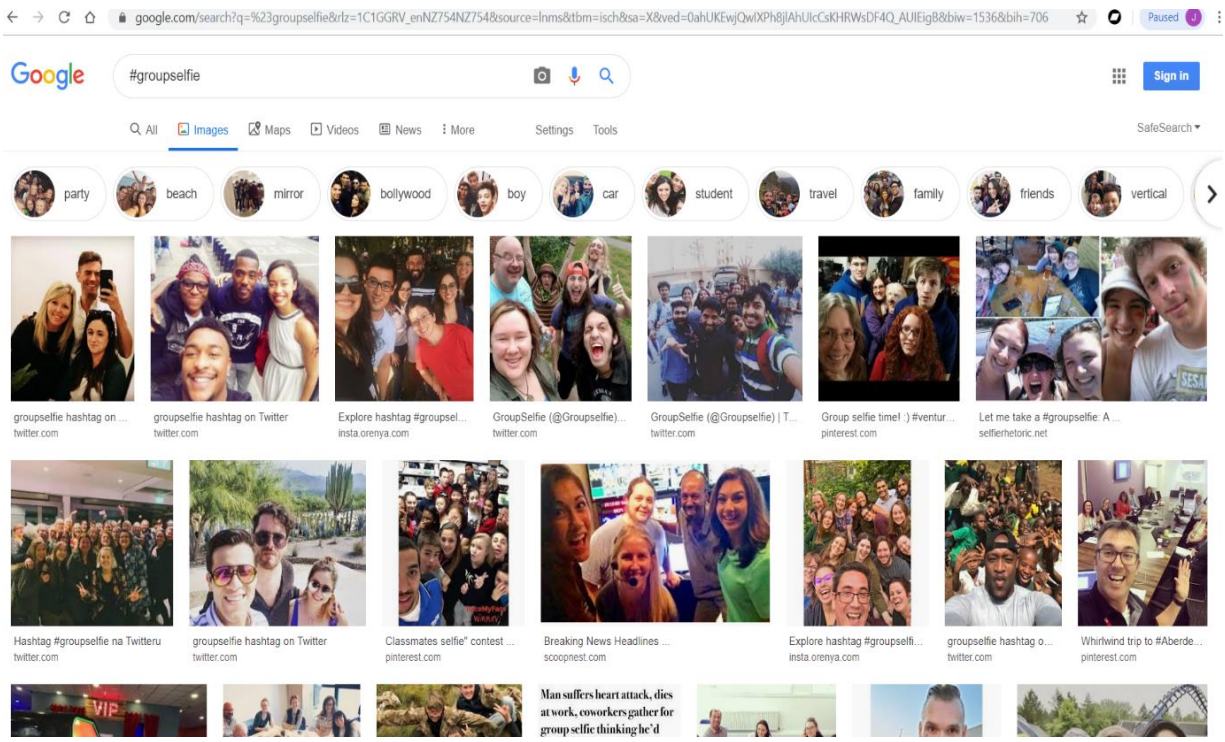

Figure 1 A screenshot image of search results for the keywords "#groupselfie" on Google Images taken on 28th October 2019 (Google Image Search, 2019).

Figure 1 is a Google Image search screenshot of a range of group selfies shared on different platforms.[14] Here, we see a group of people in each image, posing for a selfie, where one person holds the camera at arm's length. It is common practice now to take a selfie with a group of people instead of posing for a group photo enabled

[14] Instead of selecting single images for analysis in this thesis, I have chosen a string of images by searching for the most popularized trends of image-making on social media. The reason for picking multiple images is that it allows us to see how certain image-making practices are popularized, with commonly used techniques, compositions and styles. Simultaneously, using a string of images allows for us to perceive all of the images as forming a semiotic chain where meaning can be established through looking for sameness and difference (Wexler, 2017, p. 269).

by the higher quality of front cameras on our smartphones. The images seem casual and unedited, where the backdrop and locations are not carefully chosen for enhancing their aesthetic appeal, nor are they edited for a more artistic effect using photo filters, which is typical now of images shared on platforms such as Instagram. The cameras are generally held at a top down angle which has become a bodily language for clicking a more flattering selfie. They all are similar in composition and style. Such a coherence in image-making is achieved only when appearances become intelligible in our mind as common perceptions (Berger, 2013, p. 40). Just as we know that when a camera is pointed in our direction, the general obligation is to smile, we now seem to know how to hold our phones for a selfie.

As a genre of photography, group-selfies are almost banal. 'Banality' here is not meant as a pejorative, but as signifying a habitual form of image-making that we engage in. They signify a group of people, marking some moment spent together, whether it is something like meeting a group of colleagues after work for a drink or a casual Sunday brunch with the family. It is quite common now to create these group selfies with people at work, family, friends or any acquaintances. They could be thought of as vernacular photography where "images are produced and consumed as part of a prescribed set of social activities" (Eugénie, 2004, p. 6). We can keep these images in our digital photo albums as mementos and not share them on social media. But when shared on social media, they signify 'having fun' and having 'an active social life'. Certainly, we want to mark these moments in our everyday lives when we are doing something outside of our monotonous work cycle, to show that we have a life outside of work. Not surprisingly then the largest number of images on platforms like Instagram are shared over the weekend (Araujo, et al., 2014, p. 20). Moreover, the cultural milieu on social media is such that it is almost compulsive to *show* and display one's social life; the unspoken assumption being that one does not have a social life if our images are not shared on social media.

The everyday aesthetic of group selfies is so prevalent that it is used by political leaders across the world, who often click group selfies and share them on their twitter accounts, helping them build their brand-image as 'people's leaders'. Most recently, Democratic Candidate for the 2020 US elections, Elizabeth Warren has been painstakingly spending hours at her campaign rallies clicking such selfies with her supporters (Alter, 2019). Clicking a selfie with people allows politicians to say to the voters "Look, I'm ordinary! I am just like you!", no matter their policies, what they have to offer to solve our economic and social problems.

Walter Benjamin said about photography that "image technologies facilitate and shape social relations" (as cited in Smith & Sliwinski, 2017, p. 2). Benjamin argued how instruments of mass communication, often mediate human relations through unconscious means, what he called as the 'optical unconscious' (Smith & Sliwinski, 2017). In taking up this understanding of how our social relations are formed through the act of seeing, unseeing and the psychical processes of perception, often involving unconscious mechanisms, we can

examine how social media technologies and the new image making patterns are affecting our social relations. Social media platforms enable us to create and share our own images and form social relations based on images both on and off digital social networks. Users who regularly share their images to social media know that the pressure to look good in your images is unavoidable depending on the people in your online networks, such as colleagues from work, peer groups, friends and so on. And this could be true of any other social group that one wants to portray a favourable image of oneself to. We want to make sure that the best of our images gets shared and seen by others in our networks.

My parents who have only recently started using smartphone cameras to click selfies often share unflattering images on their newly created social media profiles. They are only just getting the hang of what is the purpose of making your own images to look good and to share them on social media platforms. They have certainly not practiced taking their selfies often enough to know that only some angles can make one look 'good'. It would be wrong to assume that they (being of an older generation) do not care about vanity, but perhaps their immediate social relations are not dependent on how their images are perceived on social media. While we may say that photography is one of the most accessible forms of art since everyone is able to take a photograph, as Bourdieu has argued, "the norms which organize the photographic valuations of the world in terms of the opposition between that which is photographable and that which is not are not indissociable from the implicit system of values maintained by a class, profession or artistic coterie, of which the photographic aesthetic must always be one aspect even if it desperately claims autonomy" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 6). On the surface, it may seem that social media disestablishes all the older class-based, aesthetic codes and differences in photography whereby every selfie, every image is the same, there are new forms of aesthetic barriers, values and semiotic codes established through our social media images. On social media, our valuations of what is photographable and aesthetically pleasing are regulated by the Like button through those in our social networks, maintained by these very implicit semiotic codes of what should and must not be shared. If I constantly posted my selfies posing in front of a mirror on Facebook, or photos of everything I eat, I'd very quickly lose respect from the academic, the 'intellectual', professional class of people in my networks. Although there are no 'dislike' buttons on social media, a badly composed image such as a bad chin selfie would certainly get punished with 'no Likes', just as a good picture will be validated with many Likes.

For those in an increasingly precarious labour market where the struggle is not just to find a job that provides a living but finding stable, full-time employment, specifically in an economy with a large share of reliance on service industry jobs, there is a tremendous amount of pressure to manage one's 'image' through social media. Insecurity permeates the subjective and material conditions under neoliberal capitalism, which is then visualized in various forms on social media. As suggested in Chapter 3, ideology does not always announce itself as an ideology but is rather a "set of images, symbols and occasionally concepts which we 'live' at an

unconscious level" (Eagleton, 2012, p. 219). This aspect of neoliberal capitalism and its influences on subjectivity are explored further in the next section.

Neoliberal Subject and the Selfie

It was argued in Chapter 2 that the future of work is precarious. The neoliberal stage of capitalism and the growing insecurity the comes with labour market 'flexibilization' impacts not just the relations of production but the entirety of our social relations. In her work, Moore (2017) explicates the relation between precarious work in the labour market and the various Apps and wearable technologies available in the market for tracking our own productivity and health. She explains how the glamorisation of work in the 'gig economy' where one is always digitally connected, 'free' and self-employed, has created a myth of reduction in global unemployment in recent years. Moore (2017, pp. 12-13) shows that in the UK, from October to December 2016, the number of self-employed people had gone up from 125,000 to 4.80 million. While applauding this trend as the main driver of total employment in the UK, the parliament did not acknowledge that about 80% of those self-employed earn less than 15000 pounds a year, which is 2/3rd of the national median wage (Moore, 2017). Through case studies and interviews, Moore shows how the experiences of those working in precarious jobs (often dubbed as 'self-employed'), puts an ever-increasing responsibility on workers to constantly monitor themselves, quantifying and tracking their own productivity and wellness, in finding new ways to become 'hireable' and "effectively becoming observing, entrepreneurial subjects" (Moore, 2017, p. 15). And this is just one of the ways in which subjects are mired with insecurity and made to be responsible for their own wellbeing under the neoliberal order.

Similarly, in a discourse analysis of two mainstream newspapers in Norway and Turkey[15], Türken, Nafstad, Blakar, & Roen (2016) examine how neoliberal discourses and concepts such as 'self-development' are constructed in the media. Across both the newspapers, the authors argue that this discourse is often discussed in the frameworks of: a) the subject as rational (knowing what one wants, being a calculating subject), b) the subject as autonomous and responsible (self-control, the subject takes charge of one's life, hard work to achieve a better life), c) entrepreneurial (the subject who continually works on herself, making oneself into a manageable, hireable product and lastly, d) positivity and self-confidence (repeating mantras such as 'better self-insight', 'inner peace', 'self-love', 'praise oneself') (Türken, Nafstad, Blakar, & Roen, 2016, pp. 32-46).

Parallel to such rhetorical devices employed in order to create a 'productive' labour that suits the needs of contemporary capitalism, the subject is simultaneously influenced by the consumerist injunction to enjoy

[15] The newspapers analysed in this study were *Aftenposten* published in Norway (year 2011 and 2012) and *Huriyet* published in Turkey (year 2011), both with high circulation.

oneself to the fullest. In Lacanian terms, late capitalist ideology works as a superegoic agency which urges us to enjoy ourselves and simultaneously asks us to suppress our desires; whereby the subject is plagued with the guilt for giving into one's desires and for not enjoying oneself (Lacan, 2004). There are contradicting ideological demands placed on the subject: you must work on yourself, be fit, work hard, take charge of your life, be productive; and also, splurge on yourself, buy things that make you happy, eat a donut, live a little! but do not consume too much, buy organic, healthy products instead! and so on. As an illustration of this contradictory messaging we can look at how 'eco-friendly' products are marketed today. Since consumer products such as clothing or fashion are now cheaper and made available to a large number of people, owing to the sweatshop fast fashion and exploitative labour conditions in countries like China and Bangladesh, the class divisions based on clothing and consumption are now re-established through 'eco-friendly, green' consumption. The products that are marketed as 'environment friendly', are targeted towards a middle-class consumer who gets to reaffirm their class status by looking-down upon the working classes who cannot afford to adopt a 'green' lifestyle. The subject must thus not only be the perfect labourer for the functioning of late capitalism, but also the perfect consumer.

This context of the neoliberal economic, social and cultural order, where discourses of 'the subject as a self-entrepreneur' are used to legitimize the cutback on social services and welfare and simultaneous injunctions to be a consumer, gives us a different perspective on the Instagram influencers and the visual culture of image-making and sharing on social media, specifically selfies. A 'selfie' as an object of visual culture alludes to making oneself visible on social media, of making one's own image. Our images on social media are used to create a brand for oneself using those marketing strategies previously used for selling commodities. The same PR and marketing strategies that are normally used for maintaining the public image of celebrities are now used by people to make themselves a saleable commodity, with the goal of gaining online visibility (Zulli, 2018). There are a number of blogs and websites dedicated to 'how to take the perfect selfie', (Carmen, 2017) or '15 Poses and Tips for Selfies', and so on, giving us advice on how to get more Likes on our social media. Connecting neoliberal subjectivity with selfies, clarifies the ways in which social media users are firstly, steered in a certain direction to connect with other users in specific ways afforded by the design and architecture of the different platforms, and secondly, helps explain how the pervasive ideological structures of neoliberal late capitalism produce specific forms of social relations, subjectivity and thereby visual culture on social media.

An exploration of how users on Instagram compete for popularity helps us understand this further. Instagram is a photo and video sharing App that attained a huge number of followers since its launch in 2010. By June 2018, it reached a user base of 1 billion monthly active users (Iqbal, 2019). Trends such as *Instafame* can be thought of as a form of microcelebrity culture where Instagram users "strategically formulate a profile, reach

out to followers, and reveal personal information to increase attention and thus improve their online status" (Senft, 2013, as cited in Marwick, 2015, p. 138). Since Instagram is such a visual medium, textual descriptions and comments are less emphasized in the favour of sharing images, and more commonly, selfies (Marwick, 2015). The App's layout is designed in a way that encourages users to scroll through images shared by people they follow, to restrict one's attention to simply glancing through the images. Since the platform offers a variety of filters and editing techniques, the images are often filtered and professional looking.

The users who gain the most amount of Likes and Followers are often "conventionally good-looking, work in 'cool' industries such as modelling or tattoo artistry and emulate the tropes and symbols of traditional celebrity culture, such as glamorous self-portraits, designer goods, or luxury cars" (Marwick, 2015, p. 139). And the most popular influencers like Kylie Jenner, who has made this a career, earn about $1.3 million per Instagram post (Iqbal, 2019). The popular image-making trends tend to be emulated from these microcelebrities on Instagram to then become a viral phenomenon. One such famous Instagrammer is Cayla Friesz, a high school sophomore from Indiana, who has 31K followers on Instagram, and also shares a lot of selfies (Marwick, 2015, p. 148). She is what one classifies as *Instafamous*, with a huge fan following including blogs and twitter fan accounts. She often poses in front of a mirror, in what is called as a mirror selfie, wearing different clothing in each of them and her followers obsessively blog about and track each piece of clothing that she wears in her images, trying to find out where she buys her clothes from to emulate her fashion style (Marwick, 2015). And this is just one such illustration of users turning their images into a saleable commodity. Mirror selfies are some of the most commonly shared selfies on social media.

A mirror selfie is an image of oneself clicked in front of the mirror usually with a smartphone. Figure 2 shows a number of such mirror selfies shared by users on different social media platforms. The subjects in these images seem to be trying out a varied number of angles and poses. Instead of a front camera selfie where the image is focussed on the subjects' face, a mirror selfie allows one to click a full-body image. One can experiment with different poses, try on different outfits, showcase one's sense of fashion and display one's body in a way that looks attractive or 'sexy'. The body itself becomes the centre of display and this display is largely performative. One recurring pattern in these images is that many of these subjects are female but we cannot assume that women click more images of themselves than men. In Figure 3, we see a range of selfies clicked at the gym. Here the subjects are predominantly male. In both cases, the body is the central object of the image reproducing largely conventional forms of gendered bodily performance.

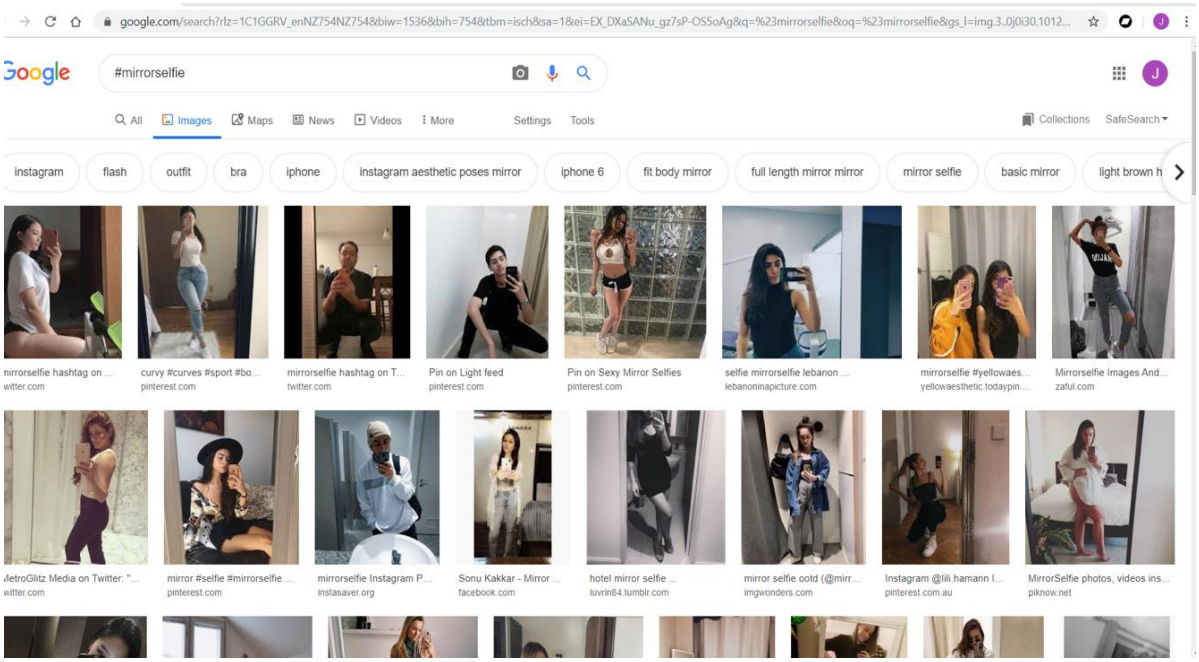

Figure 2 A screenshot image of the search words "#mirrorselfie" on Google Images taken on November 7th, 2019.

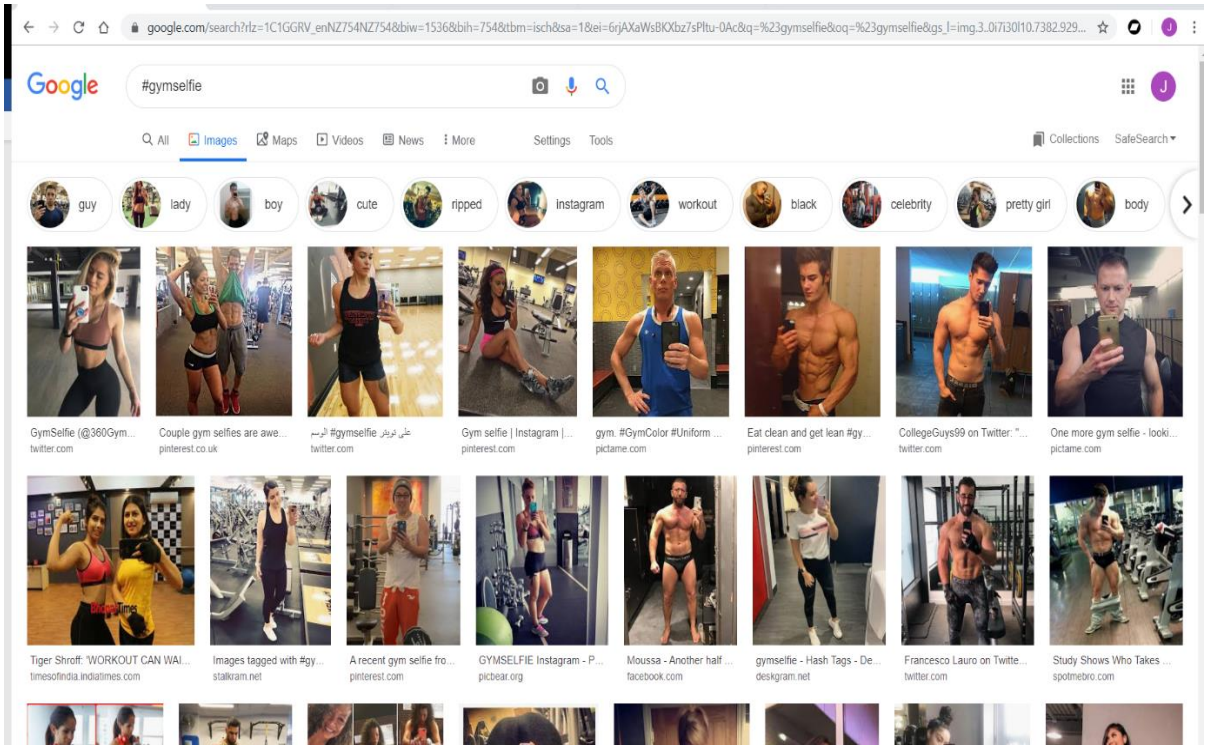

Figure 3 A screenshot image of search words #gymselfie on Google Images taken on November 1st, 2019.

In Figures 2 and 3, we see that the female subjects in both these set of images have a common range of poses. Each of these poses signify something - one hand on the hip and a slight tilting of the hip helps accentuate

them, one leg bent sideways at the knee for that petit look, one leg in front of the other makes your legs look longer, and so on. These are all poses that we have *seen* models and celebrities perform in fashion magazines and in films. The implicit rules of what counts as a 'sexy pose' are not necessarily written down in magazines, although there are plenty of online blogs offering you "10 looks for the 'sexiest' selfie". Some of the most popular Instagrammers, Kim Kardashian and her sister Kylie Jenner, often post their mirror selfies in these same poses that are widely construed as being sexy.

In *The Fashion System*, Barthes picks apart the codes and signifiers of fashion where he argues, "contrary to the myth of improvisation, of caprice, of fantasy, of free creativity…fashion is strongly coded" (Barthes, 2006, p. 100). He dissects the semantic structure of the language used in fashion magazines where fashion is not only written, but coded and made ready for consumption through a system of signification. Similarly, our own images on social media, although they appear to be improvised or creative, often follow a certain set of semantic codes. Although there is complete freedom for people to use photography as a medium of aesthetic expression without any general demands made on us, making it possible for us to experiment with it by changing the conventional codes of photographing subjects, we still find well-defined styles of genres, subjects and compositions in the images that people make (Bourdieu, 1990).

For instance, the male subjects in their gym selfies are displaying a conventional masculine trait of physical strength. They are displaying fit, 'ripped' bodies, strong abs and shoulders, which serves the function of reproducing their machismo in the form of the image. In most images in Figure 3, the men are shirtless to exhibit their upper-body strength, while in some cases even displaying their leg muscles. These poses and the way subjects portray themselves are often emulated, sometimes unconsciously, but often consciously *learned* by subjects. They are implicitly coded by the celebrity pictures that are seen, liked, and fantasized. Gym and fitness culture, for both men and women, have become so pervasive that one finds it harder and harder to be satisfied with one's body. Hashtags such as 'fitspiration' and 'thinspiration' are increasingly popularized on Instagram, where the images shared by users are often idealizing certain body types for both men and women. For instance, a content analysis of advertisements and media representations of fitness in a study by Deighton-Smith & Bell (2018) has shown that there is a large amount of misinformation that is spread online where exercise, physical activity and fitness are presented as a means to achieve an attractive body rather than as something to do for good health. The images shared by users are often accompanied with labels such as "Fit people have better sex" and "When you work out your body gets happy, and reward you by start looking sexy as f**k", while poor choices made by others who do not exercise are often reprimanded as being 'lazy' and 'stupid' (Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2018, pp. 17-19).

Advertising discourses have always fed on the insecurities of subjects, specifically producing new types of insecurities. Gill (2008) shows how more recent advertisements targeted towards female consumers often explicitly appropriate the affective notions associated with a free and independent woman who does not follow the traditional roles such as cooking or cleaning anymore while also asserting the idea that her beauty and her sexiness are a woman's best assets. Women's magazines complete the task of using rhetorical devices to play with women's sense of self-worth by offering a multitude of products to cover up all their flaws. Certainly, the same is true with what men are encouraged to do and be, in the varied advertising discourses, often reproducing hegemonic notions of masculinity. It shouldn't be surprising, then, that young girls and women all over the world are struggling with their body image, where cases of both anorexia and bulimia have risen to a large extent in the last few decades (Hill & Curran, 2017). Both these disorders, as research suggests, are driven by a maladaptive form of perfectionism (Murray, 2003). In many cases, this form of perfectionism and the desire to 'fit' an idealized image even results in body dysmorphic disorders (Hill & Curran, 2017).

Selfies and the Reproduction of the Ideal Subjects of Late Capitalism

Chapter 3 argued that the notion of interpellation offers a nuanced understanding of ideology whereby it is understood as a framework of ideas that people use to make sense of their reality, for the way things are and the way they relate to them or what they do in relation to them. Ideas do not simply exist in our heads but are informed and mediated by socially signifying practices, through language. As Althusser (1973) emphasized, what subjects think or think they are doing is articulated in the form of language, in the signifying practices using images, symbols, signs, actions, everyday rituals or practices.

Complementary to the Althusserian notion of ideology, is the Marxist notion of commodity fetishism that helps make sense of the consumption frenzy under late capitalism. In his explication of commodity fetishism, Baudrillard (1981) provides an important insight which helps understand the self-branding phenomenon online. He argues that fetishism needs to be understood as not simply a fetishism of this or that material object but that of the signifiers attached to those very objects/subjects/ideas.

We not only fetishize the commodity, but the signifiers, the codes attached to it. The earlier example of 'eco-friendly' consumption suits as the perfect illustration of such "a passion for the code, which, by governing both objects and subjects, and by subordinating them to itself, delivers them up to abstract manipulation" (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 93). Which is to say that we do not desire the objects per se, whether it is a car, or a phone, or a skirt, or our image-objects such as selfies, but the signs that are attached to having these objects/subjects. Desire has a social logic to it, it is mediated and learned through language and signifiers. The fact that subjects may desire or are attracted to people who are 'fit' and go to the gym has a social character to it. While we may ascertain that subjects and users on social media today are much more actively participating

in creating and sharing their own spectacles, it does not necessarily mean that these individually created spectacles are not inscribed by the dominant ideology of late capitalism.

Moreover, for understanding the interpellation of subjects into dominant ideologies, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of both the Lacanian Imaginary and Symbolic orders. This was discussed in Chapter 3, but it is worth reinforcing here that for Lacan, the imaginary constitution of the subject in the mirror stage helps in the constitution of the subject's self-image and ego formation in the early years of a child's life. In exploring this idea of the mirror-stage, Lacan (2012) in the 1950s had changed his conception of the subject's ego formation as being an on-going process (and not an event that happens in the formative years of a child) throughout the subject's psychic life which constitutes the Imaginary order. This imaginary sense of self signifies the *process* of ego formation or how the *conscious* subject that thinks of herself as X or Y. For Lacan, this fantasy of wholeness that the subject feels about oneself, as reflected in the mirror is a (*mis)recognition*. The subject is always embattled with this mirror image and what the Other (the Symbolic Order) thinks of her. While the Imaginary is this house of mirrors, the Symbolic Order is our relation to the big Other which can be our parents, language in general, or cultural norms or values, and so on, whose gaze the subject feels the need to please (Lacan, 1978). It is the same way in which our online images attain a libidinal charge and an affective value when they get attached to signifiers such as the 'Like' button or other such emoticons. To clarify, in the Lacanian account, the subject's self-image is not only restricted to actual images as seen in the mirror or photographic images (although, they are also that) but also how we imagine ourselves to be- the *I* as the subject of the statement (Lacan, 2004, p. 677), where the subject qualifies the 'I' with some context. For Althusser, ideology is not necessarily the subject's failure to know reality. But just like in the Lacanian mirror stage, the subject within ideology feels a sense of coherent, unified self 'mirrored' back in ideological discourse. Ideological interpellation is thus a process of identification, with our own image reflected in the discourse of the Other.

Under neoliberalism, we can think of how the rhetoric that places great emphasis on competition, individualism, self-interest and unrealistic ideals of perfecting one's self-image, have successfully been able to shift cultural and social values (Vergaeghe, 2014). On the surface, the subject is offered solutions that fantasize about reaching the subject's ideal-self, where the subject can feel whole – by having the perfect body, face, lips, hair, or the perfect commodities to own. It has further created a myth of meritocracy, asserting that with hard work, one could achieve anything, from wealth, success and the fantasy of a successful lifestyle that comes along with it. Social media platforms further accentuate this myth.[16] Those who reach the top ladder of

[16] Certainly, there are counter-veiling tendencies on social media where users are challenging the dominant forms of image-making styles and norms. But the point here is to understand what the dominant tendencies tell us about the culture at large.

schools, universities, professions, and occupations, or popularity on social media receive the due rewards and those who do not reach these heights are deemed less deserving (Hill & Curran, 2017). Of course, this echoes through the culture producing subjects who show symptoms of not just narcissistic traits but insecurity, anxiety, depression and so on. Consumerist ideology still reigns under late capitalism. This focus on the self and neoliberal chimera of making the subject accountable for everything from job-loss to climate change, goes perfectly well with the reigning consumerist ideology. While fast food is a massively profitable industry that insists on the injunction to enjoy and excessively consuming, the dieting and fitness industry is equally profitable where health and fitness are offered as solutions to the over-consumption problem. This 'working on the self' also requires money and more commodities. Going to the gym and going for yoga needs money. Following strict diets needs both, money and time. Eating healthier requires money as these are increasingly turned into popular fads and marketable, expensive products, from gluten-free to dairy-free to organic foods. All of these ways of 'self-improvement' signify a lifestyle choice, and those already struggling in an unstable labour market certainly struggle to keep up with it.

Chapter 6 The Travel Image

> The object of art – like every other product – creates a public which is sensitive to art and enjoys beauty. Production not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object. Thus, production produces consumption 1) by creating the material for it; 2) by determining the manner of consumption; and 3) by creating the products, initially posited by it as objects, in the form of a need felt by the consumer.
>
> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (1973, p. 92).

Introduction

A commodity, as Jameson (2009, p.257) argues, is constructed at the level of two phenomena: first, said commodity needs to have been transformed into an object; and second, it needs to be endowed with some value or have a price attached to it. Jameson, however, clarifies that this categorization is not as clear-cut, as commodities might not be distinct physical objects (for instance, services), and its exchangeability on the market might not be as simple (as is the case of cultural commodities such as art work). Using this conceptualisation, if we unpack the notion of travel we can explicate that 'travel' is, foremost, a commodity.

In the year 2018, for instance, there were a record 1.4 billion international tourist arrivals globally, and tourism contributed to about 2% of the global GDP (Blackall, 2019). To travel to far-away places, is a practice of consumption with a massive global tourism industry that advertises and markets the idea of 'travel' to us, the consumers. For the subjects, 'to travel' is not only a subjective desire to experience something new, of course it may be that, but invariably, it has several culturally and socially mediated connotations attached to it, such as freedom, fun, enjoyment, adventure and so on. Every destination visited has a myriad of signifiers attached to it. 'Travel' in this way, just like any other commodity, has a social logic of desire to it (Baudrillard, 1998). This chapter examines a common photographing trend on social media- travel photography, placing it in the background of travel as consumption. Consumerism, after all, is still the reigning ideology under late capitalism, and is needed to assure that the wheels of capital keep turning. Drawing from the works of Žižek (2002) and McGowan (2004), this chapter examines the images of travel shared by users on social media to unpack how in seeking enjoyment through consumption, we reproduce the ideological edifices of late capitalism.

The Ideology of Enjoyment

For Lacan, to enjoy is not simply to follow one's desires but something of an ethical duty commanded by the superego. Žižek (2002) and McGowan (2004) both suggest that within late capitalist societies, it is this superego agency that demands enjoyment in the form of consumption. McGowan (2004), analyses and traces

the changes to the constitution of subjectivity, corresponding to the different stages of capitalism. He argues that early capitalist ideology demanded a renunciation of enjoyment as a prerequisite for its functioning with an insistence on the ideals of a strong work ethic, in order to maximize labour productivity and output (McGowan, 2004). With the emergence of global capitalism, consumer culture encourages subjects to constantly seek new products in the hopes of obtaining enjoyment (McGowan, 2004), whereby, one can only plug their lack with one fantasy/object after another (Eagleton, 2001, p.41).

As Marx argues in *The Grundrisse*, "Production not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object" (1973, p.92). Marx is referring to the ways in which capitalist ideology creates not just commodities or objects, but also creates a subject who desires the commodities, simulating a demand for them. Late capitalist ideology puts this notion of creating a consumer subject at its very core, wherein a great deal of ideological rhetoric and restructuring of the economy goes into creating a consumer society. These changes can be seen in, for instance, the easy availability of credit for buyers, industries such as marketing and advertising that produce the signification systems attached to consumption and generating demand for commodities, planned obsolescence for products, fast changes in fashion cycles, or even a constant promise that this or that object or experience will satisfy our desires and fill in the lack at the core of our subjectivity. We can think of consumption as not just restricted to the consumption of goods, but increasingly that of services- consumption of entertainment, events, educational services, travel and so on (Harvey, 2017). The creation of needs for such ephemeral commodities, and a demand in the market, means intervening in the opinions and tastes of consumers. A whole set of industries such as advertising, marketing and cultural industries increasingly play an essential role in the process.

For instance, each year global consumer trend statistics highlight the different tendencies of consumers and their behavioral changes with respect to buying and the solutions that can be adopted by industries to compete in the marketplace. Highlighting the trends for the year 2019, marketing experts wrote, "diversity and inclusivity are shaping the future in beauty where consumers of any gender, all sexual persuasions and every skin colour are seeking to align with brands that understand their uniqueness" (Danziger, 2019). Similarly, the same report identified, "responsible consumerism will go mainstream in 2019. Taking the lead in responsible consumerism are Ikea which challenges its consumers to become instigators of social change, Nike that is aligning with its customer's social issues and environmental concerns, and For Days offering a membership model for temporary clothing ownership" (Danziger, 2019).

Neither Nike's products, nor the company's long history of sweatshop labour has any positive relation to social issues or environmental concerns. Yet, advertising and marketing make it possible to build a certain brand image for Nike. For instance, after hiring the NFL athlete Colin Kaepernick for an ad campaign, Nike's annual

sales went up by 7% in 2019 (Olson, 2019). Kaepernick, was the first NFL athlete to take a knee during the national anthem, protesting police brutality against African Americans in the U.S. Nike's CEO Mark Parker says that Kaepernick's campaign inspired a "record engagement with the brand" (Olson, 2019). Considering the popularity of 'woke' culture online, it is not surprising that companies are adjusting their branding strategies.[17] With one shrewd ad campaign, Nike, and the consumers who buy their products became part of the youth 'woke' culture. We don't simply consume commodities, we also consume the signs that are attached to them. As a brand, Nike can enjoy the status of being woke and as consumers, we can identify ourselves with the rebellious young consumers while at the same time, enjoy a guilt-free consumption of products made by exploited labour. Capitalist ideology tends to absorb and appropriate all forms of oppositional discourses or what we may call counter-cultural strategies.

Consumption, in this sense, is an accumulation of signs of enjoyment where one obeys the social and collective logic of desire (Baudrillard, 1998). Under late capitalism and the accompanying process of "sheer commodification" (Jameson,1991), the logic of the market dominates and comes to subsume the entirety of social relations under the logic of capital. Advertising images and marketing discourses constantly invoke desires that render all kinds of objects desirable to us. One can think of how Black Friday sales are advertised across the world, suggesting that we must shop! This, however, does not imply that we will necessarily go out and shop. But the contention is that, there are various inducements to do so; for instance, offers such as "shop now and pay later". Certainly, here the Althusserian emphasis on ideological reproduction through the subject's actions, practices, rituals and beliefs, helps us get out of the limitation of conceptualising ideology only as 'ideas' in people's minds. As Jameson puts it, "with the onset of consumer society, indeed, it becomes an open question whether the practices of consumption are not more effective ideological mechanisms to ensure social reproduction than more traditional form of the "internalisation" of values or beliefs" (Jameson, 2009, p.435).

With social media platforms and the various digital technologies, our immersion into the world of consumer culture has only further intensified. For instance, one could look at Facebook's advertising model in order to unpack this. While Facebook's vice president of advertising, Rob Goldman has said that the platform sells targeted ads to users based on what Facebook knows about them, such as their profile information, their activity on the platform and so on; it is much more complicated than that (Matsakis, 2018). Facebook not only takes information from the user's activities on the platform, but also collects user's browsing history, the apps

[17] Woke is a slang term used in African American Vernacular English, often meant as 'I was sleeping, but now I'm woke'. In 2014, after the shooting of Michael Brown in Missouri, the word became commonly associated with activism, specifically with the Black Lives Matter movement. It is now a popular term used online for activism/activists (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2017).

the user visited and their activities on those apps (Tiku, 2018). It is further intrusive because based on this information, the platform's algorithm then categorises each user's information. Nitasha Tiku (2018), points out that the illusive tab termed 'Your Categories' under Facebook's Ad Preferences section, identifies her as "a newlywed, away from family, who travels frequently, has very liberal politics, is close friends with expats, and whose multicultural affinity is African-American" (Tiku, 2018). Further, a document released by The Intercept has shown that Facebook's Artificial Intelligence (AI) powered prediction engine called "FBLearner Flow" not only offers advertisers the data to target potential consumers based on their preferences, but can also predict how users will behave, what will they buy, and what they will think (Biddle, 2018). The document further points out that such future behaviour prediction allows companies and third parties an opportunity to alter the consumer's anticipated buying course (Biddle, 2018). All big digital companies earn a large portion of their annual revenues from advertisements. Google's parent company Alphabet, in its 2017 balance sheet shows how advertising accounts for 84 percent of the company's revenue (Hamza, 2018). With AI powered machine learning and algorithms, capital is now able to deploy technologies that can predict what we truly desire.

Every society or symbolic order has its own mechanisms of mediating the subject's desires. As late capitalism is the dominant social order today, we can start to explain how capitalist ideology captures the subject's inner-most desires. The next section examines how our own images on social media are mediated by the symbolic order that commands us to enjoy!

Images and Enjoyment on Social Media

At first glance, it may be thought that photographic images are simply analogous with reality, a two-dimensional reproduction of our three-dimensional reality as it is (Barthes, 1982, p.196), without any meaning imposed on it. But we understand reality only through the means of language and the everyday symbolic-discursive practices that we engage in. In a similar way, creating and sharing images on social media is a discursive practice, mediated by the various social and cultural influences that we encounter. We cannot explain the image-making trends that go viral on different social media platforms, without first understanding each platform's designs such as the 'like' and 'follow' buttons, that influence the image-making and sharing practices.

For instance, users on Facebook share images with the urge and expectation of getting 'likes', assuming that those on our Facebook friend list understand the shared, symbolic and implicit meaning of exchanging 'likes'. As discussed earlier, the images shared on Facebook, are often influenced by our desire to gain approval from the big Other (ego ideal), ergo the viewers on our social media profiles. When we share our images, we are often careful of what impression we might make on our friends, relatives, co-workers, lovers and so on. When we act in order to obtain recognition, we have the big Other in mind (McGowan, 2004, p.27). By comparison

there is a shared meaning of sending our images on Snapchat, which is more commonly used for private communication with our close ties, as it offers a more transient, instant messaging (IM) style image-sharing experience, and less to build one's social capital (Piwek & Joinson, 2016).

When we use images to communicate something, it becomes a 'discursive' act, whereby a meaning or message is conveyed with the hope that the receiver will decode this meaning as it is implied (Hall, 2005). Like in any other form of communication, there can be multiple ways of reading and decoding a text, whether these are images, videos, or textual content, within a culturally-specific context. Although there are certain ways of reading texts or 'codes' that become dominant, attaining a certain degree of common-sense perception in a culture.

This explains why users often share their images of enjoyment on social media. For instance, in their case study, Goodwin et al. (2016, p.5) suggest that many young users on social media said that they post their images of drinking with friends on their Facebook profiles as these images connote a more 'successful social life'. Besides, images are often carefully filtered to remove all the awkward, embarrassing images to display the right kind of enjoyment, not just for the gaze (or the 'likes') of those on our friends list but also for the eyes of those anonymous users checking our profiles (Dhir, Kaur, Lonka, & Nieminen, 2016). By doing so we validate the imperative to 'have fun'. Facebook's newsfeed algorithm makes sure that the posts that get more 'likes' and 'shares' or in other words, generates engagement, are visible for a longer period. Users who don't enjoy themselves, or at least share their images of enjoyment, risk losing the game of visibility and attention on Facebook (Goodwin et al., 2016). Social media in this way, offer us a platform for symbolic identification (Lacan, 2002) with the ideological imperative to enjoy under late capitalism.

The following section unpacks the semiotic meanings of commonly shared travel images on Instagram to examine how the previously discussed notion of enjoyment, interpellates subjects into the edifices of late capitalism.

The Travel Image

Within capitalist ideology there is a tendency to create a myth of equalization, suggesting that the free market eliminates all forms of inequalities. In a similar way, it has been argued that in the past, travel as a leisure activity was only accessible to the elite, but now, it has been democratized for all (Urry, 2002). Urry (2002) discusses how, as travel got more democratized, different status and class-based distinctions became drawn between distinct aspects of travel, for example, air, sea, or rail travel (p.85). These distinctions can certainly be seen being reproduced today, for example, cruise travel is still very much restricted to the affluent classes. However, like any other commodity on the market under capitalism, while everyone is 'free' to travel where they please, travel (or at least unrestricted travel) is contingent on one's class, nationality, passport and

sometimes racial, and ethnic positions. One of the ways to illustrate this, is to examine global tourism statistics to see which demographics travel the most. In 2017, the highest number of international tourists came from China, Germany, the U.S. and the U.K., all relatively well-performing economies in that year (Blackall, 2019). Europe in 2018 had the highest share of international outbound travelers in the world (UN World Tourism Organization, 2019).

However, as the global tourism industry is booming, contributing substantially to the global economy, accompanied by a growing demand for travel in the emerging capitalist economies, there is an increased push to make air travel cheaper, visa allocations easier, and through apps like Airbnb, making accommodations more affordable. Academic journals such as the *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing* specifically discuss how travel and tourism can be sold and marketed to people in different countries. If travel is construed as being democratized today, it is because expanding the market by inducing more and more people to travel is an incredibly profitable venture (UN World Tourism Organization, 2019). A range of advertising mechanisms are deployed for this purpose. Countries are marketed as destinations for travel and are turned into myths for the purposes of tourism consumption. For instance, the Indian tourism website attaches a plethora of signifiers to turn the idea of India into an image of totality, describing it as: "One of the oldest civilisations in the world. India is a mosaic of multicultural experiences. With a rich heritage and myriad attractions, the country is among the most popular tourist destinations in the world" (Incredible India Website, 2019). On the website, one can explore every part of the country through the carefully created images and choose what attracts them the most about these places; whether they are seeking "adventure, spirituality, heritage, art, food, luxury, nature, museums or shopping" (Incredible India Website, 2019). The images, of course, flatten out and expunge any troubling sights that might not attract a tourist's gaze, such as plastic waste on the beaches, or poverty.

Further, the UN World Tourism Organization's report (2019) states that consumers are increasingly travelling, "to seek 'change' in quest for authenticity, or to show 'Instagrammable' moments, experiences and destinations, or to pursue a healthy life" and so on. Invariably, our own images of travel on social media often reflect these impulses. Susan Sontag (2005) wrote of the inseparability of travel and photography, describing how for a tourist, a photograph offered the evidence of how the trip was made and the fun was had (p.7). Travel images shared on social media often become evidences of one's experiences of having enjoyed when on a holiday.

As an example, one could look at the most commonly shared images online, such as when searching the term "Travel Instagram"[18] on Google Images (Figure 4), which gives us a cross-section of the most popular or shared images in the genre.

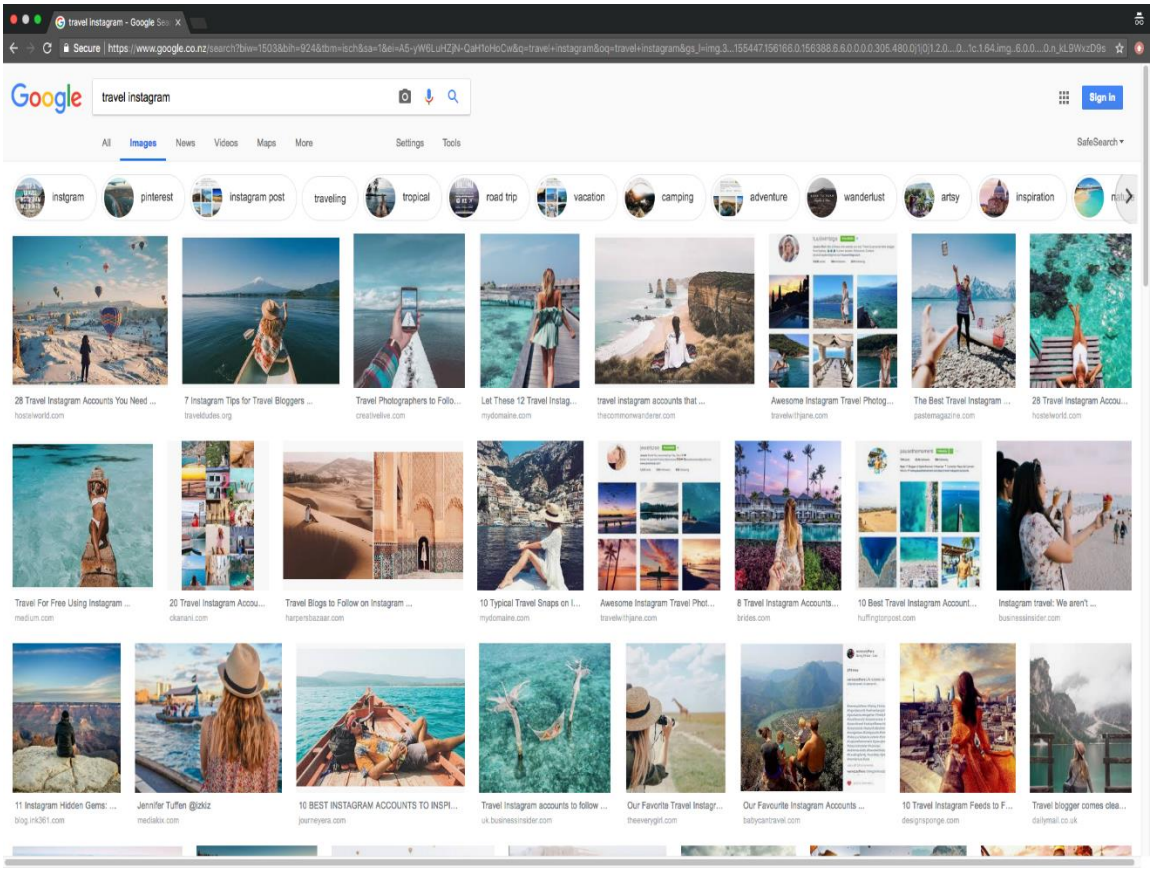

Figure 4 A screenshot image of Google Image search results for the words: "travel instagram" taken on October 2nd, 2018, at 11.23.55am (2018).

What do these travel images signify? Roland Barthes (1978) in *The Photographic message* explained how photographs, like any other discourse, have two meanings. At first glance, we 'read' these images on the plane of language which is an analogical reading; simply looking at the content, the landscape and the object. What most of these images have in common is a lone subject, female, and generally a backdrop of an exotic location. Solo travel is now a largely popular choice among young travellers, according to Google Trends (2018). In addition to the denoted reading, Barthes (1978) refers to a connoted meaning which can be read in the style of reproduction, that the creator of the image deploys.

[18] Here, Instagram images were selected as it is largely a platform for image-sharing. While it has its own design mechanisms such as the 'heart' and 'follow' buttons, which indulge the users into specific kinds of social communication, it proves to be a useful medium for researching visual culture. A researcher can look at larger trends in image-making practices as Instagram is largely a visual medium.

What is connoted here can be first, unpacked at the level of the treatment of the image, the selection of colours, and the filters, the composition as well as the way the subject/object is presented. This connotative meaning is not always graspable but needs to be inferred from the production and the reception of the image. This second meaning, whether it is aesthetic or ideological, reveals a certain depth of the 'culture' for the intended viewer or receiver of this message (Barthes, 1978, p.197). We notice in the images in Figure 4 that many, if not all of them are purposefully clicked, edited and even fashioned for the gaze of the viewer. To create incredibly well edited, professional-looking photographs is a trend on social media platforms such as Instagram (Manovich, 2015-16). However, the same is not the case with images shared on other platforms such as Facebook, which can be attributed to two reasons. First, Instagram is a purely visual medium which offers several filters on the platform and many users have, over time, adapted to the commonly used styles in its image-making culture. Second, Instagram's user base is much younger than that of Facebook (Marketing Charts, 2019), which influences the style of image-making on the platform. Moreover, creating images that are much more stylized, edited, and well presented, cannot be reduced to a choice based on one's individual imagination. The images in Figure 4, were carefully posed, selecting the perfect backdrop, camera-angles, and the perfect balance of hues. Such image-making practices are part of the larger cultural and social milieu whereby one's images are used as a means of displaying cultural and social capital, particularly on social media such as Instagram. As Bourdieu argues, "the norms which organize the photographic valuation of the world in terms of the opposition between that which is photographable and that which is not are indissociable from the implicit system of values maintained by a class, profession or artistic coterie, of which the photographic aesthetic must always be one aspect even if it desperately claims autonomy" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 6).

Further, it can be seen that all of these images have a subject in them, that is, they are not simply images of landscapes or locations. The presence of a human, usually solitary subject in the photograph makes images seem more intimate, relatable and less abstract; displaying that these are not just far-away locations advertised in a travel agency's window, but reachable, graspable places where others have travelled to. At the same time, the layout of the images is not zoomed in on the subject but allows equal, if not more space for the backdrop. The background settings in these images are largely similar; the clear blue sea, a gorgeous sky, mountain tops, boats and beaches. For the viewer, it is hard to identify the location of these mountains and the sea. But perhaps, the location is not an important signifier here but the affect it produces for the viewer. Travelling to beaches and mountain tops connote a sense of exploration, calm, and an escape from the everyday life of work. When we view such images of others having a good time, away from the city from where we work, it induces a feeling that we are missing out. It is any wonder then, that the *Fear of Missing Out* (or FOMO) is an actual cultural, social phenomenon?

Tourism as a commodity has been signified in various ways which can also be seen reflected in the images that users share on their social media profiles. In the context of travel photos, Leanne White (2010) in her study suggests how photographs shared by other users on Facebook reinforce the ideas of travel as a highly visual experience and how they might even influence the travel decisions of those who see these photos. Advertising images often alter the relations between words, image, meaning and the referent so that they refer not to the utility of commodities but the desires they illicit. Seeing the images of travel, of those on our social media, often illicit similar desires. To unpack this further, we can look at another trend on social media of posting images of oneself posing in yoga postures at popular or exotic locations such as the ones in Figure 5.

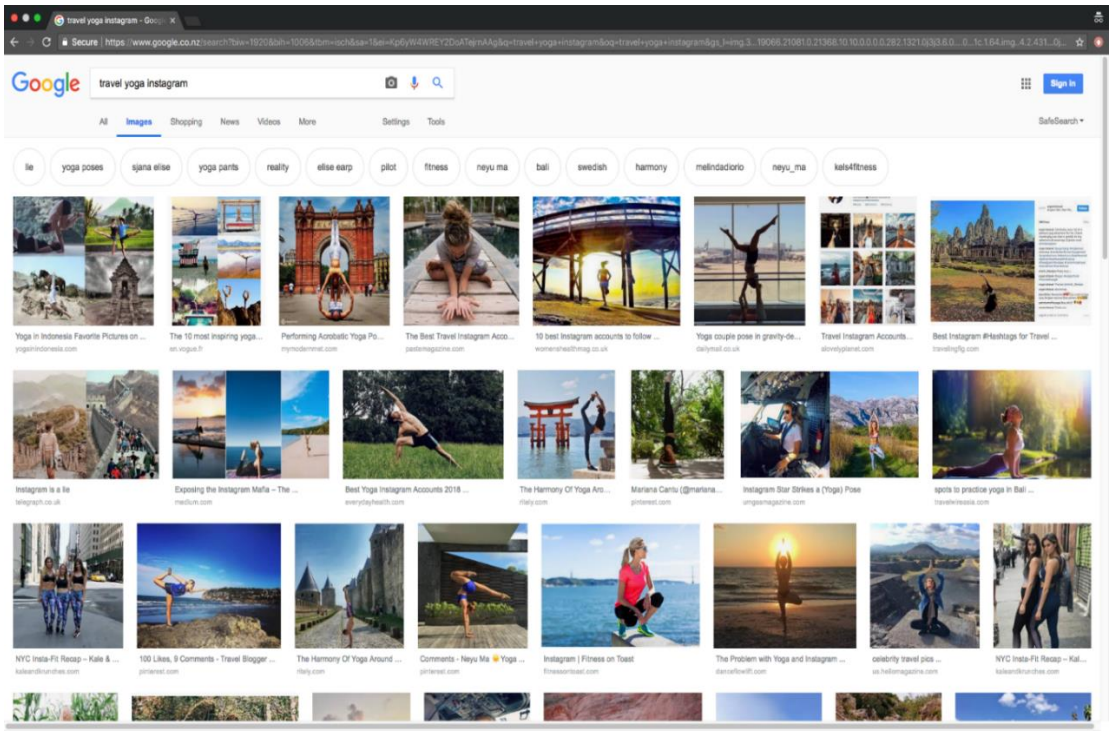

Figure 5 A screenshot image of Google Image search results for the words: "travel yoga instagram" taken on October 2nd, 2018, at 11.23.04 am (2018).

On its own, there are a number of signifiers associated with yoga, specific to one's cultural context. For some who associate it with Hinduism, it signifies spirituality. For others, it is associated with fitness regimes and a clean, healthy lifestyle. What does it signify when the people pose in a yoga posture for a photograph at exotic locations? Every location as a commodity has certain signifiers attached to it. Most often, these signifiers are a result of extensive marketing and advertising campaigns. New Zealand Government's tourism advertising, for instance, commonly uses phrases such as 'Clean and Green New Zealand' or 'Middle Earth'. Everyone wanted to go find their inner-selves in India or heal their souls in Bali after they watched *Julia Roberts* in *Eat, Pray, Love*, which led to such a travel boom in Bali that the phenomena was called '*Eat, Pray, Love* tourism' (Brenhouse, 2010).

In the images in Figure 5, the backdrop of these images are different locations which may signify different things. There are many more images shared on Instagram under the hashtag '#travelyoga' where we see individual subjects, usually women, posing at popular tourist locations such as the Eiffel Tower or the Berlin wall. To a tourist, every place is an exotic location to be visited. To have travelled, is to have lived a more fulfilled life. The world smiles at us, no problem if Cambodia is torn by civil unrest, our travel images will always show us smiling (or doing yoga) outside Angkor Wat. And because every place is imagined as offering itself to us, everywhere is more or less the same for the tourist (Berger, 1972, p.150).

For a viewer of these travel images on social media, the possibility of themselves travelling to these exotic locations becomes a fantasy to be realised. Our desires are constantly driven by the images of other's enjoyment or the lack of our own enjoyment, whether it's the food they post images of, and the restaurants that other people tag in their photos or their holidays to exotic locations. As Baudrillard points out, "we are prepared to try everything, for consumerist man is haunted by the fear of 'missing' something, some form of enjoyment or other" (1998, p.80). The rhetoric of *FOMO* or the fear of missing out, signifies then the fear of not being able to enjoy.

Berger (1972) suggests this in relation to advertising images, that it does not promise pleasure, but happiness: "happiness as judged from the outside by others. The happiness of being envied is glamour" (p.132). Although, advertising directly makes spectators dissatisfied with their present way of life, our intention for posting images online is not to make others dissatisfied and in turn selling them something, rather, it's simply a desire for affirmation, 'Yes, I enjoy too'. Isn't it a compulsion to enjoy oneself when on a holiday? Žižek (1997) suggests how the Japanese have found a way to get out of this deadlock of the injunction to enjoy by directly organizing a fun activity as part of their everyday duty, so that, when that's out of the way, one can actually relax and feel free of the pressure to have fun (p. 50). The prerequisite to being an ideal subject within late capitalism is to be able to enjoy oneself. But the enjoyment of others pertaining to consumption is to be envied or held up as an ideal against which the subjects imagine their own enjoyment.

In a similar vein, it is how Berger (1972) speaks of publicity as becoming a part of mainstream culture. The envy associated with glamour of the other (celebrity) at an earlier time, of what the subject would like to be (Ego-ideal) can now be associated with the others on my social media feed, to be precise the more popular, outgoing friends on Facebook. In a way, social media has democratized the notion of a celebrity, a more participatory culture as Jenkins (2009) suggests turning masses into internet celebrities. But the contradictions of life within capitalism remain. The working conditions remain poor, the struggles of the working-precariat class remain, but this struggle is inadvertently 'balanced' by a dreamt future in which imaginary activity (of enjoying oneself) replaces the passivity of the moment. As said earlier, the freedom to travel to exotic places is

not a freedom but is rather restricted to one's belonging to a certain class, nationality and ethnicity. Enjoyment in this form remains illusory. The commandment to enjoy finds its acceptable outlet through images. We can go to places around us, click images of being happy and fulfil the demands of the superego to Enjoy!

The *Yolocaust* Project and the Injunction to Enjoy!

To explicate this notion of enjoyment as ideology and its cultural manifestations in the form of images, one can look at the *Yolocaust* (2017) project created by Israeli satirist and author Shahak Shapira, where he superimposed twelve images clicked by anonymous users at the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin with original images from Nazi extermination camps in the background. The artist further gave an option to the twelve users whose images were edited stating that if they wanted their images removed, they could email him. Users who originally posted these selfies ended up apologizing for their images which also became a part of the project. These selected images were taken from Facebook, Instagram, Tinder and Grindr.[19] Comments, hashtags and 'Likes' from the original posts were also included as part of the project.[20] The name was selected as poking fun at the viral trend of urban youth reference to *YOLO*, or 'You Only Live Once'.

Figure 6 An image created by artist Shahak Shapira, from the Yolocaust Project (2017) (Shapira, 2017).

To recount Barthes' understanding of a myth, it is first and foremost a system of communication. A myth is not any object, idea or a concept but the way in which these are conveyed in a discourse. In that sense anything can take form of a myth.

[19] See Figure 6, for instance.

[20] This is an excerpt from the artist's note describing the project on the Yolocaust website:
"The crazy thing is that the project actually reached all 12 people whose selfies were presented. Almost all of them understood the message, apologized and decided to remove their selfies from their personal Facebook and Instagram profiles. Aside from that I also received tons of great feedback from Holocaust researchers, people who used to work at the memorial, folks who lost their family during the Holocaust, teachers who wanted to use the project for school lessons, and evil people who sent photos of their friends and family for me to photoshop".

To use the example from *Figure 3*, at the plane of language, what is signified here is the concept of travel, and the signifier is that of two young boys jumping at the Holocaust memorial in Berlin. The relation between the signifier and signified produce the sign here, that of 'having fun'. A denotative reading of this image would suggest a sense of excitement that comes with being young and seeing the world anew. It is here that we need to understand the value of myth and its ideological demeanour. In a myth, the signifier is already formed by a number of signs that collate to form that signifier; it already has a meaning. As a person who uses social media and is exposed to hundreds of such images every day, the denoted meaning of this image is already built into my reading of it. The correlation between the signifier and the signified then becomes not just a sign but *signification* (Barthes, 2000). It is at this stage that bourgeois ideology becomes public philosophy, which helps us withstand everyday life (Barthes, 2000).

There are a number of signs in culture within late capitalism which collate to form the myth of enjoyment. A naturalization of enjoyment; an enjoyment that we all must attain is experienced as innocent speech by being normalized. By naturalizing the notion of enjoyment and disseminating its representations in culture as a form of lifestyle and status that a huge class of people cannot live up to but only fantasize about, capitalist ideology successfully creates an illusion of a lack of class differentiation; as if class differences do not exist anymore.

The images selected in this project (Figure 6 and 7) give us a vague idea about travellers, the globe trotters who travel for 'fun'. The photographs selected depict a notion of adventure. Figure 6 was tagged with accompanying tag which says, "Jumping on dead Jews @ Holocaust Memorial". It was shared on Instagram and 87 other users have shown their approval by 'loving' (with a heart emoticon) it. At first glance one can discern that this image is well rehearsed, orchestrated even, to capture the momentum of the jump. What stands out in this photograph are the subjects' facial expressions and their action. Why not just stand and pose like a conventional tourist? Momentum is seen as a sign of vitality, often associated with youth. The connotation of these images is 'look at me, I'm enjoying myself' but also 'I'm young!' Advertising plays a huge role in creating these myths imbued in images. Barthes (1978) argues that any image's signification is not necessarily intentional. The image may itself be denotative in nature unless it is used in advertising. Since this is not an advertising image, it is impossible to delineate a photographers' intentions in clicking the image. One may, for fair reasons argue that there is no correlation of the images shared by users on social media with that of images on travel websites or advertisements, at least not directly. A study undertaken by Myunghwa & Schuett (2013) suggests that an important factor that influences a users' travel experience sharing (in the form of images) on social media is their perceived notion of enjoyment. They argue that users often share images based on what is perceived as enjoyment within their social media circles. Further, their paper provides suggestions to those working in the travel and marketing industry on how to utilize this information to improve their advertising

strategies for this target audience. This is certainly why more and more companies are increasingly investing in Instagram influencers, who sell their products on social media.

Further, at the plain informational level (Barthes, 1978), the original image here (on the left) in Figure 6 (if one ignores the text accompanying it), suggests nothing but two young travellers having 'fun'. Their mouths gaping open, letting out a joyful scream, suggests a genuine moment of gusto. At the symbolic level, it is embedded in the visual discourse of most travel photography on social media which is replete with similar images. For Barthes, the symbolic meaning is the obvious meaning of an image, the one that the author intended to mean, "the meaning that seeks me out as a viewer of the image" (Barthes, 2006, p.110). At the informational and symbolic level, this image is not specifically hard to decode. But there is an excess of meaning here, a 'third meaning' as Barthes (2006) suggests, which is a meaning that is both ostensible and slippery, and this is the meaning which can be ideological. In Figure 6, it is the words "Jumping on dead Jews @ Holocaust Memorial" accompanying this image that reveals its slippery meaning. While the first two meanings of the image on the surface, seem to be positive in connotation, it is the third meaning (Barthes, 2006) that is significant when we consider the historical, geographical, or political context in which this photograph was taken.

Figure 7 Another image created by artist Shahak Shapira, selected from the Yolocaust Project (Shapira, 2017).

The myth of enjoyment is constructed as an escape form the drudgery of the everyday, and travel assumes this notion as an experience which is out of the ordinary. Which is why just a standing pose when one travels to exotic locations is not enough, unless it's a family photograph, or with a group of people where staging an image in motion becomes more difficult (as seen in Figure 7). The stillness of everyday life, of going through the motions of long working hours and reduced pay, then become only an obstacle to be overcome, by the experience of movement that one enjoys while travelling. Another signification that can be noted in Figure 6 is that of comfortable clothing, such as loose fits, sports-wear, outdoorsy attire generally associated with travellers. At the heart of the image is a notion of freedom, play, to enjoy mobility, permeating culture with a spirit of adventure. The compulsion of wearing a formal attire in our everyday working lives, especially in the

current corporate office culture arouses a sense of discomfort, which comfortable clothing helps us escape. But it's not just about comfort here; but about fitness. Fitness is not just a way of keeping good health, but an array of marketing discourses accompanies this notion to stay fit. An expanded consumer market for fitness products assuredly constructs a discourse that sells the idea of being 'fit' as being healthy. It's not enough to be a hard worker, a workaholic, within late capitalism one must know how to find a balance. The solution to a ton of stress from being overworked is not leisure or relaxation but more work; a workout.

The notion of enjoyment turns consumption into a substitute for participation in important social issues. Every place becomes an exotic location to be visited, a promise for having a more fulfilled life is to travel. Signification in this case boils down to a general aesthetization of everyday life, of pure circulation of images (Baudrillard, 1993). To a young traveller, then, posing at different exotic locations only becomes part of that 'out of the ordinary' experience. It is not the local citizens who pose at locations and share their images. To them these spaces hold a culturally specific value of a shared memory. But then again can this be said with utmost conviction? One doesn't have to look far into the past to understand how subjects lose their sense of space and time and how postmodern culture encourages a sense of a continuous present (Harvey, 2017). For instance, the popular location-based augmented reality game, Pokémon Go, got into a similar controversy for including locations such as the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park in Japan, or the Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, as Poke stops. [21] The collective symbols of a shared memory or history itself are no longer experienced in real geographical locations but in costume events, construction of images or in televised series (Harvey, 1990). Spaces similarly become cartographic evidences of locations that can be tagged on social media feeds. For a user of social media, every location is the same.

Bauman (1997) in this context succinctly describes tourists and postmodern liquid subjects. The figure of the tourist for Bauman (1997) is the epitome of avoiding any sense of fixity. I arrive, I maintain a distance, enjoy myself and leave. Time is experienced only as a *continuous present* and space is only a vector of direction, 'where to- next?' The location tagging feature on social media accurately serves this purpose. Users can now visit places, click photos, tag themselves at these locations and move on. Tourists and wanderers for Bauman (1997) are the metaphors for subjects in contemporary postmodern societies. We are all always on the move, pursuing amusement, under the illusion of 'freedom of choice'. The difference lies in the level of freedom afforded to each one of us within the socio-economic hierarchy.

In an interesting study on the proliferation of the tourism industry in America after the Second World War, Richard. K Popp (2012) analyses the then popular travel magazine *Holiday* in relation to how travel was

[21] Pokémon Go, a Nintendo game launched in 2016, works on smart phones where players use the device's GPS to locate virtual characters called Pokémon, who appear on the phone screen as if they were in the same location in the real world as the player.

marketed as a growing industry, more accessible to the middle and working classes by contextualizing it in the existing cultural, political and economic conditions of the time. He argues that while tourism became a powerful engine for economic growth, to the African Americans and other racial minorities in the U.S., the culture of holidaying seemed like a damning evidence of institutionalized racism that restricted them to the status of being second class citizens (p.60). Marketing dreams through the lens of fantasy and social mobility, travel locations were seen as enchanted spaces to be celebrated by various classes. The mid-1950s campaigns around tourism and travel went to the extent of branding the American economy as "People's Capitalism" (Popp, 2012, p. 66). Such a rhetoric was based on the ideological construction of the notion of a classless society. Leisure was commodified, as the desire to have 'fun' became associated with the idea that while consumers' appetites for necessities may be sated, there were no limits in the market for pleasure. He further argues that beyond associating the idea of having a 'good life' with travel, the travel industry's ideological lens was focused around the narrative of individual freedom that was suggested through the discourse of mobility (p. 71). For instance, he explains how a 1925 "Save to travel" advert aimed at young office workers with the message: "Life at home seems dull and prosaic, until the great day when a tour is finally undertaken. Thereafter a new zest is added to life, the unappeased longings disappear and unwonted content blooms in the midst of old routine surroundings, no matter how drab and uninspiring" (Popp, 2012, p.16). Popp (2012) points out that the Depression era ads were aimed at co-opting economic hardships as a selling tool for travel industry, creating a cultural climate in which tourism could become a necessity (p.19) Just as Popp(2012) suggests in the past, when much of the world was going through political, economic turmoil, fun for the sake of fun was made into a powerful testament to the American system, allowing its citizens the mobility to pursue fun. Interestingly, the World Bank data on International tourism expenditures (1996-2015) shows a great spike in the year 2008, the graph has only grown since 1996, with the exception of setbacks in the year 2001 and 2009, both years following economic recessions. As of 2015, world expenditure on tourism has more than doubled in the previous two decades (Data Indicator: Worldbank, 2016).

Is it any wonder, then, that the Working Holiday Visa program has seen a tremendous growth in recent years in advanced capitalist countries across the globe? A visa offered to young backpackers that was initially advertised as a means for young travellers to have a 'cultural experience', now is a means of exploiting migrant labour at cheap rates. Reilly (2015) argues that the Australian labour market has come under the spotlight for exploitation of these migrant travellers, encouraging them to engage in specified industries in Australia such as horticulture and tourism. A number of allegations have been made by the Australian Broadcasting Commission's national current affairs programme *Four Corners* regarding the exploitation of these tourist workers, including underpaid wages, excessive working hours, substandard living conditions and so on (Reilly, 2015, p.475). Enjoyment through travel is not just that 'out of the ordinary' experience of escaping the

drudgery and routine of everyday life, it is here contextualized in the overall socio-economic context. A credit-based economy assures the subjects that enjoyment is possible, even though it puts one into a cycle of debt. In the current milieu of flexible work hours and contractual jobs, precarious work, the notion of travel and enjoyment is marketed as a recourse for the uncertainties that come with this kind of employment. Just the idea of the Working Holiday Visas would suffice to explain how work transforms and merges into the desire to take holidays outside of one's country.

The Images of Enjoyment and the Reproduction of Consumerist Capitalism

In Figures 6 and 7, the artist superimposed the existing user images with the original images from Nazi concentration camps in the background. The edited images were meant to shock its viewer with jarring images that make the historical relevance of that location more obvious. Barthes (as cited in Showcross, 1997) has been critical of this style of editing photographs. Barthes considers this to have no substantial effect on the viewer because the photographer, or the artist in this case, is too conscious of how the audiences will react to their work. As Barthes argues: "he has almost overconstructed the horror that he propounds, adding to the deed, by contrasts or commingling, the intentional language of horror" (as cited in Showcross, 1997, p.3). What the artist has done here is presented an exaggerated deed, which does not lead to an engagement into a questioning of things as they are but merely imbues those who posted and shared, or liked these images with a sense of guilt.

The users who posted these images, as stated in the beginning, were given an option to have their images removed by emailing the artist an apology. There is no doubt here about the guilt-shaming involved which also got rightly criticized by a number of people. Berger (1980) makes an important argument about the violence of photographs from the Vietnam War in newspapers in his essay titled *Photographs of Agony*. He explains how as we look at image after image of the horrors of war, an indispensable sense of despair takes over, followed by a feeling of indignation for other's suffering. But the indignation also demands inaction. How to emerge out of this moment of truth and get back to our normal lives? As soon as one realises their sense of perceived inadequacy, the shock wears off and it now becomes too familiar, to accommodate their sense of political incapacity. By editing these images in this way, the artist has risked a similar dispossession of thought and feeling from the viewers. Those using social media, often already overtly comfortable with violent images and content, follow the popular visual discourse which neither challenges, nor questions the impulse behind our acts of enjoyment. The users who created these images such as in Figure 7, were already aware of the significance of the place. And this is simply how we experience travel, where every location is the same and needs to display that we have had our fun.

The Lacanian notion of the superego is not just an agency that commands enjoyment but at the same time plagues us with guilt for giving into those desires. The inherently unsatisfactory feeling of gratifying our desires is associated with a sense of guilt. The Yolocaust images illustrate the notion of a fetishistic split; which Žižek explains as the disavowal structure of *I know very well, but all the same* (Žižek, 2002). Just as in Marx's notion of fetishism of commodities, it is not what people think they are doing, but in their social activity, people act as if the commodities were not simply objects but objects with special powers. Žižek (2003) thus argues that in our consumerist demands to enjoy, it is not as if the subjects are unaware of how things really are, they know what these commodities are, "relations between people", but in our everyday lives the paradox is that we act as if we do not know this and follow the fetishist illusion (p.41). This is how we experience the imperative to enjoy under late capitalism.

Further, when users 'like' certain images of enjoyment, in a Žižekian sense, there is a notion of enjoying by proxy through the other (or the Other is enjoying for me), whereby I am passive while the Other does it for me. I'm relieved of my duty to adhere to the superego's injunction to enjoy! For Žižek, this substitution is the means by which somebody else does it for me and constitutes the basic feature of the symbolic order (Žižek, 2003). It is in this sense that one can argue that communication on social media is more interpassive (Žižek, 2003; Pfaller, 2014) than interactive, whereby, even though one can interact with a screen as opposed to sitting passively in front of it, the activity is in itself passive. I'm constantly 'acting' through the medium by scrolling, liking, sharing; the medium does it in my stead. Very much like Žižek's example of canned laughter on television, the medium of social media is used to substitute my actions/inactions. I tag myself in protests and post their images online rather than going to one, or alternatively even going to a protest becomes a symbolic act of representing oneself as being 'woke'. I change my profile pictures in support of social causes rather than actively doing something about it. It then allows me to rid myself of my guilt through virtual 'activity'. Similarly, I 'like' images of enjoyment as it relieves me of my duty to enjoy.

Chapter 7 The Political Image

Introduction

From the Christchurch terrorist attack to Charlottesville, to the shooting at the Gilroy Garlic festival in California, the El Paso killings, to the *Generation Identity* youth groups sailing through the Mediterranean Sea to sink refugee ships coming into Europe (Al Jazeera, 2017), there has been a surge in white supremacist violence across the globe where the dominant ethnic group is of European descent. A common link that ties these perceived 'individual' perpetrators together is a surge in the online radicalisation of youth into the folds of white supremacist ideology. By analysing memes, one of the most popular form of content used for political messaging on digital media today, one is able to examine this expanding global movement that calls itself the Alt Right. Focussing on the 2016 U.S. presidential elections and the mainstreaming of the Alt Right's ideology as a case in point, this chapter explains the often complex and contradictory process of the subject's interpellation into political ideologies.

The chapter begins by putting forth a brief history of the Alt Right, its intellectual predecessors, and the strategies deployed by the movement's ideologues to make use of digital and social media platforms with the goal of mainstreaming white nationalism as a political discourse. Although a lot has been written about the Alt Right since the election of Donald Trump as the president of the U.S., when it comes to the question of who voted for Trump, there has been a tendency across media rhetoric and common understanding that it was the alienated, white working-class voters who brought him into power (Walley, 2017; Lerner, 2016). Certainly, the emergence of a growing global far right movement needs to be seen in conjunction with the ongoing crisis of capitalism, specifically since 2008. While the crisis and the resultant inequalities certainly feeds into the anxieties of the oppressed classes, it is argued here that we need to first comprehend the complex ideological roots that haunts the *political unconscious* of many societies: white supremacy rooted in a nostalgia for a bygone era of racial capitalism. While racialisation and class exploitation share the same roots, of establishing capitalism through primitive accumulation and violent colonisation, it is necessary to move beyond a deterministic understanding of both race, class and the subject's interpellation into these ideologies. An ideology analysis of the Alt Right's rhetoric, specifically through their most popular memes, in the context of the 2016 U.S. elections helps us examine how subjectivity is formed in historically specific contexts, in relation to particular discourses that become dominant in certain social formations (Hall, 2005).

The Alt Right: Origins

What is the Alt Right?

The Alt Right is a white supremacist movement that gained online momentum before and during the 2016 U.S. presidential elections and Donald Trump's electoral campaign.[22] Although this online movement gained momentum in the U.S., their ideology and strategies of leveraging social media platforms as a propaganda machine have now spread globally. The Alt Right can be defined as a "loose collection of social media users and boards, public personalities, and content platforms that often adopt libertarian or far right advocacy. The group commonly espouses claims, including but not limited to, support for white supremacy, opposition to feminism, rejection of identity-based rights, exclusive immigration policies, and an abhorrence of political correctness" (Woods & Hahner, 2019, p. 3). Spreading to mainstream social media platforms from the more obscure message and image boards like 4chan, 8chan and Reddit, this movement began as a seemingly disparate group of young people who had in the past amalgamated together for political and non-political trolling and doxing using hashtags and other such digital tools (Marwick & Lewis, 2017).[23]

While the movements followers seem to agree and disagree on various issues, its ideological and network roots can be traced back to a group of intellectuals who have been publishing their ideas long before the online Alt Right movement around the election of Donald Trump kick-started in 2015. The word 'Alt Right' or 'Alternative Right' was coined by Paul Gottfried in 2008, a far right intellectual in the U.S. who has been advocating for a new far right movement that goes beyond traditional conservatism describing it as 'paleo-conservativism'. Gottfried and his supporters have argued that this ideology envisages a renewal of race science, a vehement dislike of immigration, diversity, and multiculturalism, a scepticism of free trade and foreign military interventions, and generally advocating for extremely traditional views in relation to gender, ethnicity and race (Wendling, 2018, p. 17). Much before the 2016 presidential elections, there were already a number of far right think tanks and intellectuals, billionaire funders who were working towards establishing a youth-centred, white nationalist movement. Their webpages, published books, manifestos, blogs, YouTube channels and memes are swarmed with holocaust denial, conspiracy theories such as white genocide and a call to bring back fascism and glory to an oppressed white race. In the early days before and after the election of Trump to the White House, growing concerns around the number of white supremacists who supported him were written off by some right- wing mainstream media outlets such as Fox News. In one such instance, Bill

[22] Much of the data analysis and observations in this chapter are a result of a project that was taken up by me with a team of collaborators at the Digital Methods Summer School (2016) at the University of Amsterdam. I am grateful for the experience of having worked with a great team of peers who shared a common interest in understanding the Alt Right and using digital methods to gain more insights into their online networks (Alt-Right Open Intelligence Initiative, 2017). The word Alt Right is sometimes interchangeably used with the term 'online white supremacists' or 'far right' in this chapter. The reason for this is political. The group that identifies itself as the Alt Right likes to hide behind the neutrality of their name as it simply connotes a 'new or alternative form of right-wing politics'. As it is shown in this chapter, this neutrality hides the violence of their ideological pursuit and hence needs to be challenged.

[23] Before the 2016 U.S. elections, this group had come together in a controversy of online trolling and harassment campaign called #GamerGate. This hashtag popularized in 2014 focussed on trolling those women who spoke against the issues of sexism, misogyny and progressive critiques of the gaming industry. Female game developers such as Zoe Quinn and Brianna Wu, who had made these criticisms were targeted and harassed with threats of rape and death meted out against them by the online Alt Right movement. At the time, this movement was not as organized as it is now.

O'Reilly, a Fox News commentator argued that this white supremacist movement was very small and insignificant, and that most of Trump's supporters were not racists (Main, 2018, p. 11). There has been a tendency in global mainstream media narratives to reduce this movement to a fringe group or simply describe it as bored young people. The next section briefly delves into the intellectual and political roots of this growing far right movement to critique some of the commonly held assumptions about it.

The Intellectual Cannons of the Alt Right

Largely critical of the Republicans or neo-conservatives for being too soft on various policies of diversity and inclusion, paleo-conservatives are proud of their anti-establishment status since their ideas are considered unfit and unpalatable in mainstream social and political circles. A prominent figure in U.S. politics, besides Trump, who espoused these publicly, is Pat Buchanan, who while running for President in 2000 voiced his views on *The Cultural War for the Soul of America* (Wendling, 2018). It was Buchanan's book *The Death of the West*: *How Dying Populations and Immigrant Invasions Imperil Our Culture and Civilization* that was later popularized and quoted on various online platforms by the Alt Right, under the eccentric conspiracy theory of 'white genocide'.

Then there are others such as Jared Taylor, a Yale graduate and the editor of a white nationalist online magazine founded in 1990 *American Renaissance,* that often publishes articles on racial differences in IQ between the races, and general ideas on race realism (Hankes, 2016). Richard Spencer, a Duke PhD drop out, subsequently took up Gottfried's ideas and founded the website *AlternativeRight.com* in 2010 (Wendling, 2018) which would become the precursor to the online movement that eventually started spreading on message boards such as 4chan, 8chan and Reddit. As early as 2009, Spencer and a lot of these familiar far right figures were backing Ron Paul's 2008 presidential campaign. Paul's campaign energized a lot of people who were against the mainstream conservativism of Bush era including "libertarians, localists, foreign-policy noninterventionists, and white supremacists" (Hawley, 2017, p. 55).

Richard Spencer's website *AlternativeRight.com* established in 2010 became one of the first such online outlets for far-right propaganda that would later come to have a lasting influence on electoral politics in the U.S. with the election campaign of Donald Trump. A range of white supremacist ideas were heavily circulated on this website such as, a simplified explanation of genetic differences, IQ linked to racial and ethnic groupings, an idea that nation-states must be broken up according to ethnic and religious groups and that primarily the goal of this movement was to create a nation-state only for white people (Wendling, 2018, p. 22).[24] To achieve this

[24] It is probably useful to point out that a number of these ideas were already circulating around in the paleo-conservative, libertarian circles since the 90s where libertarians like Charles Murray had argued that inequalities in the U.S. could be explained by understanding the genetic differences in the intelligence of different races (Hawley, 2017, p. 34).

Spencer calls for a 'peaceful ethnic cleansing' or re-immigration of all the non-whites to 'where they come from'. Certainly Spencer is not advocating only for 'peaceful' changes to immigration policies. The website also quite favourably talked about the white nationalist mass murderer Anders Breivik's manifesto titled *A European Declaration of Independence,* who Spencer calls "a serious political thinker with a great many insights and some practical ideas on strategy" (Wendling, 2018, p. 24).

In 2016, Donald Trump announced *Breitbart Media's* infamous Steve Bannon as the CEO of his electoral campaign and later the White House Chief Strategist. Steve Bannon took over *Breitbart* in 2012, after the death of Andrew Breitbart and used his own Wall Street connections to gain funding for its expansion. In July 2016 before taking charge of the Trump campaign, Bannon claimed that *Breitbart* was a platform for the Alt Right (Main, 2018). As the website became a propaganda page for Trump's electoral campaign, the ideas shared on it were often watered-down versions of some of the hard-core white nationalist Alt Right views to obscure the language around white nationalism. Some of the prominent *Breitbart* writers have often been dubbed as the Alt Lite. Mostly involving people such as Milo Yiannopoulos and Ben Shapiro who gained a celebrity status in the process, the Alt Lite's strategy has been to make white nationalist content more palatable, attractive to the general audience and 'edgy' by alluring their followers and audiences on social media to a transgressive agenda against political correctness.

While the Neo Nazi version of the rhetoric was published in places such as the *Daily Stormer*, run by Andrew Anglin, *Breitbart News* and the likes of Milo were publishing views that were 'anti-political correctness', pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable, normalizing white identity politics. Although the rhetoric deployed by the so-called Alt Lite might be different from the hard-core Neo Nazis of the Alt Right, they shared the same goals. The Alt Lite offered a gateway into the Alt Right. As many of the public figures in the Alt Right have suggested, theirs is an ideological movement that aims to make white nationalism more palatable in mainstream political discourse (Astor, 2019).

A common understanding of the Alt Right often dubs this whole group as either an online radicalized fringe circulating content on the dark corners of the web, or a group that is restricted to U.S. politics, but an analysis of their global online networks reveals otherwise. For instance, Vladimir Putin's close advisor Alexander Dugin (Main, 2018, p. 218), who is a prominent far right Russian white nationalist (Harkinson, 2016), is often quoted by Richard Spencer in his interviews and tweets as an inspiration. Dugin is a professor of sociology at the Moscow State University, and is known to have influenced a range of far right political parties across Europe such as The British National Party, Greece's Golden Dawn and the National Front in France (Tolstoy & McCaffray, 2015). Alexander Dugin, with his 37K Twitter followers, often retweets and promotes Spencer, Trump and the Alt Right using his much-popularized social media profiles. The Alt Right also has established

connections to a pan-European youth identitarian movement that calls itself *Generation Identity* set up in France in the 2000s. On the surface this movement caters to anyone who wants to celebrate being 'white' and Christian, but several far-right parties across Europe have garnered political support through this fast-growing white nationalist movement with their branches in Austria, Germany, Italy and the U.K. (Al Jazeera, 2018). *Generation Identity* is also responsible for spreading conspiratorial ideas on different digital platforms alluding to "the great replacement" which was quoted by the Christchurch white supremacist murderer in his manifesto and has proven ties with Marine Le Penn's National Front Party (Rees, Harrison, Boazman, Jordon, & Davies, 2018).

The Leveraging of Digital Platforms

To a certain extent it is easier to follow and track the more prominent far righters in the online space, but fake profiles on social media and the anonymity offered by message boards like Reddit and 4Chan have made it far more difficult to understand the breadth of the far-right online movement. As we are often dealing with a large swathe of online users who like and share content anonymously, it is impossible to arrive at a concrete number of followers.

One way to understand the scale and extent of the ideological warfare staged by the Alt Right is to look at the web traffic that their webpages and social media profiles have garnered since 2015. In an analysis of web traffic on a number of Alt Right webpages from October 2015 to February 2018, Main (2018) shows that "at about 64 million visits and 10.3 million unique visitors on average per month, *Breitbart* far surpassed not only conservative right wing websites but also all the left wing opinion web-based political magazines" (pp. 27-29). And these are the numbers only for *Breitbart*, not all of the Alt Right webpages put together. Through *Breitbart* and Steve Bannon's campaign tactics, the Alt Right had found an online space for their political propaganda. In fact, Trump's 2016 social media strategy proved to be so successful that in the 2018 Mid-term elections, both Republicans and Democrats were heavily investing in viral content such as memes for social media messaging that could sway constituencies (Roose & Collins, 2018).[25]

Another possible method to estimate the popularity of the movement is to identify the number of followers that the more popular Alt Right members have on their different social media profiles. For instance, popular white nationalist Laura Loomer who often posts 'white identity politics', Islamophobic, largely misinformed content

[25] The aim here is not to disavow the influence of Russian troll farms from the illusive Moscow based Internet Research Agency (IRA) and their efforts to sway the elections in favour of Trump. But in the mainstream narrative about Russian meddling in U.S. elections what is being downplayed is the involvement of the home-grown white nationalist movement that has been feeding on the growing discontent and distrust of democratic institutions.

on her Instagram profile has a following of 111,000 users (Martinez N. , 2019). Milo Yiannopoulos and Alex Jones (another conspiracy theorist) have a following of 406,000 and 99,000 each on Instagram (Martinez N. , 2019). Or one can take a look at the Alt Right's own 'free speech' platform *Gab*, which had about 480,000 users in 2018. After being dropped by its hosting site *Go Daddy*, for its connection with the Pittsburgh synagogue shootings in 2018, *Gab* came back online within a week and was filled with anti-Semitic content immediately. These seemingly independent Instagram 'influencers' have gathered a lot of attention on social media by posting images and content that tickles some and offends many.

Trump's own electoral campaign made full use of this digital infrastructure of various platforms. A Facebook insider, Martinez (2018) explains how Trump managed to conquer the Facebook newsfeeds of users without having to pay more money than the Clinton campaign for ad space. Martinez explains that Facebook ads work just like real estate where potential advertisers send in their ad piece, along with a potential bid that they'd be willing to pay for it. But Facebook's ad infrastructure doesn't only reward the highest bidder, it also uses a complex algorithm that considers both the monetary value of each bid and how well the ad can engage Facebook's audiences in 'clickbait', which is clicking the ad, sharing, liking or commenting (Martinez A. G., 2018). While both the Trump and Clinton campaigns were bidding for the same ad spaces, specifically in some of the swing-vote states, Trump was providing much more clickbaity, 'politically incorrect' attention grabbing content which effectively won him much more ad space and attention on Facebook with less money.

The revelations of the Cambridge Analytica files have only made us better understand the complexity of how and to what extent were digital platforms used (both in the U.K.'s Brexit-Leave Campaign and the election of Trump) for swaying political opinions. The files revealed how Cambridge Analytica and its parent company SCL, companies that use big data analysis for marketing purposes, were able to gather user's social media profiles and create a psychological tool that would target users with matching political content. Funded by Robert Mercer, a hedge-fund billionaire and Bannon, the company harvested big data from Facebook to create psychological profiles of 230 million U.S. citizens to start an "information warfare" where millions of people were targeted with fake news and misinformation before the elections (Cadwalladr, 2018). Christopher Wylie, the man who helped create this psychological tool compares politics to fashion trends. He claims that just as you can get people to wear an ugly pair of Crocs one day because it's fashionable, even though it was thought to be ugly just yesterday; the same marketing strategies could get people to choose Trump (Cadwalladr, 2018). With the intensity of the social and digital media space and the focus regularly placed on garnering attention at any cost, democratic participation was driven by and reduced to likes, shares and clickbait. Capitalism and fascism were openly fornicating while we were lost in the sea of data, sometimes condemning but mostly busy scoffing at Trump's latest tweets. We should hardly be surprised then that two and a half years into his presidency, Trump is still always trending on Twitter.

As Trump's campaign was making full use of digital platforms like Facebook and Twitter for electoral propaganda, the Alt Right used another very effective tool: Memes. The next section explores the complexity of how memes are used by the Alt Right as tools for ideological interpellation and recruiting subjects into the folds of white supremacy.

Alt Right Memes and Ideological Interpellation

Memes for political messaging

New media technologies have changed the way we participate in politics and political struggles. From Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street, to the more recent Climate Change School Strikes, protestors have made use of digital and social media platforms to organize wide scale, at times even global, social movements. And increasingly, memes have played a crucial role in the form of both, top-down political campaigning and grass-roots campaigns (Shifman, 2014, p. 122).

A term coined by Richard Dawkins, memes are conceptualized by him as "a cultural unit that is spread from one person to another through copying and imitation" (Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2018, p. 295). Dawkins used the examples of cultural phenomenon like "catchy tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches" (1990, as cited in Onge, 2018, p. 187). Memes have now become one of the most commonly shared forms of cultural unit in the space of digital communication. On the internet, memes can be of multiple formats where "its creators take an item (text, image, or video) and change parts of it to input their own ideas, while keeping a consistent resemblance to the memetic group" (Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2018, p. 295). We can think of memes as both individual and collective forms of expression, as individual creators often use an already existing template to add their own twist to it. They are increasingly popular and spread virally in a globalized digital culture where people from different parts of the world often adopt their own regional, cultural styles and formats for making memes and viral content. More importantly, memes have become central to political participation and opinion sharing on digital media.

Going back as early as the 2008 Obama campaign, memes and viral clips of Obama's campaign slogan "Yes We Can" were highly successful in attracting millions of online viewers (Shifman, 2014). Shifman (2014, p.125) argues that the content shared and forwarded to people by their friends and colleagues was more likely to be viewed as politically persuasive by users than the content sponsored and shared under official campaign logos. Memes became the perfect medium for such one-to-one political messaging as they can be effectively used to construct a collective, shared identity and to assert the validity of political opinions that can be shared with a larger in-group.

We saw a similar repeat of this phenomenon before and after the 2016 elections in the U.S., whereby at the end of the election campaigns the internet was swarmed with either pro-Trump or anti-Clinton social media messaging (Woods & Hahner, 2019). A large part of this can be accredited to the Alt Right for their relentless propaganda to the extent that many members of the Alt Right have claimed credit for "meme-ing Trump into the White House" (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 2). It would be incorrect to assume that it was solely a strategic top-down rhetoric from the Alt Right intellectuals and influencers discussed earlier that made Trump so popular on different platforms. Alt Right's memes and rhetoric was spontaneously taken up and engaged with, liked, shared and spread by a large number of users on different platforms. But perhaps what emboldened the Alt Right is a Presidential candidate who was retweeting memes from a number of white nationalist accounts on Twitter. Digital content analysts at Little Bird software argue that from the start of his campaign until February 2016, Trump had retweeted about 75 users who follow at least three of the top 50 #WhiteGenocide influencers (Kharakh & Primack, 2016).[26]

Memes had become the core part of the far right's online collectivisation around the election of Donald Trump. A huge range of memes and hashtags were popularized for this purpose such as Pepe the Frog, God Emperor Trump, red pill, cultural Marxism, the Deplorables and so on. So far, what is discussed in this chapter alludes to the various mechanisms by which ideological propaganda was deployed by the Alt Right and the Trump campaign. But a discussion of the political sphere based only on the ideological apparatuses does not explain why so many people would find such political messaging agreeable and be emotionally invested in it. What is missing is an account of how this propaganda successfully created "an effect of ideological belief in a cause and the interconnecting effect of subjectivisation, of recognition of one's ideological position?" (Zizek, 2012, p. 321).

Pepe the Frog: The Nodal Point of Alt Right's Discourse

In Chapter 3 the notions of subjectivity, ideology and the subject's identification with ideological discourse were explored. Althusser's theorization of ideology is indebted to a Lacanian conceptual apparatus which helps to connect the often-difficult thread between the individual subject and the social, political and the economic structures. But when it comes to a theorization of political ideologies and the subject's interpellation into them, Marxism has had a complex history which has been often critiqued as class reductionism. Within Western Marxism, the problem has been acute and still continues to persist whereby an explanation for particular phenomenon such as racism, homophobia or conservativism in the working classes is "often reduced to be caused by, or functional to, the overriding dynamic of class and class conflict" (Barrett, 2012, p. 241). Ernesto

[26] Usually described in social media marketing terms, 'influencers' are the users of social media who have a large following on their social media profiles and usually engage in persuading their followers to buy products, services or in this case, ideas.

Laclau (1977) has made some significant contribution in using Althusser's theory of interpellation into an analysis of political ideologies enabling an understanding of how, for instance, non-class ideological elements have in the past, helped condense popular-democratic themes into fascistic ideological configurations (Barrett, 2012, p. 241). Zizek (2009), Laclau (1977) and Stavrakakis (2003) have all deployed the Lacanian concept of master signifiers to explicate the relationship between language, signifiers and our passionate investment in political ideologies through them.

I want to begin here with a brief discussion of this concept of a master signifier to further understand the subject's interpellation into the Alt Right's ideology through memes.

For Lacan (1993), every discourse or a discursive network consists of some often repeated privileged signifiers which become the nodal points that help to "button down meaning and ensure the smooth exchange of signifiers" (Hook & Vanheule, 2016, p. 2). Lacan suggests that, "everything radiates out from and is organized around this signifier, similar to these little lines of force that an upholstery button forms on the surface of material" (Lacan, 1993, p. 268). In our everyday exchange, these master signifiers are often loaded with affect and passion garnering much more importance than other associated signifiers in the signifying chain. Words such as 'family', 'religion', 'my country' are examples of such signifiers which we tend to have affective attachments to, without being able to articulate or explain why we feel this way about them. In speech, what is signified through these master signifiers in not the literal meaning of the word, but it performs a discursive function of halting a sequence of floating signifiers which only offer inadequate explanations. This Lacanian notion of master signifiers and our unconscious libidinal investment into it helps explain the libidinal enjoyment or *jouissance* that is often produced through speech (Hook & Vanheule, 2016, p. 3).

In the context of the 2016 U.S. elections for instance, a number of floating signifiers can be identified with the Trump campaign that were dominating the public rhetoric, such as "Make America Great Again", or "freedom of speech". While understanding political ideologies, Stavrakakis (2003, p. 281) explains how these nodal points or master signifiers of a discourse are of great significance in constructing collective bonds that can hold a large group of people together around their shared libidinal investments in a leader or an idea.

For the Alt Right, such a nodal point (or master signifier) that sustained the multiplicities of identities of people into one ideological field and helped them to form a collective identity was the symbol of Pepe the Frog embodying the notion of political incorrectness.

Figure 8 Matt Furie, Pepe the Frog (2005)

First created by Matt Furie in 2005 for a comic titled *Boy's Club*, Pepe the Frog (Figure 8) was the usual "bro playing videogames, eating pizza, smoking pot and being harmlessly gross" (Woods & Hahner, 2019, pp. 68-69). As a widely popular comic sensation on 4chan, Pepe was well-known for his unorthodoxy and a lack of concern for societal expectations (Woods & Hahner, 2019, p. 69). And such a transgression of the norms of everyday speech for 'lulz' [27] or enjoyment that comes from it, was already a huge part of online meme subcultures. By the beginning of the election campaign in 2015, Pepe was being appropriated as a symbol for the Alt Right on a number of platforms like 4chan and Reddit and was largely being used to rally for Donald Trump.

When he joined the Presidential candidacy in 2015, Trump announced that he was going to "build a wall to keep out all the Mexican criminals and 'rapists'". Within a few days, the publisher of Neo Nazi content on *Daily Stormer*, Andrew Anglin wrote, "I urge all readers of this site to do whatever they can to make Donald Trump President" (Posner & Neiwert, 2016). Trump's speeches, statements and tweets were consistently in line with the online trolling culture where one says things to offend, trigger, or illicit an emotional response in return. Subsequently on Reddit, the sub-reddit named The_Donald, devoted to Donald Trump became the most influential sub-reddit on the platform. According to its moderators, it was "the largest, best and closest thing to an official campaign sub-reddit for Donald Trump 2016" (Lagario-Chaftkin, 2016). Pepe was being deployed to promote Trump's candidacy and a huge number of memes were being created, shared, liked and proliferated on social media. *Figure 9* shows a meme that depicts Trump in a Pepe-style imagery which was shared by Trump in October 2015, accompanied with the text "You can't Stump the Trump". The mainstream media's excessive attention and coverage of Trump's retweeting of white nationalist accounts was already making the Alt Right gain a strong public presence.

[27] In internet slang, 'lulz' is the amusement or laughter derived at the expense of others.

Figure 9 Trump's retweet of a Meme depicting Trump in the style of Pepe (2016).

Just like Pepe and his constant pushing of the boundaries of normalized speech, Trump appealed to those who felt like their 'freedom of speech' was being impinged on or repressed by certain groups of people. Trump's supporters and the Alt right followers were all riding the train of enjoyment where 'political incorrectness' was being pushed to its extreme and one could finally revel in a burst of limitless enjoyment in the release of our innermost unconscious desires. Speech was precisely the mode of this unrestrained traumatic kernel of enjoyment. Pepe soon came to embody a radical investment in hatred of all forms – a hatred of feminism, of any progressive rights and support of minority groups such as African Americans, the trans-community, a hatred of Jews, Muslims, Mexicans, immigrants, multiculturalism and the SJWs (Social Justice Warriors) or those on the Left. At the same time, Pepe offered a positive association and an inclusive collective pride in specific identities such as being white, Christian, a gamer, men's rights activists, 'incels' (involuntary celibates), Neo Nazis, those who took pride in confederacy, gun-lovers, a proud American, or those who were sick of more of the same 'establishment' political agenda that Clinton represented and so on. *Figure 10* aptly depicts an amalgamation of these identities that were coalescing into an online movement. Pepe allowed for a fixing of these multiple floating signifiers/identities in the formation of a collective identity based on exclusion and inclusion of those who become a part of the in and out groups.

Figure 10 Pepe the Frog Depicts the Alt Right (Burke, 2018).

In serving the function of a master signifier, Pepe became the fixed point in the political rhetoric that interpellated the Neo-Nazis of the Alt right, the Alt Lite, and those outside of the white supremacist fold who did not wish to overtly associate themselves with such an ideology but shared one or more of these allegiances or opinions. Ideological interpellation is a messy and contradictory affair. Ideology is not only a set of ideas that one can agree or disagree with, but a structure that imposes itself, not necessarily at the level of the conscious (Eagleton, 2012) and assists in producing subjects that suit the needs of a mode of production. It's not always a set of doctrines but more the symbols, images, or concepts that "we live at an unconscious level" (Eagleton, 2012) and is often inscribed through material practices in our everyday lives. For instance, the casual sexism and misogyny, the sexualisation of women everywhere, the gender pay gap, the subtle and overt violence faced by women in their everyday interactions in most patriarchal societies is not a written down doctrine that announces itself as patriarchy. It becomes imbued into the political unconscious of societies that for instance, value cultural practices or religious beliefs that are patriarchal, with real and devastating consequences on the lives of subjects. Such an ideological structure operating at the level of the unconscious can be harnessed to politically mobilize a group of people who are empowered by and are already actively "living" this ideology. Such an understanding of ideology helps explain why women would come out and vote for a Presidential candidate who had overtly proclaimed misogynistic views. Or why young white women would join the Alt Right, proclaim themselves to be ethno-nationalists and are now complaining about misogyny in the group (Warren, 2017). More importantly, it can help us substantiate that all ideological interpellation cannot be determined by one's class position or class ideology on its own. Keying into another popular meme shared during the Trump election campaign, the next section further examines this contradictory nature of ideological interpellation and argues for a more nuanced understanding of the concept.

Alt Right- A Revolt of the Angry White Working Classes?

In a speech at a fundraiser event in New York City in September 2016, Hillary Clinton said that "you could put half of Trump's supporters into the 'basket of deplorables'… the racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic - you name it. The other half feel that the government has let them down and are desperate for change" (Reilly, 2016). In a heavy media and all round political backlash for Clinton's 'elitist' comments, Trump contested with a tweet where he said, "Wow, Hillary Clinton was SO INSULTING to my supporters, millions of amazing, hardworking people. I think it will cost her at the Polls!" Clinton's statements were immediately taken up by the Alt Right and turned into a meme that became the centre of anti-Clinton, anti-establishment messaging on social media platforms.

Figure 11 A Meme referring to Clinton's statement on "the basket of deplorables" tweeted by a close advisor of the Trump campaign at the time, Roger Stone and later retweeted by Donald Trump. Jr (Vitali, 2016).

A photoshopped version of the poster from the film *The Expendables*, this meme in Figure 11 features the faces of Mike Pence, Gov. Chris Christie, former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, both of Trump's eldest sons, conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, Donald Trump, Alt-Right icon Milo Yiannopoulos, Trump's close aid Roger Stone and the favourite online white nationalist symbol Pepe the Frog (Vitali, 2016). This meme was also retweeted by Trump's close allies, Roger Stone and Donald Trump Jr., where Trump Jr. tweeted - "I am proud to be grouped with the hardworking men and women of this country who have supported my father" (Vitali, 2016). Whether Clinton's statement was a political disaster or whether she was a weak contender to Trump is not the central concern here and neither do I intend to defend Clinton as a presidential candidate. Rather, I want to point out the sliding of the signifiers and Trump's rhetorical hijacking of the event. As the meme suggests, taking pride in being a 'deplorable' candidate, Trump was able to campaign as a leader who aligned with the 'hard working' Americans, those who Clinton had publicly deemed as deplorable, racist and bigoted. In fact, Trump repeatedly invoked the idea of the 'forgotten men' of America whose needs had been overlooked, substantially changing the election narrative in his favour. During the election campaign, both Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump were addressing the issues of growing inequalities in the U.S. Where Sanders was critical

of the neoliberal policies and the 1% of wealthy elites, Trump blamed the non-White 'other' such as immigrants and other foreign nations for taking away American jobs. In a rhetorical juxtaposition of race and class, white Americans were identified by Trump as the 'hard working' people.

Yet, despite all of the links suggesting that there was more to the election of Trump than just the 'angry white working class' voters, many journalists and political pundits (Lerner, 2016) even on the left (Berardi, 2016; Tuscano, 2017) went on to claim otherwise, both before and after the election results were declared. Headlines declared Trump's victory as a "working class revolt" (Crampton, 2016) and news media such as Fox News were announcing Trump, "the working-class candidate" (Mondon & Winter, 2019). On the Left, Berardi ('Bifo') wrote an article which made an argument stating, "the white worker class, humiliated over the last thirty years deceived by endless reformist promises, impoverished by financial aggression, has now elected the Ku Klux Klan to the White House" (Berardi, 2016). In the news media, articles featuring interviews with prominent white nationalists were discussing the rise of the Alt Right as "a product of the white working class left behind by automation, outsourcing, and the era of rising economic inequalities" (Harkinson, 2016).

And yet, if one looks at the demography of the voters who were categorized as 'working class' in the election coverage in the U.S., it was a confusing categorisation of different groups of people under a broad category of those who "do or do not have a bachelor's degree" (Walley, 2017). This reductive categorization of 'working class' lumped together a number of groups who might have none or very little class affinity, as it included small business owners, small farmers, middle class office workers, suburban dwellers, the traditional working classes of the former industrial belts, service workers, precariat, and the poor (Walley, 2017, p. 232). Demographically, Walley (2017) argues that it was lumping together the well-off conservative Tea Party voters in the South and those workers who have been dislocated from the Rust Belt and erasing the complex history of the middle classes in the U.S.

Considering the huge leap in the inequalities that have plagued the U.S. especially since the 2008 crisis, it is true that the anguish of the poor, working classes is often reflected in their voting patterns. Yet this overstating of the Trump voter as a rural, non-college educated 'white working class' person is in itself, an ideological claim that blames the rural poor for voting for a racist candidate. On the other hand, Trump's own strategy of rhetorically addressing the "American working class" made it an ideological move par excellence because in many ways he was also excluding the non-White Other in the category of 'working classes' often referring to them as outsiders. Trump's strategy mostly played on the idea of targeting the traditionally Republican voters who largely lived in the areas hit by a decline in the manufacturing sector, and have suffered the most from the neoliberal economic policies of the last few decades (Sasson, 2016). Although in his rallies Trump targeted these areas promising a return of manufacturing jobs, exit poll statistics suggested that those who actually

voted for him earned an average of $72,000, which is much higher than the national average yearly income (Walley, 2017, p. 232). In his detailed report on the economic standing of both Clinton and Trump voters, Silver (2016) has shown how although Republican turnout on voting day had considerably increased in the 2016 elections, there was no sign of a particularly higher turnout amongst the 'working class' or even lower income Republican voters. What also went unreported is the fact that Trump won the votes of suburban white college-educated middle-class men *and* women by a higher than expected margin, the votes that Clinton was hoping to get. Consequently, the slippery slide of the association of 'working class' with being 'white' and being forgotten was an ideological manoeuvre for the campaign to divide the diverse working class in the U.S. along racial and ethnic lines. It was no big surprise then that both the Trump and the Alt Right were heavily gloating about the victory of a forgotten 'white working class'. Trump gleefully declared on election day, "Today the American working class is going to strike back, finally" (Mondon & Winter, 2019, p. 513).

The case in point substantiates the non-class character of ideological interpellation. As Laclau (1977) has argued, we can see how "non-class ideological elements operated, for example, in the integration of popular-democratic themes into Fascist ideological configurations and that these processes might, historically, be either independent of class or articulated with class but were in no circumstances reducible to class ideologies" (Laclau, 1997, as cited in Barrett, 2012, p. 241). Although alienation, and the growing economic inequalities since 2008 crisis are exasperating the political field with a rise of democratically elected, ultra-authoritarian leaders across the globe, we must look at the roots of these ideologies that are able to attract a large number of people towards them.

Memes and the Ideological Reproduction of Racial Capitalism

In Chapter 3, it was argued that there is no outside of ideology for the subject (Zizek, 2012). Using a Lacanian understanding of the child's entry into the symbolic order through language, it was argued that interpellation into ideologies and the subject's identification with ideological hailing is a process that goes on throughout the subject's lifetime. Ideologies in this way are not only reproduced by institutions through discursive mechanisms but also through the various desires and unconscious mechanisms by subjects themselves. This is why when someone questions our ideological adherences, it can feel so personal because it is intrinsically a question of identification and identity.

It is important to qualify this with a further comment: ideology or ideological hailing is not only a matter of an utterance and everything spoken cannot be identified as ideological. But, rather as Eagleton argues, "ideology is less a matter of the inherent linguistic properties of a pronouncement than a question of who is saying what to whom for what purposes" (Eagleton, 1991, p. 9). It is not simply that the word 'monkey' is ideological, but

the context that it is used in could be a question of maintaining dominance and power. Language, symbols, images, texts often become the modalities through which ideological interpellation takes place.

But this doesn't mean we can reduce everything said and done to being in the domain of the ideological. There are those practices that are purposefully ideological such as ideas disseminated by the media for instance, and those practices where subjects themselves reproduce ideologies. I would like to recount something from my childhood to illustrate this. I remember being very young when I was told by my mother that I was beautiful because I had a fairer skin complexion just like hers. She often complimented me for my skin tone and would reprimand me for playing outside in the summer because I would get darker in the sun. I began to understand that this wasn't simply something that she did for her own individual gains or only a matter of her perception (although this may also be the case), but skin bleaching is a very common practice in many parts of India with a massive industry that sells beauty products to both women and men, promoting whitened skin (Shevde, 2008). Here it can be understood that there is a material, deliberate ideology that disseminates a cultural schema of "whiteness as attractive" through advertising and selling of beauty and grooming products. It took me by surprise to find out that this was a very common occurrence in many parts of the globe where non-white people were subjected to a systematic process of racialisation (Pierre, 2008). Pierre (2008) for instance, writes about *BODY/WHITE* products that one can find advertised on billboards across the town of Accra, Ghana; a product that unapologetically advertises transforming black bodies into white ones. This issue is not confined to certain nations such as India and Ghana but is part of the structural and historical process of European colonisation that has reproduced a particular conception of beauty.

In his analysis of the psychology of colonialism in *Black Skin White Masks*, Frantz Fanon (2008) argues that colonialism is internalized by those who are colonized, by inculcating an inferiority complex through racial discrimination *amongst their own people* and by emulating the colonizers. Fairness as being beautiful was so deeply culturally embedded in Indian society that it was reproduced within the different regions of the country, hierarchically dividing people into lighter and darker shades of skin colour.

My body was overwritten from a young age, with signifiers that persisted as the remnants of racialisation since the decolonisation of India from British rule. But it's certainly more complicated than an ideological discourse working its manipulative magic on the subject's passive psyche (Jameson, 2009). Ideological interpellation, after all, is a process of exchange where the subjects hailed by ideological rhetoric are offered some compensatory pleasures in return (Jameson, 1981). My mother (mis)recognized herself in this discourse as she gained something in return, perhaps a sense of coherent fullness mirrored back in a cultural milieu that repeats

one message: fair skin is beautiful. And for a large part, so did I. We make this bargain all the time when it comes to ideology.[28] We invest affectively in ideologies as we gain something in return.

Racialisation is very much a part of the structures of European modernity and has been historically used as a legitimization for colonising lands in the name of 'civilizing' the non-White other (Jackson, 2019). Modernity has for a long time been mired with white supremacy; where whiteness and being European have become the symbol of human progress, civilization and all that is good. One should not then be surprised to see white supremacy raise its ugly head, not only as isolated incidences of inter-personal racism and institutional violence but as a collectively organized ideological movement. Reading the views disseminated by the Alt Right as mentioned before, one can note that their movement takes collective pride in this history of European superiority and colonial power on the world stage. This presumed superiority of whiteness, whether it is the skin, the language, religion, the culture or even the accent we speak with and the inferiority of all that is not-white has become an endemic part of the collective political unconscious of many Western societies. It reveals itself often in the cultural texts and histories that are celebrated and venerated in these societies and the simultaneous silencing and destruction of the histories of the non-white Other. In Aotearoa New Zealand, for instance, the dispossession of Maori from their lands, the Crown's violent breaches of the *Te Tiririt O Waitangi* and a destruction of the Maori way of life during colonisation, are historical facts, although these are not taught in schools or often even at the University. Racial discrimination and the disadvantaged position of the indigenous Maori community today in Aotearoa, is a flipside of this blatant erasure of the historical injustices meted out against the indigenous groups (Abel & Mutu, 2011) alongside a simultaneous celebration of the colonial past.

Nonetheless, the recent global rise of white supremacy should not be seen as a historical aberration but as a corollary of capitalism's systemic crisis. Modern forms of racialisation and exploitation of the labouring classes share a common root: capitalism established through European colonialization. Both Du Bois and Robinson argue that slavery as 'black labour' was "a particular development in the history of world capitalism … a subsystem of world capitalism" (Robinson, 2000, pp. 198-199). The social relations between capital and labour in the case of slavery contained the ideological mantel of white racial superiority. In his critique of the labour movements in the U.S., Du Bois goes as far back as the American Civil War that turned into a race war against the Blacks, to identify the roots of racial violence (Robinson, 2000, p. 202). Today, in many ways this ideology reveals itself in a complex hierarchical division even between non-white labour groups based on

[28] This is not to argue that post-colonial societies like India don't have their own ideological contradictions that plague them, where colour lines get complicated and intermingled with lines drawn across caste, class, gender, religion, language and even sub-castes. I want to clarify that discrimination and even segregation based on colour and this establishment of superiority and inferiority overlaps the bounds of the caste and racial divide in India. The examples used here from my own experience are only meant as an illustration of the spontaneous form of ideological interpellation.

ethnic and racial lines. In the U.S for instance, Vijay Prashad (2000, p. 18) argues that South Asians are often pitted against African Americans and asked 'Why can't an African American be more like an Asian?' or 'your people work hard'. As if to be constantly reminded that a South Asian model immigrant "is the perpetual solution to what is seen as the crisis of black America" (Prashad, 2000, pp. 18-19). The unsaid implication here being that African Americans don't work hard enough. The ideology of racialisation became a means by which poor immigrants, white workers, and the black workers and slaves were pitted against each other.

Ideology, as a legitimization of the power of this or that group of people, exists in all societies and there is often an irrational, unconscious, passionate character to it. Both our language and bodies bear the signs of this 'spontaneous' form of ideology which is practiced and enacted by subjects in their everyday lives. But the point is to recognize that what we are seeing today as a resurrection of a fairly organized movement of white supremacists is a result of the violent histories of the colonial, capitalist project constructed through global political, cultural and most of all economic structures imposed on societies. It is an attempt to reorganize and reproduce the relations of production along racial and ethnic lines, to cope with the *Real* of capitalism's systemic crisis and an impending ecological collapse. To challenge it requires an incredible will to decolonize and a dismantling of capitalism.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

Amidst the pan-India protests against the ruling government's recently passed citizenship laws, which look very similar to Nazi Germany's Nuremberg Laws (Mansoor & Perrigo, 2019), and which will make millions of people from minority groups and the poor- stateless, the government has imposed internet shutdowns in several parts of the country to curb protestors. When the protests erupted in the first week of December 2019, on two University campuses in New Delhi, several videos of police brutality against the students went viral on social media and spread across the globe. The state immediately ordered mobile carrier companies to suspend mobile data and SMS services in the national capital (Ghoshal, 2019). According to *Access Now*, a campaign that is fighting internet shutdowns by states globally, the number of internet shutdowns have dramatically risen around the world in the last five years and this is certainly a dangerous trend. In 2019, the governments in Iran (Gambrell, 2019) and Sudan (Parker, 2019), shut down the internet for several days to curb protests from spreading, and violently suppressed dissent. Once the internet has been shut down, protestors are unable to come to each other's defense, or post and share videos of state forces using immense violence on its own people. One year since the start of the Yellow vests movement in France which turned into a full-blown revolt against Emanuel Macron's neoliberal policies, multiple injuries have been reported due to police brutality, including the use of rubber bullets by the police and the armed forces (Bock, 2019). Repressive forces often work in tandem with ideological forces.

It was argued in this thesis that it is the spontaneous form of ideology where any mode of production has historically encountered its most dire internal contradictions, where the dominant ideas about the way the political, social and economic structures function or ought to function become inconsistent with the everyday lived realities of subjects. The protests in 2019, reflect these contradictions and the cracks that are increasingly becoming more visible in the ideological promises of neoliberalism. An attempt has been made here to extrapolate the functioning of dominant ideology and its spontaneous reproduction through our everyday cultural and social actions. While the notion of spontaneous ideology is examined in the context of new media technologies to explicate how we identify ourselves with this or that ideological rhetorical devices, it does not mean that we, as subjects, are docile or passive towards it. Althusser (2012, p.113) contends that the ideological state apparatuses are often, not only at stake but are important sites of class struggle, as it is here that exploited groups are able to find the means and instances to express their resistance. All of the protests this year, in France, Chile, Hong Kong, Lebanon, Iran, Sudan, India, have shown us that people make use of the internet and new communication technologies such as social media to organize and fight back against the neoliberal, increasingly authoritarian and repressive state apparatuses (Rachman, Mander, Dombey, Wong, & Saleh, 2019). In Chile, demonstrations that spontaneously broke out against increasing metro fares by secondary students, turned into nation-wide protests against a host of problems such as pension cuts, rising

student debt, and a myriad of grievances against the neoliberal state. The students who were at the centre of these protests started organising using social media (Cuffe, 2019). Certainly, it is not the claim here that all of these protests have been overtly against the neoliberal state. Nonetheless, these protests as well as the rising support for authoritarian leaders globally, can be seen as symptomatic of a wide range of issues erupting in the global economic-political sphere, intimating an ongoing systemic crisis, perhaps a steady drive towards authoritarian capitalism (Zizek, 2015).

While this thesis has focused on the ways in which we as subjects often reproduce the dominant cultural codes through our everyday social and cultural practices, beliefs, symbols and so on, it does not mean that there are no counter-veiling tendencies to such ideological reproduction. It is after all the subjects who also challenge the dominant ideological rhetoric. Social media and new media technologies are mechanisms by which capitalist ideology is reproduced, simultaneously however, they are also crucial tools used for ideological contestation and struggle.

As illustrated in Chapter 7, the contradictions in the social relations of production whereby an ideology fails to legitimize itself for subjects, does not automatically lead to a progressive outcome. Even these spontaneous eruptions of protests may not necessarily have a well-articulated ideological alternative or a political program. Ideologies constitute a realm of contestation wherein there is a constant negotiation, "where meanings and values are stolen, transformed, appropriated across the frontiers of different classes and groups, surrendered, repossessed, reinflected" (Eagleton, 2012, p. 187). In this context, what has been quite damaging to left politics is making assumptions that the mere presence of economic inequalities and ripening of objective conditions will guarantee that some positive social change will happen. Without an account of the subject, subjectivity and spontaneous ideology, we are often left aghast by political events such as the disastrous 2019 U.K. general election results where, supposedly Labour-safe seats fell to the Conservative Party for the first time in a generation.

As stated in Chapter 3, Jameson (2009) contends that if the texts of mass culture are seen as producing false consciousness, this process cannot be understood as that of sheer violence but that it necessarily means deploying persuasive rhetorical devices in which many incentives are offered to the subject in exchange for ideological adherence. It is not that subjects are dupes of the capitalist schema but that we are offered incentives in exchange. They can be in the form of an affective hailing claiming the superiority of one religious, ethnic, or gender groups over another, or political messaging such as 'Get Brexit done', or in the form of material incentives such as promising to bring back 'American jobs', and so on. As Eagleton puts it, "the study of ideology is among other things an inquiry into the ways in which people may come to invest in their own unhappiness" (Eagleton, 1991). We may fail to recognize that the perks of today might not be good

for us in the long run, we may even be cynical enough to think that "it's all about living in the moment", or we might be passionately invested in our national identity. As examined in this thesis, there are multiple factors that impact and influence the way we identify ourselves with this or that ideological rhetoric.

Spontaneous Ideology and its Reproduction on Social Media

The three cases examined in the thesis illustrate the distinct ideological and rhetorical schemes at work, which reproduce our adherence to the existing dominant mode of production. Chapter 5 focused on the varied influences of neoliberal ideology that individuates us, reproducing the ideal subjects for late capitalism. Unpacking the neoliberal ideological inducements wherein the subject is constantly told to perfect oneself, where cut-throat competition is hailed, and where a self-interested, self-seeking individual is celebrated, we find that selfies are the dominant cultural code by which we present ourselves online. By analysing different forms of selfies shared on social media, it is argued that dominant image-making practices such as selfies often reflect the existing cultural, political, social and economic anxieties – the dreams, desires and fears that capture our imagination. The growing insecurity that comes with labour market 'flexiblisation' in the neoliberal era, not just influences the relations of production but changes the entirety of our social relations. Subjects are asked to become the entrepreneurs of self (Moore, 2017, p.15) with various injunctions to be responsible for oneself, whether it's through monitoring our own health or through constantly attempting to be employable in an already inconsistent labour market. Selfies, albeit inadvertently, are often used as a self-branding mechanism on social media, whereby subjects employ marketing and branding strategies to attain online visibility, earlier used by celebrities to maintain a good public image.

If Chapter 5 discussed the subject's imaginary constitution where our innermost fantasies are mired by the neoliberal rhetoric to achieve self-perfection, Chapter 6 focussed on the symbolic order under late capitalism and the various ways in which subjects are commanded to maximize their enjoyment. Drawing from McGowan and Zizek's notion of enjoyment as a superegoic injunction under late capitalism, a popular visual cultural trend of sharing our travel images on social media platforms is analysed in the context of consumer culture. This notion of enjoyment is first unpacked by explicating our relation to commodities and the signs of enjoyment that we accumulate by consuming various objects. As opposed to the earlier stages of capitalism, where capitalist development demanded a renunciation of enjoyment through an ideological rhetoric of a strong work ethic, global capitalism is accompanied with a change in the ideological structuring of society and subjectivity in order to stimulate consumer demand. This transformation of the social order no longer prohibits enjoyment but commands it (McGowan, 2004). However, it does not mean that this social order actually produced enjoyment but that it produces a sense of obligation for subjects to do so (McGowan, 2004). To travel is primarily an act of consumption, with an entire tourism industry and national economies relying on

people wanting to visit places. For countries like Italy, for instance, in 2016, the turnover provided by tourism accounts for 117 billion euros which was 11.8% of their national GDP (Hyland, 2016). While overtly, like any other commodity on the market under capitalism, everyone is 'free' to travel wherever they please and there is certainly an abundance of destinations that one can travel to. Within a globalized world, travel is contingent on one's financial/class status, nationality, passport, sometimes racial, and ethnic positions. The places that we travel to have connotative meanings attached to them, whether I travel to Vietnam or to Italy, something is implied, with my choice of destination. Analysing our travel images using this conceptualisation of an ideological demand for more and more consumption and enjoyment, allows us to see that our images often reflect this ideological demand, reproducing a consumer subject for late capitalism.

From the symbolic order that commands enjoyment, Chapter 7 moves on to discuss the Real of capitalism's crisis. Capitalism's history cannot be untangled from the history of European colonisation. Modern forms of racialisation and exploitation of the labouring classes share a common root. Decolonial scholars such as Du Bois and Robinson have argued that slavery was a crucial part of the development of capitalism (Robinson, 2000, pp. 198-199). Modernity has, for a long time been mired with white supremacy; where whiteness and being European have become the symbol of human progress, civilization and all that is good. In analysing the memes shared by the organized, online movement of white supremacists such as the Alt Right, it becomes possible to examine the ideological roots of racialised capitalism and its recent revival as a significant online movement in European dominant countries. By using various social media and message board platforms, the Alt Right were able to disseminate conspiracy theories such as "the great replacement". But how do we understand the acceptance and the passionate imbibing of such a rhetoric by subjects, who not only voted for Trump but went out with weapons and killed several people based on their conviction in these ideas? Alt Right memes, and the role they played in the popularizing of their ideas, helps us understand that ideological reproduction is not only about what messages are disseminated but that they spread because the ideology might already be rooted in the political unconscious of the subjects.

By understanding the spontaneous reproduction of ideology in this way, we might be able to account for many such inconsistencies. One such contradiction is the popularity of climate change denial on online platforms, which can only be satisfactorily explained if one explicates the historical conflicts between religious faith and scientific thought in different societies. As explained in the Introduction, if we limit our analysis of social media to what kind of content is allowed on the platforms, in suggesting that they need to be regulated, we ignore the already existing ideological tendencies in our societies. Certainly, these platforms can be kept under check since they are being used and misused by various social groups. But this does not resolve our problems since mass communication technologies have always been used for the purpose of propaganda and spreading misinformation - *Fox News* being the prime example here. And lastly, an understanding of the spontaneous

reproduction of ideology helps us overcome our own prejudices; those based on our algorithmically-driven, ideological filter bubbles on social media, or commonly held perceptions about people and the world that we may have formed based on living in sheltered neighbourhoods in urbanised, developed places. We may have very well forgotten that the repressed histories of our societies have long taken root in our unconscious, which every now and again, break out in a Freudian return of the repressed.

Implications for Researching Social Media

The aim of this thesis has been to redirect the focus of existing critical analysis of social media by placing ideology critique at its centre. Selecting a relatively small volume of images from a pool of millions being shared on social media to draw out the functioning of ideology might be a shortcoming of the analysis, but the theoretical insights that have been drawn out might be worth bearing in mind for future research. Using hashtags to identify the overarching patterns in the most popular images often reveals that these patterns are large enough as global trends to be able to critically examine them. And it is often in images, and the ways we see the world that ideology is reproduced by subjects. For Marx (1968), after all, ideology is a metaphor for the image behind the concept, the *camera obscura*, which he explicates in his writings in *The German Ideology*. Or as Mitchell argues "the concept of ideology is grounded, as the word suggests, in the notion of mental entities or "ideas" that provide the materials of thought" (p.164). For instance, we may have never actually seen an orca or its photographic image, but we can still imagine it in our minds when we read a descriptive, textual account of such a creature's existence. When we grow older, if we are taught to think of the validity of scientific knowledge, we may realise that orcas are real mammals, however, Santa Claus is a myth. It is through images that we come to imagine these narratives and explicate the functioning of ideology. By using a semiotic-psychoanalytic method, this thesis establishes that the way we see things- our visuality, is not only culturally constructed but is constructed within the economic, political and social constrains of the dominant mode of production on a global scale.

The three examined cases illustrate that just because subjects today have the 'freedom' to communicate and a multitude of platforms that facilitate such communication, it does not make the entire notion of ideology redundant but makes it a central ground for ideological contestation. As explicated in the introductory chapter, social media and our current economic and political context, makes it much more crucial to focus on the often-overlooked notion of ideology, especially in Marxist studies of culture today. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, when ideology is theorized in the context of social media, it is often discussed without the notion of a subject that is actively engaged in ideological reproduction. As argued by Ellis (2005), "Without an account of the subjective moment of the social processes, Marxism is unable to account for Fascism or political apathy in terms which could prevent the same political mistakes from being repeated" (pp. 179-180). Further, deploying

a Lacanian conceptual framework here assists in overcoming the limitations of a purely Althusserian understanding of ideology. As argued Chapter 3, what is missing from Althusser's account of ideology is an explanation of the Lacanian Real, and the role of the unconscious mechanisms that play a part in ideological interpellation. In Althusser's conception of ideology almost assumes that ideology never fails to interpellate its subjects (Hall, 1985), almost as if ideology always performs its function of hailing subjects without, to reproduce the dominant capitalist ideology, and goes on performing this function without any interruptions (Jameson, 2009). This is where Lacan's notion of desire and lack make the process of interpellation a much more contradictory affair than it appears to be in Althusser's account (Eagleton, 2012, p.216). What we see in the above examples of the several protests this year, is an illustration of the fact that interpellation does fail. And when it does, when subjects come out in large numbers to say that they've had enough- repressive state apparatuses are brought in complete force to the defend the ideological forces.

To that extent then, social media need to be seen primarily, as tools of communication, which can be put to use, by subjects who challenge the dominant ideology and by those who inadvertently or knowingly reproduce it. Ideology is a framework of ideas that people use to make sense of their reality, for the way things are and the way they relate to them or what they do in relation to them. There is nothing inherently progressive, transformative or even regressive about digital technologies, just like any other form of communication technologies. The goal has been to understand the new communication technologies by placing them in the context of late capitalism, to be able to reiterate their function as ideological state apparatuses, while simultaneously examining how subjects spontaneously reproduce ideologies. For instance, in India, the text-messaging app called WhatsApp now owned by Facebook, is being used by the ruling national government to spread misinformation, propaganda and fake news to millions of people (Ponniah, 2019). With a user base of 200 million people in India, fake news and rumors spreading on WhatsApp have led to mob killings of 31 people in the years 2017 and 2018 (Ponniah, 2019). Whereas in Lebanon, a government plan to start taxing people for using WhatsApp triggered a national uprising in October 2019 against the government, for bringing the nation to brink of an economic collapse (Chulov, 2019). Although WhatsApp itself can be the point of discussion here, we cannot fully explain these cases without first understanding how in both instances, subjects partake in the already existing ideological complexes and contradictions within their respective social formations. In India, the mob killings are a result not only of misinformation and fake news being shared on WhatsApp but also because the majority Hindu religious community is being emboldened by a Hindu fascist government. While in Lebanon, subjects did not take to the streets only because the government planned on taxing WhatsApp, but people were already struggling and tired of the economy being in shambles (Chulov, 2019).

As argued earlier, technologies exist and are used by subjects within existing political, economic and social orders. More importantly, ideologies are not simply ideas but have very material consequences. It is how Donald Trump has been able to justify to a large number of Americans that his concentration camps are just prisons for illegal immigrants who want to enter their supposedly great country. It is how Bolsanaro has managed to convince Brazilian citizens that destroying the Amazon rainforest will bring in foreign investments, revenue and hence, prosperity to the country. Ideologies and our passionate investment in them have very material, physical consequences, even on a planetary scale- just think of this year's Climate strikes. It is on us as subjects to utilise the available social media tools at our disposal, mobilize people on a global scale and challenge the dominant mode of production today.

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