

5-2013

Social Media Fetishism: The Substitution of Life, The Disavowal of Death, and The Zombie Syndrome

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Social Media Fetishism: The Substitution of Life, The Disavowal of Death, and The Zombie Syndrome

An honors thesis presented to the
Department of English,
University at Albany, State University Of New York
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with Honors in English
and
graduation from The Honors College.

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Research Advisor: Mary Valentis, Ph.D.
May, 2013

Abstract

Title: Social Media Fetishism: The Substitution of Life, The Disavowal of Death, and The Zombie Syndrome

Statement: I am studying social media as a symptom within a culture of fetishism, where social media has become a substitute for human interaction under the concepts of fetishism outlined by Marx, Freud, Kaplan, Debord, and Baudrillard because I want to find out why people have fetishized social media so that one can understand how to rectify the underlying issues causing the fetish.

In the past decade, social media has become fetishized by a select group of users, characterized by hours a day spent on these websites, and failed attempts to delete their accounts permanently. I analyze both fetishism and social media in order to understand the implications of social media fetishism. I start with fetishism. I open up the discussion of fetishism by tracing the concept's evolution from its origins in native cultures as a worship of talismans and other charms in substitution for a physical presence of their Gods. From there I analyze fetishism through the lens of Marxist commodity fetishism both to apply the concept of commodity fetishism to the current social media culture, and also to further illuminate the substitutive nature of fetishism through highlighting commodity fetishism's substitution of human sentiment by a material object or objects. I continue to analyze the substitutive nature of fetishism through Freud's sexual fetishism, in which objects or body parts are used as substitutes for sexual arousal as well as for intimacy. After establishing a basis for fetishism in these three historical contexts, I re-contextualize fetishism from the modern perspective of Louise Kaplan, author of *Cultures of Fetishism*. Then, in order to establish the link between fetishism and social media, I analyze Facebook and Twitter as fetishized spectacles, through the lens of Debord's "Society of the Spectacle." This connection also builds upon Baudrillard's theories on simulation, analyzing social media as a simulated reality. After firmly establishing this line of reasoning, I seek to prove that the avoidance of human interaction or desire for mediated interaction, as well as the creation of a social media identity, is a direct response to anxiety characterized by the fear of death. I posit that since one cannot maintain stable identities in the real world due to criticism as well as the potential for physical death, one seek to create more stable, lasting, enduring, and potentially indestructible personalities on social media sites that by characteristic of being on the Internet, have the potential to exist outside the boundaries of human existence and the human lifespan.

Acknowledgments

Throughout the process of writing my thesis, Professor Mary Valentis has helped me more than any other person. For this, I am eternally grateful.

Thank you.

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Introduction

In the past decade, social media in mainstream society has been steadily increasing. The most obvious examples of which are Facebook and Twitter, but in addition to these two are a whole cornucopia of other social media forms. Many people accept these forms of social media into their lives. Some people see social media as a fad, others as a hobby, and others are indifferent. However social media should be seen as a symptom. While social media may seem harmless, it is actually a cultural fetish. While this is not necessarily true for all social media users, it is true among a fetishistic culture of users. A criticism of this thesis might be that the conclusions are not universally applicable. However, this thesis is only referring to those individual users of social media who use it in a manner that could be considered fetishism defined by absence, substitution, and fixation. Some people may use social media once or twice a week, and have no real attachment to their profiles or social media identities. These are not the people addressed in this thesis. Again, this thesis is only addressing those individuals that participate within the culture of social media fetishism.

Historically, fetishism is not foreign to international culture. According to William Pietz's research, the concept of the fetish most likely originated from the native tribal traditions of the inhabitants of the Guinea coast of Africa, who worshipped charms and talismans as a substitute for not having a physical manifestation of their Gods. The word fetish comes from the Portuguese "fatisso" meaning charm or sorcery, which later evolved through the French *Fétich* after popularization in 1760 by anthropologist C. de Brosses' "Le Culte des Dieux Fétiches." Around 1867, the term was adopted into American English as fetish, meaning "something irrationally revered".

One famous theorist who studied fetishism was Karl Marx. Marx specifically studied commodity fetishism, which is the substitution of human sentiment by a material object produced through labor. Already, one can see the beginnings of a pattern. In both of these cases, fetishism involves the substitution of one notion or idea for a more easily attainable perverted re-creation of the original idea. In the case of commodity fetishism, the original idea would be that of human interaction and labor through trade that has been reduced to an acquisition of an object that represents the interaction in labor, but eliminates the human component.

In Freudian sexual fetishism, a person substitutes the original idea of sexual intercourse for a representation of that idea or of that arousal such as an object or body part. As one begins to see more of the pattern of fetishism, one can come to more conclusions. At first one was able to establish that fetishism involves substitution. But now with a third form of fetishism to analyze, it becomes apparent that not only is substitution an aspect of fetishism that remains constant as others differ, but so is the loss or absence of intimacy.

In the case of the natives, they did not have the intimate connection with their Gods that they sought, and so they created a substitute. In commodity fetishism, there is an absence or loss of the intimacy that is experienced in the interactions between people, which has been hyper-accelerated in the digital age. One now has the ability to click once on Amazon and have a package waiting for one at one's doorstep, all without any type of human interaction or intimacy. In sexual fetishism, a person directly avoids the intimate contact with another person and creates a substitute in the form of a body part or object so that one can experience the benefits of sexual arousal without the risk of intimacy.

This thesis challenges, analyzes, and explores the risk of intimacy as it relates to fetishism. To understand fetishism, one must first understand why one are creating substitutes for intimacy. One create substitutes for intimacy because one see intimacy as a time of vulnerability. But vulnerable to what? When one becomes intimate, one immediately becomes subject to two vulnerabilities. One becomes vulnerable to physical destruction as well as psychological destruction. When one is intimate, potentially naked, one lets his/her guard down in relaxation while allowing the other person to view his/her self as he/she is without any type of mediation. Physically, one is vulnerable to destruction without clothes and without any type of weapons, shields, or form of protection agaisnt harm. Psychologically, when one becomes intimate, one does the same. One trusts another person with the fullest versions of oneself. Normally one adapts oneself to one's surroundings. To a certain extent, one acts to meet social expectations. But when true intimacy is reached, one does not feel the need to conform. One does not change oneself. One is oneself in one's entirety. And thus one is vulnerable to psychological destruction. If one presents one's unmediated self to people, one's identity, one subject one's unprotected personality to criticism, which if one is not psychologically strong enough to weather, can destroy one's self-concept and self-esteem.

The root of these fears, as well as the root of all fears, is the fear of death. What would one fear if one were immortal? Would one fear finding a job? Of course not; one only worries about work because one needs a job to feed oneself. Would one fear heights or roller coasters or murderers or theft? One would have no reason to have any of these fears as they all relate to the eventuality of possible death. Now if people's physical bodies were invincible, what might one still be afraid of? Even with infinite life, a man

might still be scared to approach a woman he finds attractive, especially if he is insecure. If he believes that he is ugly, and knowing that he is immortal believes that he will be ugly for eternity, then he will likely experience a profound sense of fear when approaching an attractive woman. So in this case, although he is not fearing a physical death, he is fearing a psychological death. He fears the death of his self-pride. He fears embarrassment. The only logical reason for fearing this type of embarrassment is that a person actually fears the death of his/her psychological self, self-image, or self-concept as much as he/she fears physical or bodily death.

Professor Louise Kaplan, author of *Cultures of Fetishism* adds great insight on this topic. Kaplan re-contextualizes Freud to explain the concept of disavowal. In Freudian Psychology, disavowal stems from the male's fear of the female's lack of the phallus. Freud believes that men become so terrified by the image of what they subconsciously view as castration, that at some level of the subconscious they actually disavow that the woman does not have a phallus. Kaplan goes on to explain that while this type of disavowal is integral to fetishism, the disavowal is not of the woman's absent phallus as is historically suggested. Rather, the disavowal is often of the concept of death or loss as its own entity, despite its various forms. She posits that when a person engages in fetishism, he seeks to compensate for or substitute for that which is lacking. In the case of the native peoples, the talismans and charms were a disavowal of the notion that God could not be experienced directly and physically. In the case of commodity fetishism, the commodities or products of labor are disavowals of the presence and humanity of the laborers. A person can fetishize a Coach pocket book while at the same time disavowing the notion of the underpaid and frequently outsourced minimum wage or fewer workers

who struggle to make a living while the company turns million dollar profits. At the same time, the person disavows a piece of her own humanity as she turns her back on her contemporaries and at the same time identifies with the materials she purchases as opposed to her own bodily self.

This disavowal functions in social media. In a social media fetish, a person disavows all aspects of his character or personality that he does not accept. At the same time, he is disavowing both psychological and physical death. People are substituting insecure identities in the real world for secure identities in social media worlds. If people talk face to face, they can be insulted and criticized. If the person is weak minded or insecure, his reputation as well as his self-image or self-concept is in jeopardy, is unprotected, and is thus vulnerable to death. In the real world, other people can see their emotions. Other people can see what they don't want to be seen.

This is not the case with social media. In the case of social media, the user is entirely in control of creating his profile or avatar. On popular sites such as Facebook, the user creates an entire identity by linking events and pictures through a timeline. A person creates a digital representation of himself. Since this digital representation can only be altered by the user, so long as his password is secure, it is a safe identity. It is protected from criticism. If a person does criticize him and threatens his identity, he can block him with the click of a button. If a person is tagged in a picture he does not like, he can untag himself, disavowing that this captured side of him was even him at all. He eliminates the image from the timeline, and thus from his identity, and thus from the digital self-concept or self-image that he is projecting into the world. At the same time, by creating and managing an online profile, the person is creating and managing an identity that is

outside of death. Or perhaps that is conceivably outside of death. People die and their Facebook pages remain. Their identities remain. Even after physical death, they have somewhat managed to preserve their identities. Is this not the attraction to fame? It is almost intuitive that people seek fame in order to extend their presence, image, and person, past the physical limits of humanity.

In the real world, the user or person does not have this type of control. For one, in the non-virtual world, a person more or less dies when his body is laid to rest, or in other words loses the ability to maintain animate function. Second, in reality, if a person is attempting to deny his own uncomfortable life situation such as that he is obese and living in his mother's basement while believing the reality that he is a level 40 Paladin, the real world, and human interaction, pose a serious threat to his entire identity. For this person, not only is he escaping physical death in his Paladin realm, he is also escaping the psychological death of his social media identity, or identity within a social media supportive massive multiplayer online video game. If this person were to interact largely in the real world, he would have to accept the death of his psychological self-image, self-concept, or self-identification as a level 40 Paladin.

Through this line of logic, as well as continuing to analyze and explore this topic through the lenses of other theorists on fetishism and substitution such as Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard, it will become clear that social media fetishism is a reaction to the fear of death, either of the physical self or of the psychological self.

Chapter I

Before one can contextualize fetishism in a modern sense, one must first understand its history. Over the past few centuries, the word fetish has been attributed with various different meanings. However, although the term fetish takes on different meanings in different contexts, there are central principles that link each of these definitions. In each instance the word fetish is used throughout history, an object is seen as a material representation of an individual's irrational or indirect conception of value. In some contexts, the individual's attribution of value is supported by a societal system of economics that reinforces this type of thinking, as is the case in Marx's notion of the fetish. In other contexts, the individual's attribution of value is related to that individual's personal experience, regardless of the surrounding society, as in Freud's notion of the fetish.

It is my view that both of these perspectives are accurate, and are complementary, not mutually exclusive analyses of the fetish. In order to understand the fetish in a modern sense, one must not only trace its history, but also find the connection between its disparate parts. One must take into account both the individual and societal components of the fetish. Understanding the history of the fetish is important because through each contextualization of the word fetish, one experiences not a distortion, but an augmentation. And though many of the differences between conceptualizations must be discarded to come to a definition, it is finding the similarities in the word fetish through so many different lenses and perspectives that is crucial to establishing its definition at present. Throughout its history, three characteristics of fetishism are absence, material substitution, and uncontrollable fixation.

Although anthropologist William Pietz admits that, “origins are never absolute,” his research proposes that:

The fetish as an idea and a problem, and as a novel object not proper to any prior discrete society, originated in the cross-cultural spaces of the coast of West Africa during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries [...] the fetish originated within a novel social formation during this period through the development of the pidgin word *Fetisso*, this word in turn has a linguistic and accompanying conceptual lineage that may be traced. *Fetisso* derives from the Portuguese word *feticio*, which in the late Middle Ages, meant “magical practice” or “witchcraft” performed, often innocently, by the simple, ignorant, classes. *Feticio* in turn derives from the Latin adjective *facticlus*, which originally meant, “manufactured.” The historical study of the fetish must begin by considering these words in some detail, only then going on to examine the subsequent development into *Fetisso*, and finally that word’s textual dissemination into the languages of northern Europe, where national versions of the word developed during the seventeenth century. (Pietz 1)

For Pietz the etymology of the word fetish is as important as its various definitions.

Though this essay focuses more on the definitions of fetish established from the seventeenth century onward, Pietz is correct in his assertion that it is worth considering in some detail, the words preceding fetish. By Pietz’s research, the first word in the lineage is the Latin adjective *faticulus*, meaning manufactured. This word then evolved into the Portuguese word *feticio*, meaning magical practice or witchcraft.

Before the word fetish had even fully coalesced into the term one recognize today, it had already embodied two concepts. The first concept is that of being manufactured. This represents the material or physical object. The second concept is the notion of magic or witchcraft. These terms represent a spiritual or non-physical dimension of that which is the object of the fetish. At the time of their use these two terms may have been used separately from one another. However once the word had transcended *faticulus* and *feticio* to become *fetisso* and ultimately *fetish*, their meanings had combined forming the conceptual foundations of the modern fetish.

The first time the word fetish was used was with African tribes. Though it is uncertain exactly who was first to apply the term to African spirituality, its meaning in that context is documented. Tribal Africans would often carry talismans, charms, or other trinkets that they assigned great value to. Talismans could be said to imbue a person with strength, wisdom, prosperity, or possibly even affect that which is outside of the person such as the weather and the afterlife (Pietz 4-6).

Absence is the first key component of defining fetishism. What is lost in this assignment of value is a correlation to the physical. Surely one can agree that holding a carved piece of wood is not what causes rain. And yet without the science one use today to explain what was then phenomenon, the tribal Africans would believe that holding a “special” piece of carved wood, rock, or jewel were correlated to this phenomenon. Or at least so believed the Portuguese traders who called African spiritual objects fetishes. This belief marks an absence. Whether it is an absence of information, explanation, or understanding. There is an absence of the psychological representation for the actual cause of rain. Since these people did not have the technology to create a correlation

between rain, pressure systems, humidity, warm fronts and cold fronts, etc, they sought out a physical correlation as an explanation.

Substitution is the second key component of defining fetishism. The use of an object to create a physical representation of an idea is a substitution for that lack of understanding. The object does not actually have any power of its own. The greatest extent of the power the object has in reality is in so far as it can be used. However in these cases, objects could be granted even the power to create rain. They are substituting a talisman, charm, or trinket to account for an absence of information, understanding, or explanation. So the Portuguese claimed that the tribal Africans would take the idea of raining, and they would connect that idea to a physical object. To choose which object, a popular theory in these types of tribal African religions is the first encounter theory. This is the notion that Africans would take whatever they first encountered after an event to be some sort of sign or symbol from the divine. Although many times the first encounter was an object, the power was also extended to plants and animals. So if it rained heavily for three days and then a farmer found a piece of driftwood washed up ashore, that piece of wood might be seen as the cause of the rain. Or it might even be carved into the shape of a raindrop and then used as a talisman to bring rain.

Fixation is the third key component of defining fetishism. In the case of the tribesmen, their talismans were used as objects of worship. They would use the same object time and time again in hopes at producing the same effects. It could even be called an obsession with these objects. Although the actual focus of these tribesmen's motivations were in a more direct relation to the actual rain and the crops which it helped them to raise, the fixation would not be so much on the events, but rather displaced to the

object. This fixation and obsession is not only the assignment of value, but it is also the displacement of value. It is my assertion that the root of all this displacement of value is the value of life. This is a displacement of the value that a person has for oneself.

In the example of the rain talisman, it is the rain that is valued. The rain is valued because it helps to produce crops. Crops are valued because they help to keep people alive. In the examples where talismans bring strength, wisdom, or another personal quality, all of these are enhancers to life. And all of these qualities are qualities that can be expressed by that person's life force. For example, a talisman only aids in making a person strong in so far as that he believes it will and then allows himself to become strong. But it is not the talisman doing the work; it is merely the talisman that persuades the person to invest in his own expression of strength. In each example, the value that is displaced is the value of life, or of the value of the original person. If this example seems vague, perhaps it will become clearer through the view of commodity fetishism.

Although commodity fetishism is quite different from the fetishism of the African tribesmen, it still contains the three basic principles of absence, substitution, and fixation. Commodity fetishism is a term invented by Karl Marx. He uses the term to describe the products of labor that are traded within a capitalistic system. Marx understands that objects have use value. When he talks about commodity fetishism and the misappropriation of value, this is not what he is referring to. He acknowledges use value:

The utility of a thing makes it a use value. But this utility is not a thing of air. Being limited by the physical properties of the commodity, it has no existence apart from that commodity. A commodity, such as iron, corn, or a diamond, is therefore, so far as it is a material thing, a use value,

something useful. This property of a commodity is independent of the amount of labour required to appropriate its useful qualities. When treating of use value, one always assume to be dealing with definite quantities, such as dozens of watches, yards of linen, or tons of iron. The use values of commodities furnish the material for a special study, that of the commercial knowledge of commodities. Use values become a reality only by use or consumption: they also constitute the substance of all wealth, whatever may be the social form of that wealth. In the form of society one is about to consider, they are, in addition, the material depositories of exchange value. (Marx 2)

When Marx is referring to commodity fetishism, he is talking about when the value of a commodity transcends its use value. In the examples Marx mentions, every product has a use that can be compared to the uses of other products. But when the commodity becomes what Marx refers to as a “mysterious thing” is when the value of human labor becomes lost within a commodity. Marx uses the example of table. As he sees it, the product of a table has the power to take on a power even greater than that of the value of labor it took to produce it. Marx is somewhat baffled by this phenomena. It is so difficult for him to compare to his own realm of experience that he says, “to find an analogy, one must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race (2).”

For Marx, a commodity becomes fetishized when it takes on a trade value. When the commodity is being traded, it takes on a value that transcends the value of the labor.

In a sense the value of the labor is lost. Marx says that in order to trade items for other items, then one must be equalizing the general and abstract quality of human labor into the object or commodity that is produced. To Marx, the fetishized commodity is a necessary result of producing within a system that trades products for other products:

The equalisation of the most different kinds of labour can be the result only of an abstraction from their inequalities, or of reducing them to their common denominator, viz. expenditure of human labour power or human labour in the abstract. The twofold social character of the labour of the individual appears to him, when reflected in his brain, only under those forms which are impressed upon that labour in every-day practice by the exchange of products. In this way, the character that his own labour possesses of being socially useful takes the form of the condition, that the product must be not only useful, but useful for others, and the social character that his particular labour has of being the equal of all other particular kinds of labour, takes the form that all the physically different articles that are the products of labour have one common quality, viz., that of having value. (Marx “The Fetishism Of Commodities And The Secret Thereof”)

For example, a modern version of this principle might be a Coach pocketbook.

Regardless of the hours that it requires to make, despite its use value or the cost of materials, a Coach pocketbook can sell for hundreds to thousands of dollars. The labor is not worth thousands of dollars. The materials are not worth thousands of dollars. As soon as the Coach pocketbook becomes not just a pocketbook that is for use by the person who

produced it and instead becomes a commodity to be traded, it has transcended its use value. It takes on an immense, almost magical value.

In this case, when the product takes on this almost magical value it is an immediate substitution for an absence. The absence is the absence of the accurate representation of human labor. The labor is no longer associated with the pocket book. The pocket book becomes an entity unto itself to interact with people and products, to be both used and exchanged. The product itself is a substitution for the value of labor. It both substitutes for and replaces the conceptualization of labor. And once the product takes on this commodity form, it becomes fixated upon. It becomes an object to be almost worshipped. Especially such is the case with a Coach pocket book. A person will display such an item and even use that item as a symbol of value for the person. The bag signifies the status of a person with enough money to purchase such an item. Thus when the person displays this item, his/her own perceived worth increases.

When one look at the situation in this way, when one think of the ways in which people use objects as a means of identifying their own value of worth through the displacement of the value of other's labor, one can return back to the notion of life. A person's labor is merely an expression of that person's life force. It is an expression of that person's efforts and energy. However a commodity is more than that. In a commodity, a person places the value not only of the person's labor that has gone into it, and not only of the value of its use, but also the value of the person himself. The person associates with his commodities and ranks his own value with the value of his commodities. He decides how much he is worth, and how much his own life is worth, by estimating the perceived worth of the commodities which he possesses.

Paralleling Marx's theory of commodity fetishism in both renown and eloquence is Freud's theory of sexual fetishism. While many of Freud's points are dated and disproved, his ideas are worth examination for the sake of its historical context and to aid in the process of re-contextualization. Following the pattern of the previous two forms of fetishism, Freudian fetishism is also characterized first by an absence. Traditionally, in Freudian sexual Fetishism, the absence is that of the mother's penis. According to Freud's theory, at the root of all fetishes, there is the male fear of castration. When a boy realizes that his mother does not have a penis, whether consciously or unconsciously, he fears that her penis has been castrated. He does not want to lose his penis because he was born with one. He has become attached to it. He recognizes that it is a part of his body.

For a little boy, this is a fear too overwhelming to manage. He cannot come to terms with the notion that he might lose penis. In an able to pacify these fears, the unconscious mind engages in an action know as disavowal. In an essay titled, "Freud; or, The Absent Object" Giorgio Agamben explains the paradoxical reality of disavowal:

In the conflict between the perception of reality, which urges him to renounce his phantasm, and the counterdesire, which urges him to deny his perception, the child does neither one nor the other; or, rather, he does both simultaneously, reaching one of those compromises that are possible only under the rule of law of the unconscious. On the one hand, with the help of a particular mechanism, he disavows the evidence of his perception; on the other, he recognizes its reality, and through a perverse symptom, he assumes the anguish he feels before it. (Agamben 31)

Under this definition, “the fetish is therefore the “substitute for the woman’s (the mother’s) penis that the little boy once believed in and – for reasons familiar to us – does not want to give up” (152-53) (Agamben 31.)

On this point I must disagree with Freud. It has been said that Freud’s perception is sometimes skewed due to his focus on sexuality. This is true here as well. It is not necessarily true that the concept of disavowal is a direct result of the reaction to the mother’s absent penis, nor is it true that the fetish is the substitute for the mother’s penis. While the concept of disavowal is indeed in play, Freud misrepresents it in his sexualized application. Disavowal is a much more deeply rooted issue than the fear of castration. Freud says that for “reasons familiar to us” the boy does not want to give up his penis. This is a vague assumption on Freud’s part, as well as it is a shallow one. Freud assumes that because he has a penis and wants to keep it, that this fear is thus understandable and able to be generalized. Although it may seem obvious to Freud why he does not want to lose his penis, that there are actually deeper reasons.

This fear, as well as all fear, is a reaction to the fear of death, be it a physical death or a psychological one. One example is of Freud’s fear of losing his penis. On a physical level, the penis is the reproductive organ. If Freud loses his penis, he loses the ability to continue his genetic life. Without a penis, he cannot create a child and cannot pass on his genes. Thus there is a death to his lineage. Though the lineage could potentially continue through a brother or sister, the exact combination of Freud’s DNA would be lost. It would be dead. From an evolutionary perspective, our most basic instinct, our most basic programming, is to survive and reproduce. Along this line of logic, Freud believes that sexuality is present even at the adolescent phases of

development, though people are aware unconsciously, not consciously. By Freud's own logic, if a person has an unconscious awareness of sexuality, then although a little boy may consciously perceive, "I don't want to lose my penis," he may unconsciously perceive, "I don't want to lose my ability to reproduce." The child fears the loss of his penis because unconsciously, he fears his physical genetic death.

There is also a psychological component to the fear of death. At a conscious level, the boy is able to realize that the penis is a part of his body. He identifies it with himself. From a young age, people identify themselves with their bodies. A little boy might be as scared to lose his arm or his leg, as he was to lose his penis. The child's fear is not merely due to a fear of castration, but of the destruction of the self, a concept which is infinitely more terrifying, especially for a child. Children are still making the connection between mind and body. They must learn how to crawl, then walk, then run. They are still in the stage of learning and developing their motor skills. They are creating the mind-body associations that one take for granted throughout the rest of our lives. But at this stage in life, making those mind-body connections is of the utmost importance. At the stage one is still learning to use one's body, one must also be learning to identify them. One is becoming aware of oneself, or self-aware. A child would see the loss of a limb or reproductive organ as not only a loss of part, but also as a destruction of the whole. Whether a child is male or female, most children are at some point exposed to death and loss. These concepts and the fear of them are relatively inescapable.

This fear affects people not only in childhood, but also throughout the rest of their lives. One retains the fear of destruction of the self, whether it is psychological or physical. As one becomes older, one begins to associate oneself not only with one's body

but also one's possessions and position. A common fear among adults is that of job loss. Again, there is a physical level of this fear. People fear that if they cannot maintain their jobs, they will not be able to support themselves, and thus will die. And again, there is a psychological component to this fear. At a psychological level, people aren't just afraid of losing the ability to make money, they are afraid of the death of the identity they have created. There is a social aspect where a person becomes "unemployed." The word has a stigma. All of a sudden, a respectable workingman must now tell people that he is unemployed. Before he was a man to be admired. Now he is a man to be pitied or to give compassion to. The identity he created for himself as the successful workingman dies with the loss of his job. It is the same fear of destruction of the psychological image of the self of castration. These losses represent a type of psychological castration of a person's identity. Unconsciously, one links this absence to death.

On an unconscious level, one sees absence as a notion and one relates that notion to the absence of the self. This is the absence that one truly fears. One fears the absence of one's own presence. A destruction of even part of our presence or our identity sparks the fear of destruction of the self, which has become expanded to be defined as a person as well as that person's possessions and position. That is not to say that once a person loses possession or position that he is actually destroyed. In fact, certain individuals experience loss or crisis and after a period of deep self-evaluation, emerge with a stronger concept of self that is no longer dependant on that which has been lost. Though it should be acknowledged that some people also become depressed after loss, and some never fully recover or regain composure. Though they are not actually dead, they have accepted a psychological destruction. This situation is where the fear stems from. People fear they

will suffer an irreparable psychological destruction. Contrary to Freud's beliefs, it is this fear, the fear of absence of self, or the fear of death that instigates the disavowal response. People are disavowing both psychological and physical death, as well as the actions that remind them of death, such as castration. The fear of death is the root fear in the fear brought about by the notion of castration. The idea that the fear of death is the root fear is also more logical than Freud's view of the fetish in that his view is sexually biased against women. Women do not have the same fear of castration that men have, and yet women also have fetishes. Including women in the perspective of the fetish, it makes more sense that both men and women are reacting to the fear of something that reminds them of death, and then disavowing that.

So then, if the absence aspect of the fetish is not the absence of the mother's penis, then there must be another absence to account for. This absence is the absence of intimacy. If disavowal is a reaction to fear, then sex must produce a fear. The fear one reacts to in sex is the fear of intimacy, which ultimately triggers the fear of death. When a person is intimate with another person, both individuals are in a vulnerable position. Firstly, if the individuals are engaging in intercourse, there is a high probability that they are naked. To be naked is to remove a barrier of comfort. The majority of one's time is typically spent clothed, and the time one spends interacting is almost always clothed. Clothes act as a boundary. In a physical sense, clothes give a person more protection from outside elements. In a psychological sense, clothes provide people with a layer of identity. People can draw others' attentions to approvable topics, such as music, a style, or a certain designer. Clothes can draw attention away from the body so that the body cannot be criticized as easily. Clothes can serve as a buffer or distraction. To remove this

layer, is to put oneself in a more vulnerable position. In the fear of physical death, being naked or unclothed puts one at a disadvantage against attack. Unconsciously, one fears confrontation in a vulnerable position, should it lead to death. In the fear of the psychological death, there are multiple aspects of fear. A person may fear performance anxiety. She may fear that she may not reach climax or that she will not be able to bring her partner to climax. She may fear criticism from her partner about her body, or about her performance, even if climax is reached. In this regard, the fear relates to death in that if she conceives of herself as successful, this sexual failure could result in the destruction of herself as a successful person. She will lose her own approval. Her perceived sexual flaw will distort the quality of the whole.

In contradiction to Freud's belief that the absence of the fetish is the absence of the mother's penis, my assertion is that the absence of the fetish is the absence of intimacy. By replacing the intimate person with an object, the fear of judgment is removed. The fear of attack from the other person is removed as well. Again, by a power granted only to the unconscious mind, a person is able to paradoxically disavow death through the disavowal of intimacy, while still convincing herself that the object she replaces the person with is an intimate object. She uses the same object to arouse intimacy as she does to disavow it. Normally, the person with which another person becomes intimate is the sexual object. For Freud, the sexual object is "the person from whom the sexual attraction emanates," (Freud 4). The sexual object is usually the object of the sexual aim, which Freud defines as, "the action towards which the impulse strives," or the action of sex (Freud 4). In cases of fetishism the person with the fetish does not need an actual person. They accept and rather prefer the absence of the person.

And as with the previous examples of fetishism, once there is the absence of intimacy, there is also a substitution with an object.

In cases of fetishism, the person is replaced with an objectified representation. The sexual object is typically, “a part of the body but little adapted for sexual purposes, such as the foot, or hair, or an inanimate object which is in demonstrable relation with the sexual person, and mostly with the sexuality of the same (fragments of clothing, white underwear)” (Freud 53). Recently shoes, latex materials, and certain sexual toys have also constituted fetish objects. As Marx had no other words to describe fetishism other than to hail back to the religions from which it originated, Freud does the same saying, “This substitution is not unjustly compared with the fetich in which the savage sees the embodiment of his god,” (Freud 53). Though both of these prominent thinkers use the term fetish in completely different settings and contexts, both of them hearken back to the origins of the word. If not by the similarities throughout the different perspectives, the connection between these different types of fetishism is clear in the conscious perspective of these writers who respectively connect each of these philosophies to the same central notions.

In this instance of the fetish, the substitution is typically not only a substitution for the sexual object, but also often for a traumatic or particularly excitatory event in a person’s early life:

The persistent influence of a sexual impress mostly received in early childhood often shows itself in the selection of a fetich, as Binet first asserted, and as was later proven by many illustrations,—a thing which may be placed parallel to the proverbial attachment to a first love in the normal (“On revient toujours à

ses premiers amours”). Such a connection is especially seen in cases with only fetishistic determinations of the sexual object. [...] In other cases it was mostly a symbolic thought association, unconscious to the person concerned, which led to the substitution of the object by means of a fetich. The paths of these connections cannot always be definitely demonstrated. The foot is a very primitive sexual symbol already found in myths. Fur is used as a fetich probably on account of its association with the hairiness of the mons veneris. Such symbolism seems often to depend on sexual experiences in childhood. (Freud 56-57)

So not only is the sexual object or person being substituted, but the object of fetishism also acts as a substitution or replacement for the representation of or recreation of a feeling or memory that was experienced during childhood.

In cases of sexual fetishism, the notion of fixation is probably most well known or at least most recognized among fetishes. A popular example in our culture is the foot fetish. A person with a foot fetish will fixate on feet. He will have a quasi obsession with them. He will return to that same sexual object replacement over and over again to produce the sexual aim through that means.

Also, if fixation is most apparent in sexual fetishism, then perhaps so is this notion of fetishism tracing back to a misappropriated value of life. In this case, the act of sex is the actual physical representation of the production of human life. It is quite literally a person’s expression of his or her life force. In sexual fetishism, a person misappropriates his own life force, as well as the creative power for the life force of a man and woman to produce a child, and attributes that same power to a body part or object. It is both a perversion and misappropriation of the life force. This perversion and

misappropriation is especially obvious in that while in tribal fetishism and commodity fetishism the life force is imagined to be contained within the object, in the case of sexual fetishism, the object or body part will never have the ability to produce life in the way that two humans can.

One can also view this perversion from the perspective of the sexual aim.

Considering the act of sex as the ultimate goal, one also sees that the fetish can become so distorted as to preclude the actual enactment of sex with another person completely. Freud views these as the worst types of cases. In some of the cases, those afflicted with a fetish would use the fetish object or body part to encourage stimulation, which eventually results in copulation with another person. However in the cases that Freud sees as the worst type of perversion, the other person is eliminated entirely. Sometimes people will engage only in masturbatory acts stimulated by fetish objects or representation of objects. For example a person with a foot fetish might engage in masturbation with only shoes or socks or perhaps even pictures of feet. In this case, the life force of the person, or the potential to create life, has been entirely wasted as well as misappropriated to the fetish.

In the case of sexual fetishism, as in the previous examples, the fetish marks not only the misappropriation of the life force, but also the aversion to death. In the case of tribal fetishism, it was clear that attributing a talisman with the power to bring rain is a misappropriation of the life force. Through the lens of Freudian disavowal, one can also see this act as a disavowal of death. In a similar way to the sexual fetish, the tribal fetish and the commodity fetish are also maneuvers to disavow or in some way avoid a psychological death, a physical death, or a combination of the two. In the example of tribal fetishism, one acknowledged that the tribesman's motivation for using the rain

talisman was to summon water for the crops, which would produce food to eat, which would keep him alive that much longer. Earlier, the focus was on the misappropriation of the life force. Disavowal suggests that the focus be not on the preservation of life, but rather on the fear or avoidance of death. This may seem like semantics, but it is an important distinction to make. If the focus is on the preservation of life, then the focus is on what a person is moving towards. If the focus is on the fear or avoidance of death, then the focus is on what a person is moving away from.

This difference is crucial in understanding the fetish. If a person move towards a location, then it is possible that he will eventually arrive at that location, given that he continues to pursue his course. However, if a person moves away from a location, he will never arrive there. And yet, he will still be defined in relation to that which he moves away from, thus never truly escaping. For example, let's say a person is traveling to Rome. If he takes the road to Rome for long enough, he will eventually arrive in Rome. Once he has arrived, his intention has been fulfilled. On the converse however, let's say a person is traveling away from Rome. When he leaves Rome, he will set out on the same road as the previous traveler, only this time, he will be moving in the opposite direction. However for this traveler, there is no pre-determined point of completion. He can walk anywhere between one step and one thousand steps away from Rome and technically, he will no longer be there. Physically, he will no longer be there. However psychologically, he cannot escape Rome. He is on the road away from Rome, which is technically the same road to Rome as well. He is still counting his steps away from Rome. Psychologically, his fixation is upon Rome. It is the object of his thought. What if Rome were to expand? If so, he would have to keep moving. Thus, due to his constant fixation

on Rome, the man will continue to move incessantly, with no destination in sight. His object of intention becomes not a location, as with the previous traveler, but on the act of movement itself.

This example is an ideological representation of the fetish. The difference between the man moving toward Rome and the man moving away from Rome is important because it explains the repetitive fixation upon the fetish. On one level, the fetish is a metonymy. It is an object that stands in the place of another concept. In our society, many subjects can be viewed as being culturally or psychologically metonymical. What is different about the fetish is that the fetish is often preferable to the source not merely by choice but rather by indefinite compulsion. This seemingly endless compulsion stems from fear or trauma, as Freud suggested. In the example of a person moving away from Rome, psychologically Rome would be the psychological site of a traumatic event. In the example of the tribesman, the traumatic event would be the fear of death by not raising enough crops. In the example of the Coach consumer, the traumatic event would be of a psychological death. In this case, the person who obsesses over the pocketbook fears that she will experience a social death if she is stripped of her instrumental bearers of status. With the bags, she creates a certain image of herself that she values with her life. Without them, she fears the death of that image and of that woman she believed herself to be.

As the old saying goes, "The criminal always returns to the scene of the crime." The same is true in the case of trauma. The mind continuously returns to the traumatic event or incident that caused the damage. The person cannot forget the event and yet at the same time the person cannot process the event. Though some people may be able to

overcome this boundary through therapy or other means, fetishists seek to self-medicate through the use of the fetish. This is the same paradoxical reality of disavowal that Agamben explains, however applied to the concept of all trauma, as opposed to specifically of the fear of castration. It is the same, “conflict between the perception of reality, which urges him to renounce his phantasm, and the counterdesire, which urges him to deny his perception...” (Agamben 31). In the case of the tribesman, the phantasm is the false psychological object of a rain talisman conflicting against the reality that he is dependant upon nature, a force that he does not understand, and thus cannot ensure his survival. In the case of the Coach consumer, the phantasm is the woman’s psychological image of herself as a person of status and worth conflicting against the reality that the purchase of a pocketbook does not enhance her character in any way, and thus her notion of status is imaginary. In both cases, the fetishists are able to do, “both simultaneously, reaching one of these compromises that are possible only under the rule of law of the unconscious,” through the substitution, fixation and obsession on either the talisman or the Coach pocketbook (31). In this unconscious compromise, a person is continually walking away from the trauma or fear as the man walks away from Rome. Since he does not take measures to heal the trauma, be it from childhood or otherwise, the fetishist must repeatedly affirm his disavowal through the fetish, in a never-ending effort to combat the repressed knowledge of the real, or of the traumatic reality. Thus, although many subjects could be labeled as metonymy, only those subjects that incite fear or trauma based fixation and compulsion can fall under the category of fetish.

At this point, it should be clear that fetishism is composed of the three basic concepts of absence, substitution, and fixation. This definition is apt to describe tribal

fetishism, commodity fetishism, and sexual fetishism. The purpose of this three-component definition is to reduce fetishism to a concept that can be easily understood and explained throughout different contexts. So while this thesis has so far only directly confronted tribal fetishism, commodity fetishism, and sexual fetishism, this definition is apt to describe not only these three contexts, but any other context of fetishism as well. Ultimately, this analysis will lead to the examination of fetishism in the context of modern social media. In addition to the components of absence, substitution, and fixation, the concepts of fear-based disavowal and the avoidance of physical and/or psychological death are key to explaining and understanding this new social media fetishism.

As a 21st century psychoanalyst, author, and feminist scholar, Kaplan's perspective will enrich the perspectives of Marx and Freud as it will help to bridge those perspectives with more modern theorists such as Debord and Baudrillard, and can carry that narrative straight through to present day. In her book, *Cultures of Fetishism*, Kaplan is a sherpa, guiding people safely through the world of familiar, making the confusing, uncomfortable, and strange more understandable, comfortable, and familiar. Her perspective performs the same functions within this thesis. In addition to Kaplan, Debord and Baudrillard, 20th century theorists, will help to analyze society in relation to commodity as well as to explain how fetishism has evolved from the perspectives of Marx and Freud to the world of social media.

Chapter II

At this point, one understands the three basic components of fetishism to be absence, substitution, and fixation. This perspective has helped to link tribal fetishism, commodity fetishism, and sexual fetishism. While establishing three basic components of fetishism is helpful to connect different theories through one narrative, if one is to continue this discourse on fetishism, one must expand that narrative. In her book, *Cultures of Fetishism*, Dr. Louise Kaplan discusses the types of fetishism one have already mentioned as well as many other types and examples of fetishism. She skillfully connects the bizarre world of fetishism through the narrative of the fetishism strategy. Understanding Kaplan's perspective of the fetishism strategy will help us to deepen our current understanding of fetishism as well as to open our awareness to other aspects of the fetish that will facilitate connection throughout its seemingly differentiated parts.

When Kaplan discusses the fetish, she uses the term fetishism strategy. The connotation of the word strategy implies that the use of a fetish might be intentional and even advantageous. In certain instances, the fetish is negotiated by the unconscious. While this statement may seem contradictory to that point, it is not. The fetishism strategy is a strategy of both the conscious and the unconscious minds. The fetish is not an entity of the conscious or the unconscious but rather as a negotiation between the two. Under the fetishism strategy, the fetish is what helps us to become familiar with the unfamiliar. The fetish is the object that forms that bridge. The conscious mind is the land of the familiar. What one is conscious of, one is aware of. What one is unconscious of, one is unaware of. What one is unaware of is unfamiliar. In that way, the conscious mind

is associated with the familiar as the unconscious mind is associated with the unfamiliar.

The fetish is the mediator between the two. Kaplan explains it in this way:

Holding on to something familiar is a good way to approach the unfamiliar, and when you don't need the props anymore you can let go of them. Little children do this with their security blankets, and when they are ready to move on to a new stage of development, they get rid of them – or maybe hang on to little shreds as a reminder of feeling safe. (Kaplan 2)

The difference between the security blanket and the fetish is that more than a few shreds are held on to for safety. Fetishes often become lifestyles. People begin to have a preference for the fetish. They choose to use the fetish permanently and forego the opportunity to use the fetish only as a tool to acquaint oneself with the unfamiliar. These people become so comfortable with the fetish that the effort doesn't seem worth it to overcome or acquaint with the unknown. In reference to the types of fetishism one have discussed, Kaplan asks the questions, "Why is there a need, instead, for a tangible object that represents the spirit? Why do human beings get so emotionally invested in objects that are concrete and tangible?" (5). She believes that these matters are an issue of control:

In contrast to the god or spirit who is ephemeral and intangible, the fetish exists within the realm of the real and actual world. A fetish can be held, seen, smelled, even heard if it is shaken, and most importantly it can be manipulated at the will of the fetishist. In this manner, some essentially unknowable, intangible, spiritual, and ambiguous "someone" or

“something” that seems to have a will and energy of its own, is transformed into something tangible and concretely real and therefore capable of being controlled and manipulated. (5)

This is the basis of the fetishism strategy. Although the fetish may start off as a way to become acquainted with the familiar, people often choose to use the fetish as a permanent solution. They prefer to be in control, even if it means never facing or overcoming their fears. Thus, they use the fetish to disavow those fears. As long as the person maintains fixation upon the fetish, he avoids facing the unfamiliar, and thus is able to continuously disavow its presence. Although he is afraid of the unknown, he is not aware of his own fear because the fetish, when used as a permanent object and not a temporary tool, enables him to repress his fear into his unconscious mind.

In describing the fetishism strategy, Kaplan outlines five specific principles in addition to the points already listed, which correlate with the theories of fetishism one have mentioned, as well as others. Kaplan’s five principled description of the fetish enhances my own three-category depiction of the fetish. These classifications serve to identify distinct lines between different aspects of fetishism, while still unifying those divided aspects under one unified category. Kaplan’s five principle does not undermine the notions of absence, substitution, and fixation, but rather explains different types of absence, substitution, and fixation. While these are five different principles, Kaplan herself admits that they often overlap or operate in tandem.

Kaplan’s first principle of fetishism explains the substitution of a person or thing:

1. Fetishism is a psychological strategy or defense that enables a human being to transform something or someone with its own enigmatic energy

and immaterial essence into something or someone that is material and tangibly real, a form of being that makes the something or someone controllable. (6)

Kaplan's example of this first principle is reality television. In today's reality television, "human beings are dehumanized and transformed into mechanical, stereotyped representations of actual human beings. They become commodities," (6). A more specific example of this principle would be the recent hit reality series, *The Jersey Shore*. One of the most well known characters on that show is called Snookie, which is not actually her name. When portrayed in the media, this character is often mocked for her appearance on the show. There has even been debate as to whether or not the show is scripted, or as to how much of the show is scripted, because of the way that characters, such as Snookie, so perfectly fit a pre-determined stereotype. This character has been parodied on other hit shows such as *South Park*, *Family Guy*, and *Saturday Night Live*. In each example, the character is portrayed through a stereotype. According to Kaplan, this is what reality T.V. does when operating through the fetish; it transforms people into commodified, dehumanized, stereotypes.

In another example, Kaplan compares this first principle of the fetishism strategy to Marxian commodity fetishism. She references Marx's mention that the secret of commodity fetishism is to, "absorb the greatest possible amount of surplus-labour," (Marx "The Working-Day"). According to Marx, "Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks. The time during which the labourer works, is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has purchased of him," ("The Working Day"). Through this quasi-

vampiric process, the workingman is transformed into the capitalist's commodity. His life hours are absorbed by the capitalist either in the form of money or in the form of the produced commodity. In that way, a person is transformed into something tangible, as the first principle suggests.

Kaplan's second principle of fetishism explains the substitution of ambiguity or uncertainty: "Fetishism transforms ambiguity and uncertainty into something knowable and certain and in doing so snuffs out any sparks of creativity that might ignite the fires of fetishism," (Kaplan 6). This principle can best be related to the rain talisman example. The tribesman does not know what controls the rain, and thus the survival of his crops, which is also his own survival, is uncertain and ambiguous. As one discussed earlier, the fetish or rain talisman acts as a type of security blanket. But since there is no point where the tribesman learns meteorology, the talisman is not a temporary tool, but rather a permanent fetish.

Kaplan's third principle of the fetishism strategy relates to hiding personal details, preferences, and characteristics: "Fetishism brings uncertain details into the foreground of experience in order to mask and disguise other features that are thus cast into the shadows and margins and background," (6). She relates this principle to Freudian sexual fetishism. As mentioned earlier, the sexual fetish may arise as a psychological ploy to avoid thinking about a traumatic event. On the surface, it would appear a person has strange sexual preferences and desires. People are often shocked, repelled, or disgusted by another person's bizarre sexual fetish. This is exactly how the fetishism strategy works; "the surface layer, the images that captivate the visual field, the words that clamor to be heard, are masquerades," (6). A person is so focused on the bizarre aspects of the fetish

that he does not question the underlying or unconscious, “desires, motives, and defenses,” of the fetishist. This works the same way for the fetishist; “the powerful presence of the erotic surface disguises and covers over the absences that would otherwise remind us of something traumatic,” (6).

Before moving on to discuss the fourth principle of the fetishism strategy, Kaplan takes a moment to bring up the subject of necrophilia. At the outset of her studies, Kaplan believed that necrophilia was, “far away from fetishism,” (7). However after further research, she realized that, “Necrophilia, it turns out, is the key to a less obvious but, in certain crucial respects, more essential meaning of fetishism,” (7). Indeed, death is at the heart of fetishism. Though necrophilia itself is not at the root of all fetishism, it is the underlying principle and motivations of necrophilia that apply throughout various types of fetishism. When something is dead, it is at a minimal threat to us. In the first three examples of the fetishism strategy, one notes the transformation of a human into an object. In a way, this implies the death of a person, of an idea, or of a concept. If one transforms that which frightens one into an object, then it is essentially dead and no longer poses a threat. So while not all fetishism shares the use of a literal cadaver, “in it’s larger, more encompassing meaning, fetishism is about the deadening and dehumanization of otherwise alive and therefore threateningly dangerous, unpredictable desires,” (7).

The fourth principle of the fetishism strategy explains the, “transformation of living, animate substance into something dead or deadening,” which one might also refer to as the “necrophilic principle” of fetishism: “The more dangerous and unpredictable the threat of desire, the more deadened or distanced from human experience the fetish object

must be,” (7). Under this principle, one can understand necrophiliacs as those who are extremely terrified of sexual intercourse with a living person. The reason the fetish object must be dead and distanced comes back to the ability to control. As opposed to, “ a fully alive, human being with dangerous, unpredictable desires who must be wooed and courted,” the fetish object is significantly more reliable and controllable (7). As opposed to a person, the fetish object, “expects neither commitment nor engagement,” and thus is deemed, “safe, easily available, and undemanding of reciprocity,” (7).

The fourth principle is inextricably tied to the fifth principle of fetishism that explains the hidden death drive of the fetish object: “The death drive tints itself in erotic color. The impression of erogenous color draws a mask right on the skin,” (8). Though this last principle sounds ambiguous, what she means is that negative thoughts and tendencies will often manifest latently within the fetish and will remain hidden under the provocative surface of the fetish. Through the fetish, “an entire history is enabled to masquerade as a detail, anxiety to masquerade as freedom, depression to masquerade as elation, and hatred to masquerade as love,” (10).

To better understand this last principle, let’s look at an example from contemporary popular culture. In 2004, author Dinitia Smith produced a feature story analyzing the hit television series *Sex and the City* through interviews with several feminist theorists. Most of the theorists, buying into the manifest surface content of the show, portrayed the woman as having sexual freedom. However one theorist, Elaine Showalter, analyzes the show through the lens of fetishism. Showalter notices that the female lead characters of the show have a, “desperate need to purchase and possess Manolo Blahnik and Jimmy Choo stiletto shoes and high fashion, high status

pocketbooks and “sexy” underwear, and suggestively seductive outerwear, was not in the service of a liberation of their sexuality,” (10). The free sexuality is a masquerade. It is a distraction. It is anxiety masquerading as freedom. Showalter sees these high fashion commodities as fetishes, or security blankets comfort these women from their, “potentially anarchic, chaotic, and unregulated sexuality,” and “otherwise frightening “anything goes” social environment,” (10). In this unfamiliar and unpredictable world, the commodity items are familiar reminders of safety. They are a constant point to which these women can return to as a base or an anchor. As Kaplan mentions in the first principle, these women take their lack of control over themselves and of their lives and transform that, “immaterial essence” into a high fashion commodity object, “that is material and tangibly real, a form of being that makes the something or someone controllable,” (6).

Now that one can understand the fetishism strategy, next one must further examine the impact of fetishism on modern society. One of the first theorists to begin looking at modern society within the context of fetishism is Guy Debord. Debord writes from a perspective both informed by and inspired by Marx’s view of commodity fetishism. But Debord is no mere repetition of Marx. Marx talks about the loss of the value of labor, and thus the misappropriation of the life force and energy of the laborers. In this line of thought, though the value is distorted, objects would maintain their use and trade values. Debord not only further seeks to explain, “the obvious degradation of being into having,” but also to explain the extended loss of use and trade values in what Debord calls the society of the spectacle, or in other words, a society that values appearing over being or having (Debord 17).

The society that Marx discusses is most certainly in the transition from “being into having,” (17). In the example of the Coach pocketbook, the woman is focused more on having the item than she is on being any certain way. She is not as focused on her characteristics and traits. She prefers to let her items represent her. She prefers to be represented by the pocketbook. Because Coach is a brand name, she can associate herself with that brand and other wearers of that brand. Coach is known to be a popular, expensive, brand that sometimes caters to celebrity appeal. In modern society, notions of celebrity and status often influence capitalistic consumer culture. When a woman buys a coach bag, she can feel like she shares some sort of status with her favorite celebrity. Though she realizes she is not an actress on the red carpet, the pocketbook is nonetheless a signifier of status and wealth, especially among her peers. Due to this effect, the woman believes that she has achieved being through having. Being is the essence of life. What is life if not the act of being? Thus, as the commodity fetishist moves from being, she is distorting the life force. Debord himself notes this quality of the spectacle and inherently of fetishism to twist and distort a person’s life as well as reality:

The images detached from every aspect of life fuse in a common stream in which the unity of this life can no longer be reestablished. Reality considered partially unfolds, in its own general unity, as a pseudo-world apart, an object of mere contemplation. The specialization of images of the world is completed in the world of the autonomous image, where the liar has lied to himself. The spectacle in general, as the concrete inversion of life, is the autonomous movement of the non-living. (2)

The fetishist in the society of the spectacle takes another step away from being, further distorting the life energy. If the example of the Marxian commodity fetishist is a woman who buys a coach pocketbook, then the example of Debord's commodity fetishist is a woman who buys a fake Coach pocketbook. In the society of the spectacle, the next step away from being after having is appearing. At this point, it no longer matters to the woman whether or not she can even afford the pocketbook. She knows that in order to achieve her desired level of status, she only needs the appearance of owning the Coach pocketbook. Now think of this concept when applied to social media. The woman might not even buy a Coach pocketbook at all. She may simply borrow a friend's Coach pocketbook. Or even worse, she might borrow a friend's fake Coach pocketbook so that she can take a picture of herself wearing it. Once she has taken the picture of herself with the bag, she has achieved the appearance she desires. She can then post this picture as her avatar or profile picture so that all who see her profile will associate her with the bag, and if her hopes are fulfilled, with status as well.

The woman who buys a fake pocketbook or borrows one to take a picture is a logical representation of Debord's fetishist, however this one example does not completely encapsulate Debord's societal criticism. Debord argues that not just some individuals, but rather the entirety of Western civilization is part of the spectacle. The spectacle is not so much a personal criticism as it is a societal description for all of Western civilization. For Debord, the spectacle is society itself, it is, "is nothing other than the sense of the total practice of a social-economic formation, its use of time. It is the historical movement in which one are caught," (11). In Debord's view, today's spectacle is both an extension of and a result of Marxian commodity fetishism. The

spectacle would not be possible without the world that Marx described. Debord explains this in his analysis of the spectacle:

The first phase of the domination of the economy over social life brought into the definition of all human realization the obvious degradation of being into having. The present phase of total occupation of social life by the accumulated results of the economy leads to a generalized sliding of having into appearing, from which all actual “having” must draw its immediate prestige and its ultimate function. At the same time all individual reality has become social reality directly dependent on social power and shaped by it. It is allowed to appear only to the extent that it is not. (17)

First people had to make the transition from being into having. It is the time spent in the period of having that allows the spectacle to become possible. It is the time spent focusing on having as well as the technological ability to spread appearances. At first, people could purchase objects and having would be enough because those people would be the only one to possess those individual objects. After a while, as production became more technologically advanced, it was easier to make copies. Instead of a person buying a painting from a famous artist, he could just as easily buy a replicated print, for even cheaper. It is the accessibility to commodities and their replications that has rendered the cheap appearance preferable to the expensive original. At the same time, having an original becomes less valuable because of the amount of copies and replications. Even a person who has an original copy might be mistaken for someone who has bought a replica. And although the person who bought the original might make efforts to explain

himself, the fact that he must explain himself at all is the mark of the spectacle. At this point, a person with an original painting must answer to the spectacle if he wishes to maintain his prestige. He must exert an effort to explain to his guests where and how he obtained an original painting. And yet, even still, the man's guests may walk away believing that the image was merely a copy or replica and that the man was a liar. It is the effort that the man must make to explain, as well as the chance that his efforts may be in vain, that begin to render the image or appearance preferable to the real. In a modern production society, it is simpler to acquire appearances, whether they are copies, replicas, or falsehoods.

In this world of copies, one must take notice that originality has become lost. Or in other words, it has become absent. The more one understands the spectacle, the more it becomes clear that the spectacle itself is a grandiose societal fetish. It is the magnification of the commodity fetish to a mass scale. In the example of the commodity fetish, people were focused on products. The commodity fetish thrived in a world that existed before the popularity and proficiency of media. The spectacle is what's on television. The spectacle is what's in the movie theaters. The spectacle is what's on the news and what's at the mall. The spectacle is the entire system of the marketplace as a fetish. If this is not clear, let us examine the notion of the spectacle from the three basic components of the fetish.

The first component of the fetish is absence. In the case of the spectacle, what is absent would be what Debord might refer to as being. There is an absence of social interaction. There is an absence of connection between individuals. According to Debord, "The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated

by images,” (4). There is a loss of intimacy when speaking of sexual fetishism. When ones talk about the spectacle, one is talking about a loss of intimacy and human connection through societal and hierarchical separation and segregation. The mainstream media facilitates this disconnection. The spectacle, more or less, is the mainstream media. It is the history of people through the connection to production and products. Debord attempts to explain this:

Separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle. The institutionalization of the social division of labor, the formation of classes, had given rise to a first sacred contemplation, the mythical order with which every power shrouds itself from the beginning. [...] Thus all separate power has been spectacular, but the adherence of all to an immobile image only signified the common acceptance of an imaginary prolongation of the poverty of real social activity, still largely felt as a unitary condition. [...] The spectacle is the preservation of unconsciousness within the practical change of the conditions of existence. It is its own product, and it has made its own rules: it is a pseudo-sacred entity. It shows what it is: separate power developing in itself, in the growth of productivity by means of the incessant refinement of the division of labor into a parcellization of gestures which are then dominated by the independent movement of machines; and working for an ever-expanding market. All community and all critical sense are dissolved during this movement in which the forces that could grow by separating are not yet reunited. (25)

In this passage, Debord is explaining the history of the spectacle from the beginning of time. He is explaining how the spectacle begins with separation. First comes the separation and specialization of labor and classes. This division of labor and production makes people feel alienated from one other. It makes it so that people are now on different levels of society and thus it is harder for them to connect. But this is what I am talking about when I speak of the spectacle as an illusory reality. The spectacle of separation due to different classes is a social construction. At a basic level, people are still humans. They are not that much different from any other human on this planet when it comes to physicality. The true difference between these people is the difference in their experience and personality. But these differences of experience and personality are not what separate people. It is the spectacle or social construction that separates people. Personality and experience can be shared. People can have conversations and can connect with one another. But they do not. People feel as if they can only interact with their own class. Or if it is not a feeling, it is a reality due to the fact that the poor do not have the same access as the rich. The rich can travel to any location with their money. They can engage with the lower classes if they choose. However since the spectacle is created by the separation of power, those with class and wealth have deliberately separated, and thus do not often choose to engage with lower classes. The lower classes are isolated and alienated. They are often confined to the neighborhoods that they were born in. If they do not have money to leave the neighborhood, then they cannot. In this type of world, what ends up happening is that people do not interact with many different types of people. They interact mainly with their own class. And even still, rather than interact with their own class, they feel the pull of the spectacle. They feel the need to direct their attention

and gaze towards it. This is what Debord is talking about when he mentions, “poverty of real social activity, still largely felt as a unitary condition.” People are lacking for social interaction. People crave social interactions and experiences that they do not have, and they are tricked into believing that the spectacle will provide them with these experiences. In reality, what they seek is intimacy, enlightenment, and connection. It is almost tragic that in their noble search, they are fooled into believing that the separation, degradation, and disconnection of the spectacle will provide them with what they search for. Under these circumstances, it should be clear that the absence of the fetish is the absence of direct social interaction. It is the interaction of people un-mediated by images and unmediated by products.

What is amazing about the spectacle fetish is that it would seem that most are unaware that they are a part of it. It is more of an unconscious fetish. As opposed to the talisman, which is consciously carved, the pocketbook, which is consciously bought, or the sexual fetish object, which is consciously used, the spectacle fetish is chosen sometimes by choice, but sometimes by ignorance. It is chosen in that people believe this is what will bring them more of a full life but instead does not. It leaves them in the constant cycle of the fetish that is always moving away and is never arriving. At this point in time, the number one cause of unnatural death is suicide. America is known across the world for its anti-depressant pharmaceutical industry, and yet even still, the number one cause of unnatural death is suicide. If America’s leading cause of death is suicide, and if one of its most well known products is anti-depressants, then people are sad. People are unhappy because there is a part of them that realizes, at some level, that they have been tricked. Or perhaps it is not so much that these people realize that they

have been tricked, but rather that these people still feel a lack. They still feel the lack of social interaction. There is a part of them that craves presence and awareness, as opposed to the constant distraction of the spectacle. In previous examples, disavowal is marked by a choice. In the example of the spectacle fetish, there is both a conscious and an unconscious disavowal. For some, there is an unconscious disavowal within the fetish of the spectacle because for them, it is an unconscious societal fetish that almost everyone is a part of. For these people, there is an unconscious disavowal of unhappiness. These would be the people that do not realize that working every day, coming home and watching television for news and a couple of hit shows, and purchasing products from the marketplace is not a way of life, but rather a substitution for life. For these people, the disavowal is of both life and sadness. These people refuse to accept that they need a change in their lives. They refuse to accept the part of their psyche that craves direct, unmediated by images, human interaction. And so, they disavow this part of themselves. They create an absence of awareness, and though unconsciously, play directly into the hands of the spectacle fetish.

However there is also a group of people that consciously submerge themselves within the spectacle, and thus are making a conscious disavowal. People who dedicate their lives to keeping up with the Kardashians, the newest apple products, and coolest fashion trends are disavowing being, or life itself. The spectacle fetish has many similarities with this negation, although the terms are different. Debord speaks of the spectacle in terms of an appearance that negates a person's life:

The concept of spectacle unifies and explains a great diversity of apparent phenomena. The diversity and the contrasts are appearances of a socially

organized appearance, the general truth of which must itself be recognized. Considered in its own terms, the spectacle is affirmation of appearance and affirmation of all human life, namely social life, as mere appearance. But the critique which reaches the truth of the spectacle exposes it as the visible negation of life, as a negation of life which has become visible. (10)

The people who are actively choosing to immerse themselves in the spectacle are making a conscious disavowal, and thus they are intentionally negating life for the superficial spectacle. These people have given up on being. They have resolved the issue of lack of being by deciding that they do not need to be. They have committed to a life of appearances. They have learned to disavow any feelings of hollowness that may accompany a life of appearances. Or as Debord would say, "Separated from his product, man himself produces all the details of his world with ever increasing power, and thus finds himself ever more separated from his world. The more his life is now his product, the more he is separated from his life," (33). This is somewhat of a paradox. At one level, man is creating his world. He is the one that builds the products and commodities, and thus "produces all the details of his world." And yet, on another level, the more man creates his world, the less he is a part of that world. Intuitively, it would seem as if the opposite were true. It would seem as if the more man creates the world, the more he becomes linked to it. There are a few reasons why this seemingly contradictory information is an accurate description of the workingman's paradox. In Debord's words, "The spectacle is capital to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image," (35). As the man works to create more commodities, he does not have the time to

experience them. As mentioned earlier, with certain commodities, the man that builds the commodity might not be able to acquire enough capital or excess labor to purchase the commodity. In this scenario, the man is producing one of the details of his world in the sense that he actually helped to assemble the commodity and yet is separated from the world market in which the commodity is sold in the sense that he does not have the capital to act as a consumer in that market. If this man is creating a world, it is not for himself, but for the elite. He produces for the President of his company who makes millions of dollars a day without lifting a finger and is granted the privilege to international travel access and the ability to consume as he pleases. The poor produce for the rich. The rich consume the poor. It is the classic Marxian class struggle. It is the struggle of the 99% against the 1% as it has been phrased recently in the media through the Occupy Wall Street protests. In this world the workingman's life is one of producing commodities that he cannot consume. His life becomes work. His life becomes building tangible commodities that he can never truly touch, commodities that he can only dream to possess. To him, these commodities are not actualities. They are images. They are icons. They are symbols of his work and of his wasted life and time. They are symbols of the life he has lost, or the life he has devoted to the production of the commodity so that he may earn enough capital to buy the food that keeps his corpse animated. And yet, the workingman is not without commodities. Though he may not be able to buy the more expensive commodities, there are poorer men than him. In the Western world, many companies outsource cheaper labor to outside of the country where the labor laws are not so strict. These workers, who are almost slaves, help to produce the world of the workingman. The workingman works so that he may buy food, but also the cheaper

commodities. He seeks to emulate the rich and famous in a microcosm. Though he cannot reach their scale, he aims to reflect this image as best as he can, while still surviving and, “The abundance of commodities, namely, of commodity relations, can be nothing more than increased survival,” (40).

In this day and age, the major commodity of is the television or sometimes referred to as the opiate of the masses. People can simply watch television. Television is the spectacle box. There is no stronger proponent of the spectacle than the television, which allows the workingman a peak into the lives of the rich and famous. It is the television that makes the workingman feel as if he needs these commodities and needs to work waster his life earning the capital to acquire them. In modern culture, a popular meme is the zombie meme, as evident in the *Resident Evil* series, *Call of Duty's Nazi Zombies*, and AMC's *The Walking Dead*. A zombie can be defined as a human corpse that is animate, but does not contain the typical characteristics of life. For the zombie, there is an extreme lack of psychological awareness. The zombie seeks only to consume. All that the zombie knows is survival. It is not a coincidence that at this point in time, the zombie meme is so popular in American culture. The ability of people to identify with the zombie meme as well as its current popularity is a reflection of the collective unconscious. Collectively, there is an unconscious or unconscious awareness of our half brain dead constantly consuming society. In the same way that fetishists use the fetish object as a means of finding comfort, I believe the conscious mind uses the zombie meme as a fetish to represent the unconscious awareness of our current, unfortunate, societal condition of mass consumption. This type of comfort seeking is what Kaplan is referring to when she discusses the fetishism strategy. The image of the zombie is familiar, and

thus acts as a security blanket for the conscious. While the conscious mind is appeased and distracted, the unconscious mind latches on to the latent content of the zombie meme. To strengthen this point, one can also take a look at the vampire meme. This is another popular meme in our current Western society as one have seen with the recent explosion of novel series such as *Twilight* that also has a hit movie following and television hit series such as *True Blood* and *Vampire Diaries*. The vampire meme is another representation of an animated corpse that must constantly consume in order to survive. At the same time, these vampires represent a smaller percentage of the population that preys upon the larger population, which resonates with the Occupy Wall Street protests of the 99% against the 1%.

Largely, these memes, as well as Debord's theory, are signifiers of a culture that is in transition from the focus on being and experiencing, to having and consuming. The masses endlessly produce for the upper echelons of society, who have the money and freedom to actually experience. These elite of society have both the money to acquire almost any physical possession that they might desire as well as the ability to travel to any location at more or less any time. Through the majority of society's struggles to work, obtain, and consume, the elite is able to enjoy, relax, and experience. As one continue this cycle, it becomes harder and harder for the working class to obtain those objects which they seek. As the population continues to increase exponentially along with the steady rise and inflation, it now requires significantly more hours of time working for the average person to buy a car today than to buy one just forty or fifty. The ability to obtain and to have is becoming more and more difficult for the average person. With this difficulty present, society has begun to shift its focus off of having. As having becomes a

greater struggle with odds that increase every single day, society is shifting its focus to something easier. Society is beginning to let go of the idea of having, and has now become infatuated with the idea of appearing. If one is focused on one's appearances, then one does not need to have as much. One only needs enough having to cover the surface layer. For example, with an emphasis on having, one might buy a gold watch. With an emphasis on appearing, one may simply buy a cheaper copper watch that is covered in gold. Thus, there is less having of the actual gold but for the same appearance value. The appearance is cheaper and easier to obtain than the actual product. Theorist Jean Baudrillard is aware of this change, and makes a comment that if society shifts focus in this way, society may eventually lose all traces of the original. In the next chapter, one analyze the work of Jean Baudrillard, who picks up where Debord left off, as he analyzes this new shift from having to appearing as it is manifest throughout simulated society.

Chapter III

About twenty years after the publication of Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, theorist Jean Baudrillard published *Simulacra and Simulation*, which follows the narrative of the societal shift from having to appearing. At the beginning of his book, Baudrillard reminds the reader of Borges fable:

...the cartographers of the Empire draw up a map so detailed that it ends up covering the territory exactly (the decline of the Empire witnesses the fraying of this map, little by little, and its fall into ruins, though some shreds are still discernible in the deserts - the metaphysical beauty of this ruined abstraction testifying to a pride equal to the Empire and rotting like a carcass, returning to the substance of the soil, a bit as the double ends by being confused with the real through aging)... (Baudrillard 3)

While Baudrillard agrees that this metaphor is not a direct or completely accurate representation, this picture of the map overlaying reality is an image well suited to facilitate understanding a complex theory. In Baudrillard's updated version of this metaphorical image, the map is no longer overlaying reality, but rather it has replaced reality. In other words, society is further along its transition from having to appearing. Society is at the point where it has abandoned having almost entirely. In reference to earlier examples, society is continuing forward from the ideas of faking the real. Society is moving from owning a fake designer pocketbook, to taking a picture of one with a friend's designer pocketbook, to taking a picture of one with a friend's fake designer pocketbook. As society progresses, the real becomes less and less present. In the original example of Borges fable, the fraying of the map coincides with the crumbling of the

Empire. In Baudrillard's version, "it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours. The desert of the real itself,"

(3). Reality is fading away as the simulation takes its place. The real may still exist, but only in fragments, here and there. In fact, returning to the example of the pocketbook, let's take it a step further. Now that photo-editing applications are available via the Internet to just about anybody, one doesn't even need to borrow an actual object anymore. Society is at the point where one can edit oneself, or possibly even just one's face, onto a pre-existing picture. At this stage, the real is almost entirely absent. Once again, while the idea of editing a picture of us with a designer pocketbook is not a perfect metaphor, it is a working example of Baudrillard's theory in action. Clearly, society has not yet reached a complete disappearance of the real. People still buy pocketbooks, both authentic and replica. But this is not the point. The focus lies in the societal shift. While not every individual has been consumed by the simulation, and surely there must be those clinging to shreds of reality, the number of individuals who invest time, money, and energy into simulated versions of reality is increasing while the number of individuals who invest time, money, and energy into physical reality is decreasing. At the same time, modes and platforms of simulated reality have been dramatically increasing over the past few decades, presently manifesting primarily through various social media sources, but previously through other electronic media. The focus on the real has declined as one have progressed from theater, to television, to video arcades, to computers, to video game consoles, to portable handheld video games, to cell phones, to smart phones with direct access to the globally connected Internet. With so many options of simulated realities to

choose from, it is no wonder why less children spend time playing outside and why the ones who do come inside earlier than those born before the explosion of simulation technology during our current digital age. If one was born in this age, perhaps one might not notice a shift at all. Even parents might not see a drastic change. But if one is to view this progression from the perspective of a grandparent or elder, it is an obvious difference. And for the scholar, who can time travel through the centuries via the medium of text and literature, it is undeniable that this shift has been occurring for the past few hundred years. For the scholar, it is a blatant red flag, screaming for analysis. And indeed, this scholar cannot help but to crave an answer as to why one society is moving in this direction, where society find itself if it continues along this pattern, and what the implications of following this pattern are for humanity.

For example, just thirty years ago a watch that has video-chat capabilities was seen as high-tech spy equipment from the future. Today, any kindergartener with an ipad and Internet access can video-chat, not to mention that some people actually do own video-chat watches. As one imagines what is possible, one yearns to create what one had previously believed was impossible. This is just a small example of the technology now available, as Google performs research on cars that can drive themselves, boasting to finish developing the technology within the next three to five years. While this does not mean they will release a self-driving car at this time, nor does it mean government regulation would allow it, it is still an obvious indicator of the direction in which society is heading. As one realizes the possibility of self-driving cars, one must also begin to consider that science fiction movies may be more forecast than they are fantasy.

This idea of the idea preceding the reality is consistent with Baudrillard's theory and metaphor of the map:

The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory - precession of simulacra - that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map. (3)

If one can look at theorists, scientists, and filmmakers who speculate about the future as society's cartographers, then one can see how the maps they are creating overlap with the real. They are no longer mapping the territory. The map does not conform to the territory. They are mapping what they predict. They are mapping what they believe will happen. In accordance with those maps, and in accordance with their beliefs, reality conforms to the prediction. The map precedes the territory, eroding what used to be there, as it imprints its own design upon the ever-decaying landscape.

This concept is similar to the scene in the movie *Inception* where one sees a den of people who have spent entire lifetimes in dream space, choosing to believe that perception is reality. In *Inception*, these dreamers pay an operator to maintain their bodies and minds in a permanent dream state. In this scenario, the dreamers are able to map out the lives that they want to live and then live them. To them, it does not matter that their dreams are not real in the traditional sense. They prefer the control and stability of the dream world. Even knowing that they will never interact with real individuals, only projections of their own unconscious minds, they do not care. In the real world, these individuals appear almost as zombies or comatose victims. For these individuals, the real has disappeared completely. They live only in a world of appearances and imagined

experiences. For these perpetual dreamers, Baudrillard's prediction has come true; the territory has disappeared and only the map remains.

It is shocking how well Baudrillard's assessment of reality in the 1980s corresponds with our current situation, as well as *Inception*'s representational projection of our current situation:

It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and shortcircuits all its vicissitudes. Never again will the real have the chance to produce itself - such is the vital function of the model in a system of death, or rather of anticipated resurrection, that no longer even gives the event of death a chance. A hyperreal henceforth sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary, leaving room only for the orbital recurrence of models and for the simulated generation of differences. (Baudrillard 4)

When Baudrillard describes substitution of "the signs of the real for the real," one can see this as a direct description of the *Inception* dream world. However this can also be seen as a description of the world now. There are many individuals who choose to substitute the signs of the real for the real through engagement in social media and virtual realities.

One popular alternate virtual reality that substitutes signs of the real for the real is the video game *Call of Duty*. This is an entire video game series that focuses upon placing the player in the position of a soldier in the middle of a war zone. In this game,

players can engage an interactive single player story that follows the beginning of a war to a victory. Many of the wars in these games are even modeled after real events, although they do not maintain perfect historical accuracy. This game also contains the option for players to compete online against players from all over the world. In this multiplayer online setting the players are split into two teams. The goal of each player is to murder as many of the other team's players as possible while simultaneously avoiding being murdered by the other team. The player who can either murder the most players in a time frame or be the first to reach a certain number of murder points is declared the winner. *Call of Duty* is the type of game with a cult following. These players are not playing any mere game; they are substituting hours of their lives to become simulated soldiers who engage in simulated murders. This is one of the most modern forms of the fetish that exemplifies the hyperreal of which Baudrillard speaks. This behavior is consistent with the absence of reality during the time played, the substitution of that reality with a simulated virtual reality, and the fixation upon that simulated virtual reality characterized by hours per week or even per day spent engaged in interaction. At present, society does not have the technology of *Inception* to permanently suspend people in an alternate reality, however if there is already a culture of fetishism surrounding these simulated virtual realities, and this just being one of countless options, then one can see how society is already on the path to the hyperreal.

In studying fetishism, one is also studying a societal affliction. As Kaplan details, when engaging with the fetish, one is intentionally seeking to deaden the experience of life. Analyzing a possible future is of the utmost importance because one must acknowledge that the presence of virtual reality and virtual interaction, whether through

video games, social media platforms, or other Internet related simulation, is only increasing. Since these virtual realities are fetishes, it is urgent that they be understood as early as possible. The fixation of a fetish is intense. Once entranced by the fixation of a fetish, one finds it is difficult to escape its clutches. People often are not even aware of their fetishes and thus are not even taking action to escape or overcome them. This can be dangerous especially when one is discussing the example of a video game such as *Call of Duty*. In *Call of Duty*, the players are strictly adhering to the principles of fetishism as they are trading the potentially physically dangerous conditions of real life for the psychological comforts of creating death. Of course, there is an aspect to these games that the player will be killed and will lose the game, so there is some courage on that part of the player to risk at least a psychological death, although it should be noted that video game deaths often do produce violent reactions in real life, such as throwing a controller or screaming out expletives. However ultimately, the chance of winning and the continuous victory of exceptional gamers is enough to create comfort, security, and pleasure, through the virtual re-creation of the murderous environment of a war zone. And while *Call of Duty* is already an excellent example of fetishistic simulated reality, it becomes the perfect example when one realizes the *Nazi Zombies* feature included with the more recently released editions such as *Call of Duty: World at War* and *Call of Duty: Black Ops*. While these editions feature the same basic format of the previous games, they include the added bonus of the *Nazi Zombie* challenge min-game within the game. In the *Nazi Zombie* challenge, players are spawned in a territory or level that is infested with zombies with the objective of eliminating all of them. Once the player has eliminated all zombies, there is a brief pause before the zombies spawn again, but now on a level 2

difficulty, meaning that there may be more of them, or that they are harder to kill. This continues endlessly. While the highest recorded level reached is over 100, there is no end to the game other than the player's death. Also, the game cannot be paused and so to reach higher rounds, players must commit hours upon hours of their time. An average round time may be anywhere between three and eight hours. So basically, players continue to engage in the same exact repetitive task of killing zombies on the same exact level in the same exact way. One can see how these players become the simulated zombies they kill. They lose all signs of life other than a will to continue playing as zombies lose all signs of life other than the will to continue consuming. Even more so than the regular game, those players of *Nazi Zombies* are seeking comfort through deadening or zombifying themselves. Through the contradictions of seeking comfort through life in deadening that are evident in the example of this game one is reminded of the paradoxical agreement orchestrated by the unconscious mind. One must question the logic of seeking comfort in life through death and deadening.

The paradoxical behavior of the unconscious mind to seek life through death or vice versa is both perplexing and intricate. In an essay titled *Evil and The Death Instinct*, Psychiatrist Zvi Lothane analyzes Freud's *Beyond The Pleasure Principle* to explain this logic. He also analyzes the work of Sabina Spielrein, a psychoanalyst and student of Carl Jung's whose writings on the life instinct and death instinct inspired Freud, and of Wilhelm Stekel who was, "a founding member of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society who was later marginalized by Freud and expelled," (Lothane 278). Examining Freud's *Beyond The Pleasure Principle* as well as the work of his students on the same topic will help to explain the seemingly paradoxical nature of the fetish. Stekel writes on the

conflict between life and death, and names these urges Eros after the Greek God of Love, representing life energy and the life instinct, and Thanatos after the Greek God of Death, representing death energy and the death instinct. While Stekel's writings are in German, Lothane translates a portion of a dream analysis in which Stekel refers to these concepts:

Just as in the dream there is generally no negation, there is similarly no negation of life. Dying in dreams most often means living and it is precisely the highest life's pleasures that finds its expression in a death wish... such ideas were reportedly spoken of by poets and philosophers, too, have repeatedly highlighted these connections between Eros and Thanatos. (Lothane 278)

Lothane also provides us with an excerpt from Spielrein's essay in which she quotes Jung's perspective on Eros and Thanatos (though again the terms are not used directly):

The passionate yearning, i.e., the libido, has two sides: the power that beautifies all and one that on occasion destroys... the destructive nature of the creative power... To become generative means to destroy oneself, since the becoming of the next generation means that the preceding one has reached its peak: In this way our descendants are our most dangerous enemies, with whom one cannot cope... The anxiety over the erotic fate is understandable, for there is something unforeseen in it... He who renounces the courage to experience, must stifle in himself the wish to commit a kind of suicide. This explains why death fantasies readily accompany erotic wishes. (Lothane 278-279)

By looking at these two quotations, one can see that the dualistic nature of life and death, be it discussed under the name of Eros and Thanatos, or of the Libido, or of the death drive, or of those principles which lie beyond pleasure and pain. One can see differences between these different descriptions and it is difficult to say that just one of these individuals is correct. Through an all-encompassing perspective, one can realize that each one of these individuals, despite their disagreements, are all focused on the exact same topic of the fetish but under differing terms.

In Stekel's psychoanalysis, he comments that life's greatest pleasures often express themselves in the form of a death-wish dream scenario. According to Freud, dreams are psychological manifestations of the dreamer's unconscious desires. However Freud also subscribes to the pleasure principle that says humans are basically wired to engage in those behaviors, which maximize pleasure and minimize pain. Logically, it does not make sense that seeking death would be a form of avoiding pain or of attaining pleasure. It is this contradiction that inspires analysis. Why is it that a person who adheres to the pleasure principle might unconsciously seek death? For what reason could death be unconsciously pleasurable? Or what could be so painful that a person might unconsciously choose death to avoid it? Carl Jung, another former student of Freud, provides one perspective that might explain, "why death fantasies readily accompany erotic wishes," (279). Jung begins his analysis by positing that the libido, or sex drive, has a dualistic yet conflicting beautifying and destructive nature. Jung resolves this conflict by supposing the act of generation, or of creation of life, which is the ultimate aim of the sex drive, is in itself an act of self-destruction. Jung sees generation of life as a mark of the expiration of the usefulness of the generator. In Jung's perspective, the only

reason one is so driven, the only reason that the sex drive is so powerful, is because it's primary function is a response to death.

Biologically, and thus on some unconscious level, the body realizes that it will perish, and thus must reproduce in order to pass on its genetic information so that although the body may be lost, the genes that created it are still present within the progeny. In Jung's view, one is aware, whether consciously or unconsciously that our ancestors were the ones that created us, and that they have disappeared into death. Jung refers to them as "our greatest enemies," but what he means is that they are reminders of our greatest fears of death with which one "cannot cope." When he mentions the anxiety over the erotic fate that contains an unforeseeable component, he is pointing out that to live is a commitment to constantly be on the lookout for death risks. If one commits to the life urge, then one is willingly and knowingly engaging with danger. It is an understandable fear because any person alive can acknowledge that life is filled with risks that often produce fear. However one all experience varying levels of this fear. Some are able to come to such terms with fear that they engage in death-defying acts such as skydiving, mountain climbing, scuba diving, etc. On the other end of the spectrum are those who are so afraid of the dangers of life that they become somewhat neurotic, committing themselves to lives of hermitage, attempting to leave the house as little as possible. One can imagine the stereotypical germophobe who is so afraid of dirt that he will not leave his house and develops an obsessive-compulsive need to constantly clean. It is this end of the spectrum to which Jung refers when he speaks of those who renounce the courage to experience. These people who are trying to protect themselves from the outside world, who don't even try to face the world with courage but rather

choose to attempt controlling their level of fear through avoidance must also be simultaneously suppressing an unconscious desire for suicide. For these people, the amount of fear the outside world creates within them becomes so difficult to manage, so unpleasurable, that perhaps suicide would seem preferable as an end to the psychological pain of chronic fear for these people. This struggle is a question of which is stronger, the desire to acquire pleasure or the desire to avoid pain. Returning to the example of dreams, these people who try to avoid danger through hermitage may dream of dying in a sky diving accident. If the person were fully committed to the death drive, then he would indeed have committed suicide and would not be dreaming. But the fact that he is alive to be dreaming means that he has not yet made a full commitment to the death drive, or to the complete avoidance of pain through death, and so if one see him dreaming of dying while skydiving, one are merely seeing the simultaneous expression of two mutually exclusive desires, which as Stekel says may be why it is “precisely the highest life’s pleasures that finds its expression in a death wish.”

In *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*, Freud notices the contradiction of seeking life through death or vice versa and seeks to come to a new understanding of the operation of the conscious and unconscious mind that encompasses and accounts for his earlier writing. Through speculation, Freud is able to tactfully describe a new way of interpreting the relationship between conscious and unconscious that does not contradict the pleasure principle, but rather describes a process that operates simultaneously and separately from the pleasure principle. At times, these two processes may intersect and possibly create fiction or confusion, but ultimately, these two processes are able to coexist.

Freud frames his argument through the perspective of understanding a human, or a living organism, in terms of “an undifferentiated vesicle of sensitive substance: then its surface, exposed as it is to the outer world, is by its very position differentiated and serves as an organ for receiving stimuli,” (Freud 5). Citing Embryology as evidence, Freud describes how the sensitive brain and other vital organs form first, but are vulnerable and without protection. Then, these vital and living cells produce the partially deadened outer layer, or in other words the human body that has dead skin cells constantly flaking off of it and yet also contains sensory receptors that relay information back to the brain and vital organs. These vital organs are controlled by the unconscious mind. So it is the unconscious mind and brain that realize the need for “protection against stimuli from the outer world,” (Freud 8) and create both the body with sensory receptors and the conscious mind with perception, which are both somewhat deadened compared to the brain and vital organs. The conscious mind, though connected to the unconscious mind, is dead to the activity of the vital processes. One does not consciously pump one’s blood, nor breathe at night, nor a myriad of other autonomic functions. Freud describes the advantage and function of this death layer:

...The outer layer has by its own death secured all the deeper layers from a like fate—at least so long as no stimuli present themselves of such a strength as to break through the protective barrier. For the living organism protection against stimuli is almost a more important task than reception of stimuli; the protective barrier is equipped with its own store of energy and must above all endeavour to protect the special forms of energy-

transformations going on within itself from the equalising and therefore destructive influence of the enormous energies at work in the outer world. (6)

In this way, the conscious mind acts as both a barrier and a filter for different pleasure-pain stimuli from the outer world, otherwise known as exogenous pain. If the outer layer and conscious mind perform optimally, then they will protect the unconscious mind from the painful stimuli of the outer world and will integrate the pleasurable stimuli of the outer world. Freud does also mention that at certain times, pain and pleasure do arise from the inner world, otherwise known as endogenous pain. The difference between the two is whereas pleasure is experienced gracefully, inner pain (a psychological anguish such as grief, guilt, frustration, etc.) sets off the barrier protection and defense reaction. Since the pain is coming from inside though, the barrier of the conscious mind cannot be applied to it, and so, this is the root of projection. One projects those qualities within oneself that disturb one onto those around one so that it will be easier to protect oneself against them. There are also other exceptions to the system of outer protection and inner operation, the most important of all being trauma; “such external excitations as are strong enough to break through the barrier against stimuli one call traumatic,” (9). Trauma is especially significant in this context and in this perspective. One sees here in Freud’s analysis that trauma is indeed the first domino that sets off the chain reaction of the fetishism response or what Kaplan refers to as the fetishism strategy. To an extent, it is the trauma that is being strategized against. But Freud does not see it this way exactly. Freud describes the event as a type of psychic binding:

An occurrence such as an external trauma will undoubtedly provoke a very extensive disturbance in the workings of the energy of the organism, and will set in motion every kind of protective measure. But the pleasure-principle is to begin with put out of action here. The flooding of the psychic apparatus with large masses of stimuli can no longer be prevented: on the contrary, another task presents itself—to bring the stimulus under control, to ‘bind’ in the psyche the stimulus mass that has broken its way in, so as to bring about a discharge of it. (9)

In other words, the pleasure principle is the guiding principle that guides the function and operation of the conscious mind and sensory organs. However the pleasure principal does not supremely rule the unconscious mind and vital organs. Instead, it would seem that it is the unconscious mind itself that created the pleasure principal for the conscious mind to adhere to as a means of protection. So it should not be a surprise that the creator of this principal is not bound by it. When a traumatic event has broken the barrier against stimuli it has bi-passed the conscious and entered directly into the realm of the unconscious. Apparently, the unconscious follows an alternate system of principles when it comes to dealing with trauma, and that this system takes priority over and supercedes the pleasure principle. The way this system works is that the unconscious mind in combination with the vital organs must produce enough energy to combat the energy of the trauma through binding. Part of this binding process involves apprehension and fear. According to Freud, if one is experiencing a trauma, then one’s systems of apprehension were not pre-charged enough to receive the charge of the trauma and thus flooding occurs. Freud believes that part of the reason one are conditioned to remember fear is “the failure of the mechanism

of apprehension to make the proper preparation, including the over-charging of the systems first receiving the stimulus,” (11). Part of this fear and apprehension is that the conscious layer of the mind becomes wounded its then more sensitive to trauma. When Freud describes the psychic binding of traumatic events he mentions that the energy required to bind the event is taken from the sensory organs and conscious mind. What this means is that part of the conscious energy that was being used as a force of protection has now been re-allocated and assigned to act as a binding agent. This re-allocated energy can no longer be used as a protective force of the conscious mind and sensory organs until the bind is release and the trauma has been healed. Thus, until the bind is released, the conscious mind becomes weaker to other traumatic events, as it has lost some of its protective force. For example, let’s look at the extreme example of a physically abusive relationship. In these situations, there is so much trauma that the conscious mind has become entirely compromised. After repeated incidents of trauma and abuse, the conscious mind has either almost entirely or entirely depleted itself of its protective energy or force. All of its energy is trapped in the psychic binds of the previous trauma, and so there is nothing left to protect against incoming trauma. Thus, it is often the case with these types of relationships that the victim of the abuse becomes so traumatized, or so drained of conscious energy, that defense is no longer possible. Since the conscious mind is unable to perform its protective role, the victim is often unable to remove oneself from the abuse or trauma relationship. While this is an extreme example of how trauma may function, a less extreme example would be perhaps a teenager who was bitten by a dog as a child. This individual may fear dogs and experience an apprehensiveness around the sight or even mention of them. Unlike an abuse victim, this

boy's trauma has not completely exhausted his conscious energy. If he was only bitten by one dog, then there will only be that one bind. However since that energy has not been unbound, the boy will experience fear. That fear is the remembrance of the previous failure as well as it is the stress of the bind. When he sees or imagines a dog, he remembers the event that he has bound. When this happens, the remembrance of a bound trauma, the mind's natural reaction is to re-live the event so that it may be processed and released. This way, the energy stuck in binding could return to its function as a protective force. However if the conscious mind has not become stronger and acquired more energy since the time of the trauma, it will not be able to unbind and process the event. Thus, until he gains more strength and can heal the original trauma, he will be more vulnerable to that type of trauma in the future, because it would be an attack on an already damaged system. When one speaks of ways for the conscious mind to gain strength to heal and release the trauma, one is really speaking about some sort of therapy or process in which the individual learns and develops coping mechanisms. This is the type of psychoanalytic therapy Freud provides and he attempts to provide the individuals with strength through equipping them to heal their unconscious wounds through understanding their dreams. Freud comments that in the cases where a trauma becomes bound, the conscious mind may repress the experience into the content of a re-occurring dream. Here, Freud expertly defends the pleasure principle. He posits that in his analysis of dreams according to the pleasure principle, that the dream is a wish fulfillment. In certain cases of trauma, Freud admits that certain dreams are not wish-fulfillment dreams, and yet do not invalidate the pleasure principle:

...One may assume that they thereby subserve another purpose, which must be fulfilled before the pleasure-principle can begin its sway. These dreams are attempts at restoring control of the stimuli by developing apprehension, the pretermission of which caused the traumatic neurosis. They thus afford us an insight into a function of the psychic apparatus, which without contradicting the pleasure-principle is nevertheless independent of it, and appears to be of earlier origin than the aim of attaining pleasure and avoiding 'pain'. (11)

Freud actually takes a, "moment to concede for the first time an exception to the principle that the dream is a wish-fulfilment," before he explains the mechanism behind this type of dreaming. He describes these types of dreams as obedience to a "repetition-compulsion" which is fueled by the "(not unconscious) wish to conjure up again what has been forgotten and repressed," (12). A criticism to be made of Freud's analysis is that despite how articulately his argument was made, it seems possible that since he had already written in agreement of the pleasure principle, he may have been biased due to pride to find an exception and not a contradiction to the pleasure principal. Yet, despite this potential bias, logic of the argument is worth its value. And one should keep in mind that at the beginning of this essay, Freud openly admits that, "What follows now is speculation, speculation often far-fetched, which each will according to his particular attitude acknowledge or neglect." But speculation is valuable in the way in which one can apply those possibilities to a current reality. Through scrutiny of this contradiction between the drives in life and death, as well as the different perspectives upon the matter, one gains a better understanding of the mechanisms behind the fetish. When one discuss

the ways in which people are deadening the world around them in order to feel alive, one can understand that many of these fears that motivate people towards the necrophilic nature of fetishism stem from failed attempts to properly respond to trauma.

When one considers this speculation upon the nature of the conscious and unconscious minds in relation to fetishism, one can realize that in a way, the conscious mind and sensory organs are but a fetish of the unconscious mind and vital organs. As one recalls from Kaplan, “in its larger, more encompassing meaning, fetishism is about the deadening and dehumanization of otherwise alive and therefore threateningly dangerous, unpredictable desires,” (7).

(Kaplan 7). In this scenario, the unpredictable and threateningly dangerous desire is the desire for life itself. It is the desire to engage in the act of living, which as Jung points out is an endeavor one already knows will end in death, as one is reminded by the demise of our ancestors. This is why the vulnerable vital organs and susceptible unconscious mind must create the dead layer of the conscious mind and sensory organs, which creates for people a skin of death that flakes off as they walk. The unconscious mind protects life with death. In order to ensure that the conscious mind will not interfere, the unconscious mind deadens it, and creates separation upon creation, leaving only the door of dreams open for communication and interaction. And of course it also allows through that which it deems pleasurable as well as the pains that it cannot guard against. Clearly this deadening conscious layer that the unconscious creates is not entirely effective, as one has demonstrated that there are ways to connect with the unconscious. There are methods such as psychoanalysis, introspection, meditation, and other types of therapy under which one can bring make the content of the unconscious into consciousness.

However when one is talking about the development of the human brain, one must remember that humans did not always have the language and technology that they do today. So in earlier times, this deadening of the outer layer was certainly more effective. Now, as one continues to evolve, it would seem perhaps that the conscious mind has become evolved enough to realize it cannot protect against trauma, and thus must either re-connect with the unconscious to heal and strengthen and release bound energy, or to create another form of protection. The latter option, the option of creating another form of protection, is key to the concept of social media fetishism.

If the conscious mind is a protective layer that the unconscious mind attempted to create as a dead layer to protect itself, then social media avatars are a third layer of protection that the unconscious mind has created for itself. This third layer of the social media profile will seek to achieve the same protective goals of the conscious mind. In the social media profile, similar to the conscious mind, people will attempt to optimize pleasure and minimize pain. This is most visible within the largest international social media affliction center of this age: Facebook.

Chapter IV

In order to classify Facebook, as well as other social media, as the most modern form of the societal fetish, one must establish that the social media site meets the three basic fetish qualifications of absence, substitution, and fixation.

In the example of sexual fetishism, absence was marked by a loss of intimacy. With this new perspective of the conscious and unconscious mind, one can now begin to better understand what is meant when one refers to intimacy. One realizes that the unconscious mind lies at the core of the human psyche. The unconscious mind is the puppet master, pulling the strings of the conscious mind and sensory organs. The unconscious mind controls not only breathing and function of the vital organs, but also dreams, emotions, and memories. When one speaks of intimacy, one is speaking of access to the unconscious mind. The most common context for the use of the word intimacy is in the case of sexual intercourse. In the case of sexual intercourse, one is typically naked. One's clothes are the outermost layer of one's person. One's clothes form a layer. They are a protective layer for one's skin. The unconscious seeks to protect itself in two ways, both physically and psychologically. The physical layer of protection for the unconscious is the skin, physical body, and sensory organs. The psychological layer of protection for the unconscious is the conscious mind. These concepts of physical and psychological protection have their differences, but at the same time, they cannot be separated. The unconscious mind is inextricably tied to the vital organs. They are both the same entity. So when one refers to the unconscious mind or vital organs, one is really referring to both, but for the sake of describing both aspects of this mind and body dualism, when one refers to the unconscious mind, one is referring to the psychological

component and when one refers to the vital organs, one is referring to the physical component. When the unconscious performs an action, it is both mind and body that engages, however it is the unconscious that is responsible for the thought, and thus is credited for the action. Understanding this, one can see clothes as an extra physical layer for the vital organs in the same way that one can view a social media profile as an extra psychological layer for the unconscious mind. The way in which the unconscious mind and vital organs protect themselves seem to be through layers, and as one analyzes, one can see that these layers are numerous and varied. At the physical layer, one continues to add more protection the more danger one perceives. So in other words, the colder the weather becomes, the more layers one puts on including coats, jackets, gloves, sweaters, etc. When it is warm out, there is less of a temperature threat and so one feels more comfortable with fewer layers. Or at least one does on a physical level. Americans are aware that the onset of summer causes millions to panic about their physical appearance as they begin diets and workout routines. The physical and psychological aspects of protection are intertwined. In the winter, one may think that one is only protecting oneself against the cold, but one is also protecting oneself psychologically from judgment and criticism. Of course there are those individuals who flaunt their bodies, feeling that their perfect form needs no protection but this thesis does not focus on them. This thesis is focusing specifically upon those behaviors that align with fetishistic principles. And so although many of people may not be at the level of a full on foot fetish, many people do engage in some behaviors, such as the desire to cover up or to improve appearance for the summer, that are consistent with the logic and principles of fetishism. When one realizes the self-conscious body response that is brought about by the

coming of beach weather, and that clothes are a protective layer against not only the elements but also against criticism, then it is no surprise that nudity is typically a characteristic of intimacy. In a way, intimacy is nudity. Intimacy is an unprotectedness. But it is more than just the physical body being unprotected by a layer of clothing. Intimacy is the removal of both psychological and physical layers and barriers. Intimacy is the point at which the unconscious allows itself to interact with the outside world without the mediation and protection of the conscious mind. If the conscious mind is a barrier to the unconscious mind, then absolute intimacy would be pure unconscious expression and interaction. However absolute intimacy, or absolute anything really, is too abstract to describe with a concrete example, and perhaps there isn't one. But one can understand intimacy not as the binary difference between protection and no protection, but one can see intimacy as the amount of protection a person has against the outside world. I would imagine that at a certain level of protection removal, perhaps becoming naked, or perhaps speaking to an individual about sensitive topics such as childhood memories, traumatic events, or deep passions, one can say that a person has engaged in intimacy. Intimacy is a personal experience and the level will vary for different individuals. A person can be physically intimate while emotionally distant and vice versa. However one can say that in a general sense, there is a level such as being fully clothed and closed off to conversation that is clearly not a level of intimacy. Intimacy begins with the decision to let one's guard down either physically, psychologically, or both, and from there, once a person has started to let her guard down; it is only a matter of how much of the conscious layers of protection that one is able to remove until perhaps he or she has reached a state of absolute intimacy. Seeing intimacy in this way, one can acknowledge

that in the use of a Facebook profile, one is experiencing an absence of intimacy. A Facebook profile provides an individual with both the ultimate physical and psychological control. It is an almost impenetrable shield. This nearly flawless shield against the outside world is a clear sign that intimacy has been lost. There a large fear and protection motivation present in the creation and maintenance of a profile. The barrier of the profile allows the individual the ability to protect against all threats.

The second characteristic of the social media fetish is the substitution of the actual life lived in the real world that may be more dangerous for a virtual life that is safer and more stable. The person substitutes for the absence of intimacy by instituting greater mechanisms of control through the social media profile. For example, when creating a Facebook page, the individual is the one that is in control of what pictures one posts and allow oneself to be tagged in. This protection is almost perfect because other people have the ability to tag an individual in pictures that one may not want to be seen in, or be tagged in publicly. So for a brief period, there is potential danger. However as soon as a person realizes that one is tagged, one can immediately untag oneself. In terms of one's profile pictures though, one is in absolute control. On Facebook, each user selects one photo to represent oneself to the world and online community. Each time a user selects a new profile picture, the previous profile picture is added to an album titled Profile Pictures. This way, people can trace back to see all of the moments one has selected to represent oneself over time. Recall the fear of judgment a person might have at the beach in the summer time. With the ability to only choose those pictures that one believes are the most attractive and acceptable for the world, the danger of criticism is reduced to the threat of a negative comment on the picture. And even this is not much of a threat. Just

like being tagged in a picture that one does not like, if a person comments negatively on a picture that one does like, one also has the ability to delete that comment. Plus, a person typically receives a notification that goes directly to a mobile smart phone that the person likely carries at all times, so one will immediately be able to rectify and delete a negative comment. Or also, if the person is swayed by the negative comment, one has the option to delete the picture entirely from the album. But, it is unlikely that too many negative comments will penetrate a person's Facebook. Because before a person even has the ability to comment on one's Facebook, you must accept that person as your friend. So the only people that have access to one's pictures, statuses, and other content are those to whom you have given permission. And even if one does accidentally accept the friend request of a hidden enemy, there are the options of unfriending that person as well as blocking that person. If one unfriends a person, that person may still be able to message one and see some of one's content. When one blocks a person, they are completely shut out of one's Facebook life. This is almost similar to the binding of trauma. A person can be blocked as a way to remove that person from one's life and thoughts, however that person's name will always be present on a list of blocked accounts, thus creating a blocking bind. Of course, there are some individuals who are not paying much attention to the security settings of their pages. Some are reckless with their Facebook profiles just as some live reckless lives. In fact, those who live reckless lives often post them recklessly to Facebook and this can become a problem for employment. A boss does not want to hire a person when the first image to appear when his name is googled is him half naked in an inflatable pool filled with green Jell-O as his friends hold his feet in the air so he can do a keg stand while simultaneously taking a hit of a joint. One cannot say that

these type of people are definitely not Facebook fetishists, just because they are not exhibiting caution. In some cases, they may be fetishists afflicted with stupidity. They may be careless or not realize the dangers. In fact, it seems quite logical that a person posting these types of pictures to the Internet is not considering them a potential danger, for whatever reason. But it is the fact that these individuals are continuously posting pictures of themselves and maintaining these profiles that is indeed a behavior that falls in line with fetishism.

It is the continued maintenance marked by hours of use per week that qualifies Facebook under the third characteristic of the fetish, which is fixation. Most people do not just use Facebook sometimes. The feature that individuals typically spend the most time absorbed in is their News Feed. The News Feed is a compilation of the activity of your Facebook friends. This is different than notifications in that while notifications are alerts about events that are specifically related to the individual using the account. The notifications present themselves in the form of a little red blip at the top of the page containing the number of notifications you have missed while you were away. People often experience a feeling of excitement when seeing this blip because it means something related to them has happened and become discouraged when they do not see it, as it means that they are not in the spotlight. The News Feed is information about anyone one is friends with as well as posts from any pages that you have liked. One can read conversations that other people have had on their walls. One can see pictures that have been posted as well as the comments. One can subscribe to pages that fill one's Feed with funny pictures, inspirational quotes, cat memes, hard news, entertainment, and just about anything else one can think of. While using the News Feed, if the user sees a status that

one does not want to see, one can hide that status from his Feed. Although the status has not been deleted for others to see, it has been eliminated from the stream of information of the primary user. This is a tremendous amount of control. When one is in the real world, one often cannot control the information that is coming one's way. When one is in school, one is forced to learn what one is taught. When one is in social environments, if one hears a conversation one does not want to hear, one does have the option of walking away, but if one does not walk away then one can only attempt to tune it out, but will still probably still pick up words here and there. With the News Feed, the user does not have to move at all. The user does not have to change a single aspect of what one is already doing. The only task required is the click of a button that says hide and the unwanted sight is completely gone from the perception of the user. In some situations, the user might want to completely hide all content from a certain friend. In this scenario, the user may not want to delete one's friend because one does not want to hurt one's friend's feelings. One does not want his friend to see that he has been deleted. But one simply just can't stand seeing another of his friend's posts about how well LeBron James plays basketball. So without hurting one's friend's feelings and without creating any real world conflict, one can hide all of the person's content from his Feed.

Recently, Facebook has adapted an interface called the Facebook Timeline. Now, Facebook has literally become a virtually timeline of a person's life. If one enters one's birthday into the website, then one's timeline begins with one's birth date accompanied by a generic unisex icon image of a blue baby in a diaper. If one enters the location of one's birth, the site provides a G.P.S. mapping image of the location. With this Timeline feature, a person has complete control of the story that they are telling about themselves

form birth to death. When one talks about the unconscious becoming injured by wounds that the conscious mind cannot protect it from, one is talking about injuries to one's psychological concept of oneself. In one's mind, one also has a timeline. This timeline of one's life, being that it is stored within one's memories, is controlled and managed by the unconscious. Similarly to the Facebook Timeline, one does not have a full account of one's life. One does not have a complete perspective. In fact, one forgets many more days than one remembers. Out of 365 days in a year, most people have explicit memories of less than 100 and maybe even less than 50 days. So in the same way that with one's Facebook profile one is consciously selecting the story one wants to tell and what one wants people to see, the unconscious mind is deciding what it wants to remember, what it wants to allow one to be conscious of sometimes, and the ways in which one's past memories affect one's present behavior in ways of which one is not conscious. Your unconscious mind and the way that it records one's psychological timeline also does not include the perspectives and thoughts of the people around one, as well as concepts that one may not have fully understood at younger ages. For example imagine a five-year-old girl having what to her is a traumatic experience where her mother will not buy her chocolate at the supermarket. The girl may remember this event as a time when her mother betrayed her or acted against her. If the event causes enough emotion, while the girl may consciously forget this event, she may hold an unconscious grudge against her mother, and might not be as generous with her throughout the rest of her life. This is the way one's unconscious mind works, affecting one's current behavior based on previous experiences that one may not even remember. But if one were to know more of the story and see that the mother truly wanted to buy her daughter the chocolate but could not

because she was already struggling to buy basic groceries, then one would realize that the little girl's perspective is skewed. And certainly, if the little girl were to find this out when she were older, she might as well realize that her mother was doing her best. However one is not often reminded of the events of one's childhood. One is not often aware of the motivations behind one's behavior and their potential associations to one's past. The decisions that one makes subconsciously under traumatic circumstances, especially during the early formative years of childhood, are great influencing factors upon one's behavior and characteristics later in life. It is possible that even if when the little girl grew up her mother did tell her of the event, and even if she did indeed forgive her and understand, that her behavior towards her mother still may not change because of how deeply rooted the binding of the traumatic event may be. A conscious forgiving of the event may not be powerful enough to undo the intense psychic binding of a trauma.

When one looks at a Facebook Timeline, one must realize that to an extent, one's Facebook Timelines is a reflection of one's internal personal unconscious timelines. One's Facebook Timelines is the pieces of one's unconscious timeline that are safe enough for the public to see, thus becoming a conscious timeline. They are the pieces that one grasps and understand. But neither of these timelines are objective timelines of a person's life. Both the unconscious timeline and the Facebook Timeline are selectively constructed. They must both pick and choose what to leave out. Since both are selectively constructed, they can be challenged. They are insecure and unstable. They are so highly subjective that any outside influence can potentially alter one's internal experience. For example, a man can believe that he is handsome, but if his conscious mind and will are not strong, he may change his own perception of himself due to a comment from a

woman who told him that he was ugly, or possibly even just rejected him. That is why one is not fully aware of one's own unconscious timeline. The unconscious identifies that timeline with itself. As far as the unconscious knows, it is the collection of its experiences. If those experiences are challenged, the unconscious may question its very being, it may question itself and its perception of reality to the point of shock. A person may collapse psychologically, becoming depressed, if his unconscious perception of both himself and of life as a whole has been shaken. Knowing this, one can see how the creation of a timeline that one is entirely in control of and entirely aware of would be advantageous to the protection of one's unconscious.

The unconscious wants to be in control of who and what it is. The way that this translates to Facebook is that people use Facebook to start cataloging all of their memories. People begin to take pictures of what they are eating and post them to Facebook. They take pictures of themselves at concerts, sporting events, and shows. People take pictures of themselves when they are at parties, in the house, with friends, alone, at a store, trying on clothes, flexing in the mirror, etc. In just about any situation, there is probably a group of people who are taking pictures to upload to Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter's Twit Pic. But what's strange about this event is that these people are taking these pictures and uploading to qualify that they are at the event and are experiencing, and yet in the act of uploading, they are missing the event. As people set up their dinner for a photo shoot, it is getting cold, and thus may not even taste as good as it looks. Facebook actually has an adaptation for their mobile application that allows a user to "Check-In" to a location. What this means is that when a person is out in the world at a bar, school, restaurant, salon, baseball game, supermarket, etc., one has the ability to use

a G.P.S. feature that proves to the other people that a person was indeed where he said he was. However in order to use this feature, it is a similar problem with taking pictures, in that one must spend time typing in his location. One must also make sure that one is in an area that is receiving service or wi-fi so that one can send the picture out to the Internet. The major absence of Facebook is intimacy; however there are other absences involved with Facebook as well, such as this absence from real life. It is a tradeoff. People trade their living moments for dead representations of them. One cannot attain these dead representations of one's life without trading actual living moments. The phone does not automatically update when a person reaches his location. Nor does the device take pictures for itself as the individual enjoys the experience. In order to post an affirmation of absence and life on the Internet, one must absolutely and necessarily transmute living and intangible moments into dead and tangible representations. These memories, or pictures that represent memories, become fetishized collections, similar to the hoarded and dead items of commodity fetishism. One is once again presented with the shift from being to having and from having in to appearing. The pictures are more tangible than memories, and yet they are still not as tangible as the objects of the commodity fetish. Of course, with these online pictures, there is the option to print them out into pictures that can actually be touched and held and passed around, however most people don't even do this. Typically these pictures that people take are for the sole purpose of posting to Facebook for the sole purpose of being seen by the people that they are friends with and are linked with. This is a clear mark of the transition from having to appearing of which Baudrillard speaks. In the past, the goal of this type of cataloging life fetish might have manifested itself in the form of a physical photo album. This way one could have the

photo album to remember the events one has tried to capture. With the photo album, there is also not so much emphasis on the people that are going to see it. Of course with a photo album, one ends up showing people and looking at them with one's friends sometimes. However they are not always available and they are not constantly updating. When one takes pictures for a photo album, one does not know for a guarantee that the photo will be seen. Before there were digital cameras, there wasn't even that guarantee that the picture would develop. With these complications to the earlier picture taking of photo albums, there is necessarily less focus on the appearance of the pictures and who will see them as much as it is a personal scrap booking to be shared with close family and friends that will actually enter the house. That is another factor. Even when a photo album is displayed, it is not typically displayed to complete strangers as a photo album usually resides in a person's home and relative strangers and acquaintances typically do not enter our homes. So when one are thinking of how one will appear in the pictures, one is not taking into account the critique of those who are on the outer fringes of one's social circles, and thus might have different judgment and criticism criteria than closer friends and relatives. So with this new expanded audience of the Facebook and other social media forms that allow users to post their pictures to the hundreds or maybe thousands of people that they have accepted friend requests from. This clear shift from the emphasis on having to appearing is a major criteria that gives assurance that social media is actually an evolved form of the fetish.

Debord talked about the ideas of the marketplace and of the mainstream media. Baudrillard talked about the idea of simulated reality and the societal shift from having to appearing. In Facebook, there is a combination of both Debord's separation through the

mainstream media and marketplace as well as Baudrillard's simulated reality of appearances. In regards to the marketplace and mainstream media, Facebook brings the marketing and advertising directly to you and even caters to you. When users log in to Facebook and create their profiles, they, "like" what they find interesting, and approve of. The "like" button is a button in the forms of a thumbs up that can be pressed to signify what a person does and does not like, as well as to increase the amount of information from that source that appears in the user's News Feed. Simultaneously, Facebook is sending this information about the bands, television shows, products, etc., that you are "liking" to advertisers who pay for this information. Information that one put out there on the Internet is being exchanged to advertising companies for profit. Of course this is a concern on the level of privacy, but it also makes it so that every single advertisement one sees on Facebook is geared directly towards oneself. Although the majority of Facebook is targeted towards the appearing fetishistic characteristic of Facebook, there is also the component of this advertising focused on the having characteristic. Although society is shifting from having to appearing, people have not yet overcome having, and so this component is still a part of Facebook. Also, even as society moves into the focus on appearances, there are people who will move faster and slower. Facebook caters to all fetishistic audiences. It caters to those who are just beginning their transition and are heavily focused on having as well as those who are further along in the transition and pay more attention to the pictures they post and the way that their profile looks instead of on the items that they have.

This type of marketing also intensifies the separation caused by the spectacle. In the example of the spectacle, one saw the mall as a type of modern day marketplace. In the

mall, people can at least actually see and interact with each other. Though they may be separated by their different focuses and by the stores in which they are shopping in and the levels of their income, there is still a place where all of these individuals must intersect. Facebook is only the appearance of where individuals intersect. Although all of its user can say they are a part of Facebook, with all of the ways that Facebook can be customized, it is impossible that two people will have the same Facebook. There may be some similarities between people's Facebooks, especially among groups of friends, and so they are guaranteed to see many of the same posts, comments, and other shared content. Of course they can, this is the audience one performs for. But in terms of the pages that one are "liking" and the content that appears on our Feed from these "liked" pages, one are having entirely different experiences of this world. Also, since one is being marketed to directly, the products one sees will be different from those who have different interests. This is only part of the separation. The biggest factor of marketplace separation that is caused by Facebook is the ability to not only be advertised to online, but also to use Facebook as a virtual marketplace. This way, one is not even actually leaving one's house. One does not even have to get dressed. One is able to order products naked from our room, and just wait for them to get to our houses. If one clicks a product link on Facebook, it will usually take one to a page where one is directly presented with the option to buy the product. Depending on the website, this purchase may even be immediate. Sites such as Amazon.com provide users with the option to set up shipping and billing information at a given time so that at all points in the future, users can use one click to complete an entire purchase without wasting time entering the same information every single time. One notices a separation even with an actual marketplace, but with a

virtual one, one is confirming Debord's position that, "The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images," (4). When one purchases products in a virtual marketplace, one becomes a mediated image. One is not acting in person whatsoever, but rather purely mediating through not only an image, but also a cornucopia of images, all of which one have personally pre-selected. If one is merely mediated by images, then one can certainly say that there is a large absence, that being the absence of one's entire person and body. Even when one uses Facebook to talk to others, one is devoid of all body language communication as well as one's tone. According to a 2006 article from the *New York Times*, "Albert Mehrabian, a pioneer researcher of body language in the 1950's, found that the total impact of a message is about 7 percent verbal (words only) and 38 percent vocal (including tone of voice, inflection, and other sounds) and 55 percent nonverbal," (Pease, and Pease). Talk about absence. When one is communicating through Facebook, one are reducing our communication to that of only words, which one can see is just 7 percent of content, while the other 93 percent of the intended communication is lost entirely. This is reminiscent of the zombie meme that one discussed earlier. One is being reduced to one's most basic components. If one uses these web sites for hours per day and a lot of what one is doing is reading what people have said and what they have posted, then what one is spending time doing is communicating. Of course one is so attracted the zombie meme on an unconscious level. In the same way that zombies only use the most basic components of their basic function, so does one become like these zombies when one's interpersonal communication loses over 90 percent of its informational content. When one think of this 7 percent effective communication, one can imagine it being similar to

the basic moaning and groaning that retains the tones and body language, but loses the actual words. So perhaps these zombies are actually a step above today's social media fetishist, in that they have only lost the 7 percent that is words where one have lost the 93 percent that forms the rest. Of course one is not actually a step beneath these zombies, as one still retains cognitive function; but the point is that one are not much better than these zombies. The zombies that people favor in mainstream media are really just slightly exaggerated dramatizations of themselves that they project into the world. One can also see how this loss of communication facilitates separation. Most people probably do not even realize how much communication is being lost through a virtual interface. The problem is worse with the more recent generations of students whoa re growing up with this technology. For these younger users who have never learned how to interact without the use of social media interfaces and texting on cell phones, one are seeing a breakdown in communication skills in general. Journalist Sherry Turkle from the *New York Times* wrote an article in April of 2012 in which she analyzed the effects of text based communication as well as interviewing high school students. One of the comments included that of, "A 16-year-old boy who relies on texting for almost everything [who] says almost wistfully, "Someday, someday, but certainly not now, I'd like to learn how to have a conversation," (Turkle). While the remark may be somewhat tongue in cheek, there is a frightening truth hidden within this joke. A recent study performed by Pew Internet and American Life Project titled "Writing, Technology and Teens," demonstrated that, "All that instant messaging and texting teenagers do is creeping into schoolwork. In fact, 64 percent of youngsters ages 12 to 17 have used emoticons, text shortcuts and informal language in school assignments," (Horowitz). With this statistic,

it becomes blatantly apparent that all of this text-based messaging which one engages in both on one's phone and in social media sites is actually affecting intelligence. For 64 percent of students, growing up with technology has altered both their perception and use of grammar. If one can verify that students are translating their texting skills into essays, then when one take a look back at the comment from the 16-year-old who wants to learn to have a conversation and realize that perhaps he actually would have difficulty having a face-to-face conversation. He may actually be so used to texting that he may not be able to interpret non-verbal interpersonal cues and may have moderate to extreme difficulty carrying out an unmediated conversation. Social media has replaced television as the opiate of the masses. Not only is one seeing the zombie meme reflecting society's current zombie state, but just as zombies continue to affect more and more people until there are no survivors, the next generation has been indoctrinated into this zombie culture to the point where they do not even realize that their communication lacks 93 percent of the content of a face to face interaction. People are so focused on the appearance of a conversation that they are losing most of its content.

As one follows this narrative, one realizes that Facebook continually takes the substance out of life at every turn. People are exchanging more and more of the content of their real lives for virtual ones. People are submerging ever deeper into the world of appearance and simulation. Each generation will grow up with exponentially more technology than the last, and thus will be further entrenched within simulation than the last. To quote Robert Kirkman, Author of *The Walking Dead* comic book series, "We're surrounded by the DEAD. We're among them -- and when we finally give up we become them! We're living on borrowed time here. Every minute of our life is a minute we steal

from them! You see them out there. You KNOW that when we die -- we become them. You think we hide behind walls to protect us from the walking dead? Don't you get it? We ARE the walking dead! WE are the walking dead," (Kirkman). It is not the zombies on the show that are the walking dead, it is the zombies on their couches, glued to their television and computer screens. The fetish has evolved. It is no longer a fetish but rather a spreading epidemic that can only be described as the zombie syndrome.

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