A critique of social networking services within the public sphere of the 21st century

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by

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is the product of my independent research carried out under the guidance of my supervisors. The thesis has not been submitted or presented, either in whole or in part, for the award of any degree in any university or institution of learning. I further declare that all anti-plagiarism rules have been complied with and all sources consulted or referred to have been duly acknowledged as appropriate.

Signed

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A Critique of Social Networking Services within the Public Sphere of the 21st Century

Introduction

Are the social networking services (SNS) and social media platforms of the contemporary era (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Messenger, WhatsApp and YouTube) proving to bolster and invigorate what one may regard as the contemporary — digitalised — public sphere of the 21st century, along with the denizens of the digital age who are now required to operate therein? Alternatively, are these platforms — that are no doubt highly sophisticated and impressive in terms of both their technological capabilities and planetary scope — somehow managing to undermine the capacity for effective, emancipatory and meaningful engagement? It is the primary intention of this critical investigation to explore this multifaceted, and, no doubt, pressing matter.

The hypothesis of this particular investigation is rooted in the firm conviction that social networking services, social media platforms and the vast array of digital communicational technologies[1] that facilitate the functionality of such platforms, have invariably brought about an unprecedented amount of change and transformation to contemporary society. It can be argued that such change/transformation has evinced itself primarily with regard to how it is that the individual now chooses to interact, communicate and engage with those around him/her, along with how they now opt to access/acquire information (Jackson, (2008); Turkle (2011); Kaufmann (2012) and Bauman and Lyon (2013)). Furthermore, it can also be argued that these technologies have managed to have a significant impact on the actual manner in which information is now compiled, delivered and retrieved - whereby vast troves of information (in an array of audio-visual formats) are now instantly available with the mere click of a button/touch of a screen (Turkle (2011); Fuchs (2014); Morozov (2013); Stiegler (2016); Vaidhyanathan (2018) and Zuboff (2019)).

While such changes and transformations are indubitably to be regarded as being remarkable from *a technological perspective*, and while there is certainly an array of potential socio-

[1] The distinction between communicational technologies and communicative potential is based on Habermas's (1992) differentiation between the substantive notion of communicative action as opposed to other generalised and instrumentalised forms of communication (Amiradakis, 2019: 149). More on these matters will be dealt with in Chapter 4 of this investigation.

political and personal benefits that can be attributed to the sense of ease, convenience and efficiency that has accompanied such transformations, it is the contention of this investigation that such impressive technological feats have not — in and of themselves — had the desirable or empowering outcome(s) on the contemporary public sphere that one would, at first glance, assume that they would have. As such, it is the primary aim of this investigation to highlight exactly how and why the public sphere of the 21st century finds itself in a particularly precarious position, along with the individuals who are required to operate therein - as a direct result of the functioning of the various digital communicational technologies that now abound.

In order to provide the reader with some background to this particular topic, and why such an area of investigation is to be regarded as being of immense import for those living within the digitalised domain of the contemporary era, it is the second generation critical theorist, Jürgen Habermas (1991), who provides the reader with a thorough and cogent historical analysis of what the public sphere entails, along with how/why such an arena of deliberation managed to play such a crucial role within the socio-political life of early bourgeois society[2]. According to Habermas's thorough reconstruction, it was the bourgeois public sphere that effectively served as a site where practical reason was institutionalised, through norms of reasoned discourse, in which well-considered argumentation — and not statuses or traditions — was to be decisive (Calhoun, 1992: 2).

It is directly in this regard that Habermas (1991: 27) avers that the bourgeois public sphere may be conceived, above all, as:

> the sphere of private people who come together *as a public* ... *against the public authorities themselves* [emphasis added].

[2] A thorough analysis of the bourgeois public sphere shall be provided for the reader in Chapter 4 of this investigation. At this stage, some introductory remarks will be enunciated so as to elucidate the important link between the Habermasian notion of the public sphere and the digital communicational technologies of the contemporary era.

In light of such a description, one can assert that as it initially operated and functioned, this early instantiation of the modern[3] public sphere was — in principle at least — designed and structured in such a manner so as to allow all members of the public to engage amongst themselves and with the authorities. Such engagement would assume the form of a critical-rational debate, and it would aim to encompass matters pertaining to the general rules and conditions governing society (Kellner, 1997: 2).

As auspicious as such a set of developments was — in terms of the democratising features inherent to the operations of the public sphere itself, along with the critically-informed set of inter-personal relationships that were to develop therein and the sense of self-cultivation that was to arise as a result thereof — Habermas (1991) argues that the institutional and epistemic foundations of the bourgeois public sphere were eventually undermined. According to Habermas (1991: 195), such a process of degeneration occurred through the insidious (and invidious) processes of refeudalisation and colonisation. To put it briefly, these two processes essentially refer to a scenario whereby an array of private entities/interests began, increasingly, to assume public power on the one hand, while the state penetrated the private realm on the other (Calhoun, 1992: 21). According to Habermas's (1991: 161) critical estimation pertaining to this particular matter, such a process culminated in a regressive scenario — democratically speaking — whereby:

> rational-critical debate had a tendency to be *replaced by consumption*, and the web of public communication *unravelled into acts of individuated reception*... [emphasis added].

It is in relation to this situation that Thomassen (2010: 45) argues that the series of 'structural transformations' that Habermas identifies within his reconstruction — which will all be explored in much greater depth and detail throughout the course of this investigation — can effectively be regarded as the decline and disintegration of the (bourgeois) public sphere. In its stead, a more privatised, manipulated and deceptive sphere of engineered and pseudo-deliberation would come into effect.

[3] According to Edgar (2006: 96–100), the utilisation of the term 'modern/modernity' refers to the period of Western history (from roughly the 17th century) broadly categorised in terms of its commitment to the values articulated in the European Enlightenment whereby reason and scientific inquiry were to bring about technological and political progress (Amiradakis, 2016b: 282-283).

Ingram (1987: 118) elaborates upon this rather worrying matter by averring that with the decline and disintegration of the bourgeois public sphere, an unprecedented social pathology came to prevail in modern society. According to Habermas (1987: 113), this social pathology fundamentally pertains to a scenario within the "post-bourgeois" period of society, where a growing number of facets inherent to the individual's lifeworld[4] came to be colonised, manipulated and exploited by private interests. As a result, the public sphere, along with its penchant for promoting a public forum for self-cultivation and critical-rational discourse, was effectively neutralised - ultimately succumbing to the instrumentalised and commercial dictates of late capitalist society.

In light of what has been delineated above, it can be averred that Habermas's pessimistic depiction of the post-bourgeois/contemporary public sphere provides one with a bleak overview of how the public sphere degenerated as time elapsed. Thus, from once being an open and accessible platform within which a wide array of individuals could enter, so as to inform themselves about current events and to then discuss pertinent topics pertaining to the socio-political matters of the time, the public sphere effectively devolved into an impotent and ineffectual realm in which mass manipulation and the propagation of prevarication came to prevail. As such, it is easy to see how this critical Habermasian reconstruction can leave one with a feeling of utter despair and dismay (Crossley and Roberts, 2004) - particularly when attempting to locate contemporary sources of emancipatory resistance, so as to revivify those democratising tendencies that Habermas once identified as being inherent (and central) to the public sphere in its original instantiation.

It is in direct relation — and contradistinction — to the aforementioned sentiments of dismay and despair that it becomes very interesting (if not exciting) to note, that within the technologically driven society of the 21st century, there has been a definite resurgence in the debate regarding the role of the public sphere and its re-emergence within a digital, online format (Fuchs, 2014). Thus, if one is to peruse the large collection of contemporary

[4] This Husserlian term will be unpacked and elaborated upon as this investigation progresses. At this introductory point of the investigation, suffice it to say that the notion of the 'lifeworld' is a term coined by Edmund Husserl, and that is employed in this context so as to describe the world that is given to us most immediately: the world-horizon in which we live without making it thematic as a world (Husserl, 1970: 379).

literature, media reports and popular discussions pertaining to the matter of the public sphere and its new-found relation to the various digital technologies of mass communication, one will invariably be able to locate an array of contemporary researchers, Internet enthusiasts and technological tycoons — such as Benckler (2006), Castells (2009), Papacharissi (2009), Sullivan (2009), Ghonim (2011) and Zuckerberg (2017) — who argue that the Internet, and in particular, social networking services and social media platforms, are fostering a comparatively greater degree of political participation, critical communication and democratisation within contemporary society. Augmenting such an auspicious set of claims, Jin and Feenberg (2015: 59) aver that these digital technologies have managed to create a new kind of democratic public sphere which possesses considerable oppositional and emancipatory potential.

Such favourable assertions then seem to both defy and counteract the rather bleak and depressing estimation that Habermas's critical synopsis has elucidated thus far - particularly in relation to the (supposedly) enfeebled and manipulated condition in which the public sphere of the contemporary epoch finds itself. As such, it is these contrary appraisals of modern mass communicational technology, and the democratising tendencies that they (purportedly) possess in relation to the resuscitation of the public sphere, that seem to offer the digital denizen a potential source for democratic revitalisation and reinvigoration. It is directly in this regard that Fuchs (2014: 57) notes that what all of the aforementioned contributions share, is the fact that they all tend to stress — rather emphatically — the transformative, emancipatory and edifying power/potential associated with social networking services, social media platforms and the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) that facilitate digital interaction and online engagement. As such, Fuchs (2014: 57) maintains that all of these propitious promulgations contain philosophically idealistic interpretations or revisions of Habermas's conceptualisation of the public sphere, which has now been firmly placed within a highly technologised and digitalised framework.

While such claims are certainly auspicious and promising in nature, and while they do manage to ignite a certain measure of hope within the contemporary individual who is looking for a viable and legitimate platform upon which meaningful interpersonal and socio-political engagement can take place, Fuchs (2014: 57) asserts that it would be prudent for

the contemporary researcher to refrain from embracing/endorsing such estimations in their entirety. According to Fuchs (ibid.), such a cautionary posture is to be considered as being advisable due to the fact that many of the aforementioned positions — which, in his estimation, can be classified as being 'techno-centric[5]', 'cyber-utopian'[6] or 'Internet-centric'[7] in their orientation (Morozov, 2011: xiii) — tend to focus exclusively on the novelty of electronic/digital communication (and its supposed merits), while often ignoring/overlooking issues pertaining to the public sphere's materiality and the political economy that surrounds it - both of which are to be regarded as being complex sets of issues that Habermas has cogently stressed and detailed within several of his investigations.

In light of the above, Fuchs (2014: 58) maintains that those investigatory approaches that gravitate towards the techno-centric, cyber-utopian or Internet-centric end of the spectrum often tend to avoid asking the complicated — yet crucial — socio-political questions pertaining to matters such as: 'Who is it that owns the dominant Internet platforms of the contemporary epoch?'; 'Who actually owns social media?'; 'How do such digital devices relate to, and contribute to, the highly-technologised form that capitalism has assumed in the 21st century?'; and 'What other interests can such devices and platforms actually serve beyond those that are ostensibly espoused?'. It is as a direct result of such investigatory omissions and theoretical blind spots that Fuchs (2014) asserts that many of the aforementioned positions are inclined to evaluate the phenomena of digital mass communicational technology, along with its relationship to the public sphere of the 21st century, in a superficial and parochial manner. As such, it is these approaches that are then

[5] 'Techno-centrism' is to be understood as an unwavering belief that technological progress would serve to 'ground humanity's advance toward freedom and happiness' (Feenberg, 2008: 2).

[6] Morozov (2011: xiii) defines the notion of 'cyber-utopianism' as: 'a naïve belief in the emancipatory nature of online communication that rests on *a stubborn refusal to acknowledge its downside*' [emphasis added]. According to Morozov (2011: xiii), it stems from the over-optimistic, 'digital fervour of the 1990s', when Western-based technological pundits averred that the Internet could *'boost democratic participation, trigger a renaissance of moribund communities, strengthen associational life, and serve as a bridge*' between different people/communities [emphasis added].

[7] The notion of 'Internet centrism' is closely associated with cyber-utopianism (Morozov, 2011: xv-xvi). However, Internet-centrism is not to be understood as being a set of beliefs; rather, it is: 'a *philosophy of action* that informs *how* decisions, including those that deal with *democracy promotion*, are made and how long-term strategies are crafted. While cyber-utopianism stipulates *what* has to be done, Internet-centrism stipulates *how* it should be done. Internet-centrists like to answer every question about democratic change by first *reframing it in terms of the Internet* rather than the context in which that change is to occur. They are often *completely oblivious to the highly political nature of technology*, *especially the Internet*' [emphasis added] (Morozov, 2011: xv-xvi).

prone to producing synopses that are both limited in scope and one-dimensional in terms of their orientation.

Such a claim is bolstered by Turkle (2011: 242) who argues that what such optimistic — yet inherently myopic — evaluations tend to promote and endorse (often inadvertently), is a 'triumphalist' narrative of contemporary technology that can be regarded as being epistemologically naïve (at best), and politically dangerous (at worst). Thus, echoing the critical concerns articulated above, Turkle (2011) avers that this 'triumphalist' narrative of technology simply tends to overlook or, on a less generous interpretation, refuses to take note of the myriad aspects associated with the contradictory and confounding nature of modern capitalist society. As such, it is this refusal/inability to acknowledge such issues that can then be understood as being immensely dangerous, as it is such an aversion that indubitably culminates in a simplistic, deceptive and misleading reproduction of the subject matter in question. It is as a result of such methodological pitfalls and epistemic shortcomings that many of these investigatory approaches often fail to do justice to the nuanced nature of the phenomena they are intending to explore and come to terms with.

According to Fuchs (2014: 58), it is in light of these concerns that 'serious challenges' have been posed to the techno-centric, cyber-utopian and Internet-centric positions as articulated above. Such challenges can be said to have arisen from the fact that the aforementioned concerns essentially compel the contemporary critical researcher to take note of — and integrate — a much wider, materialist understanding of the public sphere, along with the various socio-historical conditions in which such a sphere is located. Furthermore, such concerns also demand that the contemporary researcher return to Habermas's original conceptualisation of the public sphere, which explicitly incorporates matters pertaining to the political economy into its analysis and evaluation.

Based upon what has been delineated above, many contemporary critical media researchers — such as Kellner (1989), Jackson (2008), Dean (2009), Turkle (2011), Morozov (2013) and Zuboff (2015) — argue that it is such a revised course of investigatory action that can (and should) serve to inform the theoretical, epistemological and methodological foundations upon which a critical analysis of social networking technologies, along with

their complex relation to the contemporary public sphere, can be undertaken. According to these theorists, such a multifaceted and nuanced investigatory approach should (hopefully) allow one to ascertain whether or not these communicational devices are indeed to be regarded as being the digital liberators of the contemporary public sphere as some commentators claim them to be, or, alternatively, if they pose one of the greatest threats to democracy in the 21st century (Vaidhyanathan, 2018).

Based on the above, it is the intention of this investigation to critically assess whether or not social networking services, and the social media platforms upon which they operate, are able to create, fortify and actualise a digitalised instantiation of the public sphere as originally posited by Habermas (1991). This will be done by taking into account the myriad factors — as mentioned above — that may potentially serve to influence/inhibit/invigorate the development of such a situation.

In order to effectively achieve this overarching outcome, in Chapter 1, this investigation will firstly aim to position Habermas's philosophical undertakings within the broader corpus of work in which they originally emerged i.e. within the field of (early) Critical Theory as initially formulated and developed by Max Horkheimer and the Institute for Social Research (Bonham, 2015: 1). This particular facet of the investigation will therefore endeavour to reconstruct Horkheimer's (2002: 198 - 199) novel vision of creating a 'critical theory of society' which was inherently founded upon an interdisciplinary epistemological framework, grounded in historical materialism, with a dialectical methodology guiding its investigatory pursuits. Furthermore, as shall be evinced throughout the course of the opening chapter, it will be explicated how it is that Horkheimer's nuanced investigatory approach — which no doubt influenced and shaped Habermas's outlook — ultimately sought to promote the sentiments of human emancipation and liberation in circumstances of domination and oppression. This was primarily to be achieved via the aid, pursuit and promotion of reason itself (Abromeit, 2011: 163). As such, Chapter 1 will aim to highlight exactly what it is that Critical Theory as an investigatory paradigm entails, and how it is that such a paradigm came into being, along with why it is that such a paradigm is still worthy of continued exploration and implementation.

Chapter 2 of this investigation will then seek to elucidate what it is that Horkheimer and Adorno's (1997) multifaceted and critical response towards modern society, technology and the rise of monopoly capitalism entails as articulated within *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Furthermore, it will be explicated how it is that, running through the entire course of their critique, there is the "golden thread" of what they deem to be the emergence of a highly corrosive and uncritical form of instrumental rationality that has come to pervade nearly all facets of contemporary life. For Horkheimer and Adorno, it is the manifestation of such phenomena that has ultimately inhibited and truncated the possibility of liberation and autonomy from emerging within modern society - regardless of its technological and scientific achievements (Villa, 2007: 18; de Melo-Martin et al., 2011: 205).

It is in this regard that Chapter 2 will also aim to highlight — via the aid of the Culture Industry thesis — Horkheimer and Adorno's incisive argument pertaining to the technologies of mass-reproduction and cultural dissemination which were in full operation during the early/middle periods of the 20th century, including the cinema, radio and newspaper. According to their critical evaluation, such technologies have been designed (rather duplicitously) so as to operate in direct accordance with the dictates of monopoly capital, and as such, they are inherently tainted/corrupted by the wider socio-economic system in which they are required to function. Thus, rather than serving an edifying/liberating purpose for those individuals residing within the early/middle periods of the 20th century, Horkheimer and Adorno believe that such technologies ultimately serve to subdue, pacify and lull the modern individual into a passive state of acquiescence and an abject acceptance of the status quo. The reconstruction of such a critical appraisal will aim to provide this investigation with an introduction as to how it is that many of the early critical theorists understood the emergence of mass culture, mass communicational technology, and the insidious and invidious effects that such phenomena were to have upon society at large.

Within the latter sections of Chapter 2, Adorno and Horkheimer's (1997) rather dystopian — yet illuminating — insights will then be augmented and supplemented by the critical works of Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm. This is due to the fact that while both Marcuse and Fromm share many of the critical views of their colleagues at the Institute for Social

Research, they nevertheless manage to bring their own unique, and nuanced contributions to the foreground. Consequently, Marcuse's (2002) slightly updated and revised notion of 'one-dimensionality' as explicated within *One-Dimensional Man* — which builds upon many of the preceding insights of Horkheimer and Adorno (1997) — will be explored in direct relation to what Marcuse perceives as being a growing sense of conformity and instrumentalisation within the second-half of the 20th century, as a direct result of society's technological progressions and developments.

Marcuse's insights will then be supplemented by Fromm's (2013) psychologically motivated notion of 'automaton conformity' (as it appears in *Escape From Freedom*). Via the aid of this notion, Fromm attempts to identify and describe what he regards as being the oppressive psychological mechanisms at work — within the context of the 20th century — which effectively serve to exacerbate and accentuate the dire state that he, and his fellow critical theorists, believe modern society to be in. Fromm's contribution pertaining to this matter can thus be said to provide the critical observations of his colleagues with a very useful and insightful socio-psychological framework within which the phenomena of mass culture, mass communicational technology and instrumentalised rationality can then be placed. In this regard, it is the overarching intention of Chapter 2 to provide this investigation with a firm basis pertaining to the views of the 'first generation' of critical theorists - with particular reference to the rise of modernity, mass communicational technology and mass culture.

In direct relation to the overtly sceptical and wary views that Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and Fromm have provided in the second chapter of this investigation, it will be the aim of Chapter 3 to identify and expand upon a much-needed "counter-balance" with regard to the subject matter of mass culture, and its associated technologies of reproduction/communication. Thus, as shall be evinced in the third chapter of this investigation, such a counter-balance will be introduced into the investigative foray of this particular study by elaborating upon the work of Walter Benjamin, with a particular — though not exclusive — focus on his idiosyncratic views contained within his groundbreaking essay titled: 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. The reason why this course of investigation will be pursued resides in the fact that it is Benjamin (1939) who aptly manages to open up a much-needed dialogue with regard to the positive impact that

mass culture and its associated communicational technologies can potentially have upon society.

As shall be argued throughout the course of Chapter 3, Benjamin manages to achieve such an outcome by effectively highlighting what it is that he identifies as being both liberating and edifying in relation to the reproductional/communicational technologies of photography and film. He does so by drawing the reader's attention to the immense amount of revolutionary potential that is contained within these mediums of reproduction, along with the illuminating impact that such technologies are able to wield upon the sensory apparatus of the individual. Consequently, it is Benjamin's firm conviction that these reproductional/communicational technologies are ideally suited for raising the levels of critical and revolutionary consciousness within the mass public of the (early-mid) 20th century.

In light of Benjamin's contrary estimation of the socio-technological phenomena in question, it will be argued that a definite dialectical tension exists between the various theorists that have been considered thus far. This is to be regarded as being of immense import with regard to the current study — from both an historical and an epistemological perspective — as it vividly highlights the necessity of appreciating and taking into consideration the array of conflicting positions pertaining to the emergence of mass culture and its associated technologies of mass communication. As shall be argued over the course of this entire investigation, such a conflict-ridden sentiment continues to resonate within the present-day debates regarding the variegated role that social networking services and social media technologies are playing within contemporary society, along with the myriad effect(s) that such communicational devices are having upon its denizens. Benjamin's position regarding what has been delineated above can thus be said to provide this study with a theoretically nuanced approach so as to allow one to truly appreciate the conflict-riddled nature of the phenomena in question.

Moving forward into the latter half of the 20th century, Chapter 4 of this investigation will aim to examine the views of Jürgen Habermas (as introduced above), who has spent a great deal of his professional career exploring the notion of the public sphere, along with how it is

that contemporary culture (and its associated technologies of communication) have impacted upon it. As will be evinced throughout the course of Chapter 4, the argument and analysis that Habermas (1991) provides for the reader — with a particular focus on *The Structural Transformation of the Bourgeois Public Sphere* — can be considered as being a carefully laid-out synopsis pertaining to the development, transformation, and degeneration that the public sphere has undergone.

Within this detailed overview and reconstruction, Habermas (1991) manages to illuminate how it is that the public sphere (in its early, modern instantiation) emerged within 'bourgeois society' as a direct result of a very particular set of interconnected and interdependent social, political and economic factors. It is within such a delicately poised setting, Habermas avers, that the public sphere came to function — albeit for a short time — as an effective platform for socio-political engagement and personal cultivation. Habermas then goes on to argue that due to a series of 'structural transformations' that occurred within the public sphere itself — themselves connected with a wide array of socio-economic and political developments unfolding at that stage in European history — the bourgeois public sphere entered into a period of decline and disintegration, ultimately finding itself within what he believes to be an emaciated state, which has continued well into the course of the early 21st century.

What is very important with regard to Habermas's thorough analysis and reconstruction of the public sphere, is that upon a close reading of *The Structural Transformation of the Bourgeois Public Sphere*, one is certainly able to discern and appreciate how it is that Habermas makes a concerted attempt to acknowledge and consider the dialectical tension — pertaining to the phenomena in question — that his predecessors at the Frankfurt School had already incorporated in their respective analyses. Habermas's careful investigation regarding the modern public sphere, along with the various transformations that it underwent, can then be regarded as providing this investigation with an updated, and finely balanced understanding of the changes that modern society has experienced over the course of the past few decades, along with how these changes and transformations have impacted directly upon the public sphere and its (in)ability to function as an effective domain for socio-political engagement and personal cultivation.

The fifth, and final chapter of this study will attempt to bring all of the preceding views — along with the necessary inclusion of several updated, revised and contemporised perspectives — into a critical conversation with one another, in order to apply them interpretively to the highly technologised and digitalised domain of the 21st century. This will be done in order to ascertain whether or not the contemporary communicational technologies in question are indeed able to create and facilitate the functioning of a healthy and effectual public sphere.

Thus, in Chapter 5, we will initially explore how there has been a growing merger between contemporary society's technologies of mass communication and the economic form(s) that capitalism has managed to assume as a direct result of such technological progressions. In order to achieve this outcome, the insights of certain contemporary critical thinkers will need to be considered, including those of: i) Kellner (1989) and his notion of 'Techno-Capitalism'; ii) Fuchs (2008) and his views pertaining to the emergence of what he defines as 'Transnational Informational/Global Network Capitalism'; iii) Dean (2009) and her critical commentary pertaining to 'Communicative Capitalism'; and finally, iv) Zuboff (2015; 2019) and what she dubs as being the rise of 'Surveillance Capitalism'.

This course of investigatory action will be pursued in order to highlight how it is that, over the course of the past 40 years or so, as a direct result of the tremendous techno-scientific developments that have occurred, modern society has become increasingly dependent and reliant upon an array of information-communication technologies within the domains of both work and leisure. As a result of this phenomenon of increasing techno-dependence/reliance of individuals in contemporary society and the rising levels of interconnectivity between the realms of labour and leisure, there has been an insidious — and well-concealed — assimilation between these ICTs (that now possess sophisticated 'informating' capabilities so as to track, record and assess the behavioural patterns of their users) and the economic/commercial operations of society.

These critical insights will then be utilised to explore how contemporary social networking services, social media platforms, and the various ICTs that facilitate their operationality, have been programmed in such a manner so as to harness and exploit the attentional

capacities of the modern individual to ensure that they remain fixed — or "attentively tethered" — to these devices. As shall be disclosed, such a sense of electronic enthralment has been induced on the part of these devices, via the sophisticated means of algorithmic intervention and content manipulation, in order to create a situation in which a process of permanent data surveillance can be sustained, and to a certain extent, to allow for the user's behaviour and actions to be modified/manipulated so as to accord with the instrumentalised dictates of the capitalist milieu in which they operate. This set of critical outcomes will then provide the reader with a direct link to the introductory section of Chapter 5, which is aimed at explicating just how it is that the system of contemporary capitalism has evolved and adjusted itself in direct accordance with the technological capabilities of these modern communicational technologies. As a result thereof, these new technologies are not to be regarded as being either innocuous or neutral in terms of their orientation.

In order to effectively achieve this set of critical outcomes and to ensure that the aforementioned links are both illuminated and fortified, the views of Stiegler (2011; 2016), Vaidhyanathan (2018) and Zuboff (2019) will prove to be invaluable, as they provide a great deal of insight into the situation as it currently stands. It is thus these theorists that manage to highlight how it is that, as a direct result of the communicational devices that the digital denizen so willing embraces (to the extent that these devices have now become a central component of his/her existential makeup), there has been a systematic undermining of the individual's ability to engage in effective interpersonal communication, along with the opportunity for a substantive sense of creative personal cultivation to unfold. It is the insights of these contemporary theorists, along with those that have been considered within the preceding chapters of this investigation, which will then manage to illuminate for the reader exactly why and how it is that these contemporary communicational devices — in their current format — are actually undermining an effectual and emancipatory public sphere from emerging within the digital domains of the contemporary epoch. Furthermore, it is the intention of Chapter 5 to elucidate why a great deal of critical attention needs to be directed towards such socio-technological developments, as it is these very "progressions" that — paradoxically — possess the regressive ability to undermine many of the modern democratic ideals that have taken centuries to develop.

Chapter 1: First Generation Critical Theory and its Applicability in the Age of Social Media[8]

In the much-quoted opening section of their seminal text ([1944]1997: 3), *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno somberly aver that:

> [i]n the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty *yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant* [emphasis added].

What such a dark and damning introductory statement aims to highlight for the reader of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is that within their critical investigation of the Enlightenment, along with its accompanying form of (instrumentalised)[9] rationality as embodied in Western thought, both Horkheimer and Adorno (1997) seek to discover how it is that the supposed progress of modern science, technology, medicine and industry — which promises to liberate people from ignorance, disease, and brutal mind-numbing work — actually ends up facilitating the creation of a world where people willingly swallow fascist ideology, knowingly practise deliberate genocide, and energetically develop lethal weapons of mass destruction (Zuidervaart, 2011).

This incredibly sceptical, if not outright cynical, position is reinforced in Horkheimer's accompanying text titled *Eclipse of Reason* (originally published in 1947 for an English-speaking audience) which, he argues, aims to investigate and critically interrogate the modern concept of rationality that underlies contemporary 'industrial culture' in order to

[8] Certain sections of this chapter have drawn — either directly or indirectly — from several journal articles that were published (by the author of this thesis) during the course of researching/writing this dissertation, namely: Amiradakis, M.J. (2016a), 'Is social networking fostering the fungibility of the Other'; Amiradakis, M.J. (2016b), 'Social networking services: A digital extension of the surveillance state?'; and, Amiradakis, M.J. (2019), 'Habermas, mass communication technology and the future of the public sphere'. Permission has been granted by the relevant and applicable publishers (Taylor and Francis) for the utilisation, inclusion and reproduction of this material within this dissertation (see Appendix A for further details regarding this matter).

[9] More on the notion of 'instrumental rationality' and its applicability to digital communication technology within the 21st century will be thoroughly explored throughout the course of this particular investigation. However, for the purposes of clarification, instrumental rationality — particularly from the perspective of the critical theorists — can be described as a dominating, calculating and reductionist form of reason that seeks to control and exploit all aspects of nature, including humanity, by reducing all elements of nature to their simplest components in order to explain, and thus, control them, without taking into consideration the wider, myriad factors that constitute the phenomena in question (whatever they may be).

discover whether it does not in fact contain unretractable defects that vitiate it essentially[10] (Horkheimer, [1947]2013: v). As such, one can then argue that within both *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *Eclipse of Reason*, both Horkheimer and Adorno ultimately aim to attain a critical understanding as to how it is that modern rationality, as manifested within contemporary industrial society — with all of its supposed technological and scientific 'triumphs' — actually undermines its own purported liberating and emancipatory outcomes/effects.

One could then tentatively argue that it was Horkheimer and Adorno's overarching intention at this stage in their respective academic journeys/careers to limpidly highlight how it is that such a contradictory and self-defeating scenario has come into existence. In Horkheimer and Adorno's view, this is due to the fact that such a disturbing scenario is itself actually founded upon all the modern progressions/advancements that Western Rationality has managed to bring about, and it is these very achievements that actually serve to work against the forces of liberation, freedom and harmony which such ostensible progressions/advancements claim to engender and promote[11].

It is in this critical vein of thought that Horkheimer ([1947]2013: v) claims that the present potentialities of what he refers to as 'social achievement' (including the domains of both science and technology) far surpass the expectations of 'all the philosophers and statesmen who have ever outlined the idea of a truly humane and just society'. Yet, regardless of such positive potentiality, there is nevertheless a universal feeling of fear and disillusionment that prevails upon humankind. In light of this, Horkheimer is of the opinion that the hopes of humankind — which according to his understanding include the idea of a 'reasonable organisation of society that will meet the needs of the whole community' (Horkheimer, [1937] 1972 T & CT: 213) — seem to be farther from fulfilment today than ever. It is due to this that Horkheimer (2013: v) pessimistically proclaims that 'progress' is threatening to nullify the very goal that it is supposed to realise, i.e. the formulation and formation of a

[10] It is as a result of this that *Eclipse of Reason* should therefore be read as a valuable clarification of, and supplement to, many of the key ideas in *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* rather than simply as a repetition, a watering down or even a break with the radicalism of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Kellner, 1989: 101).

[11] According to Adorno ([1973]2004: xix) such a bleak scenario ultimately ends up in the creation of an unavoidable 'negative dialectic' which appears to be both insurmountable and inevitable.

more reasonable and harmonious society, as progressive rationalisation tends to obliterate the very substance of reason in the name of which progress is espoused.

It is in this regard that Horkheimer (2013: v) asserts that even as the technical knowledge (which would include every successive technological and scientific breakthrough that each succeeding epoch brings with it) of contemporary society manages to expand the horizon of the individual's thought and activity, he is nevertheless of the opinion that the modern individual's autonomy along with their ability to resist the 'growing apparatus of mass manipulation' is being progressively undermined. At the same time, Horkheimer pessimistically proclaims that the contemporary individual's power of imagination and independent judgement are all being indubitably corroded with, somewhat ironically, each purported progressive step that society manages to take[12].

Based upon such a damning and dubious set of assertions, Horkheimer goes on to advance the critique that it is in fact the 'technical facilities' (amongst other things) that coincided with the process of enlightenment which have invariably brought about a process of dehumanisation in relation to the general population of contemporary society. It is ultimately such a pessimistic outlook that then allows Horkheimer and Adorno (1997: 35) to caustically conclude — in their customary aporetic fashion — that the curse of 'irresistible progress is irresistible regression'. It is as a direct result of such damning and sweeping statements that *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (and to a somewhat lesser extent *Eclipse of Reason*) is often described as depicting the 'dark side' of Critical Theory that provides one solely with a negative and pessimistic vision of history (Kellner, 1989: 88).

However, it is nevertheless important to note that there is still a residue (however faint) of social optimism that remains within the text. This is made evident by the fact that within *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, both Horkheimer and Adorno begin with a formulation of the dialectic of enlightenment, which then essentially aims to elucidate both its contributions

[12] How 'prophetic' this insight of Horkheimer's really was is made evident from Richard Kearney's (1988) genealogy of the imagination, which is somewhat ambiguously titled *The Wake of Imagination* – that is, either what follows imagination's death, or its possible re-awakening, in an age (postmodernity) when a veritable plethora of images threatens to suffocate people's capacity for imagining.

and its limitations (Kellner, 1989). This is made clear by the following passage which appears within the introductory section of the text:

> The fallen nature of modern man cannot be separated from *social progress*. On the one hand the growth of economic productivity *furnishes the conditions for a world of greater justice*; on the other hand it allows the technical apparatus and the social groups which administer it a *disproportionate superiority to the rest of the population* [emphasis added] (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1997: xv).

It is important — and somewhat unfortunate — to note that such hopeful possibilities contained within the dialectical structure of the enlightenment are not really developed and thought through either in the book itself or in either of the authors' later work (Kellner, 1989: 88)[13]. As such, Kellner (1989: 86) states that within *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the scepticism, reflexivity and negative thinking[14] which made social critique a central part of Critical Theory's theoretical practice, ballooned to epic proportions whereby the current social developments (at that point in history) led both Horkheimer and Adorno to believe that the world was falling into barbarism. It is therefore as a direct result of these caustic, cynical and somewhat 'dead-end' comments, that — in accordance with what Postone and Brick (1993: 216) have noted — the works of both Horkheimer and Adorno took an incredibly pessimistic turn, especially from the 1940s onwards.

This pessimistic response to the state of extant society can be said to have arisen within the works of both Horkheimer and Adorno primarily due to the fact that they were developed at a turbulent point in history which just preceded, and then included, the rise of fascism in Germany, the incredibly dark days of World War 2, along with the unprecedented and unfathomable atrocities that were associated with it (Kellner, 1989: 84). In addition to this, the extended and inescapable shadow that such a disastrous period in world history continued to cast over both theorists essentially compelled their respective philosophies to

[13] Although, in vindication of the two co-authors, it could also be said that at the time there were scant signs of hope for the emergence of a more humane society.

[14] The term 'negative thinking' can be attributed to both Hegel (for whom negation is a driving force in history) and Marcuse ([1964]2002: 128), who, in *One-Dimensional Man* describes it as one of the 'subversive elements of Reason' which aims to critically investigate, critique and ultimately overcome what he perceives as the 'triumph' of one-dimensional reality and thinking associated with contemporary society.

engage in a kind of defensive rearguard action against what they perceived as being the falsity of progress[15]. This can be said to have occurred due to the fact that both theorists believed that such "regressive progress" was intimately connected with the supposed developments of both science and technology and its accompanying form of instrumentalised rationality which, according to their investigations, had come to pervade all forms of Western thought and practice (Schmidt, 1993: 40).

It was therefore during this particular phase in both theorists' careers that their work came to exhibit a tragic pessimism which also marked the theory of modernity that was developed by several German sociologists (including the likes of Tönnies, Simmel and Weber), which can be read as a pessimistic response to the developmental trends of modernity that posit no real hope of reversing the direction of historical development (Kellner, 1989: 100). This position is aptly summed up in Horkheimer and Adorno's damning critique of Western rationality, as evinced within *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which they perceive as being a self-destructive, patriarchal and domineering scientific attitude that came to prevail in the 20th century (and beyond).[16] To compound this dismal and damning outlook, both theorists go on to argue that such a form of rationality is solely geared towards the domination of human beings and nature, with technology acting as the *essence* of such an instrumentalised form of knowledge and domination (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1997: 4). The future of humanity, according to such caustic views, then seems to be bleak at best and damned for eternity at worst.

Bearing these exceedingly negative and dystopian views of both Horkheimer and Adorno in mind, the crucial question that therefore needs to be raised at the introductory stage of this particular investigation — which is explicitly aimed at exploring whether or not the digitalised technologies of social networking and social media possess the ability/potentiality to act as, and facilitate, the effective functionality of the public sphere (in the Habermasian sense) — is: Should the contemporary researcher/theorist, who finds

[15] It is also important to note that Horkheimer and Adorno's condition of being uprooted émigrés coming from a 'high-culture' background and entering a context of popular culture also played a significant part in explaining and understanding their dim views.

[16] This fairly idiosyncratic and nuanced critique will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 2 of this investigation.

himself/herself living in a world that is inundated by a wide array of technological paraphernalia and digitalised communicational platforms, actually turn to the works of these seemingly obstinate and anachronistic technophobes in order to gain an accurate and comprehensive understanding of the phenomena in question?

Exploring and answering this multifaceted question will be the focus of the first chapter of this investigation. As will be highlighted throughout the course of this entire investigation, the (affirmative) response to this question will then effectively serve to emphasise why it is that the critical contemporary researcher should still turn to the critical works of first-generation Critical Theory (and no doubt beyond) in order to scrutinise the possibility/viability of social media as a feasible medium through which a productive, open and democratic public sphere can be created and bolstered. In addition to this, it will also be demonstrated how it is that such an approach (both methodologically and epistemologically)[17] effectively encourages one to introduce additional works, perspectives and discourses from a wide array of other critical thinkers falling beyond the scope of quintessential 'Critical Theory'[18] *per se*, in order to shed some new (and much needed) critical light on the matter of social media technology and its potential to mediate an effective public sphere. As shall be disclosed, such an approach can thus invariably assist

[17] It is important to note that the terms methodology, epistemology and ontology will be employed and utilised several times in this chapter in order to describe Horkheimer's distinctive approach toward Critical Theory as a school of thought and investigation. For the sake of clarification it will therefore prove to be beneficial at this stage of the investigation to provide the reader with a brief characterisation of what each of these terms actually entails. Thus — in a very basic sense — the term ontological refers to that which has to do with the mode of being of something; methodological refers to that which pertains to the clarification and justification of the various methods employed in an investigative endeavour; and epistemology refers to that which has to do with the modes, grounds or conditions, and limits of knowledge itself.

[18] It is in this regard that Bonham's (2016) distinction between 'Critical Theory' and 'critical theory' needs to be introduced and appreciated, in which he indicates that Critical Theory has both a narrow and a broad meaning. Bonham (2016) therefore asserts that, in the narrow sense, 'Critical Theory' designates several generations of German philosophers and social theorists associated with the Frankfurt School (which will be the major focus throughout the course of this investigation, although not exclusively). Bonham (2016) continues by noting that according to these theorists, a 'critical' theory may be distinguished from a 'traditional' theory according to a specific practical purpose: a theory is critical to the extent that it seeks human 'emancipation from slavery', acts as a 'liberating … influence', and works 'to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers' of human beings (Horkheimer, 1972: 246). Due to the fact that such theories aim to explain and transform *all* the circumstances that enslave human beings, many 'critical theories' in the broader sense have subsequently been developed. Very importantly then, in both the broad and the narrow senses, a critical theory aims to provide the descriptive and normative bases for social inquiry aimed at decreasing domination and increasing freedom in all their forms. Thus, while Critical Theory is often thought of narrowly as referring to the Frankfurt School that begins with Horkheimer and Adorno, it can also be argued that any philosophical approach with similar practical aims could be called a 'critical theory'.

one when attempting to create and formulate what Fuchs (2009: 69) refers to as a Critical Internet Theory and what Feenberg (2010: 67) terms a Critical Theory of Technology, which both of these contemporary critical theorists argue is urgently required in our digitalised and technocentric day and age.

1.1) Why turn to Critical Theory to explore and assess social networking technologies?

Whilst attempting to address the main question around which this particular chapter revolves, it is initially important to note that according to Feenberg (2010: 151), he — as a critical thinker who deals extensively with various issues pertaining to technology in contemporary society — is wary of endorsing the aforementioned views of Horkheimer and Adorno concerning both science and technology in their entirety. This is primarily due to their overtly dystopian and pessimistic overtones[19]. However, Feenberg (ibid.) is nevertheless willing to both acknowledge and applaud their meritorious achievements in highlighting the destructive capabilities/potentialities of both science and technology within a modern setting. Feenberg is of this opinion due to the fact that it was the powerful arguments and critiques of Horkheimer and Adorno (amongst others), regarding the ambiguous and often misunderstood role that science and technology have actually played in the development of society in the 20th century (and beyond), which provided the contemporary critical researcher/theorist with what Feenberg dubs to be a useful antidote against a blind, positivist and deterministic faith in inevitable progress.

However, even despite this 'useful antidote', one can nevertheless go on to argue that this very attitude — pertaining to a blind faith in the inevitable progress which both science and technology will invariably bring about — continues to exist until this very day amongst many, if not most individuals in the current age (Morozov, 2013: ix). This is made evident when one is to critically reflect upon the rhetoric and unwavering faith that certain technological pundits and digital tycoons have expressed when discussing the inevitable

[19] Feenberg (1999: 151) refers to such critiques of technology as being substantivist in nature due to the fact that such a critique essentially argues that the 'instrumentality inherent to technology is in itself a form of domination, that controlling objects violates their integrity and distorts the inner nature of the dominating subject'. This critique, according to Feenberg, is similar to that of Heidegger (1977), Jacques Ellul (1964) and a host of social critics who might be described unkindly as 'technophobic'.

progress that 'smart' technologies and science are supposed to bring about for the betterment of humankind within our very day and age i.e. the 21st century.

For example, one need only consider the following techno-idealistic/ideological statement from Eric Schmidt (quoted in Morozov, 2013: ix -x) , Google's executive chairman, when he told an audience of MIT students that:

> Technology is not really about hardware and software any more. It's really about the mining and use of this enormous data to *make the world a better place* [emphasis added].

A further comment worthy of critical reflection is that made by Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, who altruistically proclaims that his company is not focused on the

> primary goal of making money [but rather, making the world] *more open and connected* [and that] there are a lot of really big issues for the world to get solved and, as a company, what we are trying to do is to *build an infrastructure on top of which to solve some of these problems* [emphasis added] (ibid).

In the face of such wildly optimistic and potentially misleading claims pertaining to the social usefulness and 'benevolence' of new digital media and technologies, it is nevertheless important to note that Feenberg and Morozov's appreciative appraisal of the critical views pertaining to the pervasive and idealistic technocratic/technocentric attitude of the 20th and 21st century — as initially highlighted by the likes of Adorno and Horkheimer — is echoed by a wide array of other contemporary theorists and researchers. These individuals include the likes of Jackson (2008), Turkle (2011), Bauman and Lyon (2013), Stiegler (2014), Fuchs (2014) and Berry (2014) (to name but a few), who are all rooted within different academic disciplines - including sociology, psychology, history, media studies, politics and philosophy. While these researchers and theorists are located within a very wide array of academic disciplines, they are all connected by their intrepid attempts to critically assess and evaluate the impact that modern digital technology is having upon society and its inhabitants - and not necessarily for the benevolently motivated benefit(s) that the pundits and tycoons persistently seem to proclaim. One can thus effectively argue that the increase in concern regarding the requirement of critical investigations that need to be directed

towards the new digital (or 'smart') technologies of the 21st society has evinced itself on a relatively vast scale within the various realms of academia.

This is primarily due to the fact that as the wave of online interacting, socialising and communicating continues to spread across the globe at a prolific and unprecedented rate, contemporary scholars from an array of disciplines are currently attempting to come to terms with the tremendous amount of change that has occurred with regard to the communicational and socialising practices of individuals in the 21st century (Vallor, 2012: 185). The need for an increase in critical awareness and investigation pertaining to contemporary communicational and interactive technologies can therefore be seen as being very important as it allows the contemporary researcher to effectively analyse, understand and anticipate the social and ethical consequences of these emerging changes (ibid.). Such a set of exigencies becomes all the more important and crucial because, if one is to follow Moore's Law which states that computing power essentially doubles every 18 months (Berry, 2014: 13), we are now actually at an important juncture in the history of modern technology as the surplus power contained within most contemporary computing technologies is expanding at an unprecedented rate and can therefore be regarded as having enormous social and political implications.

According to Turkle's (2011: 243) analysis of the matter at hand, what such an unprecedented scenario vividly highlights is that there is indeed an imperative need for an amended narrative of technology, whereby the 'Triumphalism Narrative' — which is currently so widely embraced and propagated throughout contemporary society — needs to be confronted and countered with a 'Realistic One' in order to critically elucidate technology's true effects on us whilst also remaining 'impartial' enough so as to describe the situation at hand in an accurate and honest fashion (ibid.). What this therefore implies is that such an amended narrative should fundamentally be aimed at elucidating the various possibilities and benefits associated with the culture of connectivity, as well as possessing the critical insight and distance required in order to effectively gauge the problems and distortions which can be associated with the 'tethered self' (Jackson, 2008: 120) i.e. a self

that finds itself inextricably intertwined with the digital technologies that surround it and in which it is embedded[20].

This then inevitably begs the bigger question as to whether or not one can realistically assert that beyond the sceptical, pessimistic and critical views posited by the first generation of Critical Theory regarding the detrimental effects that science and technology have had (and will continue to have) on humankind, their work actually promotes an open and critical discourse regarding the impact and emancipatory potential of science and technology within contemporary society. One can then push such a critical line of questioning even further and inquire as to whether or not such critical views are still to be regarded as being of value and importance within the contemporary age. In particular, how can the first-generation of Critical Theory assist the contemporary researcher when attempting to investigate, assess and report on the impact that mass communications media and information-communication technologies (ICTs) such as social networking services and social media in general are having upon contemporary society, along with what their potential benefits and pitfalls entail?

In order to effectively address these crucial questions, one needs to initially go back to the theoretical, epistemological and methodological origins of Critical Theory, as envisioned and delineated by Max Horkheimer during the 1920s, 1930s and early 1940s, in order to become fully aware of its nuanced and multifaceted underpinnings along with how it is that such an approach still proves to be highly applicable and useful when investigating our current situation (Fuchs, 2014: 77). In addition to this, it will also prove to be beneficial to highlight what the overarching aims and goals of Critical Theory in its nascent phase entailed, as it is in fact these foundational aspects of Critical Theory which ultimately confirm why such an approach still proves to be of immense value to the contemporary researcher (beyond the critical and cautionary notes that the critical theorists consistently direct towards science

[20] While the term 'inextricable' has been used in this context so as to highlight just how interconnected and in some sense dependent the modern individual finds himself/herself in relation to the various forms of technological paraphernalia that have become part and parcel of contemporary existence, it is crucial to note that being 'tethered' in the sense described above is not to be understood as a necessity of the contemporary self. This very investigation is an attempt at raising our collective critical consciousness about social networking services and social media in general, which is thus necessary for a self that is perhaps, shall we say, connected but not tethered.

and technology). It is in this regard that Bronner (2011: 8) states that the critical theorist of today, who is attempting to grapple and come to terms with the variegated issues facing contemporary society, must first look backward in order to move forward, as it is the early version of Critical Theory which still has much to teach about the issues that confront us in our current day and age, and thus, still has the potential to contribute a great deal to contemporary discussions (Abromeit, 2011: 14).

1.2) The core elements of early Critical Theory

In 1923 the Institute for Social Research (later referred to as the 'Frankfurt School') was founded in Frankfurt, Germany. It was established as the first Marxist-oriented research institute in Germany primarily through the efforts of Felix J. Weil, who is described as being an activist and supporter of radical causes (Alway, 1995: 22). After the premature death of its first director, Karl Albert Gerlach, Carl Grünberg — a self-avowed Marxist — took the helm as the first active director of the Institute. During this phase of its existence, the Institute represented an effort to reappraise and reconstruct Marxist theory in light of changed historical conditions (i.e. in light of the socio-historical changes that occurred since the time of Marx' original writings) (ibid.). For Grünberg, the aim of Marxist-oriented research was thus to discover the causes and laws of social change.

Thus, in a fairly orthodox Marxist fashion, Grünberg operated under the theoretical framework which viewed and evaluated social life (in all its manifestations) as a reflex of the existing economic system, and that the illuminating key to social theory can be found in the laws governing the economic system. The Marxian dichotomy of 'base' and 'superstructure' therefore explicitly guided Grünberg's conceptualisation and understanding of society and how one should come to terms with the underlying causes and laws guiding society's development (and pathologies). Grünberg was therefore committed to the idea that Marxism is at once a self-contained economic theory, a *Weltanschauung* and a method of research[21], and under his directorship, the Institute specialised in empirical and historical

[21] Wiggerhaus (1994: 34) elaborates upon this particular point when he states that as a result of Grünberg's Marxist-oriented research efforts, a situation had been created in Frankfurt which was unique in the German (and not only the German) academic world. This was due to the fact that Marxism and the history of the labour movement could now be studied at university level, and anyone who wished to take a doctorate on topics in these fields could do so without fear of reprisal.

research from the point of view of historical materialism with its object clearly defined as the given concrete historical world (Kellner, 1989:13). However, Grünberg had to stop work in January 1928 following a major stroke which left him both mentally and physically paralysed, and he was therefore forced to step down from the position of directorship (Wiggerhaus, 1994: 34).

As a result of this unfortunate turn of events, Max Horkheimer was named director of the Institute in 1930 and officially installed in January 1931. Since his appointment as director in 1930, Horkheimer has often been referred to as a 'highly effective academic entrepreneur', who was successful in gathering an extraordinary and somewhat eclectic group of individuals who would eventually come to work together under the wider rubric of Critical Theory — including the likes of Frederick Pollock, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, Theodore Adorno, Leo Löwenthal and Walter Benjamin (to name but a few) (Alway, 1995: 24). Horkheimer also proved to be remarkably adept in leading the Institute through its turbulent periods of exile, emigration, and return as a direct result of the rise (and eventual decline) of National Socialism and fascism in Germany along with the outbreak and conclusion of World War 2 (ibid.). Horkheimer is also largely credited with successfully managing to set the renewed and revised agenda for the Institute's work-based operations, critical investigations and methodological underpinnings[22].

It is therefore important to note that under Horkheimer's direction, the Institute attempted to carry through a unique synthesis of philosophy and social theory which is today typically associated with the school of thought that later came to be known as Critical Theory (Kellner, 1989: 14). What this then implies, is that it was explicitly under Horkheimer's leadership that the theoretical, epistemological and methodological views which would later become known as Critical Theory were developed, as it was he who unequivocally aimed to develop a novel and multifaceted social theory, on an interdisciplinary basis, so that:

> theory could benefit both from the reflective capacity of philosophy and the rigorous procedures of the individual sciences (Held, 1990: 175).

[22] For a thorough and illuminating description of Horkheimer's significant contribution to, and leadership of, the Institute for Social Research, see John Abromeit's (2011) informative book titled *Max Horkheimer and the Foundations of the Frankfurt School* which deals explicitly with these matters.

In relation to this particular investigation and how the epistemological and methodological basis of early Critical Theory continues to contribute and assist the contemporary researcher when investigating the impact that digital communicational technologies are having upon society, it is important to note that the outlines of early Critical Theory were already evident in Horkheimer's lectures and essays that emerged during the 1930s and early 1940s. Furthermore, many important ideas and insights were also contained in his early — explicitly Marxist-oriented — reflections[23] pertaining to (amongst other things) the political economy, which he argued had placed society in a particularly precarious position during the early part of the 20th century.

It is thus to these texts that we will initially turn as it is here that Horkheimer:

> accords philosophy a central position within the Institute's project, reaffirms the necessity and value of interdisciplinary work, and identifies the central elements around which theoretical and empirical work would be organised (Alway, 1995: 24).

These central elements, which will also prove to be of immense value for this particular study, include:

i) A novel interdisciplinary approach towards research that would fundamentally guide the research, investigation and interpretation of the extensive fields of inquiry in which the Institute would immerse itself;

ii) An epistemological and ontological paradigm that is based upon a revised form of (Hegelian-Marxist) dialectical materialism which operates within a distinctively socio-historical framework; and

iii) A critique of ideology which was developed in order to interrogate the common narratives and tropes typically associated with the supposedly progressive and

[23] These critical views and reflections of Horkheimer's are articulated in his aphoristic-styled text titled *Notizen und Dämmerung* (later translated as *Dawn and Decline*) which was published in 1934.

emancipatory aspects of the 20th century, along with how it is that such ideologies are actually produced, reinforced and maintained within contemporary society;

It is the overarching aim of this chapter to highlight what these central elements actually entail, along with how these core elements, and their ultimate axiological goal of creating a more just, more differentiated and more harmoniously organised society (Horkheimer, [1937]1972: 205), can still be usefully applied when investigating the digital realm of the 21st century[24]. It is thus to these central, critical and creative elements that we will now turn our attention in order to elucidate how it is that they may still prove to be of immense value for the contemporary critical researcher — particularly when attempting to gain a well-rounded, critical and multifaceted understanding of the digital technologies and the various ideologies associated with the digitally dominated day and age of the 21st century.

1.2.1) Critical Theory's interdisciplinary framework

In his inaugural address titled 'The State of Contemporary Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research', Horkheimer ([1931]1993:1) states that the overarching goal of the Institute — under his directorship — was to develop a materialist social theory (later to be referred to as Critical Theory) that would be characterised by an integration of philosophy and the sciences (Kellner, 1989: 23). According to Horkheimer ([1931]1993:1), the ultimate aim of such an approach would be to develop a social philosophy that was designed in such a manner so as to provide one with a thorough and comprehensive interpretation of:

> ... the vicissitudes of human fate — the fate of humans not as mere individuals, however, but as members of a community ...

located within the wider context of human social life.

[24] What is also of immense import with regard to the early works of the first generation of Critical Theory is that they managed to display a refreshing and exciting sense of optimism and creativity with regard to research, practice and change which was later to be eclipsed almost entirely by the pessimistic overtones expressed in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and beyond.

For Horkheimer, social philosophy has traditionally concerned itself with the essential issues pertaining to human social life. Such questions, according to Horkheimer, can be said to concern the:

> individual's relationship to society, the constitution of communities, the role and meaning of culture and the quality and status of social existence (Alway, 1995: 24).

Under Horkheimer's directorship, these fundamental concerns and questions — which are inherent to socio-philosophical thought, as well as its orientation toward the totality of social life — were still to inform and guide the Institute's work. However, these essential questions and lines of inquiry would now be placed within a revised and renewed framework in order to systematically address the issues confronting contemporary society.

It is in this regard that Horkheimer ([1931]1993: 11-12) notes that the revised project of social philosophy is nothing more than a reformulation of the basis of the 'new problem constellation' of the old question concerning the 'connection of particular existence and universal Reason, of reality and Idea, of life and Spirit'. However, rather than dogmatically relying upon one-dimensional, static and fragmented approaches which very often provide the researcher with a limited and myopic scope when attempting to gain a broader understanding of such matters, Horkheimer ([1931]1993: 11-12) argues that the matter of research takes on a renewed and reinvigorated light when one puts the question of research more precisely - namely, when one proceeds to ask:

> which *connections* can be demonstrated *between* the *economic role* of a *specific social group* in a *specific era* in *specific countries*, the *transformation* of the *psychic structure* of its *individual members*, and the *ideas* and *institutions* as a *whole* that influence them and that which they created? [emphasis added].

For Horkheimer, only once the question of research within the contemporary world has been positioned along such diverse, variegated and interconnected lines, does the possibility of undertaking real research actually become possible, and as such, it is these factors that were to be concretised and critically pursued by the Institute itself.

In order to effectively come to terms with what such a broad claim actually entails, along with the nature of the research that the Institute was expected to undertake under its new director, Horkheimer ([1931]1993: 9) proceeds to advocate an investigatory approach that was explicitly based upon a new form of interdisciplinary work, in which:

> … philosophers, sociologists, economists, historians and psychologists are *brought together in permanent collaboration* to undertake in common that which can be carried out individually in the laboratory in other fields [emphasis added].

For Horkheimer ([1931]1993: 9), the task and goal of such a collaborative and interdisciplinary effort between philosophy and the various disciplines falling within the academic range of what is typically referred to as the 'social sciences' is:

> ... to do what all true researchers have always done: namely, to pursue their *larger philosophical questions* on the basis of the *most precise scientific methods*, *to revise and refine their questions* in the course of their substantive work, and to *develop new methods* without losing sight of the *larger context* [emphasis added].

What such an elaborate and ambitious statement then aims to highlight, is that under Horkheimer's directorship the Institute for Social Research intended to develop a comprehensive and overarching interdisciplinary social theory that aimed to encompass the entire material and intellectual culture of humanity ([1931]1993: 1), in a determined attempt to come to terms with the inner workings of modern society and the problems/pathologies which confronted it.

According to Horkheimer ([1931] 1993: 9), the deficiencies and limitations of the various forms of dogmatic social philosophy that had been undertaken up until that point in the early 20th century were to be overcome through a 'new synthesis of philosophy and science' which would involve 'the ongoing dialectical penetration[25] and development of

[25] This notion of 'dialectical penetration' will be further explored, in greater deal, later in this chapter when we deal with the 'dialectical materialism' associated with Horkheimer's early version of Critical Theory. At this stage of the investigation, however, it is important to take note of the fact that the term can be broadly understood as referring to an investigatory practice that emphasises both the importance and necessity of acknowledging and appreciating the contradictory and — at times — antagonistic tendencies contained within

philosophical theory and specialised scientific praxis'[26] (Alway, 1995: 24). What this then implies is that for the contemporary critical theorist, implicitly, in the 1930s, Horkheimer was already opening the door for later critical researchers to inspect, investigate and interrogate the impact that later phenomena — such as digital communication technologies — would have upon society along with what the wider implications of such phenomena would spell for society at large. Thus, even in its nascent formulation, Horkheimer was well aware of the fact that if Critical Theory was to remain on the cutting edge of social theory, then it must be subject to the sort of critique which it applies to traditional theories and must move beyond previous inadequate or obsolete positions. Similarly, it must also aim to promote the development of new theories to account for the social conditions and changes within contemporary societies (Kellner, 1989: 2).

Following Horkheimer's reformulation, such an approach towards research and investigation within the Institute was then structured in such a manner so as to be elaborate enough to allow the critical researcher to be aware of the wider context in which societal phenomena occur, as well as being nuanced enough to allow one to gain a comprehensive understanding of the various issues which confront society within a particular epoch (Abromeit, 2011: 141). Thus, in a strikingly novel and somewhat unprecedented fashion, Horkheimer ([1931]1993: 10) proceeds to stress that under his directorship, the Institute would attempt to undertake a 'new start directed at new tasks' which would then allow its members to raise the crucial questions of:

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all phenomena. Such an approach is thus aimed at highlighting the nuanced and multifaceted nature of all phenomena in question and thus appreciating the wider network in which such entities exist and operate.

[26] According to Kellner (1989: 22), such an innovative endeavour was undertaken by Horkheimer as a direct response and reaction to what he perceived as the inadequacies within both classical Marxism — as envisioned by the likes of Lenin, Mach and Lukács (cf. Abromeit, 2011: 141 - 156) — and the dominant forms of bourgeois science and philosophy that prevailed at that particular time. For Horkheimer, orthodox Marxism had congealed into a dogmatic, reductionist and objectivistic metaphysical materialism (Kellner, 1989: 23) which he believed resulted in a 'deficit in clear relations to the present' (Horkheimer quoted in Abromeit, 2011: 155). In addition to this, Horkheimer also exhibited a dissatisfaction with the bourgeois social sciences which he characterised as a 'fragmentation of the sciences, each cut off from the other and pursuing its own investigations in isolation from other disciplines' (Kellner, ibid.). It was as a direct result of this that Horkheimer maintained that both 'bourgeois science' and 'scientistic Marxism' were *not* able to conceptualise current problems in their intricate, interconnected and contextualised entirety. Thus, in his inaugural lecture, Horkheimer highlights what he perceives as being the limitations of the classical German social theories of Kant and Hegel and of contemporary metaphysical and positivist philosophies that were prevalent towards the beginning of the 20th century. In light of these perceived shortcomings, Horkheimer concludes that none of the dominant philosophical schools contains an adequate social philosophy that is equipped to deal with the challenges and problems that were to arise within modern society.

> …the *connection* between the *economic life of society*, the *psychical* development of the individual and the *changes in the realm of culture* in the narrower sense (to which belong not only the so-called intellectual elements, such as science, art and religion, but also law, ethics, fashion, public opinion, sport, amusement, life style, etc.) (ibid:11) [emphasis added].

Such a formulation already makes it clear that, in direct contrast to Grünberg's fairly orthodox and standard Marxist approach which relied exclusively upon an analysis of the economy in order to explain all aspects of societal phenomena, under Horkheimer's leadership the Institute would place a much greater emphasis on the superstructure and its reciprocal interaction with and influence on the economic base. It is in this regard that, in his 1937 essay titled 'Traditional and Critical Theory', Horkheimer ([1937]1972: 237) explicitly states that the concept of the dependence of the cultural on the economic has changed. While Horkheimer ([1937]1993: 249) does go on to state that the economy is indeed the first cause of societal wretchedness, and as a result of this 'critique, theoretical and practical, must address itself primarily to it', he nevertheless qualifies such an explicitly (orthodox) Marxist claim by arguing that it would be 'mechanistic, not dialectical thinking, however, to judge the future forms of society solely according to their economy'.

In this way Horkheimer maintains that economics in isolation will not be able to provide the standard/norm by which the community of (putatively) emancipated individuals is to be measured. It is as a direct result of such a statement that he maintains that Critical Theory is concerned with society as a whole, and that this broad and multifaceted scope is completely forgotten in investigatory approaches that rely solely on an economistic basis for inquiry. Horkheimer's approach can therefore be described as being less interested in the internal transformations of the economic structure than in extra-economic processes, whose social determination was to be investigated as well as their intrinsic logic of development (Bonss, 1993: 112).

In light of such a stance, Horkheimer therefore maintained that psychological, cultural and historical arguments must be employed alongside economic arguments, since the autonomy

and non-synchronic character of the extra-economic processes could no longer be understood through further refinements in economic explanation solely, but:

> Rather, this situation can be overcome to the extent that philosophy – as a theoretical undertaking oriented to the general, the "essential" – is capable of giving particular studies animating impulses, and at the same time *remains open enough to let itself be influenced and changed by these concrete studies* (Horkheimer, [1931]1993: 9) [emphasis added].

Based upon such a multifaceted and vast area of inquiry and investigation, one can thus argue that the interdisciplinary programme that Horkheimer envisioned was ultimately aimed at overcoming the chaotic specialisation of the various specialised disciplines which had proliferated by the early 20th century and which ultimately ended up providing the researcher/investigator with a limited, one-sided and fragmented account of the various problem areas/phenomena in question. Horkheimer's interdisciplinary approach was thus intended to mediate the splits between philosophy and empirical research (Benhabib et al., 1993: 6) in order to provide one with a larger framework of contextualisation and understanding[27]. It is in this regard that Stirk (2000: 42) states that Horkheimer's call for an interdisciplinary research programme was based upon a powerful recognition of the fact that the diversity of the various disciplines, to say nothing of the substantive material accumulated by each of them, had escaped the grasp of any one individual and thus required serious revision and reinterpretation[28].

[27] Reinforcing this position, in the introduction to the first issue of the Institute's Journal titled *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Horkheimer (quoted in Kellner, 1989: 27) ambitiously claims that the social research from various academic fields would form part of an attempt to develop a theory of contemporary society as a whole which aimed at describing and explaining the entirety of the social process itself. Such a claim then implicitly rests upon the presupposition that beneath the chaotic surface of events one can actually attempt to grasp and conceptualise a structure of the effective powers guiding society, and its inhabitants, at any given time.

[28] The importance of this reconfiguration regarding the manner in which one effectively attempts to investigate, research and come to terms with the various phenomena arising within contemporary society is cogently summed up by the German psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl (1969: 20) — and thus adds credence to Horkheimer's desire to transcend the rifts of specialisation through interdisciplinary means — when he argues that: 'We are living in an age of specialists, and this takes its toll. I would define a *specialist* as a man who *no longer sees the forest of truth for the trees of fact*. … [so much so that] the pictures by which the individual sciences depict reality have become so disparate, so different from each other, that it has become more and more difficult to obtain a fusion of the different pictures' [author's emphasis].

It is in this regard that Kellner (1990: 19) argues that one should utilise the term supradisciplinary — as opposed to interdisciplinary — when referring to Horkheimer's novel methodological and epistemological approach towards research and presentation. This is due to the fact that Horkheimer's nascent Critical Theory project initially involved investigative attempts pertaining to individuals from various disciplines working together, in a collective capacity, in order to:

> develop a historical and systematic theory of contemporary society rather than just bringing individuals from separate disciplines together to chat, or assigning various specialists different topics for research and inquiry (1990: 19).

As Löwenthal (1980:109 quoted in Kellner, 1990: 8) cautions, in a very myopic sense the phrase 'interdisciplinary work' can simply come to mean:

> nothing more than to leave the disciplines as they are while developing certain techniques which foster a kind of acquaintance between them without forcing them to give up their self-sufficiency or individual claims.

In opposition to this fairly static and sterile notion of what it is that interdisciplinary work should aim to encompass and achieve, one can then argue that Horkheimer's novel vision for a critical theory of society was created in such a manner so as to ensure that it directly contradicted this non-confrontational and conventional approach - particularly when placed within the context of research and investigation.

This is primarily due to the fact that Horkheimer's revised approach explicitly aimed to criticise the validity claims of the separate disciplines as they appeared in isolation and, as a result of these shortcomings, it then attempted to create a new kind of integrative and multifaceted social theory in which the various interconnections and interrelatedness of societal phenomena would be scrutinised and examined within a wider social whole. As has been previously mentioned, the guiding impulse animating this entire inter/supradisciplinary programme would ultimately be the Institute's unwavering desire to bring about human emancipation from slavery and to work towards the creation of a world 'which satisfies the needs and powers' of human beings (Horkheimer, 1972: 246).

Horkheimer ([1937]1972: 227) therefore maintains that it is this very possibility for change and transition to a better future which then needs to become the theme of contemporary theory and practice i.e. Critical Theory.

Regardless of whether or not one prefers to utilise the term 'supradisciplinary' as opposed to 'interdisciplinary' when attempting to describe or conceptualise Horkheimer's novel approach towards research and integration, what is of the utmost importance is that one is cognisant of the fact that his early approach emphasised that all of the relevant concepts, definitions and propositions advanced on the basis of available scientific experience (traditional theory) must be heeded as these concepts and formulations constitute an essential part of the material for the analysis and comprehension of socio-historical events (Held, 1990: 188). As Horkheimer ([1937]1972: 233) notes, indiscriminate hostility to theory, as typically delineated by the 'savant' (or traditional theorist), must be viewed as a hindrance in relation to any hopes for society's (eagerly anticipated) emancipation and progression.

Thus, rather than being viewed as an inherently technophobic or anti-scientific school of thought that aimed to exclude or neglect science or technology within its investigatory concerns and methodological/epistemological foundations, or being a school of thought that indiscriminately excelled at vilifying both science and technology as being solely pathological and destructive forces which had no useful role to play within contemporary society, as Bonss (1993: 100) indicates, such an understanding is severely off the mark and highly misleading. This is due to the fact that from its very beginnings, one of the basic concerns of Horkheimer's Critical Theory was to determine the role of science and technology within the larger context of society. Berry (2014: 12) reinforces this point when he indicates that Critical Theory has always had some engagement with the questions and possibilities raised by both science and technology, and, to a certain degree, has always attempted to keep abreast of such questions and developments when attempting to evaluate the developmental trajectory of modern civilization[29].

[29] Kellner (1989: 186) does however note that after the publication of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *One-Dimensional Man* (and some studies done by Pollock regarding the wider effects of automation on society), the later works of the critical theorists — particularly the first and second generation — have tended *not* to

It is Horkheimer ([1932]1972 S & C: 3 - 9) himself who manages to elucidate this particular point within his essay titled 'Notes on Science and the Crisis' when he argues that from the viewpoint of its relation to both society and to truth, science (along with its practical embodiment as manifested in modern technology) presents society with the potential for progress in knowledge and productive capabilities. Horkheimer ([1934]1978: 19) augments such an auspicious claim within *Dawn and Decline* in an aphorism titled 'Unlimited possibilities' when he states that:

> The 20th century is the age of *unlimited possibilities*. *Technological advances occur every day*. Abilities which were admired as exceptional just a short time ago are now below average. And *human productivity keeps increasing* … not only in industry but *everywhere* [emphasis added].

However, according to Horkheimer's ([1932]1972 S & C: 3-4) critical analysis, the effective realisation of such auspicious and productive possibilities ultimately depends on the social conditions in which they may arise and as a result, it is these conditions that can then either hinder or encourage such development (Bonss, 1993: 101).

Elaborating on this matter, in his essay titled 'The Latest Attack on Metaphysics', Horkheimer ([1937]1972: 179) states that:

> the ruling economic powers use science [and technology] as well as the whole of society for their special ends [which must invariably] lead to the 'perpetuation of the *status quo*' [author's emphasis].

It is in this regard that Horkheimer (ibid.) critically notes that science proves to be one of the 'numerous elements within a social wealth which is not fulfilling its function'[30]. It is due to

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trace the development of new technologies and their impact on society. Critical Theory's failure to follow the introduction and development of new technologies is somewhat curious, for it was this tradition that for several decades focused on the impact of science and technology on all realms of social life and which thus provided some of the most advanced theorising of these phenomena (ibid.). It is precisely this approach that is to be reanimated within this present study regarding the digital communicational technologies of the 21st century.

[30] This sentiment is cogently reinforced by Erich Fromm (a former colleague of both Horkheimer and Adorno, and a co-founder of early Critical Theory) in *Escape From Freedom* ([1941] 2013: 111 - 112) when he states that 'the growth of the productive forces of society permits us to visualise a future in which the continual struggle for the satisfaction of material needs will cease'. Yet, it is paradoxically such apparatus — within the

this that Wiggerhaus (1994: 39) asserts that Horkheimer actually attempted to reinvigorate the 19th-century enlightenment project of both investigating and using science, technology and industry to make the social 'whole less arbitrary and more just' by critically examining the conditions inhibiting the 'true development' and progress of society - and subsequently, attempting to address them in the most effective manner possible at the given time. As such, Horkheimer was convinced that society in its present crisis-ridden form is 'unable to make effective use of the powers it has developed and the wealth it has amassed' (ibid.). As a result of this, scientific knowledge and its practical embodiment as manifested in technological artefacts share the fate of other productive forces and means of production whereby its application is 'sharply disproportionate to its high level of development and to the real needs' of humankind[31] (Horkheimer, [1932]1972 S & C: 4).

It is therefore crucial to note that in direct contradistinction to the later models of Critical Theory, in the early 1930s Horkheimer explicitly advocated a position in which the aporias in epistemology, organisation and application of science are not to be explained as the result of an unalterable 'dialectic of enlightenment' or 'ontological deficit' inherent to modern technology itself (a position which is unfortunately firmly rooted in the mind of certain readers of Critical Theory as a direct result of the later position adopted by Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*). Rather, Horkheimer's early position clearly locates such aporias in social, historical and material relations along with the organisation of science itself[32] (Bonss, 1993: 105).

Based on the above, the important point to acknowledge is that Critical Theory, in its original formulation, was *not* opposed to acknowledging and exploring various benefits and positive potentialities that science or technology promised to deliver (along with their

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context of capitalist social relations — that have inadvertently made the individual a 'servant to the very machine he [she] built', and thereby has given him/her a feeling of personal 'insignificance and powerlessness'.

[31] This critical caveat is echoed by Marx, within *Das Kapital* (quoted in Feenberg, 2010: 165) when he notes that within the context of capitalist society, rather than serving the needs of society as a whole, it would in fact be possible to write 'quite a history of inventions, since 1830, for the sole purpose of *supplying capital with weapons against the revolts of the working class*' [emphasis added].

[32] Within his analysis of science and technology along with the crisis-ridden context in which these fields currently operate, Horkheimer ([1932]1972, S & C: 8) highlights that the scope and direction of both science and technology are in many ways determined *not* by its own internal tendencies and requirements alone, but by the monopolies and private interests that dominate and dictate such research and application.

potential threats and pitfalls). It was, however, wary of the wider societal relations in which science found itself operating - which according to their critical analyses invariably had a limiting and corrosive effect on both the potentialities and practical applications that science and technology were able to manifest within society. It is as a result of this that Kellner (1989:4) indicates that from its very beginning, Critical Theory has been a theory which — at its best — attempted to sort out the:

> matrix of progressive and regressive, oppressive and emancipatory, forces bound up with the history of modernity.

Thus, while the critical theorists have consistently maintained sharply critical perspectives toward modernity and its associated phenomena, they have — following Marx — also attempted to appraise its positive contributions[33]. Such an integrative, multifaceted and, at times, admittedly contradictory approach allows Jay (1996: 41) to aver that at the very heart of early Critical Theory, lies both a theoretical and epistemological position that exhibits an obstinate aversion towards closed philosophical systems, with the end result of such an integrative approach amounting to the creation of a social theory which would allow for a richer and more detailed analysis of both society and its accompanying phenomena. This then explicitly includes the fields of science and technology (Tarr, 1977: 26), and in relation to this particular investigation, the domain of digital communicational technologies, social networking services, social media platforms along with the social conditions in which they emerge and operate.

[33] Thus, while Horkheimer was convinced that the *traditional* model of science was in crisis, he was *not* prepared to abandon science or technology altogether. This point is reinforced when we read how Horkheimer acknowledges — in an emphatically 'anti-Luddite' manner — that: 'In contrast to most all of the previously mentioned philosophers, I still believe that scientific understanding and its labors will contribute more to moving beyond the current intellectual situation than those schools of thought that believe we should do without it. I do not, of course, think that traditional natural science or even a psychology from the last century can guide us today. But there is a *modern physics*, there are new and *relevant psychological theories*, there is *sociology* and *related pursuits*, all of which only *need to be liberated from superstition* and from an *absolutizing* and *hubristic self-importance*' (Horkheimer in Abromeit, 2011: 138) [emphasis added].

1.2.2) Dialectical materialism in a socio-historical framework

In 1934, in a series of letters to Erich Fromm[34], Horkheimer mentioned that he was beginning work on a new project that would focus on the development of a materialist and dialectical logic which, he hoped, would be appropriate when attempting to analyse, comprehend and address the current historical and tension-riddled conditions in which society found itself (Abromeit, 2011: 301). As such, the development of this approach was to remain central to his concerns throughout the 1930s. When elaborating upon Horkheimer's distinctly (Hegelian/Marxist) 'materialist dialectic'[35], it is crucial to note that it was in Hegel's dialectical thought, with its emphasis on historical process, social change and determinate negation, that Horkheimer found a great deal of promise[36]. This is due to the fact that it was these aspects of Hegel's dialectical programme that explicitly pointed towards the possibility of achieving a greater sense of understanding of the world (i.e. a heightened sense of critical consciousness and awareness), along with bringing about societal change that would hopefully be geared towards the betterment of humankind (Held, 1990: 175). While Horkheimer does indeed follow the lead of both Hegel and Marx when engaging in his idiosyncratic endeavours, however, keeping true to the spirit of Critical Theory, he does not hypostatise any of their substantive conclusions (Abromeit, 2011: 303).

[34] Erich Fromm's influence and input regarding the formation of the so-called first generation of the Frankfurt School is not to be underestimated. In fact, according to Abromeit (2011: 47-48), Horkheimer's relationship to Fromm can be regarded as being the first and most important current of Critical Theory to be developed, occurring in a period spanning the late 1920s and early 1930s. The second, significantly weaker, but nonetheless important current was introduced by Herbert Marcuse, when he joined Horkheimer's Institute for Social Research in 1933. Finally, with the growing estrangement between Horkheimer and Fromm in the late 1930s, the path was cleared for a closer working relationship between Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, which initiated the beginning of a new phase in the development of Critical Theory. As a result of the above, it is the primary intention of this chapter to elaborate upon Horkheimer's early version of Critical Theory, which was heavily influenced by both Fromm and Marcuse.

[35] The reason why both Hegel and Marx had such an immense influence on Horkheimer's project pertaining to dialectical materialism is due to the fact that, according to Horkheimer, dialectical logic found its first genuine expression in the work of Hegel, who managed to move beyond what Horkheimer referred to as the subject-centred, 'consciousness philosophy' (*Lebensphilosophie*) that he argued tended to reify an absolutised and transcendental ego (Abromeit, 2011: 304). However, it was also Horkheimer's belief that Hegel was unable to free himself completely from the 'antinomies of positivism and metaphysics' (ibid.). Marx was thus the first to break decisively with the metaphysical assumptions that still informed Hegel's philosophy. It is as a result of this that Horkheimer can be said to have developed his own ideas on dialectical logic in direct dialogue with both Hegel and Marx (and by implication, Feuerbach as well).

[36] Horkheimer ([1934]1993: 234) states this very clearly in his essay titled 'The Rationalism Debate in Contemporary Philosophy' when he notes that contemporary materialism is 'schooled in Hegel's *Logic*' - by which he meant not only Marx's theory, but also his own efforts to develop a concept of dialectical materialism that was adequate to analysing, assessing and critiquing societal conditions in the twentieth century (Abromeit, 2011: 313).

This point then alludes to the novel and discerning manner in which Horkheimer approached and appropriated the critical works of both Hegel and Marx, whilst attempting to formulate his own distinctly materialist dialectic. This novel approach would later prove to have an immense influence upon the research endeavours of the various members of the Frankfurt School itself, particularly in the early years of its operations under Horkheimer's direction[37]. The crucial questions that therefore need to be raised at this particular point of our reconstruction of Horkheimer's early approach towards Critical Theory are: What is retrieved from Hegel's work? Conversely, what is rejected and revised from the Hegelian programme? It is to these questions that we will now turn our attention, due to the fact that the responses to these issues will clearly elucidate how Horkheimer managed to develop a fairly original and revised materialist dialectic that can still prove to be of immense worth for the contemporary critical researcher.

It is initially important to indicate that in direct accordance with the original Hegelian programme, Horkheimer contended that a critique of knowledge must locate all thought in its historical and societal context and uncover its rootedness in human interests[38] (Held, 1990: 176). In the Preface to his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel (1991: 21) establishes this position when he states that 'Philosophy is *its own time* comprehended in thoughts' [emphasis added]. As Redding (2016) cogently articulates, Hegel's deliberate utilisation of the phrase 'its own time' would then suggest that there are invariably an historical and cultural conditionedness and variability which apply even to the highest form of human cognition/consciousness. As such, it can then be argued that from a Hegelian perspective, the content and composition of this 'superseding' form of cognition/consciousness will arise from, and be reciprocally intertwined and interconnected with, the historically changing contents of its cultural context. Hegel thus regards human beings as thoroughly historical creatures due to the fact that he was of the opinion that what we are as human beings is:

[37] Regarding this particular matter, Abromeit (2011: 301) states that Horkheimer's project on dialectical logic represented a 'continuation of his reflections on materialism in the early 1930s' and as such, 'dialectical logic' became the most 'general philosophical concept that *linked together and guided Horkheimer's essays in the 1930s*' [emphasis added]. For further information regarding this matter, see Abromeit (2011: 301 - 335).

[38] Horkheimer can thus be said to have already anticipated the position which Habermas (1972) would later adopt and elaborate upon in *Knowledge and Human Interests*.

> determined by what we do; what we do is determined by what we understand ourselves to be; and what we understand ourselves to be is determined by what we have been (Dudley, 2009: 1).

Our history for Hegel — i.e. the events that have led to our present condition, and our awareness of those events — can therefore be said to generate the possibilities we envision for that which we might become (Dudley, 2009: 1).

Horkheimer's concurring position regarding this particular matter is elucidated when, in his essay titled 'Materialism and Metaphysics' ([1933]1972: 24), he argues that the wretchedness of our own time is connected with the structure of society, and in light of this Horkheimer was of the opinion that it was social theory that should form the main content of contemporary dialectical materialism. It is as a direct result of this that Horkheimer ([1933]1972: 24) maintained that 'the practical requirements of concrete problems affect, in turn, both the content and the form' of a dialectical materialist theory. The dialectical materialist's views, for Horkheimer (ibid.), are thus essentially determined by the '*tasks to be mastered at the moment*' [emphasis added]. As such, Horkheimer clearly held on to the Hegelian belief that the world as we understand and interpret it — along with the associated pathologies and problems that arise within it — changes with the development of the subject and his/her critical awareness or consciousness[39] along with the ever-shifting historical, social and cultural conditions that accompany it. It is as a direct result of the vicissitudes of social reality that Horkheimer ([1933]1972: 32) goes on to assert that a dialectical conceptualisation of materialism should always aim to challenge every claim to the autonomy and impartiality of thought, in the hope that a greater sense of unity, understanding and critical consciousness can be attained that would then invariably assist humanity when attempting to address the various issues facing society within its current socio-historical setting.

[39] Horkheimer ([1937]1993: 206) elaborates upon what the notion of 'critical' awareness/consciousness entails when he states that the term 'critical' (within Critical Theory as he initially envisioned it) is meant 'less in the sense it has in the "idealist critique of pure reason" than in the sense it has in the "*dialectical critique*"' which forms an '*essential aspect of the dialectical theory of society*' [emphasis added].

According to Marcuse's ([1941] 2000) reading of the Hegelian system of dialectical logic, as delineated with *Reason and Revolution*[40], a similar point is made by Hegel in terms of what he perceives as being the ultimate end or goal of the dialectical process. As such, Marcuse ([1941] 2000: 18) notes that it was Hegel's firm belief that a universal system be created whereby the philosophical quest for the unity (*Einheit*) and universality (*Allgemeinheit*) of reason is both envisioned and realised within reality[41]. Such a system would, according to Hegel, ultimately lead to the creation of a universal rational order in which individuals co-exist within a cohesive, cooperative and harmonious social order. Such a unified and universal social order would have reason (*Vernunft*) — as opposed to understanding (*Verstand*) — acting as its critical foundation (ibid. 18).

For Hegel, the distinction between *Verstand* and *Vernunft* is the same as that between 'common sense and speculative thinking, between undialectical reflection and dialectical knowledge' (Marcuse, [1941]2000: 44). Based upon such a distinction, Hegel argues that Reason (*Vernunft*) is, in its ideal form, a mode of consciousness and cognition that is motivated by the need 'to restore the totality' (which constitutes the very nature of reality itself), whilst *Verstand* provides one with a partial, one-sided and fundamentally fragmented view of the very same reality (ibid.). Hegel then goes on to emphasise how it is that within contemporary society, there is a tendency for *Verstand* (as a mode of apperception and consciousness) to prevail and it is as a direct result of this that most individuals currently find themselves in a state of satisfaction with regard to the (supposedly) 'given' state of reality. These individuals therefore come to accept reality as being comprised of a fixed, stable and somewhat static set of relations (ibid.).

[40] It is important to note that Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution* — originally published in 1941 — was his first book to be written in English, and it was Marcuse's intention, via the aid of this particular work, to introduce the theoretical premises and insights of the Institute to a broader, English-speaking, audience (Abromeit, 2010: 68). Marcuse also hoped that the book would shed new light on Hegel's critical works and a reinterpretation of his philosophy which, as a direct result of the rise of National Socialism in Germany, had unfortunately become associated with Fascist theory and practice (Marcuse [1941] 2000: vii). Abromeit (ibid.) goes on to state that this particular work can still be read profitably today by anyone interested in nineteenth-century social theory or the intellectual historical foundations of Critical Theory as it effectively manages to provide the reader with the historical background for arguments set forth by Horkheimer in the mid-1930s. It is as a result of this that we will, at several points throughout this particular investigation, turn to Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution* due to the fact that it can be seen as a valuable supplementary text that provides crucial insight into the theoretical underpinnings of Horkheimer's early Critical Theory.

[41] This position of Hegel is, according to Marcuse ([1941] 2000), clearly expounded within a progressive and consecutive production of texts, namely *Jenenser Logik, Metaphysics und Naturphilosophie* (1802), *Phenomenology of Mind* (1806) and *The Science of Logic* (1812 - 1816).

However, it is Hegel's firm belief that such a complacent, perfunctory and acquiescent attitude towards both reality and society at large ultimately makes individuals indifferent to, or unaware of, the as yet unrealised potentialities that are 'not "given" with the same supposed sense of certainty and stability as the objects of *Verstand*' (Marcuse, [1941]2000: 44). Common sense then, for Hegel, 'mistakes the accidental appearance of things for their essence', and persists in allowing one to believe that there is an 'immediate identity of essence and existence' (ibid.). This can then be regarded as one of the major problematic attributes of modern thought that Hegel sought to rectify in his own approach towards dialectical philosophy and, as a corollary, the rehabilitation of *Vernunft* itself. It is in this regard that Jay ([1973]1996: 63) states that, for Hegel (as well as Horkheimer), just as the individual must seek to re-establish his/her ability to control his/her own destiny, so too:

> must reason be restored to its proper place as the arbiter of ends, not merely means. *Vernunft* must [thus] regain the field from which it had been driven by the triumph of *Verstand.*

Horkheimer's ([1933]1972: 28) appreciation for such a critical and illuminating position is enunciated within 'Materialism and Metaphysics' when he states that for the dialectical materialist, there is an irreducible tension between concept and object. As such, the materialist, for Horkheimer, is armed with a critical weapon of interrogation and investigation that will invariably allow him/her to avoid making the errors inherent to the false security that Hegel so admonished. This is primarily due to the fact that according to Hegel's dialectical system, this critical weapon — which can be somewhat simplistically described as an unwavering critical stance towards the purported coherence between concept and object, appearance and reality, essence and existence — ultimately points towards both a progressive and developmental process in which there would be an eventual triumph of *Vernunft* over *Verstand*. Such a process would then, for both Horkheimer and Hegel, ultimately lead to the elucidation of a picture in which there is an 'association of free individuals united in common interest' (Marcuse, [1941]2000: 89).

For Hegel, such a state of existence would be created through the cultivation and refinement of a reason that would be adept at contemplating reality in its variegated (and

often conflicting) format, along with the various problems, pathologies and obstacles that may appear within it, and it is in this regard that his system can be said to be injected with a powerful sense of historical optimism. This is then to be regarded as a major component of the Hegelian dialectical system which greatly appealed to Horkheimer (as well as Marx) as it explicitly points towards the possibility of bringing about a more reasonable, harmonious and cohesive social order that could be both suitably analysed and comprehended — in all its complexity and contradictions — through continuous dialectical reflection. Such a dialectical approach would thus need to be located within a distinctively socio-historical framework, along with an explicit awareness that certain societal conditions either need to be altered or abolished in direct accordance with the 'true needs'[42] of humanity if *Vernunft* (in the Hegelian sense) is ever to prevail along with the harmony and cohesion that accompany it.

Such a position then leads Horkheimer to aver that it is, in fact, the method of dialectical materialism that needs to be both embraced and implemented if real change — in the substantive sense of the word — is to ever occur within society ([1933]1972: 31). This is primarily due to the fact that according to Horkheimer's ([1937]1972: 163) understanding, as explicated in his 1937 essay titled 'The Latest Attack On Metaphysics', dialectical theory explicitly acknowledges and embraces the fact that the 'unfolding of society, as a whole, changes continuously in history'. Furthermore, this continuous process of change or unfolding is not to be regarded as a sign of fault or error, but rather as 'an inherent factor of knowledge' itself (ibid.). For Horkheimer, this inherent factor with regard to the ever changing-nature of knowledge can then possibly be tailored and altered in such a manner so as to hopefully introduce and uphold the liberating bourgeois ideals of Reason, Freedom,

[42] The phrase 'true needs' is borrowed from Marcuse ([1964]2002: 9), who, in agreement with Horkheimer, advocates the implementation and utilisation of a 'negative' dialectical analysis of society in its material form in order to achieve 'the optimal goal', which in his estimation is the 'replacement of false needs by true ones, the abandonment of repressive satisfaction'. It is in this regard that Marcuse, like Hegel, Marx and Horkheimer, states that all liberation depends on the individual's heightened sense of critical consciousness. For the early critical theorists then, dialectical materialism provided the critical researcher with powerful cognitive tools which would hopefully facilitate such a critical process. This particular point can then also be said to have explicitly Marxian overtones as it was Marx himself (in his tenth thesis on Feuerbach) who stated that '[t]he stand-point of the old materialism is bourgeois society; *the standpoint of the new is human society, or socialised humanity*' (quoted in Abromeit, 2011: 227) [emphasis added].

Equality and Justice within contemporary society as a collective whole (i.e. a totality). It is directly in this vein of thought that Horkheimer ([1937]1972: 162) goes on to state that:

> when an active individual of sound ... [critical awareness] (*Vernunft*) perceives the sordid state of the world, the desire to change it becomes the guiding principle by which he organises given facts and shapes them into a theory [of society as a whole].

This particular point is reinforced by Marcuse ([1964]2002: 6), within *One-Dimensional Man*, when he argues that contemporary society demonstrates that it has reached the stage at which a free society 'can no longer be adequately defined in the traditional terms of economic, political and intellectual liberties'. He, like Horkheimer, is of this opinion *not* because these liberties 'have become insignificant', but rather, because they 'are *too significant* to be confined' within the traditional forms of understanding and comprehension (ibid.). New modes of conceptualisation and realisation are therefore needed so as to correspond to the new capabilities of society, if society is to ever achieve an emancipated and liberated form of existence. In direct accordance with this line of thought, Horkheimer ([1933]1972: 35) goes on to argue that in order for such a liberating process to occur it is necessary that:

> every piece of knowledge [including his own] be regarded ... as a *representation* by *particular men* in a *particular society*, *context*, and *moment of time*, a representation which is a product *but can become a productive force in turn* [emphasis added].

Marcuse ([1941] 2000: 123) expands upon what Horkheimer is referring to in the above-mentioned quote when he argues that dialectics — as conceived by Hegel and later adopted by Marx, Horkheimer and the other critical theorists — actually has a negative character. This is due to the fact that within the dialectical method, the term 'negative' has a twofold reference: Firstly, it indicates the 'negation of the fixed and static categories of common sense' (ibid.); and secondly, it is able to identify and interrogate these incomplete and therefore untrue characteristics of the world determined by these static categories. It is as a direct result of the dialectical method's negative character, with its emphasis on the negation of fixed and static categories, that the approach itself insists that nothing that

exists is true in its 'given' form and that every single entity has the ability to evolve its associated conditions and forms if they are to fulfil their inherent potentialities.

According to this line of critical argumentation, Horkheimer ([1933]1972: 28) argues that the dialectical process is negatively characterised by the fact that 'it is not to be conceived as the result of individual unchanging factors'. To put it in positive terms, Horkheimer (much like Hegel) goes on to state that the dialectical process's elements

> continuously change in relation to each other within the process itself, so that they are not even to be radically distinguished from each other (ibid.).

Thus, in direct accordance with what has been stated above regarding the dialectical method's ability to identify society's negative, fixed and static attributes, along with its ability to critically evaluate these categories in the hope of developing their potentialities, Horkheimer ([1933]1972: 45-46) notes that contemporary society has:

> reached the point where it excludes an ever larger number of men from the happiness made possible by the widespread abundance of economic [and technological] forces.

However, Horkheimer goes on to argue, in true dialectical fashion, that it is in the prevailing state of affairs that the idea of a better reality is actually envisioned and formed.

Based upon such a dialectical formulation of society and its current state of (unsatisfactory) existence, along with its inherent potentialities, Critical Theory explicitly stresses that the prevailing state of affairs 'need not be so', that the individual 'can change reality', and that the 'necessary conditions for such change already exist' (Horkheimer, [1937]1972: 227). Horkheimer therefore maintains that it is this very possibility for change and transition to a better future which then needs to become the theme of contemporary theory and practice i.e. Critical Theory. It is due to such a progressive and somewhat hopeful outlook, that Horkheimer goes on to assert that dialectical materialism's ideals are actually:

> shaped with the needs of society as a starting point and are measured by what is possible in the foreseeable future with the human forces available (Horkheimer, [1933]1972: 45-46).

It is as a direct result of Horkheimer's firm and unwavering belief in the dialectical method and its socio-historical basis, its ability to identify the retrogressive attributes associated with society, along with its capacity to act as a potentially productive force that can be harnessed in order to elucidate and cultivate an object's potentialities, that he would continue to stress the centrality of the governing principle of dialectical thought, which he perceived as being Hegel's concept of determinate (*bestimmte*) negation (Held, 1990: 176). In order to fully comprehend and appreciate what Hegel's notion of determinate negation entails, along with how Horkheimer incorporated it into his own system of dialectical materialism, it is initially important to note that the phrase 'determinate negation' arises from Hegel's idiosyncratic understanding of the terms 'determinate' and 'negation'. For Hegel, the term determinate can be defined as a moment of an entity's own self-realisation, whilst negation refers to 'the "infinite movement of Being" beyond every determinate state' (Marcuse [1941]2000: 142). According to Hegel, this then presupposes a definite 'being-in-itself' (*Ansichsein*), which is revealed — as that which is negated — through the process of critical reflection or, what Hegel coins as the process of determinate negation.

It is in this regard that, at least according to the critical theorist's interpretation of Hegel's dialectic, the real field of knowledge is not to be discovered in the 'given facts' (i.e. as certain empiricists may claim, and a field of knowledge which is acquired through *Verstand* alone) about things as they supposedly are, but rather by the critical evaluation of these 'given facts' as a 'prelude to passing beyond their given form'. As such, the real field of knowledge (that which is encompassed by the realm of *Vernunft*) then deals with appearances in order to get beyond them[43]. True existence then only begins when one recognises the immediate state of any given entity as negative. What this then means, is that according to Hegel's system of dialectics, nothing that exists within the universe is to be regarded as being 'true' in its given form due to the fact that every single thing has to evolve the necessary conditions and forms within itself if it is to fulfil its potentialities and achieve its status of 'being-for-itself' (*Fürsichsein*).

[43] As Marcuse ([1936]2009: 46) notes, in the bourgeois epoch, Reason (*Vernunft*) has been 'replaced by the acquiescent acknowledgment of "essential givens" (*Verstand*), in whose verification reason initially plays only a derivative role, and subsequently none at all'. As such, a resuscitation of Reason (*Vernunft*) within society is in dire need if this inherently misleading form of comprehension and understanding (i.e. *Verstand*) itself is to be eventually overcome.

Fürsichsein can then be said to relate directly to Hegel's concept of the 'ought' i.e. what ought to be as opposed to what currently *is* (Marcuse, [1941]2000: 139). It is Hegel's firm conviction that this notion of 'ought' is to be perceived as a 'province of actual practice' and as such, it involves the demand that 'the "ought" be fulfilled in this world' (ibid.). The dialectical movement, via the process of determinate negation, consequently impels the entity to 'transgress' the state of existence in which it finds itself and pass over to another state of existence. This then leads Marcuse ([1941] 2000: 146) to assert that, according to Hegel's dialectical system, the:

> knowledge that appearance and essence do not jibe [i.e. gel or coincide] is the beginning of truth. The mark of dialectical thinking is [thus] the ability to distinguish the essential from the apparent process of reality and to grasp their relation.

All things are therefore to be understood as being contradictory in themselves, which, for Hegel, expresses the truth and essence of things. Contradiction can therefore be considered for Hegel as being the root of all movement and life[44]. Following this logic, existent qualities are to be perceived as being 'barriers or limits' (*Grenzen*) through which its potentialities must break. Essence can then be said to achieve its true existence when 'the potentialities of things have ripened in and through the conditions of reality' (ibid. 146)[45]. The possible and the real are thus positioned in a dialectical relation which then needs to be both unravelled and reconciled.

With regard to Horkheimer's idiosyncratic approach towards dialectical materialism, it is crucial to note that it was in Hegel's explicit acknowledgment of the varying forms of contingency and contradiction inherent to the very nature of existence, along with his open

[44] As such, dialectics can be said to have fundamentally critical motivations due to the fact that the Hegelian dialectical system demands that every form of existence must be able to justify itself before a 'higher tribunal' as to whether it is adequate to its content or not' (Marcuse [1941] 2000: 131). According to Marcuse's interpretation then, for Hegel, it is the 'determination' (*Bestimmung*) of an entity that is said to equate with its 'proper nature' whilst the 'actual state' or condition of the given entity is said to equate with its 'talification' (*Beschaffenheit*). This then implies that according to such an interpretation, the talification of an entity (the manner in which it is actualised) can be said to contradict its determination (i.e. its proper nature which is yet to be revealed), and it is this contradiction which then has the force of an 'Ought' (*Sollen*) that impels the object to realise that which does not as yet exist (cf. Marcuse ([1941]2000: 131- 136).

[45] What this then implies for Hegel, somewhat paradoxically, is that 'true existence' can never be fully attained, for if it could, the 'infinite movement of Being' would be arrested. Its actualisation can therefore at most be regarded as ephemeral, and thus delineating a continuous process of discovery.

and dynamic approach towards investigating such contradictory phenomena that Horkheimer found great appeal and promise. This is due to the fact that according to Horkheimer, what distinguishes the dialectical method from other modes of inquiry is its recognition of the insufficiencies and imperfections of finished or closed systems of thought. The Hegelian dialectical method is thus to be regarded as a critical method for it reveals 'incompleteness where completeness is claimed', it embraces 'that which is in terms of that which is not' along with that which is real in terms of the potentialities that have not yet been realised (Held, 1990: 177). In his 1935 essay titled 'On the Problem of Truth', Horkheimer ([1935]1993: 184) notes that such a critique of existing knowledge thus seeks to reveal the:

> essential boundedness, limitedness, isolatedness of concepts and complexes of concepts through their progressive incorporation into the [more complete] picture of the whole.

At this point in our reconstruction of Horkheimer's own distinctly materialist dialectic, it is extremely important to note that while he is in agreement with many aspects of Hegel's dialectical method, he nevertheless does go on to criticise several elements of the system itself. Horkheimer's first point of contention hinges on the critique that for Hegel, the dialectical movement that he outlines is driven by a sense of necessity (cf. *The Encyclopedia Logic: Part 1 of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*). Such a belief in the force of necessity then implies that the emancipatory and propitious outcomes of dialectical thought and investigation are an inevitability, waiting to unfold as history progresses on its course towards what Hegel describes as 'Absolute Spirit'. As Redding (2016) notes, with his idea of the 'development of *spirit*' in history, Hegel is seen as:

> literalising a way of talking about different cultures in terms of their spirits, of constructing a developmental sequence of epochs *typical of 19th-century ideas of linear historical progress*, and then enveloping this story of human progress in terms of one about *the developing self-consciousness of the cosmos* [emphasis added].

It is in direct relation to such a position that Horkheimer ([1934]1993: 239) argues that in Hegel’s thought there is:

> only one great process that contains in itself all concepts as its moments, and [that only] the philosopher can grasp and represent this process.

The individual stages of this representation are thus considered to be eternal relations. As a result of this, all relationships in the system are also conceived of as being immutable. The complete theory itself is, in Hegel,

> no longer drawn into history; it yields an all-comprehending thought, the product of which is no longer abstract and transient (Abromeit, 2011: 319).

It is as a direct result of this that Horkheimer concludes that the Hegelian dialectic is closed. According to Horkheimer, Hegel's thought then ends up being both absolutist and metaphysical (Abromeit, 2011: 320). This is due to the fact that according to Hegel's formulation of the dialectical process — as interpreted by Horkheimer at any rate — the course that his dialectical process will take is fundamentally predetermined from the very beginning.

Thus, in the final analysis, history is — according to the Hegelian system — subordinated to the preordained teleology of absolute spirit. So, even if this plan (i.e. the unfolding of reason in the historical movement) must realise itself historically, as Hegel argues, it must also exist prior to, or outside of, history itself. For Horkheimer, a distinctly materialist approach towards dialectics perceives such an absolutised, predetermined and immutable position as being highly unacceptable and deficient due to the fact that it overlooks a fundamental claim that is (somewhat ironically) central to Hegel's own dialectical system: the fact that the world, society and consciousness is constantly in a process of change and development — and thus, not in any state to be predetermined, absolutised or hypostatised.

Horkheimer's ([1937]1972: 33) critique of Hegel's position regarding the absolutised status of his philosophical system is made evident when he states that an idealist approach of this kind must necessarily ignore the fact that the process by which knowledge, discovery and direction is obtained, itself belongs to a particular historical situation. The thesis of a meaning or a being that is already realised, or to be realised, then necessarily involves a hypostatisation of knowledge which is to be regarded as being alien to materialism. It is thus

crucial to note that in the mid-1930s, contra Hegel, Horkheimer attempted to elaborate upon a dialectical investigatory approach that would hopefully allow for the grounding of the 'bourgeois character', and the specific forms of rationality and pathologies that accompany it in the bourgeois, or modern, epoch itself and not the entire history of society[46] (Abromeit, 2011: 267).

The dialectical materialism which Critical Theory endorses therefore makes no pretension to exist outside or above the material life processes of society, but rather, views itself — in Horkheimer's terms — as a transformative activity and a form of consciously critical conduct that belongs to the development of society ([1937]1972: 229 & 232). As such, Horkheimer ([1937]1972: 177) maintains that a materialist, dialectical logic has:

> ... [direct] *reference to thought involved in the interpretation of living reality, to thought in process,* and not merely to static expression [emphasis added].

Thus, in direct opposition to Hegel's supra-historical views regarding necessity and the inevitable movement of Spirit throughout history, Horkheimer ([1933]1972: 25) — like Marx — argues that in the new context of the 20th century (and beyond), it has become impossible to give 'any supreme principle' as such the final word[47].

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[46] Horkheimer's position regarding this matter is made clear in several of his essays that were published in the 1930's, namely: 'Beginnings of the Bourgeois Philosophy of History' (1930), 'Remarks on Philosophical Anthropology' (1935) and 'Egoism and Freedom Movements: On the Anthropology of the Bourgeois Era' (1936). In these particular texts, the arguments and views presented by Horkheimer run in direct contradiction to the arguments presented in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* - which, as we have previously seen, can in many ways be read as a damning critique of Western rationality that, in Horkheimer and Adorno's view, remained essentially constant from Homer's time to the present. In direct contradistinction to such a sweeping and (somewhat ironically) all-encompassing critique of Western society and its accompanying form of rationality, in its nascent phase, Horkheimer's Critical Theory firmly insisted on placing all forms of investigation and critique within the appropriate societal and historical context if an accurate and critical understanding of the phenomena in question is to ever be adequately achieved.

[47] Horkheimer thus clearly draws from the critique which Marx (Marx and Engels Archive, Band I, p. 239 quoted in Fromm [1932] 1978: 489) puts forward — in relation to absolutist, idealist and transcendental philosophies — when he argues that 'the production of ideas, conceptions and consciousness is directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, it is an expression of his real life. His thoughts and intellectual ideas are seen to be the direct outflow of his material activity. The same holds true for the intellectual productions that find expression in politics, law, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc. Men are the producers of their conceptions and ideas, but we are talking about real, concrete men who are conditioned by the specific way in which their productive capabilities and their corresponding intercourse develop'. For Horkheimer, while every metaphysical system tends to espouse supreme or absolute principles that strive for insight into an essential nature, which not only underlies the past but the future as well, contemporary dialectical materialism does not attempt to build up supratemporal concepts that exist beyond the realms of space, time and social context. Horkheimer ([1933]1972: 32) therefore asserts that while Hegel

What this then implies for Horkheimer's ([1933]1972: 26) particular project pertaining to dialectical materialism, is that materialist theory is to be regarded as an essential element of the efforts aimed at improving the human situation, and as such, it 'inevitably opposes every attempt to reduce social problems to second place', or to reduce any unnecessary suffering and hardship — both past and present — to a rationalised schema that attempts to posit such atrocities in the name of some greater good that is yet to be achieved. Thus, for Horkheimer ([1933]1972: 32), dialectical materialism's chief concern should be aimed at

> *changing the concrete conditions under which men suffer* ... This concern may be comprehended historically and psychologically; it cannot [therefore] be grounded in general principles [emphasis added].

Thus, contra Hegel (and certain interpreters of Marx[48]), Horkheimer firmly believes that 'progress is not guaranteed in history as it depends on the productive and reproductive practices of historically acting subjects' (Held, 1990: 178). While history certainly does give rise to a number of contradictions and a number of modes of resolving them,

> when and how the 'immanent' possibilities [within such contradictions] will be actualized is not an issue that theory alone can resolve. It is a practical question. The materialistic dialectic is [for Horkheimer] *unabgeschlossen* [i.e. unconcluded] (Held, 1990: 178)).

This position of Horkheimer can be considered as being of immense import — particularly when reflecting upon his distinct form of dialectical materialism — as it explicitly points to the axiological and normative aspect that is evident throughout the works of the first generation of Critical Theory (and beyond), where there is a definite and sustained interest and effort in reducing the amount of suffering in the world (in the variegated forms in which such occurrences may take place). This is particularly due to the fact that according to Horkheimer and his colleagues at the Institute, the productive and technological capacities of the 20th century (and beyond) realistically allow for a substantial reduction, if not

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successfully managed to develop a comprehensive, insightful and critical dialectical programme, he nevertheless thought of it as 'exhausting its virtualities in his [i.e. Hegel's] own system'.

[48] As Held (1990: 178) notes, Horkheimer also rebuffed proposals by certain 'orthodox Marxists' of the second and third Internationals who simply attempted to 'invert' Hegel's system, rather rudimentarily, and to equate to Marxism an evolutionary determinism, which would see the technological advancements made by the capitalist economic system inevitably result in the system's own eventual downfall.

complete eradication, of the suffering that persistently plagues contemporary society. Such a statement then allows Horkheimer ([1937]1972: 162) to assert that contrary to being viewed as a 'closed system' that deals only with 'timeless truths or ideas', dialectical thought — in its newly oriented materialist framework — aims to integrate the empirical individual experience into the structural constituents of a given society so as to both comprehend and serve the wider interests of society as a whole.

Thus, as important as Hegel was for Horkheimer's efforts pertaining to the creation of a novel version of dialectical materialism, Hegel's idealist dialectical philosophy did not represent the final word as Horkheimer firmly believed that Marx — via the aid of Feuerbach's critique of Hegel — had overcome many of the shortcomings in the Hegelian system itself[49] (Abromeit, 2011: 321). Of particular import for Marx (and by implication, Horkheimer as well) was what he perceived as being his (i.e. Marx's) method's distinctly materialistic basis (Fromm, [1961] 2014: 8). According to Marx, it was this aspect of his dialectical method that aimed to investigate and study the concrete economic, social and political life of the individual within society along with how such phenomena wield immense influence and sway over the individual's actual way of life and his/her thinking and feeling.

It is precisely in this regard that Marx and Engels ([1939] 1976: 14) write that:

> In direct contrast to [idealistic] German philosophy, which descends from heaven to earth, here *we ascend from earth to heaven*. That is to say, we do not set out from what men imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, or imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. *We set out from real, active men and on the basis of their real life process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life process* [emphasis added].

Or, as Marx and Engels (1845) phrase it in *Die Heilige Familie* (The Holy Family) (quoted in Fromm, [1961]2014):

[49] It is in this regard that Fromm ([1961] 2014: 8) indicates that Marx never actually used the terms 'historical materialism' or 'dialectic materialism' in order to extrapolate upon his own modified position of the Hegelian dialectic. Fromm (ibid.) continues by noting that Marx did however speak of his own 'dialectical method' which would later come to influence the method developed by Horkheimer and the other Critical Theorists.

> Hegel's philosophy of history presupposes an abstract or absolute spirit, which develops in such a way that mankind is only a mass which carries this spirit, consciously or unconsciously. ... The history of mankind is [thus] transformed into the history of the abstract spirit of mankind, which *transcends the real man* [emphasis added].

It is as a direct result of Hegel's absolutist, esoteric and suprahistorical views that, in his 'Theses on Feuerbach' in the *German Ideology*, Marx praises Feuerbach in his critique of the Hegelian system for effectively bringing absolute spirit back down to earth and grounding it in the desires and needs of humanity. This point is emphasised by Feuerbach — quoted in Horkheimer ([1934]1993: 240) — when he explicitly argues that:

> a materialist philosophy regards as its epistemological principle, as its subject, not the ego, not the absolute i.e., abstract spirit, in short, not reason for itself alone but the real and the whole essence of man.

Held (1990: 181) expands upon Feuerbach's distinctly materialist philosophy by noting that, for Feuerbach:

> reality is to be understood as being constituted by human beings in their sensible existence; that is, through their sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*).

For Feuerbach then, this explicitly points towards their (i.e. human beings') own consciousness of their specific needs, wants and interests which are in turn rooted in particular physical and social conditions (Held, 1990: 181).

While Feuerbach's approach was perceived as an important breakthrough with regard to the development of a materialist philosophy by both Marx and Horkheimer, his critical appraisal of Hegel's system of thought was nevertheless viewed as being just the beginning of important developments in the philosophy of materialism (Held, 1990: 181). This is primarily due to the fact that the sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*) which Feuerbach takes as the domain of the dialectic is, for both Marx and Horkheimer, insufficiently differentiated from various types of social and political practice that have occurred (and will presumably continue to occur) throughout history. Thus, contra Feuerbach, Marx — like Hegel — looks

at 'an object in its movement, in its becoming', and not merely as a static entity (Fromm, [1961]2014: 8).

Influenced by the opinions and critiques expressed by Marx as explicated above, Horkheimer criticises Feuerbach for failing to move beyond an abstract concept of humanity. Horkheimer thus continued to insist on the preponderance of the material life process of society, but he also never forgot that this process is constantly mediated by concrete individuals. It is in this regard that Horkheimer ([1934]1993: 240) writes that:

> Dialectical materialism ... understands the subject of thought not as itself another abstraction such as the essence of 'humanity', but rather as *human beings of a definite historical epoch*. Moreover, these human beings are *not hypostatized as isolated units*, closed off from one another and from the world; their entire being and thus also their consciousness *depend upon their natural endowments* every bit as much as upon the *overall social relations that have taken shape in their time* [emphasis added].

Based upon the above, it is Horkheimer's firm belief that the concept of 'man' which Feuerbach claimed as the 'subject of the knowing process' was, in fact, an hypostatisation of the dynamics of that very vibrant and active subject.

As a corollary of this position, Horkheimer ([1933]1972: 42-43) also argued that while materialists must acknowledge as real 'what is given in sense experience' (as emphasised by Feuerbach and the empiricist tradition in general) they must not absolutise sensation due to the fact that while every given thing manifests itself through the senses, this does not mean that the specific function of the senses 'do not change in the historical process or that they are to be regarded as fixed cornerstones of the world' — a position which is thus very similar to that of Hegel's 'becoming' (*Werden*). While sense experience is therefore to be considered as a crucial basis of knowledge, it is nevertheless conditioned and changeable[50]

[50] This point can be considered as being of immense import with regard to the nature of this investigation which attempts to gauge the significance of the digital realms of social networking services, social media, and the impact that these new forms of communication technologies are having on the public sphere and the individuals required to operate/engage therein. Horkheimer ([1937]1972: 201) himself presciently acknowledges this factor and the impact that technologies have had (and will continue to have) on human beings and their relations to each other and society at large. It is in this regard that he writes that: 'the proposition that tools are prolongations of human organs can also be inverted to state that human organs

as it is invariably a product of the structure of human activities in various societies, and of culture and theory.

As important as Marx's early critiques of both Feuerbach and Hegel were for Horkheimer's, it is nevertheless important to note that Horkheimer's idiosyncratic approach towards a materialist dialectic moved beyond the views expressed by Marx in *German Ideology* in order to also encompass Marx's mature critique of political economy (Held, 1990: 181). Once Horkheimer — like Marx and Feuerbach— had revealed that he viewed not absolute spirit or humanity, but rather the antagonistic social totality of modern capitalist society as the proper point of departure for his dialectical logic (a view clearly indebted to the critical works of the later Marx), it is but a small step to Horkheimer's claim that Marx had developed, in his mature critique of political economy, the most adequate concepts for understanding this type of society (ibid.). Horkheimer therefore clearly aimed to move his approach towards a more concrete and dynamic level of analysis, and it is as a result of this that he presents his argument that Marx's critique of political economy remains the most important theoretical elaboration of the present historical epoch (Horkheimer, [1935]1993: 205).

Horkheimer's ([1935]1993: 205) appreciation for Marx's critique of the political economy is clearly explicated in the essay 'On the Problem of Truth' when he writes that it is Marx's critique of political economy, along with its associated categories on analysis and investigation, which is best able to analyse and comprehend the present form in which society finds itself. However, Horkheimer is extremely careful not to claim any transcendental or ahistorical validity for Marx's concepts. He insists that their explanatory power lies in their ability to explain the reified social relations peculiar to capitalist societies, the historically unique form of 'necessity', and the 'second nature' that accompanies them.

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are also prolongations of the tools'. For Horkheimer (ibid.), this then implies that in the later stages of civilisation — itself determined by the various scientific and technological tools that accompany it — 'conscious human action unconsciously determines not only the subjective side of perception but in larger degree the object as well'. This was a theme that would later be explored in much greater detail by Walter Benjamin within his seminal essay (1939) titled 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility' in which he explores the effect of the cinema on the subjects' apperception (Benjamin's views will be explored in greater detail throughout the course of Chapter 3 of this investigation). Benjamin's rather optimistic views regarding this matter would later be critically interrogated and rebutted by both Horkheimer and Adorno in their Culture Industry thesis - this particular tension will be expanded upon in Chapter 2 of this investigation.

In other words, Horkheimer therefore thinks Marx's analysis of modern capitalism was essentially correct, but because Marx's categories are critical and dialectical, and because they point beyond themselves to a qualitatively different society, they can by no means be hypostatised as eternal laws (Abromeit, 2011: 324).

Horkheimer was thus well aware of the fact that Marx had made rigorous truth claims with regard to capitalist society, its antagonistic structure and its eventual demise — however, for Horkheimer, Marx's whole project was posited on the possibility of creating a society in which his — i.e. Marx's — categories would no longer be true. Horkheimer ([1935]1993: 205) expresses this critical, dialectical character of Marx's explanatory and investigatory concepts in the following way:

> It would ... be wrong to think that events in a future society could be deduced according to the same principles and with the same necessity as the lines of development of the present one. The meaning of the categories will change along with the structure of the society from which they are drawn and in whose description they play a role.

One can thus argue that Horkheimer's insistence on the continuing relevance of Marx's theory did not translate into a dogmatic or rigid adherence to any of its particular aspects. Despite his emphasis on the logical necessity of Marx's critical categories of analysis, which reflect reified social relations in bourgeois society, Horkheimer rejected the notion that capitalism or Marx's critical theory of capitalism were completely closed systems (Abromeit, 2011: 324).

On a final note regarding the matter of Horkheimer's idiosyncratic approach towards the creation of a materialist dialectic, it is crucial to indicate that while Horkheimer was impressed with the progressive works of Hegel, Feuerbach and Marx — as expressed in their critical progression towards a truly materialist dialectic — he was nevertheless of the opinion that these theories were not able to account for the individual within any given social totality. As Arato and Gebhardt (1978: 477) note, for unorthodox Marxists (such as the critical theorists themselves), as useful as Marx's categories for understanding contemporary capitalist society were, they could not accept the official simplistic doctrine of superstructures and consciousness being mere 'reflections' of the economic base. For the

critical theorists, one central question remained open: what was the nature of the link between economic and cultural factors? It is as a result of this that Horkheimer turned to the works of Freud, via the aid of his close friend and colleague, Erich Fromm, in an attempt to marry these seemingly disparate thinkers. This particular point is announced by Fromm ([1932]1978: 477 - 496) when he explicitly argues that in order to understand the interconnected relationship between economic and cultural factors along with the effect that such an interaction has on the individual's consciousness, orthodox Marxism (as influenced by both Hegel and Feuerbach) needs to be reinterpreted within a Freudian framework.

Fromm's emphasis on a psychoanalytically informed empirical research therefore opened up an entire new field of social inquiry, which seemed to hold the key to redressing the inadequacies of Marx's theory of ideology, which had become evident in the first decades of the 20th century. As Fromm ([1932]1978: 491) succinctly phrases it:

> In many instances, to be sure, historical materialism could provide the right answers without any psychological presuppositions. But only where ideology was the immediate expression of economic interests; or where one was trying to establish the correlation between economic substructure and ideological superstructure. Lacking a satisfactory psychology, Marx and Engels could not explain *how* the material basis was reflected in man's head and heart [author's emphasis].

With the help of psychoanalysis, Horkheimer believed that his novel version of dialectical materialism would be able not merely to identify a correlation between particular groups and ideas, but also explain why these groups adhered to them – even if the ideas did not express their own best interests (Abromeit, 2011: 208). It is in this regard that Fromm (quoted in Abromeit, 2011: 204) writes that what psychoanalysis can offer is – if still only imperfectly – insight into the psychic apparatus of the individual, which in addition to technical, economic and social factors determines social development and deserves no less attention than those just named. It is on this particular note that we can now turn to our third, and final central tenet upon which Horkheimer's early version of Critical Theory rests, as it relates directly with what was discussed above: namely, the manifestation of new

ideologies in the 20th century and how it is that Critical Theory as an investigatory endeavour attempted to provide the critical researcher with the means for a substantive critique of such ideologies.

1.2.3) Ideology critique

In an aphorism entitled 'Platitudes', Horkheimer ([1934]1978: 48) provides the reader with a critical summation pertaining to his understanding of what, at that time in his intellectual development, the concept of ideology (or rather ideologies) within the bourgeois epoch entails, along with what function such ideologies serve. Implicitly, this critical summation then also alludes to what it is required on the part of the critical intellectual in order for such ideologies to be critiqued and overcome — if a more just and rational society is to be created. Horkheimer (ibid.) therefore writes:

> If it were really generally recognized that the *continuation of exploitation which benefits only a small number of men is the source of present day social wretchedness*; if every *newspaper reader grasped that the preservation of the present order is the cause of all the wars, crimes, poverty, misery* and *murder* he reads about; if these platitudes which not even people with an average knowledge of the world, let alone our learned men, understand *because we have a marvellously functioning brainwashing apparatus*, if these platitudes, I say, were even *to penetrate the understanding of the lowest guardian of this order, mankind could be spared a terrible future* [emphasis added].

In a later essay, Horkheimer ([1937]1972: 237) elaborates upon this critical commentary pertaining to ideology (particularly within bourgeois society) when he states that:

> Under the conditions of monopolistic capitalism ... *The individual no longer has any ideas of his own. The content of mass belief ... is an immediate product of the ruling economic and political bureaucracies*, and its disciples secretly follow their own atomistic and therefore untrue interests; they act as *mere functions of the economic machine* [emphasis added].

Based on the above, Horkheimer (ibid. 232) firmly maintained that ideology within the contemporary era is to be regarded as an important cohesive force that is holding together an exploitative social structure that is constantly threatened with its own collapse.

When reflecting upon how Horkheimer understands and describes the notion of ideology within contemporary society, along with the various functions that it serves, Horkheimer clearly believes that certain exploitative and well-concealed ideologies are indeed evident within contemporary society. Like Marx, Horkheimer argues that these contemporary ideologies have been established and implemented in order to sustain the current social order (or 'economic machine') which is unmistakably founded upon the basis of inequality, suffering and hardship.

In light of such an explication, it is clear to see that Horkheimer displays an affinity and appreciation towards the manner in which Marx and Engels (1976: 59-62) defined the term 'Ideology' in the 1840s, along with the mystifying form of false consciousness that accompanies it. This is made evident when they (i.e. Marx and Engels, 1976: 172) write how:

> the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas; i.e. the class which is ruling the material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.

The 'false consciousness' (a term which Marx never used himself) is related to the consolidating and mystifying function of ideology within the bourgeois period as this concept aims to highlight how the subordinate class — workers, peasants, serfs — suffered from a distorted understanding of social relations. This is due to the fact, so Marx argued, that:

> their mental representations of the social relations around them systematically conceal or obscure the realities of subordination, exploitation, and domination those relations [actually] embody (Kellner & Durham, 2006: xiii).

In addition to the above, Horkheimer makes his critical opinions very clear regarding the institutions of the mass media and those communicational structures and organs of the state/ruling elite that are purposed with providing individuals with 'enlightening' information. He unequivocally refers to such entities as 'marvellously functioning brainwashing apparatus' that invariably serve to reinforce the exploitative nature of the current social order. This critical sentiment is cogently bolstered in an aphorism titled 'Democracy and the Mass Media', when Horkheimer ([1934]1978: 153) writes that:

> The democracy whose electorate is *not both enlightened and humane* will ultimately *succumb* to the *most unscrupulous propagandists*. The *development of the mass media of propaganda* such as *newspapers, radio, television, polls* and their *connection* and *interplay* with the *decline in education* must *necessarily lead to dictatorship* and the *regression of humanity* [emphasis added].

Based upon Horkheimer's critical outlook towards the underlying ideals, sentiments and ideologies guiding contemporary society along with its institutions of mass communication and mass media, Jay (1996: 63) argues that if Horkheimer's Critical Theory can be said to have a theory of truth, it was to be located within its immanent critique of bourgeois society. As such, this notion of an immanent critique can then be regarded as the critical stance which would ultimately come to guide Horkheimer's conceptualisation and formulation of an ideology critique which was explicitly aimed at critically interrogating the pretensions of bourgeois ideology.

What this then implies is that Horkheimer sought to critically investigate those ideologies which were being triumphantly espoused within the mainstream media and the ruling political/corporate structures and, which very often tended to reside inside the very psyches of individuals as well. Such ideologies were then to be compared and contrasted, immanently, with the primarily wretched reality of the concrete and material conditions that confronted most individuals on a day-to-day basis. In order for such a critical assessment of contemporary society to actually take place, Horkheimer explicitly acknowledged the need for an approach that would firmly place ideology critique within its investigatory basis (Abromeit, 2011: 168). However, before expanding directly upon Horkheimer's understanding as to how and why a critique of ideology within contemporary society should take place, along with how the critical works of both Freud and Marx (via the aid of Fromm) played an important role in this regard, it is initially worth elaborating on how the central tenets of the Enlightenment had a tremendous influence on Horkheimer's thought regarding these matters (Abromeit, 2011: 103).

For Horkheimer, from a historical standpoint, the philosophy of the Enlightenment (particularly those *philosophes* of the French Enlightenment or *Lumières*) represented the

most advanced and uncompromising expression of the ideals and values of bourgeois society to date[51]. This was primarily due to the fact that these very critical and emancipatory ideals and values ultimately allowed that particular society to break through the confines of the firmly entrenched feudal and aristocratic order that prevailed at that time in European history (Abromeit, 2011: 104). In addition to this, it is crucial to note that Horkheimer ([1933]1993: 37) was of the opinion that the critical and groundbreaking works of the *Lumières* contained an articulation of universalist principles (such as Justice, Equality, Liberty, Freedom and Happiness) that not only pointed beyond a form of society that was rooted within a feudalist/aristocratic tradition, but also, to a society that existed beyond the vision of an emancipated bourgeois society itself. It is thus to these very critical ideals and values that Horkheimer actually turned in order to critique the nature and the underlying structures of contemporary society[52].

It is in this regard that Horkheimer ardently maintained that the *Lumières* made use of a critical, and anti-authoritarian concept of reason which was grounded in sensual human experience that also sought to bring about substantive change to existing societal conditions (Abromeit, 2011: 105). Such change was, according to Horkheimer's interpretation, intended to realise, to the greatest extent possible, human happiness in this world[53]. Horkheimer (quoted in Abromeit, 2011: 105) therefore characterises what he considers the fundamental principle of the Enlightenment, and its critical form of reason, in the following way:

> The object and aim of all activity is ... the real relations in the world. Thus ignorance is one of the greatest dangers for society and its elimination, the expansion of knowledge, "Enlightenment," is *always the precondition for happiness* [emphasis added].

[51] For an in-depth reading of this particular element in Horkheimer's thought, refer to his essays titled 'Beginnings of the Bourgeois Philosophy of History' (1930), 'Materialism and Morality' (1933), 'Egoism and Freedom: On the Anthropology of the Bourgeois Era' (1936) and 'Montaigne and the Function of Skepticism' (1938).

[52] For further details regarding this matter, see Horkheimer's ([1933]1993: 37) essay titled 'Materialism and Morality' when he writes how the 'battle-cries of the Enlightenment' are more valid now than ever.

[53] For a detailed analysis and overview of Horkheimer's reconstruction of the philosphes responsible for the ideas that contributed to the French Enlightenment, see Abromeit's (2011: 103-111) analysis and reconstruction of Horkheimer's various lectures and notes that he made during the early 1920's pertaining to these matters.

According to Horkheimer's interpretation then, society, along with its material basis and the real relations that occur therein were particularly important when attempting to explain what makes up an individual's physical and psychological constitution, along with what constitutes their happiness and their very understanding of happiness itself[54].

One can then confidently assert that the critical, materially-based and anti-authoritarian form of reason that was inherent to the French Enlightenment, which Horkheimer clearly admired, can be said to strongly resemble (if not mirror) the notion of *Vernunft* which Critical Theory, via the aid of Kant and Hegel, sought to recuperate within contemporary society. It was thus within the *Lumières'* explicit exhortation that humanity strive toward the creation of a more rational society, whilst also being acutely aware of the material and social factors that have an influence upon the individual's character (or psyche), that Horkheimer found a great deal of promise. This is due to the fact that such an exhortation essentially compels the critical thinker to engage in a fully-fledged critique of contemporary ideologies and the various social structures, institutions and technical apparatus that endorse and/or bolster the current social order in all its wretchedness.

Based upon what has been explicated thus far, one can aver that for Horkheimer, at this stage in his intellectual development, the role of the critical intellectual was not simply to study the laws that govern contemporary capitalist society nor to impose with force a form of 'correct consciousness' upon the 'ignorant masses', but rather, that of the Socratic gadfly (Abromeit, 2011: 168). What this then implies is that the critical intellectual needs to be viewed as someone who never ceases to point to the unrealised potential for a more rational and humane society and to the forces hindering the realisation of this potential.

In light of such an assertion, it can be argued that while Horkheimer still clung firmly to the egalitarian Enlightenment ideal that all individuals have the capability to exercise their reason and step out of the condition of self-incurred immaturity (Kant), along with the ability to develop a critical understanding of the society in which they live (Hegel), he

[54] Fromm ([1932]1978: 488) makes a similar point when he argues the French Enlightenment literature (especially that of Helvetius) made very important contributions in this particular field, and as such, the value of these critical works should not be underestimated.

nevertheless also firmly embraced the Marxian notion as to how the individual is required to make his/her own history (Abromeit, 2011: 167). As Horkheimer ([1937]1972: 242) notes,

> It is possible for the consciousness of every social stratum today to be limited and corrupted by ideology, ... [however] *the future of humanity depends on the existence today of the critical attitude* [emphasis added].

This then makes it understandable why ideology critique came to play such an important role in Horkheimer's own theoretical work during this time. This is primarily due to the fact that according to Horkheimer's understanding, it was many of the prevailing bourgeois ideologies that actually hindered, and in most cases prohibited, a critical sense of consciousness and awareness from being engendered within the contemporary individual.

Horkheimer therefore realised that if any attempt to carry on the tradition of ideology critique was to be effectual, and thus uphold the critical attitude which he felt was so important for the future of humanity, it must essentially fall upon the critical intellectual to reflect upon and elucidate those ideological barriers hindering such development. The critical intellectual must therefore seek to make these ideological barriers both visible and open to scrutiny in order for such a critique to maintain its self-reflexivity and contemporary relevance. The big question that then arises is how exactly does the critical intellectual go about attempting to engender this critical attitude within the individual members of society, particularly in relation to the ideologies that are prevalent at any given time.

It is as a direct result of this line of inquiry that Horkheimer's ideology critique attempts to push Marx's materialist dialectical logic one step further by pursuing the mediation of ideology back to the concrete individual (Abromeit, 2011: 164). Ideology as Horkheimer understands it is not to be perceived as being deeply anchored in the objective structures of society alone, but also as actively reproduced by concrete individuals in their everyday lives and their cultural practices as well and as such, has a firm basis in the psychic economies of its individual members (ibid. 165).

Based upon such an outlook, it can be argued that within his own approach, Horkheimer essentially attempts to move beyond certain orthodox/vulgar interpretations of Marx's

critical views pertaining to the creation and maintenance of ideologies within contemporary society. This is due to the fact that he had learned via his early encounter with Schopenhauer and his assertions regarding the malleable nature of the individual's 'metaphysical needs' (or psychic economies), that these needs, belief systems and ideological structures are themselves thoroughly labile and malleable[55]. As Solomon (1988: 81) notes, long before Freud, Schopenhauer ([1887]1948-1950: 328) pointed towards the existence of unconscious motives and insisted that:

> consciousness is the mere *surface of the mind*, of which, as of the earth, *we do not know the inside but only the crust*[56] [emphasis added].

Thus, in light of his critical encounter with Schopenhauer, Horkheimer ([1934]1978: 59) was of the opinion that based upon the socio-historical and economic conditions in which one may find oneself operating, the psychic economies of the individual may be structured, tailored and manipulated in order to serve many different ends[57]. It is precisely due to this reason that Horkheimer turns to the psychoanalytic works of Freud (via the aid of Fromm) in order to expand upon the notion of ideology and the variegated function that it can serve within society. Horkheimer thus believed that such an intellectual pursuit (i.e. the fusion of Freud — along with the insights of Schopenhauer — into a Marxian framework) would allow the critical intellectual to gain a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the individual's malleable psychic economy along with the important role that such phenomena actually play when attempting to expand upon an effective critique of ideology within contemporary society.

Elaborating upon such a sentiment, Fromm (2009: 57) goes on to state that:

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[55] For further information regarding Schopenhauer's views regarding this matter, refer to his *The World as Will and Idea* pp. 359 - 395.

[56] In consequence then, Schopenhauer's work pertaining to these matters highlighted for Horkheimer how the individual often places *false constructions* upon their behaviour and their reasoning for behaving in a particular manner. Moreover, that the ignorance the individual displays, the rationalisations which in all innocence he/she may provide, may themselves have a motive, although not one they may be aware of.

[57] Within the bourgeois epoch, Horkheimer ([1934]1978: 58) argued that these ends came to include an unwavering adherence to, and belief in, the ideologies of unlimited economic, scientific and technological progress and nationalism (to name but a few). This point is clearly explicated within Horkheimer's (ibid.) remarks in the aphorism entitled 'A different kind of Criticism' in which he highlights the malleable and flexible nature that ideologies within contemporary society actually possesses.

> Marx postulated the interdependence between the economic basis of society and the political and legal institutions, its philosophy, art, religion etc. The former, according to Marxist theory, determined the latter, the "ideological superstructure." *But Marx and Engels did not show ... how the economic basis is translated into the ideological superstructure* [emphasis added].

Fromm (ibid.) therefore proposed that with the critical investigatory tools provided by psychoanalysis, this apparent lacuna or hiatus in Marxian theory could be filled. This is due to the fact that for Fromm, the integration of Freud's psychoanalytic works with that of Marx's critical insights regarding the nature of contemporary society facilitates the creation of an analytic social psychology that is effectively able to highlight exactly *how* the mechanisms of the economic base of society and its ideologically oriented superstructure (along with the individual's psychic economy) are reciprocally interconnected. Such an approach then aims to place Marx's original 'base-superstructure' dichotomy into a renewed and critical light, as this dichotomy is now viewed as being founded upon both a mutual and interdependent relationship[58].

Thus, in his seminal text titled 'The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology - Notes on Psychoanalysis and Historical Materialism', Fromm ([1932]1978: 478) expands upon this particular point when he argues that, contrary to certain misinterpretations of Freud's psychoanalytic works, psychoanalysis should actually be regarded as a materialistic psychology due to the fact that it explicitly points towards the instinctual drives and needs of the individual in order to uncover and explore the driving force behind human behaviour. For Freud, these drives are the mental/psychic correlates of the instincts considered as something 'purely' physiological – that is, for psychoanalysis, no 'drive' on the part of humans is unmediated. Thus, contra certain 'ultra-orthodox' rationalist positions, Freud — like Schopenhauer — argued that only a relatively small sector of an individual's psychic life is based on conscious (let alone rational) activity, and as such, many decisive impulses are thus said to be rooted in the unconscious of the individual.

[58] Abromeit (2010: 55) notes that it is as a direct result of such a novel and insightful proposition that Horkheimer was drawn to the intellectual works of Fromm - not only because of his thorough knowledge of psychoanalysis, 'but also because he had completed a PhD in sociology and was thus in an ideal position to help Horkheimer integrate psychoanalysis into his critical theory of society' as a whole.

Fromm ([1932]1978: 478) elaborates upon this matter by highlighting that the basis of Freud's psychoanalytic method operates on the crucial assumption that there were two groups of instincts that serve as the real motive force behind one's psychic life, namely the instincts of 'self-preservation' and 'the sexual instincts' (i.e. the libido/libidinous energy). Importantly, for Freud, the instinctual structure of the individual subject is conditioned by two factors: the inherited psychical constitution of a given individual (i.e. a biological dimension) along with the life experiences of an individual (i.e. a sociological, psychological and experiential dimension) and it was early childhood that played a crucial role for Freud in this regard. It is as a direct result of the experiential orientation of psychoanalysis that Fromm (ibid.) goes on to state that the psychoanalytic method is an exquisitely historical enterprise due to the fact that it fundamentally seeks to understand the individual's drive structure through the understanding of one's life history.

In light of such a postulation, Fromm ([1932]1978: 478) argues that the theory with which psychoanalysis seems to have the greatest affinity and (paradoxically) greatest difference is Marx's historical materialism. The points of contact lie in the fact that both positions can be viewed as being materialistic sciences in that they do not start solely from ideas (as the rationalists would postulate) but from earthly life and needs. In addition to this, they are actually very close in terms of their appraisal of consciousness, as they view it as being a reflection of other hidden forces that are not readily visible/ascertainable. However, Fromm acknowledges that there are points of difference as well due to the fact that historical materialism, as explicated by Marx, sees consciousness as the expression of social existence whereas psychoanalysis sees consciousness as determined by instinctual forces, manifesting themselves as drives inherent to the individual.

Fromm however believes that these two positions are not necessarily as contradictory as they may initially appear. Fromm ([1932]1978: 482) is of this opinion due to the fact that Freud himself never assumed isolated man, devoid of all social ties, to be the object of psychology. As Freud (quoted in Fromm, [1932]1978: 482) notes in his essay titled 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego', in relation to the individual's psychic life:

other people must be considered as either models, objects, helpers or opponents. Thus, from the beginning, individual psychology is simultaneously social psychology - in this extended but legitimate sense[59].

Based upon such an interpretation, Fromm ([1932]1978: 482) goes on to argue that Freud's views then actually lead to the conclusion that the social attributes which effect the development of the individual's psyche 'owe their origins, intensification and diminution to the influence of specific living conditions and environmental relations of the instincts'. Social, material reality is therefore described as being a modifying factor on both the biological and physiological influence of the individual's instinctual structure. The family — as emphasised by Freud — can therefore be said to have a direct influence on the growing child, but, according to Fromm, the family itself is in turn conditioned by the social and class background in which it is rooted[60].

When attempting to illustrate how Marx's emphasis on the socio-economic factors plays a central role within the psychoanalytic method's understanding of the individual's psychic economy, along with the ideologies that are both created and reside therein, Fromm ([1932]1978: 486) notes that as a result of a merging between Freud and Marx, we find a situation arising whereby:

the phenomena of social psychology are to be understood as processes involving the active and passive adaptation of the instinctual apparatus to the socio-economic situation. ... [as such] the family is [to be viewed as] the essential medium through which the economic situation exerts its formative influence on the individual's psyche.

[59] However, in Fromm's view, Freud's psychoanalytic approach 'always proceeds from the fact that every group is composed only of individuals and that only the individual is the subject of psychic properties'. Freud therefore sees the origins of the psyche's development being confined to a narrower circle, such as the family (Fromm, [1932]1978: 482).

[60] Horkheimer ([1936]1972: 47-128) expands upon this particular point in his 1936 essay titled 'Authority and the Family' in which he clearly explicates and elaborates upon the crucial role that the family has continued to play within the socialisation and orientation process of the child over the course of history. In this essay, Horkheimer also argues that this psychically - and no doubt physically - formative role of the family has been incrementally undermined within contemporary society (or the bourgeois epoch) due to an array of factors associated with the nature of contemporary society itself.

Based upon such an assertion, Fromm ([1932]1978: 490-491) maintains that psychoanalysis is particularly important for historical materialism (which he sees as being synonymous with dialectical materialism), along with its understanding of how ideologies are created and operate within society, due to the following reasons:

i) While Marx and Engels postulated the dependence of 'all ideological processes on the economic substructure', lacking a satisfactory psychology, they [Marx and Engels] could not explain 'how the material basis was reflected in the individual's head and heart'. Hence, psychoanalysis is able to show 'how the economic situation is transformed into ideology via the individual's drives';

ii) Psychoanalysis is able to highlight exactly how the interaction between instincts and environment results in changes within the individual himself/herself. Psychoanalysis thus permits us to regard the formation of ideologies as a type of production process which is then invariably open to an array of influences, manipulation and societal interference;

iii) Psychoanalysis can tell us something about the way in which ideologies mould society and are in turn, themselves, moulded by society. Thus, the use of psychoanalysis within the framework of historical materialism can provide the critical researcher with a nuanced and sophisticated understanding of how ideologies are produced.

Such a summation then clearly highlights for both Fromm and Horkheimer how the possibility for a fruitful merger between psychoanalysis and historical materialism actually exists along with how such an approach can facilitate a critical and heuristically rewarding investigatory approach with regard to an ideology critique.

In addition to this, Fromm (2009: 9) also goes on to argue — in a fashion that would also resonate strongly within Horkheimer's own approach regarding ideology critique — that there are certain critical and interconnected principles that are common to both Freud and Marx which can invariably assist one when attempting to attain an accurate and comprehensive grasp of ideologies within contemporary society. The first critical principle can, for Fromm, be referred to as the critical mood or doubtful disposition that is inherent to both Marx and Freud — particularly with regard to how they both view the individual's thoughts about himself/herself and others. Marx believed that a great deal of what

individuals think of themselves and others is an illusion as such thoughts are based upon a mystifying and subjugating form of ideology that is inherent to contemporary society itself. As such, a watchful, sceptical and doubting attitude toward all ideologies, ideas and ideals is characteristic for Marx.

According to Fromm (2009: 9), Freud managed to mirror this same critical and doubtful mood as his whole psychoanalytic method could be described as 'the art of doubting'. This is due to the fact that Freud's method sought to uncover how most of the ideas a person has about himself/herself, society and the relations that occur therein, do not correspond to reality. While Marx placed a great deal of emphasis on the socio-economic structure of society, Freud focused on the libidinal organisation of the individual. Yet, for Fromm (2009: 9), both Marx and Freud displayed the same implacable distrust of the:

> clichés, ideas, rationalisations and ideologies which fill people's minds and which form the basis of what they mistake for reality.

This scepticism toward common thought then highlights the second commonality shared by both Marx (which he no doubt received via the critical works of Hegel as has been explicated above) and Freud as it is insolubly connected with a belief in the liberating force of the truth, or as Fromm (2009: 10) phrases it, truth's ability to act like a weapon. In a very (young) Hegelian fashion then, Fromm (ibid.) expands upon this matter by arguing that, for both Freud and Marx, if the modern individual can come to recognise the illusions which underlie one's typical associations regarding the nature of reality, then he/she can arrive at a critical and accurate understanding of reality itself and as such, change reality in such a way that illusions are no longer necessary. As such, false consciousness or the distorted picture of reality can be said to weaken the individual's ability to critique the underlying principles upon which society is founded. On the other hand, being in touch with reality, or having an adequate picture of it, makes the individual stronger and provides him/her with the ability to engage in such a form of critique.

Finally, Fromm (2009: 11) goes on to indicate that while the truth for Marx was to be perceived as a weapon geared towards inducing social change, for Freud it was a weapon

geared at inducing individual change. A heightened sense of individual awareness was thus the main agent in Freud's approach. It is in this regard that Freud claimed that 'Where id was, there ego shall be' and what he meant by this was — according to Fromm — that in order for this transformation to be achieved within the individual (i.e. via a heightened and emancipatory sense of awareness), reason is essentially required to penetrate the various fictions and illusions associated with common thought and thus, to arrive at a critical awareness of reality. For both Freud and Marx then, truth is the essential medium to transform both society and the individual while a heightened sense of awareness is to be regarded as the key to both social and individual transformation. Marx's comment (quoted in Fromm, ibid.) that:

> [t]he demand to give up the illusions about its condition is *the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions* [emphasis added],

then manages to highlight how — like Freud — Marx wanted to free the individual from the chains of his/her illusions in order to enable him to 'wake up' and act as a free individual.

Based upon these extremely critical, somewhat sceptical, but nevertheless emancipatory commonalities shared by both Freud and Marx, along with Fromm's important contributions as to how an effective approach towards ideology critique should be conducted within contemporary society, Horkheimer ([1933]1993: 35-36) goes on to argue that there is indubitably an inherent contradiction between the bourgeois order's ideas and the reality which confronts most individuals on a daily basis. Horkheimer is of this opinion due to the fact that while contemporary society claims to put the universalistic principles of justice, equality and freedom into operation within the lived reality of society's members, these very principles are, however, actually negated in practice (Held, 1990: 183).

It is in this regard that one can argue that the ideological basis upon which the bourgeois social order is founded, is said to reveal its own inherent negativity (as both Hegel and Marcuse have explicated above), as its development contradicts its own claims about itself and about what is possible. For Horkheimer, this distinction is ultimately determined by the roles and functions such phenomena actually serve in particular historical contexts (Held,

1990: 186). Thus, keeping true to the sceptical attitude of both Marx and Freud, Horkheimer maintained that:

> individual (or sets of) claims, perspectives and philosophies are to be regarded as being ideological if they conceal or mask social contradictions on behalf of a dominant class or group (ibid.).

As such, Horkheimer clearly believed that there was a great deal of ideological influence within contemporary society due to its blatantly contradictory nature, and it therefore fell upon the critical intellectual to investigate and interrogate these ideologies in the hope that they may be both exposed and overcome.

It is in light of such an assertion that Horkheimer's approach towards an ideology critique can be said to start with the conceptual principles and standards of its object — in this case, society and its associated legitimating ideologies. It then seeks to unfold and expand upon what their various implications and consequences entail. Based upon what the outcomes of such an investigatory approach yield, it then re-examines and reassesses the prevalent ideologies in question in light of these implications and consequences (Held, 1990: 184). As a result, a new understanding of the object is generated which then, in true dialectical fashion, allows for 'a new comprehension of contradictions and possibilities' (ibid.). It is directly in this regard that Held (1990: 185) argues:

> In confronting the existent with the claims of 'its own conceptual principles', critical theory retains the principle of negation as the mainstay of its approach. The truths to be drawn out are thus to be seen primarily as negations. But a critique of ideology that is based on immanent criticism derives a certain positive character by pointing to the limits and, therefore, the closed-off possibilities, immanent in the existing order (ibid.).

On a final note regarding the matter of ideology critique, it is crucial for one to be aware of the fact that while Horkheimer's early vision of critical theory clearly aims to expose and thematise the contradictions between society's performance and its legitimating ideologies, this does not imply any dogmatism towards a particular moral principle. By making use of the example of the institutions of the press and mass communications within contemporary

society, Horkheimer (1941: 122 quoted in Held, 1990: 186-187) qualifies this claim by arguing that:

> the media of public communication, radio, press, and film, constantly profess their adherence to the individual's ultimate value and his/her inalienable freedom, but, in reality they operate in such a way that they tend to *forswear such values by fettering the individuals to prescribed attitudes, thoughts and buying habits*. The ambivalent relation between prevailing values and the social context then forces the categories of social theory to become critical and thus to *reflect the actual rift between the social reality and the values it posits* [emphasis added].

What is of particular import with regard to such a summation of Horkheimer's views regarding such institutions and the ideologies that both guide them and are propagated by them, is that it is the various activities, claims and propagated ideals associated with such social institutions which can thus be taken seriously and investigated in light of their avowed aims and ends, without the acceptance of these aims and ends as valid. It is such an approach that will thus prove to be incredibly useful in relation to the outcomes of this particular study which is focusing on the institutions of social media and social networking services, the various ideologies that are currently associated with such new forms of media along with their purported ability to bolster the interaction and engagement of individuals within the public sphere of the 21st century.

1.3) Applying the core elements of early Critical Theory to the digital technologies of the 21st century

After providing a comprehensive overview of the core elements of early Critical Theory as initially outlined by Horkheimer in the 1930s and early 1940s, it is clear to see that his nascent vision of a Critical Theory of society was based upon a rich array of philosophical traditions extending back to the French Enlightenment, through to the German Idealists and beyond — primarily via the aid of Feuerbach, Schopenhauer, Marx and Freud. In addition to this it can also be argued that Horkheimer's approach was designed in such a manner so as to provide the critical researcher with some formidable and useful conceptual tools in order

to facilitate the process of continuous research, investigation and critical analysis. To recall, these tools (which are by no means to be regarded as being exhaustive) include:

i) an interdisciplinary investigatory framework that aims to focus on society and its constitutive phenomena as an interrelated whole;

ii) a dynamic and materialist view of society, which is itself viewed as being in a constant state of dialectical tension that is always rooted within a particular constellation of socio-historical factors;

iii) an axiological approach which is explicitly aimed at mitigating those elements within society that bring about suffering, thus, inversely attempting to increase the happiness of all members within society; and

iv) an approach that attempts to highlight how ideologies are created within a given society, from where they gain their impetus and are sustained — thus opening such phenomena up for a critical and comprehensive form of investigation and analysis.

In light of the above summation, the final logical step in this introductory chapter is to ask the crucial question as to how these core epistemological, methodological and axiological aspects of Horkheimer's early Critical Theory may in fact continue to assist contemporary researchers grappling with current issues. This question is particularly important for the individual residing within the digitalised domains of the 21st century where the socio-historical conditions, along with the technological underpinnings associated with such conditions, seem to be so far removed — even estranged — from the time when Horkheimer outlined his early vision of Critical Theory that was (in fairness) aimed at critically investigating the 'bourgeois period' of modernity i.e. the early-to-mid phase of the 20th century. This critical line of thought is echoed by Fuchs (2009: 7), in relation to the context of the 21st century and its techno-centric tendencies, when he notes that if one is to work from the premise that information, media, communication, culture and technology are now playing an increasingly important and somewhat novel role in the shaping of contemporary capitalism along with its associated possibilities and pathologies, then the

investigation, analysis and critique of these phenomena becomes one of the central tasks of a contemporised critical theory of society.

Such a statement then clearly begs the deeper question as to whether or not Horkheimer's early vision of a Critical Theory of society can be realistically extended, refined and modified so as to be applicable to the idiosyncratic, unprecedented and unforeseen developments occurring in the 21st century. This is of particular import when one is to consider the unparalleled manner in which contemporary society has now become inundated by a vast array of sophisticated and interconnected forms of digitalised communicational technologies that are all having an impact (whether positive or negative) upon the denizen of the 21st century. These technologies can thus be said to have given rise to an entirely new set of possibilities, complications and potentialities which Horkheimer could not possibly have envisaged and thus require urgent attention. This critical and crucial caveat resonates strongly with a cautionary — and somewhat prescient — claim made by Kellner (1989: 176) towards the latter part of the 20th century when he states that in order for Critical Theory (as initially envisioned by Horkheimer) to remain on the cutting edge of philosophical investigation and analysis, it will need to seriously take into consideration the changing and dynamic nature of contemporary society. Fuchs's (Fuchs, 2009a: 7) notion of a contemporised critical theory of society, which should now explicitly focus on contemporary communications technology and the various issues surrounding such phenomena, can thus be seen as an attempt to foster the creation of a contemporary extension of Horkheimer's nascent approach towards such critical investigation[61].

[61] As shall be elucidated over the course of this entire investigation, it can also be asserted that such a contemporised critical theory of society would invariably contain several of the critical elements contained within Horkheimer's later, more sceptical, versions of Critical Theory - with a particular focus on his and Adorno's unequivocal critique of instrumental rationality and the dangerous developmental trajectory that technology has assumed in the modern era. While a contemporary critical theory of society would therefore bear traces of the pessimism and scepticism that would come to define the works of Adorno and Horkheimer from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* onward, such a contemporised version of Critical Theory would also aim to ensure that it remained true to — and in constant conversation with — the initial emancipatory and investigatory vision of Horkheimer as outlined in his early works. Such an orientation towards a contemporary Critical Theory of society would therefore manage to open up the investigative horizons and thematic concerns of such an approach due to its multifaceted underpinnings, whilst also retaining the critical (and no doubt sceptical) edge that would come to define Critical Theory in its later iterations.

Such a link can be cogently bolstered due to the fact that the central elements of Horkheimer's approach are, according to Fuchs (2016), still to be regarded as being relevant, if not more so, today than ever. This particular argument can be furthered due to the fact that even though we find ourselves living in an epoch that is in many ways entirely different from the one in which Horkheimer and others of the first generation of critical theorists resided, it is nevertheless crucial to be mindful that such an approach towards research, investigation and analysis is still aimed at providing the contemporary researcher with an interconnected and nuanced view of society as it operates within its current socio-historic setting. This is then an approach that is explicitly aimed at allowing one to gain a comprehensive insight into the nature of contemporary society along with all of its contradictions, which then serves as a basis for, and should in fact, stimulate further critical investigation (cf. Kellner, 1989). What this then implies is that such an approach not only welcomes, but considers it as being of the utmost import, to include contemporary communicational technologies along with the impact that such devices are having upon the individual within its investigatory scope. Such exigencies no doubt evince themselves within such an investigatory approach due to the indubitable fact that it is such phenomena that are affecting the fundamental 'nature', operation and interactions of individuals within society as we currently know it[62].

[62] Such a claim is supported by a vast array of current research that vividly highlights how digital communicational technologies are affecting the manner in which individuals perceive themselves and others (Brannigan, 2010; De Ridder, 2013; Parsell, 2008); how they understand what it means to be politically active in a digitalised society (Fuchs, 2014; Bauman & Lyon, 2013; Turkle, 2011 & 2014; Jackson, 2009); how intimate interaction and communication should take place among individuals in the contemporary age (Kaufmann, 2010); along with a vast array of other dubious scenarios which are currently occurring, including digitalised forms of surveillance, coercion, domination and manipulation (Fuchs, 2014b; Stiegler, 2014; Dean, 2009; Zuboff, 2015) that both influence and determine how the individual actually lives, thinks and operates within the digital day and age. These pertinent claims and concerns can be further augmented when one is to reflect upon the rise of the phenomenon commonly referred to as the 'post truth' (Davies, 2016) and the emergence of 'fake news' (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017) on social networking platforms; algorithmic bias and manipulation in terms of data acquisition, reception and presentation (Morozov, 2013), which have also proved to have far-reaching consequences in both the economic and political realms of the 21st century (Kellner, 2016). In addition to this, it is important to take note of the fact that there is still a great deal of exploitation, suffering and hardship — redolent of the impoverished and inhumane working conditions of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries — which are associated with the actual mining of the minerals and the processes of assembly and manufacturing in relation to the technological hardware that is fundamentally required in order to make the 'information age' possible. This then also makes contemporary critical investigation, interrogation and intervention regarding such interrelated phenomena so crucial (Fuchs, 2014).

It is directly in this regard that the interdisciplinary aspect of Horkheimer's investigatory approach can be seen as a fruitful starting point from the vantage point of a contemporised Critical Theory of society and its accompanying forms of critical research. This point is actually echoed by Habermas in *Theory of Communicative Action*: *Volume 2* (1989: 366 & 378) in which he describes the early Critical Theory of Horkheimer's as an important approach that the contemporary critical theorist can utilise when attempting to explain the phenomena and pathologies associated with the modern era. Habermas is of this opinion due to the fact that Horkheimer's idiosyncratic approach pertaining to critical investigation, along with his remarkably novel interdisciplinary research programme, offers great intellectual stimulus and scope for the contemporary critical theorist who is attempting to come to terms with the new challenges and promises that society, culture and technology are bringing to the foreground (ibid.).

This point can thus be regarded as being of immense import for this study due to the fact that even though Habermas has spent a significant portion of his intellectual and academic career attempting to rebut and counteract what he perceives as being the overly pessimistic and dystopian overtones contained in the later works of Horkheimer and Adorno, he is nevertheless able to both affirm and endorse Horkheimer's early approach towards Critical Theory. This then implies that even though Habermas makes a concerted effort to turn away from the overly pessimistic views of Horkheimer and Adorno, he is nevertheless able to appreciate the methodological, epistemological and axiological undertones guiding their works. This particular study can therefore be described as being an attempt to pursue a similar line of critical and dialectical investigation focusing particularly on the deliberative and emancipatory potential of social networking technologies, along with the various pitfalls and challenges that present themselves in relation to these technologies in the context of the 21st century.

Elaborating upon the benefits of utilising a multifaceted, dynamic and interconnected investigatory approach when attempting to deal with contemporary phenomena, Kellner and Durham (2006: xii) state that any attempt to expand upon one’s theoretical perspectives and horizons via the aid of an interdisciplinary framework can be regarded as being of the utmost import with regard to the developments occurring within contemporary

society. This is due to the fact that such an approach invariably helps to illuminate multiple dimensions of our cultural environment which is becoming increasingly reliant upon technology and technologically based forms of communication. It is thus such an approach that then provides one with the possibility of attaining a far richer and more complex understanding of sociocultural life in the current epoch, and how contemporary communicational technologies are both influencing and impacting upon contemporary existence.

As such, both Kellner and Durham (2006: xii) argue, in true Horkheimerian fashion, that:

> multiplying the theories and methods at one's disposal aids in grasping diverse dimensions of an object, in making more and better connections, and is thus provides richer and more comprehensive understanding of cultural artifacts or practices under scrutiny.

Such an approach can therefore be said to lend itself rather well to any critical investigation that is attempting to come to terms with the impact that digital communicational technologies are having upon society, along with the underlying structures that may be influencing/impacting upon these technologies themselves.

Fuchs (2016: 2) expands upon this point when he indicates that Horkheimer's early vision of a Critical Theory of society can be regarded as being an open form of Marxism which is oriented towards researching and understanding society as a totality. Thus, in direct accordance with Horkheimer's dynamic form of dialectical materialism, open Marxism can be defined as a project that 'does not aim to reconstruct Marx's thought in the sense of presenting an interpretation which masquerades as the sole "correct" one' (ibid.). As such, the usefulness and benefit of open Marxism can be said to lie in the fact that it is to be viewed as a school of thought that prides itself on its dynamic and flexible nature. It is directly in this regard that Fuchs (2016: 2) notes how it is that Critical Theory is one of the traditions that has managed to draw the critical researcher's attention to the importance of studying contemporary culture and its associated technologically based phenomena in an open, interconnected and critical fashion. Critical Theory has therefore successfully managed to open such channels of critical exploration due to its explicit willingness to

engage with the issues of ideology, the culture industry and communication from a wide range of traditions and viewpoints (ibid.).

It is in this vein of thought that Feenberg (1999: viii-x) states that the time has come for an 'anti-essentialist' understanding and philosophy of technology which attempts to grasp how contemporary technology — including the communicational technologies which surround us — is affecting us in complex and diverse ways, which will then also have to take into account the various social, historical, political and economic dimensions associated with technology and society. This would then imply that the critical researcher needs to be wary of exclusively endorsing either pole of the debate surrounding contemporary technologies, i.e. those espousing a vitriolic and one-sided negative view which often takes the form of an acerbic techno-pessimism; whilst also being mindful to not blindly succumb to the auspicious and often misleading claims made by those who feel that new digital communications technologies are able to solve all of the world's problems (also referred to as cyber-utopianism and techno-centricism). Based upon the reconstruction of Horkheimer's initial approach towards Critical Theory, it should by now be clear that the early critical theorists were by no means to be considered technophobes or technophiles — but rather, open-minded thinkers who were prepared to investigate the impact that modern technologies were having on society in a very trying period within world history i.e. the early part of the 20th century.

It is in direct relation to this particular line of argumentation that Thompson (1996:97) goes on to note that in the writings of the Frankfurt School theorists, distinctive and original accounts pertaining to the nature of modern societies and the various problems confronting it are evident. Their account of modern society can thus be described as a part of a far-reaching and multifaceted analysis that is aimed at investigating the developmental characteristics of the contemporary era and the fate of the modern individual. It is in this vein of thought that Thompson (ibid.) goes on to assert that, in a fairly novel and unprecedented fashion, the early Frankfurt School managed to stress and highlight the importance that the critical researcher needs to place upon the development of mass communicational technologies and how it is that such phenomena are fundamentally altering the nature of contemporary society and the individuals existing therein. Such a far-

reaching analysis has been made possible due to the fact that Horkheimer's notion of critical rationality, as outlined above, is comprehensive enough to focus on the well-concealed and often hidden elements within contemporary society, and as such, avoids the risks of becoming soaked up by non-critical approaches (Fuchs, 2016: 31).

It is therefore clear to see that Horkheimer's multifaceted and interdisciplinary approach towards research has indeed managed to inspire an array of critically minded intellectuals long after he laid out the framework for his approach. However, as Fuchs (2016: 3) correctly notes, this does not therefore mean that one should reify particular traditions or thinkers (including Horkheimer), but rather, one should aim to engage in an open and critical conversation between various approaches. This is then in accordance with two of the central tenets which Critical Theory was itself founded upon - its interdisciplinary orientation and its embrace of the dialectical methodology. As such, Fuchs (2016: 3) argues that Critical Theory itself needs to be viewed as a dialectical approach, which means that:

> each new contribution relates to older contributions and sublates them in a constructive manner. A critical theory [including Horkheimer's] is therefore not to be regarded as a closed universe, but rather as an open endeavour[63] that cross-references other critical approaches (ibid.).

Keeping the abovementioned comments in mind, it is important to note that Horkheimer himself would not be opposed to such a modernised and critical extension of his own approach towards Critical Theory. This is primarily due to the fact that he explicitly maintains, with his emphasis on the ever-changing and dynamic nature of socio-historical phenomena, that theories, perspectives and conceptual tools need to be regularly revised

[63] Horkheimer ([1934]1978: 24-26) actually anticipates such concerns in an aphorism entitled 'Categories of Burial' when he vividly highlights how, when revolutionary ideas or revolutionary theory is routinised, dogmatised and perceived as being sacrosanct, they are essentially robbed of their critical potential, through their uncritical popularisation and personalisation (Abromeit, 2011: 169). Horkheimer ([1934]1978: 24-26) therefore writes that the most popular way of making a theory innocuous these days is: '… the *blithe transportation of its categories into a context which is totally at odds with the author's intentions*. … The attitude toward the revolutionary pioneers of bourgeois thought is a particularly striking instance. ... The Middle Ages banished the dead authors of heretical views to hell. In its heyday, capitalism is more tolerant. It apotheosizes greatness, productivity, personality, potency itself, but *rejects what they bring forth*' [emphasis added]. It is as a direct result of this that Abromeit (2011: 169) correctly notes how Horkheimer's comments above provide one with important guidelines for an appropriate approach to his own work. An uncritical celebration of Horkheimer's life and work would be precisely the type of recuperation that he criticises here (ibid.).

and updated — in an interdisciplinary fashion — if they are still to be of relevance to the current age. This then vividly highlights exactly how Horkheimer's insistence on a dialectical form of materialism, which is firmly rooted within a socio-historical setting, can still be regarded as being of relevance for the contemporary researcher. This is of particular import with regard to this particular study for the following reasons:

Firstly, it clearly delineates and highlights how one needs to approach a particular investigation which aims to deal with contemporary phenomena such as social media, social networking technology and other forms of digital communication - namely, on an interdisciplinary and theoretically or conceptually interconnected basis;

Secondly, it also elucidates exactly how one needs to assess and view the particular phenomenon of social networking technology as it currently exists in its contemporary format - namely within the dynamic and tension-laden socio-historical context of the 21st century;

Thirdly, Critical Theory, as we have seen, is to be regarded as an approach that addresses phenomena not in terms of absolute ideas and predetermined notions, but rather, in terms of material resource distribution, social struggles and addressing social injustices (Fuchs, 2016). As such, it conceives society along with its constitutive elements as a negativity and thus attempts to identify antagonisms within society itself in order to overcome them (ibid.);

Thus, when attempting to investigate the nature and impact of contemporary communicational technologies, Horkheimer's nuanced approach towards research and investigation therefore allows us to appreciate the fact that the Internet and its associated platforms of communication do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, they are to be viewed as multifaceted, versatile and distinctive entities that are deeply embedded within the antagonisms of capitalist society itself. Berry (2014: 47) reinforces such a position by claiming that with the increasing prevalence of the modern individual's experience of computation and the associated 'digital lifeworlds' that the 'computational' both creates and facilitates — from its fixed desktop location to an omnipresent mobile milieu — we are now starting to use computation in everyday spaces which then infuses the everyday

environment with a computational or digital overlay. This then implies that in our current day and age, the computational is not to be regarded as being distinct from, but rather, 'deeply embedded' within our everyday existence. As a direct result of the embeddedness of computational technology in our everyday lives, it has become crucial to gain a comprehensive and critical understanding of this situation.

In addition to the above, a critical theory of communicational technologies and society can be regarded as being 'negative' — in the Hegelian sense — insofar as it is based on the insight that such technologies should be understood in such a manner so as to highlight how there are neither only opportunities nor only risks inherent to such devices. Rather, such an approach appreciates the fact that contradictory tendencies and potentialities reside within such phenomena that pose both positive and negative possibilities. As such, when Horkheimer's emphasis on the dialectical aspect of critical analysis is extended into the realm of digital communicational technologies, it should fundamentally aim to highlight how complex, dynamic thinking is required to take place in order to do justice to the multifaceted phenomena in question. As such, a critical theory of contemporary communicational technologies that is dialectical and realistic aims to identify the antagonistic and competing tendencies within such technologies along with the relationship of such technologies and society as a whole. Such an approach then also aims to identify their opportunities and risks (Fuchs, 2016).

It is Habermas (1973) who actually alludes to this particular matter in *Legitimation Crisis*, when he highlights how, within contemporary capitalist societies, there is an inherent tendency for new types of conflicts, crises and pathologies to emerge depending on which particular stage or phase society manages to find itself in at a given historical epoch[64]. In relation to this particular study, such a statement would then highlight how the advent of digitally based forms of communication, interaction and existence have given rise to a new set of phenomena and exigencies that require urgent attention, investigation and

[64] While Habermas does not focus explicitly on the contemporary modes of digital interaction and communication in his large body of work, it will nevertheless be the aim of this investigation to explore the implications of this claim when related to the contemporary domain of social networking media.

understanding[65]. The introduction of digital communicational technologies can thus be said to have contributed to the formation of such a new stage or phase in the development of capitalist society, ultimately giving rise to notions such as 'techno-capitalism' (Kellner, 1989); 'transnational informational/global network capitalism' (Fuchs, 2008); 'communicative capitalism' (Dean, 2009) and 'surveillance capitalism' (Zuboff, 2015), which all manage to highlight just how the advances that have been made in the technological realm have invariably had a major impact upon the nature of contemporary society[66].

Thus, within what can be aptly described as our digitally driven era, it is becoming increasingly urgent and necessary to contribute to a critical investigatory approach that aims to interrogate and question what 'the digital life' actually entails and encompasses - particularly in an age when thinking, decision-making and one's sense of agency (and being) are increasingly being delegated to machines (Berry, 2014: 1). It is however crucial to note that both Kellner (1989) and Fuchs (2008 & 2016) argue that in order for such an investigatory endeavour to be insightful, effective and accurate, a critical theory aimed at exploring the dimensions of contemporary capitalism should resist temptations toward either the technological or the economic determinism which plague many classical and contemporary social theories. Instead, the researcher should conceptualise what might be seen as a new dialectic of technology and capitalist social relations in which digital communicational technologies are starting to play a more important role in the structuring, organising and production of everyday life. As such, Horkheimer's approach towards understanding the contradictory tendencies within society, along with its material basis, can therefore be regarded as being of the utmost import when attempting to foster such a dialectical stance.

[65] Such a claim invariably rests upon the (no doubt debatable) assumption that such an understanding would effectively equip one – policymakers, platform designers, technological moderating bodies and so on – to address the various pathologies that may manifest themselves in relation to these phenomena. If one is to operate from the vision that Horkheimer lays out for his nascent vision of Critical Theory (as this study indubitably attempts to do), then it is such a claim that can be said to provide this study with the necessary amount of critical and emancipatory impetus from where it can commence its investigatory endeavours.

[66] Each of these terms (i.e. techno-capitalism; transnational informational/global network capitalism; communicative capitalism and surveillance capitalism) will be explored in greater detail and depth in the final chapter of this investigation. This will be undertaken so as to elucidate — in direct accordance with what Habermas (1973) has mentioned above — just how the advances that have been made in digital communicational technologies over the last 40-50 years have made a dramatic impact upon how society has come to function and operate in the contemporary day and age.

In relation to the axiological dimension associated with Horkheimer's early version of Critical Theory, one may (understandably) inquire as to how a philosophical approach that was founded in the early part of the 20th century, which explicitly prides itself on the fact that it is aimed at reducing the amount of suffering in the world, can actually be applied to the domains of digital communicational technologies which seem very far removed from the suffering, pain, ethics and morality associated with the early part of the 20th century. It is in this regard that one might ask oneself why an individual should concern themselves with socially mediating technologies like Facebook and Twitter, the likely effects of which might seem trivial in comparison with the life-and-death implications of other contemporary moral issues that command the lion's share of philosophers' attention, such as abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment and genetic engineering (Vallor, 2011: 186). Vallor (ibid.) however goes on to aver that one can also argue that the pervasive digital technologies of the 21st century — such as social networking sites and mobile mediums of interaction and communication — possess the innate ability to modify our most basic modes of social interaction and bonding, and as a result of this, it is these technologies that have the potential to influence our moral lives and character more deeply than many of the ethical dilemmas that currently preoccupy us.

It is in this regard that Jackson (2008: 16) indicates that as a direct result of the modern individual's immersion within the digital worlds that have been created through the various 'smart' technologies currently available, people now seem to be plunging into a culture of mistrust and 'skimming'[67], whereby there is an increasingly dehumanising merging between human and machine that is starting to evince itself and take hold of both the socialising and interactive components of contemporary culture. This then leads Jackson (ibid.) to inquire as to whether or not such a situation can be affirmatively defined as 'progress' due to the fact that the modern individual actually seems to be slipping towards a time of ignorance that is paradoxically born amid an abundance of information and connectivity. While Jackson (2008: 21) is quick to assert that one cannot blame technology for society's ills, it is

[67] Skimming is a colloquial term utilised by Jackson in order to emphasise how, due to the pervasiveness of modern communicational technologies and the ease with which information can be accessed, the modern individual has lost his/her capacity for deep, meaningful and sustained engagement with the literary material in question. Jackson therefore makes use of the term in order to highlight the superficial and vacuous manner in which information is currently being obtained and utilised in contemporary society.

imperative for the contemporary individual to understand that modern digital technologies must not/should not be used blindly and as a result of this, we therefore need to think very critically about how we want to conceptualise and define the notion of progress in the 21st century.

Thus, when one is to critically reflect upon what it is being alluded to above, along with how modern contemporary communications technologies are indeed having a variegated, ambiguous and often misunderstood impact upon contemporary society and its denizens, one starts to become aware of the fact that the axiological dimension of Critical Theory becomes of the utmost import — particularly if contemporary communications technologies have the ability to either accentuate or mitigate the levels of suffering in society.

Finally, with regard to the various ideologies that are proliferating in the 21st century pertaining to social networking technologies and digital communication/interaction and their purported benefits/pitfalls, Morozov (2013: xiii-xiv) indicates that at this particular juncture of humanity's history, it has become increasingly necessary to interrogate what he perceives as being the dominant ideologies associated with the digital and smart-based technologies often emanating from Silicon Valley itself. Morozov (ibid.) is of this opinion due to the fact that he believes it is these dominant ideologies which very often tend to espouse a very one-sided, and often misleading, depiction of all the supposed benefits and conveniences associated with a life inundated with digital or smart technologies, but, which he argues are actually geared to fit us all into a "digital straitjacket" — without ever allowing one to fully comprehend and acknowledge the potential dangers and pitfalls associated with such a one-sided and myopic course of action.

It is as a result of such concerns that Fuchs (2009: 75) believes that an analysis of the media, communication and technology — via the aid of Critical Theory — needs to be both pursued and advocated. As such, one can aver that it is the critical approach as advocated by Horkheimer — which focuses explicitly on the creation, facilitation and perpetuation of ideologies within society — which is able to assist the critical researcher in contemporary research and investigation. This is due to the fact that such an approach is fundamentally aimed at allowing one to investigate, understand and ultimately dispel certain mythologies

and ideologies associated with the Internet and various social networking platforms, along with attaining a nuanced understanding pertaining to how such ideologies have been created and what (often concealed) function they are intended to serve. These critical outcomes then both augment and bolster the notion of ideology critique that is a constitutive component of Critical Theory as they are fundamentally aimed at interrogating the ideological claims associated with the Internet and the new digital mediums of interaction and communication along with their supposedly beneficent and altruistic associations.

Based upon this brief delineation of how it is that one can realistically employ and utilise the various core methodological, epistemological and axiological dimensions of early Critical Theory in such a manner so as to contribute to the critical debate surrounding contemporary communications technology, one can then assert that the early Critical Theory of Horkheimer still has a great deal to offer the contemporary researcher. As Bonss (1993: 99) notes, although it has often been declared dead, the early Critical Theory of the 1930s and 1940s — as conceptualised and formulated by Horkheimer in the context of his altering relationship(s) to Marcuse, Fromm and Adorno (Abromeit, 2010: 47) — exhibits an astonishing ability to survive. This is made evident by the fact that today there are more and more individuals, theorists and researchers (including feminists, eco-feminists, post-humanists and critical social commentators) who directly or indirectly link their work to the intentions of its social-scientific programme along with its penchant for critical, interpenetrating exploration and investigation (ibid.) This would then imply that in order for Horkheimer's approach to still be of use for the contemporary critical theorist, it no doubt requires the implementation and utilisation of up-to-date, empirically based research, along with the critical input of contemporary philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, political commentators and technological experts (to name but a few) — whilst still making use of the discoveries and achievements of the past.

This then explicitly highlights that in order to get an accurate overview of society, the material conditions that underlie it, its socio-historical underpinnings, its internal contradictions, the ideologies and pathologies associated with it along with its latent potentialities, one is actually compelled to focus on the impact that contemporary

technology (including digital media, social networking sites and information- communication technologies) is having upon individuals, whilst also placing it within the larger framework of society as a whole. As Garnham (2000: 4) notes, such an analysis will then need to be placed within the broader societal context in which such phenomena appear and operate as these devices are all rooted within the wider structures and processes of a given social formation. In order to effectively achieve such an outcome, one therefore needs to embrace the open-ended and multifaceted approach that Horkheimer introduced in his early version of Critical Theory, in order to animate an investigatory approach that is aimed at what might be referred to as the "digitalised post-bourgeois individual" who finds himself/herself operating in a era where digial communicational technologies are playing an ever greater role in the very constitution of his/her everyday life.

Such a position then lays the critical platform for the next chapter of this investigation which will aim to incorporate the insights of the first generation of Critical Theory, particularly those pertaining to the Culture Industry thesis and One-Dimensionality — as delineated by Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse — and how they believe that the mediums of mass communication and interaction (particularly the cinema and radio) were having a divergent impact upon society and its inhabitants. On the one hand, we have the position of Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse as explicated in their Culture Industry thesis and Marcuse's idea of One-Dimensionality which posits, in no uncertain terms, that the technological mediums of mass communication and the various industries that were driving them were having an inimical and stultifying effect upon the individual's ability to attain a critical sense of understanding and awareness of the reality confronting him/her. These rather sombre views of Adorno and Horkheimer, as well as Marcuse, will then also need to be critically interrogated and reviewed, on the other hand, in order to present this investigation with a well-founded and rounded basis from where it will be possible to scrutinise the digital mediums of mass communication which have emerged in the 21st century in the framework of Critical Theory itself. In order for this to be effectively achieved, the more optimistic views of Walter Benjamin will be incorporated in Chapter 3 of this investigation so as to ensure that the dialectically laden and contradictory nature inherent to technologies of mass communication is both appreciated and understood within a critical perspective - exactly as Horkheimer would have wanted it.

Chapter 2: The Culture Industry - Consideration, Corroboration and Continuation[68]

Based upon the reconstruction that appears in the first chapter of this investigation, in particular that of Horkheimer's early vision of Critical Theory and its multifaceted investigatory endeavours, it was argued that the early critical theorists of the Frankfurt School should by no means be seen as narrow-minded, myopic and parochial technophobes - particularly in relation to their critical views regarding science and modern technology (Bonss, 1993). In light of this reconstruction then, it was asserted that this group of theorists is not to be viewed as a conglomeration of nostalgic luddites who saw nothing of the emancipatory interest/potential residing within the ever-expanding technological sphere of contemporary reality. Rather, the first generation of critical theorists, particularly in their younger days, can be regarded as open-minded (albeit extremely wary) thinkers, equipped with an array of critical investigatory tools, who were indeed prepared and willing to investigate the multifaceted and often contradictory impact that modern technologies were having on society in the 20th century.

Such a statement is bolstered by the fact that if one is to assess some of the later works of Adorno (who is often perceived as being the eternal cynic, ultimate pessimist and mandarin luddite) such as "How to Look at Television" (1954) and "Education after Auschwitz" (1966), he explicitly expresses a certain amount of openness and optimism — while remaining characteristically wary of exhibiting an unbridled and unfounded sense of hope for the future — with regard to the liberating potential of mass communicational technology. Adorno (occasionally) expressed such an attitude in direct relation to the communicational technologies which emerged during the early-mid part of the 20th century which included devices such as the television, radio, cinema and the mass broadcasting systems (Kellner, 2001).

[68] Certain sections of this chapter have drawn — either directly or indirectly — from several journal articles that were published (by the author of this thesis) during the course of researching/writing this dissertation, namely: Amiradakis, M.J. (2016a), 'Is social networking fostering the fungibility of the Other'; Amiradakis, M.J. (2016b), 'Social networking services: A digital extension of the surveillance state?'; and, Amiradakis, M.J. (2019), 'Habermas, mass communication technology and the future of the public sphere'. Permission has been granted by the relevant and applicable publishers (Taylor and Francis) for the utilisation, inclusion and reproduction of this material within this dissertation (see Appendix A for further details regarding this matter).

Marcuse (2002: 244) exhibits a similar form of circumscribed optimism within *One-Dimensional Man* when he argues that technology in the 20th century has developed to such a great extent that it has indeed made the 'pacification of existence' possible. However, for this pacification to be effectively achieved, Marcuse fervently maintains that an aesthetic transformation of the technological sphere of existence is required whereby technics itself must become the 'instrumentality of pacification' and an organon of the 'art of life'[69]. As such, one can confidently assert that the early critical theorists clearly displayed an openness and willingness to engage with the new communicational technologies associated with the 20th century at various points in their respective careers[70].

Such a position is both advanced and furthered by Thompson (1996: 97) when he states that the multifaceted approach adopted by the early theorists of the Frankfurt School allowed them to provide distinctive and original accounts of the nature of contemporary society, along with its associated technological innovations and the various problems confronting it. Supporting this stance, Kellner and Durham (2006: xvii) indicate that due to their rather expansive orientation and nuanced investigatory pursuits, to a large extent, it was in fact the Frankfurt School which actually inaugurated what can now be referred to as the 'critical studies of mass communication and culture'. It was thus the early members of the Frankfurt School who were among the first social theorists to see the significance of what they dubbed as being the 'culture industries' in the duplication of contemporary societies. Within such industries, the critical theorists maintained that mass culture — along with its associated technologies of mass communications — and the domains of

[69] The various ideas advanced by the first generation of critical theorists (with particular emphasis on the views expressed by Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Fromm and Benjamin) pertaining to the liberating as well as the dominating aspects of technology will be explored in more detail throughout the course of the next two chapters.

[70] It will be recalled that this open and accommodating form of investigatory endeavour was to be effectively achieved, according to Horkheimer's (1937) visionary approach, by taking into account the wider socio-historical context in which such phenomena appear, the dialectical potential contained within each and every element that constitutes a given reality, the political economy which underpins and guides the operations and technologies of society, along with the various (often unconscious/hidden) socio-psychological forces at work within any given societal setting.

leisure/entertainment were to be viewed as being important agents of socialisation and mediators of political reality[71] (ibid.).

It is as a direct result of such a wary, critical and multifaceted perspective that the critical theorists maintained it was the very institutions of mass communications and broadcasting — along with the often-concealed relations of domination and power underlying them — that should be seen as primary institutions (pertaining to the socialisation process) of contemporary societies. These theorists therefore maintained that it is these primary institutions that actually wield an unprecedented array of economic, political and cultural effects upon society and as such, it is these very phenomena that need to be critically analysed and scrutinised. It is in this regard that Kellner (2001: xvii-xix) argues that it was these theorists who were, in fact, among the first to:

> analyse the new configurations of the state and economy in contemporary capitalist societies, to criticize the key roles of mass culture and communications, to analyze new modes of technology and forms of social control, to discuss new modes of socialization and the decline of the individual in mass society and (vis-á-vis classical Marxism) to analyse and confront the consequences of the integration of the working classes and the stabilization of capitalism for the project of radical social change.

As a result of such a progressive and prescient stance, it can be asserted that it was the critical theorists that cogently managed to highlight the importance that the critical researcher (still) needs to place upon an understanding of the development of mass communicational technologies and how such phenomena are fundamentally influencing, altering and structuring the very nature of contemporary society and the individuals operating therein[72].

[71] More on the matter of the 'culture industries', as envisaged by the critical theorists, will be explored and outlined in this particular chapter due to the fact that this concept is crucial to the critical theoretical framework of this entire investigation.

[72] Marshall McLuhan ([1964]2001: 16) is often lauded as being one of the first thinkers to take seriously the fact that modern media technologies are not innocuous when it comes to transmitting 'content', but are rather to be regarded as 'staples and natural resources' that affect the 'entire psychic life of the community'. McLuhan (2001: 7) therefore indicates that 'the medium' has become 'the message', having indubitably affected the way we live, think, act and relate to one another (Amiradakis, 2016a: 250). While McLuhan's observations can be regarded as being both highly astute and critically compelling, it is an often overlooked aspect of Horkheimer's early critical analysis regarding modern technologies, that it presciently anticipates

The novel and rather unprecedented approach towards investigating and critically exploring the mass communicational technologies alluded to above is most powerfully captured within a few distinctive, and at times contradictory texts, which emanated from the Frankfurt School, namely: Horkheimer and Adorno's (1997) influential critique of contemporary communicational technologies which appears in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and is titled 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception'; Marcuse's (2002) critique of what he perceives as being the new technologies of control which have emerged in the 20th century (and no doubt continue to operate in the 21st century) as articulated in *One-Dimensional Man*; and Walter Benjamin's (1935-1939) groundbreaking essay titled 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'; along with his various writings on film, cinema and popular culture[73].

The various writings and texts alluded to above no doubt manage to place the critical theorists in different camps pertaining to their outlook towards mass culture, technology and technologies of mass communication in particular. As shall be elaborated upon throughout the course of this particular chapter, within *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno's (1997) argument pertaining to mass culture and its ostensible technological advances aims to elucidate how the communicational technologies of the 20th century including film, television and radio (along with the modern phenomenon of mass consumption), are to be conceived of as media which have effectively managed to

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McLuhan's concern, when Horkheimer ([1937]1972: 201) writes that the proposition that 'tools are prolongations of human organs' can also be reversed to state that human 'organs are also prolongations of the tools'. This then implies that according to Horkheimer's early understanding of modern technology, in the later stages of civilisation — itself determined by the various scientific and technological tools that accompany it — technology was coming to play an ever greater role in the ontological and existential composition of society and its inhabitants. A similar point was also made by Benjamin (1935-1939) — long before McLuhan — in his famous essay titled 'The Work of Art in the Mechanical Age of Reproduction' in which he writes that 'During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organised, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well' (Benjamin 1939: 222). As such, the critical theorists clearly anticipated the importance of modern communication technologies within contemporary society, and as a result, they made it clear that such phenomena were not to be regarded as peripheral matters in relation to investigation, but pertinent matters that need fastidious and timeous consideration and investigation.

[73] An in-depth analysis of Benjamin's views pertaining to mass culture and its associated technologies of reproduction will be explored in the next chapter of this investigation so as to ensure that one is provided with a well-rounded, and critically informed perspective regarding the phenomena of mass culture, technologies of mass communication and what they potentially entail for contemporary society. This will then provide us with a solid and nuanced investigatory platform from where the digital mediums of communication and interaction of the 21st century can be gauged.

'complete the integration of the masses into the economy of corporate desire' (Abbinnett, 2004: 77).

As a result of such a comprehensive and all-encompassing integrative process, Horkheimer and Adorno maintain that what was once referred to as 'culture' [*Kultur*] has now become an object of technological reproduction, and as such, has — contra Benjamin (1935) — lost a great deal (if not all) of its transformative and emancipatory potential. It is directly in this regard that Horkheimer and Adorno caustically note that within the contemporary era of technological and mechanical reproduction (i.e. the late 19th century, early 20th century and beyond):

> Nothing remains as of old; everything has to run incessantly, to keep moving. For only the universal triumph of the rhythm of mechanical production and reproduction promises that nothing changes, and nothing unsuitable will appear (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1997: 134).

In conjunction with this powerful and groundbreaking critique, it is of the utmost import to be aware of the fact that Marcuse (2002) would later come to develop and further a similar line of critique - particularly in relation to the issues of contemporary consumer culture, new technologies of control and its associated forms of mass communicational technologies. Marcuse's investigation and polemics regarding these matters would be fully articulated in his seminal text titled *One-Dimensional Man*, which can be said to contain a theory of 'advanced industrial society' that aims to describe how it is that:

> changes in production, consumption, culture, and thought have produced an advanced state of conformity in which the production of needs and aspirations by the prevailing societal apparatus integrates individuals into the established societies (Kellner, 2002: xii).

Marcuse (2002) can thus be said to describe and critique what he refers to as the 'technological society', in which technology has come to play a prominent role in the configuration of contemporary life. As such, Marcuse claims that technology has actually managed to restructure the domains of labour, leisure, entertainment and communication, thus directly influencing some of the most fundamental aspects of life - ranging from the

organisation of labour to the various modes of thought, behaviour and interaction that one typically finds within modern society.

Rather than seeing these technological developments as being beneficial to the individual or society, Marcuse — like Horkheimer and Adorno — sees them as a direct threat to human freedom and individuality in a totally administered society. As such, Marcuse's later critique can be said to offer the critical researcher an augmented and nuanced approach to the Culture Industry thesis in general as it was developed in the 1960s as opposed to the 1940s (when the Culture Industry thesis first emerged). It is as a result of the direct correlation between Horkheimer and Adorno's critiques contained within their Culture Industry thesis and those contained within *One-Dimensional Man* that Marcuse's work will be utilised and included in this particular chapter in order to supplement and augment the insights provided by Horkheimer and Adorno when attempting to critically evaluate the impact of the mass communicational technologies of the 21st century[74].

While the crucial works of Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse will be extensively explored in this particular chapter and thus serve as the critical - and somewhat pessimistic - platform upon which this investigation into the digital communicational mediums of the 21st century will be based, they will not serve as the only theoretical basis from which such phenomena are to be explored. Thus, in true dialectical fashion (and in keeping with the original spirit of Critical Theory), the sceptical, wary and somewhat pessimistic views introduced within this chapter will be countered and supplemented within the next chapter of this investigation with the works of Walter Benjamin — in particular, his groundbreaking essay titled 'The Work of Art in the Mechanical Age of Reproduction' — and his views pertaining to the emancipatory and edificatory possibilities residing within cinema and the possibility of the emergence of a new technologically mediated public sphere (Hansen, 2012: 6). The views of Benjamin will be incorporated — in a dialectical fashion — in the next chapter of this

[74] It is also important to note that beyond the rather prescient and, at times, grim analysis of the technological forms of domination that have emerged within contemporary society, *One-Dimensional Man* also manages to express the hopes of a radical philosopher (Kellner, 2002: xii). Such hopes can be said to focus upon how 'human freedom and happiness could be greatly expanded beyond the one-dimensional thought and behaviour prevalent in the established society' (ibid.). This can thus be regarded as a fruitful avenue of thought that will prove to be of immense import for later stages in this investigation when social media will be critically evaluated in order to identify where its creative, emancipatory and edificatory potential may reside.

investigation as it is he who effectively manages to see something different/possible in the mediums of mass communication that were available at the time of their writings. As such, it will be these works that will act as the counterpoint to the powerful critiques of popular culture and mass media as outlined and articulated by the likes of Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse.

In light of the above, it is hoped that the reconstruction that is to appear in the next two chapters of this investigation will manage to effectively highlight the nature of the competing positions held by various members of the Frankfurt School and their wider associates in relation to mass culture and technologies of mass communication, along with the crucial fact as to how the debate surrounding the issues inherent to these competing views is both alive and well. Such a dialectically and juxtaposed reconstruction of the variegated positions alluded to above, will then (hopefully) highlight how the debate and furore surrounding mass media, modern culture and popular mediums of interaction, communication and existence are by no means to be considered as being over or definitively concluded. It is also the intention of the next two chapters to elucidate how these arguments and debates — which were actually well underway in the immediate post-World War I period (Jay, 1993:365) — need to be both seriously (re)considered in the 21st century and carefully reworked into the digital domains of social networking in order for the contemporary critical researcher to gain a critical and constructive stance regarding the multifaceted nature and impact of these new mediums of interaction and communication[75].

2.1) What is the critical impetus guiding Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse's position?

In relation to the phenomena of mass culture, mass entertainment and the technologies of mass communication, Kellner (2002: 1) notes that the views of Adorno, Horkheimer and

[75] What is of significance at this stage of the investigation is for the reader to be acutely aware of the fact that while the contentious debate and furore surrounding the Culture Industry thesis in relation to Benjamin's more optimistic views may be over 70 years old, this topic still has a great deal to offer the critical researcher and is thus worthy of further consideration and exploration. It is directly in this regard that Berry (2014: 26) notes how the original critical theorists (including Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse) presciently recognised the growing importance of culture and technology when attempting to understand the ever-changing nature of capitalism. In many ways then, their thought can be regarded as being deeply engaged with many of the problems we face today and it is thus crucial that a re-articulated critical theory is available for thought today (ibid.). However, at the same time, it would be both foolish and naive to overlook the fact that such views and critiques do nevertheless require some revision and reformulation — as Horkheimer (1937) explicitly argues — if they are to remain up-to-date and applicable to contemporary society and the challenges which confront it.

Marcuse are considered — by some — as being rather controversial. This can be ascribed to the fact that their critical assertions often tend to clash with the what can be described as the "liberal celebration" of media culture and mass communicational technology along with the more affirmative attitude that such approaches typically tend to espouse when evaluating the nature of contemporary culture, media and society (ibid.).

Importantly, when considering the critical impetus that animates the works of Horkheimer and Adorno (and by extension, Marcuse as well), particularly those insights and polemics contained in their Culture Industry/One-Dimensionality thesis, one needs to be mindful, from the very outset, that what these critical theorists fundamentally aimed to pursue and develop was an articulate, expansive and critical social theory[76] (Pietilä, 2005: 143). It is precisely in this regard that the Culture Industry thesis — along with Marcuse's synopsis of an ever-expanding one-dimensional society — can be said to represent an attempt by the first generation of Frankfurt School theorists to respond to the unprecedented technological and cultural developments in the early-mid 20th century[77] (Agger, 1992: 60). Such an idiosyncratic set of responses can be said to have arisen from the Critical Theory camp due to the fact that it was these periods — in modern Western history — that gave rise to a number of new challenges, problems and societal conditions which were unforeseen by Marx's (1867) original analysis of the capitalist system and its (supposedly) inevitable downfall (as delineated and explicated by Marx in *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*)[78].

[76] Such a critical social theory should, according to the epistemological and methodological orientation of these theorists, be capable of both explaining society as it currently manifests itself (along with the numerous maladies confronting it), and, subsequently, establishing a suitable critique of it in order to facilitate the emergence of a new and better one. As has been outlined in Chapter 1 of this investigation, such a set of critical and emancipatory outcomes are in direct accordance with Horkheimer's (1937) original formulation of what Critical Theory, as opposed to Traditional Theory, should ultimately aim to achieve.

[77] These distinctive periods of 'development' in the 20th century are explicitly referred to by Horkheimer and Adorno (1997: 43) as being those of 'late capitalism', and for Marcuse (2002: xxxix-xlvi), it is the emergence of an 'advanced industrial society' or the 'technological society'.

[78] It will be recalled that within Marxism there is a very wide spectrum of views on the role of the productive forces within society (i.e. technology and its development) and its relationship to the social relations of production and the economic system guiding society (Seed, 2010). At one end, orthodox or classical Marxism sees the development of the forces of production as a prerequisite for the potential development of a socialist society. Sometimes, and detrimentally to the model however, technology as a prerequisite is made synonymous with the development of socialism (ibid.) — thus inextricably equating the development of technology with the emancipation of society and the inevitable downfall of the capitalist system — sometimes also referred to as a crude/vulgar form of Marxism (ibid.).

Based on the above, it can be argued that the first generation of critical theorists sought to critically evaluate and investigate Marx's writings and the various 'predictions' contained therein with an explicit focus on the development of technology in the 20th century in order to discover whether or not these ostensible developments would ultimately bring about the demise of the capitalist system, and if not, why not. It was thus these updated and revised analyses of the capitalist system, in its 20th century guise, in which technologies of communication and mass production had come to play a much greater and unprecedented role in the day-to-day affairs of society (Murdock and Golding, 1974), which were intended to provide one with an array of contextually suitable investigatory tools. Upon this particular reading, such a set of tools could thus be utilised in order to critically interrogate, understand and (hopefully) liberate the emancipatory potential (possibly) contained within the realms of culture, media and the mass communicational technologies in the 20th century (and beyond).

With this critical and contextualising caveat in mind, it is interesting to note that it was actually Horkheimer ([1941]1972: 288) who coined the phrase 'cultural industries', in his essay titled 'Art and Mass Culture' in order to highlight how, according to his critical analysis of contemporary society and its new technologies of reproduction, what is typically referred to as 'popular entertainment' in the 20th century is nothing more than:

> demands evoked, manipulated and by implication deteriorated by the various cultural industries. It [therefore] has little to do with art, least of all where it pretends to be ... (ibid.).

As such, it was Horkheimer's firm contention that what these cultural industries actually produced had very little to do with aesthetic elevation, edification or even entertainment - even though these various industries may guilefully claim to do so.

Keeping Horkheimer's (1941) critical views pertaining to culture, industry, art and the state of popular entertainment in mind, one can effectively go on to argue that the phrase 'Culture Industry' was deliberately constructed by Horkheimer in order to expound upon a 'dialectical irony' which is, in fact, a key characteristic/feature of first-generation Critical Theory (Kellner, 2002: 8). In order to elaborate upon what this dialectical irony actually

entails, it is crucial to be mindful of the fact that the notion of culture (*Bildung*), as traditionally valorised and understood by the German Romantics, Idealists and the critical theorists themselves, is supposed to be averse to industry, while managing to provide society with a repository of humanising values and promoting the sentiments of individual creativity, growth and development. Regarding the various cultural industries that have proliferated in the 20th century however, Horkheimer and Adorno (1997) argue that modern culture and the various technologies that have come to accompany/augment it, have actually developed into powerful, manipulative tools that propagate a (near) ubiquitous sentiment of ideological domination (rather than that of humanisation or liberation). Marcuse (2002: 3-5) succinctly phrases this rather dubious matter when he states that:

> A comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom prevails in advanced industrial civilization, a token of technical progress. ... By virtue of the way it has organized its technological base, contemporary industrial society tends to be totalitarian. For "totalitarian" is not only a terroristic political coordination of society, but also a non-terroristic economic-technical coordination which operates through the manipulation of needs by vested interests.

In relation to the aforementioned extract, while one can aver that Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse were wary of the new technologies that were emerging in the 20th century (including the technologies of mass broadcasting, media and communication), one is *not* to infer that this necessarily means that they viewed all forms of contemporary culture and mass communicational technology as inevitably resulting in a form of subjugation/domination for society and its inhabitants. What their critical and wary stance does nevertheless highlight, is the fact that according to the first generation of critical theorists, the phenomena in question require serious consideration if they are to be properly understood and appreciated - particularly in the nuanced and dialectical fashion typically associated with the works of the first generation of Critical Theory. Thus, keeping true to their Hegelian-Marxist background, Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse firmly maintain the importance of recognising the dialectical tension inherent to all of the technological phenomena in question. As such, these phenomena should not be understood

as being closed off or ossified entities, but rather, open to dialectical investigation and interrogation in order to reveal their multifaceted and often contradictory nature (Agger, 1992: 60).

It is directly in this regard that Marcuse's (2002:4-5) comments are particularly telling when he goes on to argue that the technological processes of mechanisation and standardisation might be able to 'release individual energy into a yet uncharted realm of freedom beyond necessity'. Beyond this, he goes on to assert that if such a situation were actually able to manifest itself, the very structure and nature of human existence would be forever altered - presumably for the benefit of all humankind. As such, Marcuse seems to be well aware of the fact that as domineering and stultifying as contemporary technology tends to be in its current configuration (according to his critical analysis at any rate), the reverse side of the current situation could potentially allow for a contradictory development to unfold in which

> the individual would be liberated from the work world's imposing upon him [or her] alien needs and alien possibilities (ibid.).

It is in light of such potentiality then that Marcuse (ibid.) unashamedly suggests that as a direct result of the technological possibilities currently available, the individual could potentially 'be free to exert autonomy over a life that would [truly] be his [or her] own'. Central to Marcuse's entire polemic then lies the kernel of the dialectical irony alluded to above, and as such, it is this dialectical irony that thus needs to be fully unpacked and explored.

Horkheimer and Adorno (1997: xvi) aim to extrapolate from this dialectical irony when they aver that their critique of contemporary culture and its technological advances (as encapsulated in their Culture Industry thesis) is actually intended to demonstrate how, within contemporary society, the Enlightenment, its emancipatory ambitions and promises, along with its techno-scientific form of rationality[79], have all undergone a catastrophic form of regression. What this ultimately portends for society — according to Horkheimer and Adorno's (1997) critical investigation — is that the emancipatory and edificatory role that

[79] This form of 'techno-scientific rationality' or 'Instrumental Rationality' as Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse conceive of it, will be investigated in more detail throughout the course of this chapter.

was once played by cultural enlightenment in the life of humanity, along with the various technological and communicational mediums through which such cultural edification was to be disseminated throughout society, has been significantly (if not fatally) undermined/impaired. Such a caustic concatenation of critiques is thus intended to illuminate for the critical investigator that where the Enlightenment had once aimed to emancipate humankind from a condition of ignorance and toil it has, contrary to popular belief, transformed itself into a repressive form of ideology. Importantly then, for Horkheimer and Adorno, this form of ideological subjugation is typically expressed/disseminated via the technological means of the radio, the cinema (later the television) and the modern manifestation of mass consumption[80] (ibid.).

In relation to the desired outcomes of this particular investigation, such a dialectically laden position then invariably opens up a much-needed critical doorway of enquiry that must be explored, understood and assessed in order to ascertain whether or not this tension-riddled stance can still prove to be of use for the contemporary critical researcher attempting to grapple with the challenges and demands posed by digital forms of communication and interaction. Such an acknowledgement then invariably compels one to investigate these critical theorists' alternative argument pertaining to what the Enlightenment entails (along with its associated form of rationality) in order to get an idea of what such phenomena potentially bode for humanity and the future of contemporary society which is becoming ever-more technologically laden and dependent.

2.2) What is the Enlightenment and what does its notion of progress typically entail?

The Enlightenment is typically conceptualised as an historical period, spanning the 17th and 18th centuries, containing the liberating ideals of what would later be referred to as modernity (Fagan, 2005). The Enlightenment intellectuals — which typically range from Descartes through to Kant — can be said to be united by a shared vision/hope in which a

[80] It is crucial to be mindful of the fact that for Horkheimer and Adorno, when they developed their Culture Industry thesis (in the 1940s), these 'technological demonstrations' and consumptive behaviours were to be viewed as the latest mediums through which forms of ideological domination and indoctrination could be disseminated within the modern world. As such, these technological and cultural mediums can, and no doubt need to, be updated so as to include and take note of the later technological developments including those of television (which Marcuse and Adorno would later come to comment on), the Internet, social media, social networking and digital broadcasting/streaming, texting, tweeting, Facebooking etc.

truly humane social/political order was to be established through the dissolution of previously oppressive institutions and unenlightened conceptualisations of the world. The establishment of such an outcome was, according to the proponents of the Enlightenment, to be achieved primarily through the creation — and maintenance — of the necessary conditions in which the modern individual could freely exercise her own reason[81] (ibid.).

In his *Valerius Terminus - Of the interpretation of Nature*, Francis Bacon (1603) — whom Horkheimer and Adorno (1997: 5) perceive as being a quintessential proponent of enlightened thought — succinctly articulates this emancipatory vision when he states that:

> ... the true end, scope, or office of knowledge [in an enlightened world], which I have set down to consist not in any plausible, delectable, reverend or admired discourse, or any satisfactory arguments, but in effecting and working, and in discovery of particulars not revealed before, for the better endowment and help of man's life... [as a result] I may at the least [then] give some awaking note both of the wants in man's present condition and the nature of the supplies to be wished ... .

This optimistic (and no doubt noble) sentiment is echoed by Immanuel Kant (1784) in his essay titled 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?'. In this particular text, Kant describes the Enlightenment as the individual's emergence from his/her self-incurred immaturity. For Kant, a self-incurred form of immaturity is depicted as being:

> the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another.

Kant (1784) expresses his disdain for this type of 'domesticated', 'docile' and herd-like mentality when he emphatically makes use of the Latin phrase '*Sapere Aude*!' (Dare to

[81] It is important to note that, for a critical theorist like Horkheimer (especially in his younger days), there was no such thing as a unified or homogeneous movement typically referred to as 'The Enlightenment'. This is due to the fact that, according to Horkheimer's analysis and rather extensive historical reconstruction, the critical and emancipatory impetus driving such a movement emerged at different times, in different locations and via an array of idiosyncratic thinkers throughout the course of Western history. Thus, for Horkheimer, while the proponents of the Enlightenment were by no means to be considered as an analogous or homogeneous group of individuals, they were nevertheless united by their belief in a new, emancipatory form of reason and its relationship to society and history (cf. Abromeit, 2011: 101-111).

Know!) in order to exhort humanity to have the valour and fortitude to make use of their own reason (and understanding). Kant then goes on to explain how such an autonomous disposition is to be engendered and extended within the individual, and society at large, when he states that:

> For enlightenment of this kind [to occur], all that is needed is *freedom*. And the freedom in question is the most innocuous form of all - freedom to make *public use of one's reason* in all matters [emphasis added].

In light of the above, one can infer that for Kant, rather than letting the principles by which the modern individual is required to make decisions be determined by his/her leaders (be they social, political or religious), he rather called upon the will (of the individual) to determine — for itself — the principles which were to serve as its guide. Thus, instead of blindly acquiescing to any externally imposed laws or religious precepts, Kant maintained that the modern individual should acquiesce to his/her own self-imposed law (Dryden, 2010).

From the summation that appears above, one can then plausibly surmise that the Enlightenment — as both an epistemological and methodological paradigm — can be understood as a relatively recent doctrine and orientation towards reality that aimed to remove any form of dogmatism or mythology from the modern individual's comprehension of the world (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1997: 5). It was therefore hoped, by the proponents of the Enlightenment, that such a revised form of comprehension would manage to replace those antiquated relics of a presumably "un-enlightened past" that were still evident within human cognition. Such outdated forms of cognition would then be substituted with a form of rationality that Bacon (1694) tellingly describes as being:

> ... a restitution and reinvesting (in great part) of man to the sovereignty and power (for whensoever he shall be able to call the creatures [i.e. nature] by their true names he shall again command them) which he had in his first state of creation.

This process of extirpation, coupled with the interrelated process of edification, was to be viewed as an empowering undertaking that would liberate the individual from the:

> ... dogmas and formulas, those mechanical instruments for rational use (or rather misuse) ..., [that] are the ball and chain of his [or her] permanent immaturity (Kant, 1784).

What this then implies is that for thinkers such as Kant and Bacon (and the vast array of Enlightenment proponents), there was to be a dramatic transformation within the individual himself/herself, and by extension, society as a whole as a direct result of enlightened thought. Thus, the very perception, understanding and ontological make-up of the modern individual would be dramatically altered in such a manner that he/she would no longer be viewed as the feeble-minded, docile and "backward" invalid who was once the subordinate, passive and powerless victim of fate. Rather, the modern individual would now be viewed as possessing the immanent potential to be an empowered and progressive agent who commands and controls life in the manner that they deem to be fit.

In light of the above, it can be argued that what such a liberating and sanguine summation of the Enlightenment manages to highlight in relation to the aims and outcomes of this particular investigation, is that it brings into critical focus exactly how — from a supposedly 'enlightened' paradigm — the notions of maturity, development and historical progress were to be understood and gauged. This is primarily due to the fact that it is directly towards these 'modern' and supposedly progressive and emancipatory ideals that the Enlightenment positioned and directed itself. In addition to this, it also implicitly brings into question the role that science and technology is supposed to play in these matters as it was these disciplines and epistemic areas that greatly contributed to both the spread of, and adherence to, the Enlightenment and its central tenets (Koselleck, 2002: 222).

What now needs to be cast under the critical spotlight is exactly what it is that the concepts of progress, development and maturity (within their modern manifestation) were meant to entail and portend for humanity along with how it is that such notions were intended to be brought into everyday existence, in a material sense. Such a line of inquiry will prove to be both beneficial and useful for the outcomes of this particular study, as it is still these very ideals and concepts that continue to shape and influence our understanding and perception of progress within the world, along with the role that science and technology is required to play if such progressive ideals are to be actualised and upheld.

Amy Allen (2016: 6) supplies the critical researcher with useful insight regarding these particular matters by providing one with a genealogical and historical overview of how the notion of progress has historically been understood - particularly in relation to the Western world in which the notion of the Enlightenment (in the Kantian sense) arose. Allen states that, in its broadest sense, the idea of 'historical progress' — as envisioned and articulated by the proponents and adherents of the Enlightenment — alludes not merely to a form of progress/development that is directed toward a particular goal, but rather, to human progress overall, *Überhaupt* (ibid.).

Drawing on the work of Reinhardt Koselleck (2002: 221), Allen posits that it is actually this notion of historical progress that is to be regarded as a 'distinctively modern concept' that emerged in the eighteenth century, along with the central ideals of the Enlightenment. In light of such an assertion, Allen (2016: 6) indicates that while the Greeks and Romans (in the classical sense) did indeed have terms that were able to characterise:

> a relative progression (*Fortschreiten*) in particular spheres of fact and experience (such as *prokopē*, *epidōsis*, *progressus*, *perfectus*) (Koselleck, 2002: 221),

such concepts were preoccupied with 'looking back' and were thus, *not* to be understood as being connected to the notion of a superior future (Allen 2016: 6). Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, these terms, when situated within their classical orientation, were always to be considered and understood as being partial and local. This therefore means that for the Greeks (and Romans), the term 'progress' did not point toward an entire social process (Koselleck, 2002: 222).

Allen (2016) then goes on to delineate the primary distinction between the Christian notion of progress evident in the Middle Ages from the classical notion of progress as espoused by the Greeks and Romans. Thus, in direct contrast to the classical orientation and understanding, the Christian notion of progress pointed towards a form of 'spiritual progress that was to culminate at a point outside of time' (Allen, 2016: 7). It is in this regard that one can assert that Christianity in fact managed to 'open up the horizon of the future' (ibid.). However, the notion of this 'better future' that it proposed would only be brought to

fruition subsequent to the end of history (ibid.). Thus, as far as the notions of history and historical progress were concerned then, for the Middle Ages:

> the world as a whole was aging and rushing toward its end. Spiritual progress and the decline of the world were to this extent correlational concepts that obstructed the interpretation of the earthly future in progressive terms (Koselleck, 2002: 224).

What Allen (2016) and Koselleck's (2002: 225-230) reconstruction then aims to highlight is that what distinguishes the modern notion of progress from those of both the classical period along with that of the Middle Ages, is that the modern permutation of progress essentially aimed to transform the persistent anticipation of the 'end of the world' into an open and immanent future filled with wondrous possibilities and potentialities. As such, one can therefore assert that the spiritual notion of *profectus* (i.e. the view that progress is intimately related to a form of spiritual preparation, growth and development that would only culminate and reach its epitome once one had moved on to an afterlife) was being slowly transformed into a more worldly and immanentised notion of *progressus* as the tenets of the Enlightenment started to gain traction and wield more influence (ibid.).

This would then imply that the modern concept of progress coincided with a new experience of — and relationship with — time, and thus resulted in the emergence of several unprecedented epistemic and existential conditions for society and its inhabitants, including:

Firstly, the notion of the future as 'an infinite horizon' ultimately managed to denaturalise the belief 'that the age of the world is analogous to the old age of an individual' (Allen, 2016: 7). This then resulted in a separation 'between the age of [the] world and the idea of decay or decline' (ibid.). As Koselleck (2002: 226) aptly phrases it:

> Infinite progress opened up a future that shirked the natural metaphors of aging. Although the world as nature may age in the course of time, this no longer involves the decline of all of humanity.

It is in this regard that Allen (2016: 7) notes that:

> in modernity, decline was no longer seen as the pure opposite of progress. Rather, progress has become a world-historical category whose tendency is to interpret all regressions as temporary and finally even as the stimulus for new progress[82] (Koselleck, 2002: 227).

Secondly, as Allen (2016: 7) notes, in relation to the modern conceptualisation of progress, the 'striving for perfection' — that had been such a key feature of Christian thought — became rooted within the structures of time and space and thus, was effectively located in human history itself. As a result, within the modern paradigm, progress came to be described as a continuous and dynamic process, akin to an infinite task that must be upheld and pursued lest humankind slump into a regressive situation (Koselleck, 2002: 227–228);

Finally, and very importantly in relation to the outcomes of this particular chapter and investigation, is the fact that the modern concept of progress came to be associated with 'both technical-scientific *and* moral-political progress, that is, to progress *Überhaupt*' (Allen, 2016: 8). It is directly in this regard that Koselleck (2002: 229) goes on to assert that:

> Progress (*der Fortschritt*), a term first put forth by Kant, was now a word that neatly and deftly brought the manifold of scientific, technological and industrial meanings of progress, and finally also those meanings involving social morality and even the totality of history, *under a common concept* [emphasis added];

In light of this sanguine summation pertaining to what the enlightened thinkers advocated, along with what the Enlightenment's progressive precepts entail and when/how these ideals are to be realised, one should — presumably — be able to infer that as a direct result of the progressive trends contained within the Enlightenment itself, along with its appeal to an unbridled use of reason and its reconceived and immanentised relationship to time, modern society (and its inhabitants) would have found itself developing on an unequivocally progressive trajectory[83]. Such a conclusion can be inferred due to the fact that, based on the

[82] This can therefore be understood as a position that is most clearly espoused by Hegel within his Philosophy of History and the necessary movement of Spirit as progress unfolds along its predetermined course (Allen, 2016).

[83] While this is an admittedly brief and by no means comprehensive overview of what the central elements of the Enlightenment entail as well as what its outlook towards the modern notion of progress necessitates, such a reconstruction is apt for the purposes of this chapter, in which such an auspicious and sanguine overview of

reconstruction that appears above, what such approaches seem to share — at a fundamental level — is a common belief in the fact that, by moving away from the uninformed and dogmatic position(s) of the past, humanity would slowly manage to move towards a more rational and enlightened state of existence that would manifest itself in the 'here-and-now', and not in some distant, far-off afterlife. As a result, progress, along with its emancipatory and liberating outcomes, would in fact be available for all humanity to acknowledge, embrace and enjoy.

Opposing such an inference however, Hohendahl (2013: 242) avers that within the political/philosophical discourse of the contemporary era, the notion of progress has a rather ambivalent status due to the fact that on the one hand there is a widespread expectation (that it is generally taken for granted) that conditions within society ought to improve. On the other, and perhaps as a direct result of this uncritical belief in the ability of progress to prevail against all odds, there is a lack of critical reflection about what the notion of progress actually encompasses. In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno (2004: 320) presciently highlights the importance of continuously evaluating the notion of progress — along with the associated ideals of the Enlightenment within the contemporary world — when he states that:

> Universal history must be construed and denied. After the catastrophes that have happened, and in view of the catastrophes to come, it would be cynical to say that a plan for a better world is manifested in history and unites it.

Marcuse (2002: 13) seconds this wary stance outlined by Adorno in relation to the idea of progress when he states that reality — in the modern, enlightened world — has come to constitute 'a more progressive stage of alienation'. As such, Marcuse (ibid.) maintains that it is the contemporary subject within the modern world that is 'swallowed up by its alienated existence' and as such, 'there is only one dimension' that evinces itself in reality - hardly a situation worthy of the term 'progress' as espoused by the thinkers and proponents of the Enlightenment.

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what the Enlightenment is supposed to entail will be used as a foil against which Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse will direct their major polemics - particularly in relation to the developmental trajectory they believe modernity has adopted as manifested within contemporary society.

What such a critical and wary stance seems to highlight then, is that the critical theorists clearly possessed a very different understanding and comprehension of what the concept of progress — within the context of an enlightened world — entails. We will now turn our attention directly towards Horkheimer and Adorno's (1997) critique of the Enlightenment, as delineated within *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in order to effectively come to terms with what it is that their critical outlook entails.

2.3) An alternative view of the Enlightenment

When attempting to consider Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of the Enlightenment, one needs to be mindful of the fact that neither Horkheimer nor Adorno (1997) consider the Enlightenment as being restricted to a fixed historical period (Fagan, 2005). Thus, although they explicitly refer to Francis Bacon as a leading proponent of — and spokesman for — the Enlightenment, Horkheimer and Adorno (1997) do not believe that modern science and scientism are solely to blame for the creation of an increasingly rationalised, yet exceedingly destructive social order (Zuidervaart, 2011). According to these critical theorists, the propensity of "rational progression" to develop into "irrational regression" arises a great deal earlier.

As such, Horkheimer and Adorno tend to employ and understand the term 'enlightenment' in such a manner so as to delineate:

> a series of related intellectual and practical operations which are presented as demythologizing, secularizing or disenchanting some mythical, religious or magical representation of the world (Jarvis, 1998: 24).

The critical theorists, including Horkheimer and Adorno (1997), therefore deliberately broaden their conceptualisation of the phenomenon in question so as to incorporate a distinctive mode of apprehending reality that they believe is to be found in the (seemingly divergent) writings of Parmenides, Bertrand Russell as well as ancient Hebrew scriptures - to name but a few (Zuidervaart, 2011).

According to Horkheimer and Adorno's interpretation, if one is to critically examine such texts, one will discover that they all tend to describe the relentless 'cognitive ascent of

humanity' which, according to their (i.e. Horkheimer and Adorno) interpretation is to be understood as:

> originating in myth, proceeding to religion, and culminating in secular, scientific reasoning (Fagan, 2005).

For Horkheimer and Adorno then, the Enlightenment is to be understood as a distinctive mode of comprehension and conceptualisation that signified a profound intellectual, technological and scientific rupture from those (unenlightened) epochs which had preceded it (ibid.). Typically, such a rupture is understood as being progressive and liberating in its orientation as it inherently points towards, and in fact describes, a developmental trajectory through which the antiquated force of metaphysics, dogma and superstition are effectively overcome and conquered (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1997: 6).

Based upon the above, one may aver that Horkheimer and Adorno (1997) deliberately enlarge the extent of their study so as to encompass a much larger portion of (Western) history in order to come to terms with what the 'Enlightenment' actually entails. It is in this regard that Villa (2007) argues that if the contemporary researcher is to truly comprehend and appreciate the central arguments made by Horkheimer and Adorno in relation to their critique of the Enlightenment (and its contentious idea of progress), their central polemic (as enunciated within *Dialectic of Enlightenment*) needs to be viewed as being more of a genealogical overview than an analytical synopsis or empirical summation of one particular period in history.

When viewed from this genealogical perspective, one will notice that the central polemic of Horkheimer and Adorno is clearly averse towards those conventional reconstructions (as delineated above) that attempt to explain — in a progressive fashion — what the Enlightenment entailed along with what its liberating and emancipatory aspects included for humanity as a whole. Thus, in direct contradistinction to such a typical/standard reconstruction, the critical stance that has been adopted by Horkheimer and Adorno is succinctly contained in one of *Dialectic of Enlightenment's* central theses which asserts that:

> scientific Enlightenment rationality, as it dominates nature, inevitably dominates humanity, which is also nature (Villa, 2007: 5).

According to such a critical reading, as Western history has unfolded, in seeking to overcome irrational/antiquated conceptualisations of the world, the rationality of the Enlightenment has — somewhat paradoxically — transformed itself into an irrational form of domination (Thomson, 2006: 28).

In light of the above, it can be averred that *Dialectic of Enlightenment* initiates an unprecedented critique of the Enlightenment as it is the very notion of modern rationality which now finds itself under interrogation (Villa, 2007: 17). This is due to the fact that, for Horkheimer and Adorno, the struggle for self-preservation (with which they believe modern rationality is inextricably intertwined) has fundamentally altered conceptual rationality itself, effectively transforming it into a powerful tool of domination (ibid.). It is in this regard that Horkheimer and Adorno (1997: 30) argue that:

> [t]he more the process of self-preservation is effected ... , the more it requires self-alienation of the individuals who must model their body and soul according to the technical apparatus of modern society.

Based upon such a critical orientation, Horkheimer and Adorno (1997: xi-5) aver that both the pursuit and the very meaning of science, technology and modern rationality has become highly problematical. As Adorno (2004: 320) would later come to phrase it:

> [n]o universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb.

Such a pejorative promulgation is rooted in Horkheimer and Adorno's (1997: 4) belief that enlightened thought, as it currently evinces itself, is designed (and instrumentalised) in such a manner so as to dominate both nature and human beings. However, while both Horkheimer and Adorno aver that social freedom is ultimately dependent upon enlightened thought, they nevertheless maintain that the institutions of contemporary society — along with the various technologies which support and underpin these institutions — are infused

with the destructive seeds of their own undoing that has become universally apparent today (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1997: xiii).

2.3.1) How do Horkheimer and Adorno arrive at their critical perspective?

According to Villa (2007: 6), a significant segment of Horkheimer and Adorno's argument pertaining to the Enlightenment (as enunciated within *Dialectic of Enlightenment*) draws heavily from — and in effect, reinforces — much of what Max Weber posits in his lecture titled *Science as a Vocation* ([1917] 1946). In this particular lecture, Weber attempts to elucidate how there has been 'an epochal shift' in the Western tradition's comprehension of reason itself, along with the purpose that it is required to serve in society (Villa, 2007: 11).

According to Weber (1946: 155), when investigating the progression of reason throughout (Western) history, one will notice how the 'reason of philosophers' has been usurped by the sociological notion of 'rationalisation' and its associated sense of 'disenchantment'[84]. In order to corroborate such a claim, Weber (1946: 138-142) attempts to provide some critical insight into one of modernity's most pressing issues, namely, what value/meaning science brings with it in relation to the life of humanity (Villa, 2007: 12). Whilst attempting to respond to this rather pertinent (and no doubt vexing) matter, Weber (1946: 140-141) avers that 'the contrast between the past and the present is tremendous' particularly when one takes note of the fact within *The Republic*, Plato had once presented philosophy and science as being coterminous. As Weber (ibid.) argues, this is primarily due to the fact that:

> for the first time the *concept*, one of the great tools of all scientific knowledge, had been consciously discovered [author's emphasis].

[84] Weber liked to quote Friedrich Schiller's phrase, the 'disenchantment of the world' in order to highlight the extent and direction of rationalisation in society which was measured negatively in terms of the degree to which magical elements of thought are displaced, or positively by the extent to which ideas gain in systematic coherence and naturalistic consistency (Gerth and Mills, 1946: 51). From Weber's perspective, the processes of rationalisation and disenchantment are intimately tied and interconnected because of the fact that autonomous modern legal, bureaucratic and economic structures demand calculation, regularity, and predictability of outcome. In addition to this, and perhaps even more importantly with regard to this investigation, at a deeper level, Weber was convinced that the historical development of reason marked a distinctive shift from a substantive concept of reason to an increasingly instrumentalised conception of rationality (*Zweckrationalität*) (Villa, 2007: 12).

According to Weber's interpretation of such a "discovery", Plato's depiction of the philosopher's emergence from the shadowy cave of ignorance delineated nothing less than how 'true being' could actually be grasped (ibid.). As such, Weber (1946: 141) avers that:

> ... this [discovery], in turn, seemed to open the *way for knowing* and for *teaching how to act rightly in life*, and, above all, how to *act as a citizen of the state*; for this question was everything to the Hellenic man, whose thinking was *political throughout*. *And for these reasons one engaged in science* [emphasis added].

Weber then poses the fundamental — albeit rhetorical — question as to who, in the modern and contemporary world, views science in this manner, i.e. as containing the necessary/relevant insight, from a moral/ethical/political perspective, so as to ascertain how one is to effectively act/conduct oneself in the modern world. Weber answers his own question by alluding to the fact that in an enlightened world, including the one we now live in:

> ... scientific rationality hardly facilitates apprehending "true being" in all its cosmic meaningfulness, nor does it provide a guide to proper human conduct and the purpose of life (Villa, 2007: 12).

Weber (1946: 141) then points towards the discovery of 'the second great tool of scientific work', namely the 'rational experiment', without which, he argues that 'present-day empirical science would be impossible'. It is as a direct result of such a monumental discovery that Weber (1946: 142) maintains that, for the 'artistic experimenters' and the 'musical innovators' of the Renaissance (and beyond), such as Leonardo Da Vinci, Galileo and Bacon:

> science meant the path to *true* art, and that meant for them the path to true *nature* [author's emphasis].

At this particular point in history then, Weber (ibid.) maintains that 'art was to be raised to the rank of science'. Yet — as Weber caustically notes — to modern ears, such an idea would sound utterly absurd.

Weber (1946: 142) then goes on to note that with the arrival of Protestantism and Puritanism, along with the notion of a "deus absconditus" (an absentee God that is unknowable by the human mind), the meaning (and role) of science within modern society undergoes another major transformation as society came to believe that through a thorough examination of God's most humble of creations (such as a louse), one would effectively be able to 'show the path to God'. Weber (1946: 142) then cynically remarks:

> God is hidden. His ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. In the exact sciences, however, where one could physically grasp His works, one hoped to come upon the traces of what he planned for the world. And today? Who — aside from certain big children who are indeed found in the natural sciences — still believes that the findings of astronomy, biology, physics or chemistry could teach us anything about the meaning of the world?.

Having effectively dispensed with the (antiquated) ideas that science was once viewed as a legitimate avenue towards discovering 'true' being, nature, art or God (Villa, 2007: 13), Weber (1946: 143) then turns his attention to the more recent (bourgeois) view that science (as a 'technique of mastering life') can be understood as constituting 'the way to happiness'[85]. According to Weber (ibid.), such 'naive optimism' capitulates when one interrogates what the bourgeois idea of happiness typically entails, or when one is to critically reflect upon the increasing levels of devastation/destruction that a scientifically-oriented and highly technologised world has brought with it.

Thus, after providing his audience with an expansive overview of the development of reason in Western history along with the abrogation of science's original positioning within human life, Weber (1946: 143) contends that we must ultimately acknowledge the truth of Tolstoy's insight that:

[85] It is interesting to note that such a belief is still very much alive and well in the 21st century — and as such, may not be as naive as Weber believes — as it accords directly with what Turkle (2011: 243) calls the triumphalist narrative of technology and what Morozov (2011: xiii & 289) refers to as a sentiment of 'techno-determinism' and 'cyber-utopianism'.

> Science [particularly in its modern instantiation] is meaningless because it gives no answer to our question, the only question that is important for us: "What shall we do and how shall we live?".

Based upon this critical analysis of reasons' transformation, Weber (1946) contends that the grandiose hopes of the enlightenment thinkers have failed to materialise (Villa, 2007: 13). Thus, when gauged from a moral/ethical perspective, Weber's analysis clearly attempts to elucidate how 'reason-science' has become utterly impotent and ineffectual in the modern world (ibid.).

In direct accordance with Weber's critical synopsis pertaining to reason's transformation throughout the course of Western history, Horkheimer and Adorno (1997: xiv) aver that 'the fallen nature of modern man cannot be separated from social progress'. For both these critical theorists then, history seems to deny the very notion and/or possibility of progress (Thomson, 2006: 127). It is directly in this regard that Horkheimer and Adorno (1997: 3-6) write that the Enlightenment's programme:

> ... was the disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy. ... *From now on, matter would at last be mastered without any illusion of ruling or inherent powers, of hidden qualities* [emphasis added].

In light of the aforementioned excerpt, Horkheimer and Adorno (1997: 32) go on to assert that: '[t]he essence of enlightenment ... is *that of domination*' [emphasis added].

Horkheimer and Adorno (1997: xiii) elaborate upon this ominous assertion by noting that, from the very outset of their critical investigation (as delineated within *Dialectic of Enlightenment*), the overarching quandary that confronted them was the challenge of coming to terms with what they refer to as the 'self-destruction of the Enlightenment'. We will now examine this particular facet of their critique — namely, the 'self-destruction of the Enlightenment' — and how, according to the likes of Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse, contemporary culture and its technologies of mass communication are exacerbating the self-destructive scenario that they have identified above. Such a line of exploration will then allow us to be cognisant of the fact that for these critical theorists, the calamitous

propensities which threaten to place humanity into a technologically induced state of subjugation are to be understood as being inherent to modern culture itself. This can then be described as being a scenario that is no less real (and dangerous) in the 21st century as it was when these theorists first raised their polemics.

2.3.2) The role of contemporary culture in the self-destruction of the Enlightenment

For Horkheimer and Adorno (1997), the culture industry is to be understood as exemplifying the apotheosis of an historical process in which science, technology and an unremitting sentiment of bureaucratic organisation has came to dominate thought and experience - ultimately resulting in the emergence of a ubiquitous sense of one-dimensionality that Marcuse would later come to both lament and criticise (Kellner, 2002: 8). For the critical theorists then, the culture industry is to be understood as being yet another facet of that overarching dialectic in which techno-scientific rationality has managed to transform itself into the rationality of domination (Huyssen, 1975: 4).

For Horkheimer and Adorno, this form of domination has primarily evinced itself within the technologised confines of modern society, and as such, it has effectively managed to entwine itself with the consumerist ideals of the capitalistic market place. This has ultimately resulted in a scenario, whereby the uplifting and edifying role that culture once played in society has been significantly undermined and thwarted. As such, the critical theorists argue that (Western) democracy has somehow managed to produce fascism[86], reason — somewhat paradoxically — has generated unreason, and finally, that the culture industries have slowly managed to transform culture into a manipulative instrument of domination and control (Kellner, 2002: 1).

[86] While the link between fascism and culture may not — at this stage of our investigation — be explicitly evident for the reader, it is important to note that for the critical theorists, the manifestation of fascism in Europe during the early part of the 20th century, was invariably accompanied by a more insidious form of domination and manipulation which was inherent to contemporary, 'democratic' culture itself. Thus, the inextricable link between the more blatant (and brutal) forms of domination such as the emergence of fascism across Europe, and the more insidious form of domination contained within popular culture, should (hopefully) become more evident as this chapter and investigation progresses. Such a link, for the Critical Theorists, is aimed at highlighting how the threat of fascism, domination and barbarism is omnipresent and is not just to be located within the confines of Nazi Germany alone, but rather, that here is something inherently wrong with Western culture itself.

Based upon the above, it is clear to see that these critical theorists assume an extremely pessimistic stance pertaining to the form (and function) that culture has assumed within modern society. While such a stance may initially prove to be somewhat 'dead-end', as one can (plausibly) infer that if the critical theorists are indeed correct regarding this matter, there is then no real escape from the situation that we all find ourselves in, as we are all — in some way — caught up within contemporary culture's insidious web. However, keeping true to the liberating and emancipatory spirit that animates (early) Critical Theory, this is not to be understood as being the case. Rather, the overarching reason as to why the sceptical views of Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse still prove to be of immense worth in terms of the current investigation is due to the fact that, as we shall shortly see, they effectively manage to provide one with a critical (and elaborate) basis from where the highly technologised situation of the 21st century media sphere can be gauged - in order to discover whether or not there may indeed be a way out of this (potentially) subjugating scenario.

2.4) What is the culture industry and what is its link to one-dimensionality?

During their time of exile in the USA (from the mid-1930s through to the late 1940s), Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse witnessed the propagation of mass communications, the rise of mass culture and the advent of the consumer society (Kellner, 2002: 7). As such, these theorists managed to experience — at an unprecedented level — the power of the commercial broadcasting systems, the use of radio for political persuasion, and the ever-growing popularity of cinema and the entertainment industries. Furthermore, from their vantage point, Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse also bore witness to how private business interests played a dominant role in the structuring of mass culture (ibid.).

As a direct result of such a disconcerting series of experiences, Horkheimer and Adorno (1997) felt compelled to investigate the dubious form that they firmly believed the mass culture of modern society had assumed. From their vantage point, modern culture was being increasingly developed under the dictates of a technologically administered rationality along with what Marcuse (2002) would later go on to identify as a pervasive sense of 'One-Dimensionality'. As a result, the critical theorists viewed the culture industries as a:

central part of a new configuration of capitalist modernity which used culture, advertising, mass communications, and new forms of social control to induce consent and to reproduce the new forms of capitalist society (Kellner, 2002: 8).

Based upon this, the critical theorists go on to argue how the technology of the culture industry, along with its associated relations of control and domination, is to be understood as being no more than the achievement of standardisation (via mass production) whereby the individual's ability to resist the controlling and homogenising forces within the modern world has been suppressed[87] (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1997: 121). It is in this regard that they argue how:

[t]he whole world is actually made to pass through the filter of the culture industry... [so much so that] ... the might of the industrial society is lodged in men's mind ... [so as to mould them] as a type unfailingly reproduced in every product (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1997: 126-127).

Marcuse (2002: 5) echoes these very concerns within *One-Dimensional Man* when he goes on to note that if the productive apparatus of society — including those apparatuses found within the cultural sphere of society — could be organised and directed toward the satisfaction of the individual's vital, essential and most basic needs, such a form of control 'would not prevent individual autonomy, but render it possible'. This is, in actual fact for Marcuse, a goal that is readily within the capabilities of advanced industrial civilisation and constitutes what he refers to as the 'end' of technological rationality. However, Marcuse (2002: 5) is nevertheless adamant that in actual fact, the contrary trend currently pervades contemporary society whereby it is the technological apparatus which actually imposes

its economic and political requirements for defense and expansion on [the] labor time and free time [of the individual within both their] material and intellectual culture.

[87] Regarding this particular matter, one needs to be mindful that when the critical theorists talk about the technologies of cultural (re)production, they employ and comprehend this term on a very broad basis so as to include not merely those mechanical apparatuses one would typically associate with the mass production of an assembly line, but also — and perhaps more importantly — those administrative apparatus that organise and control human work, leisure, thought and cognition (Gartman, 2012: 46).

It is in this regard that Marcuse (ibid.) argues that by virtue of the way it has organised its technological base, contemporary society is actually totalitarian in its composition.

In his series of lectures titled *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, Adorno (2001: 100) elaborates upon this matter by drawing on the (Kantian) notion of autonomy which — for Kant — means:

> dictating the law (*nomos*) by which I act for myself (*autos*), rather than following a rule that has come from outside, acting heteronomously (Thomson, 2006: 93).

Thus, from a Kantian perspective, when an individual is required to make a decision, and the decision-making process that she employs in order to undertake such a feat is founded exclusively upon a blind form of acquiescence to certain customary/cultural expectations and norms, such an undertaking cannot be considered as being either free or autonomous. According to Kant's critical insight regarding this mater, this is primarily due to the fact that such an undertaking has essentially been imposed — either consciously or unconsciously — upon the individual from without[88].

When this situation in transposed to the (modern) context of the culture industry, the critical theorists aver that there has been a definite coalescence between the avaricious dictates of the capitalist market, the technological paraphernalia that abounds in the modern world along with the (techno-scientific) rationality that is facilitating such a process. For the critical theorists, this coalescence of society's technological, scientific and economic forces has then managed to produce a heteronomous social/cultural order to which all

[88] It is directly in this regard that Adorno (2004: 226) goes on to note that 'freedom means to criticise and change situations, not to confirm them by deciding within their coercive structures'. Marcuse (2002: 6) seconds such a critical position when he argues how it is in order for freedom within the modern world to truly be achieved, new 'modes of realisation' are required in order for such an outcome to be actualised. For Marcuse (much like Adorno in *Negative Dialectics*), such new modes of realisation can only be outlined/described in negative terms because they would ultimately amount to the negation of the prevailing modes which are currently stultifying and inhibiting the emergence of freedom within the world. Thus, in true dialectical fashion, Marcuse is of the opinion that this form of negation would lead to the introduction of revised and appropriate forms of realisation (in which technology would no doubt play a central role) in order for true freedom to emerge. Marcuse (2002: 6) elaborates on this point by outlining how, in a truly emancipated world: 'economic freedom would mean freedom from the economy - from being controlled by economic forces and relationships; freedom from the daily struggle for existence, from earning a living. Political freedom would mean liberation of individuals from politics over which they have no effective control. Similarly, intellectual freedom would mean the restoration of individual thought now absorbed by mass communication and indoctrination, and the abolition of "public opinion" together with its makers' (ibid.).

individuals are required to succumb. It is in this regard that Horkheimer and Adorno (1997: 147) argue that in relation to the prevailing social order, 'the culture industry makes itself the irrefutable prophet' that relentlessly espouses what is perceived by many (if not most) as being sacrosanct pronouncements to which all modern denizens need to adhere - lest they be removed/repelled from society. Viewed in this light, Horkheimer and Adorno (1997) aver that mass culture has become entirely commodified, standardised and administered from above (for the economic and political gain of an elite few). As a result, the very possibility of cultural enrichment — on the part of the individual — has been significantly jeopardised.

As such, Horkheimer and Adorno (1997) — like Marcuse (2002) — argue that while contemporary society may ostensibly claim to provide the modern individual with an improved and harmonious social order, in reality it abjectly fails to do so. It is this very failure that the critical theorists then term as being 'the triumph of pseudo-culture', which they believe has come to prevail within the modern world (Thomson, 2006: 74). It is in light of this very failure that Marcuse (2002: 10) argues that under the rule of a repressive whole, the idea of liberty, along with its associated mantras of freedom, choice and opportunity, can actually be made into a powerful instrument of manipulation and domination[89].

[89] Expanding upon the (distorted) notions of liberty, freedom, choice and opportunity within the context of contemporary society, Marcuse (2002: 10) goes on to argue — in a manner redolent of both Horkheimer and Adorno (1997) — that within contemporary society, the range of choice open to the individual is not to be regarded as being the decisive factor in determining the degree of human freedom which is currently available. Rather, one actually has to critically reflect upon what can be chosen and what is ultimately chosen in order to gain an accurate interpretation of what freedom within the modern world actually entails (Marcuse, 2002: 10). While Marcuse (2002:10) is adamant that the criterion for 'free choice' can never, and should never, be regarded as an absolute one due to the ever-changing nature of the socio-historical and political landscape of a particular society in which the individual may find himself/herself operating, it is neither to be considered as being entirely relative. As such, there are core constitutive elements to what the notion of free choice has to entail, if it is to ever be considered as being truly free. It is in this regard that Marcuse (2002: 10) goes on to assert that the 'free election of masters does not abolish the masters or the slaves' and that the 'free choice [one is purported as possessing, particularly in relation to the vast array of goods and services available] does not signify freedom if it is these very goods and services that manage to sustain social controls over a life of toil and fear, that is, if they sustain alienation' - which Marcuse (2002:10) indubitably believes they do.

2.5) What is pseudo-culture and how does it manifest itself?

To effectively elaborate upon the matter of pseudo-culture (and the associated sense of pseudo-individuality that it engenders), the critical theorists aver that certain strategies have been deliberately adopted and implemented by the manufacturers and disseminators of cultural commodities and the broadcasters of mass media so as to induce a — near ubiquitous — sentiment of conformity and acquiescence within the wider public. Furthermore, the critical theorists argue that these strategies have all been designed in a rather duplicitous manner so as to promote an ideology of consumption that is inherently aimed at promoting and propagating the values and ideals of the prevailing social order.

What this therefore implies, is that within the boundaries of the culture industry, all of the available artefacts that are ready for consumption have become increasingly commodified, so much so that their standardisation 'impresses the same stamp on everything' (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1997: 120). As such, Horkheimer and Adorno aver that all of the products proffered by the culture industry are to be understood as being:

> ready-made clichés to be slotted in anywhere; they never do anything more than fulfil the purpose allotted them in the overall plan (ibid.).

Furthermore, the critical theorists make it clear that from their critical perspective, these cultural products are inherently designed to perpetuate a ceaseless cycle of consumption (and the concomitant production of waste), and in doing so, they deliberately preclude any critical reflection on the part of those who are too busy consuming (and then later discarding).

It is in this regard that Horkheimer and Adorno (1997) argue that within the context of the culture industry, the notion of (pseudo) individuality — along with what supposedly prompts and sustains a sentiment of individuality on the part of the consumer — has become of the utmost import because:

> the illusion is conjured up that the completely reified and mediated is a sanctuary from immediacy and life (Adorno, 2001: 101).

As such, the individual is therefore lulled into believing that a sense of edification is being achieved — culturally speaking — through the consumption of personalised products, whereas in actual fact, all she is doing is sustaining an exploitative and consumption-oriented economic system which thrives on the ceaseless proliferation (and subsequent disposal) of predetermined products. For the critical theorists then, it is these strategies that have led to the emergence of an insidious and all-encompassing social/cultural system that is able to take hold of all society's inhabitants (Pietilä, 2005: 146). It is in direct relation to this particular point that Horkheimer and Adorno (1997: 144) go on to argue that:

> [t]he stronger the positions of the culture industry become, the more summarily it can deal with consumers' needs, producing them, controlling them, disciplining them, and even withdrawing amusement: no limits are set to cultural progress of this kind.

Echoing this sentiment, Marcuse (2002: 9) goes on to argue that within the context of contemporary society, there is an array of cultural, economic and political controls at work which all serve to:

> exact the overwhelming need for the production and consumption of waste; the need for stupefying work where it is no longer a real necessity; the need for modes of relaxation which soothe and prolong this stupefication ... .

In light of the above, Marcuse (2002: 7) asserts that most of the prevailing needs which one is to find in contemporary society (as espoused and evoked by popular culture) belong to the category of what he terms as being 'false needs'. For Marcuse (ibid.), '"false" are those needs which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests' - i.e. those needs which claim to bring about joy, relaxation and pleasure but actually prolong and exacerbate the conditions of 'toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice' which have become so prevalent within contemporary society[90]. Furthermore, Marcuse (2002: 7) argues that:

[90] While Marcuse (2002: 7) is fully aware of the fact that the satisfaction of such false needs 'might be most gratifying' to certain individuals within contemporary society, he adamantly maintains that 'this happiness is *not* a condition which has to be maintained and protected if it serves to arrest the development of the ability [within the individual] to recognise the disease of the whole and grasp the chances of curing the disease' (ibid.). The outcome, for Marcuse (2002: 7), is then the emergence of a paradoxical situation in which the individual experiences 'euphoria in unhappiness'.

> such [false] needs have a *societal content* and *function* which are *determined by external powers* ... No matter how much such needs may have become the individual's own, ... they continue to be what they were from the beginning - products of a society *whose dominant interest demands repression* [emphasis added].

It is along such critical lines of thought that Horkheimer and Adorno (1997) argue that this formulaic style of production and reproduction — with regard to needs, desires and consumptive practices — always remains the same. This repetitive approach can be — and no doubt is — applied to all of the pseudo-individuated products that the culture industry proffers the consuming individual and as such, it is this internalisation of repetition that plays a decisive role in promoting the notion of pseudo-individuation, while also managing to undermine whatever may be left of the individual's critical capacities (Gunster, 2000: 42).

Based upon such a summation of what some of the strategies implemented by the purveyors of the culture industry entail, the critical theorists ultimately see two consequences arising for the modern denizen, namely a political one and an economic one (Schuetz, 1989: 7). When viewed from an economic vantage point, Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse aver that the majority of the undiscerning populace is transformed into an acquiescent 'consumer of trash' as the elements of cultural enrichment or edification are sorely lacking in such products (ibid.). Adorno (2009: 309) elaborates upon this matter in the text 'On Popular Music' by stating that 'the less the mass discriminates, *the greater the possibility of selling cultural commodities indiscriminately*' [emphasis added]. Adorno (2009: 309) continues along this critical trajectory when he states that, from an ideological perspective:

> this ideology of vested interests cannot be dismissed so easily. It is not possible completely to deny that mass-consciousness can be molded by the operative agencies only because the masses want this stuff. But why do they want this stuff? In our present society the masses themselves are kneaded by the same mode of production as the articraft material foisted upon them.

From a political perspective, Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse believe that via the application and administration of a pervasive form of social pressure and cultural manipulation, the culture industry actually readies the way for a widespread form of ideological domination, by effectively managing to overwhelm the individual:

> ... with such an enormous machine that they feel *no longer capable of resisting its message* (Schuetz, 1989:7) [emphasis added].

As a result of this overwhelming scenario, it can be argued that the modern individual loses some — if not all — of her freedom (or autonomy in the Kantian sense) in relation to the matter of accepting or rejecting the various products proffered by the culture industry, along with those values, ideals and beliefs that are embedded within such products.

Such a critical analysis then compels Horkheimer and Adorno (1997: xvi) to aver that there is indubitably a powerful ideological attribute inherent to the culture industry (and its vast array of pseudo-individuated products), which they believe ultimately expends itself in the idolisation of the prevailing order. Gartman (2012: 44) expands upon this matter by arguing that with the rise of monopoly capitalism, an asymmetrical scenario has emerged within modern society in which the concentration of power and wealth has found itself resting in the hands of an elite few. This concentration of power and wealth then intensifies the experience of alienation for the majority of the (working) population whose labour (and consumption) is required in order to sustain and propel such a system. As such, the majority of people demand an immediate sense of pleasure in the form of ephemeral consumer goods that provide them with what can — at best — be described as being superficial (and soporific) substitutes for the very real satisfactions that have been denied — yet promised — to them by contemporary society (ibid.).

Another significant aspect of the culture industry (which no doubt augments the powerful ideological influence that it manages to wield upon the modern individual), lies in the increasing similarity between its various products — as depicted on the screen — and the 'typical' form of life one finds when living under a capitalistic system, whereby:

> The more intensely and flawlessly [the producer's] techniques duplicate empirical objects, the easier it is today for the illusion to prevail that the outside world is the straightforward continuation of that presented on the screen[91] (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1997: 126).

According to Horkheimer and Adorno, due to the advances that have been made in film and photography, reality is now being constructed with an 'infantile mimetism' that is then reproduced for a mass audience on an incessant basis (Gunster, 2000: 44). Thus, instead of shocking the audience (thus allowing them to take note of their subjugated position within the prevailing social order), the aforementioned technological advances are implemented so as to reduce — and ultimately remove — the distance between art and life (ibid.). For the critical theorists then, this increasing sense of proximity (between art and life) has had a novel and unprecedented ideological effect on the individual as '[r]eality becomes its own ideology through the spell cast by its faithful duplication' (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1997: 55). As such, Horkheimer and Adorno (1997: 127) aver that:

> Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies. The sound film ... *leaves no room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience*, ... hence the *film forces its victims to equate it directly with reality* [emphasis added].

It is directly in this regard that both Horkheimer and Adorno (1997: 124-125) draw upon the work of Kant in order to explain this phenomenon when they state that:

> The active contribution which Kantian schematism still expected of subjects – that they should, from the first, relate sensuous multiplicity to fundamental concepts – is denied to the subject by industry. It purveys schematism as its first service to the customer. According to Kantian schematism, a secret mechanism within the psyche preformed immediate data to fit them into the system of pure reason. That secret has now been

[91] The prescience of this particular critique will be highlighted in the final chapter of this investigation when we see exactly how the digital domains of social media have an uncanny ability to mould/distort the modern individual's sense of reality by systematically altering, tailoring and manipulating the information that is presented to him/her, on his/her screen, via the emergence of 'filter bubbles', 'epistemic bubbles' and 'echo chambers', so as to exacerbate the 'illusion' that Horkheimer and Adorno are referring to here.

> unraveled. ... For the consumer there is nothing left to classify, since the classification has already been preempted by the schematism of production[92].

From the above-mentioned quote, it is clear to see that Kant's arguments pertaining to schematism and his transcendental deduction of categories play a significant role when attempting to gain a firm grasp of Horkheimer and Adorno's Culture Industry thesis and how such an industry effectively manages to take control of the individual's ability to schematise for himself/herself (along with Marcuse's argument pertaining to how a sentiment of one-dimensionality has become prevalent within the modern world). Thus, in order to gain some insight regarding these matters and to comprehend how they are all interrelated, we will need to see what Kant (1781) initially had to say regarding this particular theme as delineated in his *Critique of Pure Reason*.

According to Kant ([1781] 2004: 162),

> Without sensibility no object would be given to us, and without understanding no object would be thought by us. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. Hence, it is just as necessary to make one's concepts sensible (i.e., to adjoin an object to them in intuition), as it is to make one's intuitions intelligible (i.e., to bring them under concepts). The two faculties or capacities cannot exchange their functions. The understanding can intuit nothing, the senses can think nothing. Only from their union can cognition arise [b 76].

According to Kant's notion of schematism, what he refers to as concepts in the above passage can — rather simply — be understood as being the 'seeing element' in experience i.e. they give us insight into the world that surrounds us - or what he refers to as the 'manifold of intuition' (Kant, [1781] 2004: 180). For there to be an experience then, it needs to be an experience of something, and for there to be a 'something', it — or the manifold of intuition — needs to be subsumable under a conceptual framework or a general class of

[92] On a critical note, it is important to point out that the 'schematism of production' that Horkheimer and Adorno posit can only ever be a secondary one. This then means that whatever the ideological mechanisms of the culture industry may be, at a primary level every human being still unavoidably perceives a world of 'appearances' as Kant attempts to systematically outline in *Critique of Pure Reason*. However, in the case that Horkheimer and Adorno are delineating, these very appearances have been given another (more sinister) productive twist by a cultural schematism.

things (Robinson, 2014). For Kant then, it is both experience and understanding that constitute the foundations of all knowledge. How is it then, according to Kant, that we come to have knowledge of objects and how can this knowledge actually be validated, i.e. how is schematism made possible?

Kant's (1781) systematic overview regarding this particular question, as delineated in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, posits what can crudely be referred to as an interconnected chain of interaction between the sensory organs and the cognitive faculties residing within an individual's consciousness which makes such knowledge and validation possible. This interconnected chain can be said to consist of five separate, yet intimately interconnected elements, namely: i) Sensation (response to external stimuli); ii) Pure intuitions (the placement of these sensations within the dimensions of time and space); iii) Appearance; iv) Understanding; and v) Experience. Integral to this entire process is the faculty of Imagination and Spontaneity as it is through these particular faculties that concepts and intuitions become synthesised according to a universal rule which Kant refers to as a schema. Imagination thus holds the key of drawing these elements together (through a process of synthesis) in order to constitute a knowable something. It is in this regard that Kant ([1781] 2004: 165) notes that:

> Synthesis in general ... is an effect of the imagination alone, a blind but indispensable function of the soul without which we would have no cognition at all, but of which we are hardly ever conscious.

This then raises the important question as to how Kant's notion of schematism actually links to Horkheimer and Adorno's Culture Industry thesis. In this regard one needs to be mindful of the fact that Horkheimer and Adorno (1997) perceived the production and transmission of media spectacles — for which technologies of mass communication are inescapable — as an essential (albeit secondary) device through which contemporary society has managed to dominate the thought processes (primarily those of schematisation as outlined by Kant) of the individual (Kellner, 2002: 8). It is directly in this regard that Adorno (2001: 168) goes on to argue that:

> the apparently harmless visit to the cinema to which we condemn ourselves should really be accompanied by the realization that such visits ... will probably entangle us ... with cumulative effect - in the process that will transform us into what we are supposed to become and what we are making of ourselves in order to enable us to survive, and to ensure that we conform.

Marcuse (2002: 16) extrapolates from this fascinating aspect of Horkheimer and Adorno's argument when he notes that within contemporary society there is a prevailing, pressing and pervasive 'need' which unequivocally compels the contemporary individual to conform to what he dubs as being the 'given universe of facts'. The result is however, not a healthy form of adjustment for the individual to the societal environment in which he/she is required to operate, but rather a pervasive and persistent mimetic impulse,

> an immediate identification of the individual with his [or her] society and, through it, with the society as a whole (Marcuse, 2002: 12).

What this then means for Marcuse (2002: 13), like Horkheimer and Adorno, is that in this mimetic process:

> the "inner" dimension of the mind in which opposition to the status quo can take root is whittled down. The loss of this inner dimension, in which the power of negative thinking[93] — the critical power of Reason — is at home, is the ideological counterpart to the very material process in which *advanced industrial society silences and reconciles the opposition* [emphasis added].

Thus, echoing a similar argument that was made by Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* some 20 years prior, Marcuse (2002: 13) avers that the impact of what is called 'progress' within the modern world has effectively turned Reason (in its contemporised guise) into nothing more than an acquiescent form of submission to the purported 'facts of life'. Along with this form of submission, Marcuse (2002: 13) also posits

[93] It will be recalled from Chapter 1 of this investigation that the term 'negative thinking' can be described as one of the subversive elements of Reason which aims to critically investigate, critique and ultimately overcome what Marcuse perceives as the 'triumph' of one-dimensional reality and thinking associated with contemporary society.

that Reason aims to engender 'a dynamic capability of producing more and bigger facts of the same sort of life' - i.e. facts that reproduce and reinforce the hegemonic order that has already been firmly entrenched within society. The efficiency of the contemporary system — reinforced and underpinned by all of its technological and communicational advances that have accompanied the contemporary form of Reason — thus effectively manages to blunt individuals' critical faculties and recognition of the situation that the societal system in which the individual finds himself/herself residing 'contains no facts which do not communicate the repressive power of the whole' (ibid.). Thus, Marcuse (ibid.) maintains that if the contemporary individual finds himself/herself

> in the things which shape their life [i.e. the consumer goods that are widely advertised and distributed], they do so, not by giving, but by accepting the law of things[94].

For Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse then, the notions and domains of Entertainment, Leisure, Relaxation and Culture — within the framework of a one-dimensional culture industry — are designed so as accustomise and indoctrinate audiences into accepting the given state of extant society. According to these critical theorists then, such a process ultimately ensures that the Kantian process of schematisation remains a predetermined and unquestioned fact or 'law of reality' (albeit, as pointed out earlier, a secondary one, as shown by the ability of the critical intellect to recognise that it is ideological, and not fundamental) that requires no additional thought, imagination or critique on the part of the individual (Kellner, 2002: 12). As such, an existential condition arises for the contemporary denizen in which the Industry does all of the individuals' schematising for her[95] (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1997: 124).

[94] Marcuse is adamant that such a law is not to be regarded as an indisputable 'law of physics', but rather the inherently duplicitous law or reality of their particular society. However, as Marcuse (2002: 13) so aptly points out, this very notion of reality actually 'constitutes a more progressive stage of alienation' in which this form of alienation 'has become entirely objective [whereby] the subject which is alienated is swallowed up by its alienated existence'.

[95] In the final chapter of this investigation, Stiegler's (2016) critical extension and continuation of this particular aspect of Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis (with regard to how the culture industry has managed to hijack the schematising functions of the modern individual's consciousness) will be explored in great detail. This will be undertaken so as to highlight how such a perturbing situation has managed to continue into the 21st century — at a level that would have been unfathomable for the first generation of critical theorists — within the digital domains of social media. In order to do so, particular reference will be paid to Stiegler's phenomenological analysis pertaining to how the individual's attentional/retentional economy is structured (as explicated by Husserl), along with how this attentional/retentional economy has been systematically

Elaborating on the above, Erich Fromm ([1941] 2013: 218-219) provides the reader with some useful insight regarding how the Kantian notion of spontaneity (which he believes plays such a crucial role in the process of original thinking and authentic schematisation) has been severely impaired within contemporary culture. Fromm (ibid.) therefore goes on to assert that when one is to consider the faculties of imagination and spontaneity within the individual's cognitive make-up (as emphasised by Kant), 'the decisive point is not *what* is thought, but rather, *how* it is thought'. As such, Fromm (ibid.) maintains that any form of thought that is the result of active thinking — in which the individual's faculties of imagination and spontaneity play a constitutive role — is always going to be 'new' and 'original',

> [o]riginal, not necessarily in the sense that others have not thought it before, but always in the sense that *the person who thinks has used thinking as a tool to discover something new in the world outside or inside* [of] *himself* [emphasis added].

According to Fromm (ibid.), the vast array of predetermined rationalisations that are provided to the modern denizen (via the various culture industries) are sorely lacking such revelatory qualities. As such, 'they only confirm the emotional prejudice existing in oneself'. Fromm (ibid.) therefore maintains that such a form of cognition is not to be regarded as a tool for penetrating the nature of reality, but rather 'a post-factum attempt to harmonize one's own wishes with existing reality'.

For Horkheimer and Adorno (1997), while true experience [*Erfahrung*] (on the part of the individual) is said to emerge out of the dialectical tension that arises between what is perceived as being familiar and what is unfamiliar (essentially compelling the individual to reorientate her conceptualisation/understanding of the world in light of such a new set of experiences), in relation to the experiential data that is proffered to the individual within the context of modern society, such data have already been extensively — if not

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usurped and hijacked by what Stiegler refers to as the electronically induced condition of 'algorithmic governance' that appears, ubiquitously, on the contemporary communicational platforms of the current epoch. As a result of such usurpation and hijacking, Stiegler — like Horkheimer and Adorno — ultimately believes that it is such algorithms that have effectively come to assume an increasing amount of control over the 'noetic faculties' of the modern, digitalised denizen.

exhaustively — organised and classified by the culture industry itself[96] (Gunster, 2000: 53). As such, Horkheimer and Adorno (1997: 27) aver that the actual products proffered by the culture industry, along with their general mode of consumption, counteract the kind of mediation necessary for critical thought as '... *cognition is restricted to its repetition and thought becomes mere tautology*' [emphasis added]. Marcuse (2002: 12) ratifies this critical summation of the uniformity evident within contemporary society when he asserts that within the context of consumerist culture:

> a pattern of one-dimensional thought and behaviour [has come to prevail] in which ideas, aspirations and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action *are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe* [emphasis added].

Such a claim is echoed and reinforced by Fromm ([1941] 2013: 249) when he goes on to assert that from a psychological, economic, political and moral perspective,

> a great sector of our contemporary culture has just one function - to befog the issues [that confront the modern denizen].

Fromm (ibid.) continues by averring that one of the major subterfuges that have been employed in this regard is the widespread assertion — and subsequent belief — that the problems which face contemporary society (and its inhabitants) are simply 'too complicated' for the ordinary individual to comprehend, let alone address. As such, these 'problems' are presented — by the specialists — as being far too complex and overwhelming for the ordinary layman, and that only they (i.e. this privileged and elite group of specialists) can aim to resolve them. For Fromm, such a strategy then manages to:

> *discourage people from trusting their own capacity to think about those problems that really matter* (ibid.) [emphasis added].

[96] With regard to how this situation of "predetermined organisation and classification" has continued well into the digital domains of the 21st century, in the final chapter of this investigation, this matter will be vividly illuminated when we explore exactly how contemporary Information-Communication Technologies (ICTs), along with social networking services and social media platforms, have been programmed so as to ultimately decide what content the user of a particular platform should be exposed to (in terms of information), along with the very format that such material should assume.

As a direct result of this duplicitous ruse that has been employed within contemporary culture, Fromm maintains that the modern individual ends up feeling completely helpless, caught up in a 'chaotic mass of data' with only the (misleading) hope that society's so-called "specialists" can decipher it[97].

2.6) What does the culture industry mean for the modern individual?

According to the critical theorists, what the culture industry — along with its pervasive sense of one-dimensionality — ultimately spells for the modern individual is that through the inescapable process of acculturation, the individual becomes entirely objectified and devalued (Baghai, 2007). Elaborating on such an ominous assertion, Horkheimer and Adorno (1997: xiv) note that:

> [o]n the one hand the growth of economic productivity furnishes the conditions for a world of greater justice; on the other hand it allows the technical apparatus and the social groups which administer it a disproportionate superiority to the rest of the population. The individual is wholly devaluated in relation to the economic powers, which at the same time press the control of society over nature to hitherto unsuspected heights.

As such, the critical theorists aver that the modern individual has come to signify 'only those attributes by which [they] can replace everyone else' and as a result of this, they are essentially viewed as being fungible and interchangeable (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1997: 145).

Such an assertion then corroborates Marcuse's (2002: 12) insistence on the prevalence of one-dimensional thought (and behaviour) within contemporary society and that such an instrumentalised orientation places a fundamental priority on the fungibility and

[97] In the final chapter of this investigation, it will be evinced how Fromm's critical insights regarding this matter can be regarded as being highly prescient, and worrying, due to the fact that the contemporary digital denizen currently finds himself/herself inundated with an overwhelming barrage of information/data that he/she is simply incapable of processing/comprehending. As such, this information/data now needs to be constantly filtered and assessed by algorithms and electronic filtration mechanisms that are deeply embedded within contemporary social media platforms and online search engines. This then ultimately leaves the digital denizen in a position of utter dependence and vulnerability, due to the fact that he/she has now become — unbeknownst to them — completely reliant upon these 'digital gatekeepers' in order to decide what information is to be regarded as being useful, important and thus, worthy of attention (Morozov, 2013). This then leaves him/her in a position in which manipulative and deceptive ploys can be easily engineered, employed and facilitated.

replaceability of all objects — including human beings — in order to keep the societal system/status quo in existence. Within the realm of the culture industry, Horkheimer and Adorno (1997: 154) aver that:

> the individual is an illusion not merely because of the standardization of the means of production, but because [he/she] is tolerated only so long as [his/her] complete identification with the generality is unquestioned (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1997: 154).

It is directly in this regard that Adorno (2001: 104) goes on to argue that in direct contrast to Kant's categorical imperative, the culture industry's revised categorical imperative has nothing to do with freedom or autonomy. As such, it guilefully proclaims:

> you shall conform, without instruction as to what; conform to that which exists anyway, and to that which anyone thinks anyway as a reflex of its power and omnipresence (ibid.).

In accordance with this criticism of Adorno's, Fromm ([1941] 2013: 183) goes on to assert that as a direct result of the stifling conformity inherent to contemporary society, many individuals feel obliged to adopt a psychological mechanism of escape which he refers to as 'automaton conformity'. According to Fromm (ibid.), this particular mechanism 'is the solution that the majority of normal individuals' choose to adopt and ultimately embrace in modern society.

In an attempt to succinctly phrase what it is that the mechanism of 'automaton conformity' entails, Fromm ([1941] 2013: 183) avers that in the context of the modern, consumer society, the individual:

> ceases to be himself; he adopts entirely the kind of personality offered to him by cultural patterns; and he therefore becomes exactly as all others are and as they expect him to be.

Fromm (ibid.) continues by noting that through the adoption of this mechanism of escape:

> the discrepancy between 'I' and the world disappears and with it the conscious fear of aloneness and powerlessness.

Thus, according to Fromm's (ibid.) analysis of this matter, the advantage of adopting such a mechanism resides in the fact that the person who relinquishes their individual sense of self and willingly 'becomes an automaton', identical with the countless others that surround them:

> *need not feel alone and anxious any more*. But the price he pays, however, is high; [as it ultimately equates with] *the loss of his self* [emphasis added].

What is very interesting to note regarding this matter, is that according to Fromm ([1941] 2013: 183), the socially propagated supposition that the 'normal' way of addressing this sense of aloneness and isolation (which has become a central feature of modern society) is to transform oneself into an automaton like everyone else, fundamentally undermines and contradicts one of the most prevalent ideas pertaining to the notion of individuality and what it actually means to be an individual in contemporary culture. As such, Fromm (ibid.) maintains that:

> The majority of us are supposed to be individuals who are free to think, feel, act as they please. ... Yet, although there are true individuals among us, *this belief is an illusion in most cases and a dangerous one for that matter, as it blocks the removal of those conditions that are responsible for this state of affairs* [emphasis added].

Such a stifling, stale and static state of affairs then leads Fromm ([1941] 2013: 202 - 203) to aver that:

> the substitution of pseudo acts for original acts of thinking, feeling and willing, leads eventually to the *replacement of the original self by a pseudo self* [emphasis added].

According to Fromm, while the 'the original self' can be described as being 'the self which is the originator of mental activities', the pseudo-self is to be understood as:

> ... only an agent who actually represents *the role a person is supposed to play* [in extant society] but who does so under the name of the self [emphasis added].

Fromm continues his description of the pseudo-self by noting that while a person is certainly able to play many roles in their daily routines — and be subjectively convinced that s/he is

"s/he" in each role — when such a 'role-playing' scenario occurs within the context of contemporary society, Fromm avers that the individual:

> ... is in all these roles [only] what [s]he believes [s]he is expected to be, and for many people, if not most, *the original self is completely suffocated by the pseudo-self* [emphasis added].

As such, Fromm (ibid.) maintains that the relinquishment of the original self — and its subsequent replacement by a pseudo-self — ultimately leaves the modern individual in an immense state of insecurity. In order to overcome the overwhelming sense of panic that arises from this sense of loss, s/he feels compelled to conform, that is, to seek his/her identity by attaining the approval of those (other automatons) that surround him/her. It is directly in this regard that Fromm (ibid.) argues that the automatisation of the individual in modern society has:

> increased the helplessness and insecurity of the average individual ... [and as a result] ... he is *ready to submit to new authorities which offer him security and relief from doubt* [emphasis added].

Furthering such a line of critique, Marcuse (2002: 13) avers that within contemporary society, in light of the fact that conformity has now become an essential component of one's existential character, there is only one dimension left to thought that is now 'everywhere and in all forms'. According to Marcuse's (2002: 168) critical interpretation, this is primarily due to the fact that a new form of 'positive' thinking — as opposed to the 'negative' thinking associated with critical reflection — has superseded critical thought.

Elaborating on this particular aspect of his analysis and critique of contemporary thought, Marcuse asserts that this particular mode of positive thought involves a specific concrete experience of the *Lebenswelt* - or what he refers to as a specific mode of 'seeing' the world (ibid.). This mode of 'seeing', in spite of its allegedly disinterested character is, for Marcuse, seeing within a purposive, practical framework. It is thus constituted by both a specific sense of anticipation (*Voraussehen*) and projection (*Vorhaben*), namely:

> that which experiences, comprehends and shapes the world in terms of calculable, predictable relationships among exactly identifiable units.

Thus, like Horkheimer and Adorno (1997) have previously argued, Marcuse (2002: 168) goes on to state that what is so distinctive about this mode of apperception is that the sense of 'universal quantifiability' it engenders and promotes becomes 'a prerequisite for the domination of nature'.

Based upon this interpretation regarding the developmental trajectory of contemporary culture, Horkheimer and Adorno (1997: 120) argue that:

> [f]ilms, radio and magazines make up a system which is *uniform as a whole* and in *every part* ... *and one in their enthusiastic obedience to the rhythm of the iron system* [emphasis added].

As such, Horkheimer and Adorno (1997) maintain that the various culture industries are effectively able to:

> coax individuals into the privacy of their home, or movie theatre, while producing consumers-spectators of media events and escapist entertainment who are being subtly *indoctrinated with dominant ideologies and conformist behaviour* (Kellner, 2002: 9) [emphasis added].

Marcuse (2002: 198) extrapolates from this critical point when he goes on to argue how nearly all facets of contemporary, consumerist culture contain:

> prescribed attitudes and habits, certain intellectual and emotional reactions which bind the consumers more or less pleasantly to the producers and, through the latter, to the whole.

As these products become increasingly available and accessible, the indoctrination they carry with them essentially becomes a way of life which significantly counteracts the possibility of bringing about a substantive sense of change to society. As a result of this incremental (and insidious) process of indoctrination, one-dimensional thought is

propagated by the purveyors of mass culture and mass media[98]. It is in this regard that Marcuse (2002: 16) avers that the modern denizen's:

> ... universe of discourse is populated by self-validating hypotheses which, incessantly and monopolistically repeated, become hypnotic definitions or dictations.

Such a scenario then leads Marcuse (2002: 17) to argue that within contemporary society, critical thought tends to be arrested at those semantic barriers which 'appear as the limits of Reason itself'. What this then means is that the 'self-limitation of thought' assumes immense significance in the context of the culture industry as contemporary society effectively manages to bar any form of oppositional thought and behaviour that may (potentially) arise within the critical subject[99].

In the end, according to the rather dubious analysis that has been delineated above, we are ultimately left with:

> a totalitarian system of cultural production that effectively and completely integrates individuals, their thoughts and activities, into prevailing social, economic and political structures (Gunster, 2000: 65).

It is directly in this regard that Fromm ([1941] 2013: 252-253) goes on to note that, from an historical perspective, as the ideals of modernity have slowly evinced themselves, one will notice that:

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[98] Particular attention will be paid to both the realms of politics and the 'traditional media' in the 21st century in the final chapter of this investigation so as to illuminate exactly how Marcuse's critique can be extended into the contemporary epoch. In the final chapter, it will therefore be explicated how social media platforms have had a major impact upon how the domains of politics and traditional media are required to conduct themselves from an operational perspective within the digital epoch. As such, it will also be delineated how social media platforms and social networking sites have had a major effect on the amplification and acceleration of one-dimensional thinking - particularly when critically considering the impact that filter bubbles, information bubbles and echo chambers are having upon the modern denizen and the public sphere in which he/she is required to engage.

[99] As shall be evinced in the final chapter of this investigation, Marcuse's critical insights into the narrowing/closing of various dimensions of society/life that do not accord with what is deemed as being 'reasonable' by the contemporary individual, takes on a rather literal (and highly unsettling) format, when we critically examine how algorithmic bias and informational interference on the digital mediums of communication in the 21st century (including social networking sites and social media platforms), manage to insidiously enclose the user of such devices in informational bubbles that merely repeat, reinforce and echo their (i.e. the users') current belief systems - without allowing them to gain insight into alternative/oppositional perspectives, that can actually facilitate the broadening of perspectives and horizons.

> the authority of the Church has been replaced by that of the State, that of the State by that of conscience, and in our era, the latter has been replaced by the anonymous authority of common sense and public opinion as instruments of conformity.

From the perspective of these critical theorists then, the tragedy — and no less confounding aspect — of contemporary society is then that because we have, to a certain extent, liberated ourselves from the older, more overt forms of authority, we are (as yet) unable — or unwilling — to see that we have now become the victims of a new kind of authority - namely, the culture industry in all its seductive (yet ultimately soporific) splendour.

2.7) Is the Culture Industry thesis still relevant and applicable?

It can be argued that some of the most powerful critiques to emerge in relation to contemporary culture — and its associated technologies of communication — are those of the critical theorists that deal with the notion of the culture industry and its pervasive sense of one-dimensionality. This can be ascribed to the fact that it is such a comprehensive (and novel) series of critiques that effectively manages to place a spotlight on the manner in which the myriad manifestations of contemporary culture are indubitably linked with asymmetrical structures of power, wealth and domination (Gartman, 2012: 41). However, as with any unprecedented form of critique that has left an inedible impression upon the realm of critical research, the notion of the culture industry is not without its sceptics. Critics therefore claim that Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse deliberately ignore/overlook the oppositional potential of mass culture and the new media, whilst also reducing the majority of the contemporary population to the status of an unthinking, malleable and mindless mass.

In order to effectively respond to these (and similar) concerns, and to effectively highlight how and why the critical insights of the Frankfurt School are still to be regarded as a valid source of elucidation in relation to the phenomenon of contemporary culture and the technologies that underpin it, it is imperative that the critical theorists' understanding and perception of mass culture, mass media and the various entertainment industries be examined and evaluated within an appropriate and socio-historically contextualised framework (Baghai, 2007: 1). One therefore needs to be mindful of the fact that, towards

the turn of the 20th century, the critical theorists were adeptly able to take note of a significant transformation occurring within the capitalistic franchise itself, along with the powerful influence wielded by its associated technologies of mass communication (ibid.). As such, it was these theorists who were among the first to critically reflect upon how monopoly capitalism signalled the advent of the so-called administered society, along with the growing role that technology was playing in such an endeavour.

It is in this regard that one needs to remain cognisant of the fact that among the various points of investigation and critique with which the critical theorists were intimately involved, they were centrally concerned about the potential of powerful mechanisms and technological forces that can be used as a form of indoctrination and control. Thus, from the inception of their investigation into these matters — which was as early as 1932 — up until this point in history, the psychological strategies for manipulation have become much more effective and so has the hardware (and software) that is available for the purpose (Schuetz, 1989: 11). This point can be regarded as being even more salient in the digital age of the Internet, social media and social networking technology (Kellner, 2002: 16). Thus, in terms of the current investigation, the insights of Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and Fromm can all be regarded as being of paramount importance due to the fact that their critical observations elucidate the undermining effects that pseudo-culture — and its associated technologies that augment and underpin it — can potentially have for the modern individual.

Furthermore, it is essential to point out that while the critical theorists indubitably assume a cynical stance in relation to the — distorted — form that they believe modern culture has assumed, these theorists do not see the dominance of technological rationality in the context of contemporary society as being an inevitability. Rather, if one is to gauge their critical works in a nuanced, and contextually appropriate fashion, one will discover that for thinkers such as Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse, the emergence of the culture industry is to be understood as the direct result of a specific balance of power that was itself historically mediated (Baghai, 2007: 13).

It is in this regard that the critical insights delineated within the course of this chapter can be viewed as a critique of a technologically deterministic paradigm that has come to dominate and prevail in the contemporary world. As such, the insights of the Frankfurt School are to be viewed as an attempt to destabilise extant, reified reality so as to convert contemporary culture — along with its associated technologies — into a liberating and edifying force (Gartman, 2012: 41). Thus, rather than advocating a position that is aimed at compelling the modern individual/critical researcher to resign from all forms of contemporary culture and its associated technologies (such as television), Adorno (1991: 136) avers that:

> [b]y exposing the socio-psychological implications and mechanisms of television … not only the shows can be improved but more importantly the public may be sensitized to the nefarious effect of some of these mechanisms.

To sum up then, while the aforementioned arguments of Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and Fromm provide the contemporary critical researcher with some undeniably critical and illuminating food for thought, and while their insights clearly allude to a certain dialectical tension that is inherent to modern society (along with all of its supporting and propelling technological appendages), it is important to note that these theorists do not provide one with the only perspective regarding these matters. Thus, in order to be true to the spirit of Critical Theory itself, we must now look at the matter of contemporary culture in a dialectical fashion in order to see whether or not the aforementioned views, arguments and critiques can be placed in a critical discussion with other perspectives that offer one alternative modes of perceiving the phenomena in question. In order to achieve such a dialectically motivated outcome, we will therefore turn our attention to the works of Walter Benjamin, as it is his works that provide the critical researcher with another critical vantage point from where the phenomena of contemporary culture can be gauged and conceptualised.

As shall be evinced and articulated throughout the course of Chapter 3 of this investigation, this is due to the fact that contrary to the rather bleak predictions and damning analyses of his colleagues at the Frankfurt School, Benjamin maintained that the modern technologies

of mass communication — including radio and film — contained liberating and emancipatory potential. Thus, contra Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse, Benjamin developed a fairly idiosyncratic and rather nuanced argument in which he averred that such technologies could be modified so as to raise the critical and apperceptive faculties of the modern individual, thus allowing him/her to become more aware (and no doubt critical) of the oppressive and manipulative social conditions in which they found themselves. It is thus to these works that we will now turn our attention as they will allow us to appreciate the dialectical potential contained within modern technological mediums of communication — as understood by the critical theorists themselves — and thus, provide us with a solid dialectical platform from where the phenomena of digital networking technologies can be gauged and understood.

Chapter 3: A Benjaminian Appraisal of Mass Culture and its Technologies of Reproduction[100]

3.1) An alternative view of popular culture and its associated technologies

From the outset of this chapter, it is imperative to be aware of the fact that contrary to the rather sombre and cynical views of his colleagues (and friends) at the Frankfurt School, Walter Benjamin developed a far more optimistic, affirmative and — at times — more nuanced view of the edifying and emancipatory potential contained within contemporary culture and its associated technologies of mass communication. While this may lead one to (erroneously) conclude that Benjamin can be situated in the camp of technocratic/technophile thinkers due to the fact that he tended to espouse more affirmative views towards contemporary culture and its technological phenomena, it is crucial to be mindful of the fact that he is by no means to be considered a naive technophile invigorated by an unfounded sense of techno-optimism. As such, Benjamin attempted to keep abreast of the potential dangers and pitfalls that contemporary culture and its technologies brought with it[101], whilst also attempting to examine how such phenomena could serve a progressive and emancipatory role within the modern world.

In light of such an orientation, this chapter will seek to reconstruct the views of Walter Benjamin - with particular focus and emphasis placed upon his analyses of mass culture and its reproductive technologies. Such a reconstruction is intended to highlight for the reader how the Frankfurt School — along with the wider ensemble of critical thinkers with which the School was associated — managed to develop an undeniably powerful, insightful and multifaceted theoretical platform from where the contemporary technologies of mass communication and modern culture can be both assessed and understood. Such a line of

[100] Certain sections of this chapter have drawn — either directly or indirectly — from several journal articles that were published (by the author of this thesis) during the course of researching/writing this dissertation, namely: Amiradakis, M.J. (2016a), 'Is social networking fostering the fungibility of the Other'; Amiradakis, M.J. (2016b), 'Social networking services: A digital extension of the surveillance state?'; and, Amiradakis, M.J. (2019), 'Habermas, mass communication technology and the future of the public sphere'. Permission has been granted by the relevant and applicable publishers (Taylor and Francis) for the utilisation, inclusion and reproduction of this material within this dissertation (see Appendix A for further details regarding this matter).

[101] In fact, one needs to look no further than Benjamin's (1940) cataclysmic description of Klee's 'Angelus Novus' (Angel of History) to appreciate just how attuned and sensitive Benjamin actually was with regard to the destructive proclivities and tendencies contained within society as evinced by its destructive legacy.

analysis and investigation will then aim to highlight how the first generation of critical theorists found themselves in a particularly nuanced, antagonistic and dialectically laden position with regard to the technologies of mass communication and the mass culture of the 20th century. It is thus hoped that through such a comprehensive reconstruction, the contemporary researcher will be well positioned when attempting to come to grips with the nature of the new communicational technologies currently confronting the society of the 21st century.

3.2) Walter Benjamin - approaching mass culture from a different angle

In this section of Chapter 3, what will be elaborated upon is how Benjamin — unlike Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse — would come to argue that as a direct result of the technological innovations that have accompanied the projection and dissemination of contemporary cultural phenomena, domains such as film, sports and mass entertainment are now creating a new kind of 'critically informed spectator' (Kellner and Durham, 2006: xviii). This new form of critical spectator, according to Benjamin, is distinguished by his/her ability to discerningly dissect the cultural forms with which they are presented/confronted and to then render intelligent and critical judgment on them. In fact, as shall be more fully explored as this section of the chapter unfolds, Benjamin firmly believed that mass culture and its technologies of mass reproduction possessed an empowering potentiality that was able to fundamentally alter the contemporary individual's mode of apperception pertaining to the reality and lived situation of the society in which they found themselves.

According to Benjamin, it was this altered form of apperception that would ultimately present the modern individual with the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of and orientation in the world, while at the same time gaining the ability to become more critical of the lived situation in which he/she may find themselves. As such, it can be averred that what Benjamin attempts to bring to the foreground is the profound impact of modern mass culture and its technological apparatuses on the human sensory capacity. Importantly however, it also manages to uniquely link this unprecedented sensorial impact with the wider historical transformation of culture, i.e. the displacement of literary culture by the emergence of a new mass culture within urban capitalist modernity (Kang, 2014: 100-101).

In doing so, Benjamin tries to grasp the unprecedented emergence of a new 'mass public as protagonist' in this new media culture, and to assess its political implications.

It is such a line of argumentation and analysis that then needs to be pursued in relation to this particular study as it is an avenue of thought that manages to place mass culture and its associated technologies of mass communication in a slightly revised and more affirmative light. Thus, for the purposes of this investigation, which is essentially aimed at critically evaluating the role of new social media technologies in the public sphere of the 21st century (first and foremost from a Critical Theory background), we will limit our scope to Benjamin's groundbreaking insights which appear primarily in his seminal text titled 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936)[102], along with other — perhaps lesser known — works of his such as his essays titled 'Children's Literature' (1929), 'The Author as Producer' (1934), 'The Newspaper' (1934), 'A Critique of the Publishing Industry' (1930), 'Journalism' (1927) and 'Little History of Photography' (1931) which will be used to bolster the line of argumentation and critical insights that Benjamin delineates in his Artwork Essay. The reason why most of our attention will focus upon these particular texts is due to the fact that in these works Benjamin effectively manages to highlight how and why the modern technologies of reproduction — including technologies of mass communication — along with the popular forms of culture with which they are associated offer society more than an oppressive, hegemonic and one-dimensional universe from which there is no escape.

Hansen (2013: 76) augments and extends this claim by asserting that within his rather expansive series of investigations, Benjamin effectively managed to explore crucial

[102] It is important to note that the version of Benjamin's essay — which from this point onwards shall be referred to as the 'Artwork Essay' — that is most widely read, accessed and cited (particularly within the English-speaking world) is the third version that Benjamin worked on. As Leslie (2000: 132) notes,' ... it was this third version that was translated into English as "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", and so gained widespread notoriety and inclusion in numerous art history and cultural theory compendia.' It is interesting to note that when Benjamin's title is translated directly into English from German, it reads as: 'The Work of Art in the Age of its *Technical* Reproducibility' as opposed to '*Mechanical* Reproduction' (ibid.). The utilisation of such a term then explicitly places more emphasis upon Benjamin's fascination with and interest in technology (i.e. the technical) and its increasingly central role in the existential make-up of the modern world. Such a distinction is important in relation to this particular investigation as it highlights from the very beginning that Benjamin took note of the increasing role that technology was beginning to play in the cultural sphere of the 20th century along with the numerous changes that were beginning to manifest themselves in contemporary society. As such, it was these social transformations that now needed to be both understood and analysed.

questions pertaining to modernity, the aesthetical, and their relations to technological reproduction. As such, it can be argued that the aforementioned texts' central focus rests upon the critical exploration of the variegated effects of industrial capitalism on art, culture and the reorganisation of human sense perception. In light of this, Benjamin's concern with film and technological media is to be regarded as being inseparable from, on the one hand, his philosophy of history, which pivots on the question of modernity, and, on the other, his theory of the aesthetical, which encompasses both the organisation of sensory perception, understood historically, and the fate of art and artistic practice in the narrower sense (ibid.).

For the contemporary critical researcher then, it is important to be mindful of the fact that despite Benjamin — and his associated works — finding himself situated in a different media age from that of our own, his writings can (and should) still be regarded as being fundamental to the task of critically analysing the 'global mediascape' of the present (Kang, 2014: 2). As shall be revealed throughout the course of this chapter, there are three main reasons for this (Kang, 2014: 100-101):

First, Benjamin was primarily concerned with the intimate relationship between the media, technology and its connection to capitalist modernity. This can then be regarded as a situation which is — to a certain extent — similar the one in which we find ourselves, although the capitalistic system in which we operate has indubitably been altered along with its associated technologies that underpin and reproduce it. Benjamin's critical works can therefore provide us with a much-needed critical platform from where such phenomena can be understood and evaluated;

Secondly, throughout the scope of his variegated works, Benjamin managed to bring into critical focus the intimate intersections of technological innovations and the transformation of human senses, experiences, understandings and orientations to the world[103]. These can thus be regarded as being intersectional links that have no doubt intensified in the seventy years since his untimely death and thus, can still prove to be of immense heuristic worth;

[103] It is interesting to note that according to both Turkle (2011) and Jackson (2008) a major theme to arise within contemporary media/communication/psychology studies is that new social media have fundamentally altered the ontological and existential orientation of children and their relationships within the 21st century, thus adding credence to Benjamin's original insights.

Thirdly, it is also crucial to be mindful of the fact that Benjamin's work was always geared toward exploring the possibilities of communicational technologies and human emancipation. Such a form of emancipation was not founded upon, and explicated, in some naive way that sees modern media as 'enabling tools' – or a simplistic kind of technological development – but rather as part of his abiding concern with regulating and harmonising the complex and convoluted interplay between human beings, technology and nature.

Benjamin's insights and investigations pertaining to all of the above can then clearly be regarded as being of extreme import and use - particularly in relation to the desired outcomes of this study. This is due to the fact that such an orientation and outlook manage to act as a much-needed counterbalance and dialectical juxtaposition for the rather sobering and more pessimistic views pertaining to the very same phenomena (i.e. mass culture and its associated technologies of dissemination and reproduction) as espoused by some of the other critical theorists that have been considered in Chapter 2. It is directly in this regard that Hansen (2013: 83) goes on to corroborate such a claim by noting how many of Benjamin's works, and in particular, his Artwork Essay, became something of a red flag, almost in a literal sense, which was defiantly held up as a revolutionary alternative to Horkheimer and Adorno's pessimistic critique of the culture industry. As such, it was Benjamin's works that offered students a different vision of intellectual and cultural practice and it is directly in this regard that we will now turn our attention to the works of Walter Benjamin (ibid.).

3.3) Benjamin's views on mass culture and its technologies of reproduction

Benjamin opens up the Artwork Essay with a powerful quote from Paul Valéry in which Valéry aims to highlight that, as a direct result of modern technological breakthroughs, profound changes have taken place — and are no doubt continuing to take place — within the realm of art, its transmission and its reception. It is in this regard that Valéry (in Benjamin, 2006: 18) writes:

> ... the amazing growth of our techniques, the adaptability and precision they have attained, the ideas and habits they are creating, make it *a certainty that profound changes are impending in the ancient craft of the Beautiful*. ... For the last twenty years

> neither matter nor space nor time has been what it was from time immemorial. *We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts*, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an *amazing change in our very notion of art* [emphasis added].

Extrapolating from Valéry's position, Benjamin begins his analysis of the relationship of art to the contemporary technologies of reproduction by asserting that as a direct result of the tremendous developments that have taken place within the realms of science and technology, significant changes have invariably arisen within the substructure (i.e. the economic base) of society. As a result**,** Benjamin maintains that there has also been a considerable amount of change and development that has taken place within the superstructure of society and, consequently, he (Benjamin 2006: 18) asserts that 'all areas of culture' have now been affected. Benjamin (2006: 18-19) does however go on to note that such changes and transformations within the superstructure 'take place far more slowly than that of the substructure', and as a result, it 'has taken more than half a century to manifest in all areas of culture the change in conditions of production' (ibid.). Thus, while changes and transformations in and between the substructure and superstructure of society may vary in terms of intensity, frequency and pace, Benjamin — like Marx — firmly believed that transformations in one sphere of society invariably lead to changes in the other. Such a stance then highlights how Benjamin perceived society as being a malleable entity that is composed of an array of interconnected mechanisms, all reciprocally intertwined, which manage to keep it afloat whilst constantly evolving.

It is as a direct result of the interrelated (and often unforeseen) changes that have occurred within both the super- and substructures of society that Benjamin (2006: 18) goes on to assert that a new series of investigations and theses need to be developed as the original capitalistic system that Marx had investigated and critiqued 'was still in its infancy'. As such, Benjamin maintains that Marx's original critiques and insights are not entirely equipped and able to address the new developments that have arisen since they were documented[104].

[104] This can then be regarded as an extremely important point as Benjamin's position resonates very strongly with the theoretical and epistemological orientation of this particular study as it highlights the need to constantly update, revise and critique existing theories in light of changing social, historical and economic conditions (cf. Chapter 1 for more insight regarding this matter).

Thus, like the other critical theorists, Benjamin rejected the idea that Marx's writings were to be interpreted as being immutable, fixed and unchangeable. As a result, Benjamin clearly felt that certain revisions and updates of Marx's critiques were to be regarded as being essential if one is to ever come to grips with the ever-changing nature of the capitalistic system in which they may be rooted. In fact, Benjamin even goes so far as to state that it is these revised and updated theses that should actually be regarded 'as a weapon' (2006: 18) that can be utilised to counter the ever-changing nature of contemporary (capitalistic) society. It is thus from this vantage point that Benjamin begins to develop his own "weaponised thesis" pertaining to the changing nature of cultural (re)production within the capitalistic society of the 20th century along with its associated technologies of dissemination[105].

Within his renewed thesis pertaining to technologies of reproduction and their relationship to the contemporary cultural sphere in the 20th century, Benjamin (2006: 19) begins by noting how, in principle, a work of art has always been reproducible. However, with the introduction of mechanical, or rather, technical reproduction, something new has been introduced into the sphere of cultural production and dissemination, along with the reception and appraisal of its aesthetic content. Benjamin thus goes on to note that when looking at the unfolding of technical reproduction from an historical perspective, such a process has no doubt advanced intermittently and in various leaps over long intervals. However, the process has nevertheless been accelerated, with an ever-increasing intensity,

[105] As has already been mentioned above, it is crucial to be mindful of the fact that when one is to reflect upon the literal translation (from German to English) of the title of Benjamin's Artwork Essay (i.e. 'The Work of Art in the Age of *Mechanical* Reproduction' as opposed to 'The Work of Art in the Age of its *Technical* Reproducibility'), the difference between the terms may superficially seem to suggest only elusive discrepancies. However, as Leslie (2000: 132) so aptly remarks, such an interpretation would be highly misleading as it is these very fine-tuned differences that manage to provide one with important conceptual parameters for an honest and well-rounded interpretation of the text itself. Importantly, *Technik* in the Benjaminian sense intimates 'a holistic and encompassing sense of both technology and technique' (Leslie, 2000: 132). Leslie (ibid.) goes on to state that: 'the wider idea of technological-technical, rather than the limited notion of mechanical, situates the essay more directly as part of Benjamin's ongoing investigation into the dialectic of *Technik.*' Thus, in signifying simultaneously technology and technique, *Technik* alludes to 'the material hardware, the means of production *and* the technical relations of production' (Leslie, 2000: xii). Leslie (2000: 132) continues by stating that: 'To accent technical relations of production is to acknowledge that there exist *social* and *political relationships* between *producers* and *means of production*' [emphasis added]. Based upon the above, this investigation will henceforth make use of the terms 'technical' and 'technological' (as opposed to 'mechanical') when considering Benjamin's work in order to highlight and embrace Benjamin's wider understanding of the phenomena in question.

as the technological means fuelling this process have become more sophisticated and advanced[106]. It is directly in this regard that he goes on to note that around the turn of the 20th century, technical reproduction had:

> reached a standard that not only permitted it to reproduce all transmitted works of art and thus to cause the *most profound change in their impact upon the public*; it also had captured a place of its own *among the artistic processes* [emphasis added] (Benjamin, 2006: 20).

Thus, as a direct result of the accelerated technological means that emerged in the 20th century in order to reproduce works of art — particularly with the advent of photography and film — Benjamin (2006) maintains that certain significant changes have occurred within the disseminated artworks themselves along with the audiences who are now able to view them.

In order to make sense of this claim, Benjamin (2006: 21) argues that 'even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element', namely its 'locatedness within time and space', its 'unique existence' at the precise place 'where it happens to be '- an attribute which Benjamin also refers to as the artwork's 'authenticity' or, more specifically, its 'aura'[107]. According to Benjamin's understanding, prior to modern technologies of mass reproduction, the entire sphere of authenticity lay outside of an artwork's technical reproducibility. Thus, when one was confronted with an artwork's manual reproduction, which was typically labelled as a forgery, the original managed to preserve all its authority as it was a unique entity. Benjamin (2006: 21) maintains however that this is not so *vis à vis* the means of technical reproduction.

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[106] Leslie (2000: 137-138) provides a cogent summary of this situation by stating that: '[u]ntil the advent of technical reproduction, pictures had been made by hand, parallel to the manufacture of goods before the development of industrial machinery.' As such, '[t]echnical reproduction in art, beginning with *woodcut technology*, advances intermittently, but with accelerated intensity, until it reaches a qualitatively new stage in *lithographic reproduction*. ... The invention of *photography* induces a further speed-up effect, basing reproduction not on the pace of a hand that draws, but on the seeing eye and the machinery of the lens. *Film* is the *culmination of a process* that *accelerates* the *activity* of *perception reproduction*, such that it eventually occurs *simultaneously with speech* [emphasis added' (ibid.).

[107] This is a fairly esoteric and idiosyncratic element in Benjamin's oeuvre. For Benjamin, 'an artwork may be said to have an aura if it claims a unique status based less on its individual qualities than on its real or metaphorical distance from the viewer' (Leslie, 2000: 145). As such, the 'auratic artwork' and '"auratic perception" involves a response to an authority that has been claimed on the basis of the artwork's position within a tradition or in a social order' (ibid.).

At this point in our reconstruction of Benjamin's central argument pertaining to the matter of technical reproduction and its revised relationship to an artwork's aura, it is important to note that his assertion pertaining to the above ultimately hinges on two crucial points:

Firstly, according to his analysis, technical/process reproduction is more independent of the original than manual reproduction as the duplication of an artwork (particularly via the aid of something like photography or film) means that the original is no longer necessary in order for its aesthetic content to be viewed/appreciated/understood on a wider scale[108];

Secondly, and very importantly, technical reproduction can actually — for the first time in modern history — effectively place the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself. What this then means, above all else, is that technical reproduction has enabled the original artwork to 'meet the beholder halfway' (Benjamin, 2006: 20).

According to Benjamin (2006: 21) then, by enabling one with the ability to produce many reproductions, the process of mechanical reproduction 'substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence' and, in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener of an artwork in his/her own particular situation, it manages to reactivate the object it has reproduced. This then implies that, for Benjamin, a new relationship and form of understanding are now developed between the artwork and its viewer(s) as a direct result of the very technologies that are responsible for the artwork's reproduction and dissemination.

From Benjamin's (2006: 21) perspective, while the aforementioned changes and developments are no doubt to be considered as a laudable set of achievements, he

[108] It is imperative to note that in relation to Benjamin's commentary pertaining to this matter, the term 'aesthetics' is not utilised 'in order to designate part of a theory of fine art that seeks to identify the essence of beauty in a work of art'; rather, it delineates 'a study of perception and the senses in connection with a certain form of technology' (Kang, 2014: 20). As Kang (ibid.) goes on to note, the Greek epistemological root of aesthetics, *aisthetikos*, refers to 'a study of the human sensorium'. Benjamin's concern with reproductive technologies such — as film and photography — is thus to be understood as being 'less akin to a textual interpretation of the filmic representation and narratives than to a critical analysis of the cinematic reception process involving multiple intersections of technology, image and body' (ibid.). Benjamin's analysis can thus be said to ask more specific questions pertaining to the changing nature of perception itself. As such, one can aver that his media critique aims to grasp the changing nature of perception and the constructive role of media for a new mass public (ibid.).

nevertheless maintains that this is to be regarded as an ambiguous process. This is due to the fact that as a result of this duplicating process, the artwork's presence is always depreciated 'as its authenticity is interfered with'. According to Benjamin's (2006: 21) understanding, the authenticity of a thing (in this case a work of art) is:

> the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced.

Thus, what is really jeopardised when the historical testimony is affected is the 'authority of the object' itself. It is in this regard that Leslie (2000: 145) argues that:

> ... it is technology that releases the object from tradition, as the reproduced artwork can be reproduced over time identically. Its historicity is [thus] continually remade.

As such, one can then assert that as a result of this continuous reproductive process, the reproduced artwork effectively manages to shatter tradition[109].

Such a summation of how technologies of reproduction have impacted upon the artwork's aura (for both good and bad) then leads Benjamin to elaborate upon the next crucial aspect of his analysis in which he assesses how technologies of reproduction are affecting the manner in which the modern individual perceives, understands and (re)acts to the world surrounding him/her. Benjamin (2006: 22) refers to this altered relationship between the individual and his/her surroundings as 'the social basis of the contemporary decay of the aura'. According to Benjamin, the overriding reason for the 'contemporary decay of the aura' — from a social perspective — ultimately rests on the 'increasing significance of the masses in contemporary life' (ibid.). Benjamin elaborates on his "mass-centred" position when he argues how, as a direct result of the modern technologies of mass reproduction, the desire of the contemporary masses 'to bring things closer' — both spatially and cognitively — has grown tremendously.

[109] Benjamin does therefore go on to lament the fact that that which 'withers' in the age of technical reproduction is the aura of the work of art itself. However, it is this very process of withering that is to be considered as being intimately connected with contemporary mass movements. More on the Benjaminian notion of contemporary mass movements and the unprecedented sense of collective subjectivity with which such movements are associated will follow later in this chapter.

According to Hansen (2013: 95), it is important to be aware of the fact that Benjamin — much like his close friend and fellow theorist Siegfried Kracauer — sees the phenomenon of the 'modern mass' manifest itself primarily in acts of consumption and reception. As such, Benjamin views the 'epochal turn toward the masses' as encoded in the emergence of certain spheres typically associated with modern life, including architecture, fashions, events, and institutions of high-capitalist culture (ibid.). In a draft note for the Artwork Essay, Benjamin (in Hansen, 2013: 95) asserts that:

> The mass reproduction of artworks is not only related to the mass production of industrial goods but also to the mass reproduction of human attitudes and activities (*GS* 1:1042).

As Hansen (2013: 95) aptly remarks, the importance of this passage is that according to Benjamin's understanding:

> the mass circulation of images of human behaviour in film and photography makes the consumers of these images themselves into *objects of standardization and commodification* [emphasis added].

While this observation could then be read as anticipating Horkheimer and Adorno's culture industry critique, it also highlights how Benjamin attempts to understand the role of the mass media in new forms of fashioning personal and collective identity and expression (ibid.). As such, Benjamin clearly provides the masses with an unprecedented sense of awareness and agency that is both technologically mediated and reproduced.

It is directly in this regard that Benjamin (2006: 22) writes how, as a corollary to the increasing centrality and importance placed upon technologies of reproducibility within the contemporary cultural sphere:

> Every day the urge grows stronger [on the part of the masses] to *get hold of an object at very close range* by way of its likeness, its reproduction. Unmistakably, reproduction as offered by picture magazines and newsreels differs from the image seen by the unarmed eye. Uniqueness and permanence are as closely linked in the latter as are transitoriness and reproducibility in the former [emphasis added].

For Benjamin (2006: 22), the 'adjustment of reality to the masses' and of 'the masses to reality' is to be regarded as a process of 'unlimited scope'[110], which has invariably impacted upon both the cognitive and perceptive faculties of the individual residing in the modern world[111].

Benjamin's (2006: 22) argument regarding how the masses' relationship to reality — via an altered state of perception and cognition that technologies of reproduction have brought about — rests on what he refers to as the increasing importance associated with the 'exhibition value' of contemporary artworks (as opposed to their 'cult value'). In order to substantiate this claim, Benjamin (ibid.) goes on to assert that 'originally, the contextual integration of art in tradition found its expression in the cult'. What he means by this is that the earliest artworks originated 'in the service of a ritual – first the magical, then the religious kind' (this is in fact what he refers to as its 'cultic value'). For Benjamin then, the unique value of the authentic work of art (from a cultic perspective) has its basis in ritual, and it is therefore within the realm of ritual that the location of the artwork's original 'use value' is to be found.

Benjamin (2006: 23) then goes on to note how, with the advent and introduction 'of the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction' — i.e. photography and then later film — art (when viewed from its original, cultic orientation) came to sense an 'approaching crisis' which would become evident 'only a century later'. According to Benjamin (2006: 23), this 'crisis' revolved around an 'all-important insight', namely, that for the first time in world history, technical reproduction has successfully managed to emancipate the work of art 'from its parasitical dependence on ritual'. Thus, increasingly, the work of art that is

[110] For Leslie (2000: 145-146) it is important to be aware of the fact that what Benjamin is explicating here is: 'both a *technological basis* of the contemporary decline of aura and a *social basis* of the contemporary decline of aura, which are then related to the increasing growth of urban masses and the connected intensity of their movements' [emphasis added]. As such, Benjamin's analysis effectively highlights how '[t]echnological developments in themselves bear certain implications for aura, the reproduced object, producer and consumer'. Aura therefore atrophies alongside social and technological change (ibid.).

[111] It is directly in this regard that Benjamin goes on to note that during long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence. As such, much like Horkheimer has previously argued (cf. Chapter 1), Benjamin firmly maintained that the manner in which human sense perception is organised and the medium in which it is accomplished, are determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances (i.e. new technologies) as well which are able to bring about a new kind of perception, understanding and cognition - all of which can be regarded as crucial attributes that play an ever important role in determining the course and direction in which a society can potentially develop.

reproduced 'becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility'. What this then means according to Benjamin's (2006: 23) analysis, is that:

> the instant the criterion of authenticity [as rooted in the original cultic value of the artwork] ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed.

Thus, instead of being based on its value as rooted in ritual and tradition, it now begins to be rooted in another practice altogether, namely, that of *politics* (ibid.).

In order to make sense of Benjamin's rather bold claim pertaining to the altered function that artworks have managed to assume as a direct result of modern technologies of reproduction, one needs to remember that for Benjamin (2006: 23), works of art are invariably received and valued 'on different planes'. Benjamin elaborates on this matter when he goes on to posit how there are fundamentally two 'polar types' — or planes of reception and evaluation — which come to the foreground when considering the manner in which an artwork is received by its audience: namely, with one, the emphasis falls on what he has previously referred to as the cult value of the artwork, while with the other, the emphasis falls on what he dubs as being its exhibition value. Benjamin (2006: 23) then goes on to aver that 'with the emancipation of the various art practices from ritual', comes 'increasing opportunities for the exhibition' and display of their products (or what he has earlier referred to as their 'exhibition value')[112].

Based upon such a distinction, Benjamin (2006: 23) asserts that as a result of the different methods of technical reproduction that have arisen as developments in science and technology emerged, an artwork's revised aptitude for exhibition value has managed to increase to:

> such an extent that the quantitative shift between its two poles [i.e. cult value towards exhibition value] turned into a qualitative transformation of its nature [i.e. from a ritualistic function towards a political function].

[112] It is directly in this regard that Benjamin (2006: 23) remarks how it has become 'easier to exhibit a portrait bust that can be sent here and there than to exhibit the statue of a divinity that has its fixed place in the interior of a temple'.

It is as a result of such a qualitative shift that Benjamin maintains that in the contemporary era, as a result of the 'absolute emphasis' which has now been placed upon an artwork's exhibition value, the work of art itself becomes a creation with an entirely new set of (political) functions[113].

In light of such a summation, Benjamin (2006: 25) goes on to assert that with the qualitative transformation that technologies of technical reproduction have brought about with respect to an artwork's function, there has also been a significant transformation which has occurred on the part of the audience. Benjamin follows up on this claim when he argues how technologies of technical reproduction now permit 'the audience to take the position of a "critic"' as opposed to that of a passive observer (ibid.). With regard to this particular point, Benjamin (2006: 25) asserts that as a direct result of the actual composition of the filming process and its associated technologies, along with the somewhat fragmented manner in which these technologies render and display their respective contents, the audience has inadvertently been provided with an empowering opportunity to exercise their critical faculties.

This is primarily due to the fact that, as Leslie (2000: 149) highlights:

> technical reproduction can put the copy of the original in multiple new contexts of reception. The copy [thus comes to be] favoured over the original because of its provisionality, its unfixedness from a singular existence and a limited access. Process copy reproduction can [also] continually alter and improve upon the format of 'the original'.

[113] For Benjamin (2006: 24) — up until and during the period of time in which he was writing this essay, i.e. the early part of the 20th century — he firmly believed that the introduction of photography and later that of film technology proved to be the most 'serviceable exemplifications' of contemporary technologies of reproduction that were able to promote and further this new political function of art. In the 21st century, one is now able to include mediums such as computers, cellular phones, tablets and the Internet as being contemporised technological advancements (or 'serviceable exemplifications') that have effectively managed to increase the exhibition value of artworks and information (Hansen, 2013). This claim of Benjamin then resonates strongly with one of the focal points of this investigation, which is focusing on the ability of social media platforms to act as legitimate public spheres within the society of the 21st century. As such, it will need to be ascertained whether or not these digital social media platforms are able to facilitate and foster the political role that Benjamin ascribes to artworks as a result of the technologies of reproduction, as it is these new digital platforms that are now being used to both reproduce and disseminate a wide array of material in order to promote a sense of political agency on the part of the modern individual (cf. Benckler (2006), Castells (2009), Papacharissi (2009) and Feenberg (2015)). Whether or not such attempts are to be regarded as effective - in a socio-political and cultural sense - is thus a matter that requires serious consideration and shall be further explored in the final chapter of this investigation.

It is as a result of these changes then that,

> audiences become experts, because they critically measure film against the daily reality that they experience and because they also learn to assimilate new scenarios of potential social and physical ordering (Leslie, 2000: 149).

Benjamin (2006: 27) takes this claim even further when he goes on to indicate that as a direct result of the technical environment in which film, photography and the camera are required to operate, the 'reflected image' has now become 'separable' and 'transportable' to an ever-widening public sphere. As a result of the images' mobility and increased opportunity for exposure, an increasing number of individuals are thus provided with potentially liberating and empowering opportunities to exercise their critical faculties. It is in this regard that Benjamin goes on to insist that everybody who has managed to witness the accomplishments of film, is transported into the role of an 'expert'[114].

While Benjamin's analysis may seem to be depicting an overly optimistic portrayal of the empowering attributes associated with the new technologies of reproduction, it is crucial to be aware of the fact that Benjamin was well aware of the pitfalls that such technologies potentially — and more often than not, actually do — bring with them. This is made evident when Benjamin (2006: 27) provides us with some cautionary remarks pertaining to this very matter. Subsequently, he goes on to state that while film no doubt induces a situation whereby there is a 'shrivelling of the aura' — which can be used to enlighten, empower and edify the public who did not have access to the fairly exclusive artworks of the past — there has nevertheless been a subsequent 'artificial build-up of the "personality" outside the studio'. In a manner redolent of the Culture Industry critique that Horkheimer and Adorno would later come to write, Benjamin (2006: 27-28) goes on to argue how:

> The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the 'spell of the personality', *the phony spell of a commodity*. So long as the *movie-makers' capital sets the fashion*, as a rule no other revolutionary merit can be accredited to today's film than the promotion of a

[114] More on the Benjaminian notions of the distracted critic, expert and examiner will follow soon.

> revolutionary criticism of traditional concepts of art. ... *Under these circumstances the film industry is trying hard to spur the interest of the masses through illusion-promoting spectacles and dubious speculations*[115] [emphasis added].

The above quote leaves no measure of doubt that Benjamin was well aware of the potential manipulative effects that the film industry may have upon the public and how the technologies of mechanical reproduction can be used to further the private interests of capital - thus undermining the emancipatory potential that such technologies possess. As such, we can then acknowledge that Benjamin would have both understood and appreciated the concerns and criticisms raised by the other critical theorists, particularly in relation to their culture industry critique. However, even though Benjamin (2006: 27) is well aware of the dangerous and soporific effects that such an industry could potentially have on the wider public, he nevertheless goes on to assert that emancipatory and edificatory potential is inherent in the technique of the film. It is directly in this regard that Benjamin (2006: 25) goes on to note that:

> We do not deny that in some cases today's films can also promote revolutionary criticism of social conditions, even of the distribution of property.

What then does Benjamin's rather positive synopsis portend when one is to consider the civic role that the audience is now potentially able to perform in a public sphere that has been invigorated by the technological developments of film and photography? In order to expand upon such a line of inquiry, Benjamin (2006: 28) asks the reader to reflect — in an historical sense — upon the increasing role that the written word has played in the life of the public, particularly as the various technologies and techniques of reproduction/dissemination associated with the written (and later, printed) word have progressed. By drawing from this historical example, Benjamin notes that with the increasing expansion of the press — which ensured that 'new political, religious, scientific,

[115] With regard to this dubious assertion, it can be averred that Benjamin's observations take on a renewed, and critical light, within the digital domains of the 21st century. This will be highlighted in the final chapter of this investigation when it is delineated exactly how the array of filter bubbles, echo chambers and epistemic bubbles, along with the employment of algorithmic intervention on social media platforms, are amplifying the Benjaminian sentiments of 'illusion-promoting spectacles and dubious speculations' — as referred to above — so as to serve the interests of capital. As such, it is crucial that the contemporary critical researcher take heed of Benjamin's prescient and illuminating observations pertaining to this matter as they continue to play an invidious role within the digital milieu of contemporary society.

professional and local' opinions were placed before the readers — an increasing number of readers were actually empowered by such a process and became writers themselves (ibid.).

Benjamin (2006: 28) qualifies this claim by asserting that in its nascent phase, such a process of empowerment began with the daily press opening to its readers a space typically demarcated as being 'letters to the editor'. He then goes on to compare it to the (then) current situation in Europe when he states that:

> ... today there is hardly a gainfully employed European who could not, in principle, find an opportunity to publish somewhere or other comments on his work, grievances, documentary reports, or that sort of thing.

In light of the above, Benjamin adamantly maintains that the expansion of the press — via the aid of its technologies of reproduction — has indubitably had an empowering effect on the ever-widening public sphere by essentially allowing the public to transform themselves from being mere (passive) spectators to becoming engaged and active participants. Such developments have also reduced the distance between the "experts" and so-called "non-experts", and as a result, significant boundaries impeding the interaction among different echelons of society have now been effectively removed[116]. Benjamin's position regarding this matter is made all the more clear when he goes on to argue that:

> ... the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character. ... *At any moment the reader is ready to turn into a writer*. As *expert* ... even if only in some minor respect, *the reader gains access to authorship* [emphasis added] (2006: 28)[117].

[116] While Benjamin was adeptly able to understand and foresee how the expansion of certain types of media, via the various technologies of reproduction, were able to allow for the inclusion of greater numbers of people in public deliberation and discourse, he was unable to predict exactly how the reproductive technologies of the 21st century (such as social media platforms and social networking sites) would create and facilitate the emergence of new boundaries and domains of segregation that would essentially serve to keep people apart and prevent them from gaining a sense of mutual understanding and shared perspective. More on this worrying matter will be delineated in the final chapter of this investigation.

[117] In relation to the society of the 21st century, one can further Benjamin's analysis by citing the numerous examples in which social networking technologies such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, MySpace and YouTube are empowering individuals with the opportunity to write, direct and star in their own personal narratives and documentaries. Such activity can be engaged in with relative ease, at little cost and on a daily basis. Such engaged activity can also be described as being highly interactive in nature as it allows for multiple actors to engage with one another on a regular basis. For more information regarding the interactive nature of

While such an auspicious claim may make it seem as if Benjamin was being overly optimistic with regard to the role that the media, and in particular, the printed word played in the public spheres of the late 19th/early 20th century - this is in fact not the case. It is thus crucial to be aware of the fact that Benjamin's analysis pertaining to the effect that he believed the newspaper had on the literary public sphere is dialectically fused together with his investigation relating to the ascendancy of the 'information industry' (Kang, 2014: 24). As such, Benjamin's examination of the role that newspapers played in the public sphere of the late 19th/early 20th century needs to be interpreted in relation to his wider exploration of the technologies of reproduction associated with modernity and the developing stages of the capitalist system.

In light of the above, it is Benjamin's firm conviction that the rapid growth of the newspaper was initially indicative of the growth and predominance of the middle class and its associated 'bourgeois public sphere'[118] (as Habermas would come to define it). Later, with the culmination and expansion of mass media, it was the 'information industries' that came to dominate and undermine the integrity and functionality of these literary public spheres (Kang, 2014: 39). Benjamin makes such an observation evident when he goes on to assert that with the introduction and proliferation of newspapers, a new form of communication and literary public sphere was introduced to society. As such, Benjamin maintained that newspapers did in fact contribute to the creation of "communicative spaces" (such as coffee houses, café and salons) in which 'the exchange of information and public discussion took place before the wide availability of the mass press' (Kang, 2014: 42).

While this can indeed be interpreted as an auspicious turn in terms of the growth of public spaces in which rational, critical discourse could occur, Benjamin makes it clear that with the rapid growth of the publishing industry in the 19th century there was an acceleration in the 'industrialisation of literary practice' (Kang, 2014: 39). For Benjamin, such an acceleration ultimately led to the introduction of a new form of communication to society which he

social media platforms, refer to Elizabeth-Bird (2011) and her notion of the interactive 'prosumer' in the digital day and age along with Bruns' (2006) concept of the 'produser' in the domain of the Internet.

[118] More on the Habermasian notion of the bourgeois literary public sphere will be explored in Chapter 4 of this investigation when we place a particular focus on Habermas's analysis pertaining to the structural transformations of the bourgeois public sphere which Benjamin is alluding to in this section of his work.

identifies as being based almost exclusively on 'information' (ibid.). It is crucial to take note of the fact that Benjamin's notion of 'information' is employed in the particular historical context of the rise of the newspaper and publishing industries in 19th-century Europe.

As such, information was viewed as:

> a new form of communication and a type of report that 'conveys an event or a happening *per se*', the pure essence of the thing, and, unlike a story, is not assimilated into everyday life or tradition (Kang, 2014: 39).

In a somewhat pejorative sense then, the term 'information' is utilised by Benjamin in order to 'reflect only quantified experience deprived of the profundity of life' (ibid.). It is as a direct result of the qualitative and quantitative shift that has occurred within the communicational realm — as a direct result of the prevalence of the information industry — that Benjamin goes on to posit how:

> despite noticeable increases in the amount of information, over time *knowledge as a whole has become poorer in quality* [emphasis added] (Kang, 2014: 39)[119].

Clearly then, Benjamin cannot simply be viewed as a naive optimist with regard to the liberating/empowering effects that he believed the newspaper brought to the public spheres of the 19th and 20th centuries as his analysis seems to echo many of the concerns that Horkheimer and Adorno would later articulate in their culture industry thesis. Yet, unlike his contemporary conservative cultural critics, Benjamin deviates from the exclusively "admonishing pathway" in order to unravel a dialectical factor hidden in the newspaper's disruptive function (Kang, 2014: 57). This is made evident by the fact that, in a diary entry of his, he goes on to argue how, as a result of the proliferation of information — via the various publications such as newspapers, periodicals and journals — in modern society:

[119] This point is both reinforced and extended into the domain of the 21st century by thinkers such as Jackson (2008), Dean (2009), Turkle (2011), Morozov (2013), Fuchs (2014) and Stiegler (2016) who argue that just because of the fact that technologies such as the Internet and social media platforms have resulted in the circulation and production of increasing quantities of information, this does not imply that the quality of such information has increased. As shall be explicated in the final chapter of this investigation, the scenario of "information overload" that confronts the denizen of the digital day and modern age — as a direct result of the contemporary technologies of reproduction — has brought with it an array of problems that undermine not only the epistemic credibility and epistemological integrity of these technologies and the information that they disseminate, but also the very individuals making use of them.

> ... as writing gains in breadth what art loses in depth, *the separation between the author and the public* – a separation that journalism maintains in a corrupt way – *starts to be overcome in an admirable way* [emphasis added] (SW2, 505).

In Benjamin's view then, the newspaper's function in assimilating unselective readers has managed to produce unintended consequences that can potentially bring about an empowering effect.

This line of argumentation is taken further in an essay of Benjamin's titled 'The Author as Producer' (1934) in which he goes on to aver that as a result of the proliferation of the newspaper and the information industry that has come to accompany it, the substantial barrier between writers and readers has been weakened (Kang, 2014: 57) and furthermore, that such a development actually manages to abrogate:

> the conventional distinction between genres, between writer and poet, between scholar and popularizer but also revises even the distinction between author and reader (SW2, 772).

As such, Benjamin maintains that as a direct result of the emergence and proliferation of newspapers, and the accelerating nature of the publishing industry itself, the everyday lives of ordinary people are increasingly able to become described, reported and presented to the public itself. Benjamin (1934) actually refers to this transformation in reporting and publication as the 'literarization of the conditions of living' and sees within it a great deal of emancipatory potential (SW2, 742).

At this stage of our analysis, it is important to be mindful of the fact that Benjamin's account of the newspaper's 'disruptive function' and the unintended consequences it managed to bring to the public spheres of the late 19th and early 20th century needs to be interpreted and understood within the larger matrix pertaining to Benjamin's broader account of the impact of communication technology on different forms of cultural life. Benjamin clearly articulates this for the reader in his essay titled 'Children's Literature' (1929) when he goes on to note how the prominent feature of 'technological civilization' (i.e. modernity) is bound up with the 'levelling of culture', that is, the erasing of the old — supposedly sacrosanct —

boundaries between 'high' and 'low' culture, thereby increasing the possibility for accessibility, interconnectivity and engagement with such cultural artefacts - particularly in relation to the wider (formerly marginalised) public (Amiradakis, 2019: 155). Such an assertion is further reinforced when Benjamin (1929) avers how:

> The dismantling of the old, hierarchical spheres of society had just been completed. This meant that the noblest and most refined substances had often sunk to the bottom, and so it happens that *the person who can see more deeply can find the elements he really needs in the lower depths of writing and graphic art rather than in the acknowledged documents of culture* [emphasis added] (SW2, 255).

According to this Benjaminian analysis then, the emergence of the 'public as writers' signifies that writing was no longer to be viewed as an esoteric activity associated with the elitist, mystic or cultic domains of existence (as it once was when gauged from an historical vantage point) but rather, as a popular cultural practice. As such, this revised form of engagement and activity needs to be understood as a form of literary competence which is:

> now based not on 'specialized training', but on 'polytechnical education' which allows it to become a 'public property'[120] (Kang, 2014: 58).

Importantly then, Benjamin does not regret the confluence between reader and writer, public and publisher. Instead, what is unique and somewhat vivifying about his interpretation pertaining to this matter, is that his analysis reveals the newly configured conditions of contemporary communication and he also manages to elucidate how newspapers have broadened the horizons of collective cultural and literary practices[121] (Kang, 2014: 58). As such, one can posit that via the aid of his analysis of the information

[120] It is directly in this regard that Kang (2014: 58) goes on to argue how the growth and propagation of blogging and the Internet literature in recent years manages to exemplify the fact that writing itself has continued to grow and develop as an everyday cultural practice that the masses are able to engage in. Such an assertion thus ratifies the Benjaminian idea as to how public authorship has been galvanised by contemporised and digitalised communicational technologies and technologies of reproduction.

[121] As promising as such an assertion may appear, Benjamin's hope of the "broadening of horizons" on the part of the mass public — as a direct result of the developments made by technologies of reproduction — will, however, be contested in the final chapter of this investigation. Thus, contra Benjamin, it will be argued that the social media platforms/social networking services of the 21st century are actually narrowing the scope of information that the user of such technologies is exposed to. Thus, rather than a broadening of perspectives, individuals in the contemporary era stand at risk of being enclosed in epistemic bubbles of a digital nature.

industry, Benjamin effectively manages to uncover the material conditions allowing for the 'emergence of a new social subject', which is itself mediated and articulated by modern communication technologies (Kang, 2014: 122). In light of this it can be averred that Benjamin effectively:

> founds a new logic of literary practice that begins with the growth of a new social subject in the transition to a new mass culture which is itself bound up with the information industry (Kang, 2014: 38).

In addition to how mass communicational technologies and mediums of reproduction (such as newspapers) were able to have an empowering effect upon the broader literary public, Benjamin also spent a considerable amount of time — especially from 1931 onwards — reflecting on how such mediums have impacted upon the intellectual and the role that he/she is required to perform in the public domain[122]. In his view, successful intellectual practice could be achieved not by the improvement of political or ideological conditions alone but rather, by the progressive adaptation of communication technology (Kang, 2014: 55). Benjamin (1934) makes this stance evident when he reconsiders the activities and tasks of the intellectual in a 'technological civilization'. In such a setting he goes on to posit how, in the age of newspapers, when the public becomes the writer, the intellectual actually becomes 'a producer', that is, a literary or aesthetic 'engineer' (SW2, 780).

Benjamin therefore seems to be of the opinion that the intellectual should be able to critically employ and utilise media technologies; that is, 'to re-function' communication technology (Kang, 2014: 61). 're-functioning' here indicates that intellectual activity should fully adopt current technological advancement, which in essence repositions the political tendency of the author. Benjamin effectively manages to articulate this point when he notes that:

[122] This is primarily due to the fact that in 1931, National Socialism became the dominant political power in Germany, and as such, highlighted for Benjamin just how important such communication mediums are in the political sphere of society (Kang, 2014: 54).

> technical progress is for the author as producer the foundation of his political progress. In other words, only by transcending the specialization in the process of intellectual production . . . can one make this production politically useful (SW2, 775).

Aided by the development of technological conditions for 'polytechnic education', Benjamin maintains that the relationship between intellectuals and technology should become more intimate and ultimately lead them to master technology (Kang, 2014: 61).

It is interesting to note how, despite their (considerable) differences regarding the topics of mass culture, technologies of mass communication and the role that they serve in contemporary society, Adorno himself would later move much closer to this Benjaminian position. This is made evident to the reader when, in his 1954 essay titled 'How to Look at the Television' Adorno (1991: 136) goes on to assert that:

> by exposing the socio-psychological implications and mechanisms of television … not only the shows can be improved but more importantly the public may be sensitized to the nefarious effect of some of these mechanisms.

Such a statement thus clearly points beyond the more obstinate and admonishing position that Adorno once articulated and espoused in the Culture Industry thesis and thus moves him much closer to the Benjaminian position as outlined above. It is in this regard that what Benjamin (and the later Adorno, for that matter) seems to be emphasising is the fact that the conditions of intellectual activity in the age of mass media have rapidly changed. As a result of these developments, the form of intellectual practice should therefore reflect these changes.

For Benjamin then, in the age of mass media, the primary activity of the intellectual could thus be regarded as a struggle for technological re-function (Kang, 2014: 61). It is in light of such an assertion that Benjamin clearly manages to highlight how, in the new technologically mediated public sphere where intellectual practice is bound up with communication media, the possibility of mass public participation and engagement has increased at an unprecedented rate. The intellectual encountering various media should therefore not consider the media simply as a means of transmitting his/her ideas, but as the

source of formulation, projection, transformation and the reproduction of such ideas (ibid.)[123].

Benjamin (2006: 28) expands upon the matter of advancements made in reproductional technologies and their impact upon society as a whole in the Artwork Essay when he goes on to argue that all of the changes that an expanded press have managed to bring to the literary public sphere of the late 19th century can easily be extended to the public sphere of the 20th century, primarily due to the developments that the camera (i.e. film and photography) has brought with it. Benjamin's orientation regarding the impact of the "camera-mediated" public sphere of the 20th century is introduced to the reader in his 1931 essay titled 'Little History of Photography' in which he goes on to assert that:

> the camera is getting smaller and smaller, ever readier to capture fleeting and secret images whose shock effect paralyzes the associative mechanisms in the beholder (SW2, 527).

It is as a direct result of this technological shift that Benjamin (2006: 22) goes on to aver that the democratisation of the reception of visual images is to be regarded as being inseparably interwoven with the 'increasing emergence of the masses and the growing intensity of their movements' (SW3, 105).

In light of such an assertion, Benjamin is clearly alluding to the fact that with the rapid advancement of photographic technology in the 20th century, there has also been a concomitant acceleration with regard to the individual utilisation and mastery of the camera along with the increasing exposure and dissemination of the 'literarization of the conditions of living' - all of which then holds various emancipatory possibilities for the mass public. For Benjamin then, from an historical perspective, technologies of reproduction have indubitably had an accelerating and intensifying effect on the expansion and extension of

[123] It is in light of such an orientation that one can go on to argue that Benjamin presciently recognised that the new age of mass media necessitated a reconceptualisation of the task of the critic. In the course of the 1930s, Benjamin thus clearly endeavoured to develop an alternative form of criticism corresponding to the changing nature of communication which the modern technologies of reproduction were bringing about. As such, Benjamin took note of a new moment and opportunity within European intellectual life, which took cognisance of the rapidly developing technological apparatus of media and cultural production. The role of the media critic was seen as a harbinger of revolutionary politics and a radically transformed cultural sphere in which the mass public were to take centre stage (Kang, 2014: 14-15).

the public sphere in the 20th century, thereby increasing the potential for the active empowerment and involvement on the part of the individual[124]. Thanks to individualised photography then, Benjamin maintains that we have witnessed the rise of a new public who are able to incessantly record - and then critically reflect upon[125] - their everyday lives and share these images and thoughts with other publics[126].

In order to augment his rather optimistic and positive stance pertaining to the emancipatory potential contained within the technologies of reproduction that one was able to find in the early 20th century, in his Artwork Essay, Benjamin (2006: 29) goes on to raise the crucial question as to how film and photography — as more recent technologies of reproduction — compare to painting when attempting to depict the nature of reality for an audience. In response to this line of inquiry, Benjamin (ibid.) maintains that when attempting to undertake such a reproductive feat, the painter maintains in his/her work a 'natural distance from reality' whereas the cameraman is able to penetrate 'deeply into its web'. As such,

[124] It is at this point in his analysis that in the Artwork Essay, Benjamin (2006: 28) makes explicit reference to certain cinematic practices taking place particularly in the Russian film industry whereby he felt that this changeover (from the printed word into film) had partially become an established reality. In order to corroborate his claim, Benjamin (2006: 28) refers directly to those films in which 'some of the players whom we meet in Russian films are not actors in our sense but people who portray themselves - and primarily in their own work process' — and as such, can become "critics" and "experts" particularly with regard to the daily routines and conditions that they experience on a day-to-day basis.

[125] This ability for critical reflection is to be regarded as a — if not the — key feature in relation to Benjamin's conception of the potential rise of a new critically informed public. This is a point that then should be emphasised, as it is this very moment of critical reflection which, one can argue, appears to be lacking in the digitalised milieu of the 21st century and the proliferation of platforms that are founded upon individualised photographic reproductions e.g. Instagram, Facebook, Twitter etc (cf. Bauman and Lyon (2013), Stiegler (2011a) and Fuchs (2014a)).

[126] This can be regarded as being a highly prescient and relevant point when considering the digitalised nature of photography and its accessibility and prevalence in the 21st century. We can thus easily observe the social implications of the 'literarization of the condition of life' through the contemporary daily use of digital photos constantly shared via social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and various other image-hosting websites like Flickr (Kang, 2014: 115). What Benjamin thus reveals via his analysis of the information industry and the various technologies that underpin it — dating back from its inception to the present day — is the fact that the masses are no longer to be viewed as the passive consumers of the information market or inert spectators of the entertainment industry (as Horkheimer and Adorno tend to argue); but rather that they now possess the potential to be the active producers of information, the aesthetic creators of the new media art, the authors of their own lives in a media space equipped with ever more advanced communication technology, and the consumers of their own lives via the social media. It is as a direct result of such an analysis that one can then also argue that Benjamin's analysis manages to identify the changing conditions created by the media and its associated technologies with increasing opportunities for, and sites of, struggle and contestation (Kang, 2014: 63). More on this particular aspect pertaining to the realms of social media and social networking services will be explored in the final chapter of this investigation when we critically explore the role that these new communicational technologies have played in the uprisings and protests that have occurred in the contemporary epoch (including the 'Arab Spring' revolts that occurred in many Middle Eastern nations in 2011).

Benjamin clearly believes that there is a tremendous difference between those depictions generated by the painter as opposed to those of the cameraman. What, however, according to Benjamin, is able to account for such a significant difference?

When attempting to address this remarkable discrepancy, Benjamin (2006: 30) asserts that film has successfully managed to enrich our field of apperception with methods which can be likened to those of psychoanalysis (which has been explicitly designed to bring into consciousness those elements of the unconscious that may, initially, elude the patient who is seeking therapy). It is in this regard that Benjamin (2006: 30) goes on to state:

> For the entire spectrum of optical, and now also acoustical, perception the film has brought about a similar *deepening of apperception* [emphasis added].

Thus, much like the manner in which the psychoanalyst is able to decipher and unravel the mysteries of the unconscious via different techniques, Benjamin adamantly maintains that:

> behaviour items shown in a movie can be analysed much more precisely and from more points of view than those presented on paintings or on the stage.

According to Benjamin's analysis pertaining to the deepening of apperception associated with the techniques of filming, the actual reason as to why the techniques of film are able to make the analysis and isolation of behaviour, reality and external phenomena possible, is due to the very technical nature of these new mediums of reproduction themselves. For Benjamin then, 'all film relies on the technological principle of structuring through editing or montage' (Leslie, 2000: 141). With regard to filming techniques' ability to negate illusion, when everyday social matter is filmed and presented on screen, it is invariably arranged through editing. As such, this depiction of reality is:

> alienated from its normal positioning in life. In this act of estrangement film both negates the illusion of the real and represents external reality (ibid. 142).

What this then means is that apart from depicting the physical, tangible world:

> film also tests the limits, pushing back and exploding scientific and natural laws in a utopian gesture, proving that while film is bound up with representing the actual, it does not entirely relinquish the traditional artistic function of representing an ideal real (ibid.).

It is in this regard that, from a Benjaminian point of view, film is able to liberate the perceptive faculties of the individual. As such, it is the very composition of the technology itself that actually allows the audience to both appreciate and comprehend the nature of reality in an entirely new manner[127].

Benjamin (2006: 30-31) bolsters this appreciative stance towards the new technologies of reproduction when he goes on to assert that the camera has successfully managed to introduce us to 'unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses'. For Benjamin (2006: 30-31), this is due to the fact that:

> By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, *extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives*; on the other hand, it *manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action* [emphasis added].

What Benjamin therefore finds enormously appealing and revelatory about cinematographic technology is that as a direct result of their reproductive abilities, the hidden aspect of reality — which was once the source of the 'magical' value of the image — is now limpidly elucidated for the individual. Thus, thanks to photographic technology, we are now capable of grasping reality by tearing up the mysterious screen of the image, just as psychoanalysis explains the 'magical' nature of dreams (Kang, 2014: 119). The optical unconscious therefore yields the effect of disenchantment (as Weber has previously argued), and a more rational and mechanical perception of human nature and the world emerges. For Benjamin then,

[127] In *Technics and Time, Volume, 3*, Bernard Stiegler (2011a) reinforces and expands upon this insight of Benjamin's when he goes on to argue that consciousness should be understood as a constant process of filming reality, and memorisation as the editing of film. He then goes as far as to argue that if it was not for this editing function of consciousness, we would not be able to have the experience of time passing (cf. *Technics and Time, 3* Chapter 2: Cinematic Consciousness for more information regarding this matter).

> photographically reproduced images do not simply reflect the reality *but construct it,* leading to *new ways of perceiving, reasoning and awakening* [emphasis added] (Kang, 2014: 120).

Based on the position delineated above, it becomes clear to see that in his analysis of technologies of reproduction and their relation to the apperceptive faculties of the individual, Benjamin is not only cognisant of — but in fact highly appreciative of — the fact that with the introduction of these new technologies, the apperceptive faculties of the individual have been altered, augmented and bolstered. Unlike his more austere colleagues of the Frankfurt School then, Benjamin is of the opinion that these transformations to the apperceptive faculties of the individual (while certainly being open to manipulation and exploitation on the part of the private interests of the film industry and the destructive pursuits of those who may in some way be affiliated with it[128]) also possess the potential to allow for the audience to arrive at a more nuanced, fine-tuned and critical understanding of reality.

Benjamin can thus be said to see film as a technological medium that presents the individual with new cognitive potential. It is directly in this regard that Leslie (2000: 142) goes on to note that in the newly discovered realm of Benjamin's 'optical unconscious':

> minutiae appear, amongst which it is possible, in the moment of viewing, *to be free from all constraint*. Space and time and movements through space and time are elastic. The *possibility of transformation is represented* ... *on screen* [emphasis added].

[128] In fact, on a particularly sombre and somewhat harrowing note, in the Epilogue of the Artwork Essay, Benjamin (2006: 34) presciently goes on to caution that when film — as a medium of technical reproduction — and those who bear witness to its depictions are 'violated', then such a scenario can be used to induce a pervasive sense of jingoism, fascism and the promotion of war itself. It is in light of such a cautionary position that Benjamin (2006: 34) goes on to note that: 'The violation of the masses, whom Fascism, with its *Führer* cult, forces to their knees, has its counterpart in the *violation of an apparatus which is pressed into the production of ritual values*' [emphasis added]. Benjamin continues by noting that the dialectical formation of technology in society needs to seriously considered as: '.... The destructiveness of war furnishes proof that *society has not been mature enough to incorporate technology as its organ*, that *technology has not been sufficiently developed to cope with the elemental forces of society*. The horrible features of imperialistic warfare are attributable to the discrepancy between the tremendous means of production and their inadequate utilization in the process of production ... Instead of draining rivers, society directs a human stream into a bed of trenches; instead of dropping seeds from airplanes, it drops incendiary bombs over cities; and through gas warfare the aura is abolished in a new way' [emphasis added]. To reiterate then, such a series of observations and warnings clearly highlights just how nuanced, careful and exacting Benjamin's approach towards, and understanding of, contemporary reproductive technologies really was.

According to Benjamin's distinctive understanding regarding the potentially progressive benefits associated with cinematic techniques:

> Montage in film, the normal filmic process of editing, reflects back to workers a view of the world as experienced by themselves, but also, simultaneously, a view of the world as malleable (Leslie, 2000: 142).

According to Leslie's (2000: 142) interpretation then, for Benjamin, 'representation on film does not just then mime the reified world' — as Adorno would later argue — but rather, 'such representation can be mobilized as that realm where actual constraints are superseded'. Film is thus to be regarded as being politically significant because 'potential realities are realized actually, but within the realm of representation' (ibid.). As such,

> the new 'image world' of the camera becomes a new 'play-space for humanity', authentic but also provisional and blatantly manipulated (ibid.).

It is directly in this regard then that Benjamin splits the essence of film into two parts: 'reflection' and 'construction', whereby reflection 'refers to the actuality represented in film' and construction is 'concerned with possibilities offered up by film' (Leslie, 2000: 142).

In light of the above, it can then be argued that in this aspect of his analysis on modern technologies of reproduction, what Benjamin is highlighting is the (often overlooked) fact that while film's mediation 'has the look of the real', it is in fact a mediation of a 'second order reality' (Leslie, 2000: 138). Thus, for Benjamin, what is crucial to the filmic operation is that the filmic product does in fact appear to be a simple reflection of reality. While this reflection then constitutes the basis of the viewers' enjoyment of art, there is nevertheless a 'paradoxical trick' at work here due to the fact that while film may appear 'persuasively as a completely unmediated objectivity', it is still very much to be understood as a 'constructed reality' or a fabricated objectivity (Leslie, 2000: 139).

For Benjamin, this sense of objectivity then 'cuts two ways': While the new technological means of representing external reality is certainly able to draw an authority from their ability to produce (superficially) convincing copies reflecting reality, Benjamin cautions that,

in fact, the image is nevertheless to be understood as a manufactured one that has been 'smashed up' (Leslie, 2000: 140). According to Benjamin's analysis, acknowledgement of this "manufacturing process" prevents the naive misunderstanding of film as an exact reproduction of the real[129]. As such, Benjamin maintains that 'an eye armed with a camera can test the world' as it is able to reveal 'unsuspected aspects of reality' (ibid.).

It is in light of such an affirmative stance that Benjamin (2006: 31) ultimately goes on to conclude that as a direct result of the apperceptive changes brought about by the technologies of reproduction, an entirely new dimension of existence and the world is opened up for the viewer due to the fact that:

> With the *close-up*, *space expands*; with *slow motion*, *movement is extended*. The *enlargement of a snapshot* does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it *reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject*. So, too, *slow motion* not only presents familiar qualities of movement but reveals in them *entirely unknown ones* ... Evidently *a different nature opens itself to the camera* than opens to the naked eye – if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is *substituted for a space consciously explored by man* [emphasis added].

Leslie (2000: 141) ratifies the importance of Benjamin's analysis here by noting how the

> fragmenting, allegorizing, destructive effect of cinematic devices' tends to cut through the natural appearance of the everyday landscape like a surgical instrument,

which then actually counteracts film's persuasive ability to reflect the surface. As such, it is the camera operators who are able to 'penetrate their apparatuses deep into the material of reality' (ibid.). For Leslie (ibid.), such a form of penetration and incision into reality is then

[129] In the final chapter of this investigation, this argument will be further explored, particularly in relation to the digital domains of the 21st century. Particular attention will therefore be paid to those critical claims that argue how, on a social media platform such as Facebook or Twitter, the ability of the user to discern between the "reflective" and the 'constructive' aspect (of the reproduction that appears on the social media platform) has been severely undermined, thus impairing the user's ability to differentiate between appearance and reality, reflection and construction (cf. Pariser, (2011), Vaidhyanathan, (2018)). As we have just seen, it this very ability to discern between 'reflection' and 'construction' which is to be regarded as being of the utmost import for Benjamin when considering the emancipatory potential contained within contemporary communicational technologies, and the fact that this discerning ability is being undermined (according to certain critics at any rate) does not bode well for contemporary society.

translated into aesthetic terms as it emphasises 'a new way of representing actuality in its multiple potential modalities'.

Following up on this positive appraisal of how film and photographic technology has successfully allowed for a deeper form of apperception and analysis of reality to take place on the part of the individual (who has now been transformed into a 'critic' and 'expert'), Benjamin continues his investigation when he goes on to assert that technologies of mechanical reproduction of art have also managed to change the nature of the reaction of the masses toward an artwork itself. Benjamin (2006: 29) makes such a claim evident when he avers:

> The *reactionary attitude* toward a Picasso painting *changes* into the *progressive reaction* toward a Chaplin movie. The progressive reaction is characterized by the direct, intimate *fusion* of *visual* and *emotional enjoyment* with the *orientation of the expert*. Such fusion is of *great social significance* [emphasis added].

It is thus with regard to the screen and its depiction of reality that Benjamin (2006: 29) believes that the 'critical and the receptive attitudes of the public' have managed to coincide, and it this convergence of attitudes that ultimately allows for the responsive attitude of the audience to assume a progressive quality.

As a result, Benjamin (2006: 29) argues that painting is simply in 'no position to present an object for simultaneous collective experience', as it is for the movie today[130]. The quintessential feature of the filmic experience — in direct contrast to the perception of painting — thus rests in its simultaneous and collective dimension through which film-

[130] While Benjamin does indeed go on to acknowledge that even though paintings began to be publicly exhibited in galleries and salons as transformations in the public sphere occurred, unlike a public screening and viewing of a film, there was no way for the masses to organise themselves in their collective reception of the artwork itself - a situation which has clearly been altered as a result of the transformations which have occurred with contemporary technologies of reproduction. Today, this transition can be described as having been accelerated and amplified to a phenomenal degree as social networking platforms such as Facebook can boast about having over two billion active users who make use of its various services. What this then means — from a Benjaminian perspective — is that at any given time, over two billion people, from all over the world, can have access to and critically view a wide array of content, including pictures, paintings, photos, films, essays, news headlines. As such, one can then effectively argue how the opportunity for 'simultaneous collective experience' has increased exponentially, which then, at the very least, presents the contemporary individual with a manifold of potentially empowering (or alternatively, anaesthetising) experiences in which they can engage.

watching can be repeated at any time and practised collectively by audiences anywhere around the globe. It is directly in this regard that Kang (2014: 123) notes that:

> Cinematic collective reception is no longer rooted in face-to-face interaction or communal communication circumscribed by the here and now, but is primarily mediated by the media spectacle.

Finally, Benjamin's (2006: 32) analysis leads him to explore the very nature of the reaction(s) that an artwork is able to elicit on the part of the viewer when appearing on either a canvas (i.e. a painting) or on a screen (i.e. a film). According to Benjamin, it is the painting which 'invites the spectator to contemplation' whereby the viewer 'can abandon himself to his associations'. In the case of the film however, Benjamin adamantly maintains that the spectator cannot very easily enter into the realm of rumination due to the fact 'no sooner has his eye grasped a scene than it is already changed'. As opposed to the eye fixed upon a painted artwork, the eye of the film spectator 'cannot be arrested' (ibid.). As a result of the constant barrage of moving images upon the viewer's retina, Benjamin (2006: 32) insists that the 'spectator's process of association in view of these images is indeed interrupted by their constant, sudden change'.

In order to make sense of this claim, one needs to recall that according to Benjamin, technologically reproduced art is able to meet its viewer halfway, 'in a situation determined not by tradition but by the viewer' (Leslie, 2000: 150). Responding to newly forced modes of reception, 'contemplative and distanced observation is vetoed' as film:

> negates distance, demanding a reception that is not a form of contemplative submersion in faraway, immutable events, but a more casual, 'distracted' mode.

It is as a direct result of this immense sensory transformation — on the part of the modern viewer — that Leslie (2000: 150) avers that:

> The ground of art is moved from a place of stasis ('*Standort*') to a place of action ('*Tatort*').

It is the incessant bombardment of moving images upon the spectator's eye that constitutes what Benjamin (2006: 32) approvingly refers to as 'the shock effect of the film'. According to

Benjamin's analysis, what is very important with regard to this 'shocking' element that film possesses, is the fact that it now manages to introduce a certain dimension of 'distracted tactility' or 'tactile appropriation' (fusing together perception with tactility, attention and habit) into the experience associated with the reception of artworks in the contemporary world. What is more, is the fact that according to Benjamin, this potential for shocking an audience may actually be able to serve a progressive function within the modern world[131].

Such a statement then places Benjamin in direct opposition with certain critics (including Adorno) who posit that the cinematic experience is nothing more than a mind-numbing, soporific exercise designed by those in power to placate the masses. In order to qualify his position, Benjamin notes that distraction and concentration 'form polar opposites' when assessing the manner in which an artwork may be received on the part of the spectator. Benjamin (2006: 32) continues by stating that:

> A man who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it. He enters into this work of art. ... In contrast, the distracted mass absorbs the work of art.

For Benjamin, the most common example of an artwork that allows for this type of "complete immersion" to occur evinces itself in the domain of architecture, and more precisely, the buildings with which people (rather absent-mindedly) interact on a daily basis. Benjamin therefore goes on to note that buildings are appropriated in a 'twofold manner: by use and by perception' – i.e. by sight and touch. Importantly however, for Benjamin (2006: 33), such appropriation and absorption cannot be understood in terms of attentive concentration alone as he believes that 'tactile appropriation is accomplished not so much by attention as by habit'.

It is directly in this regard that Benjamin (ibid.) maintains that:

[131] Benjamin's stance takes on a very interesting turn when one is to consider how, according to Deuze (2011: 137), life in the 21st century is all about discovering ways to deal with perpetual change, whether it be at home, at work or at play. As a result of this, these crucial aspects of human existence have converged in and through the individual's persistent exposure to, use of and immersion in digital media platforms. Deuze therefore argues that it is in fact life lived in, rather than with, the various forms of digital media available to the public that can now be defined as the ontological benchmark for the modern individual (Amiradakis, 2019: 157). As such, it is the modern individual's relationship with new digital technologies of social networking that then assumes the 'shocking' (and progressive) function that Benjamin once ascribed to film.

> the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at the turning points of history [i.e. the 20th century and beyond] cannot be solved by optical means, that is, by contemplation [of what is provided in an auditory/visual capacity] alone.

Benjamin (ibid.) rather believes that 'they are mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation'. Such an assertion therefore implies that for Benjamin, such new modes of apperception can actually become useful once they are incorporated into the individual's very mode of existence - in a fairly distracted, mundane and ordinary fashion, and it is from this existential "apperceptive platform" that they can start to serve a progressive function. It is thus due to its technical structure that film — as a technology of reproduction — has managed to take the 'physical shock effect' out of other art forms (such as Dadaism) and transported it directly into the cinema[132].

As a result of this change that the cinema has brought about, Benjamin (2006: 32) goes on to note that 'quantity has been transmuted into quality' as '[t]he film with its shock effect meets this mode of reception half-way'. Such a quantitative and qualitative change has then greatly increased the 'mass of participants', which has then also 'produced a change in the mode of participation' that may yet hold progressive attributes for the modern world[133]. For Benjamin, the mass appropriation of art within a society that is characterised by technologies of reproduction is thus to be regarded — quite literally — as a context in which the 'manhandling of cultural products' is a daily occurrence for millions of individuals (Leslie, 2000: 150). This then means that the copies can now be manipulated, and as such, they acquire a tactile dimension. According to Leslie (2000: 150), the two sensuous concepts that now relate this new form of art to the corporeal presence of the collection of people that now receive them are those of 'exhibition' and 'tactility'. As such, Benjamin's conception of aesthetics 'includes categories such as "tactility" and 'shock' - forces that act on the body' (ibid.).

[132] In what follows below, Benjamin's argument pertaining to the explicit link between cinema and tactility will be clarified and elaborated upon.

[133] On a cautionary note, and in response to those critiques who vehemently maintain that the viewing of movies 'is a pastime for helots, a diversion for uneducated', Benjamin (2006: 32) assures us that even though the 'new mode of participation' first appeared in a 'disreputable form', one should not be confused or dismayed as such a mode of apperception and participation can nevertheless serve a progressive function within contemporary society.

In light of the above, Leslie (2000: 150) contends that, for Benjamin, by:

> locating sensuous perception as the root meaning of the Greek notion of '*aisthesis*', aesthetics and art are now related to the *development of the human sensorium* [emphasis added].

As such, one can then further contend that:

> Benjamin's re-evaluation of '*aisthesis*' insists on tactility, the haptic, as part of the new techno-enhanced perception (Leslie, 2000: 151).

Leslie (2000: 153) has an extremely important insight regarding this matter when she avers that as a result of technological advancements made within society, Benjamin came to believe that technologies of reproduction could be utilised in order to assist the individual with his/her apperceptive faculties. It is in this regard that we can start to appreciate how, for Benjamin, film functions as a buffer in order to 'counter the trauma of social alienation, in part, by its actual methods of production' (ibid.).

As such, Benjamin's analyses regarding these matters clearly operate on the assumption that there is a continuous sense of evolution with regard to the human senses. One can thus aver that while he clearly identifies a distinct and definite change in methods pertaining to technological reproduction of external reality, he also delineates and describes a coterminous change in the structure of human perception itself. What this then means is that the reproduction of reality alters the very way in which reality is actually envisaged, which then alters human perceptual organisation and necessitates new forms of reproduction of reality (ibid.). The organisation of human perception is thus to be determined not only by nature but also historically, which thus implies that it is determined in line with technological innovation[134].

[134] If Benjamin's insight does contain an element of truth in it, such an observation then adds even more weight to the dire need to come to grips with the new technologies of mass communication and reproduction in the 21st century (i.e. social media platforms), as it is these very platforms that are then managing to alter individuals' relationship to not only themselves, but to others and society in general. If this is indeed the case, then understanding and insight into such phenomena are indeed to be regarded as a necessity as it can potentially allow the researcher to obtain a more accurate view of the existential situation confronting the modern individual.

Thus, according to Benjamin's analysis, industrial capitalist relations have managed to erode the oral communicability of experience, but at the same time:

> technical reproduction compensates for that change by instituting *new potential for a familiarity between receivers and producers*, once more in the form of *collectivized experience*: through mediated mass produced things, such as newspapers or films[135] [emphasis added] (Leslie, 2000: 151).

Hansen (2013: 80) both affirms and extends the sentiment expressed above by asserting how Benjamin does indeed assign film a key role in the 'undoing of alienation' for the contemporary individual because:

> on the one hand, film participates in the pathologies of industrial-capitalist technology at large, inasmuch as it subjects the sensorium to yet more shock ...; and because, on the other, film provides a medium of experience that, more effectively than the traditional arts, *enables both a sensory recognition of human self-alienation* and a *non-destructive*, *mimetic adaptation of technology* [emphasis added].

What is so significant for Benjamin is the fact that this new media experience corresponds directly to the everyday experience of modernised, urban spaces. So much so that in his 1940 essay titled 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' (1940) he goes on to state that:

> The camera gave the moment a posthumous shock, as it were. Haptic experiences of this kind were joined by optical ones, such as are supplied by the advertising pages of a newspaper or the traffic of a big city (SW4, 328).

Thus, according to Benjamin's (ibid.) analysis, while attention (in its classical sense) is to be regarded as 'a question of an engagement of the body', 'an inhibition of movement' and 'a state of consciousness arrested in the present', the emergence of shock experience has

[135] As shall be evinced within the final chapter of this investigation, such an assertion pertaining to the emancipatory potential contained within these new "collectivized forms of experience" takes on a very dubious format when one is to consider the matter from Stiegler's (2011) critical perspective. To phrase this matter briefly, Stiegler maintains that within the digitalised milieu of the contemporary era, the modern communicational devices of social media, social networking services and the Internet are increasingly able to hijack this notion of 'collectivized experience' so as to induce a sentiment of hyper-synchronisation and cognitive control within the mass public. This then ultimately ensures that the attentional/retentional faculties of the mass public are contained, for the most part, within a perpetual state of electronic enthralment, only to be guided and dictated by the interests of invested capital.

unravelled a noble challenge which presents a crisis in perception itself[136] (Kang, 2014: 121). As such, according to Jonathan Crary (1989: 103), this is to be regarded as:

> a crisis that is the result of a sweeping remaking of the observer by a calculated technology of the individual, derived from new knowledge of the body.

As a direct result of these new technologies of reproducibility then, Benjamin argues how shock experience now becomes a normal part of everyday life in modern society which produces actual physiological changes and as such, the urban experience becomes standardised and consequently collectivised (Kang, 2014: 121). For Benjamin, cinema has become a distinct urban space that plays a role in 'training social behaviour among urban dwellers' (ibid.). In the experience of film, Benjamin finds the conditions for a 'new mode of social experience' and the emergence of a 'new social subject articulated by those new technological experiences' (ibid.). The reception process engendered by film can thus be said to constitute the radical and unprecedented basis for 'a new type of social subject' (Kang, 2014: 122-123).

This then raises one of Benjamin's (2006: 33) most intriguing and perplexing themes pertaining to the altered form of perception and understanding that technologies of reproduction are able to engender within the mass public, when he goes on to assert how the public, as a result of these very technologies, has been transformed into critics and examiners, albeit distracted and absent-minded ones (ibid.). What then does Benjamin mean with regard to this enigmatic concept of the distracted critic and absent-minded examiner, and how such a concept can actually be utilised in order to bring about progressive change within a culture that is becoming more and more mediated by technologies of reproduction and dissemination?

[136] This "crisis" of perception, and its relation to the changing nature of the attentional faculties of the individual as a direct result of the impact that new technologies of reproduction are having upon the sensory apparatus of the individual will be explored in great detail in the final chapter of this investigation, where it will be argued that the new mediums of digital reproduction have effectively managed to capture, harness and steer the individual's attentional capacities so as to serve the interests of capital. As such, this then casts a renewed light upon what Benjamin had presciently observed in the early part of the 20th century in relation to the impact that technologies of reproduction were having upon the individual - unfortunately for Benjamin however, the impact does not appear to have been as liberating and empowering as he would have hoped.

In order to effectively address and comprehend this aspect of Benjamin's position, one needs to be mindful of the fact that for him, the cinema is to be regarded as a public space where distraction and reflexive judgement are not to be viewed as being incompatible (Kang, 2014: 123). What this then means, according to Benjamin's appraisal of the situation, is that whereas the decline of aura entails the crisis of individual attentiveness in its classical sense, the standardisation of shock experience in urban everyday life has led to the establishment of a new mode of perception - namely, that of distraction.

Distraction is thus to be regarded as a necessary outcome of the shock experience of film. According to Kang (2014: 124), the originality of Benjamin's analysis lies in his argument that critical consciousness is not incompatible with shock-laden visual perception. This is made evident when, in the second version of his Artwork Essay, he argues that:

> *Reception in distraction – the sort of reception that is increasingly noticeable in all areas of art and is a symptom of profound changes in apperception – finds in film its true training ground*. Film, by virtue of its shock effects, is predisposed to this form of reception (SW3, 120, author's emphasis).

What is crucial to note in relation to Benjamin's position pertaining to the notion of the 'distracted critic' is the fact that — unlike other cultural critics such as Horkheimer and Adorno — Benjamin's argument both hinges upon and endorses the radical claim that in film the otherwise discrepant perceptions (visual pleasure and critical judgement) are not only inseparable and compatible but can even be complementary[137] (Kang, 2014: 124).

What is thus so revelatory and inspiring about Benjamin's idiosyncratic approach is the fact that in his analysis, he is able to locate the emancipatory potential of a distracted mode of reception in direct relation to film's capacity to reorganise human sensorium, which corresponds to the speedy and abrupt urban rhythm ushered in by modernity (Kang, 2014:

[137] As interesting and idiosyncratic as such an analysis may be, within the final chapter of this investigation, this particular aspect of Benjamin's argument will be contested by critical thinkers such as Vaidhyanathan (2018), Stiegler (2011) and Jackson (2008), who all tend to argue that due to the fact that the attentional faculties of the individual currently find themselves in a perpetual state of exhaustion and "sensory-overload" (as a direct result of contemporary communicational platforms and technologies), the critical faculties of the individual have been severely undermined and impaired.

124-125). In addition to this, Kang (2014: 125) argues that Benjamin's approach celebrates what can be considered as the:

> construction of a new mass public whose capability of critical judgement is facilitated through the reception process *in distraction* [my emphasis].

It is crucial to note that in particular relation to this aspect of his analysis, Benjamin was deeply influenced by his friend, Siegfried Kracauer, who vividly illustrated the rise of a new mass culture and urban experiences in a metropolis like Berlin. Like Benjamin, Kracauer does not lament the disappearance of auratic aesthetic experience (Kang, 2014: 125). In his 1926 essay, 'The Cult of Distraction: On Berlin's Picture Palaces', Kracauer reveals that contemplation and concentration are just obsolete modes of perception for the rising metropolitan culture. Distraction is thus to be understood as a mode of perception that coincides precisely with the city dweller's mode of experience that is effectively predicated upon the 'constant collision of momentary images and spectacles' (ibid.).

Hansen (2013: 95) corroborates this claim by indicating that in this aspect of his analysis, Benjamin attempts to:

> rehabilitate distraction — as opposed to *Sammlung,* or concentrated contemplation that traditional art demands of the beholder — against the age-old complaint about the masses' craving for entertainment and diversion.

Furthermore, Hansen (2013: 101) avers that Benjamin manages to describe this kind of 'embodied perception' by way of another conceptual duality — 'tactile and optical reception' — which partly overlaps. For Benjamin:

> cinema has the power to increase the haptic impact of material objects and events, to bring the viewer closer to them than possible in ordinary perception, but only on the condition of technological mediation, which affords the viewer distance and protection from the actual phenomena (ibid.).

It is directly in this regard that Hansen (2013: 101) informs the reader that the haptic sense, which has effectively been suppressed and downplayed since the Renaissance (in favour of

the 'distance senses of vision and hearing'), 'is restored to a new, second-order tactility' (ibid.).

It is in light of such a summation that Kang (2014: 126) goes on to argue that Benjamin clearly sees:

> the revolutionary potential of distraction in the emerging new form of mass culture; in his view, distracted perception acquired through cinematic experience *potentially* coincides with critical judgement, and the mass audience can become a critic, albeit of a quite different kind from the traditional art connoisseur [my emphasis].

For Benjamin (2006: 33) then, it is directly in this regard that the cinema audience can be said to constitute an 'absent-minded' — or distracted — examiner. In Benjamin's view then, public audiences are not just 'passive spectators or consumers'; they are 'critical examiners' as well and it would be both theoretically inapt and historically negligent to identify the audiences of the early cinema only as the inert passive consumers of mass culture (Kang, 2014: 126).

Yet, how can a distracted form of reception transform these urban entertainment audiences into critical examiners? As has been explicated above, it is important to be aware of the fact that Benjamin's analysis stresses the critical potential of habitual behaviour acquired through corporeal, haptic engagement with one's surroundings (Kang, 2014: 126). Thus, whereas the aura that is typically embedded in traditional works of art, specifically paintings, is perceived through the single sense of vision, the new mode of media culture is communicated with an audience via the multiple senses of the body which can then be defined as a form of tactility. According to Kang (2014: 127), what is crucial to take from the above is the fact that, if one is to follow Benjamin's idiosyncratic insight(s):

> distraction indicates less a paying attention elsewhere than a [potentially] wider engagement of the *multiple senses with mass media*. In modern communications media, the tactile attribute of distraction *stands in opposition to the hegemony of exclusive visuality*.

For Benjamin, cinema is intended to serve as an alternative model to the antiquated notion of the ocular-centric 'bourgeois public sphere' and plays a constructive role in the formation of 'a new collective subject' (Kang, 2014: 128). This new collective can then be described as being a distracted mass of people/examiners, who happen to find themselves engaged and immersed in an environment in which a wide array of sensorial stimulation is part and parcel of their existential condition rather than being a multiplicity of self-enclosed 'attentive individuals' in the classical sense of the term[138].

To sum up Benjamin's position pertaining to contemporary technologies of reproduction and their (potential) impact upon society along with the individuals operating in it, one can confidently assert that his analysis highlights how some very important changes have occurred. This is made evident when one is to reflect upon how his investigation manages to elucidate the fact that the reproductive technologies of the 20th century are having a considerable impact upon contemporary individuals' relationship to the world surrounding them along with the existential conditions in which they find themselves operating. It is in this regard that one can assert that what Benjamin's analysis manages to illuminate for the critical researcher are the following three important points:

1) First, as a direct result of the modern technologies of reproduction (film, photography and cinema), for the first time in history, the audience — or mass public — is now presented with the unprecedented opportunity to regularly view and, to a certain degree, critique different depictions of reality as a result of their widespread projection;

[138] It is important to note that while Benjamin goes on to generalise the notion of the audience as 'examiner' into an argument about the media's role in the democratisation of culture, he had no illusions regarding the contemporary masses. He therefore knew all too well that class-conscious self-representation was not necessarily the direction in which dominant formations of this new collectivity were heading. On the contrary, as Hansen (2013: 96) aptly notes, Benjamin's Artwork Essay explicitly 'proceeds from the assumption that the masses are not an intrinsically progressive productive force but a problem, if not *the* problem of modern politics' — which the essay actually links to capitalist society's failed utilisation of technology and the 'resulting alienation of collective sense perception' [author's emphasis]. Alternatively, when considered from the more caustic and critical perspectives of Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse, one could in fact argue that — contra-Benjamin — from the perspective of techno-capitalism, the alienation of collective sense experience on the part of the public is *not* to be understood as an abject failure, but rather, a successful and no doubt wily utilisation of contemporary technology.

2) Secondly, in light of this unprecedented process, it is the masses themselves who now stand in an altered (and no doubt potentially progressive) relation between themselves and the realities that these new technological reproductions are depicting;

3) Thirdly, it is the very nature of the responses that the technologies of reproduction are able to elicit (i.e. the tactile, visceral and shock-like effects that they manage to evoke within the spectator) that Benjamin finds so intriguing and potentially liberating, as it is these forms of reactions that are more attuned to the lived reality that individuals now find themselves confronted with.

As a result of the three interrelated processes mentioned above, Benjamin clearly seems to be positing that it is via the aid of these new technologies (not in spite of them) that the modern individual will manage to come to terms with the nature of contemporary reality — in an historical, as opposed to universal, sense — in order to hopefully bring about the much-needed progressive and positive changes that are required in order to emancipate society and all of its inhabitants.

Based upon all of the above, it is now important to critically evaluate the position put forward by Benjamin, in order to ascertain whether or not his views are able to shed any useful light on this investigation with its focus on contemporary technologies of mass communication (i.e. social media platforms and social networking services). It is through such a critical evaluation that one will hopefully be able to arrive at the conclusion that Benjamin's fairly idiosyncratic interpretation of the technologies of reproduction has much to offer us in our critical estimation of the new communicational tools confronting the digitalised society of the 21st century.

3.4) Evaluating Benjamin's appraisal of mass culture and the modern technologies of reproduction

When attempting to critically consider the views of Benjamin (and to then assess them in terms of their applicability to the communicational and reproductive technologies of the 21st century), it is crucial to note that from an ontologically paradigmatic position, Benjamin

is to be regarded, first and foremost, as a materialist who placed a fundamental sense of importance upon the notion of *Aktualität* (Leslie, 2002: ix).

In order to make sense of what this term actually entails when considering its applicability to the variegated works of Benjamin, he himself provides us with some clues when he writes (in a letter that he addressed to Hugo von Hofmannsthal in 1928) that *Aktualität* (or actuality) is to be understood as:

> the obverse of the eternal in history, and is endlessly more significant for historical, political and cultural research (Leslie, 2002: ix).

Hansen (2013: 75-76) expands upon what this notion of *Aktualität* entails when she goes on to inform us that:

> For Benjamin, actuality [on the part of the critical researcher] requires standing at once within and *against* one's time, grasping the 'temporal core' of the present in terms other than those supplied by the period about itself (as Kracauer put it), and above all in diametrical opposition to developments taken for granted in the name of 'progress' [author's emphasis].

Extrapolating from the above, the following two points can be considered as being of paramount importance with regard to Benjamin's materialist orientation and his understanding of the term *Aktualität* (Leslie, 2000: ix):

Firstly, the aforementioned descriptions manage to highlight how Benjamin (like his friends and colleagues at the Frankfurt School) adamantly attempted to avoid high-minded abstraction in his work in order to focus on the current issues confronting contemporary society at large. As such, Benjamin clearly believed in the importance of engaging in the world as he found it;

Secondly, and in direct relation to the previous point, such a description then emphasises Benjamin's materialist proclivities in terms of his theoretical and research orientations. As such, materialism – in the Benjaminian sense – then manages to assume a direct and dynamic interaction between people and world.

In light of these two points, it is important to be aware of the fact that in order to actually endorse and pursue the notion of *Aktualität* from a materialist persuasion, Benjamin proposes that the researcher needs to take seriously:

> the clutter of material existence, and wants expressly to analyse the commodity trash of mass production (Leslie, 2000: ix).

Elaborating upon the above, Kang (2014: 10) notes how, in direct accordance with such an orientation, Benjamin became increasingly engaged with various forms of journalistic writing (as opposed to purely academic writing), involving reviews, essays and other short pieces aimed at a mass readership. It was these types of writings and readerships that were treated with some scorn by academic elites and mandarins (which no doubt included the likes of Horkheimer and Adorno as well). In fact, if one is to further accentuate this point, one can go on to assert how Benjamin — unlike Horkheimer and Adorno — actually found himself working in and for the very cultural industries (radio and newspapers) that his peers at the Frankfurt Institute were so quick to denounce as betrayals of art, culture and the Enlightenment (Kang, 2014: 18).

It is thus crucial to be mindful of the fact that Benjamin was a media practitioner before he was a media theorist (Kang, 2014: 13). Not only was he a journalist, working on newspapers and magazines, but he also became actively involved in radio broadcasting in the late 1920s and early 1930s, a period when the German radio industry was rapidly expanding and the popularity of radio as a new mass medium reached its peak (ibid.). Unlike many other German intellectuals, who mainly devoted themselves to theoretical discussion of the possibilities of radio, Benjamin actually took an active and key role in the broadcasting process itself. His engagement with the medium was thus to be regarded as pioneering (ibid.).

As a result of such an open-minded and "hands-on" orientation, it is then clear to see that Benjamin did not share Horkheimer and Adorno's negative perception of mass media, Hollywood cinema and popular music, but instead set out to find revolutionary moments and possibilities in developing new technological apparatus. Due to Benjamin's emphatic

emphasis on *Aktualität*, the essential feature of his distinctive and pioneering intellectual practice was thus to be located in his insistence upon the capturing and documentation of the topicality of everyday metropolitan life (Kang, 2014: 13). As such, Benjamin fervently maintained that the overriding task of the critic was to record and show the here and now - in all of its guises. Current events, developments in culture, new forms of entertainment, excerpts from everyday life all provide one with a much-needed, yet fragmented, insight into the existential conditions of capitalist modernity along with what can potentially be done in order to transform the situation (ibid.).

What is therefore crucial to note in relation to Benjamin's insistence upon *Aktualität* and his unwavering commitment to scrutinise what Kracauer (1995: 75) had originally called 'inconspicuous surface-level expressions', is that Benjamin presciently observed that the bourgeois public sphere, along with its distinctive forms of art and culture, had been subject to massive revision in the face of the new mass media and its associated technologies (Kang, 2014: 12). As such, Benjamin's approach limpidly elucidates that the rise of new forms of art and mass culture necessitates equally innovative types of criticism corresponding to the rapid development of the communicational and reproductional technologies with which such phenomena were inextricably intertwined (ibid.).

In light of the above, it is important to note that Benjamin's distinctly materialist insistence upon the notion of *Aktualität* needs to be kept in the foreground of one's mind when attempting to critically evaluate his investigations and arguments. As such, one can assert that while Benjamin's analysis pertaining to modern technologies of reproduction can be said to contain an array of complex arguments which focus on a variety of layers within modern society, a central theme does nevertheless manifest itself. This central theme can be said to revolve around how, for Benjamin, modern technology (i.e. *Technik*) has managed to restructure the human sensory apparatus and, as such, has had a tremendous impact upon the individual's existential orientation and understanding of the world (Franklin, 2002: 598). From a Benjaminian perspective then, modern communicational/reproductional technologies can be said to organise perception according to the social milieu in which they have originated.

It can then be argued that Benjamin concentrates his inquiries in the space opened up by this misalignment between the technological dynamic and the mode of capitalistic social ordering (Leslie, 2000: xi). Benjamin thus aimed to set forth an alternative contained in — and already demonstrated by — the aesthetic practices spawned by the technological media, yet held back by the political economic conditions (Hansen 2013: 88). The point of Benjamin's works pertaining to technologies of reproduction is to highlight the manifold possibilities 'of creating an openness to the future' (Caygill, 1998: 93). At a more pragmatic level, one can then assert that Benjamin's procedure has to be seen as an attempt to produce an actuality equal to the present state of political and social emergency - actuality understood as 'a matter of actualizing the specific potential of this particular now' (Wohlfarth, 1998: 14). The overriding point is then that the conditions for this alternative already exist, virtual yet immanent, in the very possibilities evoked by Benjamin (Hansen, 2013: 95).

It is in direct relation to Benjamin's insistence upon *Aktualität*, along with his materialist convictions that the modern technologies of reproduction could be used in such a manner so as to empower and emancipate a new collectivised, mass subject that, throughout his investigations, he is adamant that people need to learn how to use technology to work in harmony with nature (Leslie, 2000: 157). Leslie (2000: 158) notes that — in the second version of the Artwork Essay — Benjamin (1936) makes use of the term 'second Technology[139]' or 'second *Technik*' in order to accentuate this point when he avers that second Technology can be regarded as:

> a form of *Technik* that is categorised as possessing an *open character* and a *built-in affinity with play* [emphasis added].

[139] In the second version of his Artwork Essay (SW, 107), Benjamin introduces the terms 'first technology' and second technology' in order to contrast the inherent differences and orientations of these two types of technologies. According to Benjamin, first technology denotes a specific form of interaction between humans, nature and technology. In 'first *Technik*' humans react to nature's overwhelming powers by abusing it, signifying also a form of self-abuse. 'First *Technik*' is thus concerned with sacrifice and the domination of nature whereas second technology seeks to harmonise between the human condition and nature itself (Leslie, 2000: 158).

It is in this regard that the political meaning of the idea of 'play' becomes apparent in Benjamin's analysis when, in a footnote, he comments on the fusion of the collective and technology. Benjamin ([1936]2006: 124) therefore goes on to assert that:

> Because this technology [i.e. second *Technik*] aims at liberating human beings from drudgery, the individual suddenly sees his scope for play, his field of action [*Spielraum*], immeasurably expanded. He does not yet know his way around this space. But already he registers his demands on it. For the more the collective makes the second technology its own, the more keenly individuals belonging to the collective feel how little they have received of what was due them under the dominion of the first technology (SW 3, 124).

'Second *Technik*' can thus be described as being a playful, imaginative and creative form of:

> machine/human interaction, in which humans are empowered to actively control and determine the ways that technology is used, while respecting its essential nature (Leslie, 2000: 159).

As such, 'second *Technik*' is to be perceived as a 'humane gesture' that is inherently aimed at liberating people (ibid.).

It is in this regard that one can posit that Benjamin's analysis manages to emphasise how, with a sufficient amount of engagement and an adequate measure of understanding/appreciation, new emancipatory relationships between human beings and technology can emerge. It is thus as a direct result of the new reproductive apparatus — not in spite of it — that a situation can potentially emerge in which the contemporary individual realises that:

> liberation from enslavement will occur only once the constitution of humanity has accommodated itself to the new productive forces opened up by 'second *Technik*', by establishing new social relations and new techniques of intercourse (Leslie, 2000: 160).

What therefore becomes clear as a result of Benjamin's insights is that the possibilities posed by 'second *Technik*' 'spring neither from humanity alone nor technology, but from both in collaboration' (Leslie, 2000: 161). This collaborative reconstruction must thus be

arranged around the new exigencies of contemporary existence and subsequently, 'transmitted through new technologies and ways of operating those technologies' (ibid.). Benjamin's insights elucidate how technology 'fosters social, human and political change' and how modern technologies have 'initiated a disintegration of the traditional criteria' associated with the bourgeois literary public sphere (ibid.).

With regard to the contemporary technologies of reproduction and mass communication that were emerging at the beginning of the 20th century, Benjamin was well aware of the fact that the possibilities of a new public culture would never arise from declining high art and its antiquated technologies, but only from within the centre of new 'mass' cultural industries such as radio and film (Kang, 2014: 14). In the mass media, he therefore saw such technologies as presenting one with new opportunities to go beyond the conventional education system of the past and as such, he came to see radio broadcasting as a possible mediated public sphere in which he could take on the role of, and serve as, a public intellectual[140] (ibid.).

Whilst the summation and consideration of Benjamin's insights have — up until this point — largely been both affirmative and positive in terms of their applicability and relationship to the situation of the 21st century, it would be both ill-advised and myopic to unreservedly and uncritically employ his insights in their entirety. As Kang (2014: 63) indicates, certain aspects of Benjamin's account of the newspaper:

> cannot be applied to an examination of contemporary media space generated by the Internet *without careful consideration of their historical and technological contexts*[141] [emphasis added].

[140] Such a point then strongly resonates with the investigatory aims of this investigation, particularly when attempting to ascertain the potential contained within social media platforms as digitally mediated public spheres of the 21st century. Benjamin's insights therefore significantly bolster the possibility of viewing contemporary technology from a well-rounded, and potentially liberating perspective.

[141] It is in this regard that Kang (2014: 63) asserts that it would seem 'quite naive and overly optimistic', for example, that Benjamin should see the 'rise of a new public as collective author in the Soviet press of the early revolutionary period'. Furthermore, in his analysis of such matters, Benjamin also tends to overestimate the 'autonomous aspects of socialist public spheres as much as he underestimates the bureaucratic and propagandist functions of the Soviet media' (ibid.).

However, despite such limitations, it is nevertheless crucial in relation to the outcomes of this particular investigation to note that that Benjamin's account of the history of the 'information industry' back in the 19th century, along with the associated developments in technology that have accompanied it, has produced an array of considerable contributions to the contemporary understanding of mediated public spheres (Kang, 2014: 63). To accentuate this matter, Kang (ibid.) provides the example of how communication that is mediated by the Internet has resulted in new types of 'mediated interaction' that has, according to some, accelerated the 'democratisation of knowledge and information' on a gigantic scale in terms of 'collective intelligence' (Lévy, 1998: 70).

Within the 21st century and its associated digital technologies, one of the key issues is related to how the enormous amount of available information can effectively be assimilated into people's daily experiences in order to edify and emancipate - as Benjamin once viewed the mediums of film, photography and the cinema[142]. In addition to the above, one cannot overlook the fact that the Internet has led not only to the emergence of socially networked media space — as evinced by sites such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram — but also to the reconfiguration and reconceptualisation of digitalised locations in which the 'privatisation of experience' can be reproduced (Kang, 2014: 64). Such digitalised locations can thus be said to possess the (potentially emancipatory) ability to reproduce the socially disconnected individual, and as such, reanimate the Benjaminian notion of the 'literarization of living conditions' in a revised, digitalised format (ibid.).

It is in this regard that social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest can be said to possess multiple functions in which the electronic screen, plugged into the digitalised and interconnected network, becomes the 'primary window' through which the world of the 21st century is experienced, comprehended and considered (Kang, 2014: 64). It is thus here that Benjamin's analysis of the 19th-century information industry can — yet again — be said to have particular relevance with regard to the formation of 'mediated experience', particularly in the digitalised age of the Internet (ibid.). This point is

[142] This crucial matter will be directly addressed in the final chapter of this investigation when the notions of algorithmic governance, information-filtration and algorithmic bias are critically explored in relation to the Internet and social media platforms of the contemporary epoch.

further accentuated when one is to take into consideration that we are currently operating in a time when the "death of the conventional newspaper/traditional media industry" is being widely discussed and explored (ibid.). Benjamin's insight into the rise of public writers can thus be considered as being particularly relevant to our understanding of the replacement of conventional newspapers (that have typically been run by trained journalists and editors), with the rise of public newspapers (that are now facilitated by citizen journalists) and mediated through various forms of Internet communication, such as blogospheres and social media (ibid.).

It is directly in relation to the above point that one can also assert how Benjamin's insights into the changing nature of the media, and the public's growing role in the production and reproduction of media content, are highly relevant for our understanding of today's complex media environment. This point becomes particularly pertinent when one reflects upon the fact that the recent advent and prevalence of social media that is bound up with the Internet tend to:

> go beyond the limits of one-way communication embedded in mass media and to foster reciprocal communication on an unprecedented scale[143] (Kang, 2014: 148).

There has thus been a wide range of discussions focusing on the increasing possibilities for the development of grassroots movements, more systematic representation of public opinion and direct communication between political powers and the public.

Yet, as Kang (2014: 149) aptly reminds us, many discussions have been overly preoccupied with the quantitative transformation of the public sphere and seem to share both an

[143] It is directly in this regard that Kang (2014: 148) notes that: 'since the late 1990s, diverse forms of social media have been used in social movements and election campaigns across the globe. Notable examples include: the initial utilisation of mobile phones during the anti-globalization demonstration in Seattle in 1999; the enthusiastic employment of Facebook by Barack Obama's election strategists during the presidential election in 2008; and the promotion through Twitter and YouTube of demonstrations in the wake of the 2009 Iranian elections. More recently, the revolutions in North African and Middle Eastern countries, the so-called Arab Spring of 2011, have used various modes of social media.' Donald Trump's continuous engagement with Twitter — both before and after — his election as the President of the USA in 2017 can also be added to this list of contemporary examples. This then adds further credence to the need for one to critically engage with the works of Benjamin in order to gain a far more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of such matters, as his analyses manage to highlight how such phenomena have not magically appeared in an historical vacuum, but rather that there is a rich and contestable history that one is able to draw from in order to make sense of such developments.

instrumental perspective on the effective use of social media in political mobilisation and an overly optimistic standpoint on the improvement of deliberative democracy driven by advanced communicational technology. Hitherto, a good deal less attention has been paid to the vital question about the changing nature of democracy itself in conjunction with the development of communicational technology (ibid.). Benjamin's analysis of the relationship between media, politics and the masses — as elaborated in the Artwork Essay and the associated texts that have been considered above — can thus be said to offer the critical researcher a far more systematic approach to the issue of media and democracy - an issue that has become increasingly significant in the age of social media, and in fact, is the question around which this entire investigation revolves[144].

In conclusion then, let us briefly sum up how and why Benjamin's insights can still be viewed as having relevance for us in the 21st century (Kang, 2014: 212-214), and why his insights prove to be an invaluable resource in relation to this investigation:

Firstly, Benjamin's media critique is important because it provides a theoretical discussion of the radical transformation and development of new media technologies. As we have seen, he understands these technological innovations as being of fundamental importance to the understanding of human communication, interaction and comprehension in the modern age. Benjamin's investigation and analyses allow us to consider — in a contemporary context — how new communicational technologies shape modern forms of communication; what possibilities and constraints are produced as a result of such technologies; and how these phenomena are experienced by audiences, viewers and critics;

Secondly, as we have seen, the question of the human experience of media and how the various forms of media themselves transform experiences are fundamental to Benjamin's investigations. His insights highlight how new media technologies shape the human perceptual capacities and cognitive faculties. Benjamin's insights thus allow us to appreciate

[144] In the final chapter of this investigation, this point will be critically considered in a great amount of detail and depth. Such an assessment will be undertaken in relation to what critical media theorists such as Dean (2009), Morozov (2013), Vaidhyanathan (2018) and Zuboff (2019) have to say with regard to the immense impact that they believe modern communicational technologies/platforms have had upon the notions of freedom, democracy and autonomy, particularly when such notions are gauged from a contemporised perspective.

how the media and its technologies of reproduction are not simply to be viewed as being either visual or oral, literary or tactile, but rather, how these media technologies are actually able to reconfigure our sensory apparatus. New media are therefore able to produce new perceptual possibilities, new bodies and new subjectivities - all of which require urgent consideration and appreciation (Kang, 2014: 213);

Thirdly, as Benjamin's Artwork Essay manages to elucidate, all of these technologically mediated possibilities are always deeply political in character. New media are able to produce not only body space and body image, but also a new configuration of public and private spaces (Kang, 2014: 213). Thus, as media technology continuously develops, it invariably manages to create new forms and realms of communication. These developments in media technology therefore manage to transform the character of communication between the powerful and the powerless, between governments and their electors, and between dictators and the masses which then yields both emancipatory possibilities and manipulative constraints[145] (ibid.);

Finally, and in relation to the aforementioned point, Benjamin is acutely aware of both the dangers and possibilities of new media technologies. An investigation of such phenomena — guided and facilitated by a critically considered Benjaminian paradigm — is thus able to find its proper place in the contemporary world today. When one is to critically consider the rapidly changing 'mediascape of global media communications' in the early 21st century, a world which is marked by the proliferation of communications, devices, techniques, technologies and possibilities, Benjamin helps to open our eyes to the possibilities and pitfalls that such developments may potentially bring with them (Kang, 2014: 214).

To sum up then, unlike his more austere and sombre colleagues at the Frankfurt Institute, Benjamin's investigations manage to remind us of the emancipatory hopes and dangers that are embedded in the new technologies of the media. Benjamin's insights are therefore to be understood not merely as an attempt to address theoretical issues alone, but rather, an urgent imperative that illuminates both the possibilities and dangers of new media.

[145] More on these pressing matters will be explored, in great detail, in the final chapter of this investigation.

It is in light of the above that Hansen (2013: 80) affirmatively notes that:

> the problems which Benjamin addressed and the solutions he variously proposed elude classification in either techno-utopian or media-pessimistic terms. His speculations on film and mass-mediated culture are thus still able to speak to our concerns *because the problems he articulated and the antinomies in which his thinking moved persist in the globalized media societies of today...* [emphasis added].

No doubt such problems and antinomies exist in different forms and on a different scale, to be sure, but with no less urgency and no more hope for easy solutions. Furthermore, Benjamin's notion of actuality can thus be said to consist:

> not least, in the ways in which the structure of his thinking highlights contradictions and possibilities within the media culture itself, now more so than ever (ibid.).

Corroborating Hansen's affirmative appraisal of Benjamin's nuanced insights — along with their continuing applicability and relevance — Kang (2014: 21) asserts that:

> Benjamin rightly understood the need to explore the media not only within the prevailing political and economic contexts of capitalist modernity, but also in relation to the *transformation of the public sphere* and, not least, in relation to the *reconfiguration of human perceptions and faculties* [emphasis added].

Furthermore, while Benjamin may not provide one with clear-cut answers in relation to the complex matters that he deals with:

> many of the questions and issues he grapples with – the role of technologies, bodily experiences, the organisation of space, attention and distraction, communication and information – are clearly issues *that preoccupy us still in our own age of digital technology* (ibid.) [emphasis added].

Now that we have managed to acquire a firm understanding of Benjamin's position regarding the communication technologies of modernity along with what their potential possibilities and pitfalls entail with regard to the engendering of emancipatory potentialities within society, it is clear to see that his work offers the researcher a much-needed counter-

balance to the works of the likes of Horkheimer and Adorno. While the works of the Frankfurt School regarding such matters are no doubt to be considered as being of immense import in relation to the investigation of new communicational technologies in the 21st century, Benjamin manages to provide one with additional avenues of exploration which are much needed when attempting to come to terms with the digitalised mediums of communication that have emerged in the 21st century.

While the aforementioned views of Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Fromm and Benjamin, have managed to provide us with a heuristically rich and critically oriented platform from where the phenomena of social media will be explored, we now need to turn our attention to the works of Habermas - particularly in relation to his pioneering work done on the public sphere and its structural transformations. This line of inquiry will therefore be explored and expanded upon in the next chapter of this investigation (i.e. Chapter 4), and, as shall be revealed, such a line of inquiry will prove to be useful as it will provide us with the theoretical background that is necessary in order to appreciate the following crucial factors: What it is that the notion of a democratic public sphere actually entails; how it arose; what function it is supposed to serve in civic society; and finally, what shape/form it has assumed in the 21st century. Such a line of inquiry will thus provide us with the final theoretical tool which will be required before we can adequately assess whether or not the social networking sites of the 21st century are able to serve as democratic public spheres.

Chapter 4: A Habermasian Reconstruction of the Public Sphere[146]

When attempting to gain a well-grounded and theoretically rich understanding of modern communicational technologies, including the digitalised technologies of social networking and cyber communication, along with what their variegated impact upon society may be, it has — up until this point in our investigation — been argued that the critical theorists and researchers associated with the Frankfurt School produced a number of critical (and at times rather ominous) insights that are worthy of both continued consideration and critical reflection (Amiradakis, 2019: 149). Thus, whether it be Horkheimer and Adorno's Culture Industry thesis, Marcuse's notion of One-Dimensionality or Fromm's fears pertaining to increased evidence of Automaton Conformity, along with the Frankfurt School's general concern about the pervasive form of instrumentalised rationality (or technological rationality) that was becoming increasingly apparent within the highly technologised milieu of the 20th century, such matters can no doubt be considered as being of immense import to a study of this nature (ibid.). Additionally, it has also been asserted that the more optimistic and idiosyncratic insights of Benjamin — and Kracauer[147] — relating to modernity and its associated reproductional technologies (such as the camera, film, cinema and mass media) provide the contemporary researcher with some auspicious avenues of exploration (ibid.).

While the aforementioned views can thus be said to have supplied this investigation with a heuristically rich and critically oriented platform from where contemporary phenomena such as social media and social networking services can be explored, another critical thinker

[146] Certain sections of this chapter have drawn — either directly or indirectly — from several journal articles that were published (by the author of this thesis) during the course of researching/writing this dissertation, namely: Amiradakis, M.J. (2016a), 'Is social networking fostering the fungibility of the Other'; Amiradakis, M.J. (2016b), 'Social networking services: A digital extension of the surveillance state?'; and, Amiradakis, M.J. (2019), 'Habermas, mass communication technology and the future of the public sphere'. Permission has been granted by the relevant and applicable publishers (Taylor and Francis) for the utilisation, inclusion and reproduction of this material within this dissertation (see Appendix A for further details regarding this matter).

[147] While the insights of Siegfried Kracauer have only been mentioned in passing (due to time/space constraints) in the third chapter of this investigation, it is nevertheless important to be aware of the fact that much like Walter Benjamin — who was both a close friend and critical correspondent of his — Kracauer also came to develop fairly nuanced interpretations of the emancipatory potentiality residing within popular culture along with its associated technologies of mass communication. For an introduction pertaining to how Kracauer came to develop a more positive appraisal of the potential residing within such phenomena, along with what his views actually entailed, refer to the following texts: *Siegfried Kracauer* (2000), *Siegfried Kracauer's American Writings Essays on Film and Popular Culture* (2012) and *The Mass Ornament* (2005).

from the Frankfurt School, who is in fact crucial and pivotal to such a line of investigation, is Jürgen Habermas. In this chapter, we will therefore turn our attention to the works of Habermas — particularly to one of his pioneering works completed during the 1960's, namely *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* — and how it is that this particular avenue of investigation can still be fruitfully applied to the digitalised environment of the 21st century[148].

The primary reason why this particular avenue of exploration will be pursued and critically assessed resides in the fact that such a line of inquiry ultimately provides the critical researcher who is interested in the phenomenon of mass communication technologies, both past and present — whilst also being mindful of potential communication scenarios that which may yet emerge in the not too distant future — with the theoretical background that is necessary in order to appreciate the following factors:

i) What does the notion of a democratic public sphere actually entail?;

ii) How did such a sphere of interaction actually come into existence?;

iii) What function is such sphere supposed to serve within society?;

[148] According to Amiradakis (2019: 150), it can be argued that beyond the insights delineated within *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (which from this point onwards will be referred to as *Structural Transformations*), Habermas does provide the critical researcher with additional avenues of exploration pertaining to the potential developmental routes that the public sphere may take in the late 20th/early 21st century. It is in this regard that Amiradakis (ibid) asserts that within *Between Facts and Norms* and *The Theory of Communicative Rationality*, Habermas aims to — amongst other things — demonstrate how communicative power can be effectively cultivated and generated within various social domains (including the public sphere) so as to influence and limit the decision-making power of the elites and bureaucrats in the modern world. Additionally, a crucial aspect of Habermas's argument contained within these texts is the indubitable emphasis he places upon the critical and rational capacity of communicative action to bring about a substantive sense of change in the modern world (ibid.). While these are indeed to be regarded as being fruitful avenues of exploration that one could apply to the digitalised realms of social media and social networking technologies, these will *not* be a central focus of this investigation. Rather, in accordance with the position adopted by Amiradakis (2019), this chapter will effectively aim to highlight how Habermas's critical analysis of the bourgeois public sphere, along with its ultimate decline — as enunciated exclusively in *Structural Transformations* — can be regarded as a solid piece of Critical Theory that is still able to provide the contemporary researcher with a great deal of valuable insight into the nature of the media, mass communicational technologies and the public sphere in the modern world. Furthermore, it is also the intention of this chapter to — at least tacitly — demonstrate how it is useful to view Habermas's *Structural Transformations* as a critical "intermediary" text, acting as an effective interlocutor between the overtly pessimistic views of Horkheimer and Adorno and the more optimistic views of Walter Benjamin - particularly when examining the realm of contemporary culture and its mediums of mass communication (ibid.).

iv) What were the undermining elements/factors — and may still be — that have demonstrably served to destabilise the public sphere's democratising potential in society?, and;

v) What shape/form has such a sphere assumed — if any — in the 21st century?

This particular line of inquiry will then aim to highlight how, as useful and insightful as the aforementioned views and insights of the so-called first-generation of critical theorists are when considering the phenomena of modern communicational technologies, their insights into such matters are indubitably bolstered, augmented and in many respects furthered by the historically driven and interdisciplinary research done by the second-generation critical theorist Jürgen Habermas (Amiradakis, 2019: 150). Such an avenue of exploration will then also lay the basis of the penultimate section of the much-needed theoretical platform upon which the final chapter of this investigation will be founded, which will be explicitly aimed at critically assessing whether or not the social media platforms of the 21st century can be said to provide contemporary society with a viable and useful public sphere when scrutinised through the multifaceted prism with which the critical theorists have provided us.

4.1) Habermas and the structural transformation of the public sphere

As has been previously mentioned, this chapter will rely primarily on the insights contained in Jürgen Habermas's ([1962] 1991) important early text titled *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. The reason why it is this text that we will turn our attention is to ensure that this study gains a more comprehensive and contextualised understanding of what the concept of the (bourgeois) public sphere actually entails, along with why such a concept can still be regarded as being of immense import in a contemporary setting.

Included within this rather broad area of inquiry, certain key elements will need to be carefully considered and elaborated upon, including:

i) What the various historical/sociological factors were which coalesced in order to successfully bring such a sphere of interaction into existence;

ii) The manifold threats/dangers that have demonstrably managed to undermine it (and continue to do so); and finally

iii) How the remnants of such a sphere can still be usefully incorporated and applied to the communicational sphere(s) of the 21st century[149].

Before actually taking a look at what the various particulars pertaining to the bourgeois public sphere entail — as listed above — and why this multifaceted concept can (and should) still be regarded as being of immense import within the digitalised milieu of the 21st century, it is initially important to take note of, and reflect upon, a few of the introductory and contextualising remarks that Habermas makes in the preface of this work.

In the introductory section of his text, Habermas (1991: xvii) makes it explicitly clear for the reader that this particular study endeavours to analyse the ideal type[150] he refers to as the 'bourgeois public sphere' (Amiradakis, 2019: 150). As such, Habermas (1991: xvii) informs the reader that he conceives of the bourgeois public sphere as a category that is typical of a particular epoch. What is crucial with regard to this point is the fact that for Habermas

[149] It is interesting to note that Habermas's *Structural Transformations* was initially published in German in 1962. However, as Thomassen (2010: 33) notes, the text was only translated into English in 1989, which is fairly odd because it had long been translated into several other languages. What is perhaps more interesting to note is the fact that this study of Habermas's had an immense impact in Germany and as such, initiated a wide range of discussions in both the realms of academia and the wider media themselves (ibid.). As such, this text can be said to have generated a wide array of critical interest, insight and consideration within those areas that were explicitly concerned with the phenomenon of the modern mass media in contemporary society along with its associated mediums of mass communication. *Structural Transformations* can be regarded as a key foundational text for any researcher aiming to acquire a firm grasp of modern communicational technologies and their wider impact upon society (ibid.).

[150] Zygmunt Bauman (2007: 23 - 24) provides the reader with some useful insight into what the phrase 'ideal type' actually entails when undertaking critical research by noting how, following from the insights of Max Weber, 'ideal types' are not to be understood as being snapshots or likenesses of social reality. Rather, they are to be understood as being attempts to construct models of its essential elements and their configuration which then aim to render intelligible the otherwise chaotic and scattered evidence of experience. Ideal types are thus *not* to be thought of as being descriptions of social reality as it exists, but rather, the tools of its analysis and – hopefully – its comprehension (Amiradakis, 2019: 150). The purpose of these ideal types, according to Bauman (2007: 23 - 24), is to force our picture of the society we inhabit to 'make sense'. In order to achieve that purpose, these ideal types 'deliberately postulate more homogeneity, consistency and logic in the empirical social world than daily experience makes visible and allows us to grasp' (ibid.). As such, these ideal types are to be regarded as being deeply rooted in, and inherently connected with, the everyday experience and practices of the individual. However, in order to actually attain a better view of such experiences and practices, along with what their various causes and motives may be, a certain amount of distance is required so that they can be effectively isolated and examined (ibid.). Such an approach is ultimately undertaken so that the site of human experiences and practices becomes more comprehensive and clearer to critical analysis, also opening up, it is hoped, the causes and the motives of their actions to the actors themselves.

(1991: xvii), this historical phenomenon — i.e. the bourgeois public sphere — *cannot* and *must not* be abstracted from the unique developmental history of 'civil society' (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) originating in the European High Middle Ages[151]. As such, Habermas treats the bourgeois public sphere in general as an historical category and his investigation is limited to the structure and function of the liberal model of the bourgeois public sphere, to its emergence and transformation.

Based upon Habermas's explicit orientation towards the bourgeois public sphere and the unequivocal contextualisation of his particular study, Amiradakis (2019: 151) raises the critical question as to why this particular work — with its explicit focus on the bourgeois public sphere which arose within the European context of the 17th and 18th century — is to be regarded as being of any import/use/relevance for the denizen of the highly integrated, interconnected and digitalised milieu of the 21st century?

In response to this critical line of inquiry, it is crucial for the reader to be mindful of the fact that underlying Habermas's historical reconstruction of the bourgeois public sphere — along with its eventual demise — there is a central theme that permeates the study itself, and, indeed much of Habermas's entire oeuvre. This central theme can be said, ultimately, to revolve around the vital questions as to when and under what conditions the arguments of mixed groups could become authoritative bases for political action, i.e. the conditions under which a legitimate public sphere can be created (Calhoun, 1996: 1). Kellner (2000: 1) ratifies this particular point when he notes how Habermas's overarching concern with the public sphere, along with what the necessary conditions for genuine democratic engagement should entail, can be seen as a fundamental theme that deserves continued respect and critical scrutiny. As such, Habermas's essential line of inquiry and concern pertaining to what the foundational elements of democratic interaction should encompass, along with how such elements can realistically be brought about, can be said to be a thematic concern that manages to transcend any given historical context (regardless of Habermas's cautionary historical claims in regard to 'the bourgeois public sphere'), should the ideals of democratic

[151] According to Amiradakis (2019: 151), Habermas (1991: xvii) extends this cautionary caveat to his own investigation when he (i.e. Habermas) goes on to state how the concept of the bourgeois public sphere cannot be transferred — or 'ideal-typically generalised' — to any number of historical situations that may represent formally similar constellations.

deliberation and engagement still be regarded as being both desirable and laudable within the contemporary world.

Additionally, and in relation to this particular investigation, it is extremely important to take note of the fact that, according to Thomassen (2010: 34), this study of Habermas's can be regarded as being a good example of Critical Theory — as initially envisioned by Max Horkheimer — in practice (Amiradakis, 2019: 151). If this does indeed happen to be the case, then it can be averred that *Structural Transformations* manages to both augment and extend the critical epistemological, methodological and axiological base of this entire study. There are several cogent reasons that can be provided in order to illuminate why this is in fact so:

i) Firstly, as Thomassen (2010: 34) clearly explicates, this particular study of Habermas's is to be understood as being thoroughly interdisciplinary in its approach as it effectively manages to draw from a wide array of academic disciplines including: history, sociology, psychology, philosophy and political science in an attempt to come to terms with its multifaceted subject matter. Habermas (1991: xvii) elucidates this point rather succinctly in the introduction of his study when he states how, were it not for the interdisciplinary approach that he had opted to utilise, he would not have been able to capture the complexity of the public sphere in both its historical and contemporary format[152].

It is directly in this regard that Habermas (1991: xvii) goes on to assert that if the notion of the public sphere is to be truly understood and appreciated in all its complexity, as a matter

[152] It is important to take note of the fact that the works which Habermas managed to produce in the 1960s are to be understood as being firmly grounded within the tradition and concerns of the Institute for Social Research, which, at that particular time, i.e. the 1960s, was still under the directorship of Max Horkheimer (Kellner, 2000: 1 - 2). Habermas actually conceived of his study pertaining to the bourgeois public sphere as a *Habilitationsschrift*, a post-doctorate dissertation required in Germany for ascension to a Professorship, while under the mentorship/influence of both Horkheimer and Adorno (ibid.). Calhoun (1992: 4) claims that Horkheimer and Adorno rejected the dissertation, finding it insufficiently critical of the ideology of liberal democracy. On a somewhat contradictory note, however, Wiggerhaus (1994: 555) claims that: 'Adorno, who was proud of him, would have liked to accept the thesis', but that Horkheimer believed Habermas was too radical and made unacceptable demands for revision, thus, in effect, driving away the Institute's most promising student and forcing him to seek employment elsewhere. Either way, the influence of Horkheimer's early account of what Critical Theory should entail is unmistakable when one works through Habermas's early study concerning the bourgeois public sphere.

of academic integrity and intellectual responsibility, a study of such a comprehensive area of inquiry necessarily:

> *precludes exclusive reliance on the specialized methods of a single discipline*. Rather, the category "public sphere" must be investigated within a *broad field* formerly reflected in the perspective of the traditional science of "politics" [emphasis added];

ii) Secondly, and linked to the previous notion of interdisciplinary investigation, Thomassen (2010: 34) goes on to note that, true to the spirit of Horkheimer's early vision of Critical Theory, *Structural Transformations* is to be regarded as a text that is both historical, in so far as it critically examines the historical emergence, consolidation and demise of the public sphere, and sociological in that it locates an ideal of the public sphere which transcends its particular historical forms (Amiradakis, 2019: 151). Crossley and Roberts (2004: 2) reinforce this sentiment when they go on to assert that *Structural Transformations* effectively manages to weave philosophical and empirical (historical and sociological) detail together in a tight and coherent texture. As such, it can be averred that Habermas (1991: xvii-xviii) is fully aware of, and indeed, embraces the socio-historical rootedness of his study.

Despite what may (initially) seem like a sense of applicatory restrictedness and contextual limitedness, throughout the course of his study Habermas aims to highlight for the reader how the very rootedness of the study itself actually opens up the phenomenon of the public sphere for further critical exploration. It is directly in this regard that Habermas's study, amongst other things, can be said to highlight that the contemporary critical researcher needs to be mindful of the context of this study when attempting to extend the phenomenon of the public sphere into the contradictorily laden contexts of the 20th and 21st centuries - contexts that indubitably bring with them additional obstacles, opportunities and potentialities that require further study and understanding;

iii) Thirdly, another factor that links *Structural Transformations* to Horkheimer's nascent vision of Critical Theory is the fact that it proceeds as an immanent critique of the bourgeois public sphere (and all those permutations of the public sphere that have emerged subsequent to its demise). As shall be delineated throughout the course of this particular

chapter, Habermas's explicit aim with this entire study is to reconstruct and then criticise the biases and exclusions of the public sphere as it initially emerged within the European context of the 17th and 18th centuries, and especially in its contemporary form. Habermas does so on the basis of an ideal of the public sphere — as the site of rational communication — which he locates in the very historical practices he is also criticising (Thomassen, 2010:34.). It is in this regard that Habermas's study can ultimately be understood and appreciated as a critical investigatory endeavour that is explicitly aimed at holding the public sphere up against its own, immanent ideal in order to highlight both its strengths and weaknesses along with how such an ideal is still worthy of pursuit within a contemporary setting;

iv) Finally, in another move characteristic of early Critical Theory, Thomassen (2010: 35) argues that Habermas manages to locate the potential for reason to evince itself and for some form of emancipatory potential to develop within a particular institution of society - namely, the public sphere itself (Amiradakis, 2019: 151). Within *Structural Transformations* then, Habermas can be said to have located a source of hope in an otherwise criticisable society. It is this source of hope that is to be regarded as being capable of transcending contemporary society and its manifold injustices because it can, hopefully, show us a way out of them (Kellner and Durham, 2006: 6). It is directly in this regard that Calhoun (1996: 1) avers how Habermas's investigation into the emergence and decline of the bourgeois public sphere 'aims to reach beyond the flawed realities of history [in order] to recover something of continuing normative importance'. As we shall see, this 'something' can be identified as being an institutional location for practical reason to take place when dealing with matters pertaining to public affairs[153] (ibid.).

When attempting to consider the matter of the continuing relevance of *Structural Transformations* within the more contemporised setting of the late 20th/early 21st century, one can go on to argue that this early study of Habermas's still has a great deal to offer the

[153] In light of the above-mentioned factors, it should (hopefully) become clear to see that Habermas's critical investigation into the notion of the bourgeois public sphere does indeed manage to display a clear affinity for — and continuation of — the type of Critical Theory that Horkheimer initially envisioned in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and as such, can definitely be said to augment the critical foundations of this particular study. For more information regarding the matter of early Critical Theory, as initially envisioned and outlined by Horkheimer, refer to Chapter 1 of this investigation.

contemporary critical researcher. This is primarily due to the fact that, as Crossley and Roberts (2004: 2) inform us, Habermas's investigation makes two central claims that need to be both understood and appreciated, should the notion of a public sphere still prove to be of practical (and theoretical) use in the contemporary world:

i) The first of these central claims pivots around how a variety of social, economic, political and technological changes emerged during the late 18th and 19th centuries in Germany, France and Britain, which gave rise — albeit for a short period of time — to an effective bourgeois public sphere (Amiradakis, 2019: 151). For the contemporary critical researcher then, having some insight into what these factors actually entailed may provide one with some insight as to whether or not such factors may still prove to be of use and importance when considering the phenomenon of the public sphere within the 21st century (ibid.);

ii) The second key claim around which Habermas's investigation revolves focuses on how certain aversive elements within bourgeois society effectively managed to undermine this public space almost the moment it had come into being, such that the public space of the 20th century — now we might add the 21st — is riven with contradictions and conflicting tendencies (Crossley and Roberts, 2004: 2). Possessing a firm grasp of what these undermining factors involve, along with what these various contradictions entail, may then also contribute to a well-rounded understanding of what a public sphere should/should not encompass, along with how such corrosive elements need to be both addressed and overcome should the public sphere be able to retain/regain its emancipatory role within society contemporary (Amiradakis, 2019: 151).

In light of the above-mentioned factors, one can then go on to assert that what makes this particular study of Habermas's so important and relevant to our time is the fact that from his point of view, such a critical understanding and reconstruction of the bourgeois public sphere leaves a gap that is ripe for immanent critique (Crossley and Roberts, 2004: 2). As such, this gap then allows room for the generation of manifold new possibilities and avenues of critical exploration within the contemporary public sphere itself, that could, potentially, lead to certain emancipatory outcomes for contemporary society.

According to Amiradakis (2019: 151), while the aforementioned factors are aimed at providing the reader with some compelling reasons as to why Habermas's *Structural Transformations* is to be regarded as a solid piece of Critical Theory, and why — in theory at least — it can still be regarded as being highly relevant and applicable to our epoch (and this particular study), they do not as yet provide us with a great deal of insight into exactly what the bourgeois public sphere entails, how such a phenomenon came into existence, and finally, why — from a practical perspective — such a notion is to be regarded as being both novel and important for the formation and continuation of a democratic society. The next section of this chapter will therefore aim to effectively respond to these crucial questions.

4.2) What is the bourgeois public sphere and what precipitated its manifestation?

Early within *Structural Transformations*, Habermas (1991: 27) provides the reader with a useful description of what the bourgeois public sphere entails when he goes on to note that, above all, it

> may be conceived of as the *sphere of private people come together as a public*; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above *against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate* ... [emphasis added].

According to Amiradakis (2019: 152), what is of immense import for Habermas (1991: 27) with regard to the aforementioned description of the bourgeois public sphere, is the fact that within this particular sphere/realm of deliberation, the medium through which engagement and interaction was to be undertaken rested exclusively upon the public use of reason (*öffentliches Räsonnement*). What is so significant with regard to this particular point is that, according to Habermas, such a form of 'reasoned interaction' was both peculiar and without historical precedent and thus, worthy of serious consideration for the contemporary researcher[154] (Amiradakis, 2019: 152).

[154] While Habermas (1991: 3) is well aware of the fact that within the ancient Greek *Polis*, there existed a sphere of interaction that in some respects resembled the deliberative forms of engagement which he has identified as occurring within the bourgeois public sphere, he nevertheless goes to great lengths in the introductory section of his study to delineate exactly how the Greek Polis with its notions of *bios, politikos*, *oikos*, *lexis* and *praxis*, along with the Representative Public sphere of Feudal society, both differed fundamentally from the novel manner in which individuals conducted themselves within the bourgeois public sphere. For more information pertaining to Habermas's comparison and contrast of these different historical spheres of interaction and deliberation, along with how they differed from the bourgeois public sphere, see Habermas (1991) pp. 3 - 14.

For Habermas (2006: 74), it is no coincidence that such a sphere of reasoned interaction — with its explicit reliance and emphasis upon public opinion and critical deliberation — arose within Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries, in direct conjunction with the widespread expansion and embrace of the Enlightenment and its central tenets[155]. In fact, for Habermas, it is only when located within such a concrete socio-historical situation that concepts such as "public opinion" and "critical deliberation" acquire their specific meaning[156].

Habermas (2006: 74) elaborates upon this particular point when he goes on to note:

> Public discussions about the exercise of political power which are both critical in intent and institutionally guaranteed *have not always existed – they grew out of a specific phase of bourgeois society* and could enter into the order of the bourgeois constitutional state *only as a result of a particular constellation of interests* [emphasis added].

Amiradakis (2019: 152) then goes on to pose the crucial question as to what it is that was so important and particular to the European context of the 17th and 18th centuries — which was attempting to undergo a process of enlightenment — that managed to produce the conditions necessary in order to ensure the emergence of such a public sphere, within which critical deliberation could take place that would ultimately be aimed at holding the state accountable for its decisions? It is to this multifaceted matter that we will now turn our attention.

i) The split between the public realm and the private realm

When gauging Habermas's elaborate reconstruction pertaining to the various factors giving rise to the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere, Amiradakis (2019: 152) notes that according to Habermas, one of the key historical changes facilitating the rise of the

[155] For a general overview of what the European Enlightenment (typically) encompassed along with what its central motifs entailed, refer to Chapter 2 of this investigation, particularly section 2.2. titled: 'What is the Enlightenment and what does its notion of progress typically entail?'.

[156] More information regarding how these particular concepts fit rather well into the European context of the 17th and 18th centuries, when the ideals of the Enlightenment were starting to take root in the wider minds of the public, will be explicated later in this chapter particularly when we look at how Kant's thoughts pertaining to the use of public deliberation and reasoned argumentation left an indelible mark on the ideals underpinning the bourgeois public sphere.

bourgeois public sphere can be attributed to the increasing differentiation of society, particularly with regard to the separation of political authority from the sphere of everyday and domestic life (Crossley and Roberts, 2004: 2). Habermas (1991: 2) ratifies this claim when he argues, first and foremost, the notion of the bourgeois public sphere relied explicitly on a novel distinction between the private realm and public realm. As Crossley and Roberts (2004: 3) aptly observe, such a formulation then clearly presupposes the emergence of a private sphere and an associated form of private subjectivity that was able to position itself within the public sphere and articulate itself as an active interlocutor within the deliberative process (Amiradakis, 2019: 152).

With regard to the unprecedented bifurcation that occurred between the private and public realms, along with how such a bifurcation contributed to the materialisation of the bourgeois public sphere, there are a few key nuances pertaining to how Habermas understands this split that needs to be both highlighted and appreciated in order to proceed. Thus, when attempting to come to terms with what the notion of the 'private realm' entails and its associated form of 'private subjectivity', it is crucial to be aware of the fact that at one level, Habermas conceives of both home and work as belonging to the private realm (Crossley and Roberts, 2004: 4).

What is rather distinctive about this conceptualisation of privacy is the fact that, during this time in European history — from a bourgeois perspective at any rate — ownership and control of the means of production were usually fused in the person of a named and known (male) individual who entered into private contracts with his workers (Amiradakis, 2019: 152). The creation of such an association through which work and employment was to be undertaken then effectively managed to circumvent the direct influence of the state, thus providing the (bourgeois) individual with a greater sense of freedom and autonomy with regard to how he wanted to conduct his business affairs. Such a novel development could then also be said to have given rise to a legal arrangement which was in itself unparalleled and thus, contributed to a redefined conceptualisation of what the 'private subject' of the

17th and 18th centuries entailed, along with what he was capable of undertaking - in an economic sense at any rate[157] (ibid.).

At another level, however, Habermas (1991) also believes that the separation of home from work set the scene, particularly amongst the rising bourgeoisie, for an increasing privatisation of the home and of the family (Amiradakis, 2019: 152). What this then means is that the home itself, now separated from the workplace, became a private retreat from the 'outside world' (Crossley and Roberts, 2004: 3). It is in this regard that Habermas (1991: 44) goes on to note that the architectural design and physical layout of the bourgeois home itself increasingly managed to separate out private from public elements, thereby generating a space in which privatised individuals and subjectivities could take shape and, indeed, wherein the bourgeoisie were increasingly devoting themselves to the project of self-cultivation[158] (Crossley and Roberts, 2004: 3).

[157] According to Amiradakis (2019: 152), it may be — and indeed has been — argued that due to the fact that Habermas bases his entire analysis and reconstruction of the bourgeois public sphere on the manner in which society developed for those individuals who came to constitute the bourgeois stratum alone, his socio-historical account actually provides the reader with an ideologically warped and highly misleading reconstruction. In other words, a criticism can be (and has been) levelled against Habermas that his reconstruction, analysis and valorisation of the spilt that emerged between the private and public realms within bourgeois society applied exclusively to a small group of privileged white males, who were property owners and well educated. As such, it can then be further argued that an analysis and reconstruction of this nature is significantly limited and unfounded - particularly when assessing its applicability to the wider society in which the bourgeois public sphere actually arose, along with what its (i.e. the public sphere's) potential implications for contemporary society may hold (*cf*. Fraser 1992: pp. 109 - 142 for a more detailed account of what this particular criticism entails). In response to this line of criticism, Habermas (1992: 421-462) acknowledges that on one level of analysis, he concurs with the plausibility of this line of critique. However, he nevertheless maintains that the bourgeois public sphere, as an ideal type, cannot be reduced to its class basis because it contains a claim to universal inclusion. Thus, however formal and fictional the claim to universality may be, it still means that otherwise excluded groups can use this very ideal as a wager against whatever *de facto* exclusions may exist (Thomassen, 2010: 37). Thus, when gauged from a superficial vantage point, Thomassen (2010: 39) notes that it is indeed easy to see the public sphere as being nothing more than a class phenomenon – i.e. as the *bourgeois* public sphere that has essentially emerged 'on the back of the bourgeois class and capitalist trade and production' (for which there is no doubt something to be said). However, when gauged from a more nuanced and dialectically laden perspective, it becomes evident that Habermas's investigation is aimed at emphasising how 'the public sphere is not so much the public sphere of a particular class of people as the public sphere of bourgeois *society*' (Thomassen, 2010: 39, author's emphasis). This does therefore not take away from the bourgeois public sphere's very real bias and exclusivity, but it does mean that the ideas behind the public sphere (which were no doubt influenced by the ideals of the Enlightenment itself) leave it – at least formally – open to other groups in society. More on what Habermas perceives as being the redemptive features of the bourgeois public sphere, with a primary focus on its inclusive and universalistic ideals, will be elucidated throughout the course of this chapter, thus adding credence to Habermas's cautionary remarks against reducing the bourgeois public sphere's ideal type to its class basis.

[158] More on the notion of self-cultivation will be explored shortly - particularly when we look at what Habermas identifies as the literary public sphere and how, with the rise of accessible literature and the emergence of mass printing technologies, individuals within bourgeois society started to gain a greater

It is directly in this vein of thought that Habermas (1991: 44 - 45) asserts that:

> The *privatization of life can be observed in a change in architectural style* ... the communal room for husband and wife and children and domestic servants, has become ever smaller or has completely disappeared. In contrast, the *special rooms for the individual family members have become ever more numerous and more specifically furnished*. *The solitarization of the family members even within the house is held to be a sign of distinction*[159] [emphasis added].

Following on from the importance of the architectural design of the bourgeois home itself along with its extraordinary capacity to generate these 'spaces of cultivation' for those individuals residing in such edifices, Habermas (1991: 45) notes that:

> The most imposing room in the distinguished bourgeois home, in contrast, is reserved for *a completely novel chamber: the salon* ... yet this salon does not serve the 'house' - but 'society'; and this salon society is by no means to be equated with the small intimate circle of friends of the house. [As such] *The line between private and public sphere extended right through the home*. *The privatized individuals stepped out of the intimacy of their living rooms into the public sphere of the salon, but the one was strictly complementary to the other* [emphasis added].

Importantly then, for Habermas, it is only against such a backdrop — which attempts to highlight how the bourgeois individual of the 17th and 18th centuries came to experience and understand this form of privacy and how it related directly to the wider society in which it arose — that the novel (and crucial) bifurcation (and, paradoxically, spatial convergence) between the public and the private made any sense.

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understanding of themselves, their existential/societal situations, along with the struggles that they collectively experienced. It is as a result of such critical insight, according to Habermas, that cultivation-of-the-self managed to engender itself within the bourgeois individual. As we shall see, according to Habermas's reconstruction, such a form of self-cultivation would be of immense import particularly with regard to what can be described as being a responsible and mature form of engagement within the political public sphere itself (Amiradakis, 2019: 152).

[159] According to Amiradakis (2019: 152), it is in light of such a comment that Habermas's reconstruction can be said to take its cue from — and essentially agree with — Benjamin's (1939: 268) observation pertaining to how architectural layout and design can be seen as an important repository for critical investigation when attempting to understand how a particular society operates, along with the manner in which individuals come to both function and understand themselves within a given setting.

ii) The rise of mercantile capitalism

It is in relation to the distinction that occurred between the public and the private realms within bourgeois society, along with the self-cultivated form of subjectivity that was beginning to emerge during this period in (bourgeois) European history, that Habermas (1991: 14) goes on to introduce another key element — which is actually implicit within his reconstruction of the public/private bifurcation — that he believes significantly contributed to the precipitation of those conditions necessary for the emergence of the public sphere. In this regard, Habermas (1991: 14) avers that the bourgeois public sphere emerged hand-in-hand with the advent of trade/mercantile capitalism that was beginning to take shape from the 17th century onwards (Amiradakis, 2019: 153).

According to Habermas (1991: 14), the early stages of this form of capitalism saw the appearance of traders and merchants. Initially, however, these agents of commerce tended to operate within economic and social structures that could still be identified as being feudal in nature. Thus, at its inception, this early form of capitalism operated in those preceding economic structures that tended to circumscribe a particular realm in which trade and commerce could occur along with the rules and regulations governing such practices. Only gradually did these agents of commerce become more independent, venturing beyond their previously prescribed spheres of economic activity. As a result, these traders and merchants started to engage in economic practices between towns and, eventually, further beyond. This then implies that it was actually through long-distance trade that these traders and merchants managed to break out of the inherited feudal structures that had, up until that point, determined the nature and form of economic undertakings within society[160] (Thomassen, 2010: 37).

In order for such newly founded economic operations to unfold at a suitable level of efficiency and standardisation, this novel form of trade/mercantile capitalism needed to

[160] With regard to this particular point pertaining to the rise of merchant/trade capitalism, Thomassen (2010: 35) informs us that it is crucial to be aware of the fact that the changes brought about by this nascent form of capitalism were not to be perceived as being uniform and standard in their development. Rather, such developments unfolded at different paces in different countries throughout Europe with certain commonalities tying such developments together - thus providing a certain semblance of cohesion and unity to Habermas's reconstruction.

develop some standards of uniformity in terms of the rules and laws by which it was to function (Amiradakis, 2019: 153). Additionally, the issue of taxation — and its regulation — soon came to the foreground. As a result, it became clear to all those who were involved in this new economy that an overarching regulative system, based upon shared rules/understanding, needed to be created in order to allow for such economic operations to occur under consistent conditions that could, in some way, be seen as engendering a certain sense of predictability and reliability[161] (ibid.). According to Amiradakis's interpretation (2019: 153), what this ultimately meant was that as a result of this new form of economic activity that was beginning to develop — along with the regulation that was required in order to ensure its continued functionality — an unprecedented demand for information and data was beginning to emerge, which would ultimately come to have an immense impact on the bourgeois public sphere itself (Thomassen, 2010: 37).

iii) An increasing demand for information

With the emergence of early finance and trade capitalism, Habermas (1991: 14) goes on to note that the elements of a 'new social order' were beginning to take shape. In particular, Habermas (1991: 16) refers to those novel components that were constitutive of the new commercial relationships that were emerging, namely, the increasing traffic in commodities and the news/information surrounding such practices (Amiradakis, 2019: 153). What is supremely important to take note of when attempting to come to terms with how these novel elements were actually contributing to the rise of a 'new social order', is the fact that with the expansion of long-distance trade, the merchants' market-oriented calculations required more frequent and more exact information about distant events. According to Habermas, it was such a reliance upon — and increasing demand for — information that

[161] As this new form of trade capitalism began to emerge, the state actively promoted and encouraged this novel form of exchange and interaction. Thus, as this new form of commerce began to develop, the state actually came to promote those production and distribution processes that were required in order to facilitate and bolster such economic activity (Thomassen, 2010: 37). Importantly however — in the case of both production and distribution — the state was at once distinguished from, and supportive of, the market. The fact that the state consciously removed itself from active engagement within the market itself, whilst nevertheless supporting and facilitating its underlying operations, reinforces the bifurcation of the public domain from the private domain that Habermas has identified as being a defining aspect of the bourgeois period. This point then also contributes to understanding the novel form of privacy and self-cultivated subjectivity that was beginning to emerge during this time.

would later come to engender a wider desire for information about events occurring both far and wide (ibid.).

It is directly in this regard that Habermas (1991: 16) goes on to note how it is that:

> the great trade cities became at the same time *centers for the traffic in news*; [so much so that] *the organization of this traffic on a continuous basis became imperative to the degree to which the exchange of commodities and of securities became continuous* [emphasis added].

Elaborating upon this matter, Habermas (1991: 16) asserts that alongside the extended commercial relationships that were taking place — in terms of physical distance — during this point in European history, there was an increasing demand and need for information and communication between the various parties within society, so that:

> ... [It was the] *postal services and the press* [that] *institutionalized regular contacts and regular communication* [emphasis added].

Very importantly then, according to Amiradakis (2019: 153), what Habermas's reconstruction aims to highlight for the reader is how an inextricably intertwined relationship was beginning to develop between the growing amounts of trade taking place across Europe (i.e. the extending sphere of commerce) and an ever-increasing demand for data regarding such practices (i.e. the informational sphere). Put quite simply then, with the increase of trade and production came a coterminous need for reliability and predictability and thus, for information (ibid.).

From this Habermasian perspective then, it can be argued that it was such a series of interrelated developments (i.e. between the increasing levels of commercial trade and an escalating demand for information regarding such occurrences) that actually brought about the introduction of a rather novel "receptacle of data" and purveyor of information to society, namely that of "the news", which would — as time progressed — become increasingly available and accessible to wider areas of the European population of the 17th and 18th centuries (Thomassen, 2010: 37). Importantly then, it is such a series of

developments that can be said to have laid the foundations for what would ultimately become a burgeoning communication-information industry that would also serve to underpin and guide the interaction of the individuals within the bourgeois public sphere whilst also managing to define/shape those topics and concerns that were to be addressed within such a sphere[162] (Amiradakis, 2019: 157).

iv) The rise of a communication-information sector within bourgeois society

Elaborating upon the burgeoning communication-information sector that was beginning to emerge within bourgeois society as a result of increasing trade practices, Habermas (1991: 16) makes it clear for the reader that such an industry — which based itself exclusively on the circulation of information — did not immediately appear in the form of 'the press' as we may understand the term in the contemporary sense i.e. as an institutionalised entity that attempts to keep society and its inhabitants abreast of contemporary affairs and (at least nominally) is dedicated to democratic ideals such as inclusivity and the valorisation of free speech. Habermas therefore goes on to note that, in its nascent phase, this new communication-information sector was located primarily within a fairly exclusive set of communication networks which were by and large designed and utilised by the traders and merchants themselves, along with the larger entities for whom they worked.

It is in relation to this point that Habermas (1991: 20) informs us that:

> The first journals in the strict sense, ironically called "political journals", appeared weekly at first, and daily as early as the middle of the 17th century. In those days private correspondence contained detailed and current news about Imperial Diets, wars, harvests, taxes, transports of precious metals, and, of course, reports on foreign trade. *Only a trickle of this stream of reports passed through the filter of these "news letters" into printed journals* [emphasis added].

[162] It is directly in this vein of thought that Thomassen (2010: 37), following from Habermas' initial insights, goes on to indicate how, with the growth of commercial relationships, both national and later international, traders and producers needed information about infrastructure, prices, taxes and so on. While the trade itself provided one communication channel for this information, newsletters gradually began to emerge which were also used by the state and the courts to spread information. As such, these newsletters started to carry information that was not exclusively market-related and thus, began to convey information that was relevant to wider sections of bourgeois society. Such information could thus be said to have had an immense impact on the individual's notion of self-understanding and their conceptualisation of society (ibid.).

In light of such a qualitative dearth in terms of the actual nature of the information that was initially being disseminated by these so-called 'political journals', Habermas (1991: 20) avers that the definitive element of 'publicness' was sorely lacking. Bonham (2004: 134) provides the reader with a useful description of what this Habermasian notion of 'publicness' entails when he goes on to indicate that a necessary feature for any public sphere, and any of the informational tools/mediums of communication that may underpin it (such as the press), is that the communication which it entails must be aimed at addressing an indefinite audience. Any social exclusion within such mediums of communication can thus be said to undermine the very existence (and credibility) of a public sphere and its associated tools/mediums of dissemination. It is this very feature that we might then call the 'publicness' or 'publicity' of a communication medium, that is, the necessary feature of its being 'public'. As such, Habermas explicates how, due to their lack of publicness (insofar as they were addressed to only fragments of the bourgeois public, particularly those individuals who were interested in/involved with trade and commerce), these early 'political journals' contributed only a very limited amount to the burgeoning information sector and the public sphere which it would later come to have an impact upon.

It is as a result of the limitations which existed within the early permutation of the press, that Habermas (1991: 16 - 17) goes on to assert that there existed 'a press' — in the strict sense that it actively facilitated and promoted the idea of publicness as explicated above — only once the regular supply of news became public, that is, accessible and applicable to the general public. According to Habermas, the creation of such a press occurred at the end of the 17th century and, crucially, it led to the new domain of a public sphere whose decisive mark was the published word. This is important for Habermas (1991: 17) as it signified an altogether new stage of capitalism in which the press now came to play a unique and somewhat explosive role within society - and, as we shall see, made a significant contribution to the critical role that the public sphere was beginning to play within bourgeois society.

v) The emergence of a public press and the rise of the printed word

As a result of the increasing demand for information within bourgeois society, Habermas (1991: 21) informs us that that the news itself developed into a desirable commodity. What

this then means is that a growing number of individuals within bourgeois society were starting to become increasingly interested in, and thus wanted to be informed about, pertinent matters unfolding both locally and abroad (Amiradakis, 2019: 153).

According to Amiradakis (ibid.), it is as a result of the novel printing technologies (and their associated methods of reproduction and dissemination), along with the increasing demand for information on the part of the public, that the necessary conditions were brought about in order to give rise to what can be understood as a functioning — albeit nascent — information industry. Habermas (1991: 185) comments directly on the matter of such technological advancements and their impact upon the formation of such an information industry when he goes on to note:

> Already in 1814 the *Times* was being printed on a *new high-speed printing machine* that after four and a half centuries *replaced Gutenberg's wooden press*. A generation later *the invention of the telegraph revolutionized the organization of the whole news network* [emphasis added].

In light of the above, Amiradakis (2019: 154) avers that such a quote leaves little measure for doubt that — far from espousing a technophobic outlook towards the advancements made in technology and science during this historical epoch — Habermas's (1991) socio-historical reconstruction elucidates exactly how such techno-scientific developments played a definitive role in the formation of a public body that was, for the first time, able to edify and empower itself with information.

While the emergence of such an information industry and the resulting increase in the press's 'publicness' — as Habermas would phrase it — was invariably to be regarded as being of significant import in relation to the emergence of the critically-oriented public sphere, Habermas (1991: 22) goes on to highlight how the interest which the state authorities exhibited towards the press, as a technologically mediated industry of information, also provided it (i.e. the press and the printed word) with a considerable amount of legitimacy and influence. As such, Habermas (ibid.) states that it was not long before the authorities themselves began to use the press for a wide array of administrative

and legislative purposes[163]. As a direct result of such a positive estimation of the press, it was the state authorities themselves who began to address their promulgations, via the aid of the press, to "the public" as a collective in-and-of-itself. What this then means is that — in principle at least — it was as a direct result of the influence (and reach) of the press that the state was able to issue its declarations to all subjects (i.e. as a collective body) of bourgeois society[164] (Habermas, 1991: 22).

From a Habermasian perspective, such a series of developments is to be regarded as being of immense importance when attempting to gain an understanding of how the printed word managed to play a pivotal role in the formation of the bourgeois public sphere. This is primarily due to the fact that, according to Habermas (1991:22):

> Along with the apparatus of the modern state [i.e. the press], *a new stratum of 'bourgeois' people arose which occupied a central position within the 'public.'* The *officials* of the rulers' administrations were its core - mostly *jurists* .... Added to them were *doctors*, *pastors*, *officers*, *professors*, and '*scholars*,' who were at the top of a hierarchy reaching down though *schoolteachers* and *scribes to the 'people'* [emphasis added].

In practical terms, what this essentially amounted to was the emergence of a social stratum, which Habermas (1991: 23) explicitly refers to as 'bourgeois' that was, in fact, the real carrier of the public and its (informed) opinion. From the very outset then, it was this bourgeois stratum that was to be understood as being a reading public that was actually brought into existence as a direct result of the economic system that had taken root, along

[163] In order to elaborate on this matter, Habermas (1991: 22) provides the reader with a citation from an order of 1727, decreed by the Prussian cabinet, so as to highlight exactly how the press was managing to assume an ever-increasing role within the governance and functioning of bourgeois society. This order of 1727 explicitly states how, according to the Prussian authorities, the institution of the press: 'was intended *to be useful for the public and to facilitate communication ... in the service of trade and the common man, so that he can inform himself both about the decrees that from time to time are issued by the King and about the prices of various commodities* [emphasis added]'.

[164] While not trying to romanticise such a scenario, Habermas (1991:22) is quick to point out that such promulgations did not usually reach the 'common man' due to the fact that he/she could not actually read. However, at the very least, Habermas (ibid.) maintains that these promulgations did in fact manage to find a wider audience within the 'educated class'. It is directly in this regard that one can start to see how, via his socio-historical reconstruction, Habermas manages to extrapolate certain universalising ideals — such as equality and open access to information — from the emergence of an institutionalised press which, in theory, should serve the interests of the collective public.

with an interrelated information sector and institutionalised press that were actually inherent to — and constitutive of — such an economic system.

As we shall now see, according to Habermas's reconstruction, it was this interrelated series of economic, social and technological developments that contributed to the formation of a public body that was, for the first time, managing to educate itself and thus, become critically aware of the social, political and economic conditions in which it was required to operate (Amiradakis, 2019: 154). This in itself would prove to be a crucial factor with regard to the establishment of the public sphere as it indubitably managed to foster a critical consciousness within the wider public (ibid.).

vi) The facilitation of a critical consciousness within the public

As we have just seen, for Habermas (1991: 24) it was to be the newly formed bourgeois stratum of society that was empowered enough to actively engage with the authorities in a 'zone of deliberation' over those decisions and actions that were having a direct impact on their (i.e. the bourgeoisie's) lives and livelihoods (Amiradakis, 2019: 154). In fact, according to Habermas (1991: 24), it was within this 'zone of continuous administrative contact' — i.e. the zone of contact between the state and its private bourgeois citizens — that a "critical" element within the consciousness of the wider public was beginning to be formed and cultivated (Amiradakis, 2019: 154).

In order to make sense of such a claim, Habermas (1991: 24) informs us that one of the major reasons as to why this zone/sphere of interaction was actually able to cultivate a critical form of consciousness within the bourgeois stratum resides in the fact that it was within such a zone that 'the critical judgement of a public making use of its reason' was being provoked. Habermas (1991: 24) allows one to make sense of this claim when he goes on to note how the bourgeois public was able to take on the challenge of developing its critical faculties (via the process of self-cultivation) all the better:

> as it required merely *a change in the function of the instrument* with whose help the state administration had already *turned society into a public affair in a specific sense* - [namely] *the press* [emphasis added].

It is directly in relation to the increasing role that a critical press was beginning to assume in matters both private and public, and the definitive influence that it began to play within the mediating 'zone of deliberation' (i.e. the bourgeois public sphere), that Habermas (1991: 24-25) explicates how, towards the end of the 17th century, certain journals were being complemented by periodicals containing:

> not primarily information but *pedagogical instructions and even criticism and reviews* [emphasis added].

In addition to such pedagogical information that was being disseminated, Habermas (1991: 24-25) goes on to note that during the course of the first half of the 18th century, critical reasoning itself actually began to make its way into the daily press in the guise of:

> learned articles, book reviews, and occasionally 'a historical report sketched by a professor and relevant to current events'.

It was as a direct result of the publication and consumption of such critically oriented literature that Habermas (1991: 25 - 26) goes on to assert that the public was managing to cast itself loose:

> *as a forum in which the private people*, *come together to form a public, readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion*. [As such] ... *the publicum developed into the public, the subjectum into the [reasoning] subject*, the receiver of regulations from above *into the ruling authorities' adversary* [emphasis added].

According to Amiradakis (2019: 154), what is so crucial about this series of publicatory progressions that Habermas has noted above, is that via the aid of such a reconstruction, it becomes clear to see that during this period in European history not only did the press effectively manage to cultivate a critical spirit within the wider — albeit educated, and no doubt upper-class — reading public, but it also managed to foster the development of a much broader, and more inclusive 'literary public sphere' (Habermas, 1991: 56). As we shall

now see, such a concatenation of developments would prove to be of immense import with regard to the cultivation of the critical and deliberative faculties of the individual[165].

vii) The emergence of a literary public sphere

For Habermas (1991: 160), the emergence of a literary public sphere was closely linked to the bourgeois family itself, both as a consumer of the literature that was available and as a source of the relationships that were being depicted in the literature itself. As such, the literary public sphere introduced a rather novel element to the reading public whereby literature itself was to act as a mirror in which the bourgeois class was able to reflect upon its norms, role and place in society (Thomassen, 2010: 38).

Expanding upon such an assertion, Calhoun (1992: 12) informs the reader that the emergence of a literary public sphere indubitably precipitated the development of the distinctively modern idea of culture as an 'autonomous realm'. In order to make sense of such a claim, Habermas (1991: 29) goes on to explain that with the rise of the literary public sphere:

> *critical discussion* (*Räsonnement*) [was now being] *sparked by the products of culture that had become publicly accessible* ... Inasmuch as culture became a commodity and thus finally evolved into 'culture' in the specific sense (as something that pretends to exist merely for its own sake), *it was claimed as the ready topic of a discussion through which an audience-oriented* (*Publikumsbezogen*) *subjectivity communicated with itself* [emphasis added].

Crossley and Roberts (2004: 3) elaborate on this matter when they go on to note that the self-cultivation of the bourgeoisie was indeed pursued in a significant way through art and

[165] As we have seen in Chapter 3, Benjamin (1934) actually elaborates upon such an unprecedented scenario when he argues how the technologies of mass reproduction were able to bring about the 'literarization of the conditions of living' for the consuming public (SW2, 742). To briefly recall, within such a process of literarisation, Benjamin sees a great deal of emancipatory potential for society as the mass public was, for the first time, able to inform itself about the existential conditions in which it found itself along with the various factors that were contributing to their lived experiences. Importantly then, Habermas' (1991) socio-historical reconstruction of the press and its contribution towards the formation of a critically-based consciousness within the bourgeois society can be said to both bolster and augment this Benjaminian analysis pertaining to the edifying and emancipatory possibilities contained within communication and information technologies of reproduction (Amiradakis, 2019: 154).

literature due to the fact that it involved the private consumption of artistic and literary works. As such, it was to be understood as an edifying activity which contributed to the privatisation of subjectivity. It is in this regard that Habermas (1991: 26) goes on to point out that during this period in European history, one was actually able to draw a distinction 'between the public that gathered as a crowd around a speaker or actor in a public place, and the *Lesewelt* (world of readers)'. What is so crucial about the formation of these seemingly differentiated publics is the fact that, for Habermas (ibid.), they could both be understood as being effective instantiations of a 'critical (*richtend*) public'.

In order for such a declaration to be fully appreciated, it is important to be aware of the fact that during this particular epoch in European history, the literary forms that were beginning to appear — such as novels and memoirs — contained a reflexive component inherent to their composition. According to Habermas, it was this reflexive component that can be said to have offered the reader of such literature new templates of 'interior' subjective life, given their (i.e. the novels and memoirs of that period) exploration of the 'internal life' of individuals and characters (Crossley and Roberts, 2004: 3). Calhoun (1992: 10) ratifies such a claim when he goes on to note that the early novels and memoirs of the bourgeois period helped:

> to circulate a vision of intimate sentimentality, communicating to the members of the literary public sphere just *how they should understand the heart of private life* [emphasis added].

It is in light of the impact that the literary public sphere was having upon the bourgeois individual's — existential — orientation that Calhoun (1992: 11) goes on to assert that the reconceived idea of the bourgeois individual that was being cultivated within such literature helped lead to a wider reconceptualisation of humanity. Such a reconceptualisation would come to have a considerable impact upon how the public, as a collection of individuals, came to view and understand itself[166]. It is directly in this regard that Habermas (1991: 50) goes on to assert that:

[166] Calhoun (1992: 11 - 12) provides a concrete example of how the literature of the period was contributing to a redefined (self-)understanding of humanity when he informs the reader that early novels like Richardson's (1740) *Pamela* (also known as *Virtue Rewarded*) relied on and reinforced a revised sense of emancipated

> The relations between author, work, and public changed. They became *intimate mutual relationships between privatized individuals* who *were psychologically interested in what was 'human,' in self-knowledge, and in empathy* [emphasis added].

Beyond the promulgation of these new ideals pertaining to the individual, the family and humanity itself, Habermas's (1991: 36) analysis also manages to highlight how the literature that made its way into the literary public sphere could now be said to gain its authority from its readers, or rather from its readers' critical appropriation of it (Thomassen, 2010: 38). What this then means is that such literature (with a particular focus on its social value, importance and meaning) came to be something that was to be debated within wider society itself. What ultimately emerged as a result of such a process was an idea of critique, and this critique could indeed be rational[167] (ibid.).

Habermas (1991: 36) elaborates upon this matter when he goes on to note:

> To the degree, however, to which philosophical and literary works and works of art in general were produced for the market and distributed through it, these culture products became similar to that type of information: *as commodities they became in principle generally accessible*. *They no longer remained components of the Church's and court's*

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humanness, and as such, began to extend and push the boundaries and limitations that had been imposed upon preceding understandings of what the notion of subjectivity on the part of the individual should entail. In addition to how the content of the literature itself was challenging certain preconceived notions of what the 'individual' should/should not entail, it is also important to note how it is that the literary public sphere — as an institution within society — actually offered individuals a much greater measure of tolerance and inclusivity (Amiradakis, 2019: 154). Habermas (1991: 56) explains why this was the case; due to the fact that while women and dependents were both factually and legally excluded from the political public sphere, it was female readers as well as apprentices and servants who often took a more active part in the literary public sphere than the owners of private property and family heads themselves. As such, it can be averred that it was the literary public sphere that provided those who were formally marginalised/overlooked within bourgeois society with a legitimate platform from where they could voice their opinions and acquire a certain sense of agency (Amiradakis, 2019: 154).

[167] Based upon such a revised relationship that was now beginning to develop between the author, the artwork and the reading public, Amiradakis (2019: 154) asserts that Habermas both agrees with, and effectively extends, the crucial Benjaminian insight pertaining to how, via the aid of the technologies of mass reproduction and the ever-expanding information industry, the material conditions within bourgeois society were actually allowing for the emergence of a new critically minded social subject, which was itself mediated and articulated by modern communication technologies (Benjamin, 1939). It is in this regard that Kang (2014: 58) indicates that in his analysis of the literary public sphere and its impact upon the bourgeois individual, Habermas — much like Benjamin — effectively founds a new logic of literary practice that begins with the growth of a new social subject in the transition to a new mass culture which is itself bound up with the information industry (Amiradakis, 2019: 154).

> *publicity of representation; that is precisely what was meant by the loss of their aura of extraordinariness and by the profaning of their once sacramental character* [emphasis added].

In light of such an assertion, it is clear to see that much like Benjamin (1939) had argued over two decades before him, Habermas clearly believed that the proliferation of information that was entering into these literary public spheres — as a direct result of the technologies of mass reproduction — was having an edifying and uplifting effect on the wider public[168].

This pro-Benjaminian stance of Habermas's (1991: 37) is further reinforced when he explicates that:

> The private people for whom the cultural product became available as a commodity *profaned it inasmuch as they had to determine its meaning on their own* (by way of rational communication with one another), *verbalize it, and thus state explicitly what precisely in its implicitness for so long could assert its authority* [emphasis added].

From this Habermasian perspective then, what has been explicated above is to be regarded as being of immense import in relation to the formation of the bourgeois public sphere as it effectively illuminates how the literary public sphere managed to usher in the emergence of a public trained in critical discussions, even if initially only in the field of literature (Thomassen, 2010: 38).

What this then also implies is that this newly emerging critical public was beginning to acquire the necessary tools and skills that would allow them to start debating matters beyond the sphere of intimacy, just as they started debating things beyond what had to do with their private businesses in a narrow sense[169] (Thomassen, 2010: 38). In a similar vein of thought, Hohendahl (1982) informs the reader that it was the literary public spheres that

[168] As we have seen in Chapter 3, in Benjamin's rather idiosyncratic idiom, such a situation can be directly attributed to the withering of the aura which had once enveloped (and thus, circumscribed access to) the cultural artefacts of society.

[169] It is directly in this regard that Thomassen (2010: 38) argues that fields such as politics, law and government also became matters of taste and value – in short, matters about which citizens could arrive at rational solutions on the basis of critical debate.

produced the practice of literary criticism in which the division between critics and 'mere readers' was not initially sharp. The literary public spheres of this period thus managed to institutionalise a form of rational-critical discourse about objects of common concern that could be carried over directly into political discussion.

According to Amiradakis (2019: 155), the emergence of the literary public sphere can be said to have been one of the necessary preconditions allowing for the formation of the bourgeois public sphere. This is due to the interrelated fact that:

i) The topics to be debated within the bourgeois public sphere were actually informed by what was being consumed within the literary public sphere; and

ii) It was the literary public sphere that provided the bourgeois individual with the relevant skills, tools and rhetorical devices that were necessary in order to participate effectively and responsibly within the bourgeois public sphere itself[170] (ibid.).

At this point in our reconstruction of the factors that coalesced in order to bring about the conditions necessary for the formation of the bourgeois public sphere (in its political instantiation) it is crucial to indicate that were it not for the fact that across Europe these literary public spheres were beginning to be officially institutionalised, their impact would not have been so immense and widespread. It is thus to the topic of the institutionalisation of the literary public sphere that we will now turn our attention.

viii) The institutionalisation of the literary public sphere

Another key feature of Habermas's (1991: 32) overview pertaining to the literary public sphere(s) that began to emerge across Europe during this "bourgeois" period that needs to

[170] While the literary public sphere is to be understood as being a crucial element with regard to the formation of the bourgeois public sphere, it must not be inferred that it only served as a necessary precondition for the formation of bourgeois public sphere (Amiradakis, 2019: 155). Rather, from a Habermasian point of view, it was the dynamic interplay between these two spheres (i.e. the literary public sphere and the politically-orientated bourgeois public sphere) that was to be considered as being of immense importance (ibid.). According to Amiradakis (2019: 155), this point is — somewhat negatively — reinforced within a later critical analysis of Habermas's (1991 : 161) in which he goes on to lament how, due to the fact that the literary public sphere eventually gave way to the dictates of an instrumentalised culture industry, a detrimental impact was introduced to both the material that was being consumed by the reading public along with producing degenerative outcomes with regard to the nature and topics of deliberation within the bourgeois public sphere itself. More on this critical aspect of Habermas's analysis will be explored later in this chapter.

be explored pertains to the actual institutions in which they became rooted (Amiradakis, 2019: 155). In particular, Habermas (1991: 32 - 34) makes explicit reference to the coffee houses which arose in Britain, the *salons* in France and the table societies (*Tischgesellschaften*) in Germany. It is in these institutions, Habermas asserts, that various members of society — male and, to a significantly lesser extent, female — met in order to discuss issues of the day, whether they were gossip, information about prices, novels or politics (Amiradakis, 2019: 155). As such, it was these spaces of literary debate that effectively came to constitute the rhetorical and thematic infrastructure of what would later form the backbone of the political public sphere (ibid.).

Habermas (1991: 32) provides the reader with some socio-historical background and insight with regard to how these particular institutions came to influence the political public sphere of bourgeois society when he states that around the middle of the 17th century, within Britain:

> the coachman of a Levantine merchant opened the first coffee house. By the first decade of the 18th century London already had 3,000 of them, each with a core group of regulars.

For Habermas, what is important about these coffee houses (beside their rather remarkable proliferation) is the fact that not only did they make access to the relevant socio-political circles less formal and easier, but they also embraced the wider strata of the (male) middle-class and thus, came to include the likes of craftsmen and shopkeepers in their ranks.

It is also essential to point out that within these coffeehouses (much like the *salons* in France and the *Tischgesellschaften* in Germany), it was literature that had to legitimate itself to all those who attended. Perhaps, what is to be regarded as being even more significant in relation to the influence that these literary public spheres had on the bourgeois public sphere itself is the fact that:

> the critical debate ignited by works of literature and art *was soon extended to include economic and political disputes* without any guarantee ... that such discussions would be

> inconsequential, at least in the immediate context [emphasis added] (Habermas, 1991: 33).

While it is clear to see from the aforementioned excerpts that the coffee houses in Britain managed to engender and uphold certain progressive ideals (such as the importance of critical debate, a wider appreciation for social diversity and inclusion, along with a clear acknowledgement of the immense value that was to be associated with literature and the printed word), it is nevertheless crucial to point out that such institutions were rather exclusive due to the incontrovertible fact that it was only men (albeit men originating from a fairly wide section of bourgeois society) who were admitted into the coffee house society.

It is in light of the male-oriented exclusivity associated with the coffeehouse societies that Habermas (1991: 33) explicates how in France, 'in the period between regency and revolution', it was the *salons* that managed to form a 'peculiar enclave' due to the fact that unlike the British coffee houses, it was the women in France who primarily came to determine 'the style of the *salon*'. In addition to the inclusion of females within its constitutive ranks, Habermas (1991: 33) informs the reader that the *salon* actually presented French society with an unprecedented scenario in which:

> the nobility and the *grande bourgeoisie* of finance and administration assimilating itself to that nobility met with the "intellectuals" *on an equal footing* [emphasis added].

As a result of the (contextually) progressive orientation of the *salons*, along with the fairly novel ideals upon which the *salons* were founded, Habermas (1991: 33-34) goes on to assert that:

> in the *salon* the mind was no longer in the service of a patron; *'opinion' became emancipated from the bonds of economic dependence* [emphasis added].

Finally, with regard to the table societies (*Tischgesellschaften*) in Germany, Habermas (1991: 34) informs the reader that while the socio-political atmosphere in the German context differed significantly from those of France and Britain, certain similarities/parallels did indeed manage to emerge. Habermas (1991: 34) elaborates upon what these

similarities/parallels entail when he goes on to aver that, much like the male-centric British coffee houses, the public that came to constitute these table societies (*Tischgesellschaften)* was:

> recruited from private people engaged in productive work, from the dignitaries of the principalities' capitals, with a strong preponderance of middle-class academics.

What is to be regarded as being of immense significance for Habermas (1991: 34) with regard to this fairly wide association of private people that congregated under the auspices of a literary public sphere, is the fact that they essentially came to be:

> *preoccupied with the native tongue*, now interpreted as the *medium of communication and understanding between people in their common quality as human beings and nothing more than human beings*. *Transcending the barriers of social hierarchy, the bourgeois met here with the socially prestigious but politically uninfluential nobles as "common" human beings* [emphasis added].

According to Habermas's reconstruction pertaining to the institutionalisation of these various literary public spheres across Europe, what is significant is the fact that regardless of the inherent differences and contextual idiosyncrasies associated with the coffee houses, *salons* and *Tischgesellschaften*, they all ultimately came to rest, and rely, upon certain foundational aspects. It was these foundational aspects that were — in principle at least — supposed to guide how the engagement within the bourgeois political public sphere was to take place, along with influencing how these institutions should compose themselves. It is directly in this regard that Habermas (19991: 36) notes that:

> However much the *Tischgesellschaften*, *salons*, and coffee houses may have differed in the size and composition of their publics, the style of their proceedings, the climate of their debates, and their topical orientations, *they all organized discussion among private people that tended to be ongoing: hence they had a number of institutional criteria in common* [emphasis added].

According to Habermas (1991: 36 - 38), the common institutional criteria — that would ultimately influence and inform the political public sphere — that can be extrapolated from these various institutions include the following:

i) First, and perhaps most basic, was the fact that these institutions:

> preserved a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, *disregarded status altogether*. [As such] the tendency replaced the celebration of rank with an act befitting equals [emphasis added] (Habermas, 1991: 36).

Amiradakis (2019: 155) notes that while this criterion was never fully realised, the idea nevertheless had an importance of its own as it was the notion of 'common interest in truth' or 'right policy' that undergirded and bolstered the 'bracketing' of status differences (Calhoun, 1992: 12). Habermas (1991: 36) elaborates upon such an assertion when he goes on to note how, while the idea of a public coming together as equals was never actualised:

> *as an idea it had become institutionalized* and thereby *stated as an objective claim*. If not realized, *it was at least consequential* [emphasis added];

ii) For Habermas, the second common attribute to evince itself across these literary-based institutions, which is indubitably linked to the first, hinges on the premise that within these institutions, it was to be rational argumentation that was to serve as the sole arbiter of any issue (Calhoun, 1992: 13). Thus, regardless of the fact that such a norm was — often — breached, the idea that it was to be the best rational argument and not the identity of the speaker that would ultimately hold sway in matters of debate and contestation was institutionalised (Amiradakis, 2019: 155);

iii) According to Habermas (1991: 36), the third commonality to emerge hinged on the fact that the discussions within these public domains presupposed the problematisation of areas that, until then, had not been questioned (Amiradakis, 2019: 155). As such, the wide array of topics over which church and state authorities had hitherto exercised a virtual monopoly of interpretation were now opened to critical discussion and deliberation (Calhoun, 1992:

13). It is in this regard that Habermas (1991: 36) highlights how — for the first time — the 'domain of "common concern"' was opened up to scrutiny for the wider public;

iv) The final commonality to arise between these various literary public spheres, in Habermas's (1991: 37) estimation, revolves around how:

> the same process that converted culture into a commodity (and in this fashion constituted it as a culture that could become an object of discussion to begin with) *established the public as in principle inclusive* [emphasis added].

According to Amiradakis (2019: 155), such a claim resonates strongly with what Benjamin (1929) has previously argued with regard to how— as a direct result of the technologies of mass reproduction — there has been a 'levelling of culture' in which the old, supposedly sacrosanct, boundaries between 'high' and 'low' culture have been removed, thereby increasing the possibility for accessibility, interconnectivity and engagement with a wide array of cultural artefacts - particularly in relation to the wider (formerly marginalised) public[171] (SW2, 255).

In a manner highly reminiscent of Benjamin then, Habermas's (1991: 37) argument pertaining to this fourth commonality that existed between these different literary public spheres revolves around how anyone with access to cultural products — i.e. books, plays, journals — had at least a potential claim on the attention of the culture-debating public. It is directly in this regard then that Habermas (1991: 37) states:

> However exclusive the public might be in any given instance, it *could never close itself off entirely* and become consolidated as a clique; for it always understood and found itself *immersed within a more inclusive public of all private people*, persons who — insofar as they were propertied and educated — as readers, listeners, and spectators *could avail themselves via the market of the objects that were subject to discussion*. The issues

[171] As shall be recalled from Chapter 3, it is for these very reasons that Benjamin (2006: 20) describes the technologies of mass reproduction as possessing an ability to enable an original artwork 'to meet the beholder halfway'.

discussed became 'general' not merely in their significance, but also in their accessibility: *everyone had to be able to participate* [emphasis added, except for "be able"].

It is in light of the above-mentioned factors that Calhoun (1992: 12) argues that the literary public sphere invariably had an immense and significant impact upon the politicised bourgeois public sphere - not only in terms of its content, composition and concern, but also in relation to how interaction in such a sphere was to be conducted. It is directly in this regard that Habermas informs the reader that there was a definite ideology that was guiding the development and maintenance of the political public sphere which no doubt acquired its guiding impetus from the ideological base of the various literary public spheres that preceded their formation. It is thus towards both the idea and ideology of the public sphere that we must now turn our attention, as it is such an area of inquiry that will highlight exactly how the various thinkers and philosophies underpinning the Enlightenment (particularly those of Kant and Marx) played a key role in the creation of the public sphere.

ix) The idea and ideology of the public sphere

In the fourth chapter of *Structural Transformations*, Habermas (1991: 89 - 140) explicitly turns to ideology, especially in relation to what was perceived — during that formative period in European history — as being the most "advanced" ideas and the greatest thinkers of the time (including the likes of Hobbes, Locke, Burke, Rousseau, Bentham, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Mill and de Tocqueville). Habermas does so in order to explicate how, from an ideological standpoint, the formation of the bourgeois public sphere was greatly indebted to the Enlightenment and its central proponents (Calhoun, 1992: 17).

From an ideological point of view, it is crucial to bear in mind that what is essentially being developed (and then later critiqued) within this aspect of Habermas's investigation, is a conception of public opinion as a reasoned form of access to truth (Calhoun, 1992: 17). According to Calhoun (ibid.), what such a reconstruction aims to highlight is exactly how, over the course of the 'European enlightenment':

the notion of public opinion as being the 'mere opinion' (or arbitrary views) of isolated individuals taken in the aggregate, the reputation that emerges in the mirror of dispersed

> opinions, and the opinion of the 'common' sort of people ... [came to be replaced with a more positive association - namely, as] ... the *views held by those who join in rational-critical debate on an issue* [emphasis added].

According to Habermas's (1991: 102) reconstruction, it is Kant's views that are to be regarded as being the most fully developed, so much so in fact that, for Habermas, it is Kant who can be said to have been the 'paradigmatic voice' guiding the development — and rationale — of the bourgeois public sphere[172] (Calhoun, 1992: 18). It is in this regard that Thomassen (2010: 40) goes on to note how, for Habermas, the self-understanding on the part of the public sphere is famously expressed by Kant (1784) in his essay titled 'An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?"'. As has already been disclosed in Chapter 2 of this investigation, within this seminal essay, Kant (1970: 54) proclaims:

> Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of Enlightenment is therefore: *Sapere aude!* Have courage to use your own understanding!

In relation to the actual ideology underpinning the bourgeois public sphere, while such a reading (when taken on its own) seems to place the individual within a precariously atomistic/isolated position — as Kant appears to be arguing that only by the utilisation and embrace of his/her own critical rationality alone (i.e. as a solitary being) will the individual be able to strive towards the ideals of truth, emancipation and edification — it is crucial to note that this is explicitly *not* the message that Kant wishes to convey.

In order to support such an assertion, one needs to be mindful of the fact that in several of his writings, Kant does go on to highlight just how important the notions of discussion and

[172] Habermas (1991: 102 - 117) provides the reader with a critical estimation as to why he believes that Kant managed to achieve this laudable feat by firstly following Rousseau on the idea of the 'will of the whole people' but then also by holding firm to the *philosophes* and the British Enlightenment thinkers who place a great deal of emphasis on the centrality of critical reason (cf. Habermas (1991) 102 - 117 for more detail pertaining to his discussion regarding this topic).

debate are within the wider public realm - particularly when attempting to emerge from one's self-incurred immaturity (Habermas, 1991: 104). It is therefore imperative to be mindful of the fact that within his 'What is Enlightenment?' essay, Kant makes it clear for the reader that without a sufficient amount of guidance and input from others, the isolated individual would indubitably display an abject inability to make use of their critical understanding (Calhoun, 1992: 18). For Kant then, the possibility of Enlightenment becomes greater the more people actually engage in free public discourse (ibid.).

Such an affirmation is made all the more clear when one reads how, according to Kant's ([1784]1970: 54-55) critical estimation:

> It is *difficult for each separate individual man to work his way out of the immaturity that has become almost second nature to him*. He has even grown fond of it and is really incapable for the time being of using his own understanding, because he was never allowed to make the attempt. ... *There is more chance of an entire public enlightening itself. This is indeed almost inevitable, if only the public concerned is left in freedom* [emphasis added].

For Habermas (1991: 104), such a statement is to be regarded as being of immense import, particularly in relation to the ideological underpinnings of the bourgeois public sphere, as Kant makes it evident for the reader that in order for Enlightenment to occur — on both an intra- and inter-personal level — thinking for oneself actually needs to coincide with 'thinking aloud', so that others can hear what is being thought/said and thereafter contribute to/critique it in the manner they deem as being appropriate. Additionally, Kant's position makes it clear that the actual employment of critical reason needs to correspond directly 'with its public use' (i.e. upon a wider, social platform from where it can be critically applied) (ibid.). As such, Kant (1949: 303) goes on to assert that:

> Certainly one may say, 'Freedom to speak or write can be taken from us by a superior power, but never the freedom to think!' *But how much, and how correctly, would we think if we did not think as it were in common with others, with whom we mutually communicate!* [emphasis added].

Drawing from Kant's unequivocal exhortation pertaining to the importance that needs to be attributed to the practice of critical-interpersonal communication within the process of Enlightenment, Thomassen (2010: 40) informs the reader that when such a proclamation is filtered through a distinctly Habermasian paradigm, and then extended to the politicised realm of the bourgeois public sphere, the self-understanding of the public sphere can be expressed as follows:

> '*have courage* to *use your own critical reason in the public sphere*!' and '*have courage to use the reasoning in the public sphere against the authorities*!' [emphasis added].

Based upon Habermas's endorsement of such Enlightenment-based ideals, along with their official institutionalisation in the various public spheres that were to emerge within bourgeois society across Europe, one can start to appreciate how Kant did in fact prove to be one of the most — if not the most — important philosophers of the public sphere (Thomassen, 2010: 43). This is primarily due to the fact that for Habermas, it is Kant who invariably sees a great deal of emancipatory potential residing in the public's use of reason in order to establish the basis upon which a rational and just society can be brought into effect. Another laudable feature of Kant's philosophy, for Habermas, is the fact that he manages to place a great deal of emphasis on the edifying potentiality contained within the subject's ability to converse with other subjects. For Kant, it is this edifying potentiality which then provides those individuals who participate within the public sphere with the critical insight that is deemed as being necessary in order to bring about substantive change within society[173] (Amiradakis, 2019: 156).

It is clear to see from the above that Kant's insights played an integral role with regard to Habermas's reconstruction pertaining to the ideological basis upon which the public sphere was founded, along with the fact that it is in Kant's unequivocal advocacy of inter-personal communication that Habermas discovers a great deal of emancipatory potential. And yet,

[173] In light of such an orientation, Amiradakis (2019: 156) avers that one can then clearly see that far from decrying that the Enlightenment brought about an inevitable reversion to barbarism within the modern world (as Horkheimer and Adorno proclaim in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*), Habermas finds an indubitable repository of emancipatory and edifying values within one of the central premises upon which the Enlightenment was founded - namely, the faculty of critical reasoning, and the courage on the part of the individual to make use of it.

Habermas (1991: 124) nevertheless maintains that it is Marx's critique of how the bourgeois public sphere manifested itself in reality that needs to be appreciated and interpreted in critical conversation with Kant's more optimistic position[174] (Amiradakis, 2019: 156).

It is in this vein of thought that Habermas (1991: 124) goes on to argue that within his critical analysis of bourgeois society, Marx explicitly denounces the notion of 'public opinion' as false consciousness due to the fact that it conceals before itself its own true character as a mask of bourgeois class interests. For Habermas (ibid.) then, Marx's critique of political economy was effectively aimed at the presuppositions upon which the self-interpretation of the public sphere in the political realm rested. Furthermore, Habermas (1991: 124) maintains that as far as Marx was concerned, while thinkers such as Kant continued to espouse the emancipatory outcomes to be associated with critical thinking and reasoned discourse between the public and the state, Marx was of the more critical opinion that:

> the emancipation of civil society from authoritarian state regulation did *not* [necessarily] lead to the insulation of the transactions between private people from the intrusion of power. *Instead, new relationships of power, especially between owners and wage earners, were created within the forms of civil freedom of contract* [emphasis added].

According to Amiradakis (2019: 156), it is in light of such critical insights that Habermas (1991: 124) goes on to note that via the aid of Marx's critique pertaining to how the bourgeois public sphere manifested itself in reality (that it was not universally inclusive, that the supposed equality of its constituents was not presupposed and how new power dynamics indubitably entered into the deliberative process so as to undermine the supposed sacrosanct status of power of the better argument), Marx effectively managed to

[174] While Habermas (1991: 117-140) does go on to highlight, rather extensively, how it is that other thinkers such as Hegel, Mill and de Tocqueville all made significant contributions to the ideological underpinnings of the public sphere, it is the mutually antagonistic views of Marx and Kant — particularly in relation to how it is that they view the public sphere, what it is supposed to achieve and how it fares when its idea is contrasted with its concrete embodiment — that are to be regarded as being crucial for the purposes of this investigation. As shall be disclosed, this is primarily due to the fact that these two thinkers actually complement each other when the contemporary researcher attempts to grapple (via the method of immanent critique) with the question of how the public sphere has failed in its undertakings and how these shortcomings can be overcome by relying directly on the very ideas, ideals and ideologies that were supposed to be both upheld and enshrined within such an institution.

highlight and demolish all fictions to which the idea of the public sphere of civil society appealed[175] (ibid.).

In relation to Habermas's appreciation (and appropriation) of Marx's critical analysis pertaining to how the bourgeois public sphere actually manifested itself within society, it is crucial to be aware of the fact that — unlike a more traditional Marxist interpretation — Habermas manages to place Marx's rather sobering insights within a paradigm more oriented towards Horkheimer's early vision of Critical Theory. Such an approach then provides Habermas's position pertaining to the public sphere (along with the critical role it can potentially serve in society) with a glimmer of emancipatory potential that appears to be sorely lacking within a more traditional Marxist approach (Thomassen, 2010: 41).

In order to effectively ground such an assertion, one can aver that for the (traditional) Marxist, the difference between formal and actual inclusion within the public sphere is to be regarded as being a massive — if not insurmountable — point of contention, along with the fact that for the (traditional) Marxist, the actual inclusion and participation which took place in the name of 'the public' is to be understood as being nothing but a superficial act of soporific engagement used to both placate and pacify the oppressed majority. In addition to such participative shortcomings and ideological impediments, for the (traditional) Marxist, the purported 'universal right' allowing for all members of bourgeois society to actively engage in the public sphere is nothing but an empty platitude as long as the necessary material conditions that will allow for effective participation are still lacking (Thomassen, 2010: 41). According to such an interpretation then, until the necessary material conditions of society are fundamentally changed (i.e. at the level of its economic base), the interactions which occur within the public sphere (i.e. which can be seen as a mere appendage of the societal superstructure) will have very little meaningful impact upon society and the manifold inequalities/injustices with which it is riddled. As such, for the (traditional) Marxist

[175] What this then means is that for Marx, the bourgeois public sphere with which he was confronted blatantly contradicted its own principles of universal accessibility, equality and rationality and as such, the notion of 'the public' could no longer claim to be identical with 'the nation', nor could the idea of 'civil society' be considered as being synonymous with 'all of society' (Habermas, 1991: 124). In his essay titled 'On the Jewish Question', Marx ([1843] 1978: 42) ratifies such a critical stance when he goes on to argue that private civil autonomy has actually led to a situation whereby every individual is able to see in other people, not the realisation, but rather the limitation of his/her own liberty.

then, the public sphere — in its concrete form — is seen as containing very little (if any) emancipatory/critical potential for the majority of those struggling within capitalist society.

In comparison to the (traditional) Marxist's rather austere estimation of the bourgeois public sphere and its (seriously truncated) capabilities for enlightenment/edification, it can be argued that Habermas's approach provides the reader — at the very least — with an emancipatory avenue of exploration. Such a claim can be made due to the fact that while Habermas's analysis is not to be interpreted as being blind to the actual exclusions from the public sphere (as highlighted by the traditional Marxist), he nevertheless maintains that the formal equality and universal inclusion holds out a promise for the transformation of the public sphere in a progressive direction (Thomassen, 2010: 43). What Habermas's analysis therefore aims to highlight, by explicitly drawing from the seemingly contradictory insights of both Kant and Marx, is that there is clearly an inherent tension that exists within the institution of the bourgeois public sphere (Amiradakis, 2019: 156).

It is in this regard that Amiradakis (2019: 156) avers that from a Habermasian perspective, this tension can be described as follows: On the one hand, the public sphere is indubitably biased and exclusive. On the other hand, it contains a promise of equality and universal inclusion. In light of the (very real) biases and exclusions inherent to the public sphere, the promise of equality and inclusion looks particularly hypocritical and ideological. However, in light of the promise of equality and inclusion, these biases and exclusions can be criticised and potentially overcome (Thomassen, 2010: 43). In both cases however, Habermas's more nuanced position — following from the insights of Horkheimer and his early vision for Critical Theory – allows one to appreciate the fact that it is only through a critical understanding of both the ideological and material foundations upon which such a tension-riddled scenario is grounded, that the very possibility for immanent critique is made possible, and thus hopefully, the interrelated aim of bringing about a sense of substantive change to society.

To sum up this section of our analysis pertaining to how the bourgeois public sphere actually came into existence, Habermas's (1991) thorough socio-historical reconstruction makes it evident for the reader that as a direct result of the dynamic interplay that existed among

the above-mentioned factors — whether they be social, political, economic or technological — the notion of a politicised public sphere managed to emerge within bourgeois society. In relation to the overall outcomes of this chapter (and entire investigation), it is crucial to be aware of the fact that, while such a socio-historical reconstruction is intended to highlight how all of these aforementioned factors are to be understood as being intimately interrelated, such a reconstruction is also aimed at presenting this concatenation of elements as containing a dialectical form of potentiality that Habermas firmly believes can (still) bring about a substantive sense of change to society.

To elucidate how this happens to be the case, Habermas's identification of the dialectical potentiality contained within his socio-historical reconstruction can be (rather crudely) displayed in the following manner: The crucial split between the public realm and private realm which Habermas has identified as being a foundational aspect of that specific form of subjectivity that was able to effectively participate within the bourgeois public sphere can be said to have been fostered by the development of a new economic system which would eventually take root across Europe - namely, mercantile capitalism. In turn, the emergence of this new economic system then gave rise to a series of technological advancements allowing for the emergence of a burgeoning communication-information industry, upon which such an economic system ultimately came to depend in order to operate in a functional manner. Such a series of interrelated progressions subsequently led to the emergence of an institutionalised literary public sphere that successfully facilitated the development of critical thought on the part of a (now-in-the-position-to-be-empowered) public, whilst also providing a solid ideological basis for how it is that the politicised public sphere of bourgeois society was supposed to compose itself.

Such an overview allows one to appreciate the fact that — regardless of its crude simplifications — there is indubitably an inherent dialectical tension contained within Habermas's position. This is due to the fact that, following from the critical insights of both Hegel and Marx, within the newly emerging capitalist system that was emerging in Europe, there lay the very seeds of its potential downfall. This potential downfall can be said to have resided in the creation of a critical consciousness on the part of an enlightened public which had, for the first time in modern history, been made aware of the various

inequalities/injustices with which it was confronted. Importantly, this critical form of consciousness on the part of the wider public had been fostered via the very technological tools and informational products that the capitalist system required in order to sustain its own growth and development. Additionally, it was such a series of progressions that ultimately provided the public with a legitimate platform from which it could raise its concerns - namely, the public sphere[176].

As promising as such a dialectical series of developments were when gauged from a historical perspective, it is important to highlight that the bourgeois public sphere soon underwent a series of social-structural transformations that would ultimately serve to undermine its compositional integrity and furthermore, compromise its critical efficacy as a sphere in which critical-rational debate was to take place (Amiradakis, 2019: 156). It is thus to this section of Habermas's (1991) critical analysis that we must now turn our attention, as it is such an avenue of exploration that will allow us to identify and appreciate the various factors that managed to neutralise the critical impetus of the public sphere, as well as allowing us to ascertain whether or not such forces/factors still play an undermining/divisive role within contemporary society.

4.3) The decline and disintegration of the public sphere

In order to describe how the bourgeois public sphere underwent a series of structural transformations that would ultimately come to undermine its critical role within society, Habermas (1991: 141) initially informs the reader that due to the changing economic and political climate within Europe, the public sphere was required to evolve in a 'tension-charged field' that arose between the state and society. It successfully managed to do so, only up to the point that it remained itself a part of the private realm which would then come to inform/critique public policy. However, as Habermas (1991: 142) aptly remarks, the

[176] Yet again, one can clearly see how Habermas's systematic reconstruction bears a close affinity towards Horkheimer's early vision for Critical Theory along with its critical and emancipatory aims. This can be inferred from the fact that Habermas has clearly attempted to reconstruct and elucidate how, in both a materialistic and idealistic sense, modern society has effectively managed to produce the necessary means to either emancipate or enslave itself. As such, Habermas's critical reconstruction can be said to provide one with at least a glimmer of hope — in the form of an immanent critique — that should, at the very least, provide the critical researcher with a viable platform from where the various contradictions and incongruities with which modernity is laden can be both identified and, hopefully, overcome.

very (novel) notion of 'the private' — as had been recently developed within bourgeois society under the aegis of mercantile capitalism — became increasingly untenable when a new economic policy of 'neomercantilism' came into effect. In addition to this, Habermas (ibid.) informs the reader how this new economic policy went hand-in-hand with what he describes as being a 'refeudalization' of society. For Habermas, it was these two interrelated processes that would ultimately have a significant (and detrimental) impact upon the critical efficacy of the bourgeois public sphere.

In order to make sense of what the interrelated processes of 'neomercantilism' and 'refeudalization' entail, along with how they were intimately linked with the social-structural transformation of the bourgeois public sphere, Habermas (1991: 142) informs us that:

> ... in the long run, state intervention in the sphere of society found its counterpart in the *transfer of public functions to private corporate bodies*. Likewise, the opposite process of *a substitution of state authority by the power of society was connected to the extension of public authority over sectors of the private realm* [emphasis added].

What this then means in relation to the unprecedented "public/private" split that Habermas had previously identified as being such a key component in the formation of the bourgeois public sphere, is that the very distinction between "public" and "private" could no longer be usefully applied (Amiradakis, 2019: 156). The primary reason as to why this was the case is explicitly due to the fact that private powers in society were starting to assume an increasing amount of influence and authority upon those functions/institutions which had, hitherto, operated exclusively within the public domain[177].

[177] It is in this regard that Habermas (1991: 142) makes it clear that as a direct result of the increasing dominance that private interests began to play within society and its public domain, there emerged a corresponding need in relation to the state which was subsequently required to intervene in private matters. As such, Habermas (1991: 144) goes on to note that the more society became 'transparent as a mere nexus of coercive and privatised constraints, *the more urgent became the need for a strong state*' [emphasis added]. According to Habermas' (1991: 222) analysis, such a series of developments ultimately resulted in the emergence of a social-welfare state, which brought with it a number of additional complications that he would go on to interrogate and explore in many of his later works (cf. Habermas (1986) *The new obscurity: The crisis of the welfare state and the exhaustion of utopian energies*; Habermas (1992) *Legitimation Crisis*; Habermas (1996) *Between Facts and Norms* and Habermas (2003) *The Theory of Communicative Action: Volume 2*). While the emergence of the social-welfare state brought with it a number of complications and challenges for contemporary society that are indeed worthy of further critical investigation and exploration, for the purposes of this investigation, we will limit our field of inquiry to exactly how the increasing amount of private influence

In light of such developments, Habermas maintains that there was a significant blurring between what was to be understood as being "private" and "public", and as such, society itself was beginning to undergo a massive transition in terms of how it was to conduct its affairs. It is directly in this regard that Habermas (1991: 142) asserts that within the context of neomercantile capitalism, a 'repoliticized social sphere' emerged that would ultimately lead to the:

> *disintegration of that specific portion of the private realm* within which private people, assembled to constitute a public and to regulate those aspects of their commerce with each other that were of general concern, namely, *the public sphere in its liberal form* [emphasis added].

In order to provide the reader with some clarity as to how it is that the disintegration of the bourgeois public sphere unfolded, along with how it is that the policy of neomercantilism played a definitive role in this regard, Habermas (191: 143) informs the reader that in the last third of the 19th century, the policy of robust competition within the commodity market — which mercantile capitalism had previously advocated and endorsed — became increasingly restricted. So much so in fact, that, according to Habermas (ibid.), these restrictions and limitations:

> *came to prevail on an international scale*, be it through the *concentration of capital* and the *merger of larger companies enjoying oligopolistic positions* or through a *dividing up of the market* by way of price and production agreements [emphasis added].

Elaborating upon the increasing amount of restriction (and underlying sense of domination) that was being placed upon the levels of competition within the economic context of neomercantilism, along with the increasing inability of the state to intervene in this matter, Habermas (1991: 144) informs the reader that:

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upon the public realm would ultimately come to undermine the public sphere and the various factors that contributed to both its formation and facilitation. It is this line of argumentation that will be pursued as Habermas's concern about the ever-encroaching reach of private interests into the public domain can still be said to be a major concern in today's society and as such, it is to be considered as being of contemporary relevance.

> ... under conditions of free competition and independent prices [as had been advocated by the proponents of mercantile capitalism], no one was expected to be able to gain so much power as to attain a position that gave him [or her] complete control over someone else.

However, under the conditions of 'imperfect competition and dependent prices' (ibid.) — themselves fostered and accentuated by the policies of neomercantilism — social power became concentrated in private hands which invariably brought with it an array of additional complications and challenges that "post-mercantile society" was ultimately forced to confront (*cf.* Smith, A., Krueger, A. and Cannan, E. (2003) pp. 164 - 196). It is thus as a result of such commercial restrictions and systems of economic control that Habermas (1991: 144) goes on to aver how private society was ultimately forced to relinquish

> even the flimsiest pretense of being a sphere in which the influence of power was suspended[178].

As a direct consequence of the promulgation of these policies of privatisation under the system of neomercantilism, Habermas (1991: 144) alerts the reader to the fact that the division between state and civil society — which the bourgeoisie and the liberals had so fervently defended in order to bring about the public sphere — eventually broke down. Habermas (1991: 148) elaborates upon this particular matter when he asserts that:

> From the midst of the publicly relevant sphere of civil society was formed a repoliticized social sphere in which state and societal institutions fused into a single functional complex that could no longer be differentiated according to criteria of public and private.

[178] It is interesting to note that within this aspect of Habermas's (1991: 142 - 143) socio-historical reconstruction, particularly via his inclusion of the notion of neomercantile capitalism, he introduces yet another major dialectical component into his analysis which he believes played a crucial role in the subsequent decline of the bourgeois public sphere - namely the transformative and mutative nature of capitalism itself. Thus, while mercantile capitalism brought with it a certain amount of possibility/potentiality which allowed for the bourgeois public sphere to emerge in the first place (as Habermas's socio-historical reconstruction has so vividly explicated up until this point), so too would the new economic system of neomercantilism bring with it its own set of unique attributes, which would then invariably have a significant impact on how society — and its public sphere — was to operate. More on this new dialectical element of neomercantilism and its variegated impact upon society will be explored in this section of the chapter.

In light of the collapse of the "dividing line" that had once so effectively separated the realm of the private from that of the public, the next important question that needs to be raised at this point in our analysis revolves around the following pertinent matter: What effect(s) did such profound socio-economic changes have upon bourgeois society and its public sphere, along with those remarkable factors that had contributed to the emergence and facilitation of a (once) vibrant and active public sphere?

Habermas (1991: 151-152) begins to elaborate on this topic by elucidating how, to the degree that state and society permeated each other, the institution of the conjugal family became increasingly 'dissociated from its connection with processes of social reproduction' (Amiradakis, 2019: 156). What this then means, is that as a direct result of the penetration of the private into the public, the bourgeois family evolved more into a consumer of income and leisure time than an active agent of personal socialisation (Habermas, 1991: 156). As a result, Habermas (1991: 156) avers that the private autonomy of the individual — that critical faculty which Kant had so vehemently lauded and defended in his 'What is the Enlightenment?' essay — was maintained 'not so much in functions of control as in *functions of consumption*' [emphasis added].

According to Habermas's (1991: 156) critical estimation of this unprecedented situation, what this ultimately meant for bourgeois society — and its public sphere — is that the family effectively lost its 'definitive power' (in a literal sense) as an agent of personal internalisation and was, as result, decreasingly relied upon as the primary agency of society. It is in this regard that Habermas (1991: 156) goes on to note how it is that:

> The frequently invoked dismantling of paternal authority, that is, the tendency toward the leveling of the intra-familial authority structure ... was also part of this configuration. *To a greater extent individual family members are now socialized by extrafamilial authorities* ... [and] *anonymous forces outside the home* [emphasis added].

What this then meant for the bourgeois individual's sense of critical subjectivity — which Habermas (1991: 156) has previously identified as being so crucial in order for the critical-rational deliberative process to effectively unfold — was that the family retained only 'the

illusion of an inner domain of intensified privacy', and as such, its capacity aligned towards what can be described as the "cultivation-of-a-critical-self" was severely truncated.

According to Habermas (1991: 159), this condition of truncation arose explicitly due to the fact that:

> to the extent that private people withdrew from their socially oriented roles into the purely "personal" ones of their noncommittal use of leisure time *they came directly under the influence of semi-public authorities*, *without the protection of an institutionally protected domestic domain*. *Leisure behaviour supplies the key to the floodlit privacy of the new sphere, to the externalization of what is declared to be the inner life* [emphasis added].

It is in this regard that Habermas's analysis can be said to both confirm and extrapolate from the critical observations made by Horkheimer (1972) in his critical essay titled 'Authority and The Family' in which he highlights how, as capitalism has expanded and mutated, an ever-greater need has emerged to critically investigate the effects that contemporary consumer culture and its technological apparatus is having upon the individual (Amiradakis, 2019: 157). According to Horkheimer (1972: 59) this is explicitly due to the fact that as the family's pivotal role as an agent of socialisation has invariably waned, the various cultural apparatuses of contemporary society have emerged as an increasingly adept 'new power' - particularly in 'shaping the psychic make-up' of the contemporary individual (Amiradakis, 2019: 157). It is in this regard that Horkheimer (1972: 58) notes:

> When men are reacting to economic changes ... these characteristics cannot be explained by immediate present circumstances and without a knowledge of the contemporary psychic make-up. *But if cultural factors in the social process as a whole (into which they are inextricably interwoven) acquire a proper significance because they operate as characteristic traits of individuals at a given time*, *all the more do the institutions which are grounded in such traits and help to confirm and continue them have a definite even if relative life of their own* [emphasis added].

Horkheimer (1972: 123) continues along this critical trajectory by noting:

> The rhythms and forms in which the economic factor makes its influence felt in particular types of family are numerous and diverse ... *The cultural forces which mediate between economy and family determine the family type, as well as how the general rule is applied to particular cases and what inhibiting forces it encounters*[179] ... [emphasis added].

What Habermas's (1991) critical analysis thus aims to highlight for the reader is that — much like the critical positions of Horkheimer and Adorno (1997) as espoused in their Culture Industry thesis, Marcuse (2002) and his notion of One-Dimensionality along with Fromm's (2013) concern pertaining to the growing sense of Automaton Conformity in the modern world — he clearly believes that with the rise of consumptive behaviour in modern society, the leisure/culture industry has managed to assume a disproportionate amount of influence and control within both the private and the public domain (Amiradakis, 2019: 157). As such, the role that the family had once played in shaping the critical subjectivity of the individual (thus acting as a much-needed buffer against which external influences could be critically evaluated and assessed) was severely — if not fatally — undermined.

It is directly in this regard that Habermas (1991: 159-160) asserts how, as a result of the growing dominance of consumerism, the domain of leisure rapidly began to:

> *take the place of that kind of public sphere in the world of letters* ... [which was effectively being] ... *replaced by the pseudo-public or sham private world of culture consumption* [emphasis added].

Echoing the critical sentiments of his Frankfurt School predecessors then, Habermas (1991: 161) makes it clear for the reader that within this 'sham private world of culture

[179] In relation to how this critical sentiment — shared by both Habermas and Horkheimer — has been carried over into the 21st century, Amiradakis (2019: 157) asserts that one need only reflect upon what Deuze (2011: 137) has previously highlighted for us in the third chapter of this investigation - namely, that life in the 21st century is all about discovering ways to deal with perpetual change, whether it be at home, at work or at play. As a result of this, these crucial aspects of human existence have converged in and through the individual's persistent exposure to, use of and immersion in digital media platforms. Deuze (ibid.) therefore explicitly argues that it is in fact life lived in, rather than with, the various forms of digital media available to the public that can now be defined as the ontological benchmark for the modern individual. As such, and in direct accordance with what both Habermas and Horkheimer have argued, Deuze (ibid.) emphasises that it is the modern individual's relationship with new digital technologies of social networking and social media that then seems to be a — if not the — defining element in their psychic make-up (Amiradakis, 2019: 157).

consumption', while the 'individuated satisfaction of needs' may very well be achieved in a supposedly 'public fashion' — i.e. the company of others — such an assembly of consumers did not result in the emergence of a critical and rationally engaged public sphere.

According to Habermas's (1991: 161) critical estimation, this is primarily due to the fact that:

> when the laws of the market governing the sphere of commodity exchange and of social labour also pervaded the sphere reserved for private people as a public, *rational-critical debate had a tendency to be replaced by consumption*, *and the web of public communication unravelled into acts of individuated reception* ... [emphasis added].

Taking into account such an isolating and estranging series of developments, Habermas (1991: 162) ardently maintains that circulating in the consumer-centric context of the late 19th century (and no doubt beyond), the literary patterns that were to emerge evinced nothing more than:

> the explicit *production secrets of a patented culture industry* whose products, spread publicly by the mass media, *bring forth in their consumers' consciousness* [nothing but] *the illusion of bourgeois privacy* ... [emphasis added].

Such a statement is to be regarded as being of immense import in relation to the critical outcomes of this particular chapter due to the fact that, for Habermas (1991: 162), the very notion of 'an audience-oriented subjectivity', that was both critical and reflexive in its constitution — which, as we shall recall, had once represented nothing less than the bourgeois ideal type itself — was effectively transformed into:

> a *conduit for social forces channelled into the conjugal family's inner space by way of a public sphere that the mass media has transmogrified into a sphere of culture consumption*[180] [emphasis added].

[180] Commenting on the increasing sense of isolation and estrangement from one's family that the individual experiences as a direct result of the highly individuated consumptive practices associated with modern society, along with the various technologies of the mass media that facilitate such endeavours, Amiradakis (2019: 157) directs the reader to the work of Turkle (2010: 146) who argues that within the digitalised milieu of the 21st century, the manufacturers and disseminators of cultural content are now taking it: 'as a given that cell phones, texting, instant messaging, email, and online gaming have created social isolation'. They have therefore adapted and tailored their strategies of marketing "cultural dissemination" in order to reach

In light of such a critical orientation, it becomes fairly evident that according to Habermas's (1991) estimation, the cultural artefacts that were being — and still are — appropriated within the consumer-centric context of neomercantile capitalism were not to be regarded as being either innocuous or insubstantial in terms of the effects that they were to wield upon the individual and his/her critical-rational faculties. Rather, due to their predetermined, prefabricated and invasive format, it was these very cultural artefacts themselves that also contributed to the denigration of the public sphere itself, as well as the pivotal notion of a "critical-reflexive subjectivity" that was supposed to be inherent to all of its (i.e. the public sphere's) participants.

To emphasise this particular aspect of his analysis, Habermas (1991: 165) indicates that at the close of the 18th century — when mercantile capitalism was still in full effect — the public of the educated strata expanded to include sections of the self-employed petty bourgeoisie. Thus, during this period within bourgeois society's history:

> retailers, who as shopkeepers were usually excluded from bourgeois clubs, *in many places established their own associations*; still more widespread were the trade societies which *took the form of reading societies* [emphasis added] (ibid.).

Habermas (1991: 171) continues by noting how at this time in European history:

> the bourgeois reading public *was able to cultivate in the intimate exchange of letters* (as well as in the reading of the literature of psychological novels and novellas engendered by it) *a subjectivity capable of relating to literature and oriented toward a public sphere* [emphasis added].

It is as a result of such educational and institutional expansion that Habermas (1991: 166) goes on to aver that:

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individuals who now — as a matter of social protocol — '*turn away from their families to focus attention on their screens*' [emphasis added] (Turkle, 2010: 146). According to Amiradakis (2019: 157), such an observation then vividly highlights how Habermas's critical concerns pertaining to the matter of highly individuated forms of consumption, and how such practices have managed to estrange the individual from his/her family and wider community in which he/she may operate, have evinced themselves in the digitalised milieus of the 21st century.

> the 'people' themselves were brought up to the level of culture - *culture was not lowered to that of the masses* [emphasis added].

Corresponding to what Habermas identifies as being the educational and institutional expansion that occurred under the auspices of mercantile capitalism, he (1991: 166) then goes on to point out that as the market later developed and expanded according to the dictates of neomercantilism — both in its economic and technological orientation — so as to reach an ever-increasing number of people within bourgeois society, one also had to start distinguishing between the different effects that such developments were having upon cultural (re)production and consumption. In particular, Habermas (1991: 166) makes it clear that when critically evaluating the impact that the market was having upon bourgeois culture, one is required to make the crucial distinction as whether or not the market managed to create:

> an initial access to cultural goods for a public and then, in keeping with the cheapening of the cost of the products, *economically* eased the access for an ever-larger public; or whether it adapted the content of the cultural goods in order to suit its own needs in such a way that it also *facilitated* access for broad strata *psychologically* [author's emphasis].

Amiradakis (2019: 157) notes that in light of the crucial "economic-psychological" distinction that Habermas has outlined above, one is able to see how — at least implicitly — he (i.e. Habermas) is invoking and pitting the more optimistic views of Benjamin (and Kracauer) against those of the ever-wary Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and Fromm in order to ascertain exactly what kind of effect(s) consumer culture (and its associated technologies) was having upon the cultural material that was being disseminated along with the consciousness of the public that was required to consume it (ibid.).

There can be little measure of doubt that when having to decide into which camp of thinkers he positions himself, Habermas (1991: 166) clearly sides with the more pessimistic of his Frankfurt School predecessors - i.e. Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and Fromm. This is made clear to the reader when he goes on to aver that under the economic imperatives of

neomercantilism, culture itself became a commodity - not only in form but also in content (Amiradakis, 2019: 157).

According to Habermas (1991: 166), this transformation of "culture-into-a-commodity" is explicitly due to the fact that as a direct rise of consumerism within contemporary society, culture was effectively being:

> emptied of elements whose appreciation *required a certain amount of training* - whereby the 'accomplished' appropriation once again heightened the appreciative ability itself. It was not merely standardization as such that established an inverse relationship between the commercialization of cultural goods and their complexity, but that *special preparation of products that made them consumption-ready, which is to say, guaranteed an enjoyment without being tied to stringent presuppositions* [emphasis added].

Importantly, for Habermas (1991: 166), this 'guaranteed' sense of satisfaction on the part of the consumer is to be regarded as being 'entirely inconsequential' as he firmly maintains that it is only through 'serious involvement' with culture — as it presumably existed prior to the introduction of neomercantile capitalism — that one is actually able to cultivate those cognitive facilities that are fundamental for one's development as a critical-rational being. Habermas (ibid.) therefore clearly believes that the relative ease and speed with which the consumption of mass culture takes place leaves 'no lasting trace' upon the consuming individual and as such, it can therefore be said to afford one with nothing more than a kind of soporific experience which is '*not cumulative but regressive*' [emphasis added].

Bauman (2007: 46) both corroborates and extends this critical insight of Habermas's by noting:

> [w]hile consumer society rests its case on the promise to gratify human desires to an extent which no other society in the past could reach or even dream of reaching, the promise of satisfaction remains seductive only as long as the desire stays *ungratified*; more importantly, as long as the client is not '*completely* satisfied'; that is, as long as the desires that motivated and set in motion the search for gratification and prompted

consumerist experiments are not believed to have been truly and fully gratified [author's emphasis].

What Habermas and Bauman's critical views seem to reinforce is the expository insight that contemporary consumer society is — to a large extent — inherently founded upon duplicitous grounds within which cultural artifice (as opposed to artefact) is systematically employed so as to lull the individual into a false sense of consumer-filled bliss. All the while, such a process inimically manages to undermine the individual's faculties of critical thought while also isolating/estranging them from their wider network of social contacts (i.e. family, friends and wider communities) that can — potentially — act as a critical buffer from where this pernicious precedent can be resisted[181].

In what appears to be a direct criticism of both Benjamin and Kracauer, Habermas (1991: 167) avers that the consumerist-oriented strategies associated with the "post-mercantile" period of bourgeois society, particularly those pertaining to cultural dissemination and reproduction — along with the manifold technologies that were required to actualise them — have indubitably lowered the 'entrance requirements' associated with the process of cultural exposure and edification (Amiradakis, 2019: 157-158). According to Habermas (1991: 167), such a "lowering" of requirements has taken place primarily on a *psychological level*, in such a way that:

the *literature* [of consumer culture] *itself has to be tailored to the convenience and ease of a reception of fewer requisites and weaker consequences*. ... [As such] it becomes clear to see how it is that *the social-psychological criterion of a culture of consumers ... goes together with the sociological criterion of a destruction of the public sphere* [emphasis added].

[181] In light of the comments made by both Habermas (1991) and Bauman (2007), one is able to see exactly how the system of consumer capitalism effectively managed to undermine both the idea and ideology that had once underpinned the bourgeois public sphere (as listed above). Such a claim can be made due to the fact that their critical analyses delineate how the strict emphasis that had once been placed upon notions such as rational, critical and reflexive interpersonal discussion and communication within the public sphere itself were being quickly replaced by isolated acts of consumption, coupled with a withdrawal from socio-politically based activities. In addition to the above, Bauman's (2007) remarks manage to highlight how this issue has moved forward into the 21st century, and as such, the problem(s) that contemporary society now faces in relation to the above can be regarded as being of key concern should the notion of a vibrant and active public sphere still be regarded as being of social import (Amiradakis, 2019: 152).

It is in this critical vein of thought that Habermas (1991: 171) goes on to decisively delineate his disdain for the modern press and its associated technologies of reproduction — when operating under the economic imperatives of neomercantile capitalism — when he avers that:

> Inasmuch as the mass media today strip away the literary husks from that kind of bourgeois self-interpretation and utilize them as marketable forms for the public services provided in a culture of consumers, the original meaning is reversed. *The public sphere itself becomes privatized in the consciousness of the consuming public; indeed, the public sphere becomes the sphere for the publicizing of private biographies* [emphasis added].

From a socio-historical perspective then, Habermas's (1991: 162) reconstruction aims to make it clear that since the middle of the 19th century, those literary institutions (such as the coffee houses, salons and table-societies) along with the cultural artefacts that underpinned them (i.e. books, magazines, journals, newspapers), were being severely weakened and undermined. What is so important about this particular insight, is the fact that it was these very institutions — and the cultural artefacts with which they were preoccupied — that ensured the relative coherence and cohesiveness of the public as a critical-debating entity. Thus, once these institutions and artefacts started to give way, there was inevitably going to be an inimical impact upon the bourgeois public sphere as its foundational link to the literary public sphere was inherently tainted and undermined.

As a corollary to the above, what is also to be regarded as being of immense import in relation to the critical outcomes of this chapter, is that according to Habermas's socio-historical investigation, with the decline of the literary public sphere, another perturbing situation emerged whereby the preceding forms of bourgeois sociability (which can be described as being critically engaging and highly invested):

> found substitutes that have one tendency in common despite their regional diversity: *abstinence from literary and political debate* (Habermas, 1991: 163) [emphasis added].

While a critical thinker such as Benjamin was of the more optimistic opinion that with an increased sense of reach on the part of the press, coupled by the technological

advancements that would make its (i.e. the press's) associated media more accessible to the public, such a technologically progressive scenario would — potentially — have a liberating, edifying and empowering effect upon the public body, Habermas's critical reconstruction tends to go in the exact opposite direction (Amiradakis, 2019: 157). Thus, according to Habermas's (1991: 163) understanding, with this 'new model' of sociability, the 'convivial discussion' that had once taken place among bourgeois individuals rapidly gave way to 'noncommittal group activities'.

It is in this critical vein of thought that Habermas (1991: 163) — contra Benjamin and Kracauer— argues that when one is to consider the impact that the later technologies of mass communication (such as film and radio) had in relation to the various form(s) of sociability they were to promote (or inhibit):

> The characteristic relationship of a *privacy oriented toward an audience* [that] *was* also *no longer present when people went to the movies together, listened to the radio, or watched TV* [emphasis added].

Amiradakis (2019: 158) notes that according to Habermas's (1991: 163) critical estimation, the primary reason as to why the crucial notion of 'an audience-oriented subjectivity' no longer managed to evince itself within the technologically-mediated consumptive practices of the modern individual is due to the fact that:

> The leisure activities of the culture consuming public ... take place within a social climate, and *they do not require any further discussions*. *The private form of appropriation removed the ground for a communication about what has been appropriated*[182] [emphasis added].

[182] While Habermas (1991: 163) is quick to point out that such 'noncommittal group activities' indubitably managed to assume fixed forms of 'informal sociability', he nevertheless maintains that all of these activities lacked that 'specific institutional power' that had been so pivotal and influential with regard to the formation and maintenance of the bourgeois public sphere along with an active and politically engaged public body (Amiradakis, 2019: 158). Zygmunt Bauman (2007: 146) extends this critical assessment of how a profound sentiment of apathy (both political and literary) on the part of the individual has continued well into the 21st century when he goes on to note that: '*There is little doubt that the growth of consumer activism is bound up with the decline of traditional forms of political participation and social engagemen*t' [emphasis added]. Following from such a critical remark, Bauman (2007: 147) argues that what one may rightfully doubt, however, is whether consumerism has managed to bring about new forms of social engagement that can prove to be as effective in laying the foundations of social solidarity as the 'traditional forms' used to be (Amiradakis, 2019: 158). It is in this regard that Turkle (2011: 154) alerts us to the fact, according to her critical

Habermas (1991: 163) then goes on to point out — in a manner that may initially seem somewhat paradoxical — that in spite of the rise in such privatised and individuated forms of cultural appropriation, along with the sense of isolation it has induced within the contemporary individual, there has nevertheless been a continuation (if not an increase) of the tendency toward rational public debate within the context of consumer society. It is in this regard that Habermas (ibid.) notes how all of these 'so-called debates' have (keeping true to the spirit of consumerism) been formally organised, compartmentalised and neatly packaged for the sake of convenience. While it may then seem as if Habermas is describing a salubrious turn of events that has taken place within the context of consumer culture, he is quick to alert the reader to the fact that these contemporary 'debates' have been transformed from their rational-critical deliberative predecessors in a single, yet crucial way, namely that they now assume the form of a consumer item.

What Habermas (1991: 164) means to highlight for the reader by way of this critical insight is that the very act of discussion and deliberation has — under neomercantile, consumer capitalism — now managed to develop somewhat unashamedly into a business venture. As such, Habermas (1991: 164) argues that these practices have now become:

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assessment of the contemporary situation, that the digitalised, networked and hyper-connected life of modern society has given rise to a number of 'unsettling isolations of the tethered self' which are actually preparing the denizen of the modern world for 'relationships with less' (Amiradakis, 2019: 158). As such, Turkle (ibid.) argues that the modern individual is much less likely to meet others on a face-to-face basis and they are certainly less likely to join social organisations. Much like Deuze (2011) has previously argued then, Turkle (2011: 155) avers that as a direct result of the tethered nature in which the contemporary individual orientates his/her existence, humanity is fast approaching the emergence of 'a new state of the self' which 'presumes certain entitlements' including how it can '*absent itself from its physical surround - including the people in it*' [emphasis added]. This then clearly does not bode well in terms of the facilitation of a cohesive sense of sociability on the part of the public (Amiradakis, 2019: 157). Morozov (2011: 190) elaborates upon such concerns when he goes on to note that how: 'The Internet, with its promise of fostering "virtual communities" on the cheap and widely advertised by the earlier generation of cyber-utopians as something of a panacea to many of modern democracy's ills, has driven the costs of joining such groups to zero [i.e. economic facilitation]. *But it's hard to imagine how it could, all by itself, help cultivate a deep commitment to serious causes*' [emphasis added]. This is due to the fact that for Morozov (2011: 190), '... those charmed by the promise of digital activism *often have a hard time distinguishing it from "slacktivism" ... which all too often makes online activists feel useful and important* [i.e. psychological facilitation] *while having preciously little political impact*' [emphasis added]. More on the notion of political activism within the digital domain will be explored in greater detail in the final chapter of this investigation. At this point, suffice it to say that the critical views of Bauman, Turkle and Morozov manage to both ratify and extend Habermas's (1991) concerns as outlined above, along with emphasising how Habermas's (1991: 166) important "economic-psychological" distinction (pertaining to the dissemination and consumption of cultural artefacts) has continued to have an immense impact upon the contemporary individual's sense of agency and involvement within the wider context in which they are required to operate (Amiradakis, 2019: 157).

formalized whereby the presentation of positions and counter-positions is *bound to certain prearranged rules of the game*[183] [emphasis added].

Habermas (1991: 164) then goes on to point out that while such forms of "pre-packaged deliberation" have lost their critical-rational force as a direct result of their formulaic nature, from a social-psychological perspective they nevertheless fulfil an immensely important political function within the context of consumer capitalism, namely, that of becoming a 'tranquilizing substitute for action' on the part of the public[184] (Amiradakis, 2019: 157-158).

Keeping this array of critical observations in mind, it can be asserted that — much like his ever-wary predecessors at the Frankfurt School — Habermas's (1991: 165) analysis aims to highlight how, when consumerism came into full effect:

the laws of the market ... *penetrated into the very substance of the works themselves* [i.e. these debates/arguments/discussions] and *have become inherent in them as formative laws* [emphasis added].

In order to highlight exactly how such a deeply penetrative and degenerative process managed to effectively manifest itself within the cultural artefacts of consumer society, Habermas (1991: 168) refers the reader to the case of the book - which he identifies as being 'the bourgeois means of education par excellence'. Habermas does so by highlighting the significant (technical and technological) transformations that the book — and its various

[183] According to Amiradakis (2019: 157), one need only take a look at the widely televised (and now digitally broadcast) debates and public addresses that occur amongst politicians, presidents and party leaders during election time — whether it be local or abroad — in order to appreciate exactly what Habermas is referring to with regard to the vacuous, vapid and premeditated nature of these supposedly "critical encounters", along with how this sentiment of formulaic deliberation and debate has been thoroughly reinforced and strengthened in the 21st century via the aid of digital mass-communicational technology (*cf.* Margetts, H. (2006) "The Cyber Party" and Margetts et al. (2009) for more insight into the matter of how party politics have developed and transformed in the digital age).

[184] Morozov's (2011: 189-192) critical insights pertaining to how it is that there has been an increasing trend towards 'slacktivism' — as opposed to what can be described as legitimate forms of 'digital activism' — as a greater number of supposedly "politically orientated" social networking platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and even Instagram) have come into effect are particularly telling (Amiradakis, 2019: 159). It in this regard that Morozov's argument manages to demonstrate not only how Habermas's critical concerns pertaining to the emergence of a 'tranquilizing substitute for action' need to be taken seriously, but also how such tranquilizing substitutes have evinced themselves — on a particularly massive scale, as Facebook alone now boasts having over 2.27 billion monthly active users (cf. https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide) — within the digital domains of the 21st century (Amiradakis, 2019: 159).

literary permutations including newspapers, magazines, journals, etc. — underwent in terms of visual presentation, content selection, physical appearance and product dissemination as the policies of neomercantile capitalism came into full effect, along with the wider impact that such consumer-based changes had upon society and its inhabitants.

Habermas (1991: 168) therefore alerts the reader to the various techniques and strategies that were adopted by publishers and distributors in order to increase the sales of their respective products. As such, Habermas (ibid.) notes that:

> the techniques of the cartoon, news picture, and human-interest story grew out of the repertory of the weekly press, *which even earlier had presented its news and fictional stories in a way that was as optically effective as it was undemanding on the literary level* [emphasis added].

It is in light of what Habermas perceives as a "watering-down" of the literary content in question, via the supposedly "user-friendly" manner in which publishers decided to present their material to the public, that he (1991: 169) goes on to argue — much like Benjamin (1939) had done several decades before him — that:

> the mass press was based on the commercialization of the participation in the public sphere on the part of broad strata *designed predominantly to give the masses in general access to the public sphere* [emphasis added].

While such an "amplification of accessibility" may (plausibly) be perceived as being a positive development for modern consumerist society (as Benjamin has actually argued), Habermas (1991: 169) is quick to point out that:

> [t]his expanded public sphere, however, *lost its political character to the extent that the means of "psychological facilitation" could become an end in itself for a commercially fostered consumer attitude*[185]. In relation to the expansion of the news-reading public,

[185] It is in this regard that one can argue how Habermas's analysis resonates rather strongly with what Marshall McLuhan (2001: 16) would later explore, in particular how, as a result of the developments made in the field of mass-communication technology, 'the medium' through which content is depicted and transmitted (which now includes the realm of social media) effectively becomes 'the message' itself (2001: 7). Following from the critical insights of Habermas and his Frankfurt School predecessors, Amiradakis (2016a: 250) argues that

therefore, *the press that submitted political issues to critical discussion in the long run lost its influence* [emphasis added].

Habermas (1991: 169) continues along this critical trajectory by informing the reader that as consumerist culture continued to progress in further accordance with the dictates of neomercantile capitalism, the consumption of culture became — to an increasingly high degree — detached from 'classical literary vehicles' (such as the book). It is in this regard that Habermas (ibid.) argues that:

nonverbal communications or those that, if they had not been translated into picture and sound altogether, were facilitated by optical and acoustic support, replaced to a greater or lesser extent the classical forms of literary production.

As such, Habermas (1991: 169) notes how it is that by means of 'variegated type and layout', along with 'ample illustration', reading had effectively been made a great deal easier for the general public. However, at the same time:

its field of spontaneity in general is restricted by serving up the material as a ready-made convenience, patterned and predigested[186] [emphasis added] (Habermas (1991: 169).

What is also of immense importance with regard to this aspect of Habermas's critical analysis is the fact that rather than confining his critical analysis to the realm of the merely theoretical, Habermas (1991: 169-170) provides the reader with some concrete examples of how he believes this sense of impoverishment — with regard to the reception of literary

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McLuhan (2001: 7) is one of the first modern thinkers to take seriously the fact that modern media technologies are not innocuous when it comes to transmitting content, but are rather to be regarded as 'staples and natural resources' that have an immense effect upon the 'entire psychic life of the community'. For McLuhan, such a development within modern society is to be taken very seriously as it has indubitably affected the way in which the denizen of modernity lives, thinks, acts and relates to the other (Amiradakis, 2016a: 250).

[186] As shall be delineated in the final chapter of this investigation, Habermas's concerns pertaining to the tailoring of cultural content for the sake of consumerist convenience has been dramatically amplified and bolstered within the digital milieu of the 21st century. Such a worrying situation can be said to have evinced itself in relation to how the algorithms that facilitate and oversee the operations that occur on the Internet and social media platforms are, to an increasing extent, determining exactly what content/information the individual user will be subjected to. According to the critical Habermasian analysis as delineated above, not only does this process of content tailoring 'for the sake of convenience' lower the possibility for cultivation-of-the-critical-self to occur, but it also increases the individuated forms of reception/consumption that Habermas has referred to above - thus undermining the possibility for interpersonal deliberation and discussion to unfold.

content — managed to evince itself via the means of the technologically established press. He does so by noting that, with regard to a classical literary vehicle such as the newspaper:

> ... *critical debate disappears*. ... *Public affairs, social problems, economic matters, education, and health ... are not only pushed into the background by 'immediate reward news'* (comics, corruption, accidents, disasters, sports, recreation, social events, and human interest) *but ... are also actually read less and more rarely*[187] [emphasis added].

As a result of the increasing sense of impoverishment arising from what may be dubbed as the "consumerist condition", Habermas (1991: 170) believes that the news has generally come to assume some sort of recognisable guise and is actually made to resemble a narrative - from its format down to stylistic detail (Amiradakis, 2019: 159). As such, and starkly preceding the public outcry against the rise of 'fake news' within contemporary society by nearly 50 years, Habermas presciently argues how, with the development and growth of mass communication technologies, along with the consumerist-based policies that these technologies were designed to actualise, a perturbing situation arose whereby 'the rigorous distinction between fact and fiction is ever more frequently abandoned'[188]. So much so in fact that for Habermas (1991: 170), within the context of consumer-centricism:

> News and reports and even editorial opinions are *dressed up with all the accoutrements of entertainment literature*, whereas on the other hand the *belletrist contributions aim for*

[187] Much of what Habermas outlines in this regard can be said to still be in full effect, if not more so, with regard to the fragmented, disjointed and highly selective manner in which the digitalised news in the 21st century is currently being projected and displayed to the public. While more on this particular aspect of Habermas's critical analysis will be explored in the final chapter of this investigation when this critical analysis is applied to the digitalised milieu of the 21st century, at this stage, one can refer to Ricardo Gandour's (2016) *A New Information Environment: how digital fragmentation is shaping the way we produce and consume news* to see exactly how it is that Habermas's cautionary remarks which arose during the early 1960's are just as relevant — if not more so — in the 21st century.

[188] According to Kalsnes (2018), in an article aptly titled 'Fake News', while the phenomenon referred to as 'fake news' is not to be regarded as a novel concept, the American presidential election in 2016 did manage to place the topic of 'Fake News' squarely onto the international agenda (Amiradakis, 2019: 159). Kalsnes (2018) continues by noting that while one can plausibly argue that manipulation, disinformation, falseness and rumours have existed as long as humans have communicated, she nevertheless goes on to aver — in direct accord with what Habermas outlined above — that new communication technologies have allowed for new ways to produce, distribute and consume fake news, which makes it increasingly difficult to differentiate what information should be trusted from that which should not be. As such, Habermas' critical commentary regarding this matter can be described as being both prescient and highly worrying as this major issue seems to have proliferated rather alarmingly (rather than diminished) in the digital age of the 21st century (Amiradakis, 2019: 159). More on this rather perturbing situation shall be critically explored in the final chapter of this investigation.

> *the strictly "realistic" reduplication of reality "as it is" on the level of clichés* and thus, in turn, *erase the line between fiction and report*[189] [emphasis added].

Crucially, Habermas (1991: 170) then goes on to note that according to his critical analysis pertaining to this matter of the blurring between fact and fiction within the mainstream media, 'what has only managed to intimate itself in the daily press', has progressed at a 'more alarming rate in the newer media formats such as radio, film, and television'. It is in this regard that Habermas (ibid.) alerts the reader that:

> Under the common denominator of so-called human interest emerges the mixtum compositum of *a pleasant and at the same time convenient subject for entertainment that, instead of doing justice to reality, has a tendency to present a substitute more palatable for consumption and more likely to give rise to an impersonal indulgence in stimulating relaxation than to a public use of reason* [emphasis added].

According to Amiradakis (2019: 159), it is in light of such a critical appraisal of the impoverishment that the newer mediums of mass communication have introduced into society, that Habermas (1991: 170) goes on to argue how, by varying degrees, the

[189] With regard to this aspect of his analysis, Amiradakis (2019: 159) points out that Habermas echoes and reinforces the critical insights of Horkheimer and Adorno (1997: 124-125), particularly in relation to how they believe the culture industry — and its associated artefacts — has effectively managed to unravel and exploit that 'secret mechanism' associated with Kantian schematism (*cf.* Chapter 2). Amiradakis (2019: 159) continues by noting that according to Habermas's reading, this sentiment of exploitation ultimately leaves the modern individual with a profound sense of impoverishment - impoverished in the sense that the consuming individual's ability to critically identify and appreciate those edifying aspects of contemporary culture has been effectively undermined and circumvented. As such, the dividing line between reality and fiction has been significantly undermined, ultimately leaving the individual in a precarious position with regard to possible manipulation and disorientation (Amiradakis, 2019: 159). Thus, not only does the contemporary public sphere become the generator for consumption, its objects — i.e. the opinions and information circulating therein — themselves also become objects of consumption by individuals who are not able to relate to them in a critical way (Thomassen, 2010: 45). Hohendahl and Silberman (1979: 89-90) support such a reading of the inherent link between Habermas's critical analysis and that of Horkheimer and Adorno — as laid out in the Culture Industry thesis — when they go on to note that Habermas's theory regarding the decline and disintegration of the public sphere must be understood as an attempt to reformulate the dialectical relationship of the socio-cultural and political system. As such, for Habermas, the theory of the culture industry, as it was developed in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, needed historical grounding. The major difference between the classical analysis of mass culture by Horkheimer and Adorno and the description of disintegration in the public sphere by Habermas, according to Hohendahl and Silberman (1979: 89-90), is 'not so much at the level of subject matter and its critical evaluation as at the *level of its systematic starting point*' [emphasis added]. Thus, by providing the reader with a detailed analysis of how the public sphere found itself in decline and disintegration, Habermas effectively manages to ground the Culture Industry thesis within a very real set of socio-historical conditions that then provides the Culture Industry thesis with an additional measure of critical insight and impetus (Amiradakis, 2019: 159).

technological mediums of radio, film, and television all manage to insidiously rob the public of its use of reason by:

> reduc[ing] to a minimum the distance that a reader is forced to maintain toward the printed letter - *a distance that required the privacy of the appropriation as much as it made possible the publicity of a rational-critical exchange about what had been read* [emphasis added].

Unlike Benjamin then, who actively praises the technological advancements of modernity for effectively allowing different cultural phenomena to be displayed to an ever-increasing number of individuals, on an ever-larger scale and at a time that is more suitable and convenient for those individuals in question (Amiradakis, 2019: 159), Habermas (1991: 170) explicitly argues that:

> with the arrival of the *new media, the form of communication as such has changed; they have had an impact ... more penetrating ... than was ever possible for the press* [emphasis added],

and this change, in Habermas's critical estimation, has no doubt been to the detriment of society and its public sphere.

In order to emphasise this particular aspect of his critical analysis, Habermas (1991: 170) avers that the newer technologies of mass communication (i.e. radio, cinema and television), have managed to penetrate much deeper into the consciousness of the contemporary cultural-consumer than those printing-based technologies that preceded them. Importantly however, Habermas (1991: 171) argues that rather than providing the cultural-consumer with an effect that can be described as being either elucidating or enlightening:

> Programs sent by the new media *curtail the reactions of their recipients in a peculiar way*. *They draw the eyes and ears of the public under their spell but at the same time, by taking away its distance, place it under "tutelage," which is to say they deprive it of the*

opportunity to say something and to disagree. [As such] ... *[t]he world fashioned by the mass media is a public sphere in appearance only*[190] [emphasis added].

It is precisely in relation to Habermas's aforementioned critique of a consumer-based public sphere that his notion of the 'refeudalization of society' becomes very important (Amiradakis, 2019: 160). Via the aid of his critical analysis, which aims to explicate how the private interests of an elite few have come to play an ever-greater role within the public domain, along with how the public sphere was quickly being converted into a "watered-down platform of prevarication", Habermas (1991: 142) maintains that the public sphere of contemporary society has essentially been forced to take on characteristics it used to have in the feudal, pre-modern period (i.e. in the sense that the interests and views of a very small minority/elite have replaced — and subjugated — those of the majority).

It is thus via the notion of refeudalization that Habermas (1991: 195) details how the contemporary public sphere is actually 'involved in representation' — in the feudal sense of the term — due to the fact that:

producers of information and opinions are divided from the consumers of information and opinions, and in the sense that the *public sphere functions merely to acclaim the*

[190] Jackson (2008: 155) echoes (and then updates) Habermas's concern regarding the decline of the book and the dissemination of "watered-down" cultural content by arguing that the 'era of print' — with its 'crown jewel' being the book — indubitably gave us 'systems for nurturing unprecedented levels of discourse, analysis, and focus'. Jackson then goes on to pose the critical question as to whether or not 'in the free-flowing digital milieu will we find the stepping stones to these higher forms of attention and thought, or even the will to create them?' While not going so far as to provide the reader with an all-encompassing verdict, Jackson does aver — in a fashion very redolent of that of Habermas — that '[a]s we plunge into a new world of infinitely connectible and accessible information, we risk losing our means and ability to go beneath the surface, to think deeply'. Jackson is therefore clearly wary of the instantaneous manner in which a barrage of information, images, sounds and videos can bombard the consumer's sensory apparatus via the digital mediums of mass communication, as, in her opinion, such bombardment seems to possess the pernicious potential to undermine the critical thinking capacities of the individual whilst also removing the reflexive distance that is required for the critical appropriation of the material itself (Amiradakis, 2019: 160). In order to ratify this position, Jackson (2008: 163) refers the reader to a number of empirical studies that have been conducted with students who have become increasingly reliant upon the Internet and its seemingly endless reserves of digital resources. It is in this regard that Jackson argues that within the digital domain of the 21st century: 'Shifting attention to our vast online resources sounds natural, and yet faced with a tsunami of largely unsifted, unedited information, *students often don't know how to separate the wheat from the chaff nor how to thoughtfully use what they harvest*' [emphasis added] - with study after study verifying this worrisome fact (ibid.).

authority of particular opinions and pieces of information [emphasis added] (Thomassen, 2010: 46).

Thomassen (2010: 16) provides the reader with a clear example as to how this Habermasian notion of 'refeudalization' has actually entered into the public sphere when he examines the role that the 'intellectual' or the 'expert' has come to play within contemporary society. Thomassen (ibid.) therefore argues that prior to the refeudalization of the public sphere:

there was no sharp distinction between intellectuals – writers, critics and so on – and the wider public because *everybody addressed themselves to everybody* [emphasis added].

Such an observation then accords directly with what Benjamin (2006: 25) has previously noted, in particular, how the technologies of reproduction allowed the audience to take the position of a 'critic' as opposed to that of a passive observer. However, the major difference between Benjamin's position and the refeudalization thesis as advanced by Habermas, is that while Benjamin believed such an empowering transformation could — potentially — be extended to the newer technologies of mass reproduction, Habermas argues the exact opposite.

Thus, for Habermas, the more private interests and powers have come to feature within the public sphere, and as the technologies of mass-communication have continued to develop in direct accord with what these private interests demand, a sharp division has emerged between those who are in the position to produce the literature, information and opinions that are to be disseminated as opposed to those who are required to consume this material[191] (Amiradakis, 2019: 160). It is precisely in this regard that the intellectual or expert comes to represent the opinion of the public itself, and as such, the individual is completely removed from the equation of public deliberation and a private entity is inserted into his/her place.

[191] As shall be highlighted in the final chapter of this investigation, nowhere is this worrying scenario more evident than upon the various social media platforms of the contemporary epoch - particularly when one comes to understand how a few very key, powerful and wealthy online entities (such as Facebook and Google) are managing to both dictate and determine how information/news content is to be packaged for the consumer, what format such material shall assume, along with who such material shall be directed/delivered to. As such, Habermas's critical commentary regarding this matter can be regarded as being both highly prescient and incredibly important in our digitalised day and age.

Habermas's analysis pertaining to the notion of refeudalization therefore aims to highlight how, when one is to critically consider the position into which the contemporary consumer of opinion has been thrust, we can begin to appreciate exactly how these consumers have essentially been disempowered as they are largely transformed into passive receptors of information (and no doubt, propaganda masking itself as information). Habermas (1991: 175) emphasises this particular point by claiming how, the greater the levels of private interference within the public sphere, the more it (i.e. the public sphere):

> ... *assumes advertising functions*. The more it can be *deployed as a vehicle for political and economic propaganda*, the more it *becomes unpolitical* as a whole *and pseudo-privatized* [emphasis added].

To the extent that the contemporary consumer of opinion can claim that they are active, it is important to recall what Habermas's earlier analysis has alerted us to, namely, that within the consumer-centric context of modern society, consumers can only really be regarded as being 'active' in an individual capacity. What this then implies is that this revised notion of what it means to be "active" is not to be understood as being an exercise that is directed towards a larger sense of social engagement (Thomassen, 2010: 46).

While this aspect of Habermas's refeudalization critique clearly bolsters his aforementioned concerns pertaining to how, as the interests of various private parties have come to pervade the public domain, there has — more often than not — been a "watering-down" effect and undermining impact upon the critical faculties of the public, Amiradakis (2019: 160) avers that it is also crucial to be mindful of the fact that the notion of refeudalization takes on an immense amount of significance when gauged from a political perspective (Habermas, 1991: 211).

Thomassen (2010: 46) elaborates on why there is indubitably a political dimension to the Habermasian notion of refeudalization by emphasising how, as a direct result of this process of refeudalization, political elites, government, private organisations and corporations all try to manage – that is, manipulate – the public sphere (Amiradakis, 2016: 160). According to Habermas's (1991: 211 - 222) critical interpretation, more often than not these private

actors usually succeed in doing so due to the fact that within the refeudalized order, it tends to be:

> one-way communication that prevails, rather than dialogue, and it is in this regard that we can speak of *a re-emergence of representative public* [emphasis added] (Thomassen, 2010: 46).

Habermas (1991: 216) clearly articulates his position regarding this matter by noting:

> Advertising is the other function that has been taken over by the mass media-dominated public sphere. Consequently, the parties and their auxiliary organizations see themselves forced to influence voting decisions publicistically *in a fashion that has its analogue in the way advertising pressure bears on buying decisions* [emphasis added].

Habermas (1991: 217) then draws the reader's attention to the fact that, according to his critical estimation of this situation, the levels of sophistication with regard to the generation and manipulation of public opinion have increased tremendously as the technologies of mass communication have developed (Amiradakis, 2016: 160). Habermas (1991: 217) elucidates this particular matter by arguing that:

> ... within the framework of the manufactured public sphere *the mass media are useful only as vehicles of advertising*. ... [through which] *an acclamation-prone mood comes to predominate*, *an opinion climate instead of a public opinion*. *Especially manipulative are the social-psychologically calculated offers that appeal to unconscious inclinations and call forth predictable reactions* ... [emphasis added].

According to Amiradakis (2019: 160), what this then means for contemporary society and its inhabitants is that the politicians, state representatives and consumer-based corporations can all be said to (mis)use the public sphere as a means to generate legitimacy *for their interests and policies*[192] (Thomassen, 2010: 46). As Habermas (1991: 216) comments, with the incessant development of consumerism:

[192] In the final chapter of this investigation, it will be argued that this scenario of mass manipulation that Habermas has referred to above has been dramatically augmented and accentuated in the digital domains of the Internet and social media platforms. In particular, it will be evinced how an array of parties (ranging from political entities; governments; and private, commercial actors) are now able to take full advantage of the

> There emerges the *industry of political marketing*. Party agitators and old style propagandists *give way to advertising experts neutral in respect to party politics* and *employed to sell politics in an unpolitical way*[193] [emphasis added].

According to Thomassen (2010: 46), what this then ultimately means is that the role of the citizen within society is now:

> reduced to that of acclaiming, or not, what they are presented with, whether in the voting booth, when shopping, or with the remote control.

As such, public opinion — whether it be of a political, economic or social persuasion — becomes 'thoroughly managed', to the point that for Habermas (1991: 211), it is no longer to be considered as being public at all, but rather, 'nonpublic', because it has decomposed in both its audience and its common interest in reason (Thomassen, 2010: 46).

In light of Habermas's thorough reconstruction of how the bourgeois public sphere underwent a fairly dramatic series of structural transformations that would ultimately manage to have a pernicious and inimical effect upon both its composition and its efficacy, Amiradakis (2019: 161) asserts that we can fairly confidently conclude that in relation to the public sphere of the mid-20th century (and beyond), it is a pretty bleak estimation that Habermas provides for the reader (Thomassen, 2010: 47). One is able to arrive at such an austere conclusion due to the fact that Habermas's thorough socio-historical reconstruction

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sophisticated algorithms and powerful data-processing technologies underlying these online entities so as to effectively manipulate/influence the wider public in extremely complex ways that have, until very recently, been regarded as being either unimaginable or unattainable.

[193] In order to appreciate exactly how Habermas's critical insights pertaining to the notion of the refeudalization of the public sphere can still be regarded as being highly applicable and relevant to the contemporary political context, Amiradakis (2019: 160-161) argues that one need only reflect upon recent political events such as the contentious election of Donald Trump in 2016 as the American president, the tumultuous Brexit campaign currently underway in Britain (and Europe), the Bell Pottinger scandal within South Africa and the presidential elections in both Brazil and Nigeria. What makes Habermas's notion of refeudalization so applicable in all of these cases is the fact that, to varying degrees, the (mis)use of social networking technologies has been cited in order to manipulate public opinion so as to actualise the private interests of the various parties involved (*cf.* Kellner, (2016); Polonski (2019); Cave (2017); Ritzen (2019) and Jenkins (2018) for more information pertaining to these specific cases). This then brings into direct focus the role of social media technologies within the public sphere of the 21st century and how private entities possess a great deal of influence, if not control, over the opinion of the general public. As such, it can plausibly be argued that Habermas's (1991) prescient observations are indubitably manifesting their own confirmation — to an increasing extent — within the digitalised context of the 21st century, whilst also having very real and serious consequences for the denizen of the modern world. Such developments can thus be said to require serious consideration (Amiradakis, 2019: 161). More on this important matter will be explored in the final chapter of the investigation.

vividly highlights how all of those factors that had once converged so as to allow the bourgeois public sphere to come into existence— i.e. the split between the public realm and the private realm; the rise of mercantile capitalism; an increasing demand for information; the emergence of a public press; the facilitation of a critical consciousness; the emergence and institutionalisation of a literary public sphere — along with the very ideology that had once guided its operations, were all effectively undermined and systematically dismantled under the directives of neomercantile capitalism.

While Habermas's critical insights regarding the above can thus be regarded as being of immense import with regard to the outcomes of this particular investigation as it effectively enables one to gain a firm understanding as to how the bourgeois public sphere actually came into existence, what it once stood for and what would subsequently lead to its downfall — along with how his analysis manages to shed a great deal of light on many contemporary socio-political issues — it is crucial to note that his analysis is not without its shortcomings and misgivings (Amiradakis, 2019: 161). It is thus important to briefly bring these shortcomings to the reader's attention as it is these critical insights that will then allow us to clearly ascertain (particularly within the final chapter of this investigation) whether or not the digitalised milieus of social networking possess the potential to function as legitimate public spheres in the Habermasian sense, or whether (or not) they are inherently riddled with many of the problems and contradictions that Habermas has elucidated above, thus delegitimising them from the very outset as being viable platforms upon which a contemporised rational-critical public sphere can be founded.

4.4) Problems, critiques and the continuing relevance of Habermas's critical analysis

According to Crossley and Roberts (2004: 10), many of the chief concerns and critical observations that Habermas delineates with *Structural Transformations* are to be regarded as being just as relevant now as they ever were. However, as with any seminal text, Habermas's initial concerns, views and observations invariably require critical revision and reinterpretation when being considered from a contemporary perspective (Amiradakis, 2019: 161). Thus, when critically gauging Habermas's *Structural Transformations*, it has been argued that the critical analysis and socio-historical reconstruction that was to appear therein was particularly one-sided in its orientation (Crossley and Roberts, 2004: 10).

Calhoun (1996: 33) provides the reader with some additional insight and clarity pertaining to this particular critique when he argues that for some commentators a central weakness of *Structural Transformation* is that it does not treat the "classical" bourgeois public sphere and the post-transformation public sphere of consumer-based capitalism in a symmetrical fashion (Amiradakis, 2019: 161). What Calhoun (1996: 33) therefore aims to highlight for the contemporary researcher by alerting them to this line of criticism, is that after one has read *Structural Transformations*, one is left with the distinct impression that Habermas tends to:

> *judge the eighteenth century by Locke and Kant, the nineteenth century by Marx and Mill, and the twentieth century by the typical suburban television viewer* [emphasis added].

It is directly in this regard that Calhoun (1996: 33) points out that Habermas's account of the "post-mercantile" period of society, extending into the 20th century, does not really go to any great lengths so as include:

> the sort of intellectual history, the attempt to take leading thinkers seriously and recover the truth from their ideologically distorted writings, that is characteristic of his approach to seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.

At the opposite end of this asymmetrical reconstruction, critics of Habermas's uneven account have also noted that *Structural Transformations'* analysis and estimation of the earlier period do not take into account or critically consider the more spurious and dubious elements[194] that indubitably plagued bourgeois society whilst it operated under the aegis of mercantile capitalism (Calhoun, 1996: 33).

When one is thus to critically consider the lopsided manner in which Habermas describes bourgeois society as it existed during its mercantile phase, and thereafter, the result is perhaps 'an overestimation of the degeneration of the public sphere' and an over-emphasis on Habermas's part pertaining to the uniformly negative consequences that the mass media were to have upon the public (Calhoun, 1996: 33). As such, there may then be more room

[194] Calhoun (1996: 33) goes on to list what some of these dubious elements were, including: '"penny dreadfuls," lurid crime and scandal sheets, and other less than altogether rational-critical branches of the press or ... the demagoguery of traveling orators, and glances only in passing at the relationship of crowds to political discourse'.

than Habermas actually realises for alternative democratic media strategies and the emergence of other viable public spheres (ibid.).

Crossley and Roberts (2004: 11) elaborate upon this matter when they go on to note that Habermas's thesis pertaining to how contemporary society has been refeudalized and colonised by private entities tends to simplify what should rather be understood as being 'complex media practices'. These authors continue by noting that Habermas's stress and anxiety over:

> the dumbing-down and colonisation of the public sphere, encompassing as it does the invocation of a 'golden age' of media production, *stands accused of both elitism and cultural snobbery*[195] [emphasis added].

According to this 'elitist line' of criticism that has been levelled against Habermas, the critics often claim that Habermas's views are misplaced due to the fact that media practices have always been inscribed with a manipulated (and, one might add, manipulative) bias[196]. Additionally, Crossley and Roberts (2004: 11) also point out how the Habermasian conceptions of:

> 'mass communication' and 'mass media' are unhelpful in trying to understand how people and social groups *actively use and manipulate the media for their own interests in contemporary settings* [emphasis added].

Thus, contra Habermas — and in a fashion that is highly redolent of Benjamin — Crossley and Roberts (2004: 11 - 12) go on to argue that:

> People never passively consume images but actively and consistently debate and discuss everyday dilemmas, however small, within their day-to-day lives. Indeed, a plausible

[195] According to Amiradakis (2019: 161), a very similar criticism of cultural snobbery has often been directed towards Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of the contemporary mass culture as enunciated in their Culture Industry thesis. In fact, Kellner, (2000: 8) argues that in retrospect, when one is to critically reflect upon Habermas's analysis, it is evident that his analysis and estimation of mass culture are far too deeply embedded in Horkheimer and Adorno's philosophy of history as delineated in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and other theories of mass society which became a dominant paradigm in the 1950s (for more information regarding such criticisms, see Thompson, 1996).

[196] In order to appreciate this claim, Hartley (1996: 87) informs the reader that we need only to look at reportage of such events as the French Revolution to see how this has in fact been the case.

argument exists to suggest that *the mass media in fact shifts power away from political apparatus ... such as the state by reinvesting power back to a local level. The media can dictate to rather than be dictated by politicians*[197] [emphasis added].

It is along a similar line of thought that Calhoun (1996: 35) alerts us to the fact that when Habermas treats issues such as the mass media, mass communication technologies, and the contemporary public sphere as being concluded and settled, he severely impoverishes his own theory and effectively closes it off from further revision and critical exploration (Amiradakis, 2019: 162). Kellner (2000: 15) elaborates upon this particular point by noting that in *Structural Transformations*, Habermas does indeed tend to sketch 'the degeneration of media from print-based journalism to the electronic media', in an analysis that:

tends to idealize earlier print media and journalism within a democratic public sphere contrasted to an excessively negative sketch of later electronic media and consumption in a debased public sphere of contemporary capitalism [emphasis added].

According to Kellner (2000: 15) — who remains highly sympathetic to Habermas's project pertaining to the public sphere — part of the problem with regard to Habermas's critical orientation lies in the fact that Habermas's notion of the public sphere was effectively grounded, historically, in the era of print media which fostered modes of argumentation characterised by 'linear rationality, objectivity, and consensus' (Amiradakis, 2019: 162). As such, Kellner (2000: 15) argues that:

[197] In relation to the 21st century, Amiradakis (2019: 161-162) notes that such a line of argumentation has indeed been applied to the digital mediums of social media — in particular, social networking services such as Facebook and Twitter — and how it is these very mediums that allowed for greater political activism and engagement on the part of the public. In order to emphasise this contemporary outlook towards the revolutionary potential of the digital mediums of mass communication, Morozov (2011: 22) refers the reader to the case of the Arab Spring - and how Western mainstream media outlets such as the *Washington Post* and *Financial Times* declared that '[i]n Egypt, Twitter Trumps Torture, while an editorial in *Financial Times* praises social networking sites like Facebook as 'a challenge to undemocratic societies,' concluding that 'the next great revolution may begin with a Facebook message.' While critical media theorists such as Morozov (2011; 2013), Bauman and Lyon (2013) and Vaidhyanathan (2018) are wary of endorsing such optimistic claims in their entirety, and while this particular aspect of Morozov's analysis will be explored in greater detail in the final chapter of this investigation, it is crucial to note that the positive affirmation of mass communication technologies and their relationship towards political empowerment does indeed extend into certain narratives pertaining to the digital milieus of social media and as such, needs to be taken seriously without being simply discarded or overlooked (Amiradakis, 2019: 162).

since writing is Habermas's medium of choice and print media is his privileged site of intervention, ... *Habermas downplays broadcasting and other communication media*, *the Internet and new spheres of public debate, and various alternative public spheres because he does not participate in these media and arenas himself*[198] [emphasis added].

For Kellner, it is these theoretical blind spots and conceptual limitations that truncate Habermas's discussions of democracy and undermine his obvious intention of fostering democratisation himself.

It is such an array of criticisms that have been levelled towards Habermas's *Structural Transformations* that then allows one to pose the crucial question as to whether or not Habermas's investigation of the public sphere is to be regarded as being of continuing relevance and applicability for society within the 21st century (Amiradakis, 2019: 162).

For a contemporary theorist such as Calhoun (1996: 39), it is imperative to be mindful of the fact that Habermas's writing inherently implies that the point of *Structural Transformations* is:

to show the degeneration of the public sphere and to argue that *progress must lie in a democratic accommodation to the conditions of mass society rather than in their overthrow or a return to any golden age* [emphasis added].

[198] According to Amiradakis (2019: 162), this point of Kellner's is ratified by the fact that, to date, Habermas has said very little with regard to the impact that he believes the mass communication technologies of the 21st century have had on the deliberative process and the project of democratisation. In fact, one of the only documented comments that Habermas has actually made regarding the communication technologies of the 21st century appears in a footnote of a paper he published in 2006 titled 'Political Communication in Media Society: Does Democracy Still Enjoy an Epistemic Dimension? The Impact of Normative Theory on Empirical Research', in which he makes the following remark: 'The Internet that counterbalances the seeming deficits that stem from the impersonal and asymmetrical character of broadcasting by reintroducing deliberative elements in electronic communication. The Internet has certainly reactivated the grass-roots of an egalitarian public of writers and readers. However, computer-mediated communication in the Web can claim unequivocal democratic merits only for a special context: it can undermine the censorship of authoritarian regimes who try to control and repress public opinion. In the context of liberal regimes, however, the online debates of Web users tend instead to lead to the fragmentation of large mass audiences into a huge number of isolated issue publics.' According to Habermas then, the rise of millions of fragmented chat rooms across the world is actually to be regarded as an obstacle/impediment in relation to the effective institutionalisation of critical political communication. Beyond this rather dichotomous and Manichean interpretation of the Internet and the digital mediums of communication that it facilitates, Habermas has — rather surprisingly — remained all too silent regarding this topic (Amiradakis, 2019: 162).

As such, the most important destiny of Habermas's insights into the public sphere — besides the rich and critical platform he provides for those who are interested in ascertaining exactly what this sphere entails and what brought about its existence and decline — may prove to be this:

> [that it is] not to stand as an authoritative statement but to be an immensely *fruitful generator of new research, analysis, and theory* ... Not only because of its theme but also because of *the way in which it weaves economic, social-organizational, communicational, social-psychological, and cultural dimensions of its problem together in a historically specific analysis* [emphasis added] (Calhoun, 1996: 41).

Thus, despite all of the criticisms that have been levelled at Habermas with regard to his socio-historical reconstruction of the bourgeois public sphere, Nicholas Garnham (1996: 359) argues that such criticisms and critiques do not detract from the continuing virtues of the study itself. This is due to the fact that for Garnham (1996: 359), the 'first virtue' of Habermas's study is that it effectively manages to place a spotlight on:

> *the indissoluble link between the institutions and practices of mass public communication and the institutions and practices of democratic politics* [emphasis added].

The 'second virtue' of Habermas's approach resides in the fact that it places a central focus on what can be described as being the 'necessary material resource base' for any public sphere to effectively operate[199] (Garnham, 1996: 359).

Garnham (1996: 361) then goes on to argue that in his estimation, these 'virtues' are perhaps of even greater relevance now than when the book originally appeared for two crucial reasons:

[199] Garnham (1996: 359) ardently maintains that Habermas's focus on what the necessary material conditions entail in order for the public sphere to effectively operate within society is frequently occluded from several other contemporary investigative approaches which merely advocate that in order for democracy to prevail, all that is required is a 'free press'. For Garnham, such investigative approaches tend to espouse such vapid and myopic sentiments due to the fact that — unlike the critical position developed by Habermas as delineated above — they often overlook the problem raised by all forms of mediated communication, namely: '*how are the material resources necessary for that communication made available, and to whom*? [emphasis added].

Firstly, due to the fact that technological and economic developments within the 20th (and 21st) century have given rise to an 'increasingly integrated global market' along with several 'centers of private economic power' which now possess 'global reach', the role of the nation-state has been progressively undermined[200]. For Garnham (1996: 361), what is so important about this point is the fact that within contemporary research endeavours, it is typically within the political structure of the nation-state that:

> the question of citizenship and of the relationship between communication and politics has been traditionally posed.

However, as a direct result of the economic and technological developments that contemporary society is undergoing, Garnham (1996: 362) argues that the contemporary critical researcher is now compelled to re-evaluate and reassess this relationship and the nature of citizenship in the modern world. And as such, we are also now compelled to seriously consider the following question, namely:

> *What new political institutions and new public sphere might be necessary for the democratic control of a global economy and polity* [emphasis added]?

In light of the above, it should be fairly clear that Habermas's critical insights can still prove to be of immense import and relevance.

Secondly, and with specific regard to the immense development of mass communication technologies within both the 20th and 21st centuries, Garnham (362-363) argues that because of the fact that 'our inherited structures of public communication are themselves undergoing a profound change', this has led to the emergence of a trend towards what has

[200] Bauman (2007: 65) corroborates such a claim when he argues that: 'if one is to agree with Carl Schmitt's proposition that the ultimate, defining prerogative of the sovereign is the right to exempt, then one must accept that the *true carrier of sovereign power in the society of consumers is the commodity market*' [author's emphasis]. Bauman (2007: 66) elaborates on this matter by arguing that as the commodity market has come to play an ever-greater role within the private life of the individual, there has been a gradual separation between: 'the *power to act*, which now *drifts towards the markets*, and *politics*, which, though remaining the *domain of the state*, is progressively *stripped of its freedom of manoeuvre and power* to set the rules and be arbiter of the game' [emphasis added]. According to Bauman, this is indeed the prime cause of the erosion of the state's sovereignty. As such, he maintains that: '[t]he *state as a whole*, including its legislative and juridical arms, *becomes an executor of market sovereignty*' [emphasis added].

been labelled by some theorists as the emergence of the 'information society' or 'information economy'[201].

It is in light of such a development that Garnham (1996: 364) argues that Habermas's concept of the public sphere offers a sound basis for a critical analysis of:

> current developments both in the media and democratic politics and for the analysis and political action necessary to *rebuild systems of both communication and representative democracy adequate to the contemporary world* [emphasis added].

For Garnham (1996: 364), the primary reason as to why this happens to be the case, is due to the fact that in his estimation, the trend towards the 'information society' and 'information economy' will invariably result in a situation whereby there will be a shift of balance in the cultural sector between the market and public service, and this shift will be:

> *decisively in favour of the market and to shift the dominant definition of public information from that of a public good to that of a privately appropriable commodity*[202] [emphasis added].

As such, Habermas's critical insights into the socio-political economy and the contributing factors that both surround and influence the nature of mass communication within a highly privatised world can — after the relevant modifications and updates have been made — invariably shed much useful light on this unprecedented scenario.

In direct accord with what Garnham has argued above, Kellner (2000: 18) avers that in contemporary, high-tech societies a significant expansion and redefinition of what the public sphere actually entails can be seen to be emerging (Amiradakis, 2019: 162). This then

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[201] This particular trend towards what has been dubbed as the 'information age' and the 'information economy' has been vividly highlighted and cogently encapsulated in the work of the sociologist, Manuel Castells, particularly in his *Information Age* trilogy. For further information regarding this matter, refer to his works *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996)*; Power of Identity* (1997)*;* and *End of Millennium* (1998). More on the matter of the information economy — will be critically explored in the final chapter of this investigation.

[202] Garnham's (1996: 364) prescient observation will be explored in greater detail in the final chapter of this investigation when we critically assess how the global market forces have come to assume — via the aid of the Internet and social media platforms — an increasing amount of influence and dominance within the socio-political realm of the 21st century. This particular avenue of exploration will be pursued when the notions of corporate surveillance/surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2015) have been carefully considered.

implies that the time has arrived when the critical researcher is required to go *beyond* Habermas's initial formulation (ibid.). As such, within the contemporary era, the critical researcher is now actually required to:

> conceive of the public sphere as a site of information, discussion, contestation, political struggle, and organization that *includes the broadcasting media and new cyberspaces as well as the face-to-face interactions of everyday life* [emphasis added] (Kellner, 2000: 18).

Kellner (2000: 18) therefore makes it explicitly clear that in light of the significant and immense developments that have taken place within the field of mass communication technology — which have been connected primarily with multimedia and computer technologies — there has actually been a fundamental alteration of what it means to communicate in contemporary society (Amiradakis, 2019: 162-163). As a result of such immense communicational developments that have arisen, Kellner (2000: 18) maintains that a corresponding need has arisen whereby what is now required is:

> *a reformulation and expansion of the concept of the public sphere - as well as our notions of the critical or committed intellectual and notion of the public intellectual*[203].

Kellner (2000: 18) continues along this critical vein of thought by arguing — in direct accord with what Habermas has previously posited — that in the past:

> radio, television, and the other electronic media of communication tended to be *closed to critical and oppositional voices both in systems controlled by the state and by private corporations* [emphasis added].

However, Kellner (2000: 18) then goes on to make the crucial counterargument that:

> Public access and low power television, and community and guerrilla radio ... *opened these technologies to intervention and use by critical intellectuals* [emphasis added].

[203] This comment of Kellner clearly invokes the more optimistic spirit that Benjamin put forward during the 1920s and 1930s when he was attempting to gauge the potential emancipatory impact that the — then contemporary — communication mediums such as cinema and radio could have for society.

Kellner (2000: 18) therefore makes it explicitly clear that during this period of development in the history of mass communication technology — and in direct contradiction of what Habermas has said — and its influence on the public sphere:

> radio, television, and other electronic modes of communication *were creating new public spheres of debate, discussion, and information*; hence, *activists and intellectuals who wanted to engage the public* ... [had to] *make use of these technologies and develop communication politics and new media projects* [emphasis added].

With the rise of the Internet — along with the various digital technologies that it reciprocally supports and facilitates — Kellner (2000: 18) now believes that there has been an expansion with regard to the realm for democratic participation and debate and as such, new public spaces for political intervention have also been created.

Rather than coming across as an overly optimistic technophile, Kellner alerts the reader to the following incontrovertible fact, namely that at this stage in society's economic and technological development, the Internet, along with its wide array of digitalised and virtual environments, is still to be regarded as a highly contested terrain which is being used by a wide array of parties in order to promote their own agendas and interests (Amiradakis, 2019: 163). As such, Kellner (2000: 18-19) believes that the contemporised broadcast media like radio and television — and now computers, cellphones, social networking sites and social media platforms — have produced:

> *new public spheres and spaces for information, debate, and participation* that contain both the *potential to invigorate democracy* and to *increase the dissemination of critical* and *progressive ideas* - as well as *new possibilities for manipulation*, *social control*, the *promotion of conservative positions*, and *intensifying of differences between haves and have nots*[204] [emphasis added].

[204] This important argument of Kellner's will be critically considered and evaluated in the final chapter of this investigation - particularly in relation to the social media platforms of the 21st century. Such a course of investigation will be undertaken so as to ascertain whether or not the circumscribed sense of optimism that Kellner displays towards the recent developments that have been made in the field of mass communication technology can, realistically, be extended and applied to the digitalised mediums of communication and interaction of the contemporary milieu, and if not, why not.

In conclusion then, it is important to note that what we are to draw from the final section of this chapter — which has explicitly focused on the shortcomings and criticisms of Habermas's analysis of the bourgeois public sphere as delineated within *Structural Transformations* — is the fact that while Habermas's view pertaining to the public sphere and the developments of mass communication technology are still to be regarded as being highly prescient, insightful and relevant to our current epoch in which the mediums of digitalised communication technology abound, they are not to be viewed as being sacrosanct or immutable (Amiradakis, 2019: 163). Rather, they can be said to provide us with a solid, viable, extensive and critical framework from where the digitalised milieus of the 21st century can be critically gauged.

It is along these lines that Kellner (2000: 19) asserts:

> The proliferation of media culture and computer technologies ... focuses our attention on the *importance of new technologies and the need for public intervention in debates over the future of media culture and communications in the information highways and entertainment by-ways of the future* [emphasis added].

It is directly in light of the above that we will now focus our attention on how the Internet — via the aid of digital communication technologies — has affected the domains of the personal, the social, the economic and the political within the 21st century in order to critically gauge whether or not the communication platforms of social networking and social media are indeed able to provide society with a legitimate basis on which the public sphere of the 21st century can be founded. Such an avenue of exploration will thus aim to draw from, whilst also expanding upon, the critical insights that Habermas (and his fellow colleagues and predecessors from the Frankfurt School) has provided us with via his thorough socio-historical reconstruction of the public sphere, so as to — hopefully — allow the critical researcher to arrive at a position that will allow one to effectively gauge the phenomenon of social networking technology and its role as potential public sphere in the digital realm.

Chapter 5: The Role of Social Media in the Public Sphere of the 21st Century[205]

According to Vallor (2012: 1), the Internet — with its associated digitalised mediums of communication — has assumed a central role within both the social and political life of human beings around the globe. Collin et al. (2011: 8) ratify such a clam when they indicate that the use of social media and social networking services (SNS) — such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube — has become an increasingly accepted and integral (if not essential) part of everyday life. It is in this regard that one can then aver that Web 2.0[206] and its associated platforms of communication and interaction have managed to permeate throughout all facets of the contemporary individual's existence. For theorists such as Clark and Roberts (2010: 507), this notion of digital permeation has indubitably given rise to a novel 'cultural shift' - particularly in relation to the manner in which individuals now opt to communicate, socialise and interact with one another.

In relation to the above, Boyd & Ellison (in Collin et al. 2011: 8) aver that social networking services — and the social media platforms with which they operate — can be understood and defined as:

> Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a

[205] Certain sections of this chapter have drawn — either directly or indirectly — from several journal articles that were published (by the author of this thesis) during the course of researching/writing this dissertation, namely: Amiradakis, M.J. (2016a), 'Is social networking fostering the fungibility of the Other'; Amiradakis, M.J. (2016b), 'Social networking services: A digital extension of the surveillance state?'; and, Amiradakis, M.J. (2019), 'Habermas, mass communication technology and the future of the public sphere'. Permission has been granted by the relevant and applicable publishers (Taylor and Francis) for the utilisation, inclusion and reproduction of this material within this dissertation (see Appendix A for further details regarding this matter).

[206] Fuchs (2011: 137) indicates that it was Tim O'Reilly (2005) who initially introduced the notion of Web 2.0 in order to describe the new series of programmes and interfaces available to the user of the Internet within the 21st century that are able to 'operate as platforms that support various communication functions and technologies' and as such, 'constitute an architecture of participation and rich user experience' (Amiradakis, 2016a: 249). Based upon such a definition, Fuchs (2011: 134) indicates that social networking services (SNS) and social media are typical applications of what is termed Web 2.0, due to the fact that: 'they are web-based platforms that integrate different media, information and communication technologies, that allow at least the generation of profiles that display information that describes the users, the display of connections (connection list), the establishment of connections between users that are displayed on their connection lists and the communication between users' (Amiradakis, 2016a: 249).

connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system[207].

Based upon the aforementioned description, Collin et al. (2011: 12-20) argue that there are a number of significant benefits and progressive attributes that one can associate with the use of social media platforms, including the delivery of educational outcomes; the promotion, facilitation and strengthening of supportive and meaningful relationships; cultural enrichment; identity formation; the encouragement of a sense of belonging for the individual (to a wider virtual community); and the enhancement of one's self-esteem and self-efficacy (Amiradakis, 2016a: 249).

In accordance with these beneficial attributes pertaining to the utilisation of social media and social networking services, Ellison et al. (2007: 1143) aver that from both an intra-personal perspective and an inter-personal perspective, the technology underpinning the wide array of social media platforms that are currently available can be regarded as liberating and emancipatory (Amiradakis, 2016a: 239). Ellison et al (ibid.) argue that this is primarily due to the fact that such platforms are permitting the modern individual — across the entire planet — to present themselves in an array of interesting/exciting ways whilst also providing them with unprecedented opportunities to enunciate their interests with others (in a digital environment that is both intimate and secure).

When viewed from this particular perspective, social networking services and the social media platforms upon which they operate seem to be nothing less than a modern-day technological triumph, a revolutionary innovation with regard to the communication practices of individuals in the 21st century. Furthermore, Fuchs (2014a: 185) goes on to note that:

the rise of blogs (e.g. Wordpress, Blogspot, Tumblr), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Diaspora, VK), microblogs (e.g. Twitter, Weibo), wikis (e.g. Wikipedia) and content sharing sites (e.g. YouTube, Flickr, Instagram) has resulted [favourably] in

[207] Based upon such a definition, digital platforms such as Facebook, Messenger, Twitter, Instagram, MySpace, WhatsApp, YouTube, Google Plus, Weibo and Reddit all fall under the rubric of what the notion of a Social Media platform entails, with Facebook being the most prominent of such platforms as it boasts a user base of 2.2. billion as of 2018.

> public discussions on *the implications of these media for the political realm* [emphasis added].

It is as a direct result of such favourable discussions revolving around the various socio-political implications of social media platforms, that we currently find an array of contemporary researchers such as Benckler (2006), Shirky (2008) and Papacharissi (2010) who argue how the Internet, social media and social networking services (SNSs) are currently fostering a greater degree of political participation, critical communication and democratisation within contemporary society.

In order to elucidate such a sentiment, Shirky (2008: 172) asserts that the political use of social media ultimately enhances freedom for the individual due to the fact that:

> Social tools create what economists would call a positive supply-side shock to the amount of freedom in the world. ... To speak online is to publish, and to publish online is to connect with others. With the arrival of globally accessible publishing, freedom of speech is now freedom of the press, and freedom of the press is freedom of assembly.

Papacharissi (2010: 21) advocates a position that is in many ways aligned with that of Shirky's, when she avers that political activities that were in former times regarded as 'activities pursued in the public realm' are today practised in the private realm 'with greater autonomy, flexibility, and potential for expression'. As such, Papacharissi (2010: 164) maintains that social media like Twitter and Facebook are able to make the private sphere:

> a sphere of connection and not isolation, as it *serves primarily to connect the personal to the political*, *and the self to the polity and society* [emphasis added].

Papacharissi (2010: 131) elaborates on this claim by asserting that as a result of the digitalised technologies within modern society, new forms of politics and political engagement have emerged that can now be said to include:

> participating in an ... online protest, expressing political opinion on blogs, viewing or posting content on YouTube, or posting a comment in an online discussion group.

It is in this regard that Papacharissi (2010: 131) maintains that such unprecedented online activities constitute:

> an expression of dissent with a public agenda. ... these potentially powerful acts of dissent emanate from a private sphere of interaction, meaning that *the citizen engages and is enabled politically through a private media environment located within the individual's personal and private space* [emphasis added][208].

Benkler (2006: 213) goes on to bolster such an auspicious interpretation of the political implications of social media platforms when he argues that with the emergence of a networked public sphere, the possibility for easy and effective communication within the public sphere has now been opened to the denizen of the modern world. For Benkler (2006: 272), this is primarily due to the fact that it is such platforms that now allow individuals to reorient themselves from 'passive readers and listeners to potential speakers and participants in a conversation'. Benkler (2006: 272) therefore maintains that:

> The network allows all citizens to change their relationship to the public sphere. They no longer need be consumers and passive spectators. They can become creators and primary subjects. *It is in this sense that the Internet democratises* [emphasis added][209].

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[208] As Fuchs (2014a: 185) points out, such an interpretation of this rather novel situation hinges on the assumption that social media like Twitter have resulted in a collapse of the boundaries between the private sphere and the political public sphere so that the private sphere actually transforms itself into the realm of the political. Papacharissi's position pertaining to this matter therefore seems to be arguing that, much like the role that the salon once played in the bourgeois family's home (as described by Habermas in *Structural Transformations*), social media platforms are now allowing individuals to cultivate themselves within the privacy of their own homes, whilst also allowing them to keep abreast of — and indeed contribute to — wider societal and political issues occurring in the public domain. More on this matter shall be explored as this chapter unfolds - but at this point, suffice it to say that while Papacharissi seems to praise the collapse of the private/public boundaries in relation to its political implications, one can also make the argument that such a collapse has actually led to the impoverishment of political engagement and personal communication and has even resulted in the continued exploitation of the individual in the domain of his/her private life. Furthermore, as we have seen in Chapter 4, Habermas makes it explicitly clear that the divide between the public and the private realm served as a major contributing factor towards the efficacy of the bourgeois public sphere due to the fact that it allowed individuals to cultivate themselves within their own private sphere - without being constantly bombarded by a barrage of external influences/sources. As such, this matter is clearly not as simple as one may initially suspect - more critical attention will therefore need to be given towards this particular issue.

[209] Based upon such a propitious set of interpretations pertaining to the role of social media platforms and their political implications for the contemporary public sphere, one notices how all of these approaches are unified in their positive appraisal of the emancipatory effectiveness inherent to these platforms. As such, they all tend to describe the emergence of a scenario in which it is the digitalised communication platforms of the 21st century that are able to have an empowering and edifying impact upon the individual and his/her role in

On a more cautionary note, Fuchs (2014: 57) argues that while there may indeed by some credence in what the aforementioned theorists have delineated, he nevertheless maintains that contributions such as these often tend to stress new technologies' transformative power alone - while ignoring many of the other socio-economic/political variables that will invariably have an impact upon such technologies and their efficacy within the real world. As such, it is important to bear in mind that for a critical researcher such as Fuchs, the aforementioned idealistic approaches tend to overlook (or simply ignore) critical aspects of the modern capitalist society that may potentially hinder/undermine the liberating potentialities of social media platforms and the other digital communicational technologies with which they may be related.

What Fuchs therefore seems to be highlighting in the aforementioned critique of those positions that myopically endorse a position of 'public sphere idealism' in its entirety, is that the proponents of such a position often tend to overlook Habermas's thorough and multidimensional reconstruction of what the bourgeois public sphere entailed, how it arose, and ultimately what factors brought about its demise. As will be recalled from Chapter 4 of this investigation, crucial to Habermas's entire reconstruction within *Structural Transformations* is the fact that the bourgeois public sphere — as an arena for political engagement — was intimately related to, and influenced by, the rise of trade/mercantile capitalism and the various possibilities that such a system (at times unwittingly) introduced to society. Furthermore, Habermas's reconstruction vividly delineates how such an array of unprecedented possibilities (both liberating and constraining) ultimately managed to have

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the public sphere. Additionally, it is somewhat interesting to note that all of these approaches can be said to draw a great deal of their impetus — at least tacitly — from the position Benjamin (1939) initially developed (as delineated in the third chapter of this investigation). To briefly recall, Benjamin effectively argues how, as a direct result of the developments made in technological reproduction, the passive audience has now been transformed into the critical expert who — as a result of these very technologies — possesses an edifying and emancipatory platform from where he/she could engage in critical debate and dialogue. Contemporary theorists such as Shirky, Benkler and Papacharissi therefore seem to both appreciate and acknowledge this critical Benjaminian insight whilst then going further and proceeding to update it in order to keep abreast with the digitalised developments of the contemporary epoch. However, as has been made clear throughout the course of this entire investigation, when evaluating such a position — particularly from the perspective of a Critical Theory paradigm — one always needs to be mindful of the fact that there are always multiple dimensions to the phenomena in question, and as such, a more critical approach thus compels one to delve deeper into the matter of social media and its political implications if a fair, accurate and well-rounded understanding is to be attained.

an impact upon how people were able to access information, how they informed themselves and how they attempted to engage in politically oriented activities.

With regard to this investigation, which is explicitly aimed at exploring the role of social media technology within the public sphere of the 21st century, what is so crucial to bear in mind is the fact that Habermas's detailed reconstruction of the rise and fall of the bourgeois public sphere vividly highlights that in order to fully appreciate what the bourgeois public sphere of the 18th and 19th centuries once entailed, along with how it operated and what facilitated such operationality, one would firstly need to come to terms with the wider socio-economic system in which it was rooted. As such, it is imperative for the contemporary researcher to be mindful of the fact that the socio-economic system which Habermas so aptly describes within *Structural Transformations* has invariably transformed/mutated as society has progressed towards, and then into, the 21st century.

Any description of the contemporary public sphere — along with those technologies that can be said to either facilitate or arrest its development — therefore needs to take note of the manner in which capitalism has managed to evolve, as it is such a process of change and transformation that then allows for new and unprecedented opportunities/challenges to emerge that then require critical investigation. Without taking note of such changes, one will not be able to effectively explore the major role that digital technologies — such as social networking services and social media platforms — are playing in the 21st century, along with how such technologies contain an array of conflicting and contradictory tendencies, directly associated with the economic system in which they are rooted, which invariably impact upon their ability to act as empowering tools within the public sphere of the contemporary epoch. It is therefore to such matters that we will now turn our attention. In order to do so, we will turn to the works of a few contemporary critical researchers who have theorised the development of capitalism in the late 20th century and early 21st century, along with what role they believe that modern information-communication technologies (ICTs) are playing therein. This will then provide this chapter with a solid theoretical basis from where the social networking services and social media platforms can be evaluated in relation to their role/function within the contemporary public sphere.

5.1) The transformation of capitalism and its relation to modern technology

i) Techno-Capitalism

In accordance with what has been argued above, Kellner (1989: 176) asserts that many contemporary critical theorists have been reluctant to describe a new phase of capitalist society beyond the stage of monopoly/state capitalism which the first generation of critical theorists delineated in their works from the 1930s through to the 1960s. As such, Kellner is of the opinion that, at that stage (1989), no comprehensive attempts have been made within post-1960s Critical Theory to characterise the contemporary era in terms that systematically reflect the significant changes and developments that have occurred — with a particular focus on the techno-scientific realm — within late capitalist society[210]. It is directly in this regard that Kellner (1989: 176) argues that, contrary to those static and isolated positions that certain theorists/schools may adopt in order to consolidate their theoretical bases in a world that is rapidly changing, there have indubitably been:

> fundamental, dramatic changes in contemporary capitalism which require significant development of Critical Theory *if it wishes to continue to be relevant to contemporary socio-historical conditions* [emphasis added].

In a concerted attempt to come to terms with the ever-changing nature of the capitalistic enterprise in the late 20th century (and beyond) — and its inextricable relationship to increasingly sophisticated technology — Kellner (1989: 177) argues that with the introduction of complex technologies into society, a significant transformation has indeed occurred within the capitalistic franchise itself. So much so that Kellner (ibid.) believes that the mass incorporation of technology into the daily operations of the contemporary world has contributed to the formation a new stage or phase in the development of modern society, which (as we have already seen within the first chapter of this investigation) he refers to as techno-capitalism.

[210] It is imperative that one contextualises Kellner's (1989) critical remark regarding this matter. One therefore needs to bear in mind that Kellner makes this claim in the late 1980s. As such, Kellner would certainly *not* dispute the fact that many critical efforts have been made subsequent to his remarks as delineated above, however, at that particular time — and with a focus on the field of Critical Theory *per se* — Kellner believes that there was a major dearth in the critical literature and investigation pertaining to the role that technology and science was playing in the 'post monopoly-capitalism' period of modern society. As such, Kellner (1989) clearly attempted to address these literary/investigatory omissions in his own works as a critical theorist.

Kellner (1989: 178) informs the reader that according to his analysis, the term 'techno-capitalism' has been structured in such a manner so as to point toward a revised configuration of capitalist society in which technical and scientific knowledge, automation, computers and other advanced technologies play an increasingly prominent role. For Kellner (1989: 178), such a reconfiguration is to be seen as being:

> parallel to the role of human labour power, mechanisation and machines in earlier eras of capitalism, while also producing *new modes of societal organisation and forms of culture and everyday life* [emphasis added].

In order to come to terms with what this process of reconfiguration entails, Kellner (1989: 178) provides the reader with an historical overview which is aimed at describing this very process. By explicitly drawing from the work of Ernest Mandel (1975) — as delineated within his key text titled *Late Capitalism* — Kellner (ibid.) notes that it was during the 1950s that theorists from an array of traditions and standpoints began discussing a 'second industrial revolution' that was characterised by new types of production, new energy sources and new technologies. Whereas the first industrial revolution was characterised exclusively by the process of manufacturing in which machines replaced hands, and in which mechanisation replaced manual labour (an alienating and exploitative scenario which Marx went to great lengths to both describe and critique in *Das Kapital*), in the second industrial revolution, a new generation of theorists went on to describe how:

> *machines and new technologies replaced brains and played a major role in the restructuring of the labour process* and other domains of social life[211] [emphasis added].

[211] It is interesting to note that already in the 1950s, Friedrich Pollock (a close friend of Max Horkheimer's and fellow theorist from the Frankfurt School) carried through a series of studies on the varied impact of automation on the organisation of the labour process and the structure of class composition. In this important (and much-neglected) study, Pollock attempted to describe the changes which the process of automation was producing, along with the economic and social consequences that such changes were bringing with them. As such, Pollock (1957: 5) defined automation as 'a technique of production the object of which is to replace men by machines in operating and directing machines as well as in controlling the output of the products that are being manufactured'. Within this study, Pollock generally presents a critical outlook in contradistinction to those optimistic assessments of this technological transition which tended to espouse how automation was to be understood as a predominantly progressive force (Kellner, 1989: 183). Against such techno-idealistic views, Pollock (1957: 83) — rather presciently — feared that in the absence of adequate regulation and oversight, automation would actually increase the tendency toward purposive rationalisation and domination in general. For Pollock (1957: 83), such increases in domination would ultimately exacerbate 'the gulf between a small group of highly qualified "managers", engineers and specialists on the one hand and the vast mass of wage-

In order to corroborate such a position, Kellner draws from Mandel (1975: 187) who notes that the first phase by which the production process inherent to industrial capitalism underwent a process of reconfiguration took place from 1857 to 1873 through:

> the progressive introduction of machine made steam-driven machines ... combined with the growing generalization of railway construction.

According to Mandel's reconstruction, as a direct result of the rising amounts of capital that were actually needed in order to invest in — and maintain — these new machine-directed modes of production, a novel situation arose whereby an increasing concentration of capital found itself in the hands of big businesses. Mandel (1975: 188) is of the opinion that it was such a concentration of capital, in the hands of a few big businesses, which then fostered the 'transition from freely competitive to monopoly capitalism'. Furthermore, Mandel (1975: 189-190) avers that another technological reconfiguration occurred within the work place from around 1873 to 1893 via the introduction of electric motors, which was then further accentuated — from 1945 to 1965 — by the introduction of automation.

What is important to take note of in relation to the reconstruction provided by Mandel (1975) is the fact that under the aegis of industrial capitalism — in its original formulation — Marx effectively managed to postulate those tendencies towards the:

> homogenization of human labor power, as industrialisation, standardization and the fragmentation of the productive process imposed similar types of work tasks and/or de-skilled labor so that literally any worker could fulfill any task within the production process (Kellner, 1989: 179).

Thus, during this early stage of capitalism, it was the notion of human labour power that played the fundamental role within the production process. However, in relation to the emergence and operations of techno-capitalism (as described by Kellner), this is no longer to be regarded as being the case. This is due to the fact that as capitalism began to

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earners on the other'. Thus, even in the 1950s, Pollock was well aware of the dangers that automation and new technologies would pose for the society as he unequivocally demonstrates that such technologies vastly increase the powers of capitalist control and domination while diminishing individuality, freedom and democracy.

reconfigure itself, machines, automation of production, and the new technologies of computerisation started to replace human labour power - both manual and mental. So much so in fact that:

> the source of surplus value [within capitalism's revised reconfiguration] shifts from *extraction from humans to extraction from machines*, and *accumulation is fueled by technological development and automation*, and not just by more efficient organization of human labor power ... [emphasis added] (Kellner, 1989: 179).

In the later configurations of capitalistic society, technology, automation and information all coalesce in order to play an increasingly important role in the functioning and maintenance of society itself (Kellner, 1989: 178).

In *Monopoly and Labor Capital*, Braverman (1974) provides the reader with some additional detail pertaining to the various phases of manual and mental deskilling that was being actualised within capitalism's revised configuration. In so doing, he elucidates how there has been a progressive deskilling and homogenisation of labour, along with the actual replacement of humans by machines, leading to dramatic transformations of the labour process and the recomposition of class[212] (Kellner, 1989: 179). As such, Braverman effectively manages to describe how there has been a massive amount of degradation on the part of the worker in relation to the work process (both physically and mentally) undertaken in the 20th century.

[212] Stiegler (2010: 10) goes on to make a very similar argument in *For a New Critique of Political Economy* in which he argues how, as a result of the tremendous advances that have been made in automation technology — particularly since the industrial revolution — there has been an increasing sense of 'proletarianization' (deskilling and unlearning) amongst the working classes due to the fact that sophisticated, automated technologies are essentially able to analytically reproduce 'gestures of the body'. According to Stiegler (ibid.), as a result of such analytic reproducibility that now resides within technologies of automation, people themselves are no longer required to engage in the productive work process itself, but are rather required to service the machines that reproduce the "gestures of work". In addition to the above, Stiegler (2010: 11) makes it clear that as newer and more advanced technologies of automation have entered into modern society (from both a work and leisure perspective), new forms of proletarianisation have invariably followed in their wake. It is directly in this regard that Stiegler (2010: 11) goes on to note that an additional layer of complexity appeared in the wake of digital technologies that can '*lead to the proletarianization of the life of the mind as it can to its critical intensification*' [emphasis added]. For a more detailed account of Stiegler's (2010) interpretation of this process of proletarianisation, refer to *For a New Critique of Political Economy* pp. 29-44.

According to Kellner's updated analysis of this situation, the process of automation that Braverman has described above was accelerated during the 1960s and 1970s as corporate capital introduced new technologies to further rationalise the production process. As such, the overriding result of such a process was:

> a proliferation of new technologies which were seen both as a mode of reorganising and revitalising previous industrial sectors and as a new high tech sector which promised *new opportunities for increasing capitalist profitability and power* [emphasis added] (Kellner, 1989: 180).

What this then ultimately meant for late capitalist society and its work force was that new technologies, electronics and computerisation came to displace older machines and mechanisation, while information and knowledge came to play increasingly important roles in the production process, the organisation of society and everyday life[213].

It is in light of the aforementioned description, that one gets the impression that for Kellner (1989), the new era of a 'techno-culture' actually represents a reconfiguration of mass culture and the consumer society in which consumer goods, film, television, mass images and computerised information have become a dominant form of culture. In all these domains, technology plays an increasingly fundamental role, and new forms and organisations of technology play key constitutive functions in producing new configurations of the capitalist economy, politics, society and culture[214].

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[213] If one is to shift the focus from the mid-late 20th century (when Kellner, Mandel and Braverman introduced their critical analyses) to the 21st century, one will notice how Stiegler's (2010: 11) critical insights pertaining to the technological developments in modernity essentially reinforce Kellner's critical appraisal of techno-capitalism. To briefly elaborate on this point, Stiegler (2010: 11) manages to do so by describing the manner in which capitalism has managed to reconfigure itself with the new addition of the Internet and digital communication technologies, in such a manner so as to further deskill and disempower the denizens of the 21st century (or what he refers to as 'new forms of proletariansation'). Stiegler (2011: 30) emphasises this point by noting how it is that according to his analysis, the vast array of digital technologies within the capitalistic system of the 21st century amounts to a vast process of 'cognitive and affective proletarianization' - which he further describes as being a vast process involving the loss of many different types of knowledge(s) including: *savoir-faire* (know-how), *savoir-vivre* (knowledge how to live) and theoretical knowledge [*savoir theoriser*]. While more on Stiegler's critical outlook towards the state of contemporary capitalism and its relation to digital technologies will be explored and elaborated on later in this chapter, at this stage, suffice it to say that Stiegler's critical commentary certainly manages to place Kellner's original insights regarding the transformative nature of capitalism and its reconfigured links with sophisticated technologies in a renewed critical light.

[214] On a cautionary note, Kellner (1989) does explicitly argue that for a theory of techno-capitalism to do justice its complex and multifaceted subject matter, it should emphatically resist temptations toward either

ii) Transnational Informational/Network Capitalism

Much of what is included in Kellner's (1989) notion of techno-capitalism (as delineated above) is, in many ways, bolstered and extended into the digitalised domain of the 21st century by the critical media researcher, Christian Fuchs (2008). It is Fuchs (2008: 98) who introduces the reader to the notion of 'Transnational Informational/Network Capitalism' in order to highlight how the Internet and its associated digital communication technologies (including social media platforms) have contributed to yet another significant transformation within the capitalistic enterprise of the current era. As such, Fuchs contends that this contemporary transformation needs to be seriously considered and explored when trying to acquire an accurate and critical interpretation of the effect that these new technologies are having upon contemporary society — including its public sphere — along with how they feed into the capitalistic enterprise of the 21st century.

In order to come to terms with what this reconfiguration of the capitalist system encompasses, Fuchs (2008: 98) initially points out that an array of contemporary buzzwords have entered into the nomenclature of various economic theories and sociological paradigms, including: 'knowledge/information economy', 'information society', 'network society', and 'informational capitalism' (to name but a few) in order to describe the altered nature of modern society and its economic foundation. Importantly, while Fuchs (2008: 98) is well aware of the fact that these varying terms tend to signify and highlight certain theoretical constructs pertaining to the variegated composition of modern society, he (i.e. Fuchs, 2008: 119) nevertheless maintains that from a conceptual point of view, they all manage to underscore how information (or data), spanning across a diverse array of interconnected and digitalised networks, has for some time played a key — if not the key role — in the restructuring of economic, political and cultural spaces within contemporary society.

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the technological or the economic determinism which have plagued many classical and contemporary social theories. Thus, when approached from the dialectical perspectives inherent to Critical Theory, techno-capitalism needs to be understood as being a form of both progress and domination. It is a form of progress in that it produces new technologies and modes of information which have a potentially beneficial impact on human life. Yet it is a system of domination in that it forfeits many of these potentialities. That is, rather than introducing new technologies to benefit human life, techno-capitalism continues to attempt to monopolise new technologies in the interest of corporate domination and profitability, and thus continues to follow the imperatives of capitalist logic.

Van Dijk (2006: 20) supports such a claim by noting how it is that while the aforementioned buzzwords may be variegated in terms of their scope and focus, and while they may appear in an array of differing theoretical perspectives in order to describe the changing nature of contemporary society, they all nevertheless tend to depict — either implicitly or explicitly — a "networked" state of existence[215]. As such, Van Dijk (2006: 20) maintains that it is in such jargon-laden concepts one is primarily able to identify a:

> social formation with *an infrastructure of social and media networks enabling its prime mode of organization at all levels* (individual, group/organizational and societal). Increasingly, these networks *link all units or parts of this formation* (individuals, groups and organizations) [emphasis added].

In accordance with the above, Fuchs (2008: 101) goes on to aver that the notion of a networked state of existence (and the 'network society' in which this form of existence is located) inherently points towards how significant changes have occurred — and are no doubt continuing to occur — within the contemporised system of capitalism.

According to Fuchs (2008: 101), this is primarily due to the fact that the capitalistic enterprise of the 21st century has become increasingly reliant upon a technological infrastructure that is comprised of extremely sophisticated and interconnected communication technologies that are able to accumulate, store and process massive amounts of information and data[216]. In particular, Fuchs (2008: 101) alerts the reader to the fact that within such an enterprise, strategies of capital accumulation together with the technologies that facilitate them are expanding towards a global level, along with the fact that such strategies have morphed into a flexible regime of accumulation.

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[215] Castells was probably the first theorist, in 1996, to make use of this term in his text (aptly) titled: *The Rise of the Network Society*.

[216] Corroborating such a claim, Zuboff (2019: 159) indicates how the search engineering team of 'Bing' — a search engine that is owned by Microsoft and is by no means anywhere near the level of sophistication and scale of Google's search capacity — has developed a self-learning system, based on information collected from the Internet and its associated applications that is *'adding 28,000 DVDs of content every day'* [emphasis added]. To put such a quantification of data-accumulation into perspective, Zuboff (ibid.) refers to the project's senior director who is quoted as saying that: 'It's mind-blowing how much data we have captured over the last couple of years. *The line would extend to Venus and you would still have 7 trillion pixels left over*' [emphasis added].

It is in light of the aforementioned changes that have occurred within contemporary society that Fuchs (2008: 103-104) argues that when attempting to come to terms with the nature of capitalism within the 21st century, notions such as 'knowledge capitalism', 'informational capitalism', or 'network capitalism' are particularly helpful and illuminating. This is due to the fact that for Fuchs (ibid.), from a conceptual level, such terms tend to stress how labour itself (and its generation of surplus profit) has now been dramatically transformed so as to incorporate, and change itself into, an informational format[217]. In order to make sense of what this transformation of the labour process entails, Fuchs (2008: 104) delineates that the search for new strategies and forms of capital accumulation has effectively managed to transform labour in such a way that cognitive, communicative, and cooperative labour forms a significant amount of overall labour time, but at the same time this labour is heavily mediated by information technologies. As such, Fuchs (2008: 104) maintains that:

> The notion of informational capitalism ... conceptualizes contemporary capitalism based on *the rise of cognitive, communicative, and cooperative labor that is interconnected with the rise of technologies of and goods that objectify human cognition, communication, and cooperation* [emphasis added].

It is directly in light of the social, economic and technological changes that have been cited above that Fuchs (2008: 104) goes on to aver that within the parameters of this newly formed capitalistic enterprise, it is informational labour — along with those information technologies that facilitate and perpetuate such activities — that is now managing to effectively shape and define the massive amounts of capital production and accumulation strategies that the economy within the 21st century is experiencing[218].

[217] See Fuchs (2008: 98-120) in order to acquire a more detailed description of what informational labour entails along with how such a novel form of labour now underpins the strategies of production and accumulation in the contemporary epoch.

[218] This point is both reinforced and corroborated by Bozkurt (2017) who, in an article aptly titled: 'The world's most valuable resource is no longer oil, but data' notes how, when evaluating the nature of the economy of the 21st century, it is the Internet-based companies such as Alphabet (Google's parent company), Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Microsoft, that should be regarded as the 'titans' of the new digital economy due to the fact that they are the five most valuable listed firms in the world. According to Bozkurt (ibid.) the profits of these 'titans' are surging as they collectively racked up over $25bn in net profit in the first quarter of 2017 alone. Furthermore, Bozkurt (ibid.) goes on to note how Amazon.com captures half of all dollars spent online in America while, in 2016, Google and Facebook accounted for almost all the revenue growth in digital advertising in America. Such figures then clearly highlight how it is that information-based companies have come to play a massive role within the economic makeup of the modern world. Furthermore, in accordance

It is imperative to be mindful of the fact that according to Fuchs's (2008: 109) analysis, the rise of informational capitalism is inherently linked to the increasing importance associated with computer networks and global network organisations in the current epoch. As such, it is the myriad computer networks and ICTs that the denizens of the (post-)modern world are required to deal with on a daily basis that then forms the interconnected technological foundation that has, from a structural perspective, allowed for the emergence of 'global network capitalism'. On a fairly austere note, Fuchs (2008: 110) avers that such a globalised network of capital has resulted in the manifestation of (very well-concealed):

> *regimes of accumulation, regulation, and discipline that are helping to increasingly base the accumulation of ... capital on transnational network organizations that make use of cyberspace and other new technologies for global coordination and communication* [emphasis added].

Based upon Fuchs's (2008: 112) analysis, one can infer that it is primarily due to the fact that contemporary ICTs are effectively able to dissolve the temporal and spatial distances that once plagued the capitalistic enterprise of the past, that modern corporations are now able to 'flexibly manage production' and make use of 'global interconnected flows of capital, technology, labour, and information'. It is in this regard that Fuchs (2008: 112) maintains that global network capitalism is effectively based upon new knowledge-based technologies — along with the data/information such devices are able to generate — like the computer, smartphones and social media networks.

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with Fuchs's (2008) notion of how 'informational capitalism' relies on the acquisition of data and information that are generated by new forms of communicational technologies that are all interconnected within an intricate array of networks, Bozkurt (2017) argues that the major reason accounting for how there has been a dramatic change in processes of capital generation and accumulation in the contemporary epoch resides in the fact that smartphones, social media and the wider Internet applications with which they are interconnected have made data abundant, ubiquitous and far more valuable than 'normal' commodities. In order to ratify this point, Bozkurt (2017) asserts that: 'Whether you are going for a run, watching TV or even just sitting in traffic, virtually every activity creates a digital trace - more raw material for the data distilleries. *As devices from watches to cars connect to the Internet, the volume is increasing* ... ' [emphasis added]. More detail will be provided as to exactly how informational labour, interconnected information technologies and the communicational platforms of the current epoch are all inherently fused together and, thus, contribute towards both the facilitation and maintenance of this new form of capital production and accumulation within the next section of this chapter - particularly when we look at the notion of 'surveillance capitalism' as delineated by Shoshana Zuboff (2015). For now, however, suffice it to say that there is a great deal of credence and literature supporting the insights that have been expressed by Fuchs (2008) and the notion of 'Transnational Informational/Network Capitalism' as well as the informational labour on which it rests.

What is thus important to take note of is the fact that such 'knowledge-based' technologies introduce a novel component to the communicational/interactive dimension of human activity (which now primarily occurs in the digitalised, hyper-accelerated domains that such technologies have made so ubiquitous). For Fuchs (2008: 112), this novel development pertaining to this dimension of human existence resides in the fact that such technologies are now able to facilitate unprecedented properties/attributes of communication and interaction such as:

> many-to-many communication, interactivity, hyperlinking, digital compression, multimedia, conversion, simulated virtual realities, the decontextualization and derealization of communication ...

that can then all be analysed, classified and commodified. As such, Fuchs (2008: 113) concludes his synopsis of what transnational informational/network capitalism entails — from a systemic perspective at any rate — by noting how contemporary communicational technologies have now effectively created an emerging 'global space' that then provides the spatial form of an organisation underpinning the system of global network capitalism.

From a dialectical perspective, it is important to note that according to Fuchs's (2008: 120) critical analysis of this novel situation in capitalism's development, as it currently stands, the system of Global Network Capitalism/Transnational Informational Capitalism has created novel methods and qualities of domination and competition, but at the same time it has advanced new opportunities for cooperation and participation that question domination and point towards alternative futures. However, Fuchs (2008: 120) is under no illusion that as the new digitalised economic system is currently structured and operates, the tendency towards competition and control is invariably dominating the desire for cooperation[219].

[219] It is in light of Fuchs's (2008) critical commentary pertaining to the domineering, controlling and manipulative tendencies inherent to contemporary ICTs, along with his insistence on adopting a dialectical approach when evaluating the matter at hand, that we can clearly see how the spectre of the first generation of critical theorists (including the likes of Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and Fromm) lingers within such an orientation. This is made clear when we are to reflect upon the fact that it was these theorists — who as we have already seen in the second chapter of this investigation — were noticeably suspicious of the technological innovations pertaining to mass communication emerging in the early-mid 20th century, while also opting to utilise a dialectical framework from where they gauged their respective areas of interest/inquiry (i.e. the rise of modernity, mass culture and its associated technological/scientific paraphernalia). As such, it becomes evident that central to the new positions pertaining to social media technology (both positive and negative), the competing and more optimistic views of Benjamin (and Kracauer) — as delineated in Chapter 3 of this

Jodi Dean (2009: 22), a fellow critical media theorist, shares Fuchs's estimation pertaining to the domineering tendencies within the current economic order, along with the technological tools that are used to sustain such a system, when she introduces the reader to the notion of 'communicative capitalism'. According to Dean (2009: 22-23), the concept of 'communicative capitalism' is inherently critical in its orientation and is essentially intended to designate how there has been:

> *a strange merging of democracy and capitalism in which contemporary subjects are produced and trapped* [by] *highlighting the way in which networked communications bring the two together* [emphasis added].

In order to make sense of what the aforementioned scenario actually entails and how it links to Fuchs's (2008) commentary pertaining to transnational informational capitalism, Dean (2009: 23) points out that typically, those values that are heralded as central to democracy — such as inclusion, accessibility, availability, freedom of expression etc — are widely perceived (and lauded) as assuming a material form in the networked communications technologies of contemporary society[220]. As we have seen within the introduction of this chapter, there is an array of theorists/schools of thought that argues how the ideals of access, inclusion, discussion, and participation are being realised in and through expansions, intensifications, and interconnections of global telecommunications.

However, for Dean (2009) — much like Fuchs (2008) has previously argued — one would be ill-advised to posit an overly simplified, unidirectional relationship that is apparently engendered and fortified between an increase in global telecommunications technology and

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investigation — versus the more austere and cynical views of the other theorists at the Frankfurt School (which most certainly includes Habermas's critical and nuanced analysis of the structural transformation of the bourgeois public sphere as explicated in the fourth chapter of this investigation) still seem to reverberate loudly within the 21st century. One can further assert that even if such a sense of reverberation is experienced only on a tacit level, the tension between these differing schools of thought is no doubt still being experienced in current research and debates pertaining to the nature of ICTs.

[220] Dean's (2009) observation is ratified by none other than Mark Zuckerberg (as quoted in Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 1-2) who, in a wide-ranging manifesto that he published on his Facebook page in early 2017, wrote: 'For the past decade, Facebook has focused on connecting friends and families. With that foundation, our next focus will be *developing the social infrastructure for community - for supporting us, for keeping us safe, for informing us, for civic engagement, and for inclusion of all*. ... *Beyond voting, the greatest opportunity is helping people stay engaged with the issues that matter to them every day, not just every few years at the ballot box. ... We can help establish direct dialogue and accountability between people and our elected leaders* [emphasis added].'

democratisation (in the sense that an increase in the one will invariably lead to an increase in the other). Rather, Dean (ibid.) argues that the immense changes that have occurred in information and communication networks associated with digitalisation, speed (of computer processors as well as connectivity), and memory/storage capacity have had a vast impact upon both capitalism and our understanding of democracy, accelerating and intensifying some elements of each as they consolidate the two into a new insidious and invidious ideological formation[221].

Corroborating Dean's (2009: 23) assertion pertaining to how a new ideological formation has arisen within contemporary society which, to a large extent, attempts to merge the ideals of capitalism, democracy and technology into a new symbiotic relationship, it is Morozov (2013) who cautions the reader as to why such novel ideological formations are to be regarded as being particularly dangerous for the denizen of the modern world. To recall from the first chapter of this investigation, Morozov (2013: xiii-xiv) argues that at this particular juncture of humanity's history, it is the dominant and pervasive techno-utopian ideologies (that more often than not emanate from Silicon Valley itself) which tend to espouse a very one-sided, and often misleading, depiction of all the supposed benefits and conveniences associated with a life inundated with digital or smart technologies (such as how an increase in technological connectivity will lead to a more democratic society). However, while Morozov is open to the possibility that such claims could contain a measure of credibility, like many of the other critical researchers we have encountered thus far in this investigation, he nevertheless maintains that such ideologies are actually geared to fit us all into a 'digital straitjacket' — without ever allowing one to fully comprehend and acknowledge the potential dangers and pitfalls associated with such a one-sided and myopic course of action[222].

[221] It is yet again important to reflect upon — and appreciate — how, as early as the 1920s, Horkheimer placed a great deal of emphasis upon the critical examination of the ideological influences and forces that insidiously shape the structuring and functioning of society, along with its associated technologies. This then resonates strongly with what Dean (2009) is arguing in relation to the ideological underpinnings associated with communicative capitalism and its ICTs, along with how such an ideological formation is infused with a strong technological bent. As such, it can be regarded as being felicitous for the contemporary critical researcher to both acknowledge and appreciate how the influence of early Critical Theory lingers strongly throughout the nature of such contemporary research and critical investigation.

[222] The critical views of Fuchs (2008), Dean (2009) and Morozov (2013) then all manage to highlight how the new configuration that capitalism has managed to acquire is certainly formidable in its orientation and that when attempting to come to terms with its nature and underpinnings, one needs to be well aware of the fact

It is in light of these new ideological formations — that are indubitably associated with, and in fact inherent to, communicative capitalism — that Dean (2009: 23) maintains that:

> expanded and intensified communicativity *neither enhances opportunities for linking together political struggles nor enlivens radical democratic practices - although it has exacerbated left fragmentation*, *amplified the voices of right-wing extremists*, and *delivered ever more eyeballs to corporate advertisers*[223] [emphasis added].

Thus, contrary to those techno-optimistic claims that theorists such as Shirky (2008), Papacharissi (2009) and Benkler (2006) tend to espouse pertaining to the emancipatory and liberating nature of modern communication devices and the social media platforms on which they operate, Dean (2009: 23) is of the unequivocal opinion that:

> instead of leading to more equitable distributions of wealth and influence, instead of enabling the emergence of a richer variety in modes of living and practices of freedom, the deluge of screens and spectacles *coincides with extreme corporatization, financialization, and privatization across the globe* [emphasis added].

It is directly in this regard that Dean (2009: 23) ultimately believes that:

> *Rhetorics of access, participation, and democracy work ideologically to secure the technological infrastructure of neoliberalism*, *an invidious and predatory politico-economic project that concentrates assets and power in the hands of the very, very rich, devastating the planet and destroying the lives of billions of people* [emphasis added].

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that there is a great deal more to the situation than typically meets the eye - regardless of what certain pundits and technological tycoons such as Mark Zuckerberg may tend to espouse.

[223] More on each of these worrying symptoms that Dean (2009) has identified as being inherently associated with communicative capitalism will shortly be explored and evaluated - particularly when we look at Zuboff's (2015) notion of 'Surveillance Capitalism' along with Vaidhyanathan's (2018: 3) claim that social media platforms — such as Facebook — are actually antisocial and antidemocratic in nature. At this stage, it is however important to note that, much like Fuchs (2008) has previously argued, Dean's (2009) critical insights regarding the notion of communicative capitalism manage to elucidate how there are indeed many conflicting and antagonistic tendencies contained within the current social order that cannot be easily simplified or overlooked. As such, a greater understanding and appreciation of how modern ICTs and platforms of communication/interaction are altering the nature of contemporary society need to be gained before one can actually assess how such elements are either contributing to/undermining the public sphere of the 21st century.

In order to gain a greater understanding of how these tendencies towards competition, control, exploitation and manipulation are managing to manifest themselves within the communication platforms of the contemporary era that both Fuchs (2008) and Dean (2009) have alluded to above, along with how they are fuelling and sustaining the exploitative capitalistic enterprise of the 21st century and its associated ideologies, we will now turn to the work of Shoshana Zuboff (2015) and her notion of 'surveillance capitalism'. As shall be disclosed, it is this avenue of exploration that essentially manages to both merge, and expand upon, the concerns and critical insights as enunciated by Kellner (1989), Fuchs (2008) and Dean (2009), whilst also managing to place the social media platforms of the contemporary period within a central light. Zuboff's (2015) contribution will therefore provide us with the necessary basis from where the communication platforms of social media can be critically gauged in order to assess how they contribute to/undermine the public sphere of the 21st century.

iii) Surveillance capitalism

Zuboff (2015: 75) introduces the reader to her critical estimation of the latest configuration that the capitalistic enterprise has assumed by citing a White House report on the emergence of a recent phenomenon that is now widely referred to as 'big data'. Within this report, Zuboff (2015: 75) asserts, a rather ominous conclusion is posited by its authors whereby it is unequivocally stated that:

> *The technological trajectory* [of the contemporary epoch] ... *is clear*: *more and more data will be generated about individuals and will persist under the control of others* [emphasis added] (White House, 2014: 9)

Why such a conclusion is to be regarded as being central to Zuboff's notion of surveillance capitalism resides in the fact that it alludes to how 'big data' has effectively come to reshape and redefine a significant portion of contemporary society and its economic endeavours. It does so by:

i) Highlighting how the technological trajectory of society has become increasingly dependent upon the modern individual and his/her relationship towards modern technology; and (perhaps even more importantly)

ii) It illuminates how such a relationship affords contemporary technologies with the unprecedented opportunity to generate vast amounts of information/data (about their users) that ultimately provides 'others' — including big businesses — with unparalleled opportunities for economic growth, diversification and exploitation.

It is in light of the aforementioned factors that Zuboff (2015: 75) points out that the notion of 'big data' is, above all, to be understood as:

> the foundational component in a deeply intentional and highly consequential new logic of accumulation that [she refers to as] *surveillance capitalism* [emphasis added].

Extrapolating from the above, Constantiou and Kallinikos (2014:10) assert that big data actually heralds nothing less than:

> ... a transformation of contemporary economy and society … a much wider shift that makes *everydayness qua* data imprints an intrinsic component of organizational and institutional life … and also a primary target of commercialization strategies[224] … [author's emphasis].

In order to provide the reader with some historical orientation as to how this novel situation has actually managed to arise, Zuboff (2015: 76) points out that as early as the 1980s — the same era in which, as we shall recall, Kellner (1989) began to theorise about the notion of techno-capitalism — it had become clear that the emerging manifestations of information technology were characterised by a 'fundamental duality' that were not yet fully appreciated. On the one hand, these technologies could be applied to automate operations (according to a logic that hardly differed from that of centuries past in the sense that they could effectively replace the human body with machines that enabled a greater sense of continuity and control). More significantly however, is the other aspect of this fundamental duality, in her assessment of which Zuboff (2015: 76) makes it clear that automation pertaining to information technologies:

[224] It is Hal Varian (2010), Google's long-time chief economist, who corroborates such an interpretation of what the notion of big data entails when he goes on to note that: *'Data extraction and analysis is what everyone is talking about when they talk about big data'* [emphasis added].

simultaneously generates information that provides a deeper level of transparency to activities that had been either partially or completely opaque [emphasis added].

What this then means, according to Zuboff's analysis, is that the information technologies of the late 20th century were not only able to impose and execute certain prearranged formulations of information (in the form of programmed instructions), but, they were also able to generate vast amounts of information about their respective users. As such, Zuboff (2015: 76) notes that the information technologies of the past 40 years or so have managed to 'produce a form of action' that is actually linked to what might be referred to as a 'reflexive voice' whereby:

Computer mediation symbolically renders events, objects, and processes that become visible, knowable, and shareable in a new way[225].

The term that Zuboff (2015: 76) has coined in order to describe this unique capacity inherent to information technology, is what she refers to as its unprecedented ability to informate, and as such, Zuboff (ibid.) makes it clear that information technology alone has the capacity to automate and informate.

According to the brief overview provided by Zuboff (2015: 76) pertaining to the evolution of information technologies (and later ICTs), it is made apparent that even at the early stages of this technology's "informating developments" (i.e. in the 1980s), the data that was generated and revealed through the "informating process" was to be regarded as being somewhat heterogeneous in nature. This is due to the fact that the data collected via the informating process effectively managed to reflect processes that one might typically expect/anticipate from such work-based technologies, such as production flows and administrative processes along with various customer interfaces. However, what was nevertheless remarkable about these early information technologies was that they also managed to reveal certain attributes associated with human behaviour that were hitherto

[225] According to Zuboff (2015: 76), it is this novel distinction pertaining to what the information technologies are able to achieve, that — in rudimentary terms — marks the significant difference between 'smart' and 'dumb' technology.

unattainable. Thus, even in their early phase of development and implementation, these technologies were able to reveal attributes such as:

> phone calls, keystrokes, bathroom breaks and other signals of attentional continuity, actions, locations, conversations, networks, specific engagements with people and equipment, and so forth (Zuboff, 2015: 76).

In relation to how such informating processes have evolved and now manifest themselves within the 21st century, Zuboff (2015: 76) aptly remarks that it takes a significant stretch of the modern denizen's imagination to even attempt to envision a world in which these conditions — as revealed through the manifold processes of informating — are not to be regarded as being the "default setting". As Zuboff (2015: 76) points out, this is primarily due to the fact that:

> *Real time information-based computer-mediated learning has become so endogenous to everyday business activities that the two domains are more or less conflated*. *This is what most of us do now as work* [emphasis added].

Importantly, Zuboff (2015: 76) delineates how some of these modern-day informating processes can be described as being more 'formal' and explicit in terms of their appearance and functioning. Such formal practices — which seem to resonate rather strongly with the compositional features of the 'Networked Society' that Fuchs (2008) has previously described as being inherent to Transnational Informational Capitalism/Network Capitalism — tend to include:

> continuous improvement methodologies, enterprise integration, employee monitoring, ICT systems that enable the global coordination of distributed manufacturing operations, professional activities, teams, customers, supply chains, inter-firm projects .... .

However — and very importantly in relation to the notion of surveillance capitalism — Zuboff (2015: 76) also elucidates how some of the informating processes inherent to contemporary information technologies and ICTs are less formal and thus, more insidious in nature. Such processes now include:

> *the unceasing flow of email, online search, smartphone activities, apps, texts, video meetings, social media interactions, and so forth* [emphasis added].

What is thus to be regarded as being significant in relation to the aforementioned description of how information technologies have evolved in relation to their "informating capacities" — while also managing to assume an increasingly central role in the daily lives of the modern individual — is the fact that within the context of surveillance capitalism and its parasitic reliance upon big data, the acquired/extracted data (and what can be learned from it) can now be said to constitute an array of 'informational entities' that are firmly embedded in, and influenced by, the social, political, economic and historical contexts of the contemporary era (and vice versa). As such, their operational possibilities for avenues of future development are to be considered as being circumscribed by notions of authority and power[226] (Zuboff, 2015: 76-77).

For Zuboff (2015: 77), the key point that the critical researcher needs to bear in mind when attempting to understand and reflect upon the informating practices of contemporary information technologies, along with the socio-economic environment in which such technologies are rooted, is the fact that:

> *when it comes to the market sphere, the electronic text is already organized by the logic of accumulation in which it is embedded and the conflict inherent to that logic* [emphasis added].

This would then imply that it is this logic of accumulation that has managed to organise contemporary society's perception of, and shaping of, such technological innovations, and as such, it is this very logic of accumulation that then needs to be critically explored and interrogated.

[226] Such an assertion then allows one, yet again, to appreciate the nuanced and multifaceted approach that Horkheimer advocated in the early 1930's when he explicitly delineated that in order for Critical Theory to arrive at a deeper and more critical appreciation and understanding of the phenomena associated with the modern world, an interconnected and interdisciplinary view needs to adopted and pursued, should Critical Theory ever wish to have a tangible impact upon the function of society itself. As such, Horkheimer explicitly maintained that the critical researcher needs to take note of the wider societal, historical, economic and political factors that constitute any given society, along with those figures/entities that wield considerable influence and clout over its daily operations (refer to Chapter 1 of this investigation for more detail pertaining to this matter).

While Zuboff's critical analysis pertaining to how the Information Technologies and ICTs of the contemporary era possess powerful abilities to informate, and thus generate copious amounts of data pertaining to the users of such devices, this still begs the bigger question: How does such an analysis aid us in making sense of how big data actually constitutes a crucial component to the notion of surveillance capitalism? Additionally, what role do social media networks play in such a constellation?

In order to address these central questions, Zuboff (2015: 77) explains that some points pertaining to the above are fairly obvious, namely:

i) Three billion of the world's seven billion people are now computer-mediated in a wide range of their daily activities far beyond the traditional boundaries of the workplace;

ii) As a result of pervasive computer mediation, nearly every aspect of the world is rendered in a new symbolic dimension as events, objects, processes, and people become visible, knowable, and shareable in a new way; and

iii) The world is reborn as data and the electronic text has now become universal in both its scale and scope.

Thus, while it initially seemed reasonable to focus one's concerns on the challenges of an 'information workplace' or an 'information society' — as Kellner (1989) and Fuchs's (2008) analyses have clearly highlighted — the pivotal questions of authority and power now need to be understood, contextualised and addressed within the 'widest possible frame'. According to Zuboff (2015: 77), this new frame of reference is now best understood as being civilisational in its scope.

What Zuboff therefore seems to be emphasising in relation to all of the above, is the crucial point that within the current milieu of extensive digitalisation and hyper-connectivity, gaining a firm grasp of who actually learns from global data flows, along with what is learned, and how such technological feats are accomplished now needs to take a central position when attempting to come to terms with what surveillance capitalism, along with its implications for society, entails. In addition to these pressing issues, the significant question pertaining to who it is that makes the necessary decisions as to how such a form of

capitalism actually operates also becomes a key issue, along with: what happens when authority fails?

It is in light of the critical synopsis and crucial questions that Zuboff (2015) has raised above, that one can go on to assert that in order for the critical researcher to effectively address such prominent issues, one is essentially compelled to gain a wider understanding of the inner workings of how surveillance capitalism actually operates, along with who the key stake holders in such a system are. We will thus turn to these central issues as they will not only allow us to gain a critical insight of how the economic practices of the contemporary era are inherently shaping the communicational mediums of the contemporary era (and vice versa), but it will also essentially allow us to appreciate how social media platforms of the 21st century are central to this current configuration of capitalism. In addition to the above, it will also be elucidated how, due to the rootedness of social media platforms within such a system, such technological interfaces — in their current formulation — are actually undermining the public sphere of the 21st century.

5.2) The inner workings and history of surveillance capitalism and its link to the world wide web

According to Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier (2013), Google is widely considered as being the progenitor and pioneer of 'big data'. This point is ratified by Zuboff (2019: 69) who notes that thanks to the wide embrace of Google's search platform in the late 1990s, Google successfully managed to introduce — and then later impose — a ubiquitous sense of computer mediation to a broad range of human activities. This is attributed, primarily, to the fact that an ever-increasing number of people, across the globe, were opting to engage in online searches whilst also making use of an expanding array of services provided by Google that were all, in some way, interconnected with the world-wide web.

As these new online-oriented activities were being informated for the first time, they produced a new collection of data resources. In order to provide the reader with some additional detail as to exactly what these new data resources were comprised of, Zuboff (2019: 69) notes that in addition to 'key words', each Google search query now managed to produce an array of collateral behavioural data such as:

the number and pattern of search terms, how a query is phrased, spelling, punctuation, dwell times, click patterns, and location.

In terms of surveillance capitalism's development, it is interesting to note that in the early stages of Google's evolution, the "behavioural by-products" that its search engine managed to capture were, initially, haphazardly stored and operationally ignored. What this then means is that at this early stage, such data was not regarded as being very useful or valuable for either Google itself or the array of services it provided (ibid.).

It is actually Amit Patel — a young Stanford graduate student with a penchant for 'data mining' — who is frequently credited with acknowledging the immense significance of Google's accidental data caches (Zuboff, 2019: 69). Patel's work with these "collateral data logs" allowed him to arrive at the prescient insight that, given the informating capabilities of Google's search engine, detailed narratives about each user (including details pertaining to their thoughts, feelings, desires and interests) could actually be reliably deduced, inferred and algorithmically constructed from the wake of the unstructured signals that trailed every online action. Such an insight then allowed Patel to arrive at the — now groundbreaking — conclusion that the manifold collateral data that Google's services were able to informate actually provided the company with a complex and unprecedented sensor of human behaviour (ibid.).

It is in light of Patel's research pertaining to the significant amount of insight that could be gleaned from an analysis of such collateral behavioural data that Google's engineers soon realised that the continuous flows and analysis of such data could actually have a "reciprocating influence" on their search engine itself, thus enabling it to progressively evolve into 'a recursive learning system' (Zuboff, 2019: 70). What this then means is that this newly discovered recursive element within Google's search platform would allow the system to constantly improve its search results, while also spurring the development of product innovations such as spell-check, translation, and voice recognition (ibid.). At this stage in our analysis of the emergence and development of surveillance capitalism, the key point to take note of is the fact that during this early period of Google's expansion, the behavioural data that its systems managed to accumulate were effectively put to work

entirely on the user's behalf[227]. It can therefore be argued that at this stage of Google's development, whatever users inadvertently gave up that was of value to the company — in terms of their behavioural data — they (i.e. the users) nevertheless also ended up benefitting from, particularly in the form of improved services[228].

However, Google's "user-centred" work ethos/ethic — and the symbiotic nature of the relationship upon which such an ethos/ethic was founded — changed rather dramatically in April 2000, when the 'dot-com economy' came to an ignominious halt (Zuboff, 2019: 73). As the business environment in Silicon Valley began to unravel, the investors who had once boldly backed the development of information technology began to panic. As such, many investors began to express serious doubts about Google's future prospects, and some even threatened to withdraw their support. It was during this time that an increasing sentiment of 'pressure for profit' was levelled towards the company. As a result, Google's co-founders — Larry Page and Sergey Brin — quickly took heed of the profit-driven demands of their financial backers and subsequently tasked the (then tiny) AdWords team with the objective of 'looking for ways to make more money' (ibid.).

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[227] This sentiment is effectively captured by Zuboff (2019: 70) who notes that during the early stages of Google's development, collateral user data provided the company with what can be described as being 'value at no additional cost'. As a result of its explicit "user-centred" work ethos/ethic, Google opted to reinvest that value back into the user experience in the form of improved services whereby service enhancements were also offered at no cost to users (ibid.). For this reciprocal, and mutually beneficial relationship to arise, Google's users can be said to have provided it (i.e. Google) with the necessary "raw material" in the form of collateral behavioural data. This raw material was then subsequently harvested, analysed and then systemically worked back into the platform by Google's engineers in order to improve the speed, accuracy and relevance of its search engine, while also helping to construct supplementary products that would benefit its users (such as online translation services). A symbiotic relationship between Google, its users and the various services it provided could therefore be said to have existed during this stage of the company's operations. As such, the people making use of Google's services were treated as ends in themselves (Zuboff, 2019: 70).

[228] This point is reaffirmed by the fact that in the early stages of its development, Google had not placed a great deal of emphasis and impetus upon its advertising department (AdWords). Emphasis was therefore exclusively placed upon the services provided, and not on the development of a system of capital generation to be acquired through advertising alone. In fact, as Zuboff (2019: 73) points out, at that stage, the AdWords team consisted only of seven people, most of whom shared Google's founders' general antipathy toward advertisements. This antipathetic tone towards advertising had already been set by Sergey Brin and Larry Page (the co-founders of Google) in their milestone paper that unveiled their search engine conception. The paper was titled 'The Anatomy of a Large-Scale Hypertextual Web Search Engine' and was presented at the 1998 World Wide Web Conference. In this paper, Brin and Page (1998: 117-118), make their position towards advertising very clear when they state: '*We expect that advertising funded search engines will be inherently biased towards the advertisers and away from the needs of the consumers*. This type of bias is very difficult to detect *but could still have a significant effect on the marke*t *… we believe the issue of advertising causes enough mixed incentives that it is crucial to have a competitive search engine that is transparent and in the academic realm* [emphasis added]'.

In late 2000, the rationale for 'annulling the reciprocal relationship' that had once existed between Google and its users was effectively adopted, which would ultimately undermine and transform its co-founders' initial antipathy and opposition towards the role that advertising would/should play in their company (Zuboff, 2019: 75). From an operational perspective, Google's revised business model would now effectively aim to turn its ever-expanding reserves of behavioural data — along with its unrivalled computational power and expertise — toward the single task of 'matching ads with queries' (ibid.). In 2002 — the watershed year during which surveillance capitalism actually took root — Google can be said to have travelled into uncharted digital terrain by effectively exploiting the informational sensitivities that its exclusive and detailed collateral behavioural data bases could reveal. Those 'raw materials' that had once been solely utilised so as to improve the quality of search results would now also be put to use in the service of targeting advertising to individual users (ibid.).

As time elapsed — and Google's profit margins began to soar at an astronomical rate as a result of its reconfigured business operations[229] — a deeper grasp of the 'predictive power' associated with big data triggered a 'crucial mutation' that would ultimately turn Google, the Internet, advertising and the very nature of information capitalism toward an astonishingly lucrative surveillance project (Zuboff, 2019: 78). Such a mutation can be said to have manifested itself due to the fact that from an advertising/marketing perspective, Google now offered big businesses an unprecedented ability to strategically surveil, engage with, and then target consumers on a near-instantaneous basis. As such, it was the pioneers of big data surveillance (i.e. Google) that effectively offered the venture capitalists of the 21st century what can be described as being a 'scientific solution' as to how efficient and effective — albeit somewhat enigmatic — advertising and marketing were to be undertaken[230] that had, hitherto, exceeded even the most-ambitious dreams of any advertising executive (Zuboff, 2019: 78).

[229] If there is any doubt as to whether or not Google's novel strategy of accumulation is to be regarded as being effective from a capital generation perspective, as of 8th January 2019, Google was cited as possessing a market value of about 750 billion US dollars (La Monica, 2019).

[230] In practical terms, what this then means is that, from a marketing/advertising perspective, Google's new data compilation system can be said to have effectively offered big businesses a statistically verifiable mode of operation whereby: '*there would be no more guesswork and far less waste in the advertising budget. Mathematical certainty would replace all of that*' [emphasis added] (Zuboff, 2019: 79). As Vaidhyanathan

In light of the above, it can be averred that Google would no longer mine and analyse the behavioural data of its users on behalf of its users, for the strict purpose of improving the services that it had to offer, but rather:

> *to read users' minds for the purposes of matching ads to their interests, as those interests are deduced from the collateral traces of online behaviour* [emphasis added] (Zuboff, 2019: 79).

This then meant that Google consciously decided to embrace a novel strategy of capital accumulation whereby it would access the vast reserves of behavioural data that were linked with its users — which were effectively growing on a daily basis — so as to predict (with an increasing amount of statistical certainty) what a particular individual, in a particular time and place was thinking, feeling, and doing - with this valuable information then being sold to the highest bidder (Zuboff, 2019: 79). In order to achieve this impressive technological feat, new data sets — that would later be referred to as 'user profile information' or 'UPI' — were effectively compiled that would dramatically enhance the accuracy of such predictions (ibid.). It is as a direct result of these operational decisions that Google opted to embrace at the dawn of the new millennium, that the foundational mechanisms of surveillance capitalism were effectively put in place.

Based upon the synopsis provided above, one can argue that what Google effectively managed to introduce to the capitalistic foray of the 21st century is an unprecedented technological capability that had been designed so as to deduce the thoughts, feelings, intentions, and interests of billions of individuals across the entire globe (Zuboff, 2019: 81). From a systematic point of view, such a feat would ultimately be achieved by continuously recording and analysing the behavioural tendencies of each Google user via the aid of its search engine's "automating/informating architecture". On a more ominous note, such an insidious process of capital accumulation can also be described as operating as an incredibly

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(2018: 86) notes, the revised model of web-based advertising that Google pioneered also creates data that indicates whether or not the advertisement proved to be effective in terms of its intended aims/outcomes. In comparison to such a system, all other forms of advertising, are leaps of faith. Thus, the advertising system Google invented in the first few years of the 21st century operated completely differently to anything that had preceded it. Advertisers would now pay for an ad only if a person clicked on it. This meant that if an ad failed, the advertiser could try a different version or target it differently. Digital media allowed for that malleability to exist.

elaborate 'one-way mirror', that functions constantly, irrespective of a person's awareness, knowledge, and consent, thus enabling 'privileged secret access to behavioural data' (ibid.).

As such, Google's new model of accumulation can be described as a digitalised instantiation of a specific set of social relations that is effectively rooted within an intricate system of surveillance that is inextricably bound to asymmetries of knowledge and power[231] (Zuboff,

[231] It is directly in relation to this point that a compelling argument can be made as to how Zuboff's (2015; 2019) critical insights both corroborate and extend Foucault's initial insights into the development and expansion of the panoptic schema within the modern world, along with Deleuze's (1992) later argument pertaining to the emergence of societies of control. In order to appreciate such a claim, one need only reflect upon how, in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault's genealogical methodology is utilised to investigate the conceptualisation, implementation and maintenance of notions of order, control and discipline— with surveillance playing an ever-greater role as society has progressed towards modernity (Mills, 2003: 43). Amiradakis (2016b: 283) elaborates on this matter by noting that Bentham's Panopticon plays a central role in Foucault's conceptualisation of discipline and surveillance as it is the panoptic schema which symbolises an internalised disciplinary practice as one is coerced (albeit in a "soft" manner) to act as if one is constantly being surveilled even when one is not. Such a scenario ultimately gives rise to an asymmetrical "seen/be seen dyad" where, on the one hand, the surveilled is 'totally seen, without ever seeing'; and on the other, the surveiller 'sees everything without ever being seen' (Foucault, 1977: 200). For Foucault, it is the perception of power which becomes of paramount importance given that the awareness of its perpetual presence tends to render its actual exercise unnecessary. It is in this regard that Foucault talks about the new means of correct training whereby the success of disciplinary power derives from the use of fairly simple techniques pertaining to surveillance, including: Hierarchical observation, Normalising judgement and the Examination. The ultimate result of such 'simple techniques' lies in the creation of what Foucault refers to as docile bodies in which the body—and mind—actually enters into a ubiquitous machinery of power that 'explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it' for the sake of utility and obedience (Foucault, 1977: 138).The two main effects of the modern disciplinary model structured around the notion of perpetual surveillance are: 1) the internalisation of discipline in the mind of the observed; and 2) the voluntary subordination of the individual to the observer's potential gaze (Farinosi, 2011: 63). Amiradakis (2016b: 283) continues by noting that it is also important to be aware that, according to Foucault, the panoptic schema should be understood as a generalisable model of functioning and a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of ordinary citizens. As such, it should be perceived as being polyvalent in its application in that 'wherever one is tasked to deal with a multiplicity of individuals on whom an action or particular form of behaviour must be imposed, the panoptic schema may be used' (Foucault, 1977: 205). By tracking and highlighting the development, implementation and embrace of the panoptic schema, Foucault (1977: 214–217) notes that one can speak of the formation of a disciplinary society and surveillance state that stretches to an indefinitely generalised mechanism of Panopticism such that: 'our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance … there continues the meticulous, concrete *training of useful forces*; … it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the *individual is carefully fabricated in it*, *according to a whole technique of forces and bodies* … [by which] *thousands of eyes* [are] *posted everywhere* [and] *mobile attentions* [are] *ever on the alert*' (emphasis added). Olivier (2011: 45) extends this claim, stating that as the 'panoptical, maximum-visibility age of disciplined, docile bodies' has unfolded, even those 'ordinary people' who did not fall outside of the predetermined boundaries of the law (or sanity) have had their identities progressively assigned to various data banks and population registers in a process of normalising judgment. The consequence has been that virtually every citizen in contemporary democratic states has become highly individualised in terms of personal attributes such as birthplace, domicile, educational qualifications, criminal record, etc. As such, the panoptic schema can be said to have expanded into nearly all facets of modern society, enveloping all those that fall within its gaze and as such, the panoptic schema can be viewed as an exemplar of the shift in mechanisms of social control (Caluya, 2010: 622). Importantly however, this does not mean that 'surveillance capitalism' as characterised by Zuboff does not represent a step beyond the panopticism uncovered by Foucault; on the contrary, it does, as should already be apparent from what has

2019: 81). Furthermore, it is important — and somewhat disheartening — to note that Google displayed no qualms with regard to the imposition of such a set of asymmetrical relations on all of its users for the benefit of its real customers - namely, the manifold advertising agencies and firms making use of Google's advanced surveillance strategies (ibid.).

While the aforementioned overview provides the reader with a fairly clear description of how Google managed to pioneer a new regime of capital accumulation by engineering a sophisticated coalescence between methods of digital surveillance, big data and a powerful system of interconnected informating technologies on the world wide web, it does not — as yet — elucidate how any of this actually relates to the realm of social media. Furthermore, it is yet to be revealed how such a novel logic of capital accumulation is actually able to have an inimical effect upon the public sphere of the 21st century - particularly when such a logic

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been written, and will be elaborated on in what follows. It is directly in this regard that Deleuze's (1992) insights pertaining to societies of control become very illuminating. To put it briefly, Deleuze (1992: 5) claims that since the cessation of World War 2, Foucault's notion of a disciplinary society has given way to new societies of control — which have nevertheless incorporated many of the features of Foucault's disciplinary society/surveillance state — in which 'ultrarapid forms of free floating control' are swiftly coming into effect. While Deleuze (1992) is fairly cryptic with regard to the actual structures and underpinnings associated with such control societies, he nevertheless does provide a few clues: Firstly, he notes that computers, along with their information processing and tracking abilities, are playing an integral role in this transformation (Deleuze, 1992: 7) as individuals are now explicitly compelled to continuously integrate themselves into their digital structures of domination and exploitation (Fuchs, 2009: 82). Secondly, Deleuze (1992: 4) indicates that such mechanisms of control should be perceived as a 'modulation, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other' - thus essentially highlighting their 'gaseous' and malleable character. Regarding Deleuze's first point, Amiradakis (2016b: 287) argues that as search engines (such as Google) and social media platforms (such as Facebook) operate exclusively on the circulation of information that individual users are required to upload and update, along with their invasive ability to track, surveil and scrutinise the intimate details of users' lives on a day-to-day basis, corporate social media's exploitation of Internet users and their personal information can indeed be classified as an aspect of this Deleuzian 'controlling transformation'. In addition to this, if one critically examines the variegated and vicissitudinous nature of the various technologies, tools and platforms which the individual is now required to utilise and embrace in order to access and operate on these search engines and corporate social media platforms, it is not difficult to see how such devices — along with the platforms themselves — are constantly being changed, modified, upgraded and "enhanced" (Amiradakis, 2016b: 287). In order to make sense of this claim one need only peruse the various technological catalogues and consumer pricing guides which vividly highlight the myriad cell phones, smartphones, smart watches, smart glasses, tablets, iPads, iPods, iPhones, notebooks, laptops and desktop computers that are currently on offer — and which will invariably be replaced with newer models as time passes — in order to facilitate the user's constant connection to (and immersion in) the online, digital world. According to Amiradakis (2016b: 288), this description of the variegated form that technology and technological development has assumed within the contemporary world then validates Deleuze's central claim about the malleable, 'gaseous' and ever-changing nature of the new mechanisms of control one can find within society. In light of the above, one can aver that Zuboff's critical insights pertaining to the emergence of surveillance capitalism manage to bolster and extend the arguments of both Foucault and Deleuze, whilst also managing to highlight exactly how surveillance capitalism represents a key feature in contemporary society's transition from a disciplinary society and surveillance state (Foucault), to a society of control (Deleuze).

is applied directly to the social media platforms of the present epoch upon which the contemporary public sphere is said to operate.

5.3) Social media, surveillance capitalism and the abrogation of the public sphere in the 21st century

In order to address the crucial series of outstanding issues that have been raised above, and to effectively get to the heart of the matter that this investigation is aimed at exploring, it is imperative to take note of the fact in light of Google's considerable accomplishments in the surveillance-based economy of the 21st century, that its pioneering logic of accumulation has actually become the default model for most online startups and applications, and is now shared by the world's largest social media company, namely Facebook (Zuboff, 2015: 77). This claim is corroborated by Zuboff (2019: 91) who alerts the reader to the fact that Facebook was actually the first major ICT company to which Google's new logic of accumulation spread.

Such a development can be traced back to May 2007, when Mark Zuckerberg introduced the Facebook platform to the world wide web, effectively opening up the social media platform to everyone across the globe. Much like Google had previously done, Zuckerberg explicitly opted to reject the strategy of charging users a fee for services rendered. According to Zuckerberg, the primary reason as to why he decided upon such an approach is due to the fact that:

> Our [i.e. Facebook's] mission is to connect every person in the world. You don't do that by having a service people pay for (Grossman, 2014).

As a result of Zuckerberg's decision to not charge users for Facebook's services, the pressing question that loomed in Facebook's headquarters at that time invariably revolved around how the company was going to be able to turn all of its users — who at that stage numbered between 40 million and 58 million (Sedghi, 2014) — into a lucrative source of capital generation[232]. In March 2008, this looming question would be definitively and

[232] In 2007, under Zuckerberg's explicit direction, Facebook initially attempted to answer this pressing question by launching a new programme that was embedded within the Facebook platform called 'Beacon'. What Beacon would aim to do is enable Facebook advertisers to track users across the Internet, disclosing users'

effectively answered when Zuckerberg opted to hire Google executive Sheryl Sandberg to be Facebook's Chief Operating Officer (COO). Zuckerberg's decision to hire Sandberg is to be regarded as being an imperative factor in relation to the expansion of surveillance capitalism onto the (as yet) uncharted domain of social media, due to the fact that whilst at Google, it was actually Sandberg who originally led the development of surveillance capitalism through the tremendous expansion of AdWords and other aspects of online sales operations[233] (Zuboff, 2019: 92).

Thus, in successfully signing Sandberg on as the COO of Facebook, Zuckerberg quickly became an ardent proponent of surveillance capitalism, and as a result, Sandberg effectively spearheaded the company's transformation from a major social networking site into an 'advertising behemoth' (Zuboff, 2019: 92). This point is ratified by Vaidhyanathan (2018: 86) who notes that after Sandberg left Google to run Facebook in 2008, Facebook adopted many of the same techniques that had made Google valuable. Sandberg then opted to:

> direct new experiments and ad services that only Facebook could provide, given the richness of personal data and the graph of social connections. *This is the main reason Google and Facebook are the most effective advertising systems ever created* [emphasis added].

In order to appreciate how such a massive transformation within the world's largest and most influential social media platform[234] was to take place, one initially needs to appreciate

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purchases to their personal networks without permission. Due to its rather crude nature, lack of sophistication, and being too obvious in its intention — i.e. to surveil and exploit the behavioural patterns of Facebook's users — most people were outraged by the company's audacity, both in tracking them online and in usurping their ability to control the disclosure of their own personal details. Under a significant amount duress, Zuckerberg was forced to shut the programme down, and was thus compelled to search for more sophisticated (and clandestine) ways in which Facebook could effectively exploit its growing number of users (Zuboff, 2019: 51).

[233] Kirkpatrick (2010: 251) ratifies this assertion by noting that it was indeed Sandberg who effectively: '*built the search company's self-service ad business* [i.e. AdWords] *into one of the economic powerhouses of the Web*' [emphasis added].

[234] To underscore and reinforce how Facebook is indeed to be considered as being the largest, most expansive and most influential of social media platforms, and thus to elucidate just how pervasive the logic of surveillance capitalism has become — apart from the fact that Facebook currently boasts a user base of over 2.2 billion people — it is imperative to take note of the fact that of the seven most-used social media platforms, Facebook owns four — Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, and Instagram. If we consider only social media services that operate outside China, Facebook owns four of the top five; only YouTube, owned by Google, occupies the non-Facebook spot, at number two (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 102).

the fact that it was Sandberg — with her extensive experience at Google's AdWords — who allowed the engineering team at Facebook to realise that:

> *Facebook's social graph represented an awe-inspiring source of behavioural surplus: the extractor's equivalent of a 19th-century prospector stumbling into a valley that sheltered the largest diamond mine and the deepest gold mine ever to be discovered*[235] [emphasis added] (Zuboff, 2019: 92).

Kirkpatrick (2014: 266) elaborates upon such an assertion by noting that such a concentrated collection of rich — and no doubt revealing — personal data is attributed to the fact that users on Facebook voluntarily divulge vast amounts of data about themselves, their families and their friends. They then also manage to generate even more data through their behaviour on the site, by interacting with other users, on groups and with pages.

When critically reflecting upon why users feel so compelled to divulge intimate and personal information upon a social media platform like Facebook, contemporary critical research indicates that there may actually be many more ominous factors explaining why the modern individual 'voluntarily' divulges copious amounts of such sensitive information. According to Elizabeth Bird (2011: 508), it is through the implementation of 'terms of use' and 'terms of service' that corporate Web 2.0 companies such as Facebook (and the countless others that have followed in its footsteps) essentially force individual users to withdraw any claims of privacy and ownership regarding the content that they upload, such that:

> *anything they post becomes the property of the company - thus explicitly allowing for the possibility of perpetual online surveillance and marketing exploitation* [emphasis added].

Such a situation can thus be said to signify how private Internet usage has become subsumed under the exploitative demands of capital via perpetual and coercive surveillance practices (Amiradakis, 2016b: 287).

[235] Sandberg corroborates such a lavish description of Facebook's insightful data resources when she is quoted as saying that: 'We [Facebook] have better information than anyone else. We know gender, age, location, and it's real data as opposed to the stuff other people infer' (Kirkpatrick, 2014: 266).

When viewed from this perspective, private Internet usage has therefore become a sphere of exploitation — via the hidden appearance of exploitation as play — as Internet corporations accumulate their massive profits by exploiting the play of users (Fuchs, 2014b: 126). Fuchs (2014b: 130) expands upon this matter by arguing that according to his critical analysis, users of social media platforms are now actually coerced (in their social capacity) into both submitting to, and embracing, the various demands of (self-)surveillance associated with corporate social media platforms. This is due to the fact that if they stop using, or fail to make use of these platforms, they are likely to be more isolated and alienated from their peers, colleagues and family members (Amiradakis, 2016b: 288).

Thus, in order to maintain social relations and a salubrious sense of status, social media users are effectively compelled to utilise these platforms on a regular, if not obsessive, basis[236]. It is in light of such a critical observation that Fuchs (2014b: 276) argues that the individual who makes use of social media platforms is (often unwittingly) coerced to employ such media —and the associated forms of (self)surveillance associated with such platforms — within his/her life because they are striving to achieve what Bourdieu terms 'social capital' (the accumulation of social relations), 'cultural capital' (the accumulation of qualifications, education, knowledge) and 'symbolic capital' (the accumulation of reputation) (Amiradakis, 2016b: 288).

[236] Stiegler (2011: 110) elaborates on this issue, arguing that contemporary cultural and cognitive technologies are fundamentally aimed at the homogenisation and control of users' behaviour. This stems from the fact that these technologies are now able to penetrate into the consciousness of the user which then reinstantiates corporal control over the user of such technologies, ultimately giving rise to a situation in which a sentiment of voluntary servitude is induced in the individual (Stiegler, 2011: 80). Amiradakis (2016b: 286) points out that it is actually Marcuse (1974: 4) who is able to provide some additional insight into this matter when he argues that due to the 'unrepressed implementation' of modern science and technology, additional controls of domination and coercion have been introduced within contemporary society - primarily for the parochial pursuit of capital accumulation (this is a sentiment, as we have already seen in Chapter 2 of this investigation, that was shared and expressed by both Horkheimer and Adorno in their Culture Industry thesis). Marcuse (1974) further argues that alienated labour, domination and capital accumulation have turned Freud's notion of the reality principle into an overly repressive reality principle and as a result, the repression of the pleasure principle (in which the creative libidinal drive of Eros thrives) takes on a quantity that exceeds the culturally necessary suppression. In societies that are based upon the principles of domination, coercion and control, the reality principle has taken on the form of what Marcuse calls the performance principle in which domination 'is exercised by a particular group or individual in order to sustain and enhance itself in a privileged position' (Marcuse, 1974: 36) by introducing additional technological mechanisms of control and domination over and above those indispensable for civilised human association (Amiradakis, 2016b: 286).

One can then effectively argue that the coercion and control that one finds on the digital social media platforms of the contemporary era are mainly social in nature primarily due to the fact that large social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have successfully monopolised the supply of certain services, such as online social networking, and have more than two billion users (Fuchs, 2014b: 274). This allows such platforms to exercise a 'soft and almost invisible form of coercion', in which users are effectively chained to commercial social media platforms as all their friends/significant acquaintances appear there, and, as such, they do not want to lose these valuable contacts. Therefore, they cannot simply leave these platforms (ibid.).

This then accords directly with Bauman's argument (in Bauman and Lyon, 2013: 25) that the prospect of social death menacingly awaits those who have failed to, or refuse to, connect to the cyber world (Amiradakis, 2016b: 288). As Turkle (2011: 250) notes, in the contemporary milieu, Facebook has become a volition, and if an individual does not opt to make use of (and embrace) Facebook, their contemporaries are unlikely to communicate with them[237]. It is in this regard that Turkle avers that users (particularly of a younger persuasion) are beginning to reach a state of performance exhaustion (Colbert, 2011), and while many Facebook users may not think of setting up and updating a Facebook profile as a performance, Turkle indicates that it should be regarded as one (Olivier, 2012: 262) - to be, within the digital confines of the 21st century, is to connect (Feenberg, 2010: 100).

Thus, while there may indeed be a great deal more to the picture as to why users feel compelled to 'voluntarily' divulge their personal information on a social media platform such as Facebook, it was nevertheless under Sandberg's tutelage that the engineers at Facebook would quickly learn how to master the tracking, scraping, storing and analysing of billions of UPIs in order to fabricate Facebook's own targeting algorithms. Like Google, Facebook would also not restrict extraction operations to what people voluntarily shared with the company. It is thus as a direct result of Sandberg's operational influence that the team at Facebook realised that:

[237] Fromm's ([1941] 2013: 183) notion of 'automation conformity', as described and delineated in Chapter 2 of this investigation, then also seems to play a major role when attempting to gain a critical understanding of exactly why the contemporary individual feels a constant need/compulsion to regularly engage with — and constantly upload personal information onto — the social media platforms of the contemporary milieu.

> *through the artful manipulation of Facebook's culture of intimacy and sharing, it would be possible to use behavioural surplus not only to satisfy demand but also to create demand* [emphasis added] (Zuboff, 2019: 92).

Vaidhyanathan (2018: 57) elaborates upon what has been delineated above by arguing that in order to successfully accomplish the mission of 'targeting advertisements deftly', Sandberg needed more and better data about what users did, thought, and wanted to buy. It is as a result of such an avaricious — and no doubt invasive — pursuit that Sandberg effectively embarked on initiating a series of expansions pertaining to Facebook's technologically mediated capabilities to both track and profile its users.

This point is verified and elaborated upon by Zuboff (2015: 84-85) who notes that because big data analysis yields vast amounts of correlational patterns pertaining to user behaviour, the need for continuous experiments exists so that the analysts of big data can actually tease out 'issues of causality', i.e. what actually makes users respond to stimuli/act in certain ways. According to Zuboff (ibid.), in the hyper-accelerated age of the worldwide web, such experiments are comparatively easy to undertake, whereby it has become a simple matter for the designers, operators and facilitators of the major social media platforms and search engines to assign 'treatment and control groups' so as to compare and contrast how different input/stimuli affect the behaviour of different individuals, based on 'traffic, cookies, usernames, geographic areas, and so on', without individual users ever being aware of such invasive and manipulative undertakings (ibid.). Zuboff (2015: 84-85) then goes on to note that since Sandberg's appointment as COO, Facebook has consistently managed to make remarkable inroads in such experimental endeavours, as it (i.e. Facebook) regularly conducts experiments in modifying users' behaviour with a view to eventually monetising its knowledge, predictive capability and control[238].

[238] Zhukova (2017) offers some additional details pertaining to the invasive and insidious nature of Facebook's behaviour modification experiments by providing the reader with an overview of various experiments that Facebook has conducted, including: 1) 'A Massive-Scale Emotional Contagion' in which 689 003 users were unwittingly involved; 2) 'Social Influence in Social Advertising' in which 29 million users were unwittingly involved; 3) 'The Spread of Emotion via Facebook' in which 151 million users were unwittingly involved; 4) 'Self-Censorship on Facebook' in which 4 million users were unwittingly involved, 5) 'Selection Effects in Online Sharing' in which over 1 million users were unwittingly involved; and 6) 'Social Influence and Political Mobilization' in which 61 million users were unwittingly involved. For more information regarding these and other experiments that Facebook has conducted in order to manipulate, surveil and exploit its users, see

From a business point of view, the various opportunities associated with these new data flows actually mark a dramatic shift from a more traditional '*a posteriori* analysis' of what users have done in the past, to the real-time observation, communication, analysis, prediction, and modification of actual behaviour taking place now and in the near future (Zuboff, 2015: 84). This is then to be understood as signalling the emergence of an entirely new business frontier that is now exclusively comprised of:

> *knowledge about real-time behaviour that creates opportunities to intervene in and modify behaviour for profit* (Zuboff, 2015: 84) [emphasis added].

It is as a direct result of Facebook's successful expansion of its surveillance operations, and the manifold insights that such a process of expansion has managed to yield to the company itself and to its various clients, that Vaidhyanathan (2018: 57) alerts the reader to the rather sobering fact that Facebook is now, indubitably, to be understood as being:

> *the most pervasive surveillance system in the history of the world* [whereby] *more than two billion people and millions of organizations, companies, and political movements offer up detailed accounts of passions, preferences, predilections, and plans to one commercial service* [emphasis added].

Additionally, it is also worth mentioning that as a direct result of the sophisticated informating technologies and the complex algorithms that have been designed to facilitate Facebook's operations as an expansive and globalised social media platform, Facebook is now also able to track:

> all of the connections and interactions among these people and groups, predicting future connections and guiding future interactions. It even compiles contact information *on those who do not have a Facebook account* [emphasis added] (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 57).

When attempting to understand how, when such a logic of capital accumulation is applied to social media platforms (such as Facebook and the numerous others that now operate according to such a logic), it undermines their ability to function as a viable location for a

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Zhukova (2017) *Facebook's Fascinating (and Disturbing) History of Secret Experiments*. Available at: https://www.makeuseof.com/tag/facebook-secret-experiments/

public sphere to operate, Vaidhyanathan (2018: 57) argues that Facebook — and its ilk — has exposed users across the globe to three major forms of surveillance, namely: commercial surveillance, peer surveillance and state surveillance[239]. It is thus these forms of surveillance, along with what their wider social, political and economic implications entail, that then manage to severely undermine the credibility and operational integrity of such platforms (ibid.).

In order to make sense of the aforementioned claim, it is initially important to be aware of the fact that Facebook itself — as a company that deals exclusively in the analysis and sale of big data — conducts what can be referred to as commercial surveillance of its users on behalf of its advertising clients. It is in this regard that the commercial value of Facebook can be said to reside in its complete control of this priceless account of human behaviour (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 58). In order for this form of commercial surveillance to effectively operate so as to provide Facebook with its considerable commercial value[240], it is also extremely important to take note of the fact that the digital interface that Facebook provides to both advertisers and those who run Facebook pages allows them (i.e. Facebook):

> *to learn significant amounts about their audiences in general and track the level of response their posts and advertisements generate*[241] [emphasis added] (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 58).

[239] For the sake of clarity, it may be useful to think of each of these forms of surveillance as constituting three distinct, instrumentalised perspectives that have been designed and implemented in order to achieve a specific set of outcomes. For the purposes of this particular investigation, we will be focusing our attention primarily on the commercial forms of surveillance that Facebook (and other social media platforms) has exposed its 2 billion users to, as it is this form of surveillance — as we shall soon see — that dramatically undermines the credibility and potential for social media platforms to act as viable and reliable domains in which a public sphere can emerge. For additional insight as to what the notions of 'peer' and 'state' surveillance entail, and why they are also to be regarded as being an extremely problematic form of surveillance, refer to Vaidhyanathan (2018).

[240] On 23 July 2019, Facebook's net worth was valued at 566 billion US dollars (Macrotrends.net, 2019).

[241] In light of this categorising and classificatory process associated with the Facebook's commercial surveillance operations, Oscar Gandy's (1993) notion of the panoptic sort — which attempts to broadly outline the theoretical underpinnings of contemporary marketing practices — can be said to be of importance, particularly when attempting to attain a deeper understanding of the intricacies associated with this form of surveillance (Amiradakis, 2016b: 285). According to Gandy (1993: 15), '[t]he panoptic sort is a difference machine that sorts individuals into categories and classes on the basis of routine measurements. It is a discriminatory technology that allocates options and opportunities on the basis of those measures and the administrative models that they inform' (emphasis added). In a manner redolent of Foucault (1977), Gandy

One therefore needs to be mindful of the fact that in order to effectively surveil and profile its two billion users for precise targeting, Facebook uses much of the data that users offer which includes:

> biographical data, records of interactions with others, the text of their posts, location (through Facebook apps on mobile phones equipped with GPS features), and the 'social graph' - a map of the relationships among items on Facebook (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 58).

This combination of information allows Facebook to predict user interest and behaviour based on what other people with similar attributes and similar connections want, think or do, and beyond the substantial amounts of data that Facebook gathers from its own expansive core services (Facebook, Messenger, Instagram, WhatsApp, etc.), it also allows other firms to connect to Facebook directly through a service called *Open Graph*.

While this form of single-firm commercial surveillance seems almost harmless by itself — as Facebook's Public Relations department likes to espouse a self-affirming narrative as to how, when all that data serves Facebook well, it invariably provides a more enjoyable and relevant experience to users — this is not to be regarded as being the case whatsoever. As has already been mentioned above, such a narrative seems to unravel when one

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(1993: 15) asserts that the panoptic sort can be regarded as a system of power and a form of disciplinary surveillance that identifies, classifies and assesses those within its gaze. Facebook — and its ilk — can then be classified as panoptic sorting machines in that: 1) They identify the users' interests by requiring them to upload personal data when registering and also by monitoring their regular upload of user-generated content; 2) This data is then used for classifying users into different consumer groups; and 3) A comparative assessment of users' interests and available advertisements is conducted. Advertisements are then selected in order to match specific interests (Fuchs, 2011: 140). While the above insights may make it seem as if Foucault's observations are being distorted so as to comply with how Facebook conducts its surveillance operations, it is important to note the many ways in which the observations and critical insights mentioned above accord with what Foucault himself suggests in *Discipline and Punish*. To corroborate such an assertion, one needs to be mindful of the fact that in *Discipline and Punish* Foucault (1977: 220) explicitly argues that the formation of the modern surveillance state is connected with a number of broad societal processes, including an economic dimension where the primary aim is to increase both the docility and the utility of all the elements of the system. In order to increase the particular utility of each element of the multiplicity — namely the individual — by the most rapid and the least costly means, the multiplicity must be used as an instrument of growth for which the practice of perpetual (self-)surveillance becomes increasingly important. Foucault therefore maintains that these new forms of discipline function increasingly as techniques for making useful individuals and as a result of this, such techniques have been rooted and adapted in order to effectively assist the growth and control of the most important, most central and most productive sectors of society. Foucault then argues that this disciplinary practice can be regarded as a power that insidiously objectifies those on whom it is applied in order to form a knowledge about these individuals. In the case of Facebook's commercial surveillance campaign (which underpins the inner workings of surveillance capitalism at large), this would then serve to facilitate a process of data control, analysis and manipulation in the perpetual pursuit of monetary gain (Amiradakis, 2016b: 286).

acknowledges the fact that, when such surveillance practices are gauged from a critical perspective, they can definitely be defined as being highly invasive, coercive, unethical and exploitative (if not in some cases, verging on illegal).

Vaidhyanathan (2018: 57) expands upon such a critical appraisal of these commercial forms of surveillance by noting that, more often than not, Facebook gathers and deploys much of this information without its users' knowledge or consent. Furthermore, Facebook does not offer its users a full view of how their various uploads, likes, timelines, shares and links are used. To compound matters even further, Facebook does not offer the user with clear and easy ways to exempt themselves from this pervasive, and no doubt, invasive, form of surveillance. As such, most users do not have a full picture of the depth and breadth of Facebook's insidious and invasive activities[242]. Thus, from a commercial perspective, one of the chief dangers to result from the Facebook commercial surveillance system lies in the concentration of power. No other company in the world — with the possible exception of Google — can even consider building a set of personalised dossiers as rich as Facebook's (ibid.). These data resources thus reinforce Facebook's commercial dominance in the advertising business[243].

But there are other significant, and often overlooked, dangers that are inherent to Facebook's strategy of commercial surveillance. In particular, an immense danger that is inherent to — and in fact instrumental to — the success of Facebook's commercial surveillance strategy resides in the fact that for such a commercial endeavour to be effective, it requires users to continuously and effectively engage with the social media platform itself. To be more precise, for such a platform to effectively undertake its commercial surveillance operations, it requires the attentional/retentional reserves of the

[242] Vaidhyanathan (2018: 57) provides the reader with a rather telling example of the furtive and unscrupulous nature of Facebook's commercial operations by alerting one to the fact that the users of Facebook rarely are informed that it (i.e. Facebook) buys and sells troves of credit-card purchasing and profile data from (and to) the large data marketing firms. As such, Vaidhyanathan (ibid.), emphasises how this mix of the information that users willingly offer to Facebook, together with Facebook's ability to track its users on the web and in the real world, along with the commercial credit data it purchases, significantly empowers Facebook and disempowers the user in the process.

[243] As we shall soon see, this concentration of power not only affects how information in the digital age of the 21st century is accessed by the wider public, but it also inherently affects the manner in which information such as the news is recorded, written and propagated - with numerous problems associated with misinformation, disinformation, echo chambers and epistemic bubbles ensuing as a direct result.

user to be almost constantly directed towards the social media platform itself so as to ensure that the user is regularly interacting with it. What this then implies is that a social media platform such as Facebook — and no doubt the countless others that have pursed such a strategy of accumulation — is inherently designed to capture, and then retain, the attentional/retentional economy of the user so as to ensure that constant exposure and interaction is achieved. As shall shortly be disclosed, it is this hijacking of the attentional/retentional economy that is to be regarded as a major factor that serves to undermine the ability for such platforms to serve as effective public spheres.

5.3.1) The hijacking of the attentional/retentional economy

According to critical media theorists such as Jackson (2008), Turkle (2011) and Vaidhyanathan (2018), along with a contemporary critical philosopher such as Stiegler (2010), the notion of attention is to be regarded as being a pivotal, if not constitutive, element in relation to an individual's sense of being-in-the-world (*Dasein* in the Heideggerean sense). For these — and many other — theorists, this can primarily be said to reside in the fact that it is the faculty of attention that effectively allows for both the creation and facilitation of a sense of self-awareness on the part of the individual, along with a wider appreciation and critical understanding of the lifeworld[244] in which one is required to operate.

In very rudimentary terms, this can be ascribed to the fact that it is the faculty of attention that actively stimulates one's consciousness and directs the thought process itself. Furthermore, Vaidhyanathan (2018: 80) goes on to note that:

[244] The notion of the 'lifeworld' is a Husserlian term that is employed in this context so as to describe the world that is given to us most immediately: the world-horizon in which we live without making it thematic *as* a world (Husserl, 1970: 379). Furthermore, Russell (2006: 194) informs the reader that it is possible to pick out two main senses in which Husserl utilises the term, namely, the 'thick' and the 'thin' concepts of lifeworld. For Russell (ibid.), the 'thick' variant occurs when the term 'lifeworld' is used to denote the 'entire world given to us in immediate experience replete with cultural richness, manifold practical meanings and sensuous fullness'. In this case, we are dealing with a world that is itself 'the product of cultural histories and that is bound up with complex social, political and religious forms of intersubjectivity'. As such, it can be argued that in this domain we are faced with the overwhelming multiplicity of phenomena whose investigation is the task of the human sciences. The 'thin' variant of the term 'lifeworld', on the other hand, is employed by Husserl to denote that 'narrower set of phenomena, also belonging to the world of experience, which are invariant from culture to culture'. This thin sense of the lifeworld can therefore be called 'nature', or at least nature *as* it is subjectively experienced. Both the 'thick' and 'thin' versions that Russell (2006) refers to above are to be regarded as being applicable and relevant to this particular section of the investigation.

thought works in streams. If those streams are limited by duration or not allowed to stay steady and focused, the power of that thought diminishes [emphasis added].

While the aforementioned assertions pertaining to attention may seem simple — and obvious — enough, it is Stiegler (2010: 8) who provides the reader with a philosophically nuanced and detailed overview[245] as to exactly why attention (and the attentional/retentional economy with which it is intimately related) is to be taken very seriously by the contemporary critical researcher[246].

In order to elucidate why/how this happens to be the case, Stiegler (2010: 8) opts to operate from a phenomenological perspective, drawing explicitly from — and then expanding upon — the works of Husserl (and Kant) and his insights into how consciousness actually functions. Stiegler (2010: 8) therefore begins by introducing the reader to the fact that according to Husserl's phenomenological analysis, conscious time is woven with what he (i.e. Husserl) refers to as *retentions* (i.e. that which is remembered/retained) and *protentions* (that towards which our anticipatory consciousness will be directed as a result of our personalised retentions), understood in relation to the 'now'-point of the (perpetually moving) present of consciousness.

[245] Within *Technics and Time Volume 1*, Bernard Stiegler (1998) provides the reader with a detailed overview pertaining to how consciousness — as conceived and understood by the likes of Kant, Husserl and Heidegger — essentially operates. Stiegler then goes on to provide the crucial insight as to how "memory-technologies", or 'mnemotechnologies' (in differing formations across the ages) have played an integral role in both the structuring and functioning of consciousness itself, from both an individual and a societal perspective. While this is certainly to be understood as being both a rich and rewarding analysis, it is well beyond the scope of this particular investigation to focus on it in its entirety. As such, we will be limiting our focus to what Stiegler (2010; 2011, 2011a & 2016) avers with regard to the 'retentional economy' (in which the faculty of attention is central); how Husserl's insights into the primary and secondary retentions, along with the notion of the 'protention', are central in this retentional/attentional makeup; and finally, how Stiegler's insights into tertiary retentions and "memory-technologies" — or mnemotechnologies — play a crucial role in the facilitation and steering of consciousness - particularly within the digitalised milieu of the contemporary era.

[246] As shall shortly be disclosed, Stiegler is ultimately of this opinion due to the fact that these very notions (i.e. the attention of the individual along with the wider attentional/retentional economy within which it operates) find themselves in an immensely vulnerable and precarious position - particularly within the context of modernity. For critical thinkers such as Jackson (2008), Turkle (2011), Stiegler (2010) and Vaidhyanathan (2018), this has become particularly apparent in the digitalised era of social media monopolisation and globalised search engines that possess the capacity to filter massive amounts of information on our behalf, and the ever-looming presence of algorithmic intervention and manipulation.

While the Husserlian link between that which is remembered (i.e. in the form a particular retention) and that towards which one's attention will — potentially — be directed in the future (i.e. in the form of a protention) is in itself a significantly insightful observation when attempting to understand how one's attentional capacity actually functions (which will shortly be elaborated upon below), such an insight invariably raises the more fundamental issue of how one is actually able to remember/recall something in the first place.

In order to come to terms with how one is actually able to retain and recall that which has been experienced in one's lifeworld, Stiegler (2010) introduces the Husserlian notions of the primary and secondary retentions. According to Stiegler (2010: 08), a primary retention can be understood and defined as that which:

> is formed in the very passage of time, as the course of *this time*, such that, as *a present which passes*, *it is constituted by the immediate retention* (the "primary retention") *of its own passing* [emphasis added].

From a very rudimentary perspective then, a primary retention is to be understood as that which the mind apprehends when one engages with the world in the present moment. As such, it is to be regarded as being an active passage of time in which one's consciousness is directed towards the lifeworld that surrounds him/her (Stiegler, 2010: 08).

Drawing directly from Husserl's insights pertaining to the retentional faculties of consciousness and how they are intimately related to the ebb and flow of both space and time, Stiegler (2010: 08) then goes on to argue that with all temporal sequences, any event or occurrence which has just been experienced in the present (i.e. the *now* which I have just experienced), immediately becomes the moment of a particularised past and a compositional feature in one's personalised history (i.e. the *then* which belongs to me, as it was experienced by me). For Stiegler (2010: 08), by becoming part of the past:

> this passage of the present is then *constituted as secondary retention*, that is, as *all those memorial contents which together form the woven threads of our memory* [emphasis added].

Again, in very rudimentary terms, secondary retentions can be said to be constituted by those primary retentions that one is actually able to recall, retrieve and thus, remember. As such, it is these secondary retentions that then come to comprise what is typically referred to as one's memory.

In light of what has been delineated above, it is important to be mindful of the fact that according to this Husserlian paradigm of how conscious time actually operates, there is a dynamic interplay, and reciprocating influence, between the primary and secondary retentions which fundamentally influence how one's memory actually functions; what one remembers; along with where one will turn his/her attention to so that he/she can have a new set of experiences (in the form of primary retentions) that can then be later recalled (as secondary retentions).

It is directly in relation to the above that Stiegler (2011: 111) — drawing explicitly from the insights of the French theorist Gilbert Simondon — argues that only through this dynamic interplay that occurs between the primary and secondary retentions, we are actually able to 'individuate' ourselves. In very broad terms, Simondon's notion of psychic and collective individuation can be understood as the process by which one manages to constitute oneself as an *I* as opposed to a collective *We* (with which the *I* is nevertheless intimately associated). Through this process, the individual is thus able to create unique and personalised narratives pertaining directly to his/her experiences in his/her lifeworld (ibid.).

Stiegler (2011: 111) elaborates upon this matter by arguing that the process of individuation is always constituted by a selection of those temporal fluxes which compose the fabric of my existence. As such, individuation can be said to consist of those primary retentions that constitute my present, that will then also constitute that which has come to pass, which, as such, becomes my past (i.e. in the form of a secondary retention). Stiegler (2011: 111), continues by averring:

> that which has come to pass is exactly that which has come *to me*, and what I retain is therefore that which constitutes the *singularity* of my experience [author's emphasis].

What Stiegler (2011: 111) aims to elucidate with regard to this last remark pertaining to the 'singularity of experience' is that what an individual retains — as an individuated being — is not to be regarded as being the same as what his/her neighbour — as another individuated being — may retain. In fact, it is these very differences in the retentional process that are then to be understood as being the foundational elements upon which the notion of individuation is actually constructed. Stiegler (2011: 112) enunciates as much by noting that if there is indeed a difference between my primary retentions and those of my neighbour — even when we live through the same event — this is because we actually have different experiences.

How is this sense of difference then to be explained - particularly if my neighbour and I have gone though what appears to be the exact same experience? It is in relation to this point that the dynamic interplay between the primary and secondary retentions, along with the Husserlian notion of the protention, becomes imperative for understanding what is at stake. Stiegler (2011: 112) elaborates upon this matter when he notes that:

> we [i.e. my neighbour and I] have previously accumulated *differing primary retentions* that have meanwhile become *our pasts*, that is, arrangements of secondary retentions. Now, those retentions that have become secondary then *form my selection criteria* [as protentions], so that I then produce, by selecting them, primary retentions that will in their turn become secondary, and that will thereby enrich my experience, that is, *my capacity for selecting new retentions*, and so on [emphasis added].

For Stiegler (2011: 112), it is crucial to be aware of the fact that the aforementioned description as to how my neighbour and I possess the ability to focus upon and select differing primary retentions from an event that is jointly experienced, delineates nothing other than how the process of individuation actually unfolds. In order to provide some additional clarity to this matter, Stiegler (2011: 112) avers that:

> I only think differently from others, I only feel differently from others, I only desire differently from others, I only see differently from others — in short, *I only exist — because the retentional process in which I consist is unique. And because this retentional*

process is also a protentional process, that is, it is a process that constitutes horizons of expectation [emphasis added].

It is in this regard that Stiegler (2011: 112) goes on to argue that what is retained — as a secondary retention — should also be understood as a "filtering mechanism" that then creates a personalised horizon of expectation (i.e. in the sense that it will influence where my attention will be directed in the future). To phrase this point in suitably Husserlian terms, Stiegler (2011: 112) states that:

> it is a primary selection that I have effected through the use of criteria *supplied to me by my past*, a past constituted by secondary retentions *that form at the same time filters and expectations, protentions through which I receive the present* [emphasis added].

Over and above the aforementioned description pertaining to how one is able to attain a collection of secondary retentions that arise from the direct experiences an individual may undergo (in the form of primary retentions), Stiegler makes it clear that there is also another set of secondary retentions that one inherits even though they are of experiences one has not directly lived through oneself. According to Stiegler (2011: 112), this is the case for:

> everything of which I have been *told*, of that into which I have been *initiated*, or of that which I have been *taught*, of that which forms *education* and *instruction* and through which I *raise myself above myself* ... [emphasis added].

In light of the above, Stiegler (2011: 112) maintains that such retentions are to be regarded as being *both secondary* — due to the fact that they have been 'conceived, selected, projected and lived' *by others*, and as such, have constituted 'their *own pasts*' — *and collective* as they are inherited by a collection of individuals (who may belong to a particular society/culture/tradition) as the past of a previous collection of individuals (who had once belonged to that particular society/culture/tradition) [emphasis added].

Very importantly, it is these collective secondary retentions that constitute what Stiegler (2011: 112) refers to as a 'pre-individual fund' that then effectively serves to acculturate, socialise, educate and orientate the individual, while also acting as collective secondary

protentions - which then filter and influence where a particular group's collective consciousness will be directed in the future. It is in direct relation to the concept of collective secondary retentions, along with the pre-individual fund that they are said to constitute, that the Stieglerian notion of a tertiary retention, and the various mnemotechnologies with which such a notion is associated, become very important.

In order to make sense of the aforementioned claim, Stiegler (2010: 9) alerts the reader to the fact that a tertiary retention is to be understood as:

> a *mnemotechnical exteriorisation of secondary retentions which are themselves engendered by primary retentions* [emphasis added].

Furthermore, Stiegler (2010: 9) states that:

> all technical objects constitute an intergenerational support of memory as *material culture* ... To this extent, therefore, tertiary retention always already precedes the constitution of primary and secondary retention [author's emphasis].

What the aforementioned excerpts are intended to highlight for the reader is the crucial Stieglerian insight that, over the course of human history, memory-technologies (mnemotechnologies) have come to play an increasingly important role in society, as they have effectively served as a wealthy repository for those collective secondary retentions that have been accumulated over the course of time (i.e. history). As such, these mnemotechnologies have served to facilitate, foster and guide the attentional/retentional economy — as tertiary retentions — of both the individual and the larger collective within which the individual operates. Moreover, these technologies constitute a major source from where the individual, and society, can acquire those pre-individual funds through which the processes of acculturation, education and edification occur.

In addition to what has been delineated above, Stiegler also aims to highlight how, as time has elapsed, these mnemotechnologies — as tertiary retentions — have become ever more complex and nuanced in terms of their applicability, functionality and invasiveness. For Stiegler (2010: 5-6), this point becomes particularly salient when one is to critically reflect

upon how the processes of acculturation, socialisation, and education have unfolded as society has progressed towards a highly technologised and 'industrial' form of modernity. It is in this regard that Stiegler (2010: 9) notes:

> In the course of human history, ... *the mnemotechnical retentional layer is transformed, increasing in both complexity and density*[247] [emphasis added].

What is to be regarded as being of immense importance for Stiegler, is the fact that these mnemotechnologies — as tertiary retentions — have come to play an increasingly crucial role in the retentional/attentional economy of the contemporary individual and society at large. Thus, in what appears to be an updated, and phenomenologically modified version of Horkheimer and Adorno's Culture Industry thesis, along with Marcuse's critique of the ubiquitous sense of one-dimensionality that is plaguing society, Stiegler (2011: 113) argues — in a fashion that is also highly redolent of what Kellner (1989), Fuchs (2008), Dean (2009) and Zuboff (2015 & 2019) have delineated above — that the mnemotechnologies of the contemporary era have essentially been usurped by the imperatives and ideologies of capitalistic gain. As such, Stiegler is of the unequivocal opinion that this has had an adverse and inimical impact upon the individual's attentional capacities, and by implication, their ability to acculturate, educate and edify themselves[248].

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[247] In order to provide the reader with some insight into how the transformation of this 'mnemotechnical retentional layer' has progressed over the course of history, Stiegler (2010: 9-11) initially refers the reader to certain rudimentary mnemotechnologies that emerged in the distant past - including the basic systems of writing and numeration that Plato refers to in the *Phaedrus*. Stiegler then mentions the automation technologies of the industrial revolution which allowed for the reproduction of gestures and bodily acts. These technologies then developed into the increasingly sophisticated 'audiovisual systems' of the 20th century, which managed to have a widespread influence on all 'noetic, psychomotor and aesthetic functions' (which Benjamin, Horkheimer and Adorno have described in great detail). Finally, Stiegler (2011a: 2) argues how, towards the end of the 20th century, the Internet evolved into the implementer of 'standard interoperability among digital infrastructures, called TCP-IP'. According to Stiegler (ibid.), such an evolution has made innumerable new services, tools and uses possible and that, combined with new standards for text, image, and sound compression, allowed for the 'colossal phenomenon' we now know as the 'convergence of informational, telecommunications, and audiovisual technologies'. Such a convergence has subsequently led to the development of the digitalised, interlinked and hyper-connected devices (such as the smartphones, tablets, laptops and computers) that we currently make use of on a day-to-day basis. For more information pertaining to the development of these mnemotechnologies, refer to Stiegler (2011a) pp. 74 - 80.

[248] Within *Technics and Time Volume 3*, Stiegler (2011a: 2) presciently notes how, as a direct result of the tremendous development and sophistication of contemporary mnemotechnologies, there would indubitably be an increase in the amount of time spent in front of 'screens of all kinds', which would then cause them to be 're-conceptualised and redefined in terms of their functions'. Furthermore, according to Stiegler's (2011a: 2) critical appraisal, such developments have subsequently resulted in the pursuit of what he refers to as '*the industrial temporalization of consciousness*' - whereby the attentional economies of all individuals, across the

Much like the first generation of critical theorists had argued back in the 1940s and 1950s, Stiegler (2011: 113) maintains that this outcome — i.e. the usurpation and harnessing of such mnemotechnologies for the pursuit of capitalistic gain — has been achieved primarily via the "culture and programming industries" that are continuously devising sophisticated ways in which they are able to influence the attentional faculties of the contemporary individual[249]. What this then means is that these industries are now in a powerful position so as to manipulate where the modern individual needs to direct his/her attention, and where such attentional/retentional capacities should remain. It is in relation to this pressing matter that Stiegler (2011: 113) argues that:

> *the function of the culture and programming industries is to take control of these processes constituting collective secondary retentions*. *This control is achieved by replacing inherited pre-individual funds with what the culture and programming industries produce and through this substitution to cause the adoption of retentional funds conceived according to the needs of marketing*[250] [author's emphasis].

What this then means is that not only has the modern individual's attentional/retentional economy been forced to submit to the imperatives of capitalistic gain by these culture and programming industries, but, as Stiegler (2011: 113) aptly notes, from a future-oriented

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entire globe, are able to be harnessed and controlled via a mass broadcasting system that allows for hyper-synchronisation [emphasis added]. For Stiegler (2011a: 2), such a process has ultimately resulted in the subordination of the 'entire worlds of culture, knowledge, and the mind, along with artistic creation and advanced research and instruction, *to the imperatives of development and the market*' [emphasis added].

[249] It is in this regard that Rossouw (2004) goes on to note how one of the ways in which Stiegler builds on Horkheimer and Adorno is through his concept of the programme industry, which is a key component of the cultural industry. As such, the programmes that are produced industrially and broadcast through various audiovisual media today modify our experience of time, notably through our consciousnesses adopting the time of programmes, for example by watching the same daily programmes, or the same global live broadcasts. For Stiegler this is a demonstration of how the programme industry in fact constantly solicits our attention, tries to modify our behaviour - especially our patterns of consumption.

[250] Stiegler (2011: 28) highlights how this actually happens by referring to a declaration made by Patrick Le Lay, who in 2004 was the president of the French TV channel TF-1. In this declaration, Le Lay asserts that: 'there are many ways of speaking about television. But from a "business" perspective, being realistic, the base, *the job of TF-1, is to help Coca-Cola, for example, sell its product*. [emphasis added]' Le Lay continues by noting that for: 'an *advertisement to be perceived, it is necessary that the brain of the tele-spectator be available. Our programmes are there in order to make this available, that is, to divert it, and to relax it, to prepare it between two ads. What we sell to Coca-Cola is available brain time*' [emphasis added]. While this particular report refers to how *television* operates as an attention-harnessing machine in order to sell 'brain time' to various companies, with the advent of social media giants such as Facebook and globalised search engines such as Google, we shall see how this process has been highly refined and modified so as to exacerbate and accentuate the dubious situation which Stiegler has referred to above.

perspective, it also implies that 'every bit of collective secondary protention' is now essentially obliged to submit to the *'interests of investment*' [emphasis added].

According to Stiegler's (2011: 114) critical analysis, another major problem to arise as a direct result of this process, is that the contemporary individual — who is now constantly linked up to, and connected with, the vast array of mnemotechnologies that are associated with the 'hyperindustrial' epoch — is quickly losing the ability to individuate himself/herself. For Stiegler (2011: 114), this can be attributed to the fact that the contemporary individual is:

> internalizing the collective secondary retentions produced every day in production studios, in television studios, and in the *artificial living spaces* of reality television [author's emphasis].

Furthermore, when attempting to gain an insight as to exactly *how* these industries are actually able to sustain such an invasive and insidious process, Stiegler (2011: 114) avers that these collective secondary retentions/protentions are:

> produced and broadcast en masse by *a hyper-synchronic broadcast system*, aiming precisely to *reduce the differences between primary selections*, that is, to *intimately control the process by homogenizing individual pasts ... .* [emphasis added].

For Stiegler (2011: 114) then, these secondary retentions (and protentions) have been produced and broadcast in such a manner so as to short-circuit:

> *the entire process of transmission that the ascendants of a social group would otherwise take upon themselves*, a process constituted outside the programmes of the programme schedule itself [author's emphasis]

It is in this regard that Stiegler (2011: 114) argues that, regardless of what may be ostensibly claimed, the content being disseminated by these industries is *never aimed at the elevation*

of audiences, but rather, is always seeking to level and equalise[251], which for Stiegler (ibid.) is *always a question of lowering*[252] [emphasis added].

It can therefore be argued that what Stiegler's (2011: 118) critical analysis pertaining to the above aims to elucidate, is the fact that the various technologies that sustain the contemporary programming and cultural industries, as mnemotechnologies, whether analogue or digital, are still to be understood as being tertiary retentions. Thus, like the alphabet of the nascent polis, they still support access to the pre-individual funds of all psychic and collective individuation and as such, these technologies condition/influence how that individuation unfolds. However — and this is the crucial point for Stiegler (2011: 118) — when such a process becomes (hyper)industrial, tertiary retentions tend to become constituted by:

> *technologies of control that ... make possible the hyper-synchronization of calculated conscious time*, and the *decomposition of time itself*, that is, *of individuation* (Stiegler, 2011: 118) [emphasis added].

What this then ultimately implies for Stiegler (2011: 118) is that consciousnesses, and the bodies they inhabit as their behaviours, are:

> *more and more woven by the same secondary retentions and tend to select the same primary retentions, and hence to increasingly resemble one another. Thus branded, they seem to have little to say, finding themselves meeting less and less often, and cast instead into their solitude in front of screens*[253] ... [emphasis added].

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[251] Stiegler's critical commentary pertaining to the levelling tendencies inherent to the hyper-synchronisation of the culture and programming industries can then be said to serve as a contemporised extension of the critical arguments that have been made by Horkheimer and Adorno (see Chapter 2) and Habermas (see Chapter 4). It also serves as an extended criticism of the Benjaminian proposition that mass cultures' modern technologies of reproduction are able to foster the acculturation of all members of society (see Chapter 3).

[252] This argument is further emphasised by Stiegler (2016), in a later work of his titled *Automatic Society: Volume 1 - The Future of Work*, when he argues that such an attentional/retentional harnessing system has indubitably led to an increasing sentiment of '*generalized stupefaction and a functional stupidity that destroys the neganthropological capacities that knowledge contains*' [emphasis added] (Stiegler 2016: 15).

[253] Rossouw (2004) provides some further insight as to why this is the case by averring that in light of the fact that the pre-individual fund is the necessary precondition upon which the existence of autonomous individuals is to be founded, if such a fund was to be destroyed/manipulated — which is precisely what Stiegler sees as occurring as a direct result of the (hyper)industrial nature of the contemporary culture and programming industries — it would invariably lead to the loss of individuation and the increase of herd-like behaviour.

5.3.2) The hijacking of the attentional/retentional economy on social media platforms

When this Stieglerian analysis and critique is applied to the digitalised domain of social media, it soon becomes apparent that such platforms (or what can, in a suitably Stieglerian vernacular, be referred to as "digitalised culture industries") are rapidly forging ahead in their pursuit to hijack and commandeer the attentional/retentional economy of the individual. This critical sentiment is made particularly evident when one acknowledges how the invasive and insidious methods of big data analysis and surveillance capitalism — as delineated by the likes of Zuboff (2015; 2019) and Vaidhyanathan (2018) — have been directly applied to the world's largest social media platforms.

Beyond the increasing levels of sophistication and technical intricacy associated with such digitalised practices of attentional/retentional hijacking and control, it will now be argued how the social media platforms of the contemporary epoch are also limiting the possibility for individuation to occur and, as such, the personalised forms of acculturation, education and orientation with which such a process is intimately interconnected. As we shall see, this in itself holds dire consequences for such platforms to operate as a viable public sphere[254]. In what follows, it will therefore be demonstrated how, due to the array of invasive, manipulative and exploitative strategies that have been applied to the digital domain of social media, an inimical — and potentially insurmountable — burden has been placed upon these platforms, thereby severely inhibiting and impairing their ability to function as a feasible stage upon which the public sphere of the 21st century can effectively operate.

In order to make sense of — and corroborate — the aforementioned claim, Vaidhyanathan (2018: 80) avers that while attention is to be regarded as being an increasingly scarce resource in a day and age in which there are so many competing sources that are vying to

[254] To briefly recall from Chapter 4 of this investigation, according to Habermas's (1991) critical analysis of what the bourgeois public sphere entailed and how it managed to operate so effectively (albeit for a brief period of time), the notion of "self-cultivation" on the part of the individual proved to be crucial. For Habermas (1991), this was primarily due to the fact that it was through the process of self-cultivation — which is directly related to the Simondonian/Stieglerian notion of individuation — that the modern individual was able to acquire the necessary skills, discipline, edification and rhetoric in order to meaningfully engage within the public sphere itself. As Habermas's (1991) analysis has shown, once this sense of self-cultivation was undermined as a direct result of the growing influence of private influences within the public domain, it invariably had an inimical effect upon the efficaciousness and functionality of the public sphere itself, along with the actual nature of the interaction and engagement that took place amongst individuals within such a sphere.

capture it, it is also a particularly valuable resource - especially when it is brief and shallow. While such a claim may, at first glance, appear to be rather paradoxical due to the fact that one may (reasonably) assume that a steady stream of attention is to be regarded as being far more useful/beneficial than a whittled-down adumbration of it, from a commercial perspective, this is not to be understood as being the case. The major reason for this resides in the fact that people are more easily manipulated when their attention is fleeting[255] (ibid.).

According to Vaidhyanathan (2018: 80), this has led to an ever-increasing mass of advertisers, marketers and associated third parties attempting to gain control of — and then command — whatever amount of 'brain time' the user is able to provide. What has ultimately resulted from such an avaricious series of developments is the creation of a digital 'media ecosystem' that has become increasingly:

> *polluted and fractured*, [with] *each player in it experiment*[ing] *with new designs*, *targeting strategies*, *and stimuli to steal attention and then hold it long enough to convince the potential customer to take some action* [emphasis added] (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 80).

Furthermore, when one is to quantify the staggering number of parties who are all attempting to forcibly acquire — i.e. steal — the limited amounts of 'brain time' that are actually available, the accumulative logic of the attentional/retentional market tends to generate a cacophony that, more often than not, overwhelms the individual, leaving his/her attentional resources in an emaciated state of exhaustion and disarray[256] (ibid.).

[255] In practical terms, what this then means is that the billions of individuals who make use of the various social media platforms (on a daily basis) are more likely to be convinced — i.e. manipulated — to click on a link on a web page, application, or email if their attention is shallow and short (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 80).

[256] It is directly in this regard that Vaidhyanathan (2018:83) goes on to note that if the attention of the social media user becomes 'so completely harvested' that there is nothing more for them to give, how would/could they actually be expected to possess the critical facilities and faculties that are necessary to allow them to effectively discern between dependable and reliable news/information (that is actually aimed towards education, edification and cultivation) and that which is merely intended to placate, manipulate and control? As has already been argued above, with the growing sense of attentional/retentional overload on the part of the user, this ability to critically discern becomes increasingly difficult to engender and facilitate, with the prognosis of developing such a critical faculty looking ever bleaker, as these technologies of attentional/retentional control are continuing to develop and transform at an astonishing rate.

What this then implies, is that in direct contradistinction to the form of mercantile capitalism that Habermas (1991) analysed in *Structural Transformations*, within the digital age of the 21st century — i.e. the era of surveillance capitalism — information is no longer to be considered as being a scarce or limited resource (as it indubitably was in those periods of history that preceded it). In fact, if one is to gauge the matter from a critical perspective, one can further assert that in the contemporary era, it is far too abundant (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 80).

It is as a direct result of the over-abundance of information circulating within the worldwide web and the digital domains of social media, that major online entities such as Google and Facebook have "benevolently" offered to:

> help us manage the torrent of information around us *by doing the work of deciding what's valuable or interesting to us. ...* Monetizing our captured attention [then] pays for the labor and technology that *enable Google and Facebook to filter the flood of information so effectively* (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 81) [emphasis added].

In order to gain some critical insight as to exactly how the harnessing and retaining of the user's attention is monetised via the sophisticated process of "information-filtration", Vaidhyanathan (2018: 81) informs the reader that in direct accordance with the central tenets upon which surveillance capitalism is founded, Google and Facebook are to be considered as being the most successful of the set of firms that filter the tremendous amounts of information online so as to connect advertisers to potential customers - which now includes newspapers, websites, television networks and stations, radio stations, and billboard companies[257].

[257] As we have previously seen, one of the major ethical/legal problems associated with such a tailored strategy of commercial interconnection — that is explicitly based upon a sophisticated system of "information-filtration" — resides in the fact that such a process is inherently founded upon an asymmetrical relationship of coercion, one-way surveillance and a severe violation of privacy. While these issues indubitably prove to be extremely problematic and worrisome from both an ethical/legal perspective, one cannot doubt the fact that from a commercial point of view, Google and Facebook are undeniably efficacious in terms of the information-filtering services that they provide, along with the commercial interconnection that results from such a process. It is in this regard that one can confidently assert that within the era of surveillance capitalism, the sentiment of commercial gain has completely usurped any concerns for the ethical and legal imperatives that should, in fact, be regulating and guiding such a process of capital accumulation.

In light of the above, one needs to be ever mindful of the fact that on a social media platform such as Facebook, everything is to be understood as being an advertisement in some shape/way/form (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 82). Furthermore, advertisements are to be considered as being the foundational element upon which Facebook is actually able to manage and orchestrate its extensive strategy of capital accumulation, along with maintaining its status as the dominant player in the digitalised domain of social media (ibid.).

What this then implies is that when the user is confronted with the barrage of information that Facebook constantly directs towards him/her, there are:

> *no clear markers that distinguish the lines between items that are actually meant to persuade (to vote, to buy, to donate, to play) and items meant to entertain or inform* [emphasis added] (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 82).

It is in this regard that Vaidhyanathan (2018: 82) notes how even the style of presentation pertaining to the individual profiles of each user on Facebook functions as an advertisement. As such, one can argue that Facebook — as a platform that rigorously facilitates and manages the interaction, communication and personal declarations of its two billion users — has managed to seamlessly integrate and weave together the once-disparate domains of 'the commercial and the social' (ibid.). Users are thus frequently reminded (via the various pressures of social coercion) that they must incessantly tend to their social media profiles so as to offer the most compelling and pleasing (i.e. sellable) image of themselves to the world.

From a critical perspective, this then seems to imply that as the world's largest social media platform, Facebook (and no doubt those platforms that are either owned by Facebook, such as Instagram, Messenger and WhatsApp, along with those who have adopted similar business practices such as Twitter and YouTube) has an inherent tendency that is aimed at coercing its two billion users to immerse themselves in — and essentially operate according to — the prevailing exploitative structures that constitute the capitalistic order of the contemporary period. Such an insight is made particularly evident when one is to gauge what it now means to socialise and interact on a meaningful basis in the digital day and age,

i.e. by commoditising and recommoditising oneself on an incessant basis. This fusion of the personal/social, with the categories of the commercial, thus seems to be a predetermined requisite with regard to what meaningful socialisation and interaction entails within the current context.

These social media platforms can therefore be regarded as constituting the technological materialisation of an irresistible necessity (Bauman and Lyon, 2013: 30) - something that all individuals must acknowledge, understand and embrace, lest they be shunned or extricated from the realm of meaningful interpersonal engagement (Amiradakis, 2016a: 243). However, when gauged through a critical lens directed at surveillance capitalism and big data analysis, the crucial purpose of these platforms is not necessarily to satisfy needs, desires and wants pertaining to meaningful and efficient interpersonal communication, but rather, to commoditise and recommoditise the status of consumers to that of sellable and fungible commodities (ibid.), and furthermore, to normalise such a perverse mode of interpersonal interaction[258] so as to ensure that the users of these platforms constantly disclose valuable data about themselves and the respective lifeworlds in which they operate.

It is in this regard that Vaidhyanathan (2018: 83) asserts that the more time individuals spend grooming their self-presentation and declaring their 'tribal affiliations', the more they

[258] Expanding on the above, Amiradakis (2016a: 245) indicates that Kaufmann (2012) identifies two conflicting models when using SNSs and social media platforms for the fostering and development of interpersonal relationships in the current epoch: the first, the Economic Model, arrogates that individuals constantly act on the basis of rational self-interest; while the second, alternative model is based on the notion of love, which allows the individual to discard the egotistical self of old and to meaningfully devote himself/herself to others (Bauman and Lyon 2013: 47). The first option is construed after the consumerist illusion. As such, it allows the individual making use of such services to believe that they can interact/engage with another individual in the same way one selects a fungible commodity good in a supermarket (Kaufmann, 2012: 6). This is due to the fact that the technological overtones that determine the process of online interaction dictate that the user: '... can log on with one click, and log off with another click ... An individual armed with a mouse imagines that she is in complete and absolute control of her social contacts ... All the usual obstacles appear to have vanished, and a world of endless possibilities opens up' (ibid: 7). In light of this rather unnerving assertion, Bauman (in Bauman and Lyon 2013: 136) avers that in the actual process of online interaction, there is a great danger that 'something vital' disappears from view and from the mind of the user, namely, the human person, the Other of morality; the subject in his/her own right and the object (and alter subject) of my responsibility as the pragmatics of personal encounter are radically simplified and reduced to the protocols of technical connection (Feenberg 2010: 99). Such a situation is thus extremely worrying due to the fact that when another human being is treated as — and furthermore, treats oneself as — a fungible commodity good, s/he can hardly be perceived as a moral object and/or subject whose treatment and action are subjected to moral scrutiny (Bauman and Lyon 2013: 137).

'grow acculturated to this habit. It becomes a cultural norm. It assumes the soft power of ideology' [emphasis added]. Olivier (2011: 48) bolsters this point by stating how:

> Posting information about oneself on Facebook in the form of selected photographs and textual descriptions of likes and dislikes regarding movies, clothes, cosmetics, food, books and more, is *subject to 'hierarchical observation' in so far as it conforms to notions of what is 'cool' (or, ironically, 'hot'), that is, acceptable to one's peers* [emphasis added].

Underlying this entire process — i.e. whereby the user willingly, and incessantly, integrates the once-disparate realms of the social/personal with that of the commercial — are the complex algorithms that have been carefully designed and modified by the team of engineers at Facebook, so as to constantly monitor, harvest and classify the personalised data that is unremittingly uploaded by its users. To be more precise, what these carefully constructed algorithms have been designed to achieve — via the ceaseless monitoring and harvesting of such data — is the continuous sorting and classification of:

> users' profiles by affiliation and interest, and then more dynamically based on interactions and the flow of "engagement" (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 83).

Furthermore, it is important to note that it is the users themselves who constantly:

> *feed clues into Facebook's algorithms that amplify that process further, creating a constantly churning lattice of affiliation* [emphasis added] (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 83).

What this then implies is that it is the billions of individuals who make use of social media platforms such as Facebook (and its ilk) that are — more often than not — unwittingly complicit in the perpetuation of their own surveillance, manipulation and exploitation. It is thus as a direct result of the way in which such platforms have been designed, along with the manner in which their respective algorithms are programmed, that the users themselves become entangled in an extensive digitalised surveillance project that then accentuates the levels of attentional/retentional control that these platforms are able to wield upon them. This sense of complicity is effectively achieved due to the fact that users now feel compelled to feed these platforms, on a regular basis, with the necessary social/personal clues so as to

ensure that (as far as Facebook is concerned) their attentional/retentional faculties are persistently preoccupied.

With the convergence of the personal/social with the commercial, the notion of personal privacy clearly seems to have fallen by the wayside, and has become yet another collateral casualty in relation to the dominance that social media platforms now exert over the contemporary individual's lifeworld. It is in this regard that Turkle (2015: 262-266) notes that within the digitalised landscapes that the contemporary individual chooses to inhabit, the conversations that one may have traditionally thought of as being private — such as talking on the phone, sending email and texts — are now actually shared with corporations that claim ownership over such data. This is because, according to the service provider's logic, they afford the denizens of the digital age with the necessary tools to communicate, and as such, the behavioural by-products generated by such communicational practices should (rightfully) belong to them.

Furthermore, Turkle (2015: 262) notes that wherever the digital denizen lets their gaze fall online, they invariably leave a 'digital trace' that is now someone else's data. As such, Turkle (2015: 262) argues that:

> Insofar as we soul-search when we search the web and let our minds wander as we wonder what to read, what to buy, what ideas intrigue us, *these introspective activities, too, belong to the company that facilitates our search. It mines them for data it finds useful now and saves them for what it might find useful in the future* [emphasis added].

What is perhaps even more disconcerting with regard to the above is the fact that, as time elapses and we become more accustomed to this 'electronic shadow', it actually 'begins to feel so natural that it seems to disappear' [emphasis added] (Turkle, 2015: 262). It is in this critical vein of thought that Turkle notes that while privacy may not be convenient for the social networks and social media platforms upon which one chooses to operate (in terms of their commercial ventures), important questions nevertheless need to be asked, including: What is intimacy without privacy? What is democracy without privacy? And, is there free thought without privacy? In all of these cases, Turkle asserts that privacy is an essential and

constitutive element, and that it is being constantly undermined by the electronic shadows that pursue one every time they enter into the digital domains of social media and the worldwide web.

Turkle (2015: 264) elaborates on these critical observations pertaining to the abrogation of the private realm (via the expansion of the digital domain) by noting how, in the contemporary epoch, 'the desire for privacy is considered suspicious and limits your ability to have it' and as such, contemporary society is slowly being confronted with an entire generation of people who are growing up *'assuming nothing is private and* [are thus] *offering faint resistance*' [emphasis added]. As such, the current generation of digital denizens willingly — if not gladly — feed databases as they 'shop, chat, watch movies, and make travel plans'. Turkle (2015: 266) therefore notes that in the current milieu:

> tracking one's fitness, keeping in touch with friends on social media, using a smartphone - *all of these make surveillance and social participation seem like the same thing* [emphasis added].

Thus, every new service on one's smartphone, every new app, potentially offers up a new 'species' of data to their online representation. For Turkle (2015: 266), the ultimate goal for those who design these apps is to link — in the minds of potential users — surveillance with the feeling of being 'cared for'. If one is thus left with the feeling that their apps are indeed taking 'care' of them, they are then not compelled to focus on what these technological devices are constantly taking from them. It is in this regard that Turkle (2015: 266) concludes by noting that:

> *in the new data regime, the goal is for everyone to be unaware, or at least to forget in the moment, that surveillance exists* [emphasis added].

Such an incessant process of data divulgence (on the part of the user) and data extraction/evaluation/emission (on the part of the social media platform) then provides social media entities such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube with an astoundingly rich trove of useful and lucrative data that can then be sold to — and utilised by — any/all parties that may be interested in what this data may reveal. This then has

major implications not only for how the attentional/retentional economy of the individual is being insidiously commandeered by such digitalised industries, but it also means that a social media platform such as Facebook (and its ilk) now possesses an unprecedented ability to continuously influence and steer the attention of the individual[259].

When gauged from a critical angle, one can argue that this technological feat has been effectively achieved via the incessant stream of information that the platform manages to extract from, and then direct towards the user, which the user, in turn, redirects *back* towards the platform (with this process of data extraction, evaluation and emission then constantly repeating itself). What is thus to be considered as being unprecedented with regard to how such a sense of attentional/retentional control is now being achieved, particularly when compared with those methods that the culture and programming industries of the 20th century employed upon their audiovisual systems, resides in the fact that a social media platform such as Facebook (and the numerous others that have followed in its footsteps) is now effectively able to deliver personally tailored information to every single one of its two billion users, in what can best be described as being a "reciprocating fashion".

This sense of reciprocation has been made possible in light of the fact that such a process is explicitly facilitated by what each individual's UPI (User Profile Information) reveals about him/her. The content that is then generated and directed toward each user — based upon what has been gleaned from his/her UPI — is then further refined via the information-filtration and commercial-interconnection capacities of the underlying algorithms inherent to all of these platforms. Furthermore, due to the user's incessant involvement with the platform itself, such a predictive process can thus be said to be based upon a continuous strategy of classification and categorisation that is always up-to-date (in terms of the personal information it has at its disposal) and nearly instantaneous (in terms of its

[259] If one were to phrase this matter in suitably Husserlian/Stieglerian terminology, one could argue that as part of the mnemotechnologies of the digital day and age, the algorithms underlying social media's information/filtration capacities have — as tertiary retentions — managed to dictate/define both the primary and secondary retentions to which the user is exposed, while also managing to assume a protentional function, by explicitly guiding where the individual's attention/consciousness will be directed in the future. As such, these algorithms seem to have completely usurped those mechanisms of consciousness that Husserl saw as being constitutive in the weaving together of conscious time.

generated outcomes). This then implies that the personalised content being generated by the algorithms on Facebook is incessantly updated, modified and revised so as to ensure that the user's attention is in a perpetual state of electronic enthrallment[260].

While the aforementioned description of the processes pertaining to the attentional/retentional hijacking and control of the user of social media platforms, along with the extremely sophisticated methods of surveillance and behaviour modification that have been introduced to these platforms, are to be regarded as being exceedingly problematic from both an ethical and legal perspective, and while it has also been argued that such insidious and invasive processes have an inimical impact upon the individual's privacy and his/her ability to engage in a process of individuation, this is not — unfortunately — to be regarded as being the end of this worrying story. One therefore also needs to be mindful of the fact that there are other major socio-political problems that have emerged out of such an unprecedented situation.

This is made particularly evident when one is to critically reflect upon how such social media platforms, along with the vast array of strategies aimed at hijacking and controlling the attentional/retentional economy of the user — have now also been adopted by and introduced to the socio-political sphere of the 21st century. Furthermore, not only have

[260] In order to corroborate this crucial point, the reader needs to be mindful of the fact that Facebook has accomplished such an insidious, yet commercially effective, undertaking most powerfully: '*by harvesting data about our behavior and preferences to ensure we see ads that Facebook's algorithms judge to be "relevant" to us*' [emphasis added] (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 84). It is in fact for this very reason that, on 9 February 2009, Facebook introduced the — now universally recognised — 'Like' button (of a thumb pointed upwards), so that the platform's algorithms can continuously track what piques the user's attention/interest. Due to the immense effectiveness of this strategy, the platform later — on 24 February 2016 — introduced a number of additional emotive indicators, which they referred to as 'Reactions'. These emotive indicators (or "emojis") have been specifically created by the design team at Facebook in order to offer the user five different ways to interact with the various posts that they are exposed to. Such emotive reactions are now aimed at tapping into the sentiments of: Love (a heart-shaped button), Humour (a "Laughing-Face" button), Amazement/Awe (an "Awe-Struck Face" button), Sadness/Dismay/Unhappiness (a "Sad-Face" button) and Anger/Disgust/Antipathy (an "Angry-Face" button) (Stinson, Calore and Pierce, 2016). When viewed from a critical perspective that attempts to take note of how the attentional/retentional economy of the individual is being effected by such developments, one can argue that such a series of innovations can indubitably be seen as a refinement of the surveillance and monitoring tactics that have been adopted by Facebook so as to constantly track, monitor and assess the user's engagement with/and reaction towards the barrage of information that is constantly being directed towards him/her. Such emotive indicators have thus been carefully designed so as to gauge, with increasing levels of precision, exactly what appeals to the user and what does not. From the perspective of surveillance capitalism, this has all been undertaken so as to ensure that he/she is (and will continue to be) preoccupied with what the platform has to offer.

these strategies and practices been introduced into the political realm of the 21st century, they have also been adapted and modified so as to continuously influence and penetrate the socio-political consciousness of the wider public (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 87). It is to these pressing matters that we will now turn our attention.

5.4) The impact of social media platforms on the socio-political realm of the 21st century

In order to provide the reader with some critical insight into how there has been a worrying confluence and convergence of the attentional/retentional hijacking strategies (as delineated and elaborated upon above), and the socio-political realm within the digitalised milieu of the 21st century, Vaidhyanathan (2018: 88) informs the reader that when attempting to set up a political campaign on Facebook, such an undertaking operates in the exact same fashion as when one attempts to create an advertising campaign. Furthermore, such a process is lauded by the Facebook platform itself as being both easy and inexpensive, and as constituting a 'self service' that it (i.e. Facebook) has — yet again "benevolently" — provided for its users (ibid.). As such, one can affirmatively assert that along with social media's propensity for bringing together the once disparate realms of the commercial with that of the personal/social, these platforms have also laid the necessary electronic foundations for what can now be described as being a digitalised convergence of the commercial with the political[261].

[261] Such a statement clearly reinforces — and extends — one of the central arguments that Habermas (1991) delineates in *Structural Transformations* when he notes that with the decline of the public sphere, there has indubitably been a growing sentiment of 'refeudalization', whereby an unhealthy merging of politics with business (i.e. *the political with the commercial*) has come to prevail. Furthermore, and in direct relation to what has been mentioned above, Habermas (1991: 175) notes that as the levels of private interference and dominance have increased within the public sphere, the more it (i.e. the public sphere): '*... assumes advertising functions*. The more it can be *deployed as a vehicle for political and economic propaganda*, the more it *becomes unpolitical* as a whole *and pseudo-privatized*' [emphasis added]. The prescience of Habermas's (1991: 216) critical insights is further augmented when one takes note of his claim pertaining to how: 'Advertising is the other function that has been taken over by the mass media-dominated public sphere. Consequently, *the parties and their auxiliary organizations see themselves forced to influence voting decisions publicistically in a fashion that has its analogue in the way advertising pressure bears on buying decisions*' [emphasis added]. In light of such an observation, one could argue that what Habermas's critical insights actually highlight, is the indubitable fact that there has been a long and sordid history of private interests managing to exert a considerable amount of influence on the political realm, as his critical observations were already made in the early 1960s. As such, one could further argue there is nothing particularly new/novel/unnerving about what is happening in the digitalised milieu of the 21st century in terms of the convergence of the commercial with the political. While such a claim may initially seem plausible as it does indeed manage to elucidate how private influences have indubitably been a significant feature in the political affairs of society for a large part of modern history, this is not to be understood as being the sole point of concern/contention from a contemporary perspective i.e. in the era of surveillance capitalism. As will shortly

The first problematic aspect about Facebook's blatant conflation of the commercial with the political within the digitalised milieu of the contemporary era resides in the fact that there is, currently, alarmingly little oversight (from Facebook) pertaining to what such campaigns actually contain in terms of both content and rhetoric (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 88). This can primarily be attributed to the fact that such an expansive, global system — which was never in fact designed with the intention of containing/pursuing a political dimension — cannot be easily controlled or regulated (ibid.). What this then means, is that for the sake of convenience and efficiency, Facebook has deliberately opted to leave the crucial processes pertaining to the oversight, regulation and accountability of such endeavours in a largely 'uncontrolled format', with its chief form of governance being that of 'machine learning' - i.e. algorithmic governance[262](ibid.).

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be revealed, this is primarily due to the fact that social media platforms, along with the various strategies that have been employed thereupon so as to commandeer the attentional/retentional economy of the individual, have in fact managed to completely revolutionise the manner in which private interests have come to impact upon and influence the socio-political realm of the contemporary epoch. It is in this regard that one can actually argue that a renewed sense of attention and investigation needs to be applied to the critical Habermasian insight pertaining to the 'refeudalization' of the public sphere - particularly as it is now manifesting itself within the digital domains of social media and the worldwide web.

[262] Providing the reader with some critical insight into the highly problematic nature pertaining to the issue of algorithmic governance, whereby algorithms are now delegated with the task of making important decisions that will have a direct impact upon the lives of contemporary individuals, Stiegler (2016: 25) argues that the hyper-industrial societies of the current epoch are undergoing 'the proletarianization of theoretical knowledge', just as audiovisual broadcasting technologies of the 20th century resulted in the 'proletarianization of life-knowledge' and the introduction of automated technology during the industrial revolution led to the 'proletarianization of work-knowledge'. As such, Stiegler (2016: 26) believes that the decline in 'spirit value' (a term Stiegler utilises synonymously with that of the mind/mental faculties of the individual) has *'reached its peak* [as] *it now strikes all minds and spirits*' [emphasis added]. Stiegler therefore asserts that it is actually a sentiment of 'algorithmic ill-being', which is *the* defining characteristic of the 'age of hyper-control'. In order to provide the reader with some insight as to what this form of 'proletarianzation' actually entails, Stiegler (2016: 26) avers that the 'proletarianization of theoretical knowledge' is more precisely that of the *noetic functions*, that which Kant conceived *'as intuition, understanding and reason*' [emphasis added]. It is directly in this regard that Stiegler (2016: 27-28) can be said to follow on from the critical observations made by Horkheimer and Adorno in the Culture Industry thesis, by noting how: 'The discernment that Kant called understanding (Verstand) *has been automatized as the analytical power delegated to algorithms executed through sensors and actuators operating according to formalized instructions that lie outside any intuition in the Kantian sense* - that is, outside any experience... [this then ultimately amounts to the] ... *total proletarianization and of the total disintegration of the spirit*' [emphasis added]. Stiegler (2016: 32) concludes his critical assessment pertaining to the 'proletarianization of theoretical knowledge', and how such a form of proletariansation is having a direct impact upon the noetic (mental) faculties of the mind by stating how big data technology and the algorithms that allow it to be both produced and exploited, are effectively allowing for *'reason as a synthetic faculty* [Kant] *to be short circuited thanks to the extremely high speeds at which this automated analytical faculty of understanding is capable of operating'* [emphasis added].

Thus, just as commercial marketers and advertisers regularly make use of Facebook's surveillance-based strategies so as to target, track and monitor those users who are classified as being susceptible to their campaigns, along with the fact that they (i.e. these marketers/advertisers) are able to take full advantage of how Facebook's data processors continuously flex their information-filtration/commercial-interconnection capabilities so as to cluster together an ensemble of users based upon the nature of their interaction and engagement - so too are such services now available, on demand, to any and all interested political actors/influences (who are, of course, prepared to pay for them). From a socio-political perspective then, Facebook's algorithms are now able to effectively create an array of new categories, clusters and classifications that are exclusively based upon the users' socio-political proclivities. Such data can then be utilised by the various political entities who may be interested in such information, so as to systematically focus/limit/extend the reach of their particular initiatives.

While the aforementioned description may initially be seen as depicting a fairly innocuous/harmless scenario, due to the fact that it merely seems to be detailing a technologically-updated method of electioneering - it is anything but. To begin with, the immense amount of socio-political influence/manipulation that can be effected by such an approach resides in the fact that Facebook has, notoriously, been found guilty of allowing advertisers and political campaigners to deliberately exclude marginalised groups from certain campaigns. In order to corroborate this assertion, Vaidhyanathan (2018: 89) refers the reader to a number of documented cases where Facebook's algorithms have actually allowed campaign creators and disseminators to deliberately 'exclude Jews, African Americans, women, and Spanish-speakers' from certain political campaigns in which their (i.e. these marginalised groups') interests were actually being directly impacted upon. According to Vaidhyanathan (2018: 89), the aforementioned scenarios exemplify yet another way that Facebook, and social media platforms in general, are able to deliberately segregate their users and as such, are actually able to create 'alternative cultural and political universes' for those individuals who find themselves operating on these platforms[263].

[263] To recall from Chapter 4 of this investigation, Habermas (1991: 20) places a great deal of emphasis and importance on the notion of 'publicness' when considering the nature of information that is being

From the perspective of the public sphere — as delineated by Habermas (1991) — this then obviously has massive ramifications for how people are actually able to critically engage with one another. This issue comes to the foreground when one becomes cognisant of the fact that it is the very information, news and socio-political content that the individual is able to access that is being systematically compromised, altered and even concealed by these very platforms. This is due to the fact that it is the developers and designers of these political campaigns who now possess the unprecedented ability to systematically decide who has access to such content. The information-filtration/commercial-interconnection capacities of the various social media platforms that are currently available can therefore be utilised in such a manner so as to undermine the ability of individuals to access relevant information that may have a direct impact upon their lives.

Secondly, what is also of major concern in relation to the above, is the fact that due to Facebook's explicit decision to operate as a social media platform that unwaveringly provides each of its two billion users with information/content that its algorithms have deemed as being 'relevant' or 'applicable', this sense of 'algorithmic gate-keeping' invariably has a direct impact upon the actual nature and format of the information/news that the user receives in his/her news feed (Morozov, 2013: 140). Morozov (2013: 143) provides the reader with some critical insight regarding this dubious matter by noting that the major online entities of the 21st century, such as Google, Facebook, Amazon, Twitter and Instagram, repeatedly insist that that their algorithms *'offer an unmediated and objective access to Truth'* [emphasis added]. However, as Morozov (ibid.) notes, the 'mirror' (of truth) to which these entities refer is actually an exceedingly poor metaphor for capturing the role that is being played by such online entities in today's public sphere. According to Morozov's (2013: 145) critical analysis, this is due to the fact that these companies do not merely

disseminated to a particular audience - particularly when gauging whether or not such information is actually able to facilitate a salubrious sense of engagement and deliberation. As Bonham (2004: 134) reminds us — according to Habermas — a necessary feature for any public sphere, and any of the informational tools/mediums of communication that may underpin it, is that the communication which it facilitates/encourages must be aimed at addressing an indefinite audience. Any social exclusion can thus be said to undermine the very existence (and credibility) of a public sphere and its associated tools/mediums of dissemination. As such, the very fact that social media platforms such as Facebook (and its ilk) are able to segregate, compartmentalise and isolate various sections of the population so as to determine which group(s) will receive a particular form of information, indubitably undermines the notion of 'publicness' as explicated above, along with the ability of these platforms to operate as legitimate public spheres.

reflect what they deem as being 'the truth', but they also take an active part in shaping, creating, and distorting it — and they do so in numerous ways.

It is directly in this regard that Morozov (2013: 145) goes on to argue that the manner in which these online entities and social media platforms tend to depict and display what they — unashamedly — refer to as 'the truth' can more aptly be compared to:

> an engine than a camera in that how it [i.e. the pre-programmed algorithmic parameters inherent to the "reality-depiction" process] initially chooses to present and slice reality *also creates a new reality in its own right* [emphasis added].

According to Vaidhyanathan (2018:89) this "slicing of reality so as to create an entirely new one" can be attributed to the fact that it is the same logic that favours some advertisements over others, and some user-generated content (in the form of photos, posts, videos and questions) over other content on Facebook that also influences the information and content (whether it be of commercial or political persuasion) that the users actually receive[264]. As such, it is yet again the notion of engagement — i.e. where one's attention is most likely to be directed, harnessed and commodified — that essentially determines the nature of the information/content to which the user will be exposed.

Furthermore, Vaidhyanathan (2018: 89) informs the reader that much like the reciprocating manner in which Facebook attempts to control the attentional economy of the user from a

[264] Morozov and Vaidhyanathan's critical observations touch upon a crucial argument that Benjamin has delineated in Chapter 3 of this investigation, particularly his assertions pertaining to the modern individual's ability to critically discern between the 'reflection' of reality that is being (re)presented to them and the 'constructive' (or artificial) aspect of the (re)presentation. For Benjamin, it is this very ability to discern between the 'reflection' and 'construction' which is to be regarded as being of the utmost import, particularly when exploring the liberating/emancipatory impact that the contemporary technologies of mass reproduction can have upon the sensorial apparatus and imaginative capacities of the individual - as it is this very ability that allows one to envision a different set of future possibilities, whilst being critically aware of what the state of the present actually entails. Morozov and Vaidhyanathan's critical insights pertaining to the manner in which social media's algorithms are now able to directly influence/determine the very nature/perception of the reality which is presented to their users then adds a rather dubious element/twist to Benjamin's argument. This is made particularly evident when one further considers the critical insights made by media theorists such as Pariser (2011) and Nguyen (2018) who claim that due to the manner in which their algorithms have been programmed to operate, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are effectively undermining/removing the distinction between the 'reproductive' and 'constructive' aspects of reality. As such, these platforms are impairing their user's ability to differentiate between appearance and reality, construction and reflection. This critical observation will shortly be elaborated upon when the notions of information bubbles, echo chambers and epistemic bubbles are explored.

commercial perspective, the very same mechanics have also been employed by Facebook's political-campaigning services. These mechanics have thus been applied so as to have a direct impact upon the actual news and political content that the user receives, as it is these very entities — i.e. the traditional media and political parties — who now also constitute a significant portion of Facebook's expansive clientele. As such, it is these very entities that now need to fall in line with the digital dictates of the contemporary era, lest they are to fall behind and become obsolete in their respective endeavours.

When gauging the matter of how political entities (such as campaigners, parties and movements) have become actively involved with, and very reliant upon, social media, Baynes (2017) provides the reader with some telling insight as to how the realm of politics has converged with the digital domain of commercial surveillance as found on social media. Baynes (2017) does so by noting that the current president of the United States, Donald Trump, has both defended and lauded his embrace and utilisation of social media platforms (including Facebook and Twitter) in the 2016 Presidential race. As such, President Trump has actually admitted that he firmly believes he would not have won the presidency race without the assistance of such services. Furthermore, the US leader has been quoted as saying that social media is a 'tremendous platform' that allowed him to speak 'directly to voters'[265] (ibid.).

It is in relation to the above that Vaidhyanathan (2018: 172) argues that social media has invariably come to play a major role in the political affairs of the contemporary era by informing the reader that for the 2016 presidential elections in the United States, besides Facebook, other major online entities such as:

[265] In addition to elucidating how social media platforms are impacting upon the political affairs within the United States, it is also crucial to note that from the perspective of international politics, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp have also proved to play a major role in the (successful) election campaigns of Rodrigo Duterte (the current president of the Philippines), Narendra Modi (the current president of India) and Jair Bolsonaro (the current president of Brazil) (Vaidhyanathan, 2018). The fact that all of these leaders have been described as adopting and aligning themselves with authoritarian and right-wing strategies so as to consolidate their power bases then also manages to highlight the indiscriminate manner in which social media platforms can be utilised in order to pursue the agenda of any/all political parties and agents who are willing to pay for the services that such platforms offer.

> *...Twitter, Microsoft, and Google all embedded staff in the digital headquarters of major presidential candidates* [emphasis added].

Furthermore, according to a recent report by Al Jazeera, Donald Trump appears to be fortifying his ties to the digital domain of social media for his 2020 re-election campaign as he recently hosted a 'social media summit' at the White House. Commenting upon the nature/purpose of such a summit, The Internet Association — which is the tech industry's major trade group representing Facebook, Google and dozens of other companies — said that online platforms are without a doubt 'the best tool for promoting voices from all political perspectives in history' (Aljazeera.com, 2019). In light of the above, we can conclude — with a fair amount of certainty — that social media will continue to play a major role in the political domain, and as such, the convergence between the political and the commercial is only going to be bolstered and furthered as time elapses.

With regard to how social media has had an indelible impact upon the major media companies and "traditional" news-retailers, Vaidhyanathan (2018: 13) argues that as a direct result of Facebook and Google's dominance on the worldwide web, journalism in its traditional format has essentially collapsed and been redefined as both a practice and an industry. According to Vaidhyanathan (2018: 13), this is due to the fact that advertisement revenue, which was once squarely located within these traditional media outlets, has now:

> *fled to online platforms and a cacophony of new voices asserted their newfound potency, certified by high Google search ranks or millions of Twitter followers* [emphasis added].

Furthermore, Vaidhyanathan (2018: 98) asserts that due to fact that social media and the 'choice architecture' that governs them are becoming increasingly important in the daily lives of contemporary citizens, traditional news organisations are now essentially being compelled to:

> *make editorial choices (which stories to cover, how to craft headlines, whether to favor video over photos or text) to pander to Instagram's or Facebook's algorithms because they can't afford to be invisible on Facebook or Instagram* [emphasis added].

It is directly in this regard that Anderson (2011: 529) notes how the latest tech-savvy generation of news-publishing outlets are now heavily reliant upon vast troves of quantified information about their current and potential readers (thus their increasing dependence upon social media platforms). As a result of this explicit reliance on such data, they (i.e. the news retailers) now tend to think of them (i.e. their current/prospective readers) as 'algorithmic audiences' - that these are people with easily identifiable needs and desires who can be identified and catered to with the right algorithms (Morozov, 2013: 158). Such an algorithmic approach towards the depiction and delivery of news content (based on predicted outcomes and the potential 'likes' that will, hopefully, be directed towards it) then stands in direct contrast to the early media outlets that were once viewed — as we have already seen by the likes of Habermas (1991) and Benjamin (1939) — as being more publicly spirited.

Elaborating on what this sentiment of being 'publicly spirited' entails, Morozov (2013: 158) notes that the earlier generation of news publishers actually thought of their audiences as primarily 'deliberative' and thus tried to involve as many of their readers as possible in conversations over what they perceived was in the public interest regardless of how well it managed to actually fit with what the audience desired. As we have seen, from a Habermasian perspective, those conversations and public debates were — at least in theory — to be settled solely through the force of the better argument, not based on how many page views, likes, or retweets each argument got. It is on this worrying note that Morozov (2013: 158) argues that such 'meme logic' — i.e. the tendency to assess everything in terms of how the intended audience is likely to react according to what is known about that audience, in the hope that such content will be rapidly propagated throughout the web — is rapidly intruding on other parts of our culture as well, and as such, it does not bode well for the integrity or credibility of the public sphere in general.

In light of what has been delineated above, one can confidently assert that with the emergence and expansion of social media, there has been a marked impact upon and shift regarding how political parties now need to align themselves to the organisational imperatives of the digital domain, along with how socio-political matters are now being conveyed and disseminated to the digitalised denizen of the contemporary epoch.

Furthermore, as has just been elucidated, one can assert that the social media platforms of the contemporary era are in a position whereby they can explicitly influence — if not determine — what is being conveyed (in terms of content), how such content should be constructed/conveyed, and to whom this content will actually be delivered. Social media platforms therefore appear to have completely revolutionised the manner in which the news and realm of politics are being approached in the current epoch. This then invariably has massive implications for the public sphere of the 21st century, as it is the public sphere that is intimately connected with, and fundamentally reliant upon, such matters if it is to actually function in an effective and responsible fashion.

In order to provide the reader with a practical, real-life example as to how social media platforms are actually able to undertake and execute such a feat (pertaining to the selection, depiction and transmission of socio-political content on the worldwide web), Vaidhyanathan (2018: 89) notes that:

> over time Facebook not only rewards the items that are likely to generate the most markers of engagement (clicks, likes, comments, shares) *but also learns to tailor the News Feed of every Facebook profile*. *The longer you are on Facebook, the more you engage with items on Facebook, and the more you teach Facebook to send you more of the stuff that is very much like what you have already indicated interests you* [emphasis added].

Both Google and Facebook refer to the aforementioned process of information-filtration and content delivery as constituting a digitalised instantiation of a 'test of relevance' that essentially determines how their respective ICT companies operate (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 89). While such a 'test' may indeed be regarded as being very useful and applicable from a commercial perspective, when it is gauged from the perspective of self-cultivation and a socio-political sense of critical awareness (elements which, as we have already seen, are crucial for the effective and responsible functioning of the public sphere), what is immensely important to be mindful of is the fact that the sort of 'relevance' that both Facebook and Google have in mind bears little/no affinity towards:

> the helpful, the enlightening, the moral, the educational, or the true (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 89-90).

Thus, while the commercial logic that underpins social media's algorithmic sense of information-filtration/commercial-interconnection has indubitably worked very well for product-placement and service advertising, when that same logic is extended and applied to all posts, irrespective of whether they are legitimate news or news-like items, or 'videos of cats on skateboards':

> *the experience over time is one of a narrowing field of vision* [emphasis added] (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 90).

What this then means, is that as time elapses and the algorithms underlying the information-filtration process manage to classify users according to their affiliations and affinities, the users of the platform start to see more items that have been posted by 'friends' and those online entities with whom they have 'richly engaged before' - along with those individuals/entities whom they choose to follow, 'like' or comment upon (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 90). As such, the profile of each user is then classified and programmed in such a manner so as to receive more items, news feeds and articles that have been posted from publications or entertainment outlets with which they have engaged before, ultimately resulting in an unprecedented — and unnerving — scenario whereby the users of these social media platforms experience what Vaidhyanathan (2018: 90) refers to as 'funnel vision'.

This phenomenon of 'funnel vision' is actually what Pariser (2011) coined as being the 'filter bubble' which, more often than not, features on social media platforms. Pariser introduced the term in order to describe the situation whereby — as we have already seen — Facebook gives each of its users more of the sorts of items that they are likely to respond to with clicks, likes, shares and comments, thus pushing aside things that might not interest them. While such a process may not seem as being too invasive or problematic if the subject matter with which the user is dealing is considered as being either commercial or trivial, the matter takes a very serious turn when socio-political matters are broached and considered.

Pariser (2011: 08) elaborates upon the above by noting how, for a time, it seemed that the Internet was going to entirely redemocratise society. As we have already seen, Pariser was

not alone in this cyber-utopianist conviction as it was — and still is — a wide-spread belief shared by a cornucopia of contemporary thinkers, theorists and activists. According to Pariser (2011: 08), such an idealistic conviction in the democratising potential of the Internet was initially bolstered by an array of Internet-centric aspirations pertaining to how:

> bloggers and citizen journalists would single-handedly rebuild the public media. Politicians would be able to run only with a broad base of support from small, everyday donors and local governments would become more transparent and accountable to their citizens.

However, Pariser (2011: 08) then goes on to assert that contrary to such an auspicious vision of an Internet-centric future that would be both governed and facilitated by transparent systems of communication and interaction, the era of 'civic connection' he had once dreamt of, has not arrived.

Whilst attempting to explain why such an idealistic vision has failed to manifest itself within contemporary society, Pariser (2011: 08) asserts that:

> *Democracy requires citizens to see things from one another's point of view, but instead we're more and more enclosed in our own bubbles. Democracy requires a reliance on shared facts; instead we're being offered parallel but separate universes* [emphasis added].

In order to provide the reader with some additional clarification as to why the notion of democracy, and the redemocratisation of society, finds itself in such a precarious position in the contemporary era, Pariser (2011: 08) provides the reader with a personal anecdote — which is worth quoting — detailing how he initially noticed that something was going awry on the Internet, and social media platforms in particular, in this regard. Pariser (2011: 08) therefore states that:

> My sense of unease crystallized when I noticed that my conservative friends had disappeared from my Facebook page. Politically, I lean to the left, but I like to hear what conservatives are thinking, and I've gone out of my way to befriend a few and add them as Facebook connections. I wanted to see what links they'd post, read their comments, and learn a bit from them*. But their links never turned up in my Top News feed.* Facebook

was apparently doing the math and noticing that I was still clicking my progressive friends' links more than my conservative friends' .... So, no conservative links for me. I started doing some research, trying to understand how *Facebook was deciding what to show me and what to hide. As it turned out, Facebook wasn't alone*' [emphasis added].

Morozov (2013: 147) corroborates Pariser's concerns pertaining to the anti-democratic features of social media platforms — as they currently operate — by arguing that major online entities such as Google, Facebook and Twitter like to invoke noble terms like 'democracy', 'objectivity' and 'neutrality' so as to show that what their algorithms manage to compute, at near instantaneous levels, is in fact aligned with the ideals of justice and redemocratisation. Morozov (ibid.) is however quick to point out that this is indeed a very strange description and definition of democracy. Morozov (2013: 147) ratifies this claim by asserting that due to the fact that these very entities effectively act as the digital 'gatekeepers' to massive amounts of information that are available online within the current epoch, the scenario tends to depict, at best, *'more of an oligarchy than a democracy'* [emphasis added].

It is in this regard that Morozov (2013: 174) argues that for the democracy metaphor to work in the context of social media, 'democracy itself needs to be redefined'. In reality, then, Morozov (2013: 149) concludes by asserting we need to accept that some of these new digital filters don't just refuse to reveal the 'whole truth' but, in fact manage to conceal it in an array of ways that our current Internet culture precludes us from noticing. As a tangible example of how this 'concealment' process occurs on social media, Morozov (2013: 149-150) asks the reader to consider how it is that Twitter's 'Trends' feature — a filter that relies on several signals and algorithms to determine which topics are 'trending' across the platform — actually operates. Morozov (2013: 150) thus continues by noting that whether something becomes a trend on Twitter is important for one simple reason:

once the story achieves this much coveted status, it attracts even more attention, spilling into national and global conversations far beyond Twitter [emphasis added].

In this sense, Twitter too is an engine, not a camera; it doesn't just reflect realities - it actively creates them (Morozov, 2013: 151). What is more, is that Twitter, like Facebook and Google, does not disclose the signals it monitors for fear that, once this knowledge is out, the system will be manipulated and exploited. Twitter, like many other technology companies, therefore frequently adopts such a 'technocratic pose', pretending that it is just doing 'objective, neutral measurements'. However, in order to do so, Morozov (2013: 150) makes it clear that:

> *Twitter makes certain assumptions about what aspects of the public discussion constitute a trend, decides on how those aspects are to be measured, and having measured them, feeds them back to the public* [emphasis added].

As such, the company does not just 'reflect' or 'mirror' the public's interests but actively shapes them. This can be attributed to the fact that it is social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook that start with some *'basic vision of what public debate is and what it should be'* [emphasis added]. Like Pariser (2011), Morozov (2013: 152) argues that it is those visions that actively delineate what the public engages with, how they engage with it and why they actually engage with it, and that the denizens of the contemporary era risk missing if they:

> give in to Internet-centrism and naïvely believe that all these decisions reflect the nature of "the Internet" and are guided by the gradual unfolding of its spirit[266].

In relation to both Pariser's (2011) personal narrative — as delineated above — and the critical commentary that Morozov (2013) has provided so as to ratify Pariser's concerns, Vaidhyanathan (2011: 90) argues that what such critical accounts reveal is that on a very real, and personal level, Facebook and the other major online entities in the digital domain

[266] In relation to this particular matter, Morozov (2013: 152) argues that with regard to how all of the major social media platforms currently choose to operate, there is a definite preference for breadth over depth (whereby novelty is actively sought out and rewarded), and according to Morozov (2013: 152) this is in itself a highly political choice that rests on a certain vision of how public debate should function. If social media platforms are thus to truly engender a sense of redemocratisation within the contemporary era, Morozov (ibid.) believes that we need to understand what other approaches to conducting the public debate the current platforms might be making impossible or less common. As such, Morozov (2013: 152) argues that we should aim to educate and engender coders and engineers who, refusing to adopt yet another 'technocratic pose', are brave enough to defend their own preferred vision of how public debate should function. However, intoxicated as society currently is with Internet-centrism, Morozov (2013: 152) believes that we have let too many designers off the hook far too easily.

have managed to algorithmically cluster people together, thus generating a predetermined 'filter bubble' in which each user is — often unwittingly — required to operate. This then ultimately results in the narrowing and restriction of one's outlook towards the world, or to be more precise, one's access to accurate information pertaining to what it is that the world looks like.

Adding a greater level of detail and depth to Pariser's notion of how 'filter bubbles' have emerged within the social media platforms of the 21st century, along with how such bubbles promote a sense of 'funnel vision', Nguyen (2018) introduces the reader to two additional phenomena, namely 'echo chambers' and 'epistemic bubbles', which further compound the matter of information-filtration in the era of algorithmic governance. Nguyen (2018) therefore informs the reader that:

i) An 'epistemic bubble' is to be understood as an informational network from which relevant voices have been excluded by omission. According to Nguyen (2018), that omission might be purposeful to the extent that those operating within such a bubble might be selectively avoiding contact with contrary views. However, Nguyen (2018) informs us that such a form of informational exclusion may also be entirely inadvertent as those with whom one tends to be friends on a social media platform such as Facebook or Twitter are likely to share similar views and interests. Vaidhyanathan (2018: 91) notes that from a sociological perspective, the term that is employed so as to explain this sort of behaviour is 'homophily', which can be described as an individual's urge/tendency to be attracted to those whom he/she has deemed as being similar to themselves. When one takes digital networks that have been built for social reasons and starts to use them as their regular — and much relied upon — information feeds, there is a greater tendency to miss out on contrary views and run into exaggerated degrees of agreement.

It is directly in this regard that Nguyen (2018) notes how epistemic bubbles threaten those who are operating therein with a second danger, namely, that of acquiring an excessive sense of self-confidence. This can be attributed to the fact that when operating in an epistemic bubble, the individual is much more likely to encounter exaggerated amounts of agreement and suppressed levels of disagreement. While a certain level of confidence in

one's beliefs is invariably to be regarded as being a positive attribute as it fortifies one's convictions and the underlying systems of belief upon which such convictions are founded, within an epistemic bubble however, Nguyen (2018) argues that such belief systems and convictions actually become very vulnerable. To put this matter quite simply, Nguyen (2018) notes how, in very general terms, as deliberating beings, people actually have very good reason to pay attention to whether other people agree or disagree with what they may believe. Thus, looking to others for corroboration is to be regarded as a basic, yet effective, method for checking whether one has reasoned well or badly.

However, not all forms of corroboration are meaningful, particularly when one finds oneself on a social media group that operates according to predetermined epistemic selection criteria of what membership should entail (which many social media groups in fact have and enforce), thus creating a self-enclosed epistemic bubble. In such a case, Nguyen (2018) avers that the group's unanimity is simply an echo of one's selection criterion (and *vice versa*). Within such an environment, it is:

> *very easy to forget how carefully pre-screened all of the members are, how epistemically groomed social media circles might be* [emphasis added];

ii) On the other hand, an 'echo chamber' is to be understood as being a social structure by which other relevant voices have been actively discredited. Thus, whereas an epistemic bubble merely omits contrary views (either deliberately or by chance), an echo chamber brings its members to actively distrust outsiders and the views/opinions they may hold. According to Jamieson and Cappella (2010), echo chambers work by systematically alienating their members from all outside epistemic sources. Thus, it can be argued that these echo chambers are extremely effective in influencing/shaping whom the members within the chamber actually choose to trust (Nguyen, 2018).

What this then means, is that within an echo chamber, one will find an incessant barrage of attacks on the 'mainstream media', which can be understood as being attempts to discredit and undermine all other sources of knowledge, other than those deemed to be appropriate by the members of the echo chamber itself. Furthermore, within such chambers, one will

often find that there exists a systematic and continuous attempt to undermine the integrity of anybody who expresses any kind of contrary view. Outsiders are thus not simply viewed as being either mistaken or misguided, but rather, they are defined as being malicious, manipulative and actively working to destroy those within the chamber itself (Nguyen, 2018).

It is in relation to this rather perturbing situation that Nguyen (2018) argues that the resulting worldview to arise from such an echo chamber can, in many ways, be described as one of:

> *deeply opposed force*[s]*, an all-or-nothing war between good and evil. Anybody who isn't a fellow ... follower is clearly opposed to the side of right, and therefore utterly untrustworthy* [emphasis added].

According to Nguyen (2018), the end result is a rather striking parallel to the techniques of emotional isolation that he believes are 'typically practised in *cult indoctrination* which involves *new cult members being brought to distrust all non-cult members'* [emphasis added]. This then provides a social buffer against any attempts to extract the indoctrinated person from the cult. What is perhaps even more confounding, is the fact that the echo chamber scenario does not need explanations of 'bad connectivity' or 'lack of exposure' in order to understand how they inherently function and continue to operate. Rather, individuals operating in such chambers are isolated, not by selective exposure, but rather:

> *by changes in who they accept as authorities, experts and trusted sources. They hear, but dismiss, outside voices. Their worldview can survive exposure to those outside voices because their belief system has prepared them for such intellectual onslaught* [emphasis added].

Based upon the distinctions between what an 'epistemic bubble' entails, and what its wider implications involve for the individuals operating therein, as opposed to the underlying mechanics and implications of what an 'echo chamber' involves, Nguyen (2018) makes it explicitly clear for the reader that while these are two very different phenomena, each of them invariably subverts and manipulates the flow and reception of information in very

distinct ways. As such, both are to be regarded as social structures that systematically exclude sources of information, whilst also exaggerating their members' confidence in their beliefs. In both cases, there is a resounding emphasis placed upon the individual to conform to the 'universe of facts' as delineated by these insulated and controlled digital environments[267].

In relation to what Nguyen (2018) has argued above, Vaidhyanathan (2018: 90) notes that while it is in fact difficult to verify — both quantitatively and qualitatively — to what extent these echo chambers and epistemic bubbles manage to polarise and tribalise the users that are caught within them, he believes that the more important lesson to take from the above is the fact that Facebook, and its underlying mechanics of algorithmic governance, *'work synergistically to narrow our field of vision'* [emphasis added]. Thus, while it may be incorrect to generalise as to how social media platforms, and their users, have managed to forge impregnable 'echo chambers' and 'epistemic bubbles' that seal out divergent views, Vaidhyanathan (2018: 90) nevertheless maintains that:

> it's reasonable to believe that our vision is narrower than it might otherwise be if we were not engaging with Facebook so often and about such important matters. The choices we make and the choices Facebook makes for us feed each other. *We are part of the system.*

[267] For Vaidhyanathan (2018: 180), it is within such self-contained, unregulated and polarised digital environments that it has become very easy for the sentiments of disinformation and misinformation to be systematically generated and propagated like an infectious contagion. It is in this regard that Vaidhyanathan (2018: 180) argues that it is the social media platforms of the current epoch that pose one of the greatest threats to democracy in the 21st century. In order to make sense of such a dramatic claim, one needs to grasp how the notions of disinformation and misinformation actually work in the digitalised world of social media and online interaction, and in order to do so, one needs to critically consider the wider media ecosystem in which such phenomena operate. Vaidhyanathan (2018: 181) thus provides the reader with a blueprint of how these features are all interconnected. Vaidhyanathan (2018: 181) begins by noting that those who originally push this misleading/incendiary content: 'start from the fringes, such as Reddit and 4Chan, where publication is easy and they can test various forms of their message among like-minded and motivated peers'. They can then generate 'catchy new hashtags for Twitter' or join new content with established and popular hashtags. Following this, they can then post videos on YouTube, which then allows for easy redistribution via Twitter and Facebook. Once items or issues rise in visibility on Twitter, editors of established online news and commentary sites take notice (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 181). What is particularly perturbing about the situation as delineated above is the fact that it hardly matters if the stories in question are important or even true due to the fact that the specious content has moved completely up the chain of the media ecosystem. At every link in the chain, Facebook, the largest and most powerful media system in the world, plays a role in amplifying the disinformation. Those who buy into the claims of the disinformation share it gleefully. Those who are appalled by the existence of the disinformation share it out of disgust (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 181). And so these filter bubbles continue to grow ever larger, with increasing numbers of individuals being unwittingly absorbed into their distortive and deceptive domains.

> *The technology is not distinct from the culture, the politics, and the ideologies in which it operates* [emphasis added].

In a very similar vein of thought, Turkle (2015: 267) argues that each individual who 'feeds' the system ends up being shaped by it. As a result, the conformity of thought and behaviour arises, according to Turkle (2015: 267) because:

> what is shown to us online is shaped by our past interests. The system presents us with what it believes we will buy or read or vote for. It places us in a particular world that constrains our sense of what is out there and what is possible.

It is directly in this regard that Turkle (2015: 267) asserts that while the Internet and social media platforms may promise to make the world bigger, as they currently function, they explicitly narrow one's exposure to alternative/differing ideas. As such, individuals may find themselves — unwittingly — operating and deliberating inside a filter bubble in which they hear only the ideas they already know and perhaps, only those that they like.

Bloom (1987: 249) provides some critical insight regarding the problematic nature of these filter bubbles, echo chambers and epistemic bubbles by asserting that:

> Freedom of the mind requires not only, or not even especially, the absence of legal constraints but *the presence of alternative thoughts*. *The most successful tyranny is not the one that uses force to assure uniformity, but the one that removes awareness of other possibilities* [emphasis added].

It is in direct relation to what Bloom (1987) has outlined above, that Vaidhyanathan (2018: 90) goes on to note, in an aptly austere fashion, that in the contemporary epoch in which we reside, political segregation, the fraying of civil discourse, and the erosion of trust in civic institutions are indeed a fact of life around the world. As such:

> the narrowing of our field of vision, the filtering of information to that which emboldens our confidence in the beliefs we already hold, and the segregation of citizens into polarized camps *all steadily undermine the potential for republican governance and reasonable discourse about important matters* [emphasis added].

While the aforementioned description of how social media platforms are currently programmed to operate and function within the globalised capitalistic regime of the 21st century, along with how they have actually been employed and utilised by the major political and media outlets of the contemporary era, does not depict an optimistic/sanguine image of how these ICTs can be utilised in order to bolster and augment the public sphere of the contemporary era, a potentially redemptive characteristic that is often associated with such platforms is that they have successfully managed to facilitate and guide multiple political revolutions across the world. In order to come to terms with this — potentially liberating and vindicating — aspect of social media, Vaidhyanathan (2018: 129) critically examines the uprisings that occurred in Egypt in 2011, which formed part of what is typically referred to as the 'Arab Spring', in order to ascertain whether or not there is any credence to these auspicious claims.

Vaidhyanathan (2018: 129-145) thus proceeds by asking the crucial question as to why the demonstrations of 2011 brought so many people from all walks of Egyptian life into the streets when the earlier protests of 2006 and the general strike of 2008 had not. The answer — at the time — seemed so simple:

> Facebook had only been in English in 2006 and 2008, but *by 2011 it was available in Arabic. Facebook had served as a beacon for those who used Facebook to find others willing to make a stand* [emphasis added] (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 129-130).

At least, that is what Wael Ghonim — a Google employee based in Dubai who helped to run the 'We are All Khalid Said'[268] Facebook page which is regarded as a being a major catalyst for the 2011 uprising in Egypt — thought at the time.

[268] In order to provide the reader with some background and orientation as to why the 'We Are All Khalid Said' campaign was so important for the 2011 uprisings, Vaidhyanathan (2018: 128) offers the following description: 'On June 6, 2010, police beat to death Khalid Said, a twenty-eight year-old middle-class man in the import-export business, in front of his home in Alexandria, Egypt. Police told Said's family that he was involved in the drug trade and had died of asphyxiation. Witnesses to the beating disputed that claim and posted YouTube videos testifying to that effect. Soon autopsy photos of Said's bloody head, his jaw smashed and teeth mangled, spread quickly across Arabic and English Facebook and YouTube pages. People sent the photos to others attached to mobile text messages, so the authorities had less chance of monitoring the communication. Soon Al Jazeera, the international Arabic satellite news channel, noticed the rumblings and posted the images. Other international news organizations recognized Said's death. Demonstrations against the cover-up of his murder and the police corruption that caused it began stirring in Alexandria and Cairo through the summer of 2010.'

In 2011, Ghonim was subsequently invited to present a much-viewed TED talk on exactly why he harboured such optimistic and promising views pertaining to the social media platforms that were starting to gain popularity across the globe along with their potential to facilitate and foster democratic sentiments. Ghonim's (2011) exuberant ability to explain how/why the uprisings in Egypt unfolded in the manner that they did — i.e. that they were essentially spearheaded by Western-based social media platforms — to eager Western journalists invariably meant that many of these journalists credited Facebook for what became known as the 25 January Revolution[269]. As Vaidhyanathan (2018: 130) notes, in the heat of the moment, Ghonim promoted an overly simplistic idea that stunted a full appreciation of the deep social, political and economic roots of the Egyptian revolution, and that also limited a full and critical understanding of the power of social media as part of a larger media ecosystem.

In order to make sense of such a critical claim, Vaidhyanathan (2018: 130) asserts that a full and measured examination of protests and uprisings around the world since 2007 yields a mixed collection of successes and failures, which is no different from any other global set of uprisings in any other 10-year period of the past 250 years. To corroborate such an assertion, Vaidhyanathan (2018: 130) phrases the issue as follows:

> Sometimes people protest. *When they do, they use the communication tools at their disposal*. Sometimes they overthrow government. Sometimes they don't. Sometimes the protest is a one-off event, and it withers as history recedes from it. Sometimes a protest is one small step in a long process of cultural and political change [emphasis added].

As such, Vaidhyanathan (2018: 130) argues that it is disappointing and disheartening to note that many of the discussions pertaining to the social protests that have unfolded over the past decade have been locked in an extremely shallow, myopic and ultimately, unhelpful prism - as it is such a prism that tends to focus on the novelty of the communicational

[269] A similar event occurred with regard to the 2009 uprisings in Iran, when the conservative blogger Andrew Sullivan (2009) reported that the 'revolution will be twittered'. Unfortunately, this melodramatic and unfounded claim ultimately led to the misguided notion — that was then propagated across multiple major Western media outlets — that the Iranian revolution was to be understood as being a Twitter Revolution - and that it was, in fact, a Western-based ICT, namely, Twitter, that was single-handedly bringing about democracy to the Middle-Eastern nation (Fuchs, 2014a: 84).

medium alone (and the technology that supports it), without looking at the wider contextual factors (political, social, economic and historical) that have coalesced in order to bring about the actual uprisings and protests in the first place[270].

While one might argue that Vaidhyanathan tends to assume an overly pessimistic posture with regard to this matter, Vaidhyanathan (2018: 131) makes it evident that he is not opposed to those narratives that endorse how social media technologies do indeed possess certain features that can facilitate and foster democratic movements. He therefore acknowledges that social media services, such as Facebook and Twitter, do indeed affect how political and social movements come to be formed and operate, and thus, they will invariably affect the protests that (may or may not) ensue.

As such, it can be also be argued that social networking mediums such as Facebook and Twitter make it exponentially easier to alert many people who have declared a shared interest in information and plans, whilst also managing to lower the transaction costs for early organisation. Most importantly, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have the ability to convince — perhaps even fool — those who are motivated and concerned that they are not alone in their undertakings (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 131). One can therefore argue that Facebook and Twitter's ability to motivate short-term, dramatic events is indeed a remarkable feature.

However, Vaidhyanathan (2018: 130) makes it clear this is also an undeniably myopic and short-term feature associated with these platforms in the sense that it tends to dissipate remarkably easily and quickly. As Vaidhyanathan (2018: 130) notes, it is much more difficult and taxing to attempt to:

[270] It is Morozov (2011: 47-50) who draws a very interesting and illuminating parallel between the techno-centric rhetoric that is currently being used to promote the idea of how Western-based social media platforms are single-handedly managing to bring about democratic change in those countries plagued by unscrupulous authoritarian leaders, and the rhetoric of certain — misguided/unfounded — historical narratives that espouse how the Western media outlets of the 20th century (along with their sophisticated communication technologies and the 'microchip') actually brought about the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War (cf. Nelson, 2003). Again, while Morozov (2011) does not dispute the fact that such technological and communicational phenomena played a role in such matters, the tendency to advocate a single narrative when dealing with complex socio-political/historical phenomena invariably culminates in a gross distortion and over-simplification of the various factors that all coalesced in order to play a role in the transformative process cited above.

> leverage that organizational spark toward more durable political actions, involving the hard work of gathering names on petitions, running meetings, fielding candidates, disciplining messages, and delivering votes. *The first step is to make it clear that those who care are not alone. Too often, however, such passion fails to move beyond the first step* [emphasis added].

As we have previously seen, because of how such social media platforms are currently designed, along with the way in which their underlying algorithms favour content that generates strong emotional reactions, Facebook and Twitter can be regarded as being powerful tools for promoting a sentiment of motivation.

However, it is for the very same reasons that such platforms are not particular effective when trying to foster and facilitate a critical sense deliberation and meaningful discussion between disparate and opposing groups. And it is in this regard that Vaidhyanathan (2018) makes it explicitly clear that social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter do not take the place or even bolster the hard work of deep political deliberation and organisation[271]. Thus, by focusing exclusively on the novelty of these communication technologies and assuming that their simultaneous arrival in a place causes rapid change — rather than merely coinciding with it or aiding it — there exists a great danger in overlooking or simply ignoring the importance of other, more important social, economic, political and historical variables.

It is in this regard that Vaidhyanathan (2018) argues how social media platforms can indeed amplify or accelerate a movement as long as that movement already exists, and has form, substance and momentum. As such, it is crucial for the contemporary critical researcher to take note of, and be cognisant of the fact that no technologies — including social media platforms — have radical dynamics of 'freedom' (or 'oppression') benevolently built into

[271] With particular reference to Twitter's capacity to function as a tool that promotes/facilitates meaningful deliberation and discussion, Fuchs (2014a: 100-101) poses the critical (rhetorical) question as to whether any meaningful political debates could actually be based on a communication platform that is exclusively used to facilitate the exchange of short messages composed of 140-characters (which has subsequently been increased to 280 characters). Fuchs (2014a: 101) makes it clear that from his perspective, he does not believe that such a restricted and vacuous form of exchange is able to achieve such an outcome and thus asserts that: '*Short text invites simplistic arguments and is an expression of the commodification and speed up of culture*' [emphasis added].

them. Fuchs (2014a: 102) ratifies such a critical position by noting that even though Twitter, Facebook and mobile phones supported the political rebellions, protests and revolutions in countries like Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen in early 2011, and the publishing of videos about the effects of domination can support the communication of protest, one should not overestimate these potentials. There are no Twitter, Facebook or YouTube revolutions. Only people who live under certain social conditions and organise collectively can make rebellions and revolutions. Technology is, in itself, not a revolution. However, both Fuchs (2014a) and Vaidhyanathan (2018) maintain that there certainly are promising aspects of these particular technologies that can make performing certain tasks easier - whether these technologically-facilitated tasks will lead to either the emancipation or oppression of a particular group of people is another question entirely[272].

Morozov (2011: 83-84) provides the reader with a particularly telling example of how social media platforms can be utilised so as to strengthen and tighten the grip of authoritarian/fascist regimes over their citizens by arguing that:

> While it is tempting to encourage everyone to flock to social networking sites and blogs to avoid the control of the censors, it *would also play into the hands of those in charge of surveillance and propaganda. The more connections between activists it can identify, the better for the government, while the more trust users have in blogs and social networks, the easier it is to use those networks to promote carefully disguised government messages and boost the propaganda apparatus* [emphasis added].

This is indeed a tactic that many of the governments who were targeted in the 'Arab Spring' utilised in the aftermath of the uprisings in order to crack down, pursue and incarcerate those who were involved in the protests (Morozov, 2011: 146). While one may be tempted to think that such invasive and insidious surveillance strategies can only emerge in countries that are marred by authoritarian/fascist tendencies, the fairly recent revelations of Edward

[272] With regard to this particular matter, Vaidhyanathan (2018: 132) asserts that platforms such as Facebook and Twitter can be deployed effectively to move people to rise up against oppressive governments. And they can be used just as effectively to move people to rise up against liberal or cosmopolitan governments or in support of oppressive governments. As such, Vaidhyanathan (2018: 132) argues that such platforms are more effective at destabilising politics than in enlightening or enhancing deliberative politics.

Snowden have vividly illuminated how certain governmental institutions located firmly within the 'democratic' West, have used social media platforms for illicit surveillance operations (Greenwald, MacAskill and Poitras, 2013). According to Morozov's (2011: 84) critical analysis, the only way to avoid making painful mistakes and strengthening such misleading and illicit tendencies is to carefully examine how surveillance, censorship, and propaganda strategies have changed in the Internet era.

In light of what has been delineated above, it can that be argued that many Facebook and Twitter users, Internet enthusiasts in general, and these social media platforms themselves often tend to fall into the highly alluring, yet ultimately misguided, technocentric trap whereby they tend to espouse an overly simplistic narrative that tends to imbibe the notion that these communication technologies are necessarily liberating and enlightening, and that the relative openness of Internet platforms must work in the direction of free speech, free thought, and democratic reform. According to Vaidhyanathan (2018: 139) this phenomenon is a typical example of techno-narcissism, and it is intimately related to the techno-centric ideologies that critical thinkers such as Morozov (2013), Turkle (2015), Fuchs (2014) and Dean (2009) have all pointed out already. Vaidhyanathan (2018) therefore contributes to this critical narrative by asserting how, in the contemporary era of the digital domain, techno-narcissism is both ethnocentric and imperialistic. It assumes that if only people had the liberating and enlightening tools, toys and techniques of the West, their lives would improve almost instantly. Importantly, that is not to say that social media did not matter in the Arab uprisings of 2011 or any of the subsequent political eruptions around the globe. As such, Vaidhyanathan (2018: 139) concludes this critical aspect of his analysis by stating that:

> Social media definitely made a difference, although they *did not matter in predictable or idealistic ways and they did not matter in the same ways in every context. Social media did not promote democracy, transform the public sphere, or inspire massive uprisings* [emphasis added].

It is thus quite telling that in relation to all of the above, in 2015, Ghonim was invited to give another TED Talk about what his impressions of social media were in the aftermath of the Arab Spring Uprisings, which as we now know, failed to blossom into the "Arab Summer" for

most of those countries who were involved therein (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 139). With this particular presentation however, Ghonim (2015) was no longer in the exuberant "techno-centric/cyber-utopianist bubble" that had once spurred him on. Ghonim was thus no longer able to infuse his audience with the spirit of optimism or even reverence for technology. In fact, Ghonim (2015) is quoted as saying: 'I once said, "If you want to organize a society, all you need is the Internet." I was wrong'. And while Ghonim (2015) maintains that the events of 2011 revealed the great potential of Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms, he goes on to assert that:

> it also exposed its greatest shortcomings ... [Furthermore] ... *the same tool that united us to topple dictators eventually tore us apart* ... . *We failed to build consensus and the political struggle led to intense polarization* ... . *Social media only amplified that state by amplifying the spread of misinformation, rumors, echo chambers, and hate speech*. The *environment was purely toxic*. My online world became a battleground filled with trolls, lies, and hate speech. I started to worry about the safety of my family [emphasis added].

In the concluding section of his 2015 TED talk, Ghonim (2015) outlined what he perceived as being the five 'critical challenges' facing social media across the globe; these include: i) Dealing with rumours that confirm people's biases; ii) Puncturing echo chambers or filter bubbles; iii) Recognising the humanity of those with whom we interact — and often deride — through our screens[273]; iv) Coping with speed and brevity and the limits they place on

[273] Elaborating upon this particular 'challenge' that Ghonim (2015) has mentioned, Amiradakis (2016a: 244) avers that it is Bauman (2003: 59) who provides the reader with some critical insight into this worrying scenario by arguing that due to the increased sense of mobility, fluidity and connectivity associated with contemporary mobile communication technology, the individual now implicitly gains an inherent sense of comfort, as the notions of corporeal reach and touch have been cancelled/made null and void (Bauman 2003: 59). It is in this regard that Jackson (2008: 37) argues that a fairly novel situation has arisen in our digitalised day and age whereby a fine line has emerged between rich interpersonal relations and meaningless hyper-connectedness. For this reason, Turkle (2011: 154) believes 'networked-life' actually prepares a user for relationships with less – less in terms of mutual affective involvement, physical intimacy and verbal intellectual engagement (Amiradakis, 2016a: 245). Turkle (2011: 228) continues by noting how the new simulated/virtual environments provided by social media platforms offer the user the comfort of a technological cocoon: behind a screen, s/he feels protected, and the novelty of texting offers a reassuring sense of distance along with a measure of personal control (ibid: 188). Brannigan (2010) confirms this sentiment by arguing that cyber connection establishes an interactive comfort zone which creates an illusory sense of safety and control for the user. While a face-to-face encounter is inherently vulnerable and risks the fracturing of trust, online connectivity seems to negate or abolish any of the uncertainty and vulnerability associated with non-virtual proximity. Thus, from a communication perspective, interacting in cyberspace is deemed alluring and preferable as it is presented to the user as being quick and easy, detached from the tethers of personal, familial and social contexts. In person, however, users enter into a sophisticated amalgamation of embodied

deep understanding; and v) The way social media favour declaration over deliberation[274]. In relation to all of these challenges, Ghonim (2015) offered no easy solutions, due to the fact that the option of an 'easy' solution simply does not exist when attempting to deal with such complex subject matter (Vaidhyanathan, 2018: 139).

As we have seen throughout the course of this particular chapter, the critical challenges that Ghonim (2015) delineated nearly five years ago are still very much alive and well upon the social media platforms of the contemporary era. As such, it would be completely unfounded to assert that these platforms have managed to revolutionise the public sphere of the

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nuances and cues which challenge them to be palpably present and sensitive to their interpersonal interactions and interlocutors. For these reasons, Bauman (2003: 62) asserts, mobile electronic networks have quickly become a popular and eagerly used currency of human interaction. This then begs the deeper question: Why is this indeed the case? Was it the novelty of easily connecting with another, or the great facility of severing the connection that proved to be the decisive factor? Bauman (2003) notes that there is no shortage of occasions when the latter option of cutting the connection feels more urgent and matters more than the former. This is primarily due to the fact that, from the fast-paced and highly consumer-oriented perspective of the modern world, permanence and stability no longer appear to be revered or esteemed. Online contacts – as opposed to durable bonds – require less time and effort to establish and, conversely, break. As a result, such contacts are actually regarded as more suitable to the precepts of what a relationship should entail within the context of the consumer society (Jackson, 2008: 111). It is in this regard that Horkheimer and Adorno's (1997: 221) observations on the impact that the technological advances in communication media have had on interpersonal relations – as formulated during the early 1940s – are highly prescient (and harrowing). As we have seen in Chapter 2 of this investigation, Horkheimer and Adorno (along with Marcuse and Fromm) essentially argue that as they are currently configured, and in relation to the social system in which they are required to operate, modern communications media has had an isolating and alienating effect on users since it is the very progress that has been made in such fields that now, literally, keeps individuals apart. Paradoxically, then, this implies that one of the biggest merits of virtual proximity is the fact that it can be (both substantively and metaphorically) concluded with nothing more than the press of a button (Amiradakis, 2016a: 245). Feenberg (2010: 97) ratifies this claim, indicating that online, social life is increasingly reorganised around impersonal interactions whereby the individual slips easily between roles and identifies fully with none of them, belonging wholly to no particular community. It is in this regard that Olivier (2011: 41) reminds the reader that technology — including computers, the Internet, social networking services and social media — must never be regarded as innocuous. Thus, when critically gauging the SNS technologies and social media platforms which are supposedly aimed at facilitating quick and effective interpersonal communication, it would appear as if the interests of consumerist rationality, rapid consumption, swift disposability and fungibility play a pivotal role in the ontology, design, implementation and use of such devices (Amiradakis, 2016a: 246). In light of such critical observations, it would thus appear that the interpersonal relations between human subjects in the contemporary era have been placed in an inescapably precarious and objectified position as a direct result of modern communication technology. This then only serves to ratify and amplify the concerns that Ghonim (2015) has outlined above.

[274] One can go on to assert that from a critical Habermasian perspective, the social media platforms that Ghonim refers to above — as they currently operate in their chaotic, cacophonous and caustic format — are sorely lacking in what Habermas explicitly refers to as a shared and cohesive set of 'institutional criteria'. As we have seen in Chapter 4 of this investigation, according to Habermas, it is such shared institutional criteria (including attributes such as: a common interest in truth, right policy, an emphasis on rational argumentation and a 'bracketing' of status differences) that were, in fact, so crucial to the effective engagement and respectful interaction which took place within the bourgeois public sphere, along with its associated literary public spheres (refer to Chapter 4 of this investigation for more information pertaining to this matter).

contemporary era in a purely positive fashion by bolstering the ability for individuals to actively engage in effective critical discussions about pressing socio-political matters, or that they have actually made access to useful and reliable information that much easier. What can however be said, with a fair amount of confidence, is that these mediums have indeed managed to introduce a significant amount of change to the contemporary world — both positive and negative — particularly with regard to how individuals now communicate, engage and orientate themselves in the world.

Thus, before one is able to espouse/endorse an overly optimistic — and simplistic — narrative that either lauds, or derides, such mediums for their inherent (in)ability to facilitate and promote critical and open discussion among various sections of the population, a great deal more research and critical insight need to be acquired pertaining to how such platforms actually operate, and what the dynamics are that are furthering their development and expansion in the modern world. It is thus hoped that the final chapter of this investigation has, in some small way, managed to contribute to such an endeavour and that the reader has — at the very least — been left with the impression that before one can simply espouse whether or not social media have been either a 'good thing' or a 'bad thing' for the contemporary public sphere, one needs to consider the vast array of interconnected and contentious factors. While such factors invariably tend to obfuscate and complexify matters, they ultimately make the investigatory endeavour more open, critical and honest, thus providing the critical researcher with the assurance that a more accurate understanding of the phenomenon in question can indeed be attained.

While one could therefore easily assume that, in light of what has been revealed throughout the course of this chapter, social media platforms and social networking services, and all "smart-based" technologies are to be regarded as taboo, pernicious and detrimental to the development of a robust and engaging public sphere, such a stance would, yet again, tend to advocate and endorse a reductionist and over-simplified conclusion which overlooks the inherent tension and dialectical antagonism contained in these new communication mediums (Amiradakis, 2016a: 248). Thus, on a cautionary note, Amiradakis (ibid.) avers that it is important to acknowledge that social media platforms, Web 2.0 applications and mobile communication technologies are not the sole culprits to be implicated in the regressive and

worrying situation as depicted above, nor are they to be revered as the saviour of interpersonal relations within the contemporary era (Bauman and Lyon, 2013: 49).

As such, one needs to be mindful of the fact that the technocratic tendencies of the current era represent one possible path of development and rationalisation – a path shaped by the demands of capital and power which, in the process, disfigure not only human beings and nature, but also technology (Feenberg, 2010: 71). Yet, as Amiradakis (2016a: 248) notes, alternative pathways and forms of development are indeed both possible and necessary within contemporary society – an exigency that becomes all the more urgent the more technology threatens to slip out of the control of human beings (Heidegger, 1977: 4). A broader and more critical understanding of the contemporary communication technology at our disposal would therefore suggest a very different notion of development and rationalisation, based on responsibility for the human and natural contexts of technical action. As Horkheimer (2002: 260) indicates:

> in periods like ours, we must remember that *the best will to create something useful may result in its opposite* [...] *because it focuses on what is nearest at hand and misconstrues its true nature* [emphasis added].

Even though the preceding section of the conclusion of this chapter has attempted to elucidate the necessity of maintaining a dialectical, multifaceted and nuanced outlook towards the subject matter that has been the central focus of this entire study — namely, the social networking services and social media platforms of the 21st century and their relationship to the putative contemporary public sphere — based upon what has been revealed throughout the course of this chapter, what can nevertheless be concluded (with a fair amount of certainty) is the fact that, as the situation currently stands, *the* public sphere of the 21st century does indeed appear to be in grave danger. As such, the concerns and criticism that were initially raised by the likes of Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Fromm and Habermas tend to hold sway and thus, usurp the more positive and auspicious outlook of Benjamin (or Kracauer), when considering the impact that social media platforms have had upon contemporary society, its public sphere and the individuals who are required to participate therein.

Not only do the critical insights that have been provided by the likes of Kellner, Fuchs, Dean, Zuboff, Stiegler, Turkle, Morozov and Vaidhyanathan manage to corroborate many of the social-political maladies that the first generation of critical theorists both diagnosed and predicted back in the first half of the 20th century, but the range of contemporary critical researchers that has been considered throughout the course of this chapter have also managed to describe and critically explore an array of worrying and perturbing facets pertaining to contemporary society, and its associated forms of communication technologies, that the first generation of critical theorists could simply not have envisioned. It is in this regard that one can assert that the critical analysis contained in this chapter depicts a fairly bleak scenario with regard to social media platforms and their relationship to the contemporary public sphere (such as it is). Whether or not this will continue to be the case in the future, only time will tell, but it is fairly certain that if social media platforms continue to function and operate in the same vein as they currently are (i.e. under the auspices of surveillance capitalism and algorithmic governance), the public sphere of the future, along with the individuals who are required to participate therein, find themselves in imminent danger, and it is thus essential that more critical research be directed towards this pressing issue.

Conclusion

It has been the overarching intention of this study to critically investigate whether or not the social networking services and social media platforms of the contemporary era are proving to bolster and strengthen the modern public sphere, particularly in relation to the digitalised form that it has assumed in the highly-technologised context of the current epoch. Alternatively, this investigation has also sought to elucidate whether or not these communication technologies have — somewhat paradoxically — managed to have an inimical and invidious impact upon such digital domains of deliberation. In light of what has been revealed within this investigation, and based upon what each of the various theorists and critical thinkers have contributed throughout the course of this study, one can reasonably — and confidently — conclude that as these digital technologies are currently programmed/designed to function, they are to be regarded as a hindrance and an obstacle in relation to the revivification and facilitation of a vibrant and salubrious public sphere (particularly in the Habermasian sense of the term).

Before expanding upon — and then extrapolating from — such a conclusion, it is initially important to note that when attempting to provide an adequate summation of, and conclusion for, a research endeavour such as has been undertaken within this particular study, there always exists the inherent danger/temptation to rush towards sweeping generalisations and/or sanctimonious moral judgements that aim to encapsulate everything that the phenomenon in question supposedly entails. Thus, in a concerted attempt to avoid yielding to such a temptation, it has been made clear from the inception of this study that the underlying hypothesis guiding this entire investigation has been rooted in the firm conviction that social networking sites and social media platforms are — indubitably — to be regarded as being impressive technological achievements of the contemporary era. Furthermore, it has also been acknowledged that there are, indeed, an array of potential social, political and individual benefits that could be derived from the utilisation of such devices/services. However, despite such an auspicious and affirmative set of acknowledgements, it has also been a major contention of this investigation that, in their current format, these digital communicational devices are to be understood as constituting an impediment and a threat in relation to the creation and facilitation of a domain in which

a democratically induced form of deliberation and interaction is both fostered and sustained.

In light of the critical orientation that has guided this study, a few cautionary remarks will now be delineated before expanding upon what such an evaluation implies for — potential — future research endeavours. Thus, before attempting to arrive at any definitive assessment(s) of or conclusion(s) regarding the socio-technological phenomena in question, this investigation has initially attempted to gain a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the multifaceted and dialectically laden subject matter in question. Furthermore, in a concerted effort to take heed of Turkle's (2011: 243) prudent promulgations pertaining to what an 'amended narrative of technology' in the 21st century should entail — in the sense that such a narrative should effectively aim to elucidate technology's true effect(s) on contemporary society, whilst also remaining impartial enough so as to describe the current situation in an accurate and honest fashion — it has also been the intention of this particular study to circumvent many of the investigatory pitfalls and theoretical blindspots that contemporary media theorists such as Fuchs (2014), Morozov (2013) and Turkle (2011) have previously identified. Such a cautionary course of investigatory action has been undertaken so as to provide this study with what can (hopefully) be described as being an honest, well-rounded and contextually circumscribed account of the phenomena in question.

Keeping these caveats in mind, this study has then attempted to avoid the creation/utilisation of an overly simplified and reductivist investigatory narrative in which superficial and Manichean constructions are adopted — and then implemented — in order to come to terms with the subject matter in question. Countering such a stance, it has been a major contention of this entire study that such a contrived conceptual framework would only serve to thrust the technological mediums of social networking services and social media platforms into superfluous — and ultimately misleading — categories such as "good/bad"; "liberating/subjugating" and "edifying/stultifying". It has therefore been a firm conviction, throughout the course of this study, that such binary constructs invariably prohibit one from obtaining an accurate and well-rounded understanding of the communication devices in question, the manifold effects that such devices have had (and

will no doubt continue to have) upon the contemporary world and its denizens, along with the tension-laden context(s) in which such devices have arisen and are required to operate.

To briefly recall how this study has effectively attempted to achieve such an expansive set of investigatory outcomes, within Chapter 1, it was clearly explicated that this investigation was to be firmly rooted within the epistemological, methodological and axiological parameters of (early) Critical Theory as articulated by Max Horkheimer during the early part of the 20th century. Furthermore, it was then argued that the investigatory merit(s) and strength(s) to be associated with the adoption and implementation of such a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach could be located in the fact that it is within Horkheimer's nascent investigatory approach that the contemporary theorist is *still* able to identify and employ an array of formidable and useful conceptual tools in order to facilitate the process of continuous investigation, rigorous research and critical analysis. To recall, these conceptual and investigatory tools include:

i) an interdisciplinary investigatory framework that aims to focus on society and its constitutive phenomena as an interrelated whole;

ii) a dynamic and materialist view of society, which is itself viewed as being in a constant state of dialectical tension that is always rooted within a particular constellation of socio-historical factors;

iii) an axiological approach which is explicitly aimed at mitigating those elements within society that bring about suffering, thus, inversely attempting to increase the happiness of all members within society; and

iv) an approach that attempts to highlight how ideologies are created within a given society, from where they gain their impetus and how they are sustained — thus opening such phenomena up for a critical and comprehensive form of investigation and analysis.

In light of the above, it was the aim of Chapter 1 to effectively — and comprehensively — highlight exactly what Critical Theory (as an investigatory paradigm) entails, how such a

paradigm came into being, along with why such a paradigm is still worthy of continued exploration and implementation.

With the successful selection and description of an epistemological/methodological platform that was deemed as being highly attuned to this particular study, the second chapter of this investigation then sought to introduce and elaborate upon many of the critical insights and arguments of the so-called 'first generation' of critical theorists - including the likes of Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm. In particular, the works and positions that were considered within Chapter 2 included those that explicitly dealt with: i) the emergence of a modern — and supposedly enlightened — society, ii) modern society's ever-growing reliance (and then dependence) upon sophisticated technological infrastructures in order to maintain/sustain its techno-centric tendencies; iii) the rise of monopoly capitalism and what it would ultimately spell for the contemporary individual; and iv) how and why these critical theorists managed to arrive at their insightful, albeit austere, conclusions.

In order to achieve this set of critical outcomes, Chapter 2 explicitly drew from many of the central arguments that initially appeared within Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, with a sustained focus on their critique of modern, instrumental rationality and its inherent link to the Culture Industry (and its associated technologies). The views of Horkheimer and Adorno were then bolstered and supplemented by those of Marcuse (as delineated within *One-Dimensional Man*) and his slightly updated/revised critique of a one-dimensional society, in which he argues that a growing sentiment of uniformity and conformity within the modern world has come to prevail - with modern technology playing an integral role in this entire process. Marcuse's critical insights were then augmented by the socio-psychological insights of Erich Fromm, who, in *Escape From Freedom*, cogently articulates his mounting concern(s) in relation to what can loosely be described as being a growing sentiment of "imaginative/creative ennui" — itself a direct outcome of the pathological nature of modernity — that has managed to have an oppressive and stultifying impact upon the spontaneous and life-affirming faculties of the individual. According to Fromm then, this has ultimately resulted in what he dubs as being a rising sentiment of automaton-conformity that has come to affect nearly all individuals within modern society.

Central to all of the positions that were delineated within Chapter 2, is the fact that for the aforementioned critical theorists, modern society's sophisticated technological infrastructure — which explicitly includes its communication/broadcasting technology, along with its various technologies of mass-reproduction and distribution — is serving to bolster the conditions of oppression and control in order to further the interests of monopoly capital. Importantly however, within each of their distinctive analyses pertaining to this matter, none of these theorists ever postulate that modern technology is, by its very "nature" or "essence", inevitably destined to result in such an oppressive set of outcomes. Rather, as has been disclosed throughout the course of Chapter 2, all of the aforementioned theorists go to great lengths in order to explicate that due to the particular socio-historical and political context(s) in which modern society's technological infrastructure has been rooted, along with the various aims/outcomes that its compositional technologies have — either explicitly or implicitly — been designed to achieve and facilitate, such a concatenation of factors has ultimately culminated in the manifestation of a hegemonic social order in which modern technology has come to serve as an oppressive, domineering and exploitative force within the modern world.

As a direct result of the prescient and profound (yet indubitably pessimistic) proclamations contained within Chapter 2, the third chapter of this study then sought to provide this investigation with a much-needed counterbalance - particularly in relation to the cynical, caustic and at times, rather scathing, remarks that appear within the works of Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and Fromm. It was thus in direct response to such critical positions that the rather nuanced and idiosyncratic views of Walter Benjamin (and to a much lesser extent, those of Siegfried Kracauer) were introduced in order to elucidate how the critical works of the early Frankfurt School, and those associated with it, were by no means to be regarded as being homogenous or one-sided in their critique of modern society and its sophisticated technological infrastructure or the projected pathway(s) upon which such a society was destined to traverse. Thus, via the aid of Benjamin's more positive and idiosyncratic interpretation of modern technology — with a particular focus on the (then) recent technologies of photography and film — this investigation was introduced to a more auspicious and nuanced description of such communicational/reproductional technologies and the emancipatory potential they contained.

As was revealed within Chapter 3, according to Benjamin's estimation, it was these very communicational/reproductional technologies that — as a direct result of their technological makeup — inherently possess the capability to effectively capture, record and reproduce the real, lived-life experience of the modern individual, along with his/her altered existential condition as it has manifested itself in relation to the ever-growing technologised world that surrounds him/her. It is in this regard that Benjamin's analysis of such phenomena can be said to have effectively explicated how these communicational/reproductional technologies possess liberating and emancipatory potential for the modern individual, as they — i.e. these technologies — are able to align themselves with the reconfigured sensorial apparatus of the modern individual, so as to limpidly alert them to the (unjust) state of the world, thus opening up the possibility for political and social revolution to unfold. Furthermore, Benjamin's analysis also managed to elucidate how the very notion of the public sphere itself was undergoing a tremendous amount of change and transformation as a direct result of the technological paraphernalia that was being introduced to, and adopted by, modern society and its inhabitants.

The primary reason as to why this (seemingly divergent) course of investigatory action was pursued within the third chapter of this study resides in the fact that it is Benjamin who — contra the likes of Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse — aptly manages to bring into critical focus the positive impact that mass culture and its associated communicational technologies can potentially have upon society. It is thus in light of Benjamin's contrary estimation of such phenomena that the reader can be said to have been alerted to the fact that there is indubitably an inherent dialectical tension that exists between those theorists who are typically associated with the Frankfurt School (in its original guise), and their variegated positions towards the subject matter in question. In relation to this particular study, this notion of a dialectical tension — that can be said to exist in relation to the notion of modern society and its technological appendages — is to be regarded as being of immense import as it vividly elucidates the necessity of appreciating and taking into consideration the wide array of conflicting positions pertaining to the emergence of mass culture and its associated technologies of mass communication. As such, Benjamin's fairly idiosyncratic position managed to provide this investigation with what can aptly be described as a theoretically nuanced approach so as to allow the contemporary researcher

to gain a deeper understanding of the conflict-riddled nature of such phenomena, along with a renewed appreciation for the extensive (and heuristically rewarding) history pertaining to the debates and discussions surrounding such phenomena.

Within Chapter 4 of this investigation, the focus of this study then shifted toward the latter-half of the 20th century, in which the views of second-generation critical theorist Jürgen Habermas, were carefully considered. As such, particular attention was paid to Habermas's rather expansive work that explicitly deals with the notion of the public sphere, along with how contemporary culture (and its associated technologies) have impacted upon it. Throughout the course of Chapter 4 then, the extensive analysis that Habermas delineated for the reader — as enunciated primarily within *The Structural Transformation of the Bourgeois Public Sphere* — managed to provide this investigation with a carefully laid-out synopsis pertaining to the development, transformation, and eventual degeneration that the public sphere has undergone throughout the course of modern history.

What is to be considered as being of immense import with regard to the Habermasian account of the phenomena in question, is that when one is to carefully scrutinise the reconstruction and argument that Habermas presents, one is certainly able to appreciate how he makes a concerted attempt to both acknowledge and consider the aforementioned dialectical tension that his predecessors at the Frankfurt School had already incorporated into their respective analyses. As such, Habermas's thorough investigation regarding the modern public sphere, along with the various transformations that it underwent, effectively managed to provide this investigation with an updated, and finely balanced understanding of this process that is particularly relevant for the social, political and technological changes that modern society has experienced over the course of the past few decades, along with how these very changes and transformations have impacted directly upon the public sphere and its (in)ability to function as an effective domain for socio-political engagement and personal cultivation.

The fifth, and final, chapter of this study then aimed to bring all of the preceding views — along with the necessary inclusion of several contemporised perspectives — into a critical conversation with one another, so as to apply them interpretively to the digitalised

domain(s) of the 21st century. This was done so as to ascertain whether or not the social networking services and social media platforms of the current epoch are indeed able to create and facilitate the functioning of a healthy and effectual public sphere. In order to achieve such an outcome, it was initially revealed — via the aid of contemporary theorists such as Kellner (1989), Fuchs (2008), Dean (2009) and Zuboff (2015) — that there has indubitably been a growing merger between society's technologies of mass communication and the economic form(s) that capitalism has managed to assume as a direct result of such technological progressions. According to Zuboff's (2015) critical estimation of this situation, such a "techno-economic" merger has, hitherto, culminated in the emergence of an exploitative socio-economic order that she refers to as 'Surveillance Capitalism', which operates within an online, digitalised infrastructure, and relies exclusively on the (illicit/unscrupulous) acquisition, analysis and sale of big data in order to sustain its expansive (and lucrative) strategies of capital accumulation.

The aforementioned critical insights that were garnered from the introductory section of Chapter 5 were then utilised in order to explore how social networking services, social media platforms, and the various ICTs that facilitate their operationality, have been tailored — rather duplicitously — so as to harness and exploit the attentional/retentional faculties of the modern individual, ensuring that they (i.e. the users of these devices) remain attentively tethered to these devices/platforms. As was revealed throughout this particular section of Chapter 5, this sentiment of electronic enthralment has been deliberately propagated by the designers of these devices/platforms (at the behest of their benefactors), via the sophisticated means of algorithmic intervention and content manipulation, so as to create a situation in which a permanent process of data surveillance can be sustained. Furthermore, it was also revealed that such a contrived situation has — to a certain extent — allowed for the user's behaviour to be modified and manipulated so as to accord with the instrumentalised dictates of the prevailing capitalist milieu.

In order to effectively achieve this set of critical outcomes, the views of Bernard Stiegler (2011; 2016), Siva Vaidhyanathan (2018) and Shoshana Zuboff (2019) proved to be invaluable as they indubitably managed to provide this investigation with a great deal of insight into the situation as it currently stands. It is thus these theorists that, in the final

sections of Chapter 5, cogently elucidated that as a direct result of the contemporary communication devices/platforms that currently abound, there has been a systematic undermining of the individual's ability to engage in effective interpersonal communication, along with the opportunity for a substantive sense of creative personal cultivation to unfold. It is the insights of these contemporary theorists that can thus be said to have illuminated exactly why and how these contemporary communication devices/platforms — in their current format — are actually undermining the possibility of an effectual and emancipatory public sphere from emerging within the digital domains of the contemporary epoch.

It is in light of such a synopsis that one can then affirmatively aver that the underlying interrogative hypothesis guiding this particular investigation — which has focused on whether the social networking services and social media platforms of the contemporary era are undermining the possibility of an effectual and emancipatory public sphere from emerging — has been both reinforced and, ultimately, proved to be accurate. However, with this being said, it is important to note that it is not the intention of this particular investigation to reject social networking services, social media platforms or their associated ICTS in their entirety. Rather, one of the implicit aims of this entire investigation has been to highlight how there exists an imperative need within the 21st century to critically evaluate the socio-technological phenomena in question, in a concerted attempt to gain a firm understanding of what the various complications are surrounding such matters in order to address and rectify such issues.

It is directly in this regard that Turkle (2011: 293) argues that one needs to be ever-mindful of the fact that in order to effectively overcome the various issues and concerns that have arisen throughout the course of this particular investigation, the contemporary researcher needs to acknowledge that society is not simply going to get rid of the Internet and/or the various communication devices/platforms with which it is associated. As such, it is imperative that the digital denizens of the 21st century find a way to live with this 'seductive technology' in such a manner so as to ensure that it effectively works for their purposes (and not *vice versa*).

A promising avenue of exploration regarding this particular outcome seems to reside in the field of probing the ethical challenges associated with these new communication technologies (Bauman & Lyon, 2013: 132). According to Bauman and Lyon (ibid.), technological change happens so rapidly and with such profound consequences that older forms of regulation and investigation require urgent updating and revision. As such, Bauman and Lyon (ibid.) advocate or promote what Gary Marx (1998) refers to as a new form of technological ethics, which is aimed at dealing explicitly with the realm of technological innovations within the 21st century in order to place a priority on the dignity of persons, whilst also emphasising the avoidance of harms which can be associated with each new technology that is introduced into society. This position is both ratified and extended by Fuchs (2008: 350), who notes that the main task of a 'network ethics' — which would explicitly focus on the ethical aspects associated with contemporary ICTs, social networking services and social media platforms — would be to pose the question of freedom, and what it would essentially entail to achieve a real sense of freedom in a digitally networked world.

As such, Fuchs (2008: 350) advocates the pursuit of a research and investigatory approach in which there is an implementation and a subsequent cultivation of what he refers to as a 'cooperative cyber-ethics' that stresses the need for cooperation in the development, implementation and maintenance of those technologies that constitute the information/network society in which we live. For Fuchs (ibid.), it is the notion of cooperation that is to be perceived as being a key principle in such an endeavour as it could — potentially — strengthen participation, deliberation and engagement in the technologically mediated society of the current epoch. The primary tasks of a cooperative cyber-ethics would then be to: i) analyse the various antagonisms that are inherent to, and are a product of, the information society itself; ii) to question and analyse the uncritical appraisal and/or demonisation of contemporary communicational devices, ICTs and the wider information society in which they arise; and iii) to then stress the importance of the principle of cooperation when attempting to realise a participatory pathway within contemporary society. According to such a series of outcomes, one can therefore assert that the ultimate goal of a cooperative cyber-ethics is the development of a society that is integrative, humane, bottom-up, and advances the common good and equality of all (ibid.).

It is in a very similar vein of thought that Feenberg's (1999: 76) illuminating insights into what he refers to as 'the ambivalence of technology' also prove to be of immense value, especially when one is trying to come to terms with how it may be possible to actualise the emancipatory potential that resides within our current technological interfaces, whilst also attempting to mitigate its manifold adverse effects. To succinctly phrase Feenberg's position regarding this sentiment of ambivalence that he believes resides within contemporary technology, the following two principles need to be considered:

i) Technology's conservation of social hierarchies: According to Feenberg (1999: 76), this principle alludes to the fact that social hierarchies (i.e. hegemonic orders) can generally be preserved and reproduced as new technology is introduced to society. In other words, with the introduction of new technologies to society, existing social hierarchies and hegemonic orders are not simply or necessarily going to vanish as a result thereof, as these technologies may simply be absorbed/modified so as to further the interests of those already in control (a situation which has clearly occurred in relation to the introduction of social networking services and social media platforms, as has been elucidated throughout the course of this investigation). For Feenberg (ibid.), it is this principle that then manages to explain the extraordinary continuity of power in advanced capitalist societies over the last several generations, which has been made possible by technocratic strategies of modernisation despite enormous technical changes; and

ii) The democratic rationalisation of technology: For Feenberg (1999: 76), it is this principle that maintains how new contemporary technology can also be used to undermine the existing social hierarchy, or force it to meet the needs of those it has, hitherto, ignored. As such, it is this principle that then attempts to explain how there will generally be alternative ways of rationalising/constructing/designing society, and its accompanying technologies, in such a manner that they democratise rather than centralise control. According to Feenberg (1999: 79), a key factor that underlies this particular principle pertains to the actual manner in which modern technology is designed and furthermore, how it gets adapted/manipulated — as a direct result of its design features — in order to achieve certain outcomes/aims.

It is directly in relation to the second principle that Feenberg (2010: 26) goes on to place a great deal of emphasis on what he refers to as the 'democratisation of technology'. As such,

Feenberg argues when one is to critically consider how it becomes possible to actually harness the liberating and emancipatory potential that resides within modern technology, the issue is not to be phrased within a narrative that deals exclusively with the regulation of such technology and/or the legal rights of its users (as important as these factors invariably are), but rather, one that deals with the notions of initiative and participation within the design process itself. For Feenberg (2010: 26) then, much like Fuchs (2008), it is the elements of initiative and participation in the designing and rationalisation of modern society, and its associated technologies, that actually serve to prefigure in the creation of a new public sphere - which would itself be founded upon a 'reflexive' form of technology that explicitly involves the deliberate accommodation of technologies to their social and natural environment (ibid.). According to Feenberg, this would then allow for unprecedented socio-technological developmental pathways to evince themselves that would be far more liberating and emancipatory than the ones we currently experience.

As the situation in the modern world currently stands, Feenberg (2010: 28) acknowledges that contemporary society has — hitherto — been structured in such a manner so as to respond to a particularly parochial definition of technology which is viewed as being nothing more than an effective means to attaining profit and power. However, for Feenberg (2010: 28), when one is able adopt a broader and more nuanced understanding of technology, such a liberated outlook manages to elucidate very different notions of how society and its technological infrastructure could be structured, according to a far more encompassing definition of technology, that is explicitly based on responsibility for the human and natural contexts of technical action. For Feenberg (2010: 28), such a revised form of rationalisation then explicitly requires that technological advances be made in opposition to the dominant hegemonic orders that currently prevail. It is thus in light of this contrary estimation of the possible trajectory on which the highly technologised society of the 21st century can (potentially) traverse that Feenberg (2010: 28) adamantly maintains that modern technology indubitably has the inherent ability to deliver much more than one type of technological civilisation and as such, he unashamedly asserts that contemporary society has not — as yet — exhausted its democratic potential.

With regard to the communication technologies of the current epoch (such as social networking services and social media platforms), Fuchs (2008) ratifies Feenberg's position when he argues that depending on how such technologies are designed and applied, they can have positive and/or negative effects on society. While Fuchs (2008) is well-aware of the manifold complications and problems that have arisen as a direct result of how these technologies have currently been designed/tailored, he nevertheless maintains that there is a real potential for change (of both society and its technologies) towards a future space that is characterised by highly cooperative communities that engage in the joint production of meaning and digital resources. For Fuchs (2008), much like Feenberg (2010), it is in such cooperative and participatory environments that virtual communities will not only be spaces where humans share technological standards and broad interests that structure online communication but also social spaces from which strong ties and common identities emerge that are open, democratic and allow for plurality.

In light of what has been mentioned above, it is the concluding contention of this investigation that further research be directed towards these auspicious avenues of inquiry, lest the true emancipatory qualities of these impressive technological innovations be betrayed or squandered.

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