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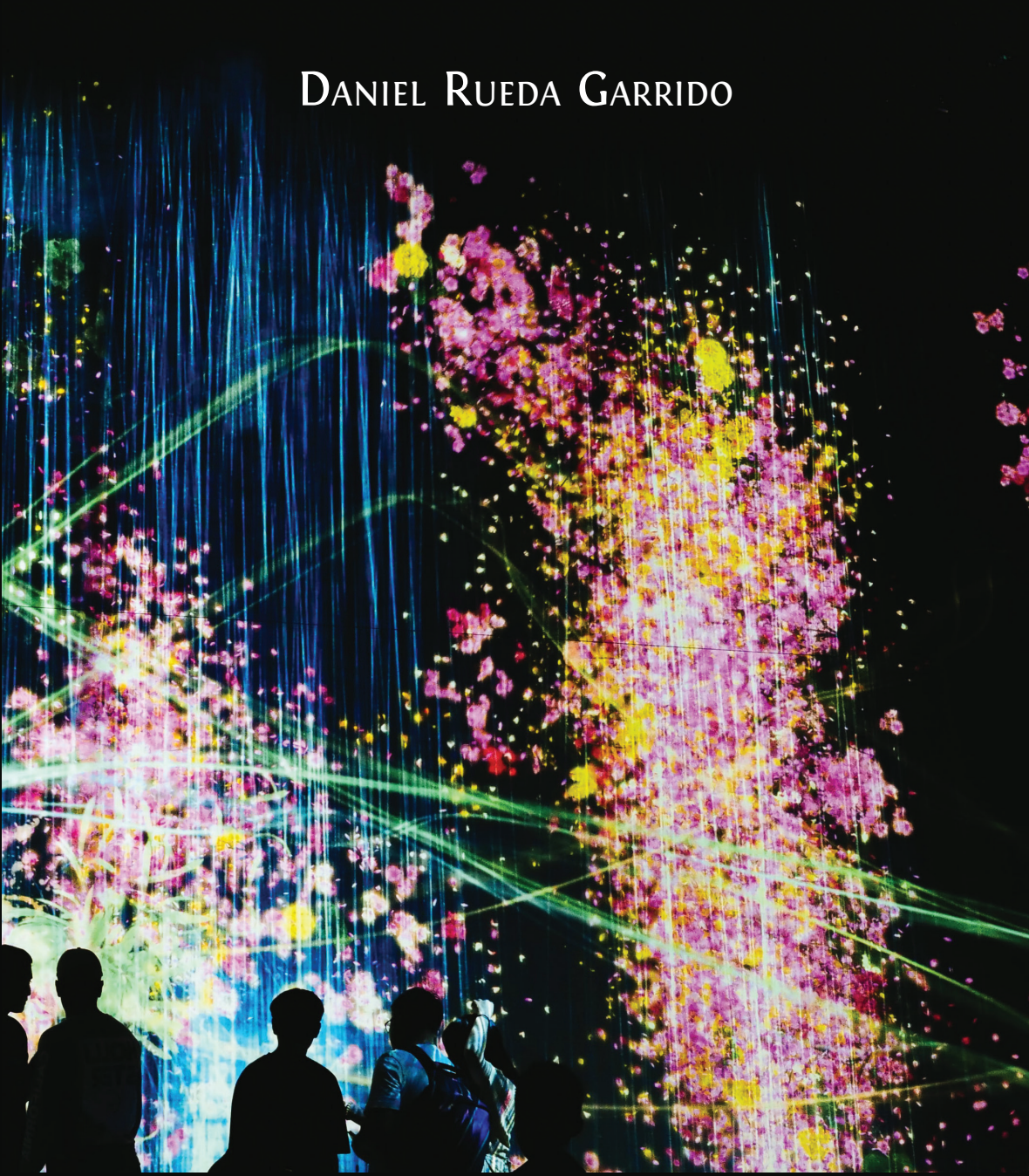

Forms of Life and Subjectivity

Rethinking Sartre's Philosophy

https://www.openbookpublishers.com

ISBN Paperback: 9781800642188
ISBN Hardback: 9781800642195
ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781800642201
ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 9781800642218
ISBN Digital ebook (azw3): 9781800642225
ISBN XML: 9781800642232
DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0259

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Cover design by Anna Gatti

6. The Capitalist Form of Life and its Subjectivity

1. Introduction

In this chapter, I would like to characterize in a more specific way the ontological unity that I have defined as a 'form of life'. To do so, I will examine the capitalist form of life. The reason for this choice is that it is the hegemonic form of life in our present, and therefore the one closest to the reader's phenomenological experience and thus possibly the one of greatest interest. In this analysis, I apply the ontological notions and structures already described in the previous chapters, but I explore closely the process of integration into a form of life. Having established the dialectical process inherent in this ontological structure, I examine how the capitalist form of life has universalized its constitutive principle by assimilating other forms with which it has come into contact. I argue that the principle of *economic maximization* has formed capitalist subjectivity, and I show this by taking the example of English society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Such economic maximization, while integrating the subjects into their own form of life, drives an opposite process of reification, whereby the greater the reification the greater the economic maximization. Therefore, I try to show how capitalist subjectivity is constituted by the intimate contradiction of a subject who, in order to be such, must progressively become an object. In such a way that the individuals, insofar as they are mediated by a form of life, become subjects and recognize themselves as subjects of that form, so in the same way the latter, in order to persevere in its being, has to be mediated by the subject, who becomes the object of that form of life.

 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0259.06

2. The Ontological Principle of the Capitalist Form of Life

If by subjectivity we understand the subject's form of life, which represents the individual in its bidirectional relationship with its situation and with other individuals, then what the individual is will necessarily be conditioned by its environment,[1] and the latter by social and political organization. The subjects are defined by their way of being in society, in the *polis*. Therefore, the politics and the economic policy implemented in the *polis* allow the appearance of one and not of another type of citizen, with certain subjectivity. In this sense, Michel Foucault also was right when he reversed the eighteenth-century notion of free men in a state of nature from which emerged civil society, stating that it was from civil society that emerged the free individual.[2] Foucault's idea can be linked to Aristotle, according to which, the regime of government produces a certain type of citizens, and therefore, for Aristotle, man could only be fully realized as a citizen of a good political regime, and it was not possible to be good entirely independently of the political organization into which he was born.[3] This is what Aristotle maintained in book III of his *Politics*[4] and what Jim McGuigan seems to want to express when, quoting Margaret Thatcher, he points out the emergence of a new way of being in relation to the neoliberal policies promoted in the 1970s: 'The following observations are inspired by Margaret Thatcher's notorious description of her own politics in 1981 when she remarked that the method is economic but the object is to change the soul.'[5] The change of regime implies a transformation in the citizens' form of life, or, in Thatcher's terms, in their souls. According to this, the subjectivity of citizens depends on the political-economic regime and can be understood as an expression of the way in which the

1 It is here suggested that the reader recall Chapter 4 of this book on imitation, conscious will and social conditioning.

2 James Heartfield, *The 'Death of the Subject' Explained* (Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University Press, 2006 [2002]), pp. 23–24.

3 The correct consequence to be drawn would be that one certainly cannot be good regardless of the notion of goodness one shares with one's community.

4 Aristotle, *Politics*, in *Complete Works*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), II, 1275b, pp. 4344–45.

5 Jim McGuigan, 'The Neoliberal Self', *Culture Unbound*, 6:1 (2014), 223–40 (p. 224).

subject behaves and experiences his form of life, or by his way of being and acting.

In that very same sense, Foucault understood the new tendencies of neoliberal capitalism at the time he delivered his seminar on contemporary subjectivity at the Collège de France (1978–79), which has been published with the title of *The Birth of Biopolitics*.[6] Foucault at that early period had already conceived neoliberalism as a strategy to rule, that is, as a regime: 'Following Foucault to the letter, [Wendy] Brown sees neoliberalism as a governmental regime that sets the rules of conduct in all spheres of life and, moreover, she believes it needs little in the way of ideological support to sustain the operations of power.'[7] Although together with Foucault's view stated in the above quotation some authors maintain that neoliberalism has to do with the regulation and reorganization of praxis,[8] the prevailing framework, represented by authors such as David Harvey, has tended to identify neoliberalism in a wider fashion as an ideology that 'frames the meaning of everyday reality for people'.[9] That means that capital neoliberalism from the 1970s produced an idiosyncratic neoliberal individual. This does not simply mean that this subjectivity is a direct effect of these imposed practices, but it does mean that exposure to such practices allows individuals to identify with the ontological principle that drives them and to adopt them as their form of life. This is what has been shown in the chapter on imitation, conscious will and social conditioning in this book (Chapter 4). However, to establish what this subject is like, one must understand neoliberal capitalism as a totalizing process, already contained in its origins of classical capitalism, of expanding the borders of a free market and increasing the maximization and accumulation of capital. Understanding it in this way sheds light on its internal determinations

6 Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008 [2004]).

7 McGuigan, 'The Neoliberal Self', p. 229.

8 It must be remarked that Mitchell Dean has claimed recently that it is a misconception to attribute to Foucault an outline of neoliberal subjectivity, as what the French philosopher insisted on was in envisaging neoliberalism as a mode of liberation from *governmentality*, that is, a way out of subjectification. In subsequent sections of this chapter I take up this argument to develop my proposal. See Dean, 'The Secret Life of Neoliberal Subjectivity', in *Rethinking Neoliberalism*, ed. by Sanford F. Schram and Marianna Pavlovskaya (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 23–40.

9 Quoted in McGuigan, 'The Neoliberal Self', p. 225.

and specifies the direction of the process as the integration of those affirmative moments within the totalization *represented* by the expansive market as pure exchange value for profit maximization. If it is so, we are ready now to extract some consequences from the dialectical reasoning for capitalist subjectivity from the origins until the so-called neoliberal capitalism, both being nothing more than different moments in the process of integration into the capitalist form of life as dialectical totalization.

Capitalism as a way of operating has been associated with the accumulation and maximization of economic profit since at least the work of Adam Smith. This was also the main attribute of what economists of a later period started to call *homo economicus*:

> This figure emerges first in late nineteenth-century political economy critiques of Mill's work, and the idea of homo oeconomicus then retroactively expands backwards, such that it comes to refer to Mill's predecessors in classical political economy, particularly Adam Smith and David Ricardo.[10]

This maximization of economic profit seems to be the principle that enacts the capitalist life and drives its subjectivity. Claus Dierksmeier considers *homo economicus* as a model of behaviour dictated by economists since the late eighteenth century.[11] A model of behaviour that actually changes the way in which we relate to reality. Nevertheless, the argument misses the point of the totalization into which most members of the society entered precisely at that time; a totalization in which the economic theory played an important role but only as justification and reinforcement of a practice that was already part of a preexisting order and not vice versa: the theory justified the practice. For instance, the discourse of free trade and free market of labour was used numerous times to justify child labour in mines and factories (lower salaries and small hands and bodies to perform tasks otherwise difficult, though

10 Samuel A. Chambers, 'Undoing Neoliberalism: *Homo Oeconomicus*, *Homo Politicus*, and the *Zoon Politikon*', *Critical Inquiry*, 44:4 (2018), 706–32 (p. 719).

11 Claus Dierksmeier, 'Reorienting Management Education: From the Homo Oeconomicus to Human Dignity', in *Business Schools Under Fire: Humanistic Management Education as the Way Forward*, ed. by W. Amann, M. Pirson, C. Dierksmeier, E. von Kimakowitz and H. Spitzeck (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 19–40 (pp. 20–21).

always dangerous), an extended practice guided by the principle of maximizing profit.[12]

In fact, this principle can actually give rise to two different forms of life: capitalism and collectivism (or communism). In the first case, we have the maximization of individual profit (whether or not they contribute to the general good) and, in the second case, we have the maximization of collective profit (an ideal version of communism, implemented in small groups or communities, such as the case of the Mondragon Project in Spain).[13] By communism, I do not mean the state apparatus of so-called communist nations. The communism we are talking about here is rather the primitive collectivism or that of the anarcho-communist proposals of Peter Kropotkin by which 'the individual recovers his full liberty of initiative and action for satisfying, by means of free groups and federations—freely constituted—all the infinitely varied needs of the human being'.[14] All those models of community life can be entered under the principle of collective maximization of economic profits. The *raison d'être* of these subjects is to cooperate in the community to maximize their profits. These profits are economic because they pursue material wealth for their own use or for exchange or business with other communities. In some of these communities, the autarchic principle is very strong, and therefore, the cooperation does not lead to a mercantile relation with other communities (for instance, Charles Fourier's original phalansteries). However, even in these, the life of the individual is at the service of the community so that it grows in its material wealth (which may or may not be the object of business). These subjects integrate themselves into the community, seeking their habits to have an economic impact on everyone. By contrast, in the capitalist form of life, maximization is always individual, and therefore, its subjects always seek to maximize their own wealth. The famous 'invisible hand' that Adam

12 Laura Frader, *The Industrial Revolution: A History in Documents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 135–36.

13 This collectivism is also perceived in groups like the Commune of Paris (1871). However, their collective enterprise was not so much driven by maximization as by a certain spirit of austerity, that is, of cooperating to meet the needs of the community. For an overview of the possibility of this type of collective enterprise and concrete examples of anarchist societies, see David Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004).

14 Peter Kropotkin, *Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles* (London: Freedom Office, 1905), p. 3.

Smith mentions in *The Wealth of Nations* is not a principle of this form of life, but rather the hope that reinforces its very possibility. The 'invisible hand' that makes everyone rich through individual selfish stimulus is not a rule, a *quod erat demonstrandum* principle. The invisible hand is a case of wishful thinking transmitted by the Scottish author. It is the hope that it will be so, in order to continue to maximize individually. It is the reinforcement that the will needs in order to impose this form of life as a possibility. Adam Smith explicitly mentions individual initiatives that promote national markets without any intention of doing so. For they create a commercial monopoly which, however, is described as a kind of benefit to the nation, achieved indirectly through individual interests in securing their profits:

> By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by *an invisible hand* to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.[15]

Adam Smith's text can be read as propaganda for the capitalist form of life. Imagine the reader if, instead of the invisible hand (which has been propagated along with all the capitalist propaganda), Smith had asserted that such individual calculation of wealth accumulation inevitably leads to monopoly and the tyranny of the few over the many. In the words of Karl Marx:

> Competition among capitalists increases the accumulation of capital. Accumulation, where private property prevails, is the concentration of capital in the hands of a few, it is in general an inevitable consequence if capital is left to follow its natural course, and it is precisely through competition that the way is cleared for this natural disposition of capital.[16]

15 Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. by Edwin Cannan, 2 vols. (London: Methuen and Co.,, 1904 [1776]), I, p. 421. The italics are mine.

16 Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. III: *Karl Marx, March 1843–August 1844* (London: Lawrence Wishart, 2010), p. 251.

In that hypothetical case, it might not have been considered the book of hours of every capitalist, but, on the contrary, counter-propaganda—as were Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (and Engels' *Outline of a Critique of Political Economy*), for example. This principle constitutes subjects who want to maximize their economic profit. Their life makes sense only through actions driven by that principle. Human life is understood as universalized in this process of integration towards a greater and more intense maximization of economic profit. But, because every principle is the negation of an opposite, the principle of economic maximization is the negation of austerity, this understood, in turn, as the negation of maximization. Let us define maximization, therefore, as that search for multiplying what one already has. Maximizing is addressed to what is intended to be multiplied. It is calculus. Economic maximization is the constant search for greater economic assets: in short, capital growth. Its denial is not poverty. The negation of maximization is rather not to maximize, not to seek the multiplication of capital. It is a life whose economic wealth is reduced to meeting present needs: that is, frugality and austerity. So he who seeks to maximize his wealth seeks to flee austerity. He is afraid of austerity. But this, as has already been said, is maintained throughout the integration of the subject in his form of life, as its original possibility. In each maximizing action beats the austerity from which one flees. That is, maximization continues to show austerity.

Austerity, as a state bordering on precariousness, is the other side of the maximization principle. So, subjects only maximize for fear of austerity. The Irish Potato Famine of 1845–52 for example, was the major premise to support importation of crops within the international capitalist market through the abolition of the Corn Laws in 1846.[17] And to this day it seems an established view that without individual economic maximization, society would return to times of austerity and poverty. As Graeme Snooks puts it:

> The conventional wisdom tells us that economic systems in the distant past experienced, over very long periods of time, either the steady state envisaged by the classical economists, or zero-sum fluctuations in GDP per capita. According to both interpretations, ancient and medieval

17 See Chris Cook, *The Routledge Companion to Britain in the Nineteenth Century, 1815–1914* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 198.

> societies were unable to escape from poverty because they were dominated by custom rather than individual self-interest.[18]

In this example, poverty is not crude survival, but scarcity and austerity as the words used show: 'steady state' and 'zero-sum'. To *escape* from austerity is then what constitutes its opposite; this is an eternal escape. So, maximization can be said to be the constant negation of the ever-present austerity. The subject never stops coming out of austerity, because if it ended, it would stop maximizing. For there to be maximization, it is necessary to experience austerity. This is why the maximizer always wants more. As much as the subject gets financial benefits, he will always experience them from austerity (or the risk of it). The profit will not make the subject, constituted by the stated principle, move away from austerity. Moreover, the more profits he obtains, the greater the assimilation of austerity. For the greater the integration of the form of life, the greater the assimilation of its opposite. To the point that only by being austere and experiencing austerity can maximization be obtained. Curiously enough, great capitalist entrepreneurs like J. Paul Getty are said to lead lives of great frugality.[19] He lived to maximize because it always seemed little to him. He always wanted more.

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18 Graeme Donald Snooks, 'Great Waves of Economic Change: Industrial Revolution in Historical Perspective, 1000 to 2000', in *Was the Industrial Revolution Necessary?*, ed. by Graeme Donald Snooks (London and New York: Routledge, 1994/2002), pp. 43–78 (p. 44).

19 J. Paul Getty (1892–1976) was a petrol-industrialist and art collector, owner of the Getty Oil Company and founder of J. Paul Getty Trust. In 1957, *Fortune* magazine named him the world's richest person. In one of his books, he wrote about what he called the 'millionaire mentality', which is purest capitalist mind (the most perfect form of profit maximization): 'The Millionaire Mentality is one which is always and above all cost-conscious and profit-minded'. And 'businessmen and business executives must be constantly alert for ways to reduce costs and increase efficiency, production, quality and sales so that the company he owns—or for which he works—can operate at a profit'. See J. Paul Getty, *How to Be Rich* (New York: Jove Books, 1983), pp. 41; 42. The latter is equivalent to reducing expenses to austere levels in order to increase profit, or, in other words, austerity inevitably as the core of the profitable attitude. For some biographers, such as John Pearson, this attitude was an imitation of J. Paul Getty's father's, whom he even wanted to surpass: 'any personal acquisition was decided henceforth strictly on a profit basis. As a good puritan, George F. Getty was a dedicated self-denier; so Paul set out to beat him here as well. He would permit himself no self-indulgence in the purchase of a place to live, a work of art, even a piece of furniture, unless he could convince himself that it would appreciate in value.' See John Pearson, *Painfully Rich* (New York: Bloomsbury Reader, 2011 [1995]), pp. 44–45.

The difference between maximizing and satisfying present needs can always be problematized. But the point that distinguishes them is that what is necessary in one is to maximize and in the other, on the contrary, is neither to maximize nor to accumulate. The one who maximizes feels the need to maximize and accumulate; therefore, his desire is not satisfied with an object, like thirst with water, but with accumulation, with the very action of multiplying his possibilities of having more. His need is not present, in the sense that it is not that which an object arouses, but that which arouses a lack of maximization, a fear of austerity, that is to say, that of experiencing that one never has enough. On the contrary, the austere form of life, which constitutes negatively the life of maximization, wishes not to maximize, which means satisfying a present need in the sense that it arises from the lack of an object or a situation to which one responds. Its satisfaction lies in the action of obtaining the object or making the situation happen; for example, in the payment of a debt or obligation. With what is obtained or realized, one has enough. In the first case, the lack is future, namely, to have more; in the second case, it is present, to obtain the object for a current need. Moreover (as I discuss below), in the first case, the lack is not of an object, so that when one tries to satisfy it with an object, one reifies that need, which is the need to maximize, i.e., to be a subject through maximization.

In the second case, on the other hand, the need is for an object, and is satisfied by its attainment. It is not reified because it is precisely the need for an object, so that a distance is maintained between the subject who experiences the need and the object. In the maximizer, however, since what is needed is not the object but the act of maximizing, that is, being a maximizing subject, the object with which the need is sought to be satisfied reifies both the need and the subject. And it does so precisely because it presents externally in the object as satisfied a desire that persists. In reality, then, two desires: the desire to maximize and the desire to be a subject that desires to maximize. The latter would be the one that responds to its ontological identification and therefore to its being. The difference with the one who lives an austere life would be that while the capitalist reifies his desire and his being (taken as a second-order desire), the former reifies his being but not his desire. For, by obtaining the object of his present desire, he satisfies it, but not the persistent desire to be a subject who wishes only to satisfy his present

needs. The austere person presents himself externally reified in this will to be austere: his austerity is presented as a finished way of being. The more he identifies himself with this reified subject (or image of being human), the more austere and, therefore, the more perfectly he directs his desires to objects at hand that merely satisfy present needs. Reification has the function in both processes of presenting as finished, complete and fixed what is not. But in presenting it that way the subject performs an act of self-recognition and affirms his identity, so that in the case of capitalism, as I say below, the subject successively mirrors himself in the objects he presents to himself in order to satisfy his desire to maximize (albeit always unsuccessfully). He is somewhat those objects in which his desire and his being are reified, although he is always more than those objects; he is also the desiring surplus that persists in maximizing.

So, if we take the current capitalist society, as incarnating a form of life driven by the maximization of individual economic profit, it can be explained why this society, no matter how much it produces and accumulates, always feels austere. Austerity is the negative principle on which it is constituted. What the anti-austerity movement around the world did in the second decade of the twenty-first century was not to point out a historical event, but to show that every capitalist form of life is founded on austerity. Maximization only makes sense as a hope against austerity. And the latter is the former's true opposite. The horror and nightmare of a subject of the capitalist form of life (as driven by that principle of maximization) is a frugal and austere life. That life is perceived with the emotions of sadness, contempt and absurdity. Living without maximizing is nonsense. And maximizing results in incessant production, acquisition, accumulation and even waste, because the opposite of having just enough to live is always having more than what is needed. However, it is always experienced as a scarcity because it is negatively principled by austerity. And likewise with regard to the preservation and care of what one possesses. The one who maximizes seeks to renew what he possesses by increasing its value in terms of capital (a newer, higher quality object, titles, status, and so on), while the one who directs himself through the principle of austerity seeks to preserve and care for that which he possesses.

The same can be said of the form of life led by the maximization of collective profit. In it, the opposite is equally the austerity. However,

rather than that of the individual it is that of the community. This community will always seek to maximize its wealth, and it will never be enough. The danger of this form of life is that the subject will experience it as an impossibility for himself because it is always insufficient for the community; the austerity of this is always haunting its subjects. One of their opposites can become their form of life, and the closest is that of capitalism. The difference between these two forms of life does not seem so great in principle, but what exactly differentiates communism (or collectivism) from capitalism?[20]Both, in principle, seek to escape from austerity, one does so individually and the other, collectively. Herein lies their similarity and what makes them correlative to each other. Both seek the same thing. At least that is the conclusion to which our onto-phenomenological analysis leads us. As strange as it may seem to the reader after decades of propaganda from both forms of life, both seek essentially the same thing: to escape from the precariousness on which austerity (as the absence of maximization) borders. And it may be strange to find this structural similarity in them precisely because such propaganda has emphasized their differences and their rejection of each other. For they have become two hegemonic forms in opposition. That they are hegemonic is not directly related to their ontological structure but to their power of universalization, therefore, indirectly to their will to power through imposition and assimilation. This hegemonic contest has presented them as being extremely different, almost diametrically opposed, while in their ontological structure they were to each other no more than one among other opposite forms of life.

What has just been argued does not imply that communism and capitalism are the same; it simply means that in their principle of being they are more similar than we have been led to believe. Now, both are different principles of life, as one is a possibility sealed by the other and vice versa. The individual maximization of economic profit is constituted negatively by individual austerity, while the collective maximization of economic profit is constituted negatively by collective austerity. And this respective ontological constitution is not a small

20 For a characterization of capitalism and its profit maximization, see Leonardo Figueroa Helland and Tim Lindgren, 'What Goes Around Comes Around: From the Coloniality of Power to the Crisis of Civilization', *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 22:2 (2016), 430–62, https://doi.org/10.5195/JWSR.2016.631.

difference. This difference marks the experience of maximization as an individual or as a collective task. That is, the escape from a shipwreck for which one alone is responsible or for which many are responsible. And, by the same token, the responsibility to prosper by one's own means after the shipwreck, or the shared responsibility to prosper through the contribution of all its members. It can be represented as the difference between Robinson Crusoe (Daniel Defoe) and the Swiss Family Robinson (David Wyss). That is, for the former, the survival and prosperity of his life was a private enterprise, while for the latter, it was a collective one. The question seems to fall, however, on the definition of collectivity and individuality. It is well known that capitalism has taken the family as one of its fundamental connotations, understood as maximizing profit through the family. Here, even more than before, we see similarities with collectivist communism: would the latter be no more than an expansion of individual profit to the family, and from the family to the communal? One of the keys to the communities that have lived and are living collectively seems to be the fact of establishing quasi-fraternal relations among its members. It is characteristic of religious communities to call each other brother and sister, and of societies that were originally collectivist like that of China, where even two strangers can call each other by family names like brother 哥哥 (*gē ge*) and sister 妹妹 (*mèi mèi*), uncle 叔叔 (*shū shū*) and aunt 阿姨 (*ā yí*).

If it were a question of expanding the number of members included in one form of life or another, then one would have to multiply the principles of life to other possible communities such as that of the couple, those that benefit for a large group such as a nation, or a form of life that maximizes for a group such as the entirety of humanity. It is not, therefore, a quantitative but a qualitative ontological question. The one that collectively maximizes what it does is to contribute to the maximization of the group's benefit. On the contrary, the one that maximizes individually what he does is to pursue a monopoly. He maximizes against others. In this way, the individualization of profit is placed against other people's losses.[21] When the principle is applied to

21 Michel de Montaigne shows this same intuition with regard to the principle of economic maximization: 'no profit whatever can be made but at the expense of another and by the same rule he should condemn all gain of what kind soever [sic]'. Further on, he identifies it as a universalizable principle: 'Let every one but dive into his own bosom and he will find his private wishes spring and his secret

a family, it seeks a monopoly over other families. That is individualistic maximization. The whole family seeks to individualize profit by pursuing a monopoly over others. The whole family acts as an individual with a single purpose. Collectivist maximization does not seek monopoly, but rather a particular contribution to common prosperity. Let us say that the latter is the sum of many contributions, whereas individual maximization (even when it is that of the family) acts as an individual: not a sum of contributions but a unique contribution. It is the individual, or the family or the group that acts individually over other individuals, families or groups. It seeks to maximize the individual's profits (or considered individual) over that of others.

From what has been said, it can be concluded that although both forms of life seek essentially the same, namely, to maximize, however, the motivation of both is significantly different. While the former seeks to flee from individual austerity understood as a loss in front of others, the latter seeks to flee from collective austerity understood as a common situation. The maximization of the former leads to monopoly by imposing its interest on others, while the maximization of the latter leads to the collective contribution seeking the prosperity of the group, a prosperity that is always experienced as elusive. However, the difference between what is considered an individual cause and what is considered a common cause is of paramount importance. While the collective maximization of economic profit is understood as remuneration of each member for his or her contribution, individual maximization takes the group as an individual entity whose profits do not mean the distributive profit for each of its members. Individual maximization is always of the individual or the entity considered individual. The example of the latter would be the corporative entities typical of capitalism. A corporation is an individual entity whose maximization is not the maximization of the profit of all its members, but only of the corporation as such (the stakeholders are the corporation as such, but not the employees and

hopes grow up at another's expense.' In Montaigne, *Essays*, Vol. I (London: Navarre Society Limited, 1923), pp. 121–22, chapter XXI, 'The profit of one man is the loss of another.' Indirectly, this quotation (which in turn is based on an anecdote from ancient Greece) proves that as a form of life, capitalist maximization is not of a particular historical time, but a possibility inherent to human beings, and that only as a hegemonic form can it be associated with a historical period, as in the following sections I intend to argue.

partners). In the case of collective maximization, the members maximize the collective profit, which also means maximizing the individual profit. This would not happen in a corporation, in a social group or state run as a corporation. Members sacrifice themselves (and are sacrificed) for the good of the individual entity. Here we refer to collective maximization of economic profit and not to communism, because it is misleading. A politically affiliated or self-appointed communist state can impose individual maximization of economic profit, if the state is taken as that individual entity to which members are sacrificed. So the boundaries in terms of language, of identifying labels, are very blurred. What distinguishes them is always the ontological structure, that is, the principle that drives them. Perhaps this is what the critics and scholars of capitalism have wanted to point out with the label of authoritarian capitalism, as if it were a new reality, when it is nothing but the internal structure of every community that is driven by individual maximization of economic profit.[22] By taking a nation as a corporation, maximization is not collective but fundamentally of the nation as an individual entity, which implies the obvious enrichment of the nation's elite, who incarnate the principle.

3. Dialectical Process towards Maximization of Economic Profit

The internal-external dialectical process of forms of life described in the previous sections can be seen in the origin and development of the capitalist form of life in England between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. In this, the internal process is directed by the principle of individual economic maximization, and its necessity consists in gradually covering as many aspects of the subject's life as possible, from labour to public life and, finally, private life in its smallest details. The external process consists in the necessity to assimilate those forms of life with which it comes into contact in such a way that the ontological

22 On the label authoritarian capitalism, see Christian Fuchs, 'Donald Trump: A Critical Theory-Perspective on Authoritarian Capitalism', *TripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*, 15:1 (2017), 1–72; Christian Fuchs, 'Racism, Nationalism and Right-Wing Extremism Online: The Austrian Presidential Election 2016 on Facebook', in *Critical Theory and Authoritarian Populism*, ed. by Jeremiah Morelock (London: University of Westminster Press, 2018), pp. 157–206.

principle constituting one of the forms of life directs the subjects and actions of the others. In this section, what I want to examine is the dialectic of the forms of life and the change of subjectivity that they operate.

The capitalist form of life emerges in social groups that have been overcome and that see their possibility of thriving in their society stifled. Around the sixteenth century,[23] the big landowners suffered the pressure and limitations of a state mercantilist form of life, where the ruling elite was the small nobility, who occupied bureaucratic positions in the government (it could be said that this form of life was one of maximizing the profit of the state and the monarchy). This is what Immanuel Wallerstein called the beginning of the modern world-system: 'there seems to be widespread consensus that in the earlier periods of the modern world-system, beginning at least in the sixteenth century and lasting at least until the eighteenth, the states were central economic actors in the European world-economy'.[24] In the midst of this state control system, the big landowners or gentry began to incarnate a new form of life in which they made their farmers wage labourers (tenants).[25] They work on the land for a wage, whereas before they worked the land for their own livelihood. The ultimate motivation is the maximization of individual profit through the exploitation of labour, time and workers. This form of life, born within the large landowners' land, will gradually expand and integrate. Among other authors, Ellen Meiksins Wood has shown that, in fact, capitalism originated in the agricultural work of the

23 For some historians this occurs in the sixteenth century, for others in the eighteenth century. That does not change the validity of the dialectic that is the purpose of this section. In fact, although there is no agreement on when exactly capitalism began, industrial capitalism is well established by the end of the eighteenth century. So, it is a matter of a longer or shorter span of time between the moment in which an incipient capitalist form of life started as economic maximization in the agrarian environment and the industrial revolution of the cities. At all times, what matters for our purpose is the dialectical process by which the forms of life and subjectivities changed.

24 Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011 [1974]), p. 193.

25 I would not make any distinction between gentry and landowner, for as Wallerstein quoted, '"the mark of the gentry," says Julian Cornwall, "was the ownership of land"', in Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I*, p. 324. In this sense, I call it just 'landowner'. For a detailed discussion and debate on this category see the mentioned work.

peasant and tenants working for the landlord. The profit-maximization strategy of the landlord was motivated by the limitations set by the strong English state:

> It [aristocracy] was part of the increasingly centralized state, in alliance with a centralizing monarchy, without the parcellization [sic] of sovereignty characteristic of feudalism and its successor states. While the state served the ruling class as an instrument of order and protector of property, the aristocracy did not possess autonomous 'extra-economic' powers or 'politically constituted property' to the same degree as their continental counterparts [...] What they lacked in 'extra-economic' powers of surplus extraction they more than made up for with increasing 'economic' powers.[26]

The important thing to be highlighted in this example is the ontological structure that constitutes its being. Some subjects understood the integration in the mercantilist form of life blocked by the elites, and that the consequent search for a new possibility will be aimed at maximizing individual profit rather than the profit of the monarch by means of actions such as working the land and performing manual labour. It should be remembered that, according to the dialectical process analyzed in the previous section, the negation of one form of life by another means the assimilation (or attempted assimilation) of the former by the principle of the latter. But assimilation occurs through the opposite features of the denied form of life. For in denying it, its opposite is affirmed. This is a key issue to bear in mind. Thus, the denial of the austere form of life affirmed its opposite, which was precisely the economic maximization. This is an important point because this could be a significant factor for such assimilation to be so successful. The potential of the peasants would be found in being negatively constituted by the form of life of economic maximization. The practices to which they were subjected unleashed this latent possibility with redoubled force. They are assimilated as subjects who maximize, *confusing* them with machines to increase productivity. Moreover, their values, habits and feelings, while remaining the same, are now reoriented by the principle of maximization.

In other words, the form of life of these peasants was the possibility from which capitalism was born as its negation: from living in balance between needs and demands to an exorbitant increase in demand above

26 Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 99.

needs following the imperatives of the markets, and from living in austerity to maximizing profits. The life of these peasants is the opposite of capitalism, without which the latter would not exist. With the denial of the peasant's form of life (in the form of imposed behaviour, exploitation and *subhuman* treatment) the class of the English great landowners is affirmed as the first capitalist elite: 'We can watch the development of a new mentality by observing the landlord's surveyor as he computes the rental value of land on the basis of some more or less abstract principle of market value, and measures it explicitly against the actual rents being paid by customary tenants.'[27] And by affirming themselves as such, the landlords exerted pressure over the tenants to improve productivity, integrating them as labourers on the farms:

> The effect of this system of property relations was that many agricultural producers (including prosperous 'yeomen') became market-dependent in their access to land itself, to the means of production. Increasingly, as more land came under this economic regime, advantage in access to the land itself would go to those who could produce competitively and pay good rents by increasing their own productivity. This meant that success would breed success, and competitive farmers would have increasing access to even more land, while others lost access altogether.[28]

That affirmation of the landowners posited also their own followers, a thriving social class that imitates them and wishes to replace them: the capitalist tenant or smallholders, who will implement a wage system to increase productivity and further on will also negate and assimilate the urban workers in factories to become the incipient middle class:

> The famous triad of landlord, capitalist tenant, and wage labourer was the result, and with the growth of wage labour the pressures to improve labour productivity also increased. The same process created a highly productive agriculture capable of sustaining a large population not engaged in agricultural production, but also an increasing propertyless mass that would constitute both a large wage-labour force and a domestic market for cheap consumer goods—a type of market with no historical precedent. This is the background to the formation of English industrial capitalism.[29]

27 *Ibid*., p. 101.
28 *Ibid*., p. 100.
29 *Ibid*., p. 103.

This budding middle class, in turn, was denied by those in public office and state institutions (which now was constituted by landowners and small nobility) in its efforts to incarnate the new capitalist form of life. In this moment of the development of capitalism, the incipient middle class (which is already shaped as social and economic power) denies now the aristocracy or nobility, and assimilates certain characteristics of them by incarnating the new stage of the capitalist form of life.

Continuing with this preview of our subsequent analysis, the elites who incarnated the capitalist form of life in the second half of the nineteenth century, were a middle class now politically empowered. This will be progressively converted into a social mass combining the characteristics of the nobility with its morbidity, its luxuries and pastimes (a form of alienation) along with the characteristics of the proletarian with its appreciation of family, religion, consumption and wage labour (now under the principle of maximization). These are the masses that will end negating the middle class as the incarnation of capitalism and will predominate by its expansion to the rest of the society. The new elite will give rise to a mass culture that will shape the twentieth century and reach even the twenty-first century. The affirmation of the capitalist form of life would thus have achieved a global universalization. In this dialectical process, the necessity of affirming one's own principle is realized as a negation of any community that does not participate in it. These communities are originally external, but they are assimilated in the process of integration and universalization. Necessity and contingency are in this process inseparable. This dialectic thus rejects both the possibility of a necessary process regardless of the facticity, as well as the Marxist description of groups or classes clashing outside of a necessary totality.

What is important to remark is that the opposite from which the capitalist form is born persists as negativity throughout the process of integration as its original possibility and negative constitution. And that the affirmation of capitalism as a negation of its opposite meant the assimilation of characteristics of that opposite form of life such as family, religion and work, characteristics that will remain as connotations of the capitalist form of life under its principle. In this sense, the economic maximization is greater if we compare the first moments with the last ones, because the mass is more profitable in its

labour activity, of leisure and of consumerism than the workers in the field or in the factories. The mass is one more step in the foundation of the need to maximize. Let us see this dialectical process in more detail throughout its stages.

3.1. The Negation of the Agricultural Life or the Austere Form of Life

The life of austerity is the one that was mostly led by the peasants (but not exclusively). It was not a question of maximizing; quite the contrary, it was about satisfying present needs without accumulating or trying to get rich. Therefore, as summarized above, if they were running away from maximization and accumulation, they were also running away from work that would bring profits beyond their own consumption and from the tenure due to the landlord. I will call this austere form of life agricultural life interchangeably.[30] When I use expressions like 'end of agricultural life', I will also be referring to the end of the austere form of life, even if the change of life still takes place in the countryside, subjected to the oppression of the landlords and industrial mills. I would like to insist once again that it is not historical accuracy that moves me but rather exclusively the illustration and clarification of a philosophical intuition such as that of a form of life, its subjectivity and its structure of dialectical integration.

The first thing that needs to be remarked is that the passage from agricultural life to a maximizing life was experienced as a great break-off by those men and women of the eighteenth century, when its effect began to be more noticeable (Matthew Arnold saw it as a conflict between civilization and feudalism).[31] A new identity began to be forged at those moments when, for the first time, the practice of enclosure removed the common lands from the peasants along with their independent work, to throw them into mass work in farms and some time later in industrial mills for the remuneration of a skimpy salary (this system

30 Let us say for the purposes of this chapter that the agricultural life is the version of the austere form of life that interests us, for each form of life has various concrete realizations, in which, however, the principle and its derived meanings do not change.

31 According to Walter Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830–1870* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 2.

grew constantly stronger, especially from the mid-eighteenth century).[32] In fact, it had happened before, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as Wood and Élie Halévy remind us,[33] but at that time the small farmers were not forced to perform wage labour after the dispossession of their lands. In addition, although the nobles used to seize common lands, in the eighteenth century, this system of enclosure and the 'expropriation of peasant proprietor' were fundamentally caused by successful business families or 'nouveaux riches' through the acquisition of lands, as William Cobbet then remarked.[34] This is how Reverend David Davis, a witness of this fundamental change in labour relations and daily behaviour, recorded his experience:

> The practice of enlarging [...] farms, and especially that of depriving the peasantry of all landed property, has contributed greatly to increase the number of dependent poor [...] The land-owner, to render his income adequate to the increased expense of living, unites several small farms into one, raises the rent to the utmost, and avoids the expense of repairs. The rich farmer also [encloses] as many farms as he is able to stock—lives in more credit and comfort than he could otherwise do—and out of the profits of the *several farms,* makes an ample provision for. Thus thousands of families, which formerly gained an independent livelihood on those separate farms, have been gradually reduced to the class of day-labourers.[35]

In this historical moment, the life of the English peasants posited as a life of a balanced austerity,[36] based on the satisfaction of present needs by means of the direct result of their work, is denied by the great landowners, who will be granted the extension of their land and farms by fencing and subsuming common lands ('the commons') for

32 See Élie Halévy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century: England in 1815* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1961), pp. 219–20.

33 Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism*, p. 101; Halévy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 218.

34 Halévy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 222. This serves to underline the fact that it was a form of life and not a particular social class or group that initiated the process. This, however, does not deny that there was some social homogeneity among the members of the community that shared such a form of life.

35 Quoted in Frader, *The Industrial Revolution*, p. 35.

36 The agricultural life was immortalized not without some propagandistic idealization in paintings and other artistic creations by painters such as Jean-François Millet. See Hamish Graham, 'Rural Society and Agricultural Revolution', in *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Europe, 1789–1914*, ed. by Stefan Berger (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 31–43 (p. 32).

greater exploitation and increase in profit. In E. P. Thompson's words, 'in agriculture, the years between 1760 and 1820 are the years of wholesale enclosure'.[37] This moment is crucial because the peasants no longer have the freedom to self-organize and they lose the possibility of sustaining themselves with the collected products of their work (since they were entitled to a proportion of the cultivated and collected products for their own subsistence). It is then that a new relationship between peasants and owners is established, a relationship based on the exploitation of the labour force in order to increase profit.[38] The result of the work is no longer the subsistence but the dependence of a salary with which to acquire the products that previously were obtained directly from their work.[39] Thus, the owner earned twice. This new relationship initiates the totalization of capitalism, corresponding to the maximizing form of life. For as Wood remarks, 'only in capitalism is the dominant mode of appropriation based on the complete dispossession of direct producers, who (unlike chattel slaves) are legally free and whose surplus labour is appropriated by purely "economic" means'.[40]

The capitalist form of life, as anthropical image, is present as an ontological totalizing principle in all the actions corresponding to its series, all its possible actions and habits. But, in a paradigmatic way, it is manifested in that interpersonal relationship by which the owner will seek to maximize the profits through 'egotistical calculation' and 'brutal exploitation'.[41] For the relationship between both, the producer and the owner, is intrinsically mediated by the market. A market that is qualitatively different in the capitalist system according to the principle that governs it: 'This unique system of market dependence has specific systemic requirements and compulsions shared by no other mode of production: the imperatives of competition, accumulation, and

37 E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), p. 198.

38 *Ibid*., p. 192.

39 See Engels' description of the peasant's life, in Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, in Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, *Collected Works*, Vol. IV: *Marx and Engels, 1844–1845* (New York: International Publishers, 1975 [1845]), pp. 308–09.

40 Wood, *The Origins of Capitalism*, p. 96.

41 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Pluto Press, 2008 [1848]), p. 37.

profit-maximization, and hence a constant systemic need to develop the productive forces.'[42]

Thus the capitalist form of life will be the totalization of all possible actions galvanized by that principle of maximization, not only of the material but of any aspect that can be perceived as an individual profit. That is the kind of new human being born from that first denial of agricultural life, in terms of austere form of life, where actions were not guided by maximization but by the satisfaction of the present needs (which implies not to work beyond the satisfaction of those needs). The capitalist form of life emerges then by means of the negation of the agricultural life, which in turn entails the affirmation of the industrial life, in terms of economic maximization (and secondarily in terms of urban industrialization); a life to which the essential naturalness of the denied agricultural life is now transferred. The capitalist form of life will go on to totalize the lives of men and women, making it feel like the only possible life, the only natural way of living, so that by the end of the nineteenth century the totalization has practically been completed in its first stages and only 20 per cent of the population is considered to be rural, for according to Sally Mitchell, 'by 1901, 80 per cent of England's people lived in urban areas'.[43]

Totalization began in the manner described above. As of that moment, not only the owners but also the peasants turned into workers of farms, industrial mills and factories (where the machinery made possible by the steam engine reigned) and began to be integrated into this totalization; and as put by Laura Frader, 'the interests of masters and servants are bound together'.[44] The owner pursues the best performance of his workers in order to obtain the highest possible profit, and the worker, already complicit by his own behaviour (forced by the existential situation of the enclosure), also pursues his highest performance except that his profit not only does not increase, but sometimes it could even be reduced, for instance, when the worker becomes older or acquires any illness or disability related to the work performed, or as Thompson put it: 'managerial or supervisory functions demand the repression of all

42 Wood, *The Origins of Capitalism*, p. 97.
43 Sally Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2009), p. 13.
44 Frader, *The Industrial Revolution*, p. 47.

attributes except those which further the expropriation of the maximum surplus value from labour'.[45] This will be precisely the logic that makes workers rebel against employers. It is the very logic of the capitalist form of life that leads workers to rebel against working conditions in the last decade of the eighteenth century: they were aware that they were losing (in favour of the owners) the maximization of the profits of their work (for they were already assimilated to the new way of being and acting). The tendency in which the totalization of this form of life has put them is to work not to subsist in an austere form of life but to maximize; although this process will require decades to become more perceptible, the seed was planted. This explains why in the previous era, in that of agricultural life, before they have become integrated into the capitalist form, no uprisings and recriminations of the peasants could be found against the owners (or that these were insignificant). Some authors, however, such as Thompson, have justified this precisely with the fact that it is in the industrial age that workers are employed en masse, so communication channels are established between them and they begin to become class conscious.[46] But this argument does not justify their revolt; all that it does is to explain that class consciousness started to emerge, which does not necessarily lead to the uprising. For workers to rise up against their employers, they had to conceive of their work as an injustice, that is, they had to consider precisely that in such a production system the possibility of increasing their profits (their wages) was being taken away from them although the intensity of their work increased, which incidentally, did not happen in the agricultural era, even though some or even much of their work was also for the profit of the owner and not theirs. My point is that a change in the conception of what is human was made at that time, and this was precisely what entailed a new consciousness of the way in which human beings have to behave: the maximization principle adopted made the industrial form of life possible, and in turn the latter expanded and actualized its totalization. And that is what Robert Owen probably meant in 1815, when he wrote that 'the general diffusion of manufactures throughout a country generates a new character in its inhabitants... an essential change in the

45 Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 203.
46 *Ibid*., p. 198.

general character of the mass of the people'.[47] This leads us to conclude that while change began slowly in the sixteenth century through the market relationship between owner and tenant, the progressive method of *enclosure* in the eighteenth century is when the capitalist form of life expands in England and from the countryside goes to the city. It is then that this new way of being and acting becomes more tangible.

3.2. The Negation of the Workers: The Rule of the Owners

During the time of the wars with France, workers outraged by the working conditions and the exploitation of their work for the enrichment of the owner begin to organize (one of the first of these organizations being the London Corresponding Society)[48] in what can only be interpreted as an uprising against the owners of factories and industrial mills, a situation exacerbated by the subsequent enactments of Corn Laws and the corresponding approval of small owners.

Workers in this semi-associated state become an uncomfortable human mass that is difficult to control by those who have an interest in maximizing their performance. The rules in the factories harden and, faced with the fear of the revolution in imitation of the one that occurred in France a few years earlier, with the approval of the owners of factories and industrial mills, the government established the Combination Acts of 1799–1800, by which the meeting and association of workers was prohibited.[49] This is one of the most perceptible events by which we can judge the denial of workers by social elites. This denial is based on the possibility that the workers could stop the process of profit maximization in one of the key moments of industrialization, when the owners came to amass a large amount of capital that would serve in many cases to pass from farms and mills to urban factories or from national to international enterprises. Not only did owners view the Combination Acts favourably because they made workers more submissive, but also because it robbed them of the possibility of associating to request increases in salaries.[50] A few years later, in the first decade of the nineteenth century, as new

47 Quoted in *ibid*., p. 190.
48 *Ibid*., pp. 17–18.
49 *Ibid*., p. 503.
50 *Ibid*., p. 198.

technologies become available, many workers will be denied in their very condition of workers in which they were incorporated at the beginning of the totalization of the capitalist form of life. The replacement in factories and textile mills of workers by machines gave rise to the social crisis that is known as that of the Luddites (1811–13). In these first years of the century of industrialization, the owners' sector, not yet considered part of a social and political class different from the rest of the non-aristocratic population, will impose its criteria, thanks to the economic influence they will come to exercise on society. And in most cases, it will be more receptive to the demands of the aristocracy than to those of the people, especially after 1815, in the aftermath of the war against France, in which they begin to assert themselves as economic and social elites, denying any assimilation with the workers. At this time, the owners who have had a certain (or more than certain) success in the first decades of industrialization, seek to maximize their revenues and turn to political power.

The denial of the workers has affirmed the owners as a budding class; it has made them stand out from the other necessary part in the industrial labour relationship, the counterpart embodied by the workers. The principle of profit maximization has put the owner in the position of denying the workers to obtain greater profits, through the freezing of wages, the scrupulosity (even cruelty) with which the rules are observed in the workplace or the dismissals due to lack of performance, and finally, mass dismissals caused by the mechanization of the means of production through new technology acquisition. The situation is summarized by Hause and Maltby in the following lines:

> Most workers came from the countryside, where they were accustomed to agricultural work defined by the rhythms of nature—the seasons, daylight, weather—or to such self-disciplined labor as spinning or weaving at home. Factory work was a regime of rules enforced by an overseer, regimentation by the clock or the pace of a machine. Typical industrial work rules forbade talking or singing. Fines for misbehavior were deducted from wages. The first large spinning factory in England fired an average of twenty workers per week and averaged a 100-percent turnover within one year.[51]

51 Steven Hause and William Maltby, *Western Civilization: A History of European Society* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 2004), p. 429.

The capitalist form of life integrates more and more the lives of the English population in this totalization by which, the actions and habits to which the population is exposed (both owners and workers) constantly invite them to integrate more and more into this current of maximization in all aspects of life, including hygiene and morality. The negation of the workers can be seen within the dialectical process as a progressive assimilation of the workers, while in large part they continue to come from rural areas and are therefore subjects of the austere form of life. This assimilation consists of the affirmation of their maximizing capacity. The latter means the denial of their form of life and their transformation into different subjects, now motivated by maximization and inserted within capitalist totalization. After this denial and assimilation, the workers will be the followers of the middle class (they will start to imitate them as models of behaviour and respectability) which begins to emerge as a natural elite and incarnation of the capitalist form of life. They, thus, reached social and economic power.

And yet owners, in the 1820s and 30s, are denied by the political elite in their particular movement in search of political rights with which to increase their possibility of influence and growth of profit and welfare. But with the Reform Act of 1832, this impediment of the aristocrats or small nobility will begin to be eliminated by the maximizing totalization through a new negation of the non-capitalist form of life. Just as in the first negation, the capitalist form of life gained the essential trait of agricultural life, namely, the characteristic of being the natural form of life, which reinforced its justification of being; likewise, in this denial, capitalism, which is gradually encompassing the whole of English society and being exported to the rest of Europe, appropriates one of the characteristics that until now was typical of workers (who, as peasants, used to do family work even in industrial mills, especially before the 1819 Factory Act), that is, the pattern of family life, care and union between the family members. This attitude gives them respectability in the eyes of society, and is among the features identified by Mitchell, Frader, Walter Houghton and others as proper to Victorian morality.[52] Respectability concerning the profit stands for the maximization of the social status of the owners. Thus, if the landowners deny the farmers, the middle class

52 See Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England*, pp. 264–65; Frader, *The Industrial Revolution*, pp. 275–76; Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, pp. 184–88; 341–47.

will deny the workers; with both negations, the form of life of economic maximization expands geographically and socially, while being successively incarnated by a different elite. With its universalization, it assimilates the forms of life of the various communities with which it comes into contact: the next to be assimilated will be the intellectual form of life of the aristocracy or small nobility.

A review of home-based work carried out by Peter Gaskell in 1836 shows us the characteristics which the capitalist form of life appropriated as its own determinations in the act of denying the austerity of workers and peasants, whose forms of life still showed the traits of its roots in agricultural life. Before the emergence of the capitalist life, it was considered that, as well as peasants, domestic manufacturers and craftsmen possessed some land and certain well-being, essential elements respectively of the aristocracy and the rising middle class:

> Before the year 1760 [...] the majority of artisans had laboured in their own houses, and in the bosoms of their families. It may be termed the period of Domestic Manufacture [...] These were, undoubtedly, the golden times of manufactures, considered in reference to the character of the labourers. By all the processes being carried on under a man's own roof, he retained his individual respectability, he was kept apart from associations that might injure his moral worth, and he generally earned wages which were not only sufficient to live comfortably upon, but which enabled him to rent a few acres of land thus joining in his own person two classes which are now daily becoming more and more distinct.[53]

This text allows us to clarify the beginnings of the totalization that we are dealing with here. If it is true that the enclosure of the land, forcing the worker to work for a daily or weekly salary at the mill or the factory of the owner, is the milestone that marks the beginning of the capitalist form of life (probably expanding the practice that had existed from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries), it is no less true that next to that of the peasants was the employment situation of artisans. These, as the text explains, were integrated into capitalism by a different path. Before the massive integration into the capitalist form of life, and also, for a short time, during the great hatching of industrial mills, although this sector of artisans worked for merchants, they did not leave their home or receive a daily or weekly salary, but instead were paid per piece or finished

53 Quoted in Frader, *The Industrial Revolution*, p. 25.

work.[54] This mode of production had two important consequences for their form of life: on the one hand they preserved their labour and vital independence, being able to organize their own work and schedules; while on the other, it preserved their economic independence, because the money they earned, although scarce, served them to rent a land from which they fed. In general, the artisanal sector will be integrated into capitalism when the monopoly of the textile mills and the first urban manufactories makes it expendable, and when artisans therefore become subject to exploitation under the supervision of the owner, receiving a salary for their workforce, with the incipient denial of the posited austere form of life: the artisans thus stop selling their products and start selling themselves.[55] At this point, the principle of their austere life is denied and their habits are assimilated and directed towards maximization within the market.

3.3. The Negation of the Aristocrats and the Consolidation of the Middle Class

The attempts and pretensions of the owners (already named middle class with some consistency by part of society from 1820 onwards, especially after the massacre of Peterloo which reinforced their separation from low ranks, according to Dror Wahrman)[56] to become holders of political power by means of parliamentary reform, is opposed time and again by the aristocrats in the House of Lords.[57] Wahrman provides many instances of this opposition to reform mostly from the upper class or conservatives, who are clearly the antagonists of the middle class at this particular period.[58] Asa Briggs, meanwhile, shows how some aristocrats favoured the reform only as a strategy to lessen the danger of driving 'them to a union, founded on dissatisfaction, with the lower orders'.[59]

54 Hause and Maltby, *Western Civilization: A History of European Society*, p. 420; and, in the same sense, Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, p. 308.

55 For this attribution, see Noam Chomsky, *Chomsky on Anarchism* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2005), p. 203.

56 Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c.1780–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 201.

57 See Angus Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture: 'Habits of Heart and Mind'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 66–67; Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class*, p. 305.

58 Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class*, pp. 323–27.

59 Asa Briggs, 'Middle-Class Consciousness in English Politics, 1780–1846', *Past & Present*, 9:1 (1956), 65–74 (p. 70).

This contempt for the group of owners, who had fundamentally driven the historical change from agricultural to industrial life (or from the austere form of life to the life of economic maximization), maximizing their profits in increasingly international business transactions, can be considered dialectically as the opposition presented to the owners by the aristocracy. This attitude of the aristocracy will nevertheless be denied in turn by the historical results of the 1832 Reform Act, when the class of the owners is officially constituted in the middle class, which now partly gets parliamentary representation. This denial, now with respect to the aristocracy as a group of power, will make the middle class the class that progressively takes the reins of national affairs, consolidating the industrial life made possible by economic maximization and its capitalist anthropical image, which, starting from these years, already in the Victorian era, the middle class will come to incarnate (while the rest of society tries to follow its rhythm, integrating equally in its totalization). This is made clear in another event of notable importance, namely, the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, which incidentally was also a strategic action to favour the maximization of the profit of the middle class, especially those involved in trade and the importation of goods (since then the ban on the importation of foreign corn was lifted), while denying the aristocracy as a superior rank, which was based on the inherited lands. Thus, more than a particular moment, in fact, from 1832 it opens a progressive period of negation of the aristocracy and appropriation of its essential features by the class that will dominate the Victorian scene. It will require the Reform Act of 1867 for its political representation to reach practically all its male members. But in these years, the process of appropriation of the negated upper rank will lead to a relaxation of morals and a certain social freedom. If the aristocracy or small nobility generally incarnated an intellectual form of life of knowledge and culture (for they were those who held positions in state offices, judges, lawyers, artists, writers and teachers), this social freedom and relaxation of the morality of the middle class is, in fact, part of their form of life in these years after the negation and assimilation of the aristocracy in its opposite principle (affirmation of its opposite), namely, that of alienation and ignorance (who in turn got integrated in the totalization of the capitalist form of life by favouring useful and

profitable activities, for many of them started to invest in business).[60] The official discourse,[61] however, will maintain the rigidity of the moral codes associated with respectability (no card games, adultery, alcohol abuse or violent behaviour; decent and prudent marriage, and so on).[62] Stephan Zweig, in his memoirs, relates how in terms of sexual behaviour, for example, prostitution was part of middle-class life: 'generally speaking, prostitution was still the foundation of the erotic life outside of marriage; in a certain sense it constituted a dark underground vault over which rose the gorgeous structure of middle-class society with its faultless, radiant façade'.[63] And this trait of behaviour, in fact, remained underneath the discourse of family values that concealed it, a discourse that, as commented above, was associated with the characteristics of the form of life that emerged after the denial of workers by the capitalist form of life through the landowners. The discourse that previously had justified the behaviour of a loving family union, while moving forward in the process of integration in the totalization, became a discourse that concealed the new characteristic acquired (of individualistic and amoral behaviour), as ashamed of it and as fearing that it would slow down the process of maximization.[64] During the second half of the nineteenth century, the middle class will be totally integrated into the capitalist form of life, making clear, in addition to the already mentioned moral relaxation, the characteristic of those who have reached by their own effort the peak of social and economic success: the self-help predicated by Samuel Smiles in 1859, associated with hard work and thrift.[65]

60 See Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England*, p. 21.

61 I claim that linguistic discourses are designed to justify or, on the contrary, to conceal a form of life (actions principled by an anthropical image) in which the ideology of the group really resides.

62 Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England*, p. 21.

63 Quoted in J. McKay, B. Hill, J. Buckler, C. H. Crowston and M. E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Western Society: A Brief History* (Boston and London: Bedford/St. Martins, 2010), p. 643.

64 Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, studies this strategy as hypocrisy, a trait of the Victorian mind (pp. 394–430); this gap between discourse and praxis could produce anxiety, as has been studied by Kristen Guest in 'The Right Stuff: Class Identity, Material Culture and the Victorian Police Detective', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 24:1 (2019), 53–71.

65 Frader, *The Industrial Revolution*, pp. 44–46; Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, p. 117.

In the moment of the denial that I have just described briefly, the capitalist form of life has become incarnated by the middle class and a stage of the totalization is about to be closed. But this stage of capitalism, in which the middle class emerges as its incarnation, only comes to an end with the denial of the middle class as class by the same totalization incarnated now in the masses of followers (internal necessity of the dialectical process for integration), those that had been previously denied as non-subjects of the capitalist form of life and assimilated by it (external contingency in the dialectical process of universalization, as shown in Chapter 5). Let us examine this in more detail.

Since the 1832 Reform Act, the expansion of the middle class progressed unstoppably, according to the standard account of this historical period. With it the capitalist form of life advances, denying all forms of life of different communities while assimilating them to the principle of economic maximization. Among these communities are, for example, those leading an artistic, religious or scientific life, a life of survival or austerity, etc.[66] The latter will begin their assimilation in England with the so-called New Poor Law (1834). With this law a distinction is made between the pauper and the labouring poor. Thus, the social benefits previously destined for the poor in general are restricted to the pauper, while the rest begin to be forced to work, sometimes privately, sometimes in workhouses.[67] The poor, as subjects of an austere or even a survival form of life, are now forced to lead a life destined to maximization, if not their own, then that of the owner and of society, in a word, rendering them useful and productive even at the cost of themselves. A number of individuals from different parties and workers' advocates took a stand against this law, expressing a rejection of the principle of calculation that inspired it, as Gertrude Himmelfarb rightly points out. These individuals could well be the subjects of non-capitalist forms of life, such as philosophers, artists and scientists, for example, the case of Thomas Malthus (who opposed it); all those were individuals who had not yet been assimilated and who defended the interests of the workers against the already advanced assimilation of the

66 I always refer to them as subjects sharing a form of life, not in terms of social and economical status.

67 Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age* (New York: Vintage Books, 1885), pp. 160–61.

latter. That assimilation condemned them to maximize or otherwise fall into the abysses of ineptitude, undesirability and dependence on others:

> The New Poor Law, which seemed the very epitome of the 'spirit of the age', the application to social problems of the laws of nature and political economy, of reason and utility, triggered a powerful movement of resistance, a movement which cannot be measured by the number of local authorities who covertly or openly sabotaged the law or by the number of laborers who rioted against it. Behind all the opposition was the assertion of something like a counter-spirit, a protest against the principles embodied in the law, and, more important, against the very idea of applying such rational, uniform, doctrinaire principles to social affairs.[68]

At that time, after an increasing number of forms of life have been assimilated in this expansive totalization, the middle class as its most pure incarnation is also denied for having reached a moment of self-absorption with the well-being achieved and fortune made, dispersed by the growing consumerism,[69] so that many of its members even rise up against the dictatorship of progress and the competitiveness of the capitalist system, positioning themselves against the advance of industry.[70] The capitalist form of life as a whole, which tends to universalization, ends up denying the middle class as a class, which now resists the indiscriminate principle of profit maximization. Its denial by the followers (those who throughout the last decades had been assimilated and now imitate the middle-class lifestyle and incarnate the capitalist totalization) will affirm a new social order that will lead to the so-called society of the masses, in which the strict limits of classes are blurred in terms of form of life. That is to say, now each class is already integrated within capitalism, which can respond to the evidence of the huge increase in white- and blue-collar jobs with respect to jobs in agriculture or factories.[71] However, some testimonies tell us how difficult it was for some people to integrate or to lead the life that was socially demanded of them, which required them to abandon their habits of the

68 *Ibid*., p. 176.
69 Jackson J. Spielvogel, *Western Civilization: A Brief History* (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 2011), p. 485; Phyllis Deane, *The First Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000 [1979]), p. 272.
70 Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 47.
71 Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England*, p. 20.

austere or survival form of life, typical of rural areas. This is the case with Joseph Livesey, a labouring poor who although he managed to open a small business and tried to lead a life in accordance with his new status, never ceased to identify himself with his previous form of life and with his co-subjects. This shows us that the process of acculturation or assimilation of one form of life by another was not always successful and found some resistance:

> Often have I caused a little unpleasantness at home by introducing persons—strangers, who were in distress … I have still all the feelings of a poor man; I prefer the company of poor people; and if misfortune should render it necessary, I think I could fall back into that humble sphere of living with which I commenced without feeling the shock as most people would do. I have tried two or three times to be a gentleman; that is, to leave off work and to enjoy myself, but it never answered.[72]

This testimony shows us that for the one who has not consummated the conversion, the form of life imposed as hegemonic, leaves him unsatisfied. Moreover, while the subjects of the hegemonic form of life reject the subjects of the form of life with which he seems to identify, he feels good about being among the latter. He feels he is one of them. He seems to want to continue being what he is, the poor man he feels he is, and which is evidenced in a humble and austere form of life. In this sense, Livesey constitutes a certain resistance to the capitalist form of life through his habits (getting together with the poor and bringing them home), feelings and identity. This speaks of a clear lack of assimilation.

The middle class now gives way to a progressively homogenized society in which most of its members (except a plutocratic elite that accounts for 5 per cent of the population)[73] work for a salary and consume in leisure time. In this way, this social reconfiguration synthesizes respectively characteristics of the working class and the upper class, for, in spite of the economic income, which is now the only criteria of social distinction, most of the people, at the beginning of twentieth century, have been homogenized in their form of life, reinforced by the increasing number of laws, moral regulations and codes of social

72 Joseph Livesey, *Autobiography* (1881), quoted in M. J. D. Roberts, *Making English Morals: Voluntary Association and Moral Reform in England, 1787–1886* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 174.

73 See Spielvogel, *Western Civilization*, p. 494.

standard behaviour.[74] This mass society is governed by a bureaucratic centralizing democracy (informed in part by the Reform Act of 1884 that granted the vote for most of the male population, and finally the universal suffrage at the beginning of the twentieth century) and the sort of mass consumerism and culture industry that Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) would refer to years later. This was a society oriented by the power of public opinion, as claimed earlier by John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty*: 'At present individuals are lost in the crowd. In politics, it is almost a triviality to say that public opinion now rules the world. The only power deserving the name is that of the masses';[75] a public opinion whose control, in Europe, will accompany the arrival of fascism and other authoritarian regimes in the next century. But this is a further integration into the same totalization.

3.4. The Mass Society and the Intellectuals

The mass society will thus be more productive and more maximizing than previous incarnations of the capitalist form of life. The most significant example of this is in the United States with the labour policies introduced by Henry Ford in his factories. Leisure is then institutionalized as part of the workers' lives, so that they not only work better hours but also have time to consume or acquire the same products they produce. In doing so, Ford was further integrating the lives of workers, and indeed, American society, into capitalist totalization. This mass society and culture industry will affirm capitalism with each of its habits and become hegemonic in England, the United States and Europe. It is the society that José Ortega y Gasset wrote about in the 1930s. He recognized this society as being ontologically constituted by a principle that makes them masses without respecting material conditions, noble titles or social status. This philosopher grasped a quality in his society that amounts to a particular human type, an ontological quality that he calls that of the 'mass-man', and contrasts with that of the 'minority', the latter also in onto-phenomenological terms. The first of these is, according to Ortega y Gasset, the type of individual who

74 See Pamela Gilbert, *Mapping the Victorian Social Body* (New York: SUNY Press, 2004); Roberts, *Making English Morals*.

75 John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader & Dyer, 1880 [1859]), p. 38.

> finds himself already with a stock of ideas. He decides to content himself with them and to consider himself intellectually complete. As he feels the lack of nothing outside himself, he settles down definitely amid his mental furniture. Such is the mechanism of self-obliteration.[76]

It should be noted that the obliteration referred to by the Spanish philosopher and this denial of everything that is not himself (this being content with himself), is precisely what I have been analyzing as part of the dialectical process of integration into one's own form of life. The masses, according to this, would be the evolution of capitalist subjectivity in this disinterest in everything that is not his own constitutive principle, that of maximizing his economic value, for 'he feels the lack of nothing outside himself'. This obliteration, therefore, refers to a state of greater reification, by which the subjects of the capitalist form of life progressively understand themselves as objects in the market of social life. What counts is the exchange value. Their intrinsic value is not given by their intellectual formation or cultivation of character but by the external law of the market, supply and demand. They become obliterated because they are reifying themselves; that is, they make themselves opaque, and only recognize themselves for the value that comes from outside, from the market, where they posit themselves as objects in order to maximize (in the following section I take up the theme of reification, as it is important to understand the dialectic of forms of life). Besides this, Ortega y Gasset characterizes the mass-man in phenomenological terms as the one who is satisfied in his own mediocrity and lack of goals. In short, the one who has been homogenized in his vital motivation and feels proud of being like the others:

> The mass is all that which *sets no value on itself*—good or ill—based on specific grounds, but which feels itself *'just like everybody'*, and nevertheless is not concerned about it; is, in fact, quite happy to feel itself as one with everybody else.[77]

76 José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1957 [1930]), p. 69. The original in Spanish reads: 'se encuentra con un repertorio de ideas dentro de sí. Decide contentarse con ellas y considerarse intelectualmente completa (la persona). Al no echar de menos nada fuera de sí, se instala definitivamente en aquel repertorio. He ahí el mecanismo de la obliteración' (*La rebelión de las masas* [Ciudad de México: La Guillotina, 2010], p. 95).

77 Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, pp. 14–15. The italics are mine.

As I mentioned above in relation to the mass-man, the lack of value in itself to which Ortega y Gasset refers should be put in relation to capitalist totalization and its reification: value comes to him from outside, as it does to objects. This remark is nowhere in Ortega y Gasset's analysis, but it is latent and can be revealed through the perspective given by the dialectics of forms of life. On the contrary, the *man* (or human being) who qualitatively can be said to constitute the minorities is the one who has his own goal and motivation, makes demands on himself with regard to them and thus separates himself from the mass. He shares with other members of his group an ideal, desire or idea, but this sharing is secondary, since it has its source in the very subjectivity of the one who identifies with a different way of being and acting:

> In those groups which are characterized by not multitude and mass, the effective coincidence of its members is based on some desire, idea, or ideal, which of itself excludes the great number. To form a minority, of whatever kind, it is necessary beforehand that each member separate himself from the multitude for special, relatively personal, reasons.[78]

In Ortega y Gasset, this self-demand and discipline is fundamentally related to knowledge and the intellectual effort to become what one is in an ontological and moral sense, because 'all life is the struggle, the effort to be itself':[79]

> The select man is not the petulant person who thinks himself superior to the rest, but the man who demands more of himself than the rest, even though he might not fulfil in his person those higher exigencies [...] those who make great demands on themselves; piling up difficulties and duties.[80]

That differentiation of Ortega y Gasset is what can also be discovered in the conceptualization that I have been defending so far. The mass-man

78 *Ibid*., p. 14. The original in Spanish reads: 'En los grupos que se caracterizan por no ser muchedumbre y masa, la coincidencia efectiva de sus miembros consiste en algún deseo, idea o ideal, que por sí solo excluye el gran número. Para formar una minoría, sea la que fuere, es preciso que antes cada cual se separe de la muchedumbre por razones especiales, relativamente individuales' (Ortega y Gasset, *La rebelión de las masas*, p. 15).

79 Quoted in Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, p. 99.

80 *Ibid*., p. 15. The original in Spanish reads: 'El hombre selecto no es el petulante que se cree superior a los demás, sino el que se exige más que los demás, aunque no logre cumplir en su persona esas exigencias superiores' (Ortega y Gasset, *La rebelión de las masas*, p. 17).

is the epitome of the capitalist form of life in the advanced state of its social expansion; that is, in the second half of nineteenth century and onwards. He is opposed to any form of life other than his own and thus denies them and assimilates them. 'Minorities', on the other hand, are all forms of life that resist the expansion of a hegemonic form. However, from the intellectual point of view, which is from where Ortega y Gasset judges, the masses as a stage in the capitalist form of life can well be opposed to the 'minority' that I have called intellectual form of life. That is to say, that community of subjects which share a way of being and acting in terms of devoting themselves to self-knowledge and the revelation of being through science (reasoning and experimentation) or philosophy (intuition and reflection). For in any case, in the terms indicated by Ortega y Gasset, the fundamental opposition between the two would be one of intellectual attitude, that of knowing oneself or alienating oneself in the crowd. Other equally minority forms of life are also opposed, insofar as they resist assimilation. However, as has been shown, only the austere form of life is contradictory to the capitalist form, for they are negatively constituted in a reciprocal way.

Neither capitalist form of life nor the intellectual form of life are strictly speaking a social class, for the same reason provided by Ortega y Gasset concerning the two human types described: 'The division of society into masses and select minorities is, then, not a division into social classes, but into classes of men, and cannot coincide with the hierarchic separation of "upper" and "lower" classes.'[81] I maintain that, as in Ortega y Gasset, there is not a social group directly identifiable with the intellectual form of life. For social groups or classes are not the same as forms of life, which imply an onto-phenomenological quality. And yet, through the social conditioning that I have analyzed in previous chapters, the majority of the members of a class or group identify themselves with a particular form of life, from which they receive their identity. In this case, we can see that the intellectual form of life was led by the aristocrats in office and professions (or small nobility), which having been largely denied by the capitalist form of life, the latter has affirmed and assimilated the opposite features of the intellectual form of life, mainly incarnated by those aristocrats, namely *ignorance and alienation* under the principle of maximization. The latter could explain

81 Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, p. 15.

other features of the masses described by Ortega y Gasset as not being aware of their own ignorance and the commonplace established by right.[82] Both are features opposed to the intellectual form of life, that of knowledge and the formation of both talent and character.

In some cases, the activities of the aristocrats assimilated by the capitalist totalization did not change, but the principle that governed them did. So those habits were left in empty formalities without the prior motivation and *raison d'être*; only as ways to continue to maximize their social status. They were still interested in art, for instance, but, like the bourgeoisie and other subjects of the expansive capitalist form of life in which they gradually incorporated themselves, art was looked at from the distance of ignorance with which to maximize their status under the auspices of acquisition and consumerist power. They were far from the artistic appreciation proper to an aristocracy prior to the beginning of capitalist totalization and which survived in those intellectual aristocrats who resisted in their form of life. Consequently, not all the aristocrats retained their wealth, only those who were integrated into the capitalist form of life. This could also explain both the fact that the aristocracy was not simply replaced by the bourgeoisie, but rather homogenized with it through wealth (economic maximization),[83] and that those aristocrats devoted to intellectual activities led a very modest, in some cases almost poor, lifestyle, as they kept outside the margins of the hegemonic form, while integrating themselves into its own form of life of knowledge and wisdom, engaged mainly in academia and scholarship:

> The distinction between the intellectuals and the plutocrats was made all the more powerful by the comparative poverty of the former. For

82 *Ibid*., pp. 18, 112.

83 See Dominic Lieven, *Aristocracy in Europe, 1815–1914* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), where he attempts to establish precisely that it was through industrial transformation of their agrarian states and capitalist enterprises that the aristocracy was not replaced by the bourgeoisie as Marx thought. For the nineteenth-century aristocrats, 'in economic terms assimilating the values of the capitalist era meant having an entrepreneurial attitude to one's estates and maybe even taking a hard-headed approach to the relative advantages of land as against stocks and bonds. Socially, modern attitudes might entail an overriding respect for money and a willingness to marry outside one's class when opportunity offered. Politically, accommodation meant allowing new elites a share in government and pursuing policies which reflected more than mere agrarian interests. As the socialist threat grew in the nineteenth century the attractions of an alliance of the propertied became ever greater' (p. 7).

> although, as observers indignantly noted, the intellectual aristocrats appeared to claim a monopoly over all aspects of thought, they were nonetheless relatively poorly paid.[84]

This form of life corresponds to what has come to be called the life of intellectuals, as I have already mentioned above. The plutocrats referred to in the quotation would be those elites within the form of life of economic maximization (certain families of the high bourgeoisie and landowning aristocrats). The debate on whether these were a social class, a separate group or belonged to different social classes continues today:

> 'The problem of the professionals and intellectuals is one of the most difficult of all those facing the analyst of class structure,' W. D. Rubinstein has noted. 'It is the gammy leg of class theory.' 'Intellectuals are not an independent "class"—they may be members of any other class; they may be spokesmen for any and every interest,' he helpfully continues.[85]

The conception of the forms of life that I have been upholding, in this case, would support the idea that intellectuals are not a social class but a form of life, that is to say a separate community, on the fringe of hegemonic totalization, even if it was identified with the aristocracy in moments prior to that. However, this would have to face up to what specialists in the field have claimed. For Noel Annan, these intellectuals came from famous aristocratic families that hybridized. In T. W. Heyck's case, he said that certainly these nineteenth-century intellectuals were a new social group, but so new that no one referred to them as 'intellectuals': '"The term 'the intellectuals' came back into use in the late-nineteenth century", writes Heyck, "and from its first continuous usage it had to do with the perceived formation of a separate and learned class".'[86] If these accounts support the perspective discussed above, they do so by showing that it is a different form of life. That it was a form of life that dates back to moments before capitalist totalization remains to be proven. However, it is equally true that Annan associated the appearance of the intellectuals with aristocratic families of long tradition: families like the Macaulays, the Trevelyans, the Arnolds or the

84 William Whyte, 'The Intellectual Aristocracy Revisited', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 10:1 (2005), 15–45 (p. 27).
85 *Ibid*., p. 16.
86 Quoted in *ibid*., p. 17.

Huxleys, that is, 'an aristocracy of both brains and blood'.[87] However, these data are not sufficient to show the intellectual form of life of these aristocrats. What does seem undeniable is that during the nineteenth century the references to a caste of intellectuals are persistent, a caste whose characteristics are cultural formation and disinterest. As William Whyte puts it:

> That there was a desire to create an intellectual elite in the nineteenth century is undeniable. From Coleridge's clerisy to Wells's Samurai, the ideal of a cultivated, disinterested and learned caste was celebrated again and again. Clergymen like Frederick Temple, scientists like John Tyndall, conservatives like W. G. Ward and radicals like Beatrice Webb, all agreed on the need for a 'voluntary nobility'; an 'aristocracy of talent'; a 'real aristocracy of character and intellect'.[88]

This 'real aristocracy of character and intellect' makes us think again of the 'minority' of Ortega y Gasset as opposed to his 'mass-man'. But, in this type of aristocrat, was it a mere desire—as the quotation seems to claim—or a real community whose form of life distinguished them from the rest, largely because of their knowledge, talent and disinterest (understood as disinterest regarding material success and economic maximization)? The fact is that it existed mainly after the reforms of the old English universities, namely Oxford and Cambridge, from the middle of the century onwards. This reform consisted of the abolition of celibacy, which meant that professors and fellows could marry and therefore complement intellectual and family life. This caused the children of the aristocratic families who populated these universities to marry into strong family networks and create the core of the intellectual elite. To this must be added the effort that these aristocrats made, not only in the universities but also in private colleges (such as Eton) to cultivate moral character and talent rather than practical skills (including business skills) in their students, seeking to form a true intelligentsia. The consequence of this was the creation of a group or community not only united through the old colleges and universities but in a different spirit, which implied a form of life that stood out from the rest:

> Family and friends, schools, colleges and clubs, together produced a new class. Or, to be more exact, produced a social fraction, with its own

87 *Ibid*., p. 16.
88 *Ibid*., p. 18.

> common culture and shared identity. This was well understood at the time. Works like P. G. Hamerton's *Intellectual Life* (1873) reflected the notion of a peculiarly cerebral lifestyle: characterized by plain-living and hard-thinking; public-spirited and politically engaged.[89]

This was certainly the role model for the kind of intellectual that is beginning to emerge across Europe, and the same is true of the process by which it is emerging. This indicates the incipient process of assimilation of other subjects into the intellectual form of life. Thus, educational institutions will be inspired with the mission of fostering this new group of honest, cultivated and disinterested intellectuals. In Spain, it will inspire the Institución Libre de Enseñanza, which will lead Spanish culture and education at least until the Civil War (1936–39), and in Belgium it will be reflected in the Université Libre de Bruxelles, and others.[90] It should be stressed that this intellectual aristocracy was initially aristocratic by blood. The aristocrats who send their children to those great English universities and colleges of the mid-nineteenth century still maintain a certain purchasing power (from their declining social status) which, however, they invest not in capitalist totalization but in the training and talent of their children. The latter puts them at odds with the commercialization of their class (even though among their relatives there are individuals devoted to business), as many had

89 *Ibid*., p. 26.

90 There is an extensive bibliography on the Institución Libre de Enseñanza and its relationship with intellectuals. The following are some of the works that the interested reader can use for further consultation: Vicente Cacho Viu, *La Institución Libre de Enseñanza* (Madrid: Fundación Albéniz, 2010); Antonio Jiménez García, *El krausismo y la Institución Libre de Enseñanza* (Madrid: Ediciones Pedagógicas, 2002); Inman Fox, *La crisis intelectual del 98* (Madrid: Edicusa, 1976); Yvan Lissorgues, 'Los intelectuales españoles influidos por el krausismo frente a la crisis de fin de siglo (1890–1910)', in *La actualidad del krausismo en su contexto europeo*, ed. by Pedro Álvarez Lázaro and Enrique Ureña (Madrid: Editorial Parteluz, Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 1999), pp. 313–52; Antonio Molero Pintado, *La Institución Libre de Enseñanza: Un proyecto de reforma pedagógica* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2000); *La Institución Libre de Enseñanza y Francisco Giner de los Ríos: Nuevas perspectivas*, II: *La Institución Libre de Enseñanza y la cultura española* (Madrid: Publicaciones de la Residencia de Estudiantes, 2014); Solomon Lipp, *Francisco Giner de los Ríos: A Spanish Socrates* (Waterloo, ONT: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1985); Daniel Rueda Garrido, 'Krause, Spanish Krausism, and Philosophy of Action', *Idealistic Studies*, 49:2 (2019), 167–88. About the intellectuals in Belgium, specifically the Krausist intellectuals, see Susana Monreal, 'Krausistas y masones: Un proyecto educativo común. El caso belga', *Historia de la educación: Revista interuniversitaria*, 9 (1990), 63–77.

been assimilated to the form of life of economic maximization together with the bourgeoisie:

> Many intellectuals were keen to distinguish themselves from the 'commercial classes'; from the 'bourgeois spirit' and its 'timid, negative, and shuffling substitutes for active and courageous well-doing' [...] They were appalled by the drawing together of the great landlords and millionaire [...] The plutocrats were seen to value money and show over the knowledge and discrimination of the educated elite.[91]

This aristocracy will become a distinctive group in contrast to their environment (which wants to assimilate them to the expansive capitalist form of life), but in a way, what they do is to continue the intellectual form of life of the aristocrats before the capitalist assimilation. The intellectual aristocrats at that time were, however, those who occupied cultural positions and professions such as teachers, magistrates, lawyers, politicians, or writers, hence the prestige of their social status. They should be distinguished from the landed aristocracy, to whom they were nevertheless related, but who were more concerned with economic profit and who would have been the initiators of capitalist totalization. In contrast, part of this intellectual aristocracy resists and opposes assimilation by defending its own form of life, as in this vivid vindication of it by P. G. Hamerton:

> We come to hate money-matters when we find that they exclude all thoughtful and disinterested conversation ... Our happiest hours have been spent with poor scholars, and artists, and men of science, whose words make us rich indeed. Then we dislike money because it rules and restrains us, and because it is unintelligent and seems horrible.[92]

These words illustrate this form of intellectual life of which I have given an account as part of a subjectivity different from the capitalist one and which comes to oppose it in an attempt at resistance.[93] However, following the advance of capitalist totalization after World War II, the denial and assimilation of other communities and their forms of life will be launched through what has been called neoliberal capitalism

91 Whyte, 'The Intellectual Aristocracy Revisited', pp. 26–27.

92 Quoted in *ibid*., p. 28.

93 In the following chapter, I elaborate a more detailed case on subjectivities other than the capitalist, taking the example of the artistic form of life, and its resistance in relation to the notions of power and hegemony.

and globalization, although, in fact, the whole progressive movement of capitalism as a form of life can well be called a process of gradual universalization. This is a universalizing process that has spread to virtually the entire world by the end of the twentieth century, and which will make some thinkers such as Francis Fukuyama announce the end of history, thus consummating the identification of the capitalist form of life and the nature of the human being.[94] In other words, the full self-realization of the human essence in the world. And yet to many critics, the subject of the capitalist form of life, like that of every form of life, seemed only to be reaching a supreme moment of reification whereby more than human essence, the essence of an alienating consumerist system, was revealed. What I want to show in the following sections is that precisely what is revealed in these moments of neoliberalism is the essence of the capitalist form of life and of its subjectivity through the intensification of both the principle of economic maximization and the structural process of reification, by which the subject maximizes more the more it becomes reified.

4. The Dialectical Process towards Reification

The term 'reification' comes from the writings of Karl Marx and has been used in different ways since then, mainly within the Marxist tradition, although in a more general sense it has moved into other dimensions of culture such as literary works, for instance, the novels of Michel Houellebecq.[95] Although it had already been referred to in early works of Marx, it is considered to have made its first appearance in the first volume of *Capital* (*Das Kapital*, 1867). There, reification is established as the process by which the relationship between people becomes a relationship between things:

> There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things [...] This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they

94 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

95 Axel Honneth, *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 18–19.

> are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.[96]

The reifying process in Marx will be completely linked to the concepts of exchange value and commodity fetishism. The relationship between the producer and the owner is a relationship between things, precisely because the worker's labour power is standardized in the exchange value of the produced object, which happens to be perceived as a fetish, isolated from the production process and the producer (as when a part is seen isolated from the whole), and instead, valued according to its relationship with other objects in the market. The owner thinks about the worker's labour power in terms of the exchange value of his products or the relation between the objects, and not between the people: thus the producer/worker is reified while his work or labour power has been reified. As can be seen, the seed of the concept of reification is indissolubly rooted in the capitalist production system and Marx emphasizes the reification of labour relations as the structure of capitalist society.

But it will not be until Georg Lukács coined the term in his *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), and especially in one of the studies included in that work 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat' (1922), that the term reification takes on a meaning of greater importance with respect to the analysis of capitalist society and, in general, with regard to social and cultural studies, thereby decisively influencing the first generation of the Frankfurt School and the development of its critical theory—without forgetting the great disagreements between these authors and Lukács.

In the first page of his essay, Lukács says that 'reification' means 'that a relation between people has taken on the character of a thing'.[97] This definition of reification connects it with Marx, that is, it expresses the objective dimension of reification related to the relations of objects in the market, but it will only be with the incorporation of Max Weber's concept of rationalization, that Lukács will complete its subjective dimension.[98]

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96 Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. XXXV (London: Lawrence Wishart, 2010 [1867]), p. 83.

97 Georg Lukács, 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', in *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971 [1923]), pp. 83–222 (p. 83).

98 Alan How, *Critical Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 65–66.

That means that reification is not just a way in which the subject thinks of others in terms of things and the calculations needed to control them for profit, but reification would be at the core of its consciousness, and it will eventually be able to reify itself. According to Lukács, the cause of this reification is, of course, the capitalist system of production in terms of the relationship between the values of commodities in the market and the aspiration to maximize profits in transactions. From the point of view of the phenomenology of the process, the subject becomes a reified being, lacking in commitment with respect to his surroundings and with the attitude of a passive observer, characteristics that for Lukács constitute a second nature.[99] However, this reifying process finds its redemption in the consciousness of the proletariat, which by breaking the illusory duality between the subjects and their objects will recompose the original unity in which the subjects/proletarians, identified with the objects of their work, reach their own human value and reveal a praxis not corrupted by reification.[100] The Frankfurt School deepened the concept of reification associated with instrumental reason and extended it to all dimensions of capitalist society, especially to cultural manifestations, which both Adorno and Horkheimer will call the 'culture industry'. Fundamentally, it is these two authors who, taking up the concepts of reification and commodity fetishism, will focus their analysis on the consumer society of capitalism in the post-war period.[101]

The political and economic strategies carried out in the aftermath of World War II precipitated what has been called neoliberal capitalism. Therefore, we must highlight the different way in which the reification identified by Marx and Lukács, as a structural phenomenon of the capitalist economy and society, is fulfilled in this last phase of capitalism. In the first place, while Lukács emphasizes the reification of the social relationship of the workers and owners that causes a praxis that replicates the instrumentalization carried out by the worker who sells his labour power to obtain a benefit; in consumer society, certainly expanded and globalized from the 1970s, the emphasis is on the other end of the chain, not on the sale but on the purchase (not on the offer but on the demand). It is at this time, with the emergence

99 Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 89.
100 *Ibid*., pp. 141–42.
101 How, *Critical Theory*, pp. 65.

of Fordist production,[102] that citizens cease to be mere workers but also become large-scale consumers, which was true only of the ruling classes in the previous period: 'Fordist styles of production were based on the extension of mass produced markets through innovations in production line and assembly plants. Fordism describes the extension of former luxuries such as cars to all workers and indeed the growth of capital generally.'[103] The reification is carried out mainly through the consumption of products that companies (through mass media) now present as necessary for the consumer. Secondly, and related to the above, while in Lukács and Marx the reification is fundamentally realized through the reification of the labour power of the proletarian class, in the post-war consumer society, the reification is not only of the proletarian class but of all people, because society begins to be standardized through the consumption of products with which the consumer identifies. And thirdly, due to the homogenization of the consumerist explosion and the cultural colonization by the neoliberal policies of the 1970s, while for Lukács it was only the proletarian class that, as a true subject of history, was called to revolution by means of class consciousness, by contrast, in the era of neoliberal and global capitalism, it is the multitude (which is no longer a particular class, for the proletarians themselves are also owners), by becoming aware of the reification of their lives in all orders, through consumerism (even the consumption of information and mass media in recent decades) and the progressive de-legitimization of social institutions, who will make the revolution and take the organs of power and control of society.[104]

According to this revised literature, the reification process is then intrinsic to the capitalist totalization from its origin. However, it is in the advanced stages of capitalism that its results are more noticeable and its expansion is global. That is, the capitalist form of life has become universalized—assimilating all those other forms with which it has come into contact—not only within one society, such as the English,

102 A. J. Veal, 'Economics of Leisure', in *A Handbook of Leisure Studies*, ed. by Chris Rojek, Susan Shaw and A. J. Veal (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 140–61 (pp. 143–44).

103 Adrian Franklin, 'Tourism', in *A Handbook of Leisure Studies*, ed. by Chris Rojek, Susan Shaw and A. J. Veal (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 386–403 (p. 392).

104 See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

the American and the European, but in most of the world's societies. Therefore, I now turn to the reification process in the last decades.

4.1. Moments of Reification in the Era of Neoliberal Capitalism

The first moment of reification is the negation of the subject by the object within the neoliberal order as global market. This moment can be identified in full around the 1970s with the neoliberal turn, but, of course, the first version of it it was already in place in the nineteenth century, with the then-called liberal capitalism and afterwards from the 1960s, as stated by John Agnew, David Harvey and Jim McGuigan.[105] This first moment of reification is substantially shared by the earlier times of capitalism. The difference at first (other than the different ways in which reification is obtained) is in quantity and will become a difference in quality, for it will imply an evolution or transformation within the form of life. As Andreas Wittel remarks:

> The capitalist market has become increasingly powerful, pervasive and hegemonic, the logic of the capitalist market colonises and destroys the logic of community, and [...] the market swallows more and more areas and aspects of life that hitherto have not been regulated by monetary measurement and monetary exchange.[106]

That is, the global market reaches an ever greater portion of the society's population and pervades aspects of people's private life previously untouched, and it is implemented through mass media and new technologies, starting with the invention of the TV and the beginning of consumerism as an essential part of the people's form of life,[107] the consumption of information as commodity[108] being the core element of

105 John Agnew, *Hegemony: The New Shape of Global Power* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2005), p. 169; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 2–3; Jim McGuigan, 'The Neoliberal Self', *Culture Unbound*, 6:1 (2014), 223–40 (pp. 226–27).

106 Andreas Wittel, 'Counter-Commodification: The Economy of Contribution in the Digital Commons', *Culture and Organization*, 19:4 (2013), 314–31 (p. 314).

107 Noam Yuran, 'Being and Television: Producing the Demand to Individualise', *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*, 17:1 (2019), 56–71.

108 Jernej Prodnik, 'A Seeping Commodification: The Long Revolution in the Proliferation of Communication Commodities', *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*, 12:1 (2014), 142–68 (p. 155).

the political and economic initiatives carried out by the U.S. from the 1960s in order to impose its form of life and become the hegemonic power.[109] The object (what is presented exterior to the subject and the real opposition to the subject) is the market, and its negation of the subject entails a negated subjectivity; the subjects hold themselves as in a constant state of lacking something. The market creates in the subjects a desire, which is otherwise translated as the need for something which is outside of themselves:[110] the need for something to complete this sudden acknowledgement of incompleteness or scarcity. This is what we have pointed out above as a difference with respect to the austere form of life; desire is reified precisely because it is not the desire for a specific object, but to maximize, namely to be a subject that maximizes by fleeing from lack or austerity, which translates into always wanting more: 'For it is not a matter of the extinction of desire but of its reproduction by choosing in the world the complement that it lacks and needs to ensure its renewal.'[111] This phenomenon, produced by the implementation of the logic of the

109 For culture as soft power, see Naeem Inayatullah, 'Why Do Some People Think They Know What is Good for Others?', in *Global Politics: A New Introduction*, ed. by Jenny Edkins and Maja Zehfuss (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 430–53.

110 In this sense, capitalism shows the shared structure of Christian religion as stated by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 2001 [1905/1930]), for it posits an incomplete subject, a subject that requires of a (divine) aid to reach its completeness and that is theologically marked as an incomplete being (desiring but unsatisfied) by the original sin. This experience of incompleteness is explained by Jean-Paul Sartre in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Vol. I (London and New York: Verso, 2004 [1960]), pp. 79–83, and taken up, in relation to consumerism, by André Gorz in *Critique of Economic Reason* (London: Verso, 1989). These references, however, might have a source in Marx's *Capital* (*Das Kapital*), when in the chapter devoted to the fetishism of commodities, he suggests, according to Michael Jennings, that 'commodities work to suppress the human rational capacity and appeal instead to the emotions, much as a religious fetish appeals to and organizes an irrational belief structure'. See Jennings, 'Introduction', in Water Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 1–26 (p. 13). From the ontology of forms of life, it is understood that this incompleteness and experienced dissatisfaction, would have its root in the constitutive negativity of the form of life, from which one always flees uselessly, as it is its condition of possibility; in the case of capitalism or form of economic maximization, as has already been said above, its dissatisfaction is born of never ceasing to experience austerity, as its constitutive opposite. All maximization, like all consumerist accumulation, involves the rejection of austerity.

111 Pierre Verstraeten, 'Appendix: Hegel and Sartre', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, ed. by Christina Howells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 353–72 (p. 364).

market in the society, triggered the whole process towards the reification or commodification of everything within the future totalization, in terms of Sartre's dialectic, which is the absolute triumph of the global capital. I would like to underline the importance of this phase for the whole subsequent process, for the reader must note that once the subject is negated by the object producing the consciousness of incompleteness, the subject from that very moment becomes a negativity, that is, its subjectivity is that of a negated subject, and when that incompleteness is completed temporarily by a market product, that is, the negation of the first negation, the subject is no more a subject but a consumer, and it has already passed through the threshold into the capitalist neoliberal order, being integrated within it, as Sartre put it, and in the logical movement towards its dissolution as a final moment of total integration or identification with the market and its logic: to render everything a commodity.[112]

The second moment is the reification of their freedom. The subjects sublimate their needs through an induced rationalizing process. It is then that the subjects, rendered consumers, identify themselves with the object based on reasons. This identification has to do with the possibility of choosing between growing offers in the global market: 'The latest [for Jean Baudrillard's time] such freedom is the random selection of objects that will distinguish any individual from others.'[113] This choice between the objects of the market is what provides the subjects with a fictitious individuality—as an individuality that comes from an object—but which can only be understood against the background of capitalist subjectivity as a totalization. The consumer, who as subject felt alienated and more importantly constrained by the restrictions of offers, once the need for such products was created, is then driven by the logic of the process to demand more variety of goods, translated as the liberation from the experience of unfreedom. In turn, this assumed liberation derives from the reification of the subject's freedom through the product chosen by the unleashed freedom of choice. Satisfaction and liberation are what the market offers to posit a consumer, who is otherwise a forever unsatisfied,

112 Paul Mason, *PostCapitalism: A Guide to Our Future* (London: Penguin Books, 2015).
113 Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 11.

incomplete and unfree subject. And we can notice with Baudrillard that by then the entire life had become a field of consumption: 'We have reached the point where "consumption" has grasped the whole of life.'[114] This process ended up establishing the free, conscious and rational consumer as a determination—consolidated through habits—of the global market in its integrating cycle of negations of the subject in its various intrinsic aspects.

The third moment is the reification of creativity—linked to imagination. This reification of creativity is to a certain extent also of identity through objects of consumerism. In fact, it is the reification of the capacity for conversion. Changing oneself within the form of life avoids the crisis and thus the demand for a change of form of life altogether. It can be said to contain the doubts and the demand for change of the subjects within the same framework in which the doubt and the demand for change arises. As the consumers become rational and free through the freedom of choice and the increase of supply, and as they become more integrated within the market, they adopt the positive determination of the consumers who not only choose between several products of the market but also create the product and, in doing so, to a certain extent create themselves. Of course, this creation is made possible by a series of tools that the system offers, and never by constructing the object with elements not offered and, therefore, outside the freedoms contemplated by the market—which is the capitalist form of life as a principled facticity; having, thus, the imagination confined within the limits of consumerist activities.[115] Slavoj Žižek expresses it singularly in the following text:

> Perhaps the properly frustrating dimension of this eternal stimulus to make free choices is best rendered by the situation of having to choose a product in online shopping, where one has to make an almost endless series of choices: if you want it with X, click A, if not, click B. We can go on making our small choices, 'reinventing ourselves', on condition that these choices do not disturb the social and ideological balance.[116]

114 *Ibid*., p. 33.

115 The reader must note that here again we encounter the limits of what we have freely given to ourselves in terms of a form of life; that is, the market as an object, the form of life in its entirety as a desired necessity.

116 Slavoj Žižek, 'A Plea for Leninist Intolerance', *Critical Inquiry*, 28:2 (2002), 542–66 (pp. 542–43).

This consumer is the ideal type of entrepreneur, those who efficiently make decisions and create their own style, adopting the logic of the market and integrating themselves more and more into it through their own creation as an object. But at the same time, the entrepreneurs continue to show their fundamental lack, which, on the one hand, made possible the later moments of their development within the neoliberal order, and, on the other, they will continue to attempt at satisfying endlessly and uselessly. For they have no intrinsic essence or characteristics beyond the subjectivity provided by their form of life, which in reality is only possible through the desire to fill this constitutive lack (maximization and accumulation are never enough). We must not forget that they are subjects only as part of the totalization and through their integration process. Paradoxically, they are subjects insofar as they become objects of the form of life represented by the global market.

The fourth moment is the reification of identity. The subjects, who are nothing more than indeterminate possibilities without their form of life, in the times of their final reification, become homogenized in several fashions. For Baudrillard, the identification with the objects was clear, even if not as clear as would become later in the digital era: 'As the wolf-child becomes wolf by living among them, so are we becoming functional. We are living the period of the objects: that is, we live by their rhythm, according to their incessant cycles.'[117] It is suggested to the reader here to think of what has been already shown in Chapter 4 about social conditioning: we are exposed to behaviours that we then imitate through our identification. The subject becomes a new product in the market, a product exploited through the network. The enterprising consumers, alienated in the products with which they have identified themselves in previous moments, now seek to create themselves as object. If, before, it was the object of consumption on which their identity was projected, in this last moment of reification, it is the consumers, in the role of the Internet users, who become the objects of consumption at different levels. They create their whole life through the network, forums and social media minute by minute. It is in these moments of digital capitalism where the reification is more intensely perceived through the masks provided by the profiles of the users and the role-play in virtual reality games. As Fredric Jameson pointed out in

117 Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, p. 29.

relation to postmodernism, the cultural side of capitalist neoliberalism: 'postmodernity itself (the free play of masks and roles without content or substance)'.[118] But even more than in virtual reality games or user profiles, the most typical mask of this digital age would be that of the users' own faces turned into objects (photos, videos, selfies, etc.) that increase or decrease their exchange value in the market depending on the visits to their place on the Web or the likes and dislikes, the effect of the comments and the reactions caused by the exposure of their life on social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, or Chinese Weibo, WeChat, and so on. What postmodernity is itself is a game of masks without substance (or the subject as a mask that comes and goes for economic purposes); the mask is the reification of the subject, who does not look anymore (masks do not look, do not have a subjectivity beyond them) but it is designed to be looked at by the market and surveillance system, the only *subject* of the global order. The life of the users get identified with the life of the subjects; their masks have become their true face; the users are the subject reified through their integration in the global/digital market game. Their human value becomes an exchange value in the digital world, where the consumer/user has been created entirely as an object, and where, as digital agents, makes profitable their reification, often economically.

To illustrate my point, I will refer to a film which shows perfectly the characteristics of the reification of the subject in this era. The film is *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* (2017). If we are to distinguish more neatly between the subject and the determinations of the dialectical process within the totality that signifies the global market, we should say first that the subject is what is negated and the integrating role and behaviour is what is affirmed. But the subject is only such insofar as it is reified. This entails that the subjects experience themselves as a negation from the moment they enter within the logic of the market, when they consume for the first time and become a consumer (because the neoliberal order constitutes the entire social life, it has become inevitably one or another form of consumerism). This, as is famously expressed by the film *Jumanji*, is the moment when the subjects enter the game (in the film, the characters literally enter inside the video-game), from

118 Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983–1996* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 60.

which, once inside, nobody can leave until the game is finished (which can be compared with the famous Eagles' song, 'Hotel California'), but in the allegory of *Jumanji* something else is implied: the game has an end. And this end of the game, even if it involves collaboration between the characters, who have all been transformed by the game into other individuals (reified to become subjects of the game totalization), requires a winner and losers. When it has reached the end, all players, already fully integrated into the game and surrounded by mortal dangers, have to conjure the game by calling it by its name in order to break its spell. That is, the game calls its own name through the characters, and to call its own name is to know itself: only what has been completed as an integrated totalization can be known (what is still in process cannot be known in its entire and final state). Can we think of a more accurate allegory to describe the neoliberal capitalism in which we are immersed as a totalizing process?

Along with this process, subjects can be seen in their reification as commodities within two parallel lines: (1) While engaged within the global/digital market, which covers gradually more of the subjects' life in terms of time and space,[119] their positive determinations within the neoliberal order are that of satisfied, free, creative and identity bearing users/consumers, which paradoxically leads to their absolute commodification by the logic of the market, which the users/consumers follow inherently so as to make of themselves objects within the market. (2) The users/consumers as affirmation within the totalizing process have their negativity, which, in dialectical terms, is everything that negates them. These subjects entail subjectivities that are a flight from their opposite form of life—the austere form of life—that which makes them incomplete or unsatisfied, unfree, uncreative and lacking an identity; that is, a negative subjectivity that only appears as an absence, but is equally constitutive. As has been said above, nothing daunts the subject of the capitalist form of life more than austerity.

119 See Agnew, *Hegemony*; Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

5. Maximization through Reification: The Internal Contradiction of Capitalist Subjectivity

According to what has been said, we can agree that reification is the general process by which the subject becomes a means for an end, which is the totalization. This instrumentalization makes the subjects objects of that totalization. Subjects are mediated by their totalization, which is their form of life, and at the same time, as objects or reified subjects, they mediate with respect to it. That is, the individuals who have been denied as free and independent beings by the totalization, nevertheless through the latter become subjects, which entails certain defining features, as well as certain freedoms and responsibilities. As mentioned above, we find in this double dialectic between the subjects and their form of life, as a totalization, a contradiction that is, nevertheless, constitutive of the capitalist subjectivity; namely, that the principle of maximization is realized with greater intensity and effectiveness the more the subject is reified. That is, when the subject has become more integrated into his form of life to the point of being a more perfect incarnation of it. What this means is that reification is to put oneself as a means to one's own economic maximization. So, paradoxically, I feel a more perfect capitalist subject the higher my maximization is in terms of my positing as object in the market (related to work, education and academia, entertainment and leisure, and so on). This contradiction seems to be confirming the thesis of the Frankfurt School that this instrumental reason is at the root of capitalism.[120] However, it could rather be understood that it is a structural requirement of every form of life, although in each one with its particular characteristics. The latter is what I suggest. Thus, in what follows, I analyze and develop the ideas that have just been put forward in relation to subjectivity as a synthesis of the two previous sections.

As has been suggested above, from the revised Sartrean dialectical reason, the capitalist form of life, identified with the global market as a totalization, aims to make objects or rather commodities of the subjects, who are negated in terms of autonomy, freedom, creativity and rationality beyond their form of life. The neoliberal individual carries out a form of life which is reified within the structure of the economic

120 See Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004 [1947]).

exchanges. The entire life of the individual has become the field of the market, and the market in the neoliberal order points to the total commodification of everything, not the subjectification, in the sense of making subjects (against a master), but profitable objects within the economic law of supply and demand. The self is thus, according to the above, not individualistic, I claim, but a mere object directed by the system in which it is integrated; a Sartrean being-in-itself, accessible by a multitude of potential consumers/user/watchers through the Web. This object, however, is an incarnation of the global market, and is therefore principled by the latter. Its becoming an object is its way of being a subject. Thus, even in its reification, as an incarnation, it is an in-itself-for-itself. The so-called 'Generation Selfie', for instance, has in this way been wrongly accused of being egotistic or selfish in this respect, for what the young man or woman who takes a selfie is showing is the emptiness or absence of use value in himself or herself, through their own reification on the Web-market, where transformed into a mere object (of desire or envy or like and dislike), they gain exchange value, sometimes at considerable moral or physical risks. A number of young people have died and continue to die in the attempt to take a selfie in dangerous situations to impress the audience in the social network and to get more *likes*: the exchange value of the times. The subjective experience is no more an experience but the reification of the moment through an image or a video (a post on the network). The subject experiences himself as an object on the Internet (as for instance, in its online profile, which is more of a relational object), an object that has become a commodity for itself and for others.[121] In this last respect, the reader must take into account the recent studies on Facebook and other social media, and the light they are shedding on how these corporations obtain their revenues by making the users more engaged in posting, commenting or watching videos and images.[122] If the users are integrated elements of the global market (where they are also reified in order to gain exchange value), in terms of subjectivity, their integration is voluntary, so that the more

121 See Grațiela Sion, 'Constructing Human Body as Digital Subjectivity: The Production and Consumption of Selfies on Photo-Sharing Social Media Platforms', *Review of Contemporary Philosophy*, 18 (2019), 150–56.

122 See Siva Vaidhyanathan, *Antisocial Media: How Facebook Disconnects Us and Undermines Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). Also, Christian Fuchs, *Digital Labour and Karl Marx* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

they are integrated into their form of life, the more they are reified, to the extent that their experience, and thus their subjectivity, is made impossible when not engaging in the global market and, more recently, through the Internet. An example of this is offered by Jodi Dean, who refers to a report carried out by Sherry Turkle:

> Reporting on her interviews with teenagers, Turkle describes young people waiting for connection, fearful of abandonment, and dependent on immediate responses from others even to have feelings. For example, seventeen-year-old Claudia has happy feelings as soon as she starts to text. Unlike a previous generation that might call someone *to talk about* feelings, when Claudia wants to *have* a feeling, she sends a text.[123]

This initially surprising text does nothing more than confirm the existing dialectical relationship between the subject (subjectivity and the digital market) and its reification. The young woman, only when she is an object, that is, when she is externalized and shown as an object for herself and for others within the digital world, shows her subjectivity, her desire, her needs, her incompleteness, etc. In reification and only in it, appears the neoliberal individual's subjectivity: the object, as the denier of the subject, paradoxically has become the beacon of subjectivity. Perhaps it is this dialectical relationship that produces the complexity of the phenomenon and its confusion. Of course, it is from this relationship that the death of the subject can be understood, and the survival in the same object that has *killed* him. A subject, in short, that is only such insofar as he is denied by the object, this taken as the global market. And this last statement embraces and explains further what James Heartfield stated: 'The only way to understand this mismatch is that the human subject persists, but in denial of its own subjectivity. Overwhelmed by the sense of powerlessness that grips each of us, we characterise our society in profoundly impersonal, even inhuman ways.'[124]

The neoliberal subject posited as a negation has then a negated subjectivity which only can be grasped as an absence—the opposite form of life that constitutes him negatively—which, nevertheless, is the fundamental explanation of why individuals throw themselves into the totalization, i.e., into the global market as a global capitalist

123 Jodi Dean, 'Nothing Personal', in *Rethinking Neoliberalism*, ed. by Sanford F. Schram and Marianna Pavlovskaya (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 3–22 (pp. 15–16).

124 Heartfield, *The 'Death of the Subject' Explained*, p. 238.

form of life.[125] The latter wouldn't work if didn't posit that negation in the first place, which is its possibility. The absence is then the effect of positing its negation; what the individual experiences as an absence (no satisfaction of their needs, no freedom, no personal identity) leads them to the affirmation of the form of life in which they are included. Therefore, the positive characterization of neoliberal subjectivity by means of attributes such as freedom, self-creation, consumerism, entrepreneurship, and so on,[126] is but the manifestation of the self-imposed form of life; the process in which the subjects integrate themselves as objects or commodities (endowed now with proper exchange value) within the global market. It is thus the consumer, in its progressive facets of satisfied, free and rational consumer, entrepreneur, digital user and creator of himself, no more than roles, masks or reifications of the subject, who is not something separated from his reification. Rather, the subject is the negated face, the negativity necessary for the affirmation of subsequent moments towards totalization. I affirm myself as an object because of an experienced need, lack or desire that I seek to satisfy. These social roles—and regular behaviours—which constitute the subject's form of life, are key players in capitalism together with taxpayers, who are also consumers: 'The *successful entrepreneur*, *sovereign consumer* and *hard-working taxpayer*, these are key players in the capitalist game today.'[127] In the critique of ideology such as that carried out by authors like Žižek, this negated subjectivity, experienced as an absence that triggers individuals to integrate within the neoliberal order, can be read as the neoliberal ideology that makes possible the neoliberal order. In the words of this philosopher: 'We "feel free" because we lack the very language to articulate our unfreedom [...] Our "freedoms" themselves serve to mask and sustain our deeper unfreedom.'[128]

As a final thought with which to summarise what has been said, the capitalist subjects exhibit that constitutive contradiction between their form of life and themselves as subjects. Or, what is the same, between

125 David Harvey, 'Universal Alienation', *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*, 16:2 (2018), 424–39. See also, David Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* (London: Profile Books, 2014).

126 McGuigan, 'The Neoliberal Self', p. 234.

127 *Ibid*., p. 225.

128 Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 2.

the maximization of economic profits that governs their behaviour and the reification to which they freely and voluntarily submit for a better incarnation of the form of life. That contradiction is constitutive of the ontological unit. This has led through the whole capitalist dialectical process to the conception of man-machine. That is, the transformation of 'the living worker into a mere living accessory of the machine',[129] already from its origins, and more recently, to the fusion of human free will and machine efficiency in its contemporary version of transhumanism.[130] The subject in the capitalist form of life thus seems destined to be transformed into an efficient object with respect to its own vital principle: the greater the reification, the greater the maximization. And consumerism is just another form of maximizing in the sense of becoming the very objects that we consume and with which we aspire to future maximizations. However, does this particular contradiction of capitalism not include the contradictory structure of other forms of life as well? Is not the subject a means whereby the Glory of God is expressed in the form of religious life, so that the greater his reification as a divine object or instrument, the greater the Glory of God on earth? And is not the artistic expression of the subject equally greater and more genuine the greater his instrumentalization with respect to art? I am only pointing out with these suggestions the constitutive contradiction of the dialectic structure of every form of life. So, would this arguably call into question Horkheimer's thesis of instrumental reason as inherent to capitalism?[131] If we accept that these mediations (which are otherwise unitary and constitutive) participate in the reification as well as in the integration of the subject into his form of life, then means and ends coincide, and the instrumentalization is therefore only apparent. There is an analogy between means and ends. By wanting to behave in a certain way, subjects want their form of life. In every action, however instrumental it may be,

129 Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 134.

130 There is a growing literature on transhumanism. Some recommended readings are: Roberto Manzocco, *Transhumanism—Engineering the Human Condition: History, Philosophy, and Current Status* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International, 2019); Robert Ranisch and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, eds, *Post- and Transhumanism: An Introduction* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014); Stephen Lilley, *Transhumanism and Society: The Social Debate over Human Enhancement* (Dordrecht, Heidelberg, New York and London: Springer, 2013); Julian Savulescu and Nick Bostrom, *Human Enhancement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

131 Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*.

in Horkheimer's sense of subjective reason,[132] subjects affirm themselves as objects in the midst of the world; not for an end beyond the action—as if they were taken themselves as instruments—but for the action itself. To be that object is the end. Thus, for example, in working to earn a salary, work is not merely an instrument, it is primarily the end itself, the way of being and acting that one wants to incarnate. To be that person that works for a salary is the end. For, the ontological principle, in this case, economic maximization, is not a mere end of the action, it is constitutive of the action itself and of the other habitual actions of the subject. It is, in short, the subject. The object and the subject coincide. The subject becomes more and more like the form of life, as an object, and, vice versa, the form of life becomes more and more realized in 'the midst of the world'. The artist tends to incarnate better and better his Art as the religious person tends to incarnate better and better his God (which, for example, has a long tradition going back to Thomas à Kempis' *Imitatio Christi*). In the same way, the capitalist subject tends to incarnate better and better the market as economic maximization (the law of supply and demand). Thus, what has not been previously detected in the analysis of capitalist subjectivity is precisely that it is constituted by that contradiction between the tendency to realize oneself as a subject and the tendency to posit oneself as an object, so that the more one integrates oneself as a subject of one's form of life, the more reified one becomes and vice versa. This contradiction of mediations between the subjects and the totalization they incarnate could also be at the foundation of every form of life.

6. Conclusion

In the historical period studied, there is a particular threshold that is overcome: the negation of the austere form of life of peasants and craftsmen. This could thus be understood as the original possibility of the capitalist form of life, which constitutes an escape from that life of austerity. This flight is a denial of that life, which is assimilated to the principle of economic maximization. It is made to disappear under a new form of life. I have argued that, according to the dialectical structure already examined, every negation implies the affirmation of

132 *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

the opposite of the denied form. That is, if the opposite of living an austere life is to live a life in which one maximizes economically, the negation of the former is the affirmation of the latter, in this case under the principle of the form of life it assimilates, which is the capitalist one. This reveals a phenomenon specific to the situation in which both forms of life meet: the negation of the austere form of life is a reinforcement of the life of economic maximization. This is a situation that I have suggested may be the reason why the capitalist form of life expanded so strongly and rapidly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This implies an exploitation of the subjectivity of those subjects who contribute to the emergence and expansion of the capitalist form of life. When the subject who lives in austerity and flees from the accumulation and maximization of his work (i.e., who lives for his needs as foreseen in the present, and who works only to cover those needs established by himself and his family) is denied in his subjectivity, he converts to a life of maximization under a principle of maximization. It is the driving force behind the agricultural and, soon after, the industrial revolution. The same phenomenon occurs when the subject that is denied, for example, is an artist—as we show in the next chapter. The one who leads an artistic form of life (of self-expression), by being denied will become a subject who maximizes through the opposite of his form of life, namely, the representation of reality and the reproducibility of art. Or, with the aristocracy, those who presided over culture and knowledge, the assimilation of the latter by the capitalist form of life will make them irremediably into businessmen, sustained by ignorance and alienation, that is, the denial of their prior ontological principle. Thus, while some of these aristocrats resist capitalist assimilation and integrate into their own totalization as a community of intellectuals, to which they gradually assimilate subjects from other forms of life, others will derive economic profits from their possessions by joining the so-called mass society, or at least integrate themselves as a mass-man, in the sense of Ortega y Gasset; that is, someone who has his value outside himself, and therefore, who is alienated and reified as another object of the expansive market, where the greater the reification, the greater the economic maximization.

If class struggle is understood as the struggle between oppressors and oppressed, in the sense of one group imposing itself on another,

denying the latter, it is no longer class struggle that takes place after the triumph of the capitalist form of life incarnated in the mass society. Class struggle refers, as discussed in this chapter, to the moments of incipient universalization through assimilation of groups or communities in contact with the expanding capitalist community within England and Europe in the nineteenth century. Once the form of life (with its principle of individual economic maximization) of this community has spread throughout most of the society homogenizing it, what remains are internal struggles, between already assimilated subjects, for further maximization. Within the mass society there will be elites and followers, but both will be capitalists, and while some will seek to preserve their elite status as the most perfect incarnation of their form of life, others will seek to replace the elite. The difference between them is now not in their form of life, as it was between the owners and the workers, or between the middle class and the aristocracy, but in the greater or lesser economic maximization, that is, in the salary or income associated with professions and trades.

It has been indicated that the process of universalization of the form of life continues until the postulated assimilation of all individuals and all aspects of their lives. The necessity of the process consists in its progressive expansion through the assimilation of the forms of life with which it comes into contact. This is not merely a necessary process, but also a contingent one. In other words, it is contingent upon the beginning of totalization at a given time and place, but once that has begun, the process necessarily tends towards its universalization. Without the assimilation of other forms, capitalism would have remained within the limits of a community of subjects for some time, and possibly would have been assimilated to other forms of life. The assimilation of other communities to the capitalist form of life, from the point of view of consumption, seems to be based on the desire to supply a created need, a lack posed by the absence of maximization, in such a way that the subject is temporarily completed by the object (which reified the desire), so that the desire to have the object ends up being the desire to be the object itself (which reified the subject's identity). With the object, the subject maximizes economically, because the object has made him superior as a subject (his human value depends on his wealth), and being superior means having greater exchange value (being able to sell

himself at a higher price). The latter must be thought of in terms of human capital, labour capital, social capital, and so on. But different types of capital, such as those distinguished by Pierre Bourdieu, can, after all, be translated or converted into economic capital.[133] The greater the social prestige, academic training, work experience, and so on, the greater the salary or economic value. Today, even something similar to digital capital could be included in the equation. That is, the number of followers in the digital media and the number of 'likes'. These are beginning to be taken into account, both for employment contracts and for literary awards or prizes. In short, economic maximization is also at the root of the consumerist attitude. For consumption is a means of reification, and presenting oneself as an object is a necessary condition for the maximization of the subject.

133 Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. by John Richardson (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 241–58.