

# A philosophical critique of consumerist culture with special attention to the notions of “false needs” and “enjoyment”

**D Fourie**  
**22870644**

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Supervisor: Prof MF Heyns  
Co-supervisor: Prof AH Verhoef

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## **PREFACE**

### Acknowledgements

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## ABSTRACT

Key Terms: consumerist culture; desire; enjoyment (*jouissance*); false needs; instrumental reason; neo-liberalism.

The main theme of this study is that of a consumerist culture within a globalised contemporary society. I will argue that within the context of contemporary society, the neo-liberal agenda of developing and sustaining the globalised economic system is the driving force behind a consumerist culture. Consumerist culture suggest that consumption of goods and services should become a significant social activity and wholly embedded with existential meaning. Within this study, I will address the proliferation of consumerist culture through the works of Herbert Marcuse and Slavoj Žižek. I argue that both these authors reveal the ways in which the ideals of neo-liberalism created and encouraged an understanding of needs through instrumental reasoning in consumerist culture. The proliferation of consumerist culture has led individuals to have a eschewed perspective of needs and by drawing on Marcuse's notion of a distinction between 'true needs' and 'false needs', and Žižek's appropriation of the Lacanian 'enjoyment' (or *jouissance*), a more nuanced understanding of needs emerges. The study will focus on the following discussion: Firstly, detailing the issues with consumerist culture and its deformational effects on an individual, societal and environmental level. Secondly, there will be an exploration and critique of Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs. It was found that consumerist culture and the neo-liberal societal structures limit or deny the satisfaction of true needs, such as individual freedom and happiness. Thirdly, Žižek's appropriation of the concept of 'enjoyment' (or *jouissance*) will be introduced with the intention of giving new perspective on the notion of 'needs' by exploring and expanding on Marcuse's notion of 'false needs'. Together, the notions of 'false needs' and 'enjoyment' bring insight into the overwhelming effects of consumerist culture and help one to critique it. Additionally, it was found that the concept of false needs provide a salient critique of consumerist culture. However, a reading of Marcuse's theory alongside Žižek's appropriation of the Lacanian concept of 'enjoyment' shows that false needs are much more nuanced than first described by Marcuse. Consumerist culture has altered the individual's perception of needs to such an extent that the satisfaction of false needs are integrated into the individual's conceptualisation of his/her desires; fantasies and imagination.

This dramatically alters one's understanding of needs and emphasises the philosophical concerns of consumerist culture.

## **OPSOMMING**

Sleutelsterme: begeerte; genot (*jouissance*); verbruikerskultuur; instrumentele rede; neo-liberalisme; valse behoeftes.

Die hoofteema van hierdie studie is die tendens van verbruikerskultuur wat ervaar word binne die huidige globale samelewing. Die argument sal gevoer word dat, binne die konteks van die huidige samelewing, die neo-liberale agenda wat op die onderhoud en ontwikkeling van die globale ekonomiese sisteem fokus, die dryfkrag van die verbruikerskultuur is. Die konsep verbruikerskultuur suggereer dat die verbruik van goedere en dienste ontaard het in 'n belangrike sosiale aktiwiteit wat belaaï word met eksistensiële waarde. In hierdie studie sal ek poog om die oorwegende toename van die verbruikerskultuur te bespreek aan die hand van die werke van Marcuse en Žižek. Daar word geargumenteer dat beide hierdie outeurs die neo-liberale invloede, soos instrumentele rede, op die ontwikkeling en aanmoediging van die begrip behoeftes openbaar en kritiseer. Kritiek op die verbruikerskultuur deur middel van die konsep van behoeftes, word uitgelig aan die hand van Marcuse se idee van 'n onderskeid tussen 'ware behoeftes' en 'valse behoeftes' en Žižek se aanwending van die konsep 'genot' (of *jouissance*). In die studie sal die volgende bespreek word: Eerstens, sal daar na die besware van die verbruikerskultuur en die vervormingseffekte op individuele, sosiale en omgewingsvlak verwys word. Tweedens, sal daar 'n verkenning wees van, en kritiek gelewer word op Marcuse se konseptualisering van behoeftes. Daar was gevind dat verbruikerskultuur en die neo-liberale sosiale struktuur die bevrediging van ware behoeftes, soos individuele vryheid en geluk, beperk of ontken. Derdens, sal 'n bekendmaking plaasvind met Žižek se aanwending van die Lacanian-konsep van 'genot' (of *jouissance*) met die doel om Marcuse se konsep van 'valse behoeftes' uit te brei en 'n nuwe perspektief te gee aan die konsep van behoeftes. Saam kan die konsepte van 'valse behoeftes' en 'genot', nuwe insigte na vore bring rakende die oorweldigende gevolge van 'n verbruikerskultuur, asook hulp verleen tot die kritisering daarvan. Daar was verder bevind dat Marcuse se konsepte van 'valse behoeftes' noemenswaardige kritiek lewer op die verbruikerskultuur. Alhoewel, 'n lesing van Marcuse se teorieë, tesame met Žižek se aanwending van die Lacaniaanse-konsep van 'genot', toon dat 'valse behoeftes' baie meer kompleks is as wat

Marcuse dit aanvanklik beskryf het. Verbruikerskultuur het die perspektief van behoeftes so verwronge gemaak dat die bevrediging van valse behoeftes geïntegreer word met die individuele begeertes, fantasieë en verbeelding. Dit het 'n drastiese effek gehad op die verstaan van behoeftes en dit beklemtoon die filosofiese besware teen die verbruikerskultuur.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In a globalised<sup>1</sup> contemporary society individuals experience what is referred to as a ‘consumerist culture’ (Cafaro, 1998:26-39; Mahjan, 2015:245-248). Within this study the notion of a ‘consumerist culture’ specifically refers to the trends within society that are driven by the motives of ‘neo-liberalism’ such as an obsession with gaining material wealth and the sustaining and development of a globalised economic system (Davies, 2014:37; Steger, 2009:101-112; Wallerstein, 1990:35, 38, 39).

Neo-liberalism is especially critiqued by academic scholars for encouraging the spread of global capitalism and consumerist culture (Davies, 2014:1-15; Harvey, 2005:5-20; Steger, 2003:101-112). The definition of neo-liberalism as a contemporary ideology has been a topic of debate within the academic community and especially within philosophy of economics and politics. Many argue that neo-liberalism, as the word suggests, is a revival of liberalism and therefore suggests that liberalism has undergone some form of development resulting in a reinterpretation (Fukuyama, 2006:56; Kristol, 1983:34). However, others argue that neo-liberalism should be perceived as a separate ideology (Ryan, 1993: 291-311).

Classical liberalism is often associated with the notion that government should have minimal influence on matters of the economy and that individuals ought to deal freely with the organisations and establishments within society (Davies, 2014:1-20; Harvey, 2005:5-20). Some argue that this characteristic of minimal governmental intervention within classical liberalism is also common within neo-liberalism (Davies, 2014:1-20; Harvey, 2005:5-20). The notion of minimal governmental influence and intervention within classical liberalism was thought to lead to freedom and democracy. However, it became clear that this was a misleading notion and a new perspective or approach was needed to realise ‘liberal’ ideals (Rawls, 1993:87). Clarke (2005:50-59) also argues that the foundations of classical liberalism can be traced back to Adam

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<sup>1</sup> In this study contemporary society is a globalised society, since globalisation as the broadening and overcoming of social and geographical boundaries, is a noticeable trend within contemporary society (Barber, 2007: 10; Davies, 2014: 22).

Smith and that neo-liberalism, as a separate economic development in capitalist society, is a revival of Smith's economic theories. Palley (2005:20-29) on the other hand, argues that neo-liberalism is aiming to oppose the economic theories of John Maynard Keynes by reducing government regulations on the economy and focusing on macroeconomic stability and policy.

In other words, due to the ongoing debate on the definition and development of neo-liberalism as a contemporary ideology, it is difficult to define and conceptualise the concept as such. Therefore, I turn to David Harvey (2005:2) who gives a comprehensive definition and understanding of neo-liberalism:

*“Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating the individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up military, defence, police and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. Furthermore, if markets do not exist ... then they must be created, by state action if necessary.”*

Harvey's definition of neo-liberalism states clearly that firstly, neo-liberalism's main goal is to advance the growth of the global economy through free market and free trade systems. Secondly, that the state's responsibility, even by force if necessary, is the advancement of free markets and free trade systems. Lastly, it is the state's responsibility to create and regulate free market and free trade systems.

Taking the abovementioned into consideration I argue that consumerist culture is the result of neo-liberal goals and objectives. Furthermore, I argue that consumerist culture has become a

significant cultural activity in contemporary global society, driven by neo-liberal motives of practical and economic means (Davies, 2014:1-20; Storey, 2003:66, 79; Tomlinson, 1991:27). The neo-liberal motive to spread global capitalism consequently also encourages the consumerist culture that individuals experience in contemporary society (Davies, 2014:2-10; Harvey, 2005:41).

The early liberalist ideals attempted to meet the individual's need for freedom and equality (Davies, 2014:1-20; Harvey, 2005:5-20). However, in contemporary society neo-liberal ideals are fixed to expose and exploit the needs, demands and desires of individuals as consumers, to sustain global capitalism (Barber, 2007:9-10; Davies, 2014:2-3; Harvey, 2005:41; McMillan, 2013:13-14, 21-24). Neo-liberal values of gaining material wealth are able to spread through globalisation, expanding the consumer base to ensure the maintaining and development of a globalised economy (Hebron & Stack, 2009:19-21; Slater, 1997:25-27, 37, 193; Wallerstein, 1990:36, 39). With that said, globalisation is merely the process of globalising values and ideals and is therefore not inherently immoral or bad (Steger, 2009:101-112). However, within contemporary society the values and ideals that are being spread is that of neo-liberalism, which as mentioned above, encourages consumerist culture that lead to deformational effects on an individual, socio-economic and environmental level.

Another part of the background context: Globalisation is instrumental in expanding neo-liberal values and with it, the influence of consumerist culture globally (Hebron & Stack, 2009:19-21; Tomlinson, 1991:25, 103, 109; Wallerstein, 1990:35, 38, 39). Globalisation can primarily be described as the process of the expansion of geographical boundaries, and/or the co-operation and integration of national and local resources, markets etc. on a global scale (Hebron & Stack, 2009:19-21; Slater, 1997:193; Steger, 2009:101-112; Wallerstein, 1990:36, 39). Neo-liberalism specifically argues that, in order to expand and support the growth of the global economy, capitalists needed to expand trade and markets to more geographical locations thereby increasing the needs of consumers within those locations. In other words, consumerist culture was encouraged by globalisation to sustain and develop the globalised economy (Hebron & Stack,

2009:19-21; Slater, 1997:25-27, 37, 193; Wallerstein, 1990:36, 39). The fact that globalisation encourages neo-liberal values and consumerism is especially pertinent for my study.

The encouragement of neo-liberal values through globalisation is apparent, since these values are popular in contemporary global society. Neo-liberalism and the globalised economic system are alluring because they promise higher standards of living, economic efficiency, individual freedom and technological progress (Steger, 2009:101-112; Tomlinson, 1991:110). Moreover, consumerist needs, desires and demands of individuals and society as a whole, are becoming crucial in the functioning of contemporary society and the global economic system (McMillan, 2013:13-14, 21-24; Steger, 2009:101-112).

From this contextualisation of consumerist culture within contemporary society, as primarily determined by neo-liberal values and ideals, the following will be presented: Firstly, a central research question that will be the main focus of this study, with several sub-questions that will be explored within the study. Secondly, a hypothesis will be formulated with regard to the central research question. A brief description of the research method implemented in this study will follow. Finally, a short contextualisation section describing the chapters and the topics that will be explored within these chapters, will conclude the introductory chapter.

### **1.1. Research question**

Within the philosophical community, there is more or less consensus that the proliferation of consumerist culture within contemporary society is driven by the neo-liberal ideals and values of gaining material wealth and maintaining the development of the global economy (Harvey, 2005:2). This study hopes to present and explore the possibility of gaining new insight and critique into the consumerist culture within contemporary society through a philosophical approach to the concept of ‘false needs’ and ‘enjoyment’. In the attempt to explore this problem by gaining new insights and critique, I focus on Herbert Marcuse’s concept of ‘false needs’ and Slavoj Žižek’s appropriation of the concept ‘enjoyment’ (or *jouissance*). Taking this focus into

consideration, the following research question will be posed: **How do the concepts of ‘false needs’ and ‘enjoyment’ assist with a better understanding of consumerist culture, and how can it lead to a more philosophically nuanced critique of consumerist culture?**

In order to address the main research question, several sub-questions will be asked. These questions are:

- 1) What are the **deformational effects** of consumerist culture and how do these deformational effects manifest on an individual, societal and environmental level?
- 2) What does Marcuse’s concept of **‘false needs’** entail, how did it develop and how can it be used to critique consumerist culture?
- 3) What does Žižek’s concept of **‘enjoyment’** entail and how did it develop and how can it be used to critique consumerist culture?
- 4) How can Marcuse’s concept of ‘false needs’ be broadened by Žižek’s concept of ‘enjoyment’ and how can that **new perspective** be used to gain new insight and critique into consumerist culture?

These research questions will be explored within the context of this study and serve as a limit to the scope of this study.

## **1.2. Hypothesis**

This study focuses on the theme of consumerist culture and the proliferation of consumerist culture within contemporary society. In my reading of both Marcuse and Žižek as culture critics, I found that they both closely associate the problems they found within society with the prominent trend of consumerist culture. Although Marcuse wrote within a different context (the 1960’s) and neo-liberalism as such did not exist, I argue that the problems he associated with advanced industrial society still persist within contemporary society as consumerist culture. The same problems identified by Marcuse during the 1960’s of advanced industrial society as an

oppressive and domineering force is also discussed by contemporary philosopher Slavoj Žižek. Granted, their approaches to the problem of a proliferating consumerist culture varies drastically, but this will be discussed more thoroughly within the third and fourth chapter of this study. Therefore, I argue that the proliferation of consumerist culture and the problems associated with consumerist culture persist and has led to the deformational effects on an individual, societal and environmental level.

In response to this proliferation of consumerist culture, it is no surprise that most of its critics draw from Karl Marx in some way. In this study, I aim to address the proliferation of consumerist culture through the work of two figures, namely Herbert Marcuse (a critical theorist) and Slavoj Žižek (a post-communist), whose individual works focus on aspects that seem to be important in consumerism and consumer culture. Both thinkers, which base their critique in Marxism in varying ways, reveal the ways in which consumerist culture creates a skewed understanding of needs through neo-liberal ideals. Marcuse shows this through his notion of a distinction between ‘true needs’ and ‘false needs’, and Žižek does so through a Lacanian appropriation of ‘enjoyment’.

My argument will proceed from the assumption that persons should reflect critically on the deformational effects of consumerism on the individual, society and the environment. Through a philosophical approach and exploration of the concept of needs within consumerist culture, new insight and critique can be given on consumerist culture. Furthermore, new insight and critique on consumerist culture can also be given in the attempt to gain a new perspective of needs on an individual and societal level. This new insight can be gained from an analysis of Marcuse’s concept of ‘false needs’ and Žižek’s concept of ‘enjoyment’.

### **1.3. Research methodology**

The primary research method that was utilised for this study was a literature review of a variety of resources as they pertain to the focus of the research question. The main focus of the literature

review through primary and secondary resources was on the philosophers Herbert Marcuse and Slavoj Žižek, and their concepts of ‘false needs’ and ‘enjoyment’ and how those concepts relate to the broader theme of this study, that is consumerist culture. In an attempt to adhere to the limit of the scope of this study, only the most relevant and influential sources were used in this regard. An attempt will be made in this study to creatively analyse, synthesise and incorporate the relevant resources to provide an answer to the research question.

#### **1.4. Contextualisation**

This section aims to provide a brief layout of the topics and discussions of the chapters to follow in this study.

Firstly, consumerist behaviour in contemporary society has led to deformational effects at the individual, societal and environmental level. (Barber, 2007:91; Miller, 2012:2-10, 23-25, 103-105). I loosely base these deformational effects on the issues identified by Charles Taylor in his book *The Ethics of Authenticity* (2003) and his concept of instrumental reason. These destructive influences include for instance narcissism (individual level), cultural imperialism (social level), as well as human-influenced climate change (Giddens, 1991:172, 198; Hebron & Stack, 2009:23, 88-90; Miller, 2012:42-46, 102-5; Taylor, 2003:9-10, 16, 115).

Secondly, I will detail the issues with consumerist culture as diagnosed and discussed by Marcuse through his concept of ‘false needs’ as it provides a salient critique on consumerist culture. In this chapter, I will explore the influences on Marcuse and the development of his concept of ‘false needs’ and what elements and circumstances contribute to his conceptualisation of ‘false needs’.

Thirdly, I will expand upon Marcuse’s concept, I will draw upon Slavoj Žižek’s appropriation of ‘enjoyment’ (or *jouissance*); arguing that it gives a new insight into the concept of needs within society. This chapter will contain a short discussion on those who influenced Žižek and whose theories contributed to the development of the concept of ‘enjoyment’.

By engaging in a dialogue with Marcuse and Žižek, I attempt to give a new perspective on the notion of ‘needs’ by exploring and expanding on both Marcuse’s notion of ‘false needs’ and

Žižek's appropriation of 'enjoyment'. Specifically, I will explore how desire furthers the concept of 'enjoyment' and how that creates a drive within an individual's function in a consumerist culture within contemporary society. In doing so, new philosophical insights and critique on consumerist culture will be given through the concepts of 'false needs' and 'enjoyment'.

## **2. CHAPTER 2: THE DEFORMATIONAL EFFECTS OF CONSUMERIST CULTURE**

Why is a philosophical critique of consumerist culture necessary? And why should there be special attention given to the notions of ‘false needs’ and ‘enjoyment’ in this process? To answer the first question, I shall discuss the deformational effects of a consumerist culture within a neo-liberal society in this chapter. I argue that consumerism and the rise of a global economic system within neo-liberal society lead to deformational effects on an individual, cultural and environmental level. The deformational effects identified within this section are loosely based on some of the concepts discussed in Charles Taylor’s work, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (2003). I have appropriated these concepts as deformational effects and contextualised them within the context of contemporary consumerist culture. I will discuss the deformational effects of consumerist culture on each of the three identified levels separately, in order to emphasise the need for a sound philosophical critique of this culture.

Special attention should be given to the notions of ‘false needs’ and ‘enjoyment’ in the philosophical critique of consumerist culture, because this culture is so focussed (and driven) by needs. As discussed in the introduction, earlier classical liberalism with ideals of democracy and citizenship aimed at meeting the need for freedom and equality. Neo-liberalism’s main aim, on the other hand, is to grow or invent ‘new’ needs, demands and desires in order for the capitalist market to be sustained (Barber, 2007:9-10; Hebron & Stack, 2009:19-21; McMillan, 2013:13-14, 21-24; Slater, 1997:25-27, 37, 193; Wallerstein, 1990:36, 39). These needs, desires and demands are promoted through neo-liberal motives to encourage consumerist culture (Barber, 2007:5, 9, 222, 235; Steger, 2009:101-112).

Globalisation plays a prominent role in the development of neo-liberalism, because globalisation acts as a vehicle of transference of certain ideas and concepts (Steger, 2009:101-112). Within the context of this study specifically, globalisation has made it possible to expand neo-liberal values and with it the influence of consumerist culture globally (Hebron & Stack, 2009:19-21; Tomlinson, 1991:25, 103, 109; Wallerstein, 1990:35, 38, 39). Especially important for this study, is the notion that globalisation also contributed to the expansion of the consumer base to ensure

the development of the global economic system, but also to the possible creation of new needs within its deformational effects (Hebron & Stack, 2009:19-21; Slater, 1997:25-27, 37, 193; Wallerstein, 1990:36, 39). These needs drive the consumerist culture (as will be discussed later on) which in return has some detrimental (deformational) effects on an individual, societal and environmental level. This will be discussed in the following section.

## **2.1. The Individual Level**

Neo-liberal values of obtaining material wealth and the neo-liberal agenda of developing and sustaining the globalised economic system is the driving force behind consumerist culture. The consumption of goods and services has become, as will be indicated in this study, a cultural activity embedded with existential meaning. Furthermore, within consumerist culture the individual rationalises consumerist acts as acts of self-determination. However, the constant enforcement of neo-liberal values and the satisfaction of ‘false needs’ as acts of self-determination have had deformational effects on the individual’s identity and personal relationships. Moreover, the individual’s perspective on self-determining identity and personal relationships become aligned with neo-liberal values through consumerist culture and the satisfaction of ‘false needs’ and fulfilment of ‘enjoyment’ (*jouissance*), as will be discussed further in chapters three and four respectively. The two prominent deformational effects of consumerist culture on an individual level are identified in this chapter as individualism and narcissism.

### **2.1.1. Individualism**

Individualism<sup>2</sup> is a prominent feature of a consumerist culture and neo-liberal<sup>3</sup> values (Barber, 2007:15, 91, 252, 331; Slater, 1997:83-103; Taylor, 2003:62-66). When referring to individualism in this section, it is not primarily used in the sense of the earlier accounts of individualism such as the disengaged rationality of Descartes and the political individualism of

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<sup>2</sup> Individualism can be described as the notion that all social and political constructs are made up of the basis or foundation of individuals. For more on individualism, please see *Individualism Old and New* (Dewey, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> A neo-liberal society can be described as a society where individual freedom is translated into economic freedom and the objectives of a neo-liberal society are aligned with the growth of the global economic system. For more on the neo-liberal society see *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Harvey, 2005).

Locke (Taylor, 2007:484; Taylor, 2003: 25). The individualism apparent in contemporary society is an individualism conflated with a concept that Taylor refers to as ‘instrumental reason’ (Taylor, 2003:5, 6). Instrumental reason is the approach with which individuals in contemporary consumerist culture rationalises and perceives the world around them in terms of profit or economic value (Taylor, 2003:5, 6). Therefore, the individualism encountered within contemporary society is specifically linked with instrumental reason. In other words, individualism understood within the terms of instrumental reason, where the primary concern of the individual is to obtain the maximum amount of material wealth possible (Taylor, 2007:474; Taylor, 2003:5, 6). Therefore, advancing the global economic system relates to the concept of individual instrumental reasoning, justifying consumerist culture as individualism.

One potential problem with this particular notion of individualism can be identified as follows: the notion that consumerist acts are acts of self-determination. This notion primarily entails that the value of a person’s identity and relations are rationalised through instrumental reasoning. It is the notion that the construction of personal identities<sup>4</sup> (by way of products and socio-economic class), rather than ascribed or fixed identities (i.e. occupation and family), compels the individual to negotiate multiple and even contradictory identities in different public and personal spheres (Slater, 1997:84). Marcuse expresses his concern with this behaviour:

*“The people recognise themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment. The very mechanism which ties the individual to his society has changed, and social control is anchored in the new needs that it has produced” (Marcuse, 1964:9).*

However, when the individual relies on the constantly changing trends within consumerist culture to construct their identity, the foundation of their identities are unstable (Slater, 1997:84).

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<sup>4</sup> The development and construction of personal identity are influenced and developed by many factors. However, within the context of this study, I will mostly focus on consumerist culture’s role in this regard.

The unstable foundations on which individuals construct their identity lead to the individual negotiating different identities (Slater, 1997:86). Slater describes this occurrence as “a recipe for identity crisis on a mass scale” (1997:84). This is apparent because the contemporary account of individualism referred to in this section is bound up with the notion of consumerist self-creation (construction of the self within consumerist culture) (Slater, 1997:31, 64). In other words, the consumerist act is primarily understood within consumerist society as the self-determining act of constructing one’s own personal identity. The problem is that this concept of self-determination is mediated by ‘false needs’<sup>5</sup> and ‘enjoyment’<sup>6</sup> (*jouissance*) as prescribed by the consumerist society. Thus, it is up to the individual to construct or choose his/her own identity with the condition that it is done through the consumption of what can be labelled false needs; that is, products driven by the desire of enjoyment (Miller, 2012:102-105; Slater, 1997:64).

The irony is, however, that society still prescribes these personal relationships and the nature of these relationships take on a significant role in the construction and development of individual identity. Gergen (1991:147) argues that, in a traditional modern community with real and personal interaction, one’s identity was confirmed and supported constantly. However, this traditional setting was disrupted within the context of contemporary society, which is difficult to make sense of. In contemporary society the individual is continually thrust into new and different relationships due to factors such as globalisation and the advancement of communication technologies. The individual, therefore, receives fragmented and incoherent notions of identity from abstract sources (Gergen, 1991:147).

Furthermore, the relationships formed in contemporary society have taken on an instrumental character (Taylor, 2003:50-52). The instrumental character of relationships in contemporary society can be attributed to factors such as globalisation and the advancement of communication technologies. This allows individuals to distance themselves from others in their intimate relationships by perceiving the others as largely instruments or tools (Taylor, 2003:50-52). In

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<sup>5</sup> False needs are defined by Marcuse as needs that are imposed upon the individual by societal constructs and systems.

<sup>6</sup> Enjoyment as *jouissance*, can be described as a pleasure that is inhabiting of desire itself.

other words, the nature of relationships in the personal and public sphere have become much more impersonal and involves abstract contact, especially when compared to the nature of earlier relationships, which were much more honest, coherent and personal, face-to-face relationships (Taylor, 2003:58-59). Since the individual in contemporary society can no longer depend on personal relationships, in the personal and public sphere, to help develop and establish their identities, they start to seek alternatives. It is, therefore, believed that it is up to the individual to construct or choose their own identity separate from their intimate relationship with others (Slater, 1997:64).

Gergen uses the term ‘consciousness of construction’ to describe the individual attempt to consciously construct and reconstruct his/her identity within different public and personal spheres (1991:146). Through this conscious construction, the individual attempts to negotiate and reflect different identities (Gergen, 1991:146), but the term ‘consciousness of construction’ is misleading. This term is misleading because in contemporary society, neo-liberal values of economic prosperity are interwoven into culture. Therefore, it is easy to conceive that the individual would construct his/her identity based on what is commendable and beneficial towards the neo-liberal motives and agendas. It is therefore not the individual per se that is constructing his/her identity, but society (Taylor, 2007:480-485). The construction of the individual’s identity within consumerist culture becomes largely based on the consuming of products that are in line with the neo-liberal motives and agendas of the society (Taylor, 2007:480-485). Thus, in contemporary society the individual’s identity is largely constructed and dictated by the global economic market and is, therefore, not a conscious individual construction. Therefore, there is a distinction between individual construction and social construction.

The distinction can be made by arguing that social construction is that which limits and affects individual freedom in favour of the societal agenda (Taylor, 2007:845). Within the context of a neo-liberal society, societal systems (such as consumerist culture and the satisfaction of false

needs) are limiting the individual in favour of advancing the neo-liberal agenda<sup>7</sup>. In consumerist culture he/she depends on products to construct, establish and express his/her identity, which is actually determined by the global economic system and is in that regard a false need (Taylor, 2007:480-483). The concept of the individual constructing his/her identity based on certain products, experiences and consumption of false needs, is supported by this statement of Marcuse:

*“The result then is euphoria in unhappiness. Most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false need.” (Marcuse, 1964:5).*

Eventually, due to instrumental reasoning and neo-liberal motives and values, individuals, being insecure in their identities, adapt to a “new mode of conformity” and dependence (i.e. consumerist culture) (Taylor, 2007:474; Taylor, 2003:15). The notion that the individual’s identity is constructed in line with consumerist trends, ultimately leads to the notion that one only identifies oneself and others by means of *appearances* (Slater, 1997:30). Partly due to the outward pressures of conformity to the global economic system, the individual in contemporary consumerist society is at risk of losing individual identity and the ability to express their unique personal identity (Taylor, 2003:29). Moreover, the individual’s identity becomes threatened by consumerist culture which prescribes a certain lifestyle and creates the notion that self-identity (lifestyle) can only be linked to the fulfilled state of enjoyment by consuming in line with the concept of false needs (Giddens, 1991:81).

However, staying true to his/her individualistic nature, he/she eventually comes to the conclusion that the conformity to consumerist culture and society at large does not satisfy his/her need for recognition or attention (Taylor, 2003:35). The developing and sustaining of an individual identity demands more than the consumption of false needs, namely individual recognition and

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<sup>7</sup> The subject of the domineering nature of societal systems will be discussed more thoroughly within the next chapter.

the human desire of fulfilment in enjoyment (Žižek, 2002:96). The individual, in order to find an attention-grabbing identity within contemporary consumerist culture, therefore turns towards a more self-centred mode of development, i.e. narcissism.

### 2.1.2. Narcissism

The instrumental reasoning of individuals convinces him/her that by obtaining more material wealth and satisfying more false needs, he/she will not be conforming to the society at large, but will stand out from the crowd to be a true individual (Taylor, 2007:475-476). However, this is narcissistic, because fulfilment in the form of enjoyment is mostly focused on the individual experience. The individual's affiliations with others are constructed according to instrumental reason (Taylor, 2007:475-477; Taylor, 2003:58-59, Žižek, 2002:96). Consumerist culture thus encourages narcissism – ironically something destructive to self-identity which is already in a crisis as explained above. Furthermore, the narcissistic tendencies of individuals within contemporary consumerist culture, cause individuals to lose perspective on matters that transcend them (Taylor, 2003:15, 22). The result is that the individual is purely focused on himself/herself, overlooking and eliminating any or all demands beyond their own, directing their interests to “trivialized and self-indulgent forms”- narcissism at its worse (Taylor, 2003:58-59). In order to sustain the narcissistic fulfilment and enjoyment, it is required of the individual to become increasingly involved in jobs and social institutions that promote and reward neo-liberal values and instrumental reasoning (Taylor, 2003:76). The increasing need for narcissistic fulfilment develops into a vicious and destructive circle of thought and behaviour. In seeking to fulfil enjoyment and satisfying false needs, individuals are not only unsuccessful in constructing their identities, but rather contribute and advance consumerist culture (Giddens, 1991:172; Taylor, 2003:62-66). It is ironic that the individual's attempt to escape that which limits his/her freedom to construct his/her own ‘unique’ identity, only limits his/her freedom more.

The conscious construction of an individual's identity is limited within the context of contemporary society since the individual only conforms (especially in their outward appearance) to the oppressive and domineering forces of consumerist culture. Rather than

cultivating the identity of the individual through critical reflection, self-development and negotiating identity with the communities in which he/she finds him/herself, the narcissist depends on short term consumerist behaviour as means of enhancing his/her own perceived image. Consequently, the narcissistic individual cannot develop an identity “against the background of things that matter” (Taylor, 2003:40). Finally, the individual within contemporary society, functioning within a self-centred narcissistic mode, forms a detachment from anything that transcends the individual, only reinforcing the individual’s narcissistic tendencies (Taylor, 2003:15, 22, 40).

Thus, there is a paradox within the identity of a narcissistic individual. The individual perceives himself/herself as in opposition to external conditioning forces; yet in order to be recognised he/she conforms to the prescribed consumerist trends. Furthermore, in order to be recognised the individual must be perceived within some social context or background (Taylor, 2007:480-482; Taylor, 2003:40). However, within contemporary consumerist society, a consumerised individual never really discovers an identity separate from society, but is ascribed the consumerist identity without much leeway to resist (Marcuse, 1964:16, 32, 154, 158-159, 168).

Since the individual does not have much leeway to resist this consumerist identity, consumerist culture can, therefore, be associated with narcissism through the continuous reinforcement of instrumental reasoning that is in line with the neo-liberal motives. A narcissistic self is an example of the ideological direction of a neo-liberal society that shapes the foundation of consumerism, of which the establishment of false needs and the desire to attain fulfilment through enjoyment is an integral part.

The two problems concerning the individual in contemporary society (i.e. individualism and narcissism) mentioned above, are the result of a consumerist culture that is motivated by neo-liberal values of a global economic system. It is the nature of consumerist culture within society today that often depicts the individuals of society as a generalised mass without any unique

aspects or qualities (Giddens, 1991:197-200). The generalisation of consumerist culture within a society driven by neo-liberalist values is therefore impersonal (Slater, 1997:26-28). Both the impersonal and the generalisation of the consumer in a neo-liberalist society, urge the individual to engage in the consuming of what may be called false needs and the attainment of enjoyment. Furthermore, the generalised and impersonal nature of consumerist culture causes the subject to be perceived as an object (Giddens, 1991:198).

To summarise, instrumental reasoning became prevalent within society due to the promotion of neo-liberal values through societal systems and conventions, such as consumerist culture and the satisfaction of false needs. Instrumental reasoning drastically affected the perspectives of individuals within consumerist culture; that is the consumer is not perceived as a unique individual, but is perceived as an object in the economic or consumer system. Thus, the identity forming of the individual is subjugated to the strong influence of the generalized effects of consumerist culture (Giddens, 1991:197-200). The individual's perspective of needs later become aligned with the continuity of the economic system, which is promoted by a consumerist culture naively indulging in the satisfaction of false needs and the wish to achieve the fulfilled state of enjoyment (Taylor, 2007:474).

## **2.2. The Societal Level**

The previous section argued that instrumental reasoning is associated with individuals tending to accept and adapt within neo-liberal consumerist society. This leads to the deformational effects on an individual level, in the forms of individualism and narcissism. However, the deformational effects are not limited to the individual level, but also extend to the societal level. The deformational effects and problems associated with personal identity and personal relationships, within consumerist culture can also be identified within the larger scale of cultural/societal identity and cultural/societal relationships. Within consumerist culture socio-cultural domination by means of consumerist acts, that develop the global economy, are rationalised through instrumental reasoning. On a societal level the deformational effects become visible in and through globalisation, cultural imperialism and inequality.

### 2.2.1. Globalisation

The first concern regarding socio-cultural domination, in terms of social-cultural identity and socio-cultural relations, is globalisation. Globalisation does offer many benefits to global relations, of which increased global trade, global interaction, the global distribution of vital resources including food, water, medicine and education are only some examples (Tomlinson, 1991:110). However, globalisation and consumerist culture as systems that encourages the neo-liberal agenda entail also the extinction of a rich diversity of unique local and societal cultures and traditions. This process can be labelled cultural imperialism. Cultural imperialism is loosely defined as a societal dominating centrum that uses systems such as the global economy to enforce and promote values and structures associated with that of the societal dominating centrum (Tomlinson, 1991:102, 103). The dominating societal centrum thus has a certain extent of control over other minority or non-dominating societies (Tomlinson, 1991:102, 103).

Globalisation spreads neo-liberal values and motives including consumerism all over the world, thus making it possible for popular (dominant) culture to be transferred via products, for example food, music and fashion (Hebron & Stack, 2009:23, 88-90; Taylor, 2007:474). The individual who consumes these products, a consumption that is encouraged through the false needs of enjoyment, becomes a victim of a globalising cultural homogenisation. This occurs because an individual who consumes products from a dominating country, like the United States of America, is also consuming the product's culture and ideological motives and values (and cultural identity) and forsaking his/her own. This is a cause of concern, as it raises serious questions regarding individual identity, but also regarding the preservation of cultural identity (Hebron & Stack, 2009:23, 58, 88-90, 98; Storey, 2003:27-31, 65, 109, 112-113, 116-117). Marcuse makes the following statement regarding this matter:

*“And as these beneficial products become available to more individuals in more social classes, the indoctrination they carry ceases to be publicity; it becomes a way of life. It is a good way of life-much better than before-and as a good way of life, it militates against qualitative change” (Marcuse,1964:14).*

The presence and popularity of products from America, such as Coca Cola, MacDonalD's and Levi jeans in every country, highlights how American culture has infiltrated and possibly compromised unique local cultures. The products themselves are not the threat, it is the inherent cultural identity which these products carry and how it disrupts cultural practices and traditions (Storey, 2003:109, 110; Tomlinson, 1991:75-76, 87). Cultural identity is a dynamic process, constantly developing, and one must therefore take into consideration the possibility that by consuming products from a country like America, the product's culture (and cultural identity), in this case Western culture, is also consumed; therefore also altering or influencing the development of other cultural identities (Hebron & Stack, 2009:88-90, 98; Storey, 2003:27-31, 116-117). Another example is the global domination of the English language, in contemporary society (Hebron & Stack, 2009:90). Language is not only a medium for communication, but is also a carrier of cultural identity (Hebron & Stack, 2009:90). Therefore, the dominance of the English language also illustrates the homogenising effect of American (Western) culture on other cultural identities (Hebron & Stack, 2009:90).

### 2.2.2. Cultural Imperialism and Recognition

The second concern is that of cultural imperialism within the context of contemporary consumerist culture. If cultural imperialism is focused on encouraging the cultural/societal identities of domineering societal centrums (e.g. Western culture and societies), there is the underlying assumption that those domineering societal centrums deny the recognition of other cultural identities (Taylor, 2003:50-52). In addition, by denying the recognition of cultural/societal identities the Western culture exercises a form of oppression over other cultures, resulting in the superiority their own cultural identity (Taylor, 2003:50-52). It is clear that in order to counter the effects of cultural imperialism, equal recognition of cultural identities is of vital importance (Taylor, 2003:50-52). The equal recognition of cultural identities demands the "universal recognition of difference" and equal opportunity for cultural identities to develop on their own (Taylor, 2003:50-52). However, the equal recognition of differences does not necessarily amount to those differences to be of equal value (Taylor, 2003:50-52). Therefore, within the context of consumerist culture, the value attributed to societies and cultures are often measured according to their contribution to the development of the global economic system

(Taylor, 2003:50-52). Thus, the value of unique local cultural identities and societies are debated and determined according to instrumental reason (rationalising and valuing everything in terms of economic value).

A collective understanding of the world, in contemporary consumerist culture, is largely shaped and directed by the global economic system. Everyday affairs function, to some degree, according to the neo-liberal values that shape and direct our world (Taylor, 2003:97). The escalating prevalence of instrumental reasoning implies that social and cultural relationships between countries are formed and entered into, based on the economic benefits of that relationship (Taylor, 2003:76). Additionally, the instrumental reasoning behind the formation of relationships has the effect of duty-bound loyalty being less and less of a priority in contemporary society (Taylor, 2003:43). Moreover, the instrumental reasoning behind cultural imperialism, advocates an ‘untamed’ force of the global economic system and rationalises the destruction of and interference with unique cultural identities, all “at the drop of a balance sheet” (Taylor, 2003:95). With all things considered, it is likely that the individual, or even small cultural groups, find it increasingly difficult to participate and find their place within the global context (Taylor, 2003:117).

### 2.2.3. Inequality

The third concern is that of inequality or an unfair and inaccurate valuation of societal and cultural identities. Therefore, it is the base structure that determines the value of other socio-cultural identities, which are in the hands of societies with a strong economy. Furthermore, the increasing trend of instrumental reason within contemporary consumerist culture challenged the established social hierarchies and fostered new modes of social structures, favouring the establishment and progression of the global economic system (Taylor, 2003:57-59). Moreover, the global economic system creates economic inequality, largely benefitting already economically secure countries (Taylor, 2010:102-104). Thus, the global economic system is insensitive to local context and is dedicated to eradicating any idiosyncrasies that inhibits the growth and prosperity of that system, including other cultural identities (Taylor, 2010:57). The

economic inequality is then legitimised by arguing that a greater involvement in and a larger economic contribution within the system would provide a more stable and growing local economy (Taylor, 2010:102-104). Economic inequality is understood in terms of a desire for an abundance of wealth and power through exercising control over others and by means of survival in the global economic system (Taylor, 2003:20-21). It is, therefore, a “process of manipulation where the problem... is sold as the solution...” (Taylor, 2010:102, 132). The act of consumption and its process is used to normalise and legitimise the exploitation of the global economic system and Western cultural imperialism (Taylor, 2010:142).

Therefore, the constant consumption of products provides economic power (but also specifically cultural) and security to the Western societies / countries that produce those products and services (Hebron & Stack, 2009:11, 19-21, 122; Marcuse, 1964:5, 12). The economic security of wealthy Western countries, the global popularity of these countries’ products and constant exploitation via these countries’ mass media and advertising, fundamentally characterised by an appeal to specifically false needs and the fulfilment in enjoyment, leads to increasing cultural imperialism and the degradation of unique societal or cultural identity in other parts of the world (Tomlinson, 1991:102, 103).

In essence, the global economic system seems to lay its demands for participation on an individual and even cultural level (Taylor, 2003:97). Hebron and Stack (2009:11, 88-90) point out that this cultural imperialism assumes a battle wherein people fight against the dominating effect of Western neo-liberal values in an attempt to preserve their own cultural identities. They refer to this phenomenon as “the triumph of American popular culture”, which occurs via Western cultural imperialism and homogenization. Thus, small groups of individuals may fight against the domineering force of cultural imperialism; however the vast majority demands sacrifice for the sake of development and economic progress, making any opposition out to seem meaningless (Taylor, 2003:100). Hence, the majority are controlled by the global economic system that they cannot escape (Marcuse, 1964:12, 208-209). Therefore, the struggle to initiate

change cannot solely rely on the individual, for it is largely an institutional problem (Taylor, 2003:8).

In summary, the neo-liberal agenda as well as consumerist culture is spread and encouraged by globalisation in order to sustain and develop the globalised economy. Moreover, the satisfaction of consumerist false needs of individuals and society as a whole, are becoming crucial in the functioning of contemporary society and economic system. Furthermore, the instrumental reasoning (of individuals and society as a whole) can be associated with the deformational effects on a societal level. These deformational effects include cultural imperialism, inequality and devaluing of unique socio-cultural identities. The perspective and value of socio-cultural identities become associated with the continuity of the economic system, as promoted by a consumerist culture naively indulging in the satisfaction of false needs and the wish to achieve the fulfilled state of enjoyment.

### **2.3. The Environmental Level**

The deformational effects of consumerist culture are not limited to the individual and societal level, but also extend to the environmental level. The satisfaction of false needs, the fulfilment of enjoyment and instrumental reasoning has become prevalent in consumerist culture and has ultimately affected humankind's relation to the environment<sup>8</sup> and the way individuals and society as a whole perceive the environment. Furthermore, this can lead to environmental problems and other so-called deformational effects, a primary example being human-influenced climate change. These deformational effects on an environmental level may also be associated with consumerist culture (Hebron & Stack, 2009:102-104, 112-113), arguably because of the relentless, continuous demand and supply of products and services. When taking this into consideration, the main concern in contemporary society should be environmental problems, especially those concerning the oceans and atmosphere (Stiglitz, 2002:223). In order to clarify

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<sup>8</sup> When I refer to the term 'environment' and 'natural environment', I specifically refer to all factors such as the immediate environment (water, landscape etc.) and also all biotic life within said environment. I do realise that there is an on-going philosophical debate concerning this terminology; however, this debate does not relate directly to the focus of this study.

the expansiveness of deformational effects, I will expand upon the two pertinent aspects below: anthropocentrism and the consumption of the environment.

### 2.3.1. Anthropocentrism

Due to this unending process of supply and demand of products and services, which are in line with the concepts of false needs and enjoyment, consumerist culture threatens the survival of the natural environment (Tomlinson, 1991:112, 175-176). Contemporary consumerist culture breeds and fosters neo-liberal values, which gives more and more influence to instrumental reasoning (Taylor, 2003:58-59). As I mentioned before, instrumental reasoning leads to individualism with narcissistic tendencies; however on a broader level, instrumental reasoning leads to anthropocentrism (Taylor, 2003:58-59). Therefore, what is encountered within the environment is always valued in terms of human value and specifically economic value (Taylor, 2003:58-59). Moreover, instrumental reasoning as a way of valuing what individuals encounter within the environment supports the notion that human beings are the most significant, since they actively contribute to the sustaining and developing of the global economic system (Taylor, 2003:58-59). The instrumental mindset in neo-liberalism was brought on by (economic, technological and scientific) progress, fundamentally altering and disrupting the relationship between humanity and the natural environment (Rolston, 1988:4, 285; Taylor, 2003:5-6). Therefore, the anthropocentric mindset of individuals brought on by instrumental reason, is inherent to the individual's dealings with nature in contemporary society (Rolston, 1988:158,159; Taylor, 2003:5-6).

Since individuals within consumerist culture value what he/she encounters within the environment according to economic value, the natural environment is also valued and utilised within economic terms. In other words, the natural environment becomes utilised and exploited in order to develop and sustain the global economic system, since this is the only way individuals within consumerist culture understand and relate to the environment. Therefore, it is due to instrumental reason and anthropocentrism within contemporary consumerist culture that many individuals have become disinterested or disregard anything that transcends the neo-liberal agenda of developing and sustaining the global economic system, in this case particularly the

concern for the preservation of the natural environment (Taylor, 2003:15, 22). The natural environment becomes a mere product to be consumed and a mere object to be analysed and exploited (Rolston, 1988:4, 285).

### 2.3.2. Consuming the environment

Instrumental reason dictates a sense of control over the natural environment, satisfying humankind's ever growing, narcissistic thirst for power (Taylor, 2003:103). Therefore, the neo-liberal motives and values in contemporary society aim towards a separation of humankind from the earth's natural history (Rolston, 1988:158, 159). The separation between humankind and nature is difficult, because although individuals are able to rationalise (in line with instrumental reasoning), human beings are still ontologically entranced within nature and the natural environment (Rogers, 2012:85). This separation seems to abolish nature and its resources, and could have great consequences which ultimately lead to humankind being unstable in the ecosystem (Rolston, 1988:158). Humankind has lost its ability to perceive itself as part of a larger natural order, which can in fact claim our very existence (Taylor, 2003:89). The increasing demand of the global economic system has pushed anthropocentrism to new heights in contemporary consumerist culture (Taylor, 2003:68). Moreover, the separation from the natural environment closes up and blocks out the kind of exploration that could lead towards a palpable interaction. Palpable interactions with the environment would demand a realisation and understanding of that which transcends the neo-liberal agenda and its systems (the global economic system and consumerist culture) (Taylor, 2003:91).

With all these things considered, it is clear that these factors attribute to the quickly escalating environmental problems. Economic values in a consumerist society take precedence over the value of the natural environment. The environment is being exploited for its resources and the profit that those resources provide. The exploitation of the environment and its resources shows that humanity has taken for granted and underappreciated the value of the environment (Rolston, 1988:281-285, 287). It is difficult to argue that the natural environment has some intrinsic value and that any sense of concern or responsibility towards the environment is a moral obligation

(Light & Rolston, 2003:9). However, even though the value of the environment cannot easily be determined, it is clear that no transformation or re-establishment of the relationship between humankind and the natural environment can even succeed when dealing with instrumental reason and anthropocentrism (Callicott, 1984:300; Marcuse, 2001a:125).

In consumerist culture the natural environment is perceived as just another commodity within a globalised economic system (Rolston, 1988:4, 5). Moreover, natural resources are used to develop products to be sold and scarce resources are sold on the free market (Rolston, 1988:4). The steadily declining quality of the products and services also contributes and encourages the rapid consumption of those products and services and depletes the natural resources at an even quicker pace. Ironically, it is the natural environment which is the provider of all needs; even products associated with false needs are made from materials and resources found in the natural environment (Light & Rolston, 2003:2).

Moreover, for due to the instrumental reason of a neo-liberal society, the economic factor and the concern of profit interfere with the conservation of the natural environment (Rolston, 1988:281-284). Thus, economic values in a neo-liberal society take precedence over the value of nature, such as the aesthetic, biotic, emotional and creative value, that nature offers. The ideological direction within consumerist society that sustains and encourages consumer culture towards false needs creates an uncritical, unsustainable attitude towards the consumption of nature and its resources (Marcuse, 2001a:130). The consumerist culture which encourages the consumption of products in line with false needs and the fulfilment of enjoyment thus reinforces the production and the distribution of products, depleting natural resources (Marcuse, 2001a:130). Rolston rightly argues that economic values at the cost of the environment will not satisfy the individual as a consumer:

*“We have no reason to think that the last fraction exploited will leave us any nearer to satisfied consumer desires in a system designed ever to escalate those desires” (Rolston, 1988:285-286).*

Globalisation made it possible to get a hold of resources from every continent no matter how scarce the resources are (Hebron & Stack, 2009:19-21; Slater, 1997:25-27, 37; Wallerstein, 1990:36, 39). The international trading of goods increased the demand for those resources (Hebron & Stack, 2009:19-21; Slater, 1997:25-27, 37, 193; Wallerstein, 1990:36, 39). In light of this, Rolston argues that the consumption of natural resources should be monitored (1988:262-263), and that it is in the awakening of new values and critical thought, that priorities will change, creating a respect for the environment that is being destroyed (Rolston, 1988:288-289). Development of any kind (global economic market etc.) should keep in mind and encourage gains that do not equal losses to nature (Rolston, 1988:286). The development of technology may be ever advancing and makes the development of new products possible, but our supply of natural resources is finite. Therefore, it is important to encourage the recycling or substitution of materials and to consume the soonest renewable resources rather than resources that are scarce. An example that Rolston uses is preferring wildlife photography over hunting endangered animals<sup>9</sup> (1988:262-264, 285). Creativity and initiative should not be underestimated, because therein may lie a great number of solutions to current environmental problems (Rolston, 1988:262-264, 285). However, these are practical concerns and the more important philosophical concerns should be considered.

Rolston argues that it is not out of the ordinary for a species to consume and exploit the environment for their benefit (1988:158). However, for humanity the extent of exploitation of the environment by individuals within consumerist culture is enforced to a great extent by the societal systems and by instrumental reasoning of individuals (Taylor, 2003:77). In other words, the great extent to which the environment is being exploited is rationalised through instrumental

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<sup>9</sup> The example which Rolston provides on hunting is not necessarily a good example, because when taking into consideration that in some cases hunting can preserve the animals and the environment. However, the main concern of his argument on preserving nature in contrast to exploiting nature should be kept in mind.

reasoning and encouraged by the neo-liberal agenda in the form of societal systems. The question then becomes: Should individuals within contemporary consumerist culture concern themselves with the extent to which the environment is being exploited? With a growing separation between humankind and the natural environment it has become clear that a growing concern or sense of responsibility towards the natural environment on an individual and societal level ought to be established (Taylor, 2003:77). Furthermore, it is also argued that this sense of concern or responsibility cannot be established by way of this instrumental reasoning of anthropocentrism.

To summarise, it is often argued that conservationists and developers should devise a compromise that would benefit both parties. However, due to conflicting values the process is time and again disrupted (Rolston, 1988:286). Rolston states that one should keep in mind that the dispute of compromise does not emphasise the real issue, which may be described as humanity versus nature (1988:286). Contrary to what instrumental reason dictates, there is no quick-fix to the escalating environmental problems (Taylor, 2003:60). An adequate solution requires of us to address the heart of the issue, which is consumerist culture and the growing force of the global economic system behind it (Rolston, 1988:285-286). The conceptualisation and understanding of acting responsibly towards the environment and exercising restraint in terms of the conservation of the environment, is unfortunately only understood in anthropocentric terms and needs to be broadened (Taylor, 2003:90). Therefore, it is only when inconsistencies in our own value system appear that we realise that we cannot “have our cake and eat it too” (Rolston, 1988:287). Only when a universal understanding and common purpose forms concerning the preservation of the natural environment within society as a whole, will any attention be given to the destructive nature of consumerist culture within society (Taylor, 2003:112).

## **2.4. Conclusion**

As discussed in this chapter, globalisation acts as an important apparatus in contemporary society, enabling the spreading of neo-liberal norms and values, consumerist culture, the global

economic system and instrumental reasoning across the globe. In this chapter it becomes apparent that due to the spreading of consumerist culture and instrumental reasoning through globalisation, there are prevalent deformational effects on individual, societal and environmental level. The deformational effects are caused and encouraged by individuals within consumerist society, predominantly by reasoning, valuing and identifying things in terms of maximising profit and contributing to the global economic system. It becomes apparent that consumerist culture and the instrumental reasoning assumed by individuals within consumerist culture have affected the individual's relationship with other individuals, with other societies and with the environment. Furthermore, consumerist culture and instrumental reasoning has had deformational effects on individual identity, socio-cultural identity and the way humankind identifies the environment. Some of those deformational effects include individualism and narcissism on an individual level, cultural imperialism and inequality on a societal level and anthropocentrism and environmental problems on an environmental level. I argue that, in order to limit the development of the deformational effects of consumerist culture, a new reasoning or new perspective of needs is necessary within consumerist culture. Thus, a philosophical critique of consumerist culture is necessary where special attention is given to the notions of false needs and enjoyment – the focus of this study.

In the following chapter I will look at the theories of Herbert Marcuse for a conceptualisation of needs and a salient critique of consumerist culture. Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs as a distinction between true needs and false needs gives significant insight and critique into consumerist society and the concept of needs within consumerist culture. However, I argue that Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs as a distinction between true needs and false needs is problematic and a broadening of his concept of needs is necessary to provide a new and more coherent and comprehensive perspective of needs within consumerist culture. I will attempt to broaden Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs by introducing Žižek's appropriation of the Lacanian concept of 'enjoyment' in a later chapter.

### **3. CHAPTER 3: MARCUSE'S CONCEPT OF 'FALSE NEEDS'**

In the previous chapter, I discussed how individuals within a consumerist society adapt instrumental reasoning as a way of valuing and perceiving that which he/she encounters and how that has led to the deformational effects on personal identity, socio-cultural identity and the environment. However, it is important to uncover how instrumental reasoning became prevalent within consumerist society and how instrumental reason influenced individual's and society as a whole's perspective on needs. Both instrumental reason and the concept of false needs are associated with individuals' habit of valuing and reasoning according to external conditioning systems, such as consumerist culture and the global economic system. It is because of this type of reasoning that is prominent in contemporary society that there is a proliferation of consumerist culture and the consumption of false needs products. It is for that reason that I will be discussing the conceptualisation of needs through the theories of the philosopher Herbert Marcuse.

I will argue in this chapter that the philosopher Herbert Marcuse provides a salient understanding and critique of the issue at hand. Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs, as a distinction between true needs and false needs, takes into account the significant influence of consumerist culture on the determining of needs, which other conceptualisations of needs, such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, do not. This chapter on Marcuse will consist of the following: Firstly, a short introduction to Marcuse will be given, discussing his academic career at the University of Freiburg and the Frankfurt School, focusing on how this developed his academic trajectory, general theories and his conceptualisation of needs. Secondly, I will discuss Marcuse's concept of needs as a distinction between true needs and false needs by looking at the influences of Marx's and Freud's theories on Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs. Furthermore, there will be a discussion on the concepts of false consciousness, one-dimensional thought and behaviour, and reason, arguing that these concepts relate to Marcuse's concept of false needs and instrumental reasoning. Thirdly, there will be a short discussion on the role of technology especially focusing on the question of whether technology is the key to freedom from false needs as argued by Marcuse. Finally, there will be a discussion of why Marcuse offers a salient understanding of needs by comparing his theory with that of Maslow's.

In terms of this study's research question, Marcuse's concept of needs bring insight into consumerist culture and how individual and societal needs relate to the consumerist act (thought and behaviour). His conceptualisation of needs and critique of consumerist culture within neo-liberal society ultimately gives new insight into how individuals and society as a whole have adapted a skewed perspective of needs. I will provide critique throughout this chapter on Marcuse's theories, with the intention to broaden his concept of false needs and in doing so; gain a new perspective of needs within contemporary society. Furthermore, the attempt to broaden Marcuse's concept of needs, as a distinction between true needs and false needs, will be the focus of the next chapter. This attempt to broaden Marcuse's concept of needs will be done by introducing Žižek and his concept of enjoyment (*or jouissance*). It is within the broadening of Marcuse's concept of needs by introducing Žižek's appropriation of the Lacanian concept of enjoyment that a new perspective of needs within consumerist culture could be gained, and a more nuanced philosophical critique of consumerist culture can eventually be developed.

### **3.1. A Short Introduction to Marcuse**

Herbert Marcuse was born on July 19, 1898 in Berlin, Germany. He was a student of philosophy, economics, political studies and German literature at both the Universities of Berlin and Freiburg (Parker & Sim, 1997:235). Marcuse is known as an influential philosopher and social theorist who, according to Kellner, "[d]uring the 1960's...was more widely discussed than any other living philosopher" (Kellner, 1984:1). In order to fully comprehend the relevance of Marcuse as a philosopher and the significance of his critique on contemporary society and consumerist culture, through his conceptualisation of "false needs"<sup>10</sup>, it is important to discuss Marcuse's background and to examine the philosophers who influenced him. It is through his conceptualisation of false needs, that he provides the necessary awareness of domineering social and cultural systems, which limit the freedom of thought, of the individual and society as a whole. Therefore, in this section, I will firstly describe the early works and research of Marcuse as a student of Heidegger at the University of Freiburg. Secondly, I will be looking into Marcuse's research as a prominent member of the Frankfurt School and his influence as the

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<sup>10</sup> According to Marcuse, 'false needs' are needs that are imposed upon the individual by societal conditions and systems (Marcuse, 1964: 5).

“father of the New Left”<sup>11</sup> (Kellner, 1984:1). The next section in this chapter will focus on Marcuse’s conceptualisation of false needs.

### 3.1.1. Marcuse at the University of Freiburg

It is important to explore the phenomenological influence of Heidegger (and Husserl) on Marcuse, because it developed and shaped Marcuse’s research focus in Marxism and furthered his conceptualisation of false needs. In Marcuse’s critique of Heidegger and Husserl, and of phenomenology<sup>12</sup> in general, the Marxist framework he adapted in most of his later work, becomes apparent. Marcuse develops his conceptualisation of needs within the Marxist framework with which he explores phenomenology and especially the phenomenological theories of Heidegger. Therefore, it is important for this study to understand his approach to phenomenology, because Marcuse’s background in phenomenology had a significant influence on his later work, where he critiques contemporary society.

Marcuse’s studies at the University of Freiburg was thus rooted in phenomenology, but there were also other influences that made an impact on him during this time (Kellner, 2001:2-5, 7; MacIntyre, 1970:8). Since Marcuse studied under Heidegger from 1928 to 1932 early in his academic career, he was an enthusiast of the “German philosophical tradition” during that period (Kellner, 2001:2-5, 7; MacIntyre, 1970:8). Marcuse’s account of the history of philosophy was also associated with the German philosophical tradition, paying particular attention to Aristotle, Descartes and Kant (MacIntyre, 1970:9-10; Parker & Sim, 1997:88). As will be discussed later, Marcuse reached the pinnacle of his research with Hegel and Marx, as a member of the Frankfurt School<sup>13</sup> (MacIntyre, 1970:9-10; Parker & Sim, 1997:88).

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<sup>11</sup> The New Left is described by Kellner (1984: 1-5) as a social and political movement in support of a broad range of civil issues, where orthodox Marxists focused on the issues of alienated labour.

<sup>12</sup> Phenomenology can be defined as an exploration of that which structures reality and the experience of reality through consciousness. However, phenomenology is also associated with a historical philosophical movement and therefore also closely relates to the development of history and culture. For more on the definition of phenomenology refer to Sokolowski’s *Introduction to Phenomenology* (2000).

<sup>13</sup> See page 41 of this study for more on the Frankfurt School.

### 3.1.1.1. Marcuse's Critique of Heidegger

While working together with Heidegger in Freiburg from 1928 to 1932, Marcuse published his first articles. The existential analytic elements of Heidegger's work were appealing to Marcuse, as it was not an abstract and rationalist theory, such as that of Descartes and Husserl (Abromeit, 2010:88; MacIntyre, 1970:11-13; Marcuse, 1964:154-158). The content of the early articles of Marcuse propose an amalgamation of theories in phenomenology, existentialism and Marxism, often referred to as 'phenomenological' or 'existential' Marxism<sup>14</sup> (Kellner, 1984:4,38; Kellner, 2001:3). Abromeit argues that an amalgamation of Marxist theory and phenomenology, specifically Heidegger and Husserl's theory of phenomenology, can still be observed in Marcuse's later works, where he discusses the theory of technology and technological rationalism (Abromeit, 2010:86, 97, 98; Marcuse, 1964:154-157).

According to Kellner, these early articles of Marcuse produced "one of the first major interpretations and critiques of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*" (Kellner, 1984:4). Marcuse would remain a critic of Heidegger's philosophy and would constantly re-evaluate Heidegger's work during the 1930's (Abromeit, 2010:88-89). Although Marcuse was critical of Heidegger's work, he still believed that, Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927) could bring forth a new interpretation of Marx (Abromeit, 2010:87, 88; MacIntyre, 1970:11-13). This new interpretation of Marx, would provide an alternative to the prevailing positivist and revisionist interpretations of Marxist theory, especially when looking at Heidegger's concept of historicity (Abromeit, 2010:87, 88; MacIntyre, 1970:11-13).

Marcuse found Heidegger's theory of historicity very appealing because it gave an in-depth critique of positivism that Marcuse viewed as an attempt to fully understand the implications of 'historical consciousness' on an individual and societal level (Abromeit, 2010:88). In Marcuse's dissertation, *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity* (1932) that he wrote under

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<sup>14</sup> For more on the concept of phenomenological/ existential Marxism see *Heideggerian Marxism* (Marcuse: 2005).

Heidegger during the early 1930's, he explores an amalgamation of Heidegger and Marx; attempting to combine Heidegger's concept of 'inauthenticity'<sup>15</sup> and 'fallenness'<sup>16</sup> with Marx's concepts of 'alienation'<sup>17</sup> (Kellner, 1984:44). Heidegger's concept of inauthenticity contributed greatly to Marcuse's critique of consumerist culture also in his later works. Marcuse argues that individuals, within what would become known as consumerist culture, are inauthentic due to the domination of society over the individual (Kellner, 1984:44).

It is in Marcuse's critique of Heidegger where one first encounters Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs. Unlike Heidegger, who argues that the individual as a human being in general (Dasein)<sup>18</sup> functions within an abstract structure of 'worldhood'<sup>19</sup>. Marcuse argues that the individual, as a living creature, is entangled within a definite socio-historical world with a specific material structure (Kellner, 1984:50-51). The individual, according to Marcuse, functions within a specific material environment that is structured within a specific socio-cultural milieu with a specific "mode of production...which expresses its existential needs" (Marcuse as cited by Kellner, 1984:50). According to Marcuse, this materially constituted world is composed of the relation of production and reproduction that is aimed at satisfying the material conditions of individual and social needs (Kellner, 1984:50). Marcuse also critiques Heidegger's concept that 'care' is the primordial-ontological comportment of Dasein. Marcuse rather argues that the primary care of any individual is for their material needs that are satisfied by the production and

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<sup>15</sup> Heidegger's concept of inauthenticity can be described as "[t]he Self of everyday Dasein is the *they-self*, which we distinguish from the *authentic Self* – that is, from the Self which has been taken hold of in its own way" (Heidegger, 1962:49).

<sup>16</sup> Heidegger's concept of fallenness can be described as "the character of Being-lost in the publicness of the 'they'. Dasein has, in the first instance, fallen away from itself as an authentic potentiality for Being its Self, and has fallen into the 'world'" (Heidegger, 1962:61).

<sup>17</sup> Marx's concept of alienation can be described as a separation between the individual and the result of his/her labour due to the capitalist system (including consumerism) (Marx, 1982:182).

<sup>18</sup> Heidegger's concept of Dasein can be described "Dasein is in each case essentially its own possibility, it can, in its very Being, 'choose' itself and win itself... As modes of Being, authenticity and inauthenticity . . . are both grounded in the fact that any Dasein whatsoever is characterized by mineness" (Heidegger, 1962:96).

<sup>19</sup> Heidegger's concept of worldhood can be described as "The context of assignments or references, which, as significance, is constitutive for worldhood, can be taken formally in the sense of a system of Relations. But one must note that in such formalizations the phenomena get levelled off so much that their real phenomenal content may be lost, especially in the case of such 'simple' relationships as those which lurk in significance" (Heidegger, 1962:37).

reproduction within a specific socio-culturally constructed environment. Ultimately, Marcuse aims at “Marxising Heidegger” (Kellner, 1984:50).

Although Marcuse would later abandon his attempt to create a ‘concrete philosophy’ through ‘phenomenological’ or ‘existential’ Marxism, there are still discernable traces of Heidegger’s phenomenology in Marcuse’s later works (Kellner, 1984:38, 39, 43; Kellner, 2001:4, 6, 7; MacIntyre, 1970:7, 11, 12, 13). Abromeit, however, argues that, although elements of phenomenology, specifically of Heidegger and even Husserl, can be found in Marcuse’s work, it is always implemented within an overarching Marxist approach (Abromeit, 2010:87,94; Marcuse, 1964:154-157). Some of the first articles Marcuse produced were focused on the attempt to “ground Heidegger’s theories of authenticity, historicity and society in a Marxist historical materialist foundation” (Kellner, 1984:50-51). Marcuse would later favour Marxist materialism, instead of the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger (Kellner, 2001:4, 6, 7; MacIntyre, 1970:7, 11, 12, 13).

### 3.1.1.2. Focus Away From Phenomenology

Marcuse started to turn away from phenomenology claiming that the abstractions of things within phenomenology does not take into account the disparity of actuality versus possibility (MacIntyre, 1970:11-13; Marcuse, 1964:132-135). This claim of Marcuse is supported by arguing that the account of possibility, specifically within Husserlian phenomenology, is a mere description of a presupposed whole (MacIntyre, 1970:12; Marcuse, 1964:132-135). Thus, Marcuse claims that Husserlian phenomenology only describes the abstract essence of phenomena within empirical terms, but does not view it within a greater existence. According to Marcuse, there is no distinction between ‘essence’<sup>20</sup> and ‘existence’<sup>21</sup>, which (according to Marcuse) is a distinct characteristic of positivism, which is also apparent in phenomenology (MacIntyre, 1970:12; Marcuse, 1964:132-135). Positivist and empiricist doctrines within

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<sup>20</sup> Essence is defined as the primary element of being (ready-to hand) (Heidegger, 1962:91-125).

<sup>21</sup> Existence is defined as a quantifying property describing something (present-at-hand) (Heidegger, 1962:91-125).

phenomenology, and in general, are viewed by Marcuse as being imperfect and oversimplified (MacIntyre, 1970:10-13).

In Marcuse's view, phenomenology is limiting, as it is unable to conceptualise a theory which goes further than the "purely philosophical approach", never effectively acknowledging a non-positivistic approach to materialist elements, which forms a fundamental understanding of history and society (Abromeit, 2010:96). Furthermore, for Marcuse, Heidegger's theories and phenomenology in general, did not provide a sufficient historical and social analysis and, therefore, "succumbed all too easily to pseudo-concrete myths of authoritarian ideology" (Abromeit, 2010:88). Kellner (2001:2-3) argues that Marcuse had become critical of the rigid phenomenological experiences of social conditions and thought it better to focus on the problem of the individual's freedom and happiness along with social transformation. In other words, Marcuse's research and tutorage in phenomenology shaped his thought processes and had a recognisable influence on his later works. Furthermore, Marcuse also structured his research and writings within a larger Marxist framework, which endured throughout all of his later work. Marcuse's critique of Heidegger was always given from a Marxist standpoint, making Heidegger out to be too idealistic and ignorant of the materialistic factors. However, the same critique can be levelled against Marcuse's attempt at "Marxising Heidegger". Marcuse becomes too focused on the materialistic aspects of life and ignores the idealistic aspects thereof.

These developments in his thinking might explain why Marcuse would become a member at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt to further explore his research within a Marxist framework (Abromeit, 2010:88). Marcuse, along with the other core members of the Institute for Social Research would proceed to work in exile in New York City (Abromeit, 2010:88). While working at the Institute for Social Research, Marcuse would have the opportunity to significantly further "Horkheimer's path-breaking efforts to develop a critical theory of society" and also have the opportunity "to come to terms with the influence of Heidegger on his own thought" (Abromeit, 2010:88).

### 3.1.2. Marcuse as Member of the Frankfurt School

In 1932, Marcuse was appointed as a university professor at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, popularly known as the Frankfurt School (Kellner, 2001:2, 4, 7; MacIntyre, 1970:10, 11). This transition marked a significant change in Marcuse's research from phenomenological existentialism and Marxism, while under the guidance of Heidegger and Husserl, towards Hegelian Marxism at the Frankfurt Institute (Kellner, 2001:4; MacIntyre, 1970:10, 11). This shift of Marcuse from phenomenology to Marxist materialism provided him with the knowledge to criticise existing reality, contributing significant insight into contemporary society and what would become known as consumerist culture (MacIntyre, 1970:9, 12, 14; Slater, 1997:120-126; Storey, 2003:27-29; Tomlinson, 1991:126-131). When joining the Frankfurt School, Marcuse first explored the concepts and relations of capitalism, fascism and the degeneration of communism. However, Marcuse would investigate and predict social trends and movements in reaction to alienation and advanced industrial society (Bronner, 2011:14, 15). It was as a member of the Frankfurt School that Marcuse had the opportunity to freely engage with his research on Marxism and to more fully develop his conceptualisation of needs. Therefore, Marcuse had the freedom to fully explore and develop his conceptualisation of needs, and in particular false needs, as his research interests was in line with the research focus of the Frankfurt School and its other members.

The Frankfurt Institute, while under the leadership of Max Horkheimer, marked the prominent re-establishment of the objectives of philosophy in social theory (Kellner, 2001:6). Marcuse became a prominent member of the Frankfurt School (Parker & Sim, 1997:235) - along with other Critical Theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer (Hebron & Stack, 2009:126-128). It was as a member of the Frankfurt School, that he became known as an influential philosopher and social theorist, or as stated by MacIntyre, "Marcuse became a persistent critic of modern thought and its relation to modern society" (MacIntyre, 1970:7). This had very specific implications for our understanding of needs.

### 3.1.2.1. The Development of Critical Theory

The Frankfurt Institute and its members developed and adapted a particular methodology, referred to as Critical Theory. This methodology was developed because the members of the Frankfurt Institution stressed the importance of social theory in philosophy, mainly dedicating their attention and research to “theoretical construction and social critique”, specifically focussing on “social psychology and mass culture” (Kellner, 2001:6). In order to avoid economic reductionism, the members of the Frankfurt School aimed to give an apt description of a complex negotiation between social, economic, political, cultural and philosophical elements, which form the social totality (Kellner, 1984:119). Kellner stated that, the Frankfurt Institute would later term their specific approach as a “critical theory of society” (Kellner, 2001:9). The critical theorists of the Frankfurt School argue that in their research they aspire to analyse and explore the individual as a social being and his/her existence within society (Bronner, 2011:11, 16, 24, 114, 116; Kellner, 1984:119). Critical theorists aspire to form an understanding of the individual, as an individual within society, as a part of a social totality and not as an isolated phenomenon (Bronner, 2011:11, 16, 24, 114, 116; Kellner, 1984:119).

For Marcuse, however, critical theory emphasises the concepts of happiness, freedom and the concern for individuals and their potentialities, which he argues the majority of philosophers do not emphasize enough (Kellner, 1984:122). In Marcuse’s view, critical theory should aim to bring about and further the highest potentialities of individuals (Kellner, 1984:122). Furthermore, critical theory should criticise a society, based on whether or not it allows or represses those potentialities (Kellner, 1984:122). Hence, Marcuse’s vision for critical theory is that it should direct its focus towards building a ‘rational’<sup>22</sup> society where individuals are free from suppression (Kellner, 1984:122).

### 3.1.2.2. Marcuse as the ‘Father of the New Left’

According to Bronner, it was Marcuse’s signature work *One Dimensional Man* (1964) that introduced young American intellectuals to the Frankfurt Institute (2011:14, 15). *One*

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<sup>22</sup> For more on the subject please see *Reason and Revolution* (Marcuse, 1955a).

*Dimensional Man* sparked many debates, as it provoked many orthodox Marxists who were not in agreement with Marcuse's critique of Marxist theory, as well as others who did not appreciate his radical critique of contemporary capitalist society (Kellner, 1984:242, 276-281). *One Dimensional Man* was, however, met and received with open arms by the 'New Left' and all others who were dissatisfied with both the contemporary capitalist society, and the Marxist orthodox theories (Kellner, 1984:242, 276-281). It was during the post-war climate of the 1960's that critical theory became increasingly popular among radical intellectuals, who were involved in the social uprisings during that period in America and over much of the world (Taylor, 2007:476-477; Bronner, 2011:5-6).

Marcuse spoke openly in many lectures, conferences and writings of his critique of contemporary society and his demands for radical social change (Kellner, 1984:1-5, 197, 276-281). The 'New Left' was a social movement during the 1960's, proclaiming the ideals of radical social transformation and human liberation with which Marcuse could identify (Taylor, 2007:476-477; Kellner, 1984:1-5, 276-281). To the public eye Marcuse was a spokesman for the 'New Left', and is referred to by Bronner (2011:84) as an "intellectual superstar" of the 1960's and 1970's (Bronner, 2011:84). Consequently, Marcuse also became the voice for the individuals who dealt with the consequences of a society with its existing mode of production, consumption and socio-political control (Kellner, 1984:1-5). However, Marcuse's theories was often misconstrued (and most likely misunderstood) by many to fit their own socio-political agendas (Kellner, 1984:1-5). Marcuse utilised Marxist theory as a method of critique in order to instigate social change and did not view it as "a dogma of absolute knowledge" (Kellner, 1984:9). From this we can discern that Marcuse has always tried to appropriate Marxism "creatively" into his critique of historical elements and the problems within contemporary society (Kellner, 1984:9). According to Kellner (1984:4) "In fact, the polemics, mystifications and simplifications of Marcuse's works in its world-wide reception have frequently obscured his important contributions to contemporary thought".

In summary, the Frankfurt Institute and its members shared Marcuse's research focus and interests, enabling Marcuse to freely pursue such interests as the conceptualisation of needs and critique of a capitalist society. Marcuse's critique of a contemporary society through concepts like 'false needs', helped spark new social and political awareness and action, which can be described as the main concern in most of Marcuse's published work at the Frankfurt Institute.

### **3.2. Marcuse's conceptualisation of 'false needs'**

In his book, *One Dimensional Man*, Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs and false needs in particular, is fundamental to his understanding and critique of advanced industrial society (Kellner, 1984:119; Marcuse, 1964:3-5, 241, 245). In my reading of Marcuse, his central arguments are based on the concept that in contemporary society, which is dominated and guided by one-dimensional thought and behaviour, the true needs of individuals are not satisfied (Marcuse, 1964:3-5, 241, 245). False needs are needs that are satisfied in an advanced industrial society which ultimately results in the supersession of the true need for liberation without repression from external dominating centres (Marcuse, 1964:3-5, 241, 245). Marcuse's notion of a distinction between true needs and false needs, the "one-dimensional thought"<sup>23</sup> assumed by individuals and with which they operate within a neo-liberal society, can be applied within the context of consumerist culture. From Harvey's definition of neo-liberalism (2005:2)<sup>24</sup>, the state is obligated to advance the global economic system. I argue that Marcuse's concept of 'false needs' as imposed by social constructs, such as the state within neo-liberal society, to advance the development of the global economic system contributed to the prevalence of consumerist culture.

Therefore, I argue that although Marcuse wrote within the context of the 1960's (what Marcuse refers to as advanced industrial society), it is important to note that the problems associated with consumerist culture i.e. the oppressive domineering nature, is still prevalent within contemporary society.

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<sup>23</sup> The notion of 'one-dimensional thought and behaviour' will be discussed fully later in this chapter of the study.

<sup>24</sup> Refer to the definition of neo-liberalism provided earlier in the study on page 8 and 9.

### 3.2.1. Marcuse's Understanding of True Needs

Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs makes a distinction between true needs and false needs. Firstly, Marcuse describes true needs as experienced by one's senses (Marcuse, 1964:4, 5, 241, 245). Thus, true needs would refer to nourishment, clothing and lodging, which Marcuse refers to as vital needs for survival (Marcuse, 1964:4, 5). Marcuse argues that true needs also include more abstract concepts of needs, such as happiness and freedom (Marcuse, 1964:4, 5). Marcuse claims that it is only these true needs that can have an absolute claim to satisfaction (Marcuse, 1964:4, 5). In Marcuse's view, true needs are fundamental and should be considered as the primary building blocks for the realisation of all other needs (Marcuse, 1964:4, 5). Therefore, if Marcuse argues that true needs are a prerequisite of all other needs, this implies that true needs are also fundamental to the establishment of false needs (imposed needs) (Marcuse, 1964:5). However, in the process of developing and satisfying true needs, society has somehow skewed individuals' concept of true needs (Marcuse, 1964:5). The true needs of individuals and society as a whole become skewed because society starts to impose other needs by implementing conditioning systems, such as societal structures, social and cultural conventions and a particular historical context (Marcuse, 1964:5). Marcuse thus conceptualised a distinction between true and false needs: true needs being basic needs and false needs being determined by external social dominating centres (Marcuse, 1964:4, 5, 241, 245). This begs the question whether or not Marcuse is making himself guilty of reductionism (materialism), just as he accused the phenomenologists of being reductionist?

### 3.2.2. Marcuse's Understanding of False Needs

In his definition of false needs, Marcuse brings into question not only the establishment of false needs but also the satisfaction of those needs (Marcuse, 1964:5, 6). Marcuse argues that false needs (needs that are conditioned by state or society with a specific goal) are often determined by external powers that the individual has no control over (Marcuse, 1964:5). False needs are "artificial and heteronomous" and, therefore, have a definite, but far reaching definition (Kellner, 1984:244). Marcuse describes false needs in terms of the perfectly functioning dominating capital force in the form of consumerist culture, which has altered an individual's perception of

needs, values and behaviour in a way that binds him/her to the social system that creates those needs (false needs) (Marcuse, 1964:9, 10-12). New forms of social domination and conformation, such as advertising and mass culture, are created to produce new needs, i.e. false needs, which integrate the individual into the consumerist society (Marcuse, 1964:9, 10-12).

According to Marcuse, false needs are “superimposed upon the individual by particular interests in his repression; the needs that perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery and injustice” (Marcuse, 1964:5). False needs are repressive in nature and no matter how much an individual identifies or satisfies these needs, they are still a product of a domineering society that demands suppression of the individual by the domination of capital (Marcuse, 1964:5). The definition that Marcuse developed for false needs is politically driven. Since his definition of false needs is based on the notion that socio-political agendas within society establish needs which limit the individual and also have an effect on the way which individuals perceive needs within society. In Marcuse’s view, false needs, although they might provide satisfaction and pleasure in the short term, are the deprivation of the individual’s true need for liberation and self-determination (Marcuse, 1964:5).

Here the tension in Marcuse’s theory becomes clear, the individual still functions within a social and historical context and should conform to live within said context, but then Marcuse emphasises that the individual should be self-determining. In other words, if Marcuse conceptualises false needs, which are prevalent in consumerist culture, as that which is imposed on the individual and limits his/her freedom, then by contrast, the ultimate true needs seem to be freedom and happiness. Marcuse argues that imposed needs are false, because they promise and create an expectation of fulfilment (Marcuse, 1964:5-6). Marcuse uses the example of advertising which promises and creates false expectations of ‘a good life’ and needs which are based or rooted in such products are false needs (Marcuse, 1964:5-6). The concepts of true needs and specifically false needs can be appropriated within the context of contemporary society now that a distinction between true and false needs becomes clearer. There is an internal tension between political factors and psychological factors that Marcuse teases out in his definition of false needs. The political factor in Marcuse’s definition of false needs is visible in the imposed

nature of false needs by external socio-political forces which the individual cannot escape from. Marcuse draws this notion of imposed and inescapable domination of the individual within socio-political systems from Marx. The individual's complacent conformity, allowing the suppression or replacement of true needs (happiness and freedom) with false needs (limiting happiness and freedom) points to the psychological factor in Marcuse's definition of false needs. Marcuse draws from the theories of Freud to highlight the psychological factors in his definition of false needs. This tension that Marcuse teases out between the political and psychological factors in his definition of false needs adds another layer of complexity to his conceptualisation of needs.

However, it should also be stated that Marcuse never gives a distinct and coherent definition of true needs, but mostly describes true needs as a contrast to false needs. Therefore, to fully understand Marcuse's conceptualisation of true needs and by extent false needs as well, a short discussion on his development of the concepts as influenced by Marx and Freud is necessary.

#### 3.2.1.1. Marx

Marcuse first encountered Marx in his studies on Hegel while he was still doing his post-doctoral work with Heidegger (Kellner, 1984:69). Hegelian philosophy gave Marcuse the leeway and opportunity to appropriate and deepen his understanding of Marxism (Kellner, 1984:69). Marcuse had a critical approach to Hegel's conceptualisation of historical development (*Zeitgeist*), yet did not object to the absolutisation of tendencies within historical development, thus making it possible for philosophical thought to transcend social and historical limitations (MacIntyre, 1970:33; Marcuse, 1955a:38, 184-185). Even though Hegel introduced the concept of human needs to Marcuse, the concept of human needs is of more importance to Marcuse than it is to Hegel (MacIntyre, 1970:35-37). In other words, Marcuse preferred Marx's materialism to Hegel's idealism. Marcuse went on to introduce Marxist theory in his later works - convinced that Marxism could overcome the limitations of philosophy and alter social reality (MacIntyre, 1970:33-35; Marcuse, 1955a:251). According to Marcuse's interpretation, Hegel's dialectic of history reached its apex in Marxist theory (MacIntyre, 1970:33; Marcuse, 1955a:251).

Marcuse favours Marxist materialism, because he argues that in terms of social revolution, it envisions both the possibility of what could be and the actuality of what is (MacIntyre, 1970:9-13). According to Marcuse, Marxist materialism re-establishes essence to a central place (MacIntyre, 1970:13). In other words, according to Marcuse matter was the essence. Marxist materialism reveals the essential structures by historical development, yet those structures are not limited to a certain time or place (MacIntyre, 1970:13). Marcuse regarded the foremost function of philosophy not in the empirical sense, but rather as an elucidation of what is or could be present (MacIntyre, 1970:10, 12, 13). Philosophical thought, according to Marcuse, thus not only enables one to become aware of structures of thought within a particular place and time, but also provides us with the ability to overcome the limitations of those structures (MacIntyre, 1970:10-11).

However, Marcuse establishes his own appropriation of Marxist materialism and connects it to social theory, which in Marcuse's view should primarily be concerned with human happiness (Kellner, 1984:119). Therefore, in Marcuse's view 'materialism' specifically refers to social systems and affairs of human needs and happiness and not as an ontological reality (Kellner, 1984:119). Marcuse would concern himself with the concept of human needs and happiness being attainable within society, rather than focusing on an ontological inquiry of reality. Marcuse's interpretation of Marx left him convinced that in order to obtain happiness one must be free to realise one's possibilities, which entails the possibility not only to satisfy one's own needs, but also have the ability to determine what one's needs are or should be (MacIntyre, 1970:9,10,33,34,35; Marcuse, 1964:241, 247; Marx, 1982:125). MacIntyre (1970:34, 35) argues that Marx's concept of freedom does not go hand in hand with happiness; in fact it is the exact opposite.

What these opposites are all about becomes clearer when MacIntyre (1970:33-35) identifies two misunderstandings Marcuse has about Marxist materialism specifically regarding freedom and happiness. Firstly, according to Marx in order to obtain freedom one must accept that the path to

freedom entails hardship and unhappiness (MacIntyre, 1970:33-35). Secondly, some may experience a greater sense of happiness when certain possibilities are not open to them, since some of those possibilities cannot be accomplished resulting in disappointment and unhappiness (MacIntyre, 1970:33-35). Kellner argues that Marcuse provides his own unique account and interpretation of Marxist materialism linking materialism and social theory with the concern of human happiness and the purpose of obtaining happiness through material conditions of existence (2001:11, 12). Furthermore, according to Marcuse, without the freedom to satisfy one's true and self-determined needs, one could never truly be happy (Kellner, 2001:11-13; Marcuse, 1964:12, 23). Should freedom be unattainable within the material conditions of the current system, a new system with a greater chance of attaining happiness should be adopted (Kellner, 2001:11-13; Marcuse, 1964:4, 7, 10, 241, 247; Marx, 1982:125-127).

Marx's influence on Marcuse is easily discernable when comparing Marx's and Marcuse's concept of human needs. Both Marcuse and Marx are concerned with the optimal development of the individual in society towards universalisable needs. Marx's understanding of the concept of human needs can be described as the universal need of humanity, which he identifies as a concrete need for human existence (Marcuse, 2001a:125-134; Marx, 1982:125-127). Marx's concept of human needs should be approached in accordance with dialectic materialism (Marcuse, 2001a:134-135). It should be recognized that the root of freedom lies within an individual's sensuous needs (Marcuse, 2001a:134-138).

Firstly, Marx identifies revolution brought on by the "emancipation of the senses" (Marcuse, 2001a:134-135). In order for there to be an advance in individual or social existence there must first be a shared need (universal need) between individuals for social change (Marcuse, 2001a:134-136; Marx, 1982:151). However, this shared need (universal need) for change does not always go hand in hand with unsatisfying social conditions such as poverty (Marcuse, 2001a:134-137). Such unsatisfying social conditions could just as easily suppress the collective need for change (Marcuse, 2001a:134-136). Individuals within these unsatisfying social conditions are more likely to struggle for improvements within the current uncompromising

social system (Marcuse, 2001a:134-138). Marx's concept of "emancipation of the senses" and their shared concept of materialism seems to echo that of Marcuse's concept of one-dimensionality and false consciousness. The underlying factor seems to be the individual's reluctance towards initiating social change. This reluctance could either be, as Marcuse describes it, a general lack of awareness (one-dimensionality and false consciousness) or the repression of the individual in social systems or conditions (1964:5-7, 241, 245).

Secondly, Marx identifies the need for revolution (Marcuse, 2001a:134-138). The sensuous experiences of unsatisfactory social conditions inspire individuals to strive for a world that does not possess these unsatisfying social conditions (Marcuse, 2001a:134-138). Marx argues that the 'true', 'real' or 'authentic' human need occurs through the individual's relation to the object and the realisation with the senses (Marcuse, 2001a:134-138). The suppression of the 'true' need to express and relate to objects with the senses will ultimately result in political revolution, hoping to find a society where one can freely express and experience true needs. The only way to obtain universal needs is through the relation to one another and the senses (which are oppressed and limited within society). Furthermore, the 'authentic' human need is in direct contrast to the needs developed through alienated labour in capitalist society (Marcuse, 2001a:134-138). In Marcuse's appropriation of the early Marx, he emphasises the importance of the gratification of needs in relation to the sensual and the repressive nature of contemporary society, arguing that a "new sensibility and consciousness" is essential for a society where happiness and freedom is attainable for the individual and society as a whole (Kellner, 1984:85). Marcuse would later incorporate Freud's theories and apply them within a Marxist framework to further argue and develop his conceptualisation of needs and also the tension evident in his definition of false needs.

#### 3.2.2.2. Freud

In Marcuse's book, *Eros and Civilisation* (1955), he critiques Freud's premise that a non-repressive society is not possible and in this encounter with Freud, Marcuse reconceptualises and appropriates Freud's theories to cultivate his own anthropology and critical theory (Kellner,

1984:157-158). In Marcuse's appropriation of Freud's theories, he gives special attention to how Freud's psychoanalysis reflects an instinctual drive towards the attainment of freedom and happiness which enables the individual to fulfil all of his/her true needs (Marcuse, 1955b:18). Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs, as influenced by Freud, and especially the extracts from Freud's theory on and the relation to the 'pleasure principle' and the 'reality principle' (Marcuse, 1955b:13-15).

According to Marcuse, Freud's pleasure principle derives from human instincts that are aimed at satisfying needs from which the individual gains pleasure (Marcuse, 1955b:13). The problem that Marcuse identifies is that the pleasure principle, as it is aimed at gaining pleasure by satisfying what the individual experiences as a need (Marcuse, 1955b:13). The individual encounters a confrontation between gaining pleasure in satisfying his/her needs and the environment denying or limiting the satisfaction of those needs (Marcuse, 1955b:13). This confrontation between the pleasure principle and the environment often results in the individual coming to the realisation that certain pleasures cannot be gained or certain needs cannot be satisfied fully without the experience of pain (Marcuse, 1955b:13). An individual comes to realise that certain pleasures or satisfaction of needs is made impossible by the environment (Marcuse, 1955b:13). It is in this confrontation that the reality principle comes into play.

In Marcuse's view, the reality principle is an external dominating force of society which results in the individual's pleasure in satisfying his/her needs being limited or denied (Marcuse, 1955b:14-15). Under the guidance of the reality principle, the individual learns to adapt and conform to the environment (Marcuse, 1955b:14). Thus, the individual learns to adapt to a "rationality" that is imposed by an external force (Marcuse, 1955b:14). In the context of consumerist society, the rationality to which Marcuse refers, is instrumental reason, since instrumental reason is the reason with which an individual values and rationalises everything, including the satisfaction of needs (according to neo-liberal values of gaining maximum profit and material wealth). Marcuse would then understand instrumental reason as that which motivates one-dimensional thought and behaviour in consumerist society and one-dimensional

thought and behaviour results in individuals consuming false needs products. According to Marcuse, the process of domination through instrumental reason, that limits or denies the satisfaction of an individual's needs within the reality principle, is an act of domination of the society over the individual (Marcuse, 1955b:14-15). This domination alters and shapes the individual's thoughts and behaviour, which he defines as one-dimensional thought and behaviour, because the individual conceptualises and rationalises the satisfaction of his/her needs according to instrumental reason. According to Marcuse, the altering and shaping of an individual's thoughts and behaviour implies that he/she is no longer satisfying their needs according to his/her instincts but according to external forces trans-substantiating his/her needs (Marcuse, 1955b:14-15). In *One Dimensional Man*, Marcuse terms this thought and behaviour as one-dimensional thought and behaviour. Furthermore, it is clear that Marcuse's conceptualisation of false needs, as needs that are imposed by society and limit or deny the satisfaction of an individual's true needs, is connected to Freud's theory of the reality principle.

Marcuse appropriates Freud's theory of the pleasure principle and the reality principle, not only in terms of individual psychology, but as mass psychology of society, arguing that Freud's psychology is primordially historical and political in nature (Marcuse, 1955b:16). In Marcuse's view, Freud's anthropology suggests that it is within human nature to strive towards happiness and liberation (Kellner, 1984:161; Marcuse, 1955b:26, 40). Marcuse argues that Freud's analysis suggest that repression and unhappiness can only ultimately lead to rebellious acts (political and revolutionary) against the conditions of repression (Kellner, 1984:161; Marcuse, 1955b:26, 40).

In summary, after looking into Marx's and Freud's influence on Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs, the following conclusions can be made. Marcuse's main concern is always with individual happiness and freedom. Marcuse's conceptualisation and definition of true needs goes beyond that of biological needs. To Marcuse, true needs are intricately bound up with the abstract notions of an individual's self-determining freedom and happiness. Therefore, the ultimate true need, which Marcuse even goes so far as to call a human instinct, is that of individual freedom and happiness. Marcuse emphasises his concern with individual freedom and happiness by

teasing out the tension between political factors and psychological factors in his definition of false needs. Initially, it seems that Marcuse solely draws from Marx to emphasise the suppression of the individual's 'true' needs (psychological factor) through socio-political agendas within society (political factor) and the collective need of liberation from such conditions. Although Marcuse never definitively defines or conceptualises what his understanding of true self-determining freedom and happiness is, he does offer a way to determine this by opposing it to false (oppressive and imposed) needs. Therefore, false needs, which Marcuse always opposes to the true need of happiness and freedom, are that which limits or denies the pleasure of satisfying the individual's true self-determined needs, a notion that draws from Freud's theory of the pleasure principle and the reality principle. The pleasure principle is closely related to the psychological factors in his definition of false needs, while the reality principle can be associated with the political factors in his definition of false needs. Moreover, Marcuse criticises and conceptualises these false needs in terms of social systems, specifically consumerist culture within neo-liberal society. Since it is consumerist culture that not only encourages the satisfaction and creation of false needs, which denies and limit the satisfaction of true needs, but it is also the consumerist act which limit the reasoning of the individual. Furthermore, it is such reasoning that shapes and develops one-dimensional thought and behaviour within the individual and society as a whole.

### 3.2.3. False Needs and Consumerist Culture within a Neo-liberal Society

In Marcuse's conceptualisation of false needs, he argues that false needs are imposed by domineering societal systems. Within the context of contemporary neo-liberal society those domineering societal systems are identified as the global economic system and consumerist culture. Therefore, neo-liberal society promotes the creation and consuming of false needs, which requires of the individual to work towards a self-destructive state of one-dimensionality (Marcuse, 1964:241-245), which will be fully discussed later in the chapter. In other words, the individual's needs are created through social convention and political strategies of a neo-liberal society. There is an accumulation in the creation of false needs and the consumption of false needs products and services. In the end, the global economic system and consumerist culture

create a society of individuals that are oppressed, unable to determine their own needs due to their inability to resist domineering societal systems. This mentality can be associated with the oppression of false needs and consumerist culture within contemporary society.

In order for individuals to be able to oppose conditioning systems such as societal structures and social and cultural convention these individuals have to be liberated from such needs (false or imposed needs) and their destructive power (Marcuse, 1964:5). Marcuse's repeated concern with social convention and the repression of the individual by the implantation of false needs through alienated labour within society shows elements of his Marxist philosophical framework (Stevenson & Haberman, 1998:139-141).

However, Marcuse also argues that, "the question of what are true and false needs must be answered by the individuals themselves, but only in the last analysis; that is, if and when they are free to give their own answer" (Marcuse, 1964:6). One might argue that this completely nullifies the point of distinction that Marcuse was attempting to make between the concept of true needs and false needs. If everyone could decide for themselves what their true needs and false needs are, then even imposed needs that limit the individual's freedom and happiness, could be conceptualised as a true need for that particular individual. However, I argue that Marcuse makes this drastic distinction between true needs and false needs, to the point where this distinction almost seems like a dichotomy, in an attempt to point to a larger context and a larger problem. Marcuse points to the larger context of an inescapable global economic system and the greater problem of a lack of self-determination within contemporary consumerist culture, which is dominated and guided by one-dimensional thought and behaviour. Marcuse gradually and skilfully incorporates the critique of a consumerist culture within contemporary society, by focusing and arguing that such a dichotomy exists in his conceptualisation of a distinction between true needs and false needs.

Marcuse argues that economic freedom for the individual is promised within a neo-liberal society (1964:4). In these societies economic freedom should ultimately link to an individual's ability to work towards a self-determining freedom, a freedom from the economy which limits

individual freedom and happiness (Taylor, 2007:478-479; Marcuse, 1964:4). Marcuse states that economic freedom should mean freedom of the individual “from being controlled by economic forces and relationships; freedom from the daily struggle for existence” (Marcuse, 1964:4). Having to choose between a wide variety of products and services does not give the individual freedom; instead, it only corroborates the extent of control of the conditioning systems that are in place within contemporary society (Marcuse, 1964:8).

Neo-liberal society promises affluence to individuals who contribute productively towards society. However, individuals consuming the same products and services do not indicate the disappearance of social classes, but rather indicates the shared satisfaction of imposed needs (false needs) that sustain the oppressive social structures in society (Marcuse, 1964:8). The individual is always busy consuming goods and services and satisfying imposed needs, making it seemingly impossible for the individual to be liberated or determine an existence of his/her own (Marcuse, 1964:243). In Marcuse’s view, a consumerist act (one-dimensional thought and behaviour) is not an act of self-determination, since choice is an illusion of choice within a preconditioned system of pseudo-freedom, limiting an individual’s choice between satisfying one false need or another (Kellner, 1984:248; Marcuse, 1964:4). If, according to Marcuse, a consumerist act (one-dimensional thought and behaviour) is not a self-determining act, then by extent the individualism encountered within contemporary society in consumerist culture is pseudo-individualism (Kellner, 1984:248; Marcuse, 1964:4). Therefore, to the minds of individuals within contemporary neo-liberal society the “truth” or “falsehood” of a need is determined by the global economic system and consumerist culture.

#### 3.2.4. The ‘Truth’ and ‘Falsehood’ of Needs as Determined by Societal Conditions and Systems

Although Marcuse argues that human needs are historical needs (the result of historical and social circumstances which lead to their conditioning), there can still be distinguished between the ‘truth’ and ‘falsehood’ of a need (Marcuse, 1964:6, 7). Within the historical context, the

‘truth’ or ‘falsehood’ of a need can be easily determined by referring to which degree social structures and systems are aimed at the optimal development (self-determined freedom and happiness) of the individuals within society (Marcuse, 1964:6, 7). Marcuse argues that in order to determine a distinction between human needs, the establishment of needs and the satisfaction of those needs require standards (Marcuse 1964:5-6). These standards within a particular historical context should involve the optimal development of the individual beyond the satisfaction of true needs and progresses towards the remedy of greater needs such as poverty and social injustices (Marcuse, 1964:6-7). It is when these standards can be determined that they can become universal standards (Marcuse, 1964:6-7). The ‘truth’ or ‘falsehood’ of needs within a particular historical and social context are therefore determined by universal standards which transcend the vital needs of the individual and propels them towards the awareness of greater shared human needs (Marcuse, 1964:6-7).

The distinction between true and false needs within the context of contemporary society has noticeably changed when compared to the ‘truth’ or the ‘falsehood’ of needs within previous historical contexts (Marcuse, 1964:4-7). This reflects another tension in Marcuse’s theory of the historical and universal clarity of true needs. Marcuse argues that individuals within contemporary society are more than suppressed due to the extreme dominating nature of external conditioning systems within contemporary society. The conditioning systems within society, which impose needs, in order to sustain the domination of these conditioning systems over individuals in society, obscures the optimal development of the individual (Marcuse, 1964:6,7). However, all needs are historically developed or imposed, whether those needs are biological, evolutionary, social, cultural, societal or historical in nature. This brings into question whether it is even possible for individuals to be liberated from false needs? In my understanding of Marcuse, it would seem that in order for an individual to be ultimately liberated from false needs that individual would have to escape their social system, their culture, their historical context and ultimately their material existence. Individuals would have to escape their historical context, but Marcuse does not suggest that, pointing to another tension in Marcuse’s theory. The escape from material existence is impossible, and a more limited liberation from false needs is a necessary concern.

It is important in this process to keep in mind that in contemporary society, where the needs of individuals become preconditioned by external forces or systems, the separation between the personal and collective factors become unclear; therefore the needs of the individual as established by the needs of society (Marcuse, 1964:3-9). A distinction between the 'truth' and 'falsehood' of a need is based on the individuals self-determined needs and external needs determined by conditioning systems (Marcuse, 1964:3-9). Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs (as a distinction between true needs and false needs) is focused on the concept of initiating societal change in order to at least gain some liberation from false needs. Conceivably, self-determined freedom and happiness is a condition for the satisfaction of true needs, which in Marcuse's view, is limited within consumerist culture. This insight into Marcuse provides a better understanding of Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs and his understanding of consumerist culture. However, in doing so, Marcuse did not develop his understanding and conceptualisation of needs (as a distinction between true needs and false needs) beyond his agenda of critiquing the neo-liberal values of contemporary society. For example, other societies, like Marxist societies, inevitably have equal concern for creating false needs.

### 3.2.5. A critique of Marcuse's Distinction between True Needs and False Needs

An important question is whether Marcuse's distinction between true needs and false needs can be that definite. In resonance with this critique, MacIntyre argues that Marcuse does not have the authority to say what true needs and false needs are and that the inescapable elitist consequence of Marcuse is that he assumes he has escaped the indoctrination which affects others (MacIntyre, 1970:72). In this regard, the distinction between true needs and false needs remains difficult. True needs and false needs (imposed needs) are experienced by a specific individual and by individuals in society as a whole. The individual experience, or shared experience of a need by many individuals, does not constitute whether a need is 'true' or 'false'. Needs are experienced, either through senses, relations with objects, in relation with other individuals, or within a social and historical context. Therefore, the question becomes how to differentiate between a shared true societal need and needs that are imposed by a societal structure or system? To rephrase, how

can there be distinguished between a collective true need of individuals within society and a collective false need, which only further the neo-liberal agenda within the global economic system and consumerist culture?

With all these things considered, I argue that a conceptualisation or understanding of needs should take into account that needs form an essential part of human experience, and that it can be shared within a social and historical context. Furthermore, should someone argue in favour of a distinction between true needs and false needs, such a distinction should take into consideration the need of the individual to participate in society, without it automatically being labelled as a false need. Needs are rather intricate human characteristics and it is in a constant state of development due to our experience of those needs within the social and historical context. According to Marcuse, true needs and false needs are differentiated by whether or not needs are imposed by external conditioning systems, but I argue that it is difficult to distinguish between shared true needs of individuals within a specific socio-cultural, socio-economic and historical context. However, I do agree with Marcuse that conditioning systems such as cultural convention and/or societal structures play a vital role in the developing and redefining of existing needs.

To conclude, individuals within contemporary society have redefined their needs (Marcuse, 1964:18, 227, 233, 245-255). More accurately, individuals who function within a consumerist culture redefine existing needs through experience (such as thirst) and those existing needs become the need for popular products (for example Coca Cola). Moreover, existing needs (such as thirst) also have an historical context. For example, when thirst is appropriated within a context where the satisfaction of such a need is limited in circumstances of war etc. The existing need 'thirst', which is experienced by a particular individual, in a contemporary context of consumerist culture is redefined and becomes a 'thirst for Coca Cola'. The needs of the individual within contemporary society have simply adapted to contemporary structures of society and individuals in contemporary society have redefined existing needs within the new context of consumerist culture. The question that should be kept in mind therefore is not whether a need is 'true' or 'false', but whether the need contributes to the sustainability of a neo-liberal

structured society. For critics like Marcuse, it seems as though the question of individual freedom and happiness has been forsaken by the consumer. Needs within contemporary society are measured by the value it contributes to the neo-liberal society, which is described throughout this chapter as problematic.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, Marcuse's distinction between true needs and false needs is conceptualised as a critique against societal structures within consumerist culture that limits or denies the satisfaction of true needs, such as individual and collective freedom and happiness. This specific articulation of Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs, points to another critique that questions the extent and the scope of freedom and happiness and how individual freedom and happiness relate to a collective concept of freedom and happiness. Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs as a distinction between true needs and false needs, creates certain tensions in his conceptualisation, as mentioned in this chapter, that are not easily escapable.

### **3.3. False Consciousness, One-Dimensional Thought and Behaviour, and Reason**

This section of the chapter will discuss how Marcuse's notions of false consciousness, one-dimensional thought and behaviour and reason relates to Marcuse's conceptualisation of false needs and will be discussed separately.

#### **3.3.1. False Consciousness**

Consumerist culture has become a daily event in an individual's functioning within contemporary society. As a result of consuming which has become a cultural convention in society, it has become difficult to establish whether the consumer is an unknowing victim or willing participant in the satisfaction of (false) needs. It is for this reason that Marcuse starts to question the level of consciousness of individuals within contemporary society, arguing that there can be distinguished between true and false consciousness<sup>25</sup> (Marcuse, 1964:5-8). Marcuse

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<sup>25</sup> The concept of false consciousness is first introduced to Marcuse by Marx (Marx, 1982:74).

is concerned with the consciousness of the individual within a neo-liberal society, because the existence and satisfaction of needs, conditioned by external systems or false needs, indicate a stagnation of consciousness within the individual and society as a whole (Marcuse, 1964:12, 76, 90, 91, 208-209). In Marcuse's view, the consciousness of the individual within society is not solely empirical, but rather a comprehensive understanding and awareness of the experiences of an individual whom is able to reflect critically within his/her environment (social groups, society etc.) (Marcuse, 1964:208-209).

The satisfaction of false needs contributes to the stagnation of consciousness within contemporary society because the individual is not able to think and reflect critically within his/her environment, due to dominating social systems (Marcuse, 1964:208-209). Marcuse refers to this specific stagnation of consciousness associated with the domineering forces of consumerist culture and the satisfaction of false needs as a "false consciousness" (Marcuse, 1964:8, 12, 79, 90). Hence, in Marcuse's view, individuals within a neo-liberal society assume (to some extent) a false consciousness, accepting anything that the state and society offers as rational, without meaningful analysis or reflection (Marcuse, 1964:12). Marcuse believes that individuals who assume false consciousness, through the fulfilment of false needs, can never be truly happy, for they are constricted and limited in their freedom to reflect and engage critically with their surrounding environment (Marcuse, 1964:12, 23). Therefore, in Marcuse's view, false consciousness is a "consciousness of servitude", for the individuals main concern is serving the domineering social systems (Marcuse, 1964:7, 23-25, 34, 55, 90, 161). Consciousness of the individual and society as a whole is greatly limited by the prevalence of false needs and the fulfilment of those needs (Marcuse, 1964:7, 24, 34, 55, 90, 161).

### 3.3.2. One-Dimensional Thought and Behaviour

One-dimensional thought and behaviour is described by Marcuse as a state of thought and a mode of behaviour to which individuals conform as a collective (Marcuse, 1964:14). One-dimensional thought and behaviour is limiting to the individual as it promotes the societal ideals

and agendas rather than individual freedom and happiness (Marcuse, 1964:14). Marcuse is concerned with the individual's will and capacity to act according to his/her own individual needs within contemporary society, arguing that the continual satisfaction of false needs only lead towards the manipulation of the individual and the stagnation of consciousness (Bronner, 2011:77; Marcuse, 1964:14). The manipulation of the rationality fostered within the global economic system and consumerist culture, ultimately directs individuals and society as a whole towards a "pattern of one-dimensional thought and behaviour" (Marcuse, 1964:14). One-dimensional thought and behaviour is methodically developed by individuals trying to uphold neo-liberal structures and administer mass information (Marcuse, 1964:14). Freedom, for Marcuse, is the ability for individuals to determine their own needs, as well as the ability for individuals to oppose that which obstructs the fulfilment of an individual's true needs (Marcuse, 1964:12). However, individuals who assume one-dimensional thoughts and behaviour cannot determine what their true needs are, for those individuals' needs are superimposed and the individual is unable to oppose structures of domination or act autonomously (Kellner, 1984:237; Marcuse, 1964:12). It is important to take into account that Marcuse always uses the term one-dimensionality (as an adjective) to describe thought or behaviours and never uses the term to describe an ontological mode of being (Kellner, 1984:235).

One-dimensional thought and behaviour is caused by the domination of the global economic system and the consumerist culture within contemporary society, to such an extent that one-dimensional thought and behaviour become second nature for individuals (Kellner, 1984:166-167; Marcuse, 1964:7, 16-18, 33-36, 46, 56, 66). Marcuse argues that one-dimensional thought and behaviour is related to the domination of societal systems (Marcuse, 1964:7, 16-18, 33-36). Marcuse associates the domination of the individual by society with both psychology and social theory, clouding the issue of freedom and happiness within contemporary society (Kellner, 1984:166-167; Marcuse: 1964:7, 16-18, 33-36, 46, 56, 66). According to Kellner, domination is a "crucial and totalising concept" for Marcuse, as it provides the perfect amalgamation of ideology, social norms, values and practises, economic and political theory as well as individual and mass psychology (1984:166-167). It is through the concept of domination as an

amalgamation of the above mentioned with which social systems function as means of suppression of true self-determining freedom and happiness (Kellner, 1984:166-167).

Furthermore, individuals within a neo-liberal society are prone to one-dimensional thought, rejecting ideas, aspirations and objectives that do not fit the established perspective or reducing them to terms that can be understood within the established perspective (Marcuse, 1964:12). Individuals who assume one-dimensional thought and behaviour, mimic and reflect the thoughts and behaviours of others around them, their need for self-determination is diminished, ultimately leading to the total domination of those individuals within contemporary society (Kellner, 1984:237; Marcuse, 1964:12). Therefore, the concept of one-dimensionality is described as a conforming nature in thought and behaviour, because of a lack in the “critical dimension” or “the dimension of alternatives and potentialities” which allow the individual and society as a whole to transcend the current societal systems (Kellner, 1984:235; Marcuse, 1964:12). Moreover, the concept of one-dimensional thought and behaviour can be closely associated with the concept of “instrumental reason” developed by Charles Taylor (Taylor, 2003:5, 6). Both one-dimensional thought and instrumental reason refer to the economic and rationalist approach of individuals in society, which promotes neo-liberal ideals and motives associated with contemporary consumerist culture (Taylor, 2003:5, 6). Therefore, the instrumental reasoning adopted by individuals within consumerist culture, leads to one-dimensional thought and behaviour, such as satisfying false needs.

In other words, within the context of contemporary consumerist culture, individuals predominantly think and behave in line with the economic values of a neo-liberal. Moreover, the more he/she consumes or satisfies these imposed needs (false needs), the more those needs appear as true needs to him/her and the more repressed his/her critical thoughts become (Marcuse, 1964:245). Marcuse indicates the extent of one-dimensionality by posing this question: “Can one really distinguish between the mass media as instruments of information and entertainment, and as agents of manipulation and indoctrination?”(Marcuse, 1964:8-9). With all these things considered, one may ask the question whether critical theorists view Taylor’s

concept of instrumental reasoning as an inevitable outcome, but also if critical theorists view the alternative as normativity. This phenomenon of the stagnation of consciousness and one-dimensional thought and behaviour, is not new according to Marcuse. It is not new because the rationality, or instrumental reason, with which individuals function and perceive society and societal constructs, is related to the existing paradigm of positivism (Marcuse, 1964:12-17). This is classified in the next section.

### 3.3.3. Reason

Marcuse argues that, “the optimism in the physical” is what leads individuals within contemporary society to assume one-dimensional thought and behaviour (Marcuse, 1964:12). The focus of positivism is on the material and denies any elements which transcend the physical (Marcuse, 1964:14). Once again, the connection between Taylor’s concept of instrumental reason and Marcuse’s concept of one-dimensional thought and behaviour becomes clear. According to Taylor, instrumental reason, which individuals assume within a global economic system and consumerist culture, limits the understanding or acknowledgement of anything transcending them (Taylor, 2003:15, 22). Therefore, one-dimensional thought and behaviour and instrumental reason are similar since both these concepts are concerned with the individual’s inability to relate to that which transcends him/her. In general, modern reason reveals strong contradictions between the radical application and exploration of science, technology and philosophy and its “uncritical quietism” with regards to established societal structures (Marcuse, 1964:12-15). In other words, Marcuse argues that modern reason questions, critiques and develops science, technology and philosophy and yet does not apply that same critical reflection to societal structures. Philosophers such as Descartes, Hobbes, Locke and Kant preferred the status quo regarding established social structures and politics (Marcuse, 1964:12-15).

*“Thus Descartes’ ego cogitans was to leave the ‘great public bodies’ untouched, and Hobbes held that ‘the present ought always to be preferred, maintained, and accounted best.’ Kant agreed with Locke in justifying revolution if and when it has succeeded in organizing the whole and in preventing subversion” (Marcuse, 1964:15-16).*

It is reason that should have been used to create a rational and functional society (Marcuse, 1964:12-16). A rational society should liberate individuals from irrational constructs, which restricts individual freedom, happiness and individual potentialities (Kellner, 1984:121; Marcuse, 1964:12-16). However, Marcuse argues that ‘reason’ was used as justification for the implementation and promotion of irrational societal structures that limited the critical thought processes of individuals within society, ultimately leading towards a “closing off of dimensions” (Marcuse, 1964:12-16). Since, the specific reason to which Marcuse refers to has developed over such a long time, it raises the question whether those dimensions are permanently closed off to the individual within contemporary society?

Marcuse believes that reason can be used to open those dimensions again. He thinks reason can judge between true and false by reopening the closed off dimensions to develop true consciousness (Kellner, 1984:121; Marcuse, 2001b:114; Marcuse, 1964:11-12). It is through reason that individuals would become aware of the dominating nature of the existing social orders (Kellner, 1984:121; Marcuse, 1964:11-12). Furthermore, when Marcuse argues that reason is the key consciousness on an individual and societal level, he presupposes that individuals do have the autonomy and the capacity to discover and change the ‘irrational’ elements of contemporary society (Kellner, 1984:132; Marcuse, 2001b:112, 114). Moreover, it is reason that has the obligation to question the status quo of enforced and preconditioned needs, and to a further extent, the irrational existence of social orders (Marcuse, 2001b:114; Marcuse; 1964:12).

Reason is a revolutionary concept for Marcuse, for when the needs and demands of the individual and society is not being met, it is reason that leads him/her to question the irrational aspects of existing society that results in inequality (Kellner, 1984:132; Marcuse, 1964:85-86). According to Kellner, Marcuse’s account of ‘revolutionary rationalism’ resonates with the basic concept of Hegel often found in critical theory (Kellner, 1984:132; Marcuse, 2001b:112). However, in Marcuse’s specific account of revolutionary rationalism, reason has the ability to

lead individuals to a happy life as well as the social orders and structures that would support happiness and freedom (Kellner, 1984:132; Marcuse, 2001b:115; Marcuse, 1964:7, 9, 11, 13-16, 18). Therefore, Marcuse's account of revolutionary rationalism is aimed specifically towards the development and promotion of happiness and the interest of the individual and society as a whole (Kellner, 1984:121; Marcuse, 1964:12-16, 51). Moreover, reason within Marcuse's account of revolutionary rationalism, implies and creates the responsibility and capability of individuals to define what his/her true needs are, for each of them as personal individuals and society as a whole (Kellner, 1984:121, 132; Marcuse, 1964:12-16, 51). Marcuse's account of revolutionary rationalism would ultimately result in ideals of happiness and freedom that should be fulfilled within society (Kellner, 1984: 121, 132; Marcuse, 2001b:115; Marcuse, 1964:12-16, 51).

To summarise, Marcuse argues that the individual has become passive and has assumed a state of one-dimensionality (thinking and behaving in line with ideals that promote the dominant societal structures and limits personal freedom and happiness). One-dimensional thought and behaviour is largely due to social and cultural conventions and the reason with which society promotes their own agendas, needs and potentialities (Marcuse, 1964:10, 19, 20, 90). Critics argue that Marcuse makes the consumer out to be passive and uncritical (Parker & Sim, 1997:237). Marcuse does not imply that the consumer was always in a state of passiveness. Rather, he states that an individual is capable of critical thought, but only if the individual is conscious of these preconditioning systems and external forces (Marcuse, 1964:6, 7). Preconditioning systems will always be in place, whether social or political, and such systems will function in accordance to benefit and promote their own ideals as needs. Therefore, it would be unlikely that the state of one-dimensionality would only exist within a neo-liberal society.

#### 3.3.4. Hegel, Heidegger and the 'Bad Dialectic'

Marcuse's main concern in his general research is that of the individual's happiness and freedom and throughout his work the dialectic of individual versus society is notable (Kellner, 1984:365).

His book, *One Dimensional Man*, focuses on how the individual within society is unknowingly losing his/her individuality (Kellner, 1984:235; Marcuse, 1964:127). Marcuse argues that in contemporary consumerist culture the individual only thinks and behaves one-dimensionally, that is thinking and behaving in accordance with the encouragement of societal structures that limit personal freedom and happiness. He does so through acknowledging how the 'one-dimensional man' is caught in dialectic reasoning, which can simply be stated as 'the bad dialectic' (Marcuse, 1964:127).

Marcuse's concept of critical reason (reason which brings into question the current state of affairs) in both *Reason and Revolution* and *One-Dimensional Man* stems from his understanding of Hegel's dialectic (Marcuse, 1955a:6; Marcuse, 1964:12-16, 51). Marcuse's conceptualisation of one-dimensional thought and behaviour is rooted in Hegel's subject-object metaphysics and dialectics. Although Marcuse seldom refers to Heidegger, in his description some elements of one-dimensional thought and behaviour can also be associated with Heidegger's concepts of 'being'. Therefore, to fully comprehend the relation between one-dimensional thought and behaviour and reason it is necessary to shortly discuss Hegel's and Heidegger's combined influence on Marcuse.

The 'bad dialectic' of one-dimensionality can be understood as follows: As understood by Heidegger, the individual has a personhood that is authentically aware of his/her identity (Heidegger, 1962:67). Heidegger refers to this identity which is aware of itself as Dasein (Heidegger, 1962:67). Society, as an anti-thesis to the individual, is a collective of ideas and concepts, which shows elements of universality. In other words, the individual's authentic knowing of itself as an individual Dasein is often lost<sup>26</sup>, Heidegger calls it fallenness (Heidegger, 1962:210). Society can be understood in terms of Heidegger's 'the they-self' in which the individual is encapsulated (in Heideggerian terms in which the Dasein is fallen or thrown) (Heidegger, 1962:210). Therefore, the individual as a critically reasoning individual is lost or

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<sup>26</sup> Lost specifically refers to Heidegger's description of 'lost' as "Dasein has indeed been delivered over to itself and to its potentiality-for-Being, *but as Being-in-the-world*. As thrown, it has been submitted to a 'world', and exists factually with Others. Proximally and for the most part the Self is lost in the 'they'" (Heidegger, 1962:435).

fallen. The outcome of this ‘bad dialectic’ is that the individual is still reasoning, however the individual is no longer reasoning as an individual. The individual is reasoning according to collective norms, ambitions, wants, needs and so forth of the society. In Heideggerian terms, the Dasein has fallen into ‘the they-self’ and is living an inauthentic, one-dimensional life. However, an inauthentic individual is unaware of this negation due to the fact that society’s universality has been negated as well.

Marcuse’s concern is to make individuals within contemporary society aware of this condition. In order to do this he utilises Hegel’s dialectics. Hegel’s dialectics can be understood as a problem that can also be reasoned backwardly. Therefore, enabling one to reverse engineer and break open the dialectic once one recognises what was preserved and negated within sublimation (*Aufhebung*) of the dialectic and knowing what the thesis and anti-thesis were the moment before sublimation (*aufheben*) (Marcuse, 1964:65-67; Sands, 2015). Hence, the breaking open of Marcuse’s dialectic of one-dimensionality (one-dimensional thought and behaviour) would determine what is negated and what has been preserved within the dialectic creating the possibility for reverse engineering the dialectic. Once the dialectic has been reverse engineered it reveals the dialectic for what it is. The individual within society and consumerist culture has lost his/her character that was essential for him/her to reflect authentically upon his/her Dasein. Therefore, it is arguably possible that from one-dimensionality there can be worked towards this authentic being of the self in its full character (Marcuse, 1964:65-67). Marcuse will eventually call this critical reasoning, which he borrows from Hegel’s concept of *Geist* (mind or spirit) (Marcuse, 1955a:9-10). This follows the methodology of the Frankfurt School (and might be related to the Frankfurt School’s thought processes being referred to as ‘critical thinking’).

According to Marcuse, all Hegel’s theories and his philosophy in general are centred in his concept of reason (Marcuse, 1955a:5). Some example that Marcuse gives to support his argument is Hegel’s concepts of *Freedom* and *Geist*. Marcuse argues that Hegel’s concept of freedom is rooted in critical reason, since an individual’s ability to exercise his/her freedom to satisfy his/her needs and fulfil his/her potentiality proves that he/she is reasoning critically

(Marcuse, 1955a:9). Furthermore, an individual possesses a *Geist* (spirit or mind) which enables him/her to reason critically in order to transcend the systems that limits his/her freedom within contemporary society (Marcuse, 1955a:9-10).

Therefore, one could interpret Marcuse's appropriation of critical reason as opposed to concepts of one-dimensionality and instrumental reason. Instrumental reason which encourages one-dimensional thought and behaviour, allows the object (false needs products) to exercise control over the individual. However, critical reason allows the individual to become aware of his/her independence of objects (false needs products) (Kellner, 1984:236). Therefore, in Marcuse's view, it is critical reason that will enable the individual and society as a whole to transcend and transform contemporary social systems that limit freedom and happiness (Marcuse, 1955a:10). It is also critical reason that makes it possible for individuals to establish new social norms and systems that are aimed at promoting freedom and happiness on an individual and societal level (Marcuse, 1955a:9). Therefore, Marcuse's appropriation of Hegel's concept of reason is revolutionary, as it is an essential component for social transformation (Marcuse, 1955a:9). Furthermore, it seems as if Marcuse is suggesting critical reason as the solution or an alternative to one-dimensionality and instrumental reason. If individuals within contemporary society were able to adapt critical reason, instead of instrumental reason and one-dimensional thought and behaviour, he/she and society as a whole might be able to gain a new perspective and understanding of needs within consumerist culture.

Critical reasoning, in Marcuse's view, is essential for the forward momentum of *Geist*, since it is the moment when an individual becomes more authentically aware of his/her true needs, of his/her sense of self and his/her personhood. It is essential for *Geist* because, in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, individuals must become aware of themselves while also making the collective of individuals, which is society, more fully aware of their one-dimensional thought and behaviour. Therefore, the more individuals strive to reverse engineer the 'bad dialectic', the closer revolution will come, enabling individuals to live authentically according to their true needs. One can obviously see that Marcuse is appropriating both Hegel and Heidegger for his

articulation of authenticity and a free and happy society, albeit Hegel-through-Marx and hence he “Marxises Heidegger” (Kellner, 1984:50).

In summary, Marcuse’s concept of reason relates to his concept of one-dimensional thought and behaviour. As mentioned in the previous section on Marcuse’s conceptualisation of needs, Marcuse also illustrates in his description of one-dimensional thought and behaviour his critique and concern with consumerist culture as motivated by neo-liberal values and ideals. Marcuse is against one-dimensional thought and behaviour and instrumental reason as it (the concept of reason) is portrayed within modern positivism. Therefore, Marcuse’s conceptualisation of reason will always require some critical and revolutionary elements.

### **3.4. Technology: The key to Freedom from False Needs?**

One-dimensional thought and behaviour has become so prevalent in contemporary society that Marcuse argues that contemporary society is ‘totalitarian’ (Marcuse, 1964:241-245). Contemporary society is ‘totalitarian’ in the sense that an economic and technical coordination exists, which functions through the manipulation of needs and mutually beneficial interests (Marcuse, 1964:3, 4, 5, 241-245). Moreover, the ‘totalitarian’ system and technology regulates individual needs and objectives (Marcuse, 1964:3). The ‘totalitarian technology’ creates a system in which there is no separation between the personal and public spheres and individual needs and social needs (Marcuse, 1964:3). In addition, this system institutionalises “pleasant forms of social control and cohesion” (Marcuse, 1964:3). Hence, Marcuse argues, the coordination between economics and technology creates a system, which enforces social control and prohibits any effective resistance to said system (Marcuse, 1964:3). This is indeed a very bleak picture of society and limits the liberation from false needs and possible individual freedom.

Some of Marcuse’s works sketch a pessimistic view of neo-liberal society and the fate of the individuals within neo-liberal society. However, he does go on to suggest some alternatives and solutions. Marcuse argues that the paradoxical nature apparent in false needs could ensure its

own destruction (Marcuse, 1964:245, 251-257). The very act of oppressing and depriving individuals of true needs and imposing false needs constitutes a void where the redefinition of needs is made possible through revolution (Marcuse, 1964:245). For this to be at all possible a state of solitude is necessary. The state of solitude which Marcuse refers to requires a complete absence of all indoctrinating media (Marcuse, 1964:245-255). Creating this void allows the individual to reflect critically on his/her needs and society free from the domination of mass consumption as prescribed by social structure and/or cultural convention (Marcuse, 1964:245-255).

As stated previously, Marcuse's primary concern is the freedom and happiness of the individual and he associates freedom and happiness of the individual and society as a whole, with an individual's ability for self-determination separate from consumerist culture (Kellner, 1984:120-121; Marcuse, 1964:16, 17, 241-245). Within the context of contemporary society, there are too many obstacles to obtain true happiness and freedom, due to the dominance of false needs in consumerist culture (Marcuse, 1964:12-16, 51). In Marcuse's view, self-determination requires of the individual to determine and fulfil their own needs (Marcuse, 1964:16-18,251-257). In order to obtain true happiness and freedom in society, social conditions and systems should be aimed at satisfying the individual's true needs (Marcuse, 1964:16-18,251-257). The production process, and the economy at large, should be aimed at the satisfaction of needs and not the maximisation of profit (Marcuse, 1964:16-18). In doing so, each individual obtains products according to their (true) needs and thus, provides the individual the opportunity to be truly free and happy (Marcuse, 1964:251-257). The individual's needs would no longer be aimed at the maximisation of profit, but according to the experience of their needs.

Marcuse also argues that the use of technology can either be used to further the processes of oppression within a neo-liberal society (as stated above), or that technology could be used to liberate the individual from imposed needs as prescribed by societal structure and cultural convention (1964:16, 32, 154, 158-159, 168). Moreover, Marcuse argues that technology could reduce alienated labour and could therefore produce products aimed at fulfilling the individual's

true needs (Kellner, 1984:120-121; Marcuse, 1964:16-20). Furthermore, utilising technology in contemporary society to fulfil the needs of the individual, instead of generating profit, would mean an overall greater satisfaction of needs (Kellner, 1964:120-121; Marcuse, 1964:16-20). Technology thus becomes an objective system for determining the “truth” or “falsehood” of a need, liberating the individual of imposed needs (false needs) (Marcuse, 1964:18, 227, 233). However, technological development in contemporary society is directed towards neo-liberal domination in the form of mass production and mass communication (Marcuse, 1964:16, 32, 154, 158-159, 168).

Indeed, Marcuse points out the ambiguity with regards to technology, arguing that the objective of technology within contemporary society is aimed towards neo-liberal values such as generating profit and not aimed at the satisfaction of true needs, which only bring forth suffering and unhappiness (Marcuse, 1964:18, 227,233). Marcuse blames the social systems for not utilising technology to satisfy the needs of the individual (Marcuse, 1964:16-20). However, in the context of contemporary society and the focus of this study, the blame falls squarely on consumerist culture as a main component in the advancement of an oppressive neo-liberal society.

Taking into consideration all of the above, it has become clear that technology is not the key to the freedom or liberation from false needs. Marcuse comes to the conclusion that technology can be regarded as neutral, since the main problem is the way in which technology is used and what technology is aimed at in a consumerist culture that is the real concern (Marcuse, 2001a:125). However, technology and the way that technology has been developed and utilised within society has become such an integral and fundamental part to the functioning of consumerist culture that it would be nearly impossible to utilise technology as a tool of liberation from false needs. Furthermore, technology has become a tool of oppression of the true need of freedom and happiness within contemporary society and therefore implies that it can be utilised as a tool of oppression within a different social system as well. Since technology and the development of

technology can be aimed at any goal or *telos*, it is dangerous to assume technology as the starting point for liberation.

The main concern and the only starting point for liberation from false needs lies within the individual's and society's conceptualisation and perspective of needs within consumerist culture. The main concern and the most likely origin for the liberation from false needs lies in the rationalisation of individuals within society and the development of a new perspective of needs and the consumerist society in which individuals are encapsulated. It is only once individuals within society and society as a whole start to gain a new perspective of needs and the societal systems that deny or limits true needs that technology can be utilised and developed within a new context and towards a new goal or *telos*. The question is how is this to be done.

### **3.5. The Hierarchy of (False) Needs: Maslow versus Marcuse.**

A short discussion comparing Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs and Maslow's hierarchy of needs will follow. Doing as a way of arguing that Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs provides better insight into the subject at hand than the popularly known theory of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Marcuse's notion of a distinction between true needs and false needs is often compared with that of Maslow's hierarchy of needs<sup>27</sup>. The reason for the comparison between Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs and Maslow's conceptualisation of needs is likely because both wrote within the same timeframe and at first glance both seem to reflect a similar understanding of the concept of needs. However, Marcuse and Maslow approach the concept of needs differently, both in terms of discipline and methodology. These different approaches have a significant influence on their distinct understanding and conceptualisation of needs.

Because Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs and Maslow's conceptualization of needs are often compared, it is important to shortly contrast Marcuse and Maslow's conceptualization of needs and in particular the needs of the individual as it relates to the needs of society as a whole.

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<sup>27</sup> For more information on Maslow's hierarchy of needs see *A Theory of Human Motivation* (Maslow, 1943).

In this section I will firstly discuss the similarities between Marcuse and Maslow's conceptualisation of needs. Secondly, I will discuss the important distinction between Marcuse and Maslow's approach to the concept and understanding of needs, with the intention of arguing that Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs offers deeper philosophical insight into the cultural and social significance of needs within the context of consumerist culture.

### 3.5.1. The Similarities of Marcuse's Conceptualisation of Needs and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Both Marcuse's notion of a distinction between true needs and false needs and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, found empirical or sensible (sensational) experience as basic or fundamental (Marcuse, 1964:5). From there (the foundation of the empirical), needs become more nuanced and abstract (Marcuse, 1964:4, 5, 241, 245; Yalch & Brundel, 1996:405-410). Maslow's theory on the hierarchy of needs states that needs can be categorised into physiological needs, the need for safety and security, social needs, the needs of the ego and the need for self-actualisation (Yalch & Brundel, 1996:405-410).

### 3.5.2. The Differences between Marcuse's Conceptualisation of Needs and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

However, there are very significant differences between Marcuse's account for true needs and false needs and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Firstly, Maslow approaches his conceptualisation of needs from the discipline of psychology and uses scientific and psychoanalytic methodologies. Marcuse, because of the interdisciplinary nature of Critical Theory, approaches the concept of needs from multiple perspectives, such as the philosophical, social, cultural, political and psychological perspectives (Bronner, 2011:14, 22-25). Secondly, Maslow's hierarchy of needs determine the order in which needs are fulfilled or satisfied starting from the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy of needs as the basic needs and then working towards the top of the hierarchy to more emotional and cognitive needs. This implies that some needs are more important than others (Yalch & Brundel, 1996:405-410). Although, Marcuse states that the most

fundamental needs are empirical (basic or vital needs) and that those needs are prerequisite for all other needs, he does not account for the order in which needs should be fulfilled (1964:4-7, 13, 16, 81). In doing so Marcuse recognises the complexity and interdependency of aspects that influence the concept of needs. Furthermore, there is another noticeable distinction between Marcuse's notion of a distinction between true needs and false needs and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. According to Marcuse's theory of needs, needs are subject to social, political and cultural convention as well as historical context, whereas according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, needs are not subject to socially constructed concepts, but is driven purely by psychological motivations (Marcuse, 1964:5, 241, 245).

To summarise, it has become clear that although there are some similarities between Marcuse and Maslow's conceptualisation of needs, there are also decisive differences. I argue that Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs, from the interdisciplinary approach of critical theory, gives a more complex understanding of needs and allows for a deeper philosophical exploration of the concept of needs. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary nature of Critical Theory, which Marcuse uses, takes into account the influence that external conditioning forces have on the concept and understanding of needs within a specific socio-cultural and political milieu, which Maslow's conceptualisation of needs does not explore extensively. Therefore, I argue that Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs is more suitable to discuss, explore and critique consumerist culture in contemporary society.

### **3.6. Conclusion**

In this chapter, Marcuse's notion of needs as a distinction between true and false needs was discussed and explored. It was noted that Marcuse was influenced by many philosophers such as Heidegger, Marx, Freud and Hegel in his development and conceptualisation of needs as a distinction between true needs and false needs. Although Marcuse never gives a finite definition of what true needs are, he always describes true needs as a basic human need to strive towards freedom and happiness.

Furthermore, Marcuse describes true needs at the hand of false needs which are needs that are imposed onto the individual within society and ultimately limits or denies the satisfaction of his/her true needs. Once Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs (as a distinction between true and false needs) can be understood, not as Marcuse prescribing and deciding what individual's true and false needs are, but as a concept that points to a greater problem. The greater problem is that of consumerist society that limits individual freedom and happiness, by imposing false needs, ultimately resulting in the 'bad dialectic' where individuals become conditioned to a rationality of society i.e. instrumental reasoning. Moreover, it is instrumental reasoning that encourages and rationalises the one-dimensional thought and behaviour in the form of consumerists acts. Therefore, Marcuse argues that a new rationality or a new perspective of needs is necessary for the individual and society as a whole to overcome the limitations of false needs and consumerist society and work towards a society aimed at satisfying true needs of happiness and freedom.

The question becomes how individuals within consumerist culture can gain a new perspective of needs in order to limit the further development of the deformational effects of consumerist society and work towards the possibility of a society which aims at fulfilling true needs and establishing freedom and happiness on an individual and societal level. This discussion follows in the next chapter where Žižek's appropriation of the Lacanian concept of 'enjoyment' will be introduced with the intension of broadening Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs, as a distinction between true needs and false needs, in order to gain a new perspective of needs within consumerist culture.

#### 4. CHAPTER 4: ŽIŽEK AND THE CONCEPT OF ‘ENJOYMENT’

In the previous chapter, Marcuse’s conceptualisation of the distinction between true needs and false needs was discussed and explored. Furthermore, it is argued that Marcuse’s notion of a distinction between true needs and false needs proved helpful in critiquing consumerist culture, since it points out that the satisfaction of false needs are imposed upon the individual and limits or denies the satisfaction of true needs. Subsequently, Marcuse argued that by limiting or denying the satisfaction of true needs by imposing false needs resulted in the ‘bad dialectic’. The ‘bad dialectic’ shows that individuals conformed to the collective rationality of society, that is instrumental reasoning which limits the individual’s thoughts and behaviour to that of consumerist acts. Therefore, in order to be liberated from imposed false needs and to freely and happily satisfy true needs a new rationality or perspective of needs in society is necessary.

Marcuse’s concept on how to gain a new perspective on individual and societal needs and how to be liberated from imposed or false needs are limited. By introducing Žižek’s concept of ‘enjoyment’ (or *jouissance*) as an appropriation of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, an attempt will be made to broaden Marcuse’s concept of false needs and in doing so, gain a new perspective of needs within the consumerist culture of contemporary society. In order to do so, I will be discussing the following in this chapter: Firstly, I will give an introduction to Žižek, describing his success and impact as a philosopher in a number of academic disciplines. Secondly, in order to fully comprehend Žižek’s theories, the philosophers and thinkers, namely Hegel, Marx and Lacan, who predominantly influenced Žižek, will be discussed. Thirdly, Žižek’s appropriation of ‘enjoyment’ will be discussed focusing on his theories of the imaginary, the Real and the symbolic and the concept of desire.

Ultimately, incorporating Žižek’s concept of enjoyment to Marcuse’s concept of false needs, could offer an explanation as to why individuals consume products and services that can be described as false needs products. In other words, Žižek’s Lacanian psychoanalytical approach to

the concept of 'enjoyment' in contemporary society could offer an alternative explanation for the prevalence of instrumental reasoning. As mentioned previously, the proliferation of false needs and consumerist culture is predominantly caused by instrumental reasoning and one-dimensional thought and behaviour. Individuals within consumerist culture mainly value and reason according to neo-liberal values, motives and agendas. However, in combination the concepts of instrumental reason, one-dimensional thought and behaviour and 'enjoyment' could offer a broader perspective on the proliferation of false needs and consumerist culture within contemporary society. It can in fact be argued that Žižek's concept of 'enjoyment' could be appropriated as a characteristic of false needs. Identifying Žižek's concept of 'enjoyment' as a characteristic of false needs would provide valuable new insight into how the individual and society as a whole functions and perceives needs within contemporary consumer society. The new insight that would be provided by Žižek's theories could give a new perspective of needs on individual and societal level. This in turn can help to develop a stronger philosophical critique of consumerist culture.

#### **4.1. Introducing Žižek**

Slavoj Žižek was born in Ljubljana, Slovenia in 1949. He obtained several degrees, of which include an undergraduate degree in Sociology and Philosophy in 1971, Master of Arts in Philosophy in 1975, a Doctorate in Philosophy in 1981, and later a Doctorate in Psychoanalysis in 1986 (Khader, 2013:4; Wright & Wright, 1999:1). Žižek was a researcher at the University of Ljubljana in sociology and it was there where Žižek could freely pursue his interest in philosophy and Lacanian psychoanalysis (Khader, 2013:4-5). Apart from his Professorship in Philosophy at the University of Ljubljana, Žižek is currently also the International Director at London's Birkbeck Institute for Humanities and visiting Professor for many universities in both the UK and America (Khader, 2013:5). Žižek is a known theorist of culture, of ideology and of subjectivity. However, it is his renewal of Marxist analysis and his theories on destructive global capitalism for which he is best known (McMillan, 2013:1). Thinkers and philosophers who influenced him include Lacan, Heidegger, Marx, Foucault and Hegel (McMillan, 2013:1; Wright & Wright, 1999:1).

Since the publication of his first English book, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989), Žižek has become a well renowned and widely read scholar in philosophy, psychology, sociology etc. (Wood, 2012:2). Many commentators contribute Žižek's well-known reputation to his charisma and engaging nature in lectures and other public appearances (Khader, 2013:7; Wood, 2012:2). Another reason for Žižek's growing status is the humour with which he engages difficult and sensitive topics (Khader, 2013:7; Wood, 2012:4). Wood even goes so far as to suggest that Žižek's charisma and joking engagement with his audience can be compared with that of Socrates (Wood, 2012:4). Both Socrates and Žižek have the ability to make self-criticising jokes and point out the irony in trends found in contemporary society (Wood, 2012:4). However, it would be a mistake to not take Žižek himself and his work seriously. On the contrary, underneath the jokes and the charisma, Žižek delivers substantial insight and an academic contribution to a diverse number of disciplines.

Žižek is widely regarded as one of the most noteworthy and stimulating thinkers in contemporary society (Wood, 2012:1-2). Žižek's broad and interdisciplinary background allows him to write on many different topics and in many different disciplines. Žižek has written on several topics such as global capitalism, German idealism, racism, religion, popular culture, new media, psychoanalysis etc. and is known for his methodology of approaching these many diverse topics, from a Lacanian psychoanalytic view through Hegel and Marx, ultimately appropriating Lacan "to reload Hegel through Marxism" (Khader, 2013:3, 5, 7). Žižek's unique methodology enables him to give ideological and epistemological critique and also enables him to engage these diverse topics and disciplines, which seem to have no common ground, from an interdisciplinary approach (Khader, 2013:3). Within Žižek's interdisciplinary approach he then applies the notion of negative dialectics, first implemented by member of the Frankfurt School<sup>28</sup>, drawing from the Hegelian notion of dialectics. By implementing negative dialectics, Žižek highlights the underlying antagonisms which create an open platform for academic research and discussion

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<sup>28</sup> In Adorno's book *Negative Dialectics* (1966) he states the aim of *Negative Dialectics* in the preface: "As early as Plato, dialectics meant to achieve something positive by means of negation; the thought figure of the 'negation of the negation' later became the succinct term. This book seeks to free dialectics from such affirmative traits without reducing its determinacy" (Adorno, 1966:xix).

(Khader, 2013:3; Žižek, 2006b:4). According to Parker, Žižek's amalgamation of Lacan, Marx and Hegel have enticed young academics to pursue new research questions especially on the topic of political action (Parker, 2013:17). Many argue that it is because of Žižek's interdisciplinary approach and his seemingly effortless blend of Lacan, Hegel and Marx that will allow him to contribute and give insight into philosophical, psychological, political and cultural disciplines well into the future (Wood, 2012:2).

Žižek's writing style, often incorporating jokes and references to pop culture, movies etc., though unorthodox, should not be dismissed as having no logic or argumentation (Wood, 2012:11). Rather, the main concern in Žižek's research is the revival and "re-actualisation" of dialectical thinking, a serious and complicated endeavour (Wood, 2012:10). The continual referencing to jokes, pop culture and movies etc., is a very important aspect of Žižek's work that he uses to emphasise his dialectical approach and makes the complicated theoretical work more palatable (Khader, 2013:3-7; Wood, 2012:10-12). His contemporary and joking writing style lends support to his arguments and guides the line of argumentation allowing his audience to appropriate a new perspective on complicated political, social and philosophical topics (Wood, 2012:10-12). It is Žižek's re-actualisation of dialectical thinking within philosophical-psychoanalytic theory that enables Žižek to question consciousness, knowledge and reality (Wood, 2012:10-12). Žižek's specific understanding and implementation of the dialectic focuses on highlighting and exposing false dichotomies (Wood, 2012:12). Žižek exposes these false dichotomies by questioning reality through dialectical thinking, arguing that reality cannot be separated from an individual's experience of that reality (symbolic order<sup>29</sup>) (Wood, 2012:10-12). Moreover, Žižek argues that all perspectives are incomplete and inconsistent, since each perspective is bound to an understanding of reality (symbolic order) within reality (Wood, 2012:10-12).

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<sup>29</sup> Žižek describes the symbolic order as the socially constructed reality of shared practises (Žižek, 2005:13). Therefore, together the symbolic order (social convention) and the imaginary order (illusion of perfection) forms reality. A more detailed description of Žižek's description on the symbolic is provided on page 97 of this study.

It is this methodology, as a questioning through dialectical thinking, of Žižek that gives a new perspective of human nature and society as a whole (Khader, 2013:5; Wood, 2012:2). Therefore, it is through his unique and controversial methodology as an amalgamation of Hegel, Marx and Lacan that Žižek gives salient and progressive insights into consumerist culture (and popular culture) and arguably in this attempt to gain a new perspective of needs within consumerist culture. In order to explore the notion that Žižek's appropriation of Lacan's concept of enjoyment within the context of consumerist culture could contribute or broaden Marcuse's concept of false needs, a more careful and thorough exploration of Žižek's methodology and the development thereof is necessary. In other words, it is Žižek's methodology as an amalgamation of Hegel, Marx and Lacan that enables a re-contextualisation of *jouissance* within contemporary consumerist culture and that allows for a new perspective on false needs.

Thus, a short discussion of Hegel, Marx and Lacan's contributions and influences on the development of Žižek's methodology and philosophical theories will follow. Marcuse's conceptualisation of false needs is closely linked with political and social factors and his understanding of those factors is based upon his interpretation of Hegel and Marx. Therefore, it is important to discuss Žižek's interpretations of those philosophers. Subsequently, Žižek's unique insight and new interpretation of these philosophers' theories would greatly influence the understanding of those political and social factors and how they relate to the conceptualisation of false needs.

## **4.2. Thinkers and Philosophers Who Influenced Žižek**

### **4.2.1. Hegel**

Hegel's theories have been appropriated by many philosophers and other theorists as a tool of critical analysis of society, history and politics (McGowan, 2013:31). Hegel is a time-honoured resource for philosophers specialising in societal critique, since his conceptualisation and development of the concept of the subject is always understood within the terms and relations to other subjects (Parker, 2013:23). Hegelian theory allows philosophers to engage with social

critique and theory as a historical development and narrative (Parker, 2013:23). It is, therefore, no surprise that both Marcuse and Žižek, as prominent critics of the ideologies within society and politics, also draw from Hegel's theories in their analysis of these tendencies within society.

#### 4.2.1.1. Different Interpretation of Hegel.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Marcuse was adamant about politicising Hegel's concept of reason (McGowan, 2013:32). In Marcuse's view reason and critical thought were revolutionary concepts with which social and political change could be actualised (McGowan, 2013:32). It is important to keep in mind that Marcuse's appeal for political and social revolution is closely related to his description of false needs, since societal structures are crucial to the creation and proliferation of false needs (Marcuse, 1964:5). Subsequently, should Žižek give an alternative interpretation to Hegel's political theory and how it relates to political and social revolution, it might also provide new insight into Marcuse's description and conceptualisation of false needs.

Žižek is unique in his interpretation of Hegel as a political thinker, since he, unlike Marcuse, does not argue for a practical realisation of social and political change through reason. Instead, Žižek comprehends "the closed nature of the social process" (McGowan, 2013:32). Therefore, Žižek recognises Hegel's concept of reason as a mere illusion to distract from the "irreducibility of antagonism" or in his reading of Hegel, that antagonism is an unavoidable endpoint for 'being' itself (Hegel, 1977:492; McGowan, 2013:32; Žižek, 1991a:78). Therefore, Žižek's interpretation of Hegel shows that antagonisms within the Hegelian dialectic are unavoidable, yet there is the inclination to think that Hegel's dialectical process would lead to a perfect society. Žižek critiques this by arguing that no society is or will ever be perfect, that a perfect society is an illusion. In Žižek's view, the heart of Hegel's political theory lies in the inevitability of antagonisms within society and reality in general (McGowan, 2013:34; Žižek, 1991a:91).

Žižek describes these antagonisms as such: Within Hegel's dialectics, the multitude of definitions and descriptions for something become contradictory (Žižek, 2005:20-21). These

different and contradictory definitions and descriptions should not be seen as obstacles, but rather as something “inherent to the ‘thing itself’” (Žižek, 2005:20-21). In order to comprehend something as a whole one must recognise the antagonisms and contradictions are fundamental to one’s understanding of it (Žižek, 2005:20-21). In other words, one’s comprehension of the ‘thing itself’ seems limited by the antagonisms and contradiction (Žižek, 2005:20-21). However, since the ‘thing itself’ functions within those limitations, those antagonisms and contradictions are what can be fundamentally understood as the ‘thing itself’ (Žižek, 2005:20-21). Take for example the definition of society, many scholars define ‘society’ in different and sometimes, contradictory ways. However, each definition of society describes an element of what society is, whether the definitions contradict each other or not. In order to fully comprehend what society is, one must take into account each definition, even if they contradict each other, because, Žižek argues that contradictions form part of our understanding of something within our constructed social (imaginary-symbolic) reality (Žižek, 2005:20-21). This is also true for the understanding of the notion of commodity within contemporary consumerist culture.

Therefore, in order to fully comprehend the notion of a commodity, as the ‘thing itself’, the contradictory and antagonistic nature of the commodity should be taken into account (Žižek, 2005:20-25). Although, Marcuse’s concept of true needs and false needs reflects some of the contradicting and antagonistic nature of different commodities, his approach to Hegelian dialectics limits his ability to perceive both the ‘truth’ and ‘falsehood’ within commodity as the ‘thing itself’. Žižek’s understanding of Hegelian dialectics reflects the contradictory and antagonistic nature of the commodity as the ‘thing itself’ through his conceptualisation of *jouissance*. The contradictory and antagonistic nature of *jouissance*, as the enjoyment of the inhibition for fulfilment, reflects the desire for ‘truth’, but the inability to find fulfilment due to the ‘false’ nature of the commodity (Žižek, 2005: 20-25).

It is said that through reason one becomes aware that one can no longer rely on or trust external forces, which creates the illusion of escape from these antagonisms and contradictions (McGowan, 2013:34; Žižek, 1991a:91). For example, one realises that a perfect society is

impossible, since everyone has a different and sometimes contradictory understanding of what a perfect society would be like. It is within the illusion that one can escape the antagonism of one's being that one assumes one's own transcendence from those limitations (McGowan, 2013:34). In other words, one accepts that there is a limit to one's own understanding of a perfect society. When an individual assumes that he/she can escape those antagonisms, this also implies he/she can escape his/her social reality. This point was used to critique Marcuse's argument that individuals could escape imposed (false) needs. It was argued in the previous chapter that in order to escape imposed needs an individual would have to escape his/her material existence. Assuming one's own transcendence "functions for Hegel as the assurance of complete immanence within the social field", since one cannot escape (transcend) one's relation with others (McGowan, 2013:34-35). Thus, in Žižek's interpretation of Hegel the transcendence is not disconnected from the field of immanence, but immanence is incorporated within transcendence (McGowan, 2013:35). Transcendence exists within immanence, since transcendence emerges from the contradictions and antagonisms within the field of immanence (McGowan, 2013:35). It is the contradictions and antagonisms within the field of immanence that is the source of political change and this political change is revolutionary, since there is coherent 'oneness'<sup>30</sup> to restrict the revolutionary change (McGowan, 2013:35). As I understand Žižek, individuals have to realise the antagonisms within society and gain a better understanding of society. This realisation would mean that the individual is no longer be under the illusion of social unity and cohesion, giving him/her the opportunity to act as political beings. It is only when individuals start to act like political beings, that revolution through political and social change is possible.

Žižek argues that by contesting the 'oneness' of 'being' an individual avoids confusion by identifying himself/herself with the Other<sup>31</sup> and realises the responsibility of his/her political situation and his/her responsibility towards political and social change (McGowan, 2013:35; Žižek, 1993:2). Individual responsibility for political and social action shows Žižek's attempt to politicise the individual by arguing that 'otherness' limits political action (McGraw, 2013:35;

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<sup>30</sup> When referring to the term 'oneness', one refers to Žižek's conceptualisation of oneness as the illusion of a consistent and unified whole as it is understood within the imaginary order (Žižek, 2005:13). The subject of perfect unity as it exists within the imaginary order will be discussed later in this chapter. .

<sup>31</sup> The 'Other' is described by Žižek as the human subjectivity within the symbolic which consists of social interactions and conditions such as norms, expectations, desires etc. (Žižek, 2005:13).

Žižek, 1993:2). In other words, political actions of individuals are limited by his/her conception of individual identity as it relates to 'otherness'. According to Žižek, an individual acts politically when he/she realises the antagonisms and contradictions within the social field instead of accepting the social field as an ontological or social absolute (McGowan, 2013:35; Žižek, 1993:2). The distancing of the individual from the Other makes transformation of the social field possible for the individual which also creates the possibility for individuals to function and act as political beings (McGowan, 2013:35; Žižek, 1993:2).

The politicising of the individual and the transformation of the social field do not imply that all truth is subjective, but instead reflects the disunity of the constructed reality (McGowan, 2013:35; Žižek, 1991a:91). In other words, the illusion of wholeness and oneness is also in peril of separation and results in the individual's realisation that the Other cannot support the notion of a perfect identity (McGowan, 2013:35; Žižek, 1991a:91). According to Žižek every Other, including nature, is subject to the separation that makes it impossible for the individual to have an amicable existence (McGowan, 2013:35; Žižek, 2007). Žižek's interpretation of Hegel as a political philosopher relies on the notion that the Other is also subject to separation (McGowan, 2013:36). This reflects Žižek's concern with the individual's consciousness, how it has been misinterpreted and how it relates to his analysis of neo-liberal systems such as the global economic system and consumerist culture (Pound, 2008:51). This creates the conditions for revolution as social and political change (Pound, 2008:51). However, Pound does question whether Žižek would be able to reach this objective.

Marcuse interpreted Hegel's political theories and philosophy as a rational<sup>32</sup> objective for society and that within rationality social and political change can be brought about (McGowan, 2013:36). Marcuse argued that when the true needs of individual (that lead to freedom and happiness) is not met within society he/she would start to question social structures and demand

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<sup>32</sup> As mentioned in the previous Chapter of this study, according to Marcuse individuals within society start to question societal constructs through reason and critical reflection. Through reason and critical reflection the individual comes to realise that a society that does not fulfil or satisfy his/her true needs, but in fact limits true needs, is not a rational society and social and political change is necessary through revolution. Marcuse refers to this as 'revolutionary rationalism' (Marcuse, 2001b: 112).

for those needs to be met, ultimately resulting in social and political revolution (Marcuse, 1964:85-86). Žižek's interpretation of Hegel, finds the necessity for social and political change within the individual as a political being. When an individual becomes aware of the antagonisms and contradictions within his/her social milieu he/she recognises that he/she cannot transcend his/her immanence within the social field. Within this realisation of the individual the illusion of wholeness of the Other becomes subject to separation, is politicised and acts as a political being. Therefore, Žižek does not call for 'revolutionary rationalism', like Marcuse. Instead he argues that in order to act politically individuals should recognise the antagonism and contradiction within contemporary society, as it appears whole and undivided Other (Žižek, 1991a:91). Thus, Marcuse differentiates between 'true needs' and 'false needs' with the intention of making individuals aware of the social and political agendas within society and by doing so Marcuse aims to solve the dichotomy between 'true needs' and 'false needs'. On the other hand, Žižek's concept of *jouissance* recognises the antagonisms of society and does not aim to solve those antagonisms or the dichotomy between what is 'true' or what is 'false' needs.

#### 4.1.1.2. Žižek's Interpretation of Hegel and his (Žižek's) Methodology

Žižek's interpretation of Hegel as a political philosopher has a prominent influence on his methodology, since his interpretation of Hegel gives a meaningful understanding into his analysis of Marxism. As mentioned previously, it is Žižek's interpretation of Marxism through Hegel that gives new insight into dialectical thought by further appropriating Lacanian psychoanalytic theories. In an attempt to further explore Žižek's methodology and the possibility that his theories might broaden Marcuse's notion of false needs, a brief discussion of Žižek's interpretation of Hegel will follow. The focus will be on how Žižek provides a salient discussion on dialectical thought through his interpretation of the Hegelian dialectic.

Philosophers such as Marcuse understand the previous failures were untimely in the revolutionary process, but also that those failures create the platform for future success (Marcuse, 1964:11-15). Žižek argues that his (Žižek's) interpretation of the dialectics is a reversal, where failure is perceived as victory (Žižek, 2005:26-27). Žižek refers to this perception as a symbolic act where the "act precisely as symbolic, succeeds in its very failure" (Žižek,

2005:26). In other words, Žižek's interpretation of Hegelian dialectics is that the act as 'thesis' is always premature and is doomed to fail (Žižek, 2005:26-27). The failure of the 'thesis' (the 'anti-thesis') allows for the reversal of the dialectic and the reversal reveals the true 'thesis' (the 'synthesis') (Žižek, 2005:26-27). Žižek refers to the 'synthesis' as the 'signification', which emerged from the failure of the 'thesis' (Žižek, 2005:26-27).

In other words, Žižek argues that individuals within society are limited by a "hegemonic ideology" of society, but by incorporating themselves into such a society allows them to interact (to some degree of regularity) within society (Wood, 2012:46; Žižek, 2008:xxvii-xxx). Žižek refers to the illusion of a unified and perfect society as an 'ideological fantasy', since the ideological fantasy creates the illusion of a whole and obscures the inevitable antagonisms and contradictions within society (Wood, 2012:46; Žižek, 2008:33-35). It is for this reason that Žižek criticises the standard interpretation of Hegel's dialectic (Wood, 2012:46). Žižek's criticism focuses specifically on the notion that the standard interpretation of Hegelian dialectics restricts a comprehensive understanding of the dialectical 'synthesis' (Wood, 2012:46; Žižek, 2005:26-27, 34). Žižek's interpretation of Hegelian dialectics emphasises the antagonisms and contradictions which obscures any efforts of a unified 'synthesis' (Wood, 2012:46; Žižek, 2005:26-27, 34). Žižek's alternative perspective of Hegelian dialectics dramatically alters any understanding of social reality, since it implies that any understanding of such reality is imperfect (Wood, 2012:46; Žižek, 1991a: 58).

According to Žižek, the general approach to Hegelian dialectics is to analyse it as if it were a "purely logical structure" (Žižek, 2005:26-27). Žižek argues that the standard approach negates the complexities and untimeliness as integral to the dialectical process. In addition, Žižek also argues that the complexities and untimeliness of the dialectic process should be understood as an immersive measure within sublimation (*Aufhebung*) (Žižek, 2005:26-27). Rather, the untimeliness and the complexities should be understood as the "central component" within the dialectical process (Žižek, 2005:26-27). In other words, the dialectical process, once reversed, always functions within paradoxes (Žižek, 2005:27).

*“The dialectical process always takes the paradoxical form of overtaking/ delay, the form of the reversal of a ‘not yet’ into an ‘always ready’, a ‘too soon’ and an ‘after the fact’- its true motor is the structural impossibility of a ‘right moment’, the irreducible difference between a thing and its ‘proper time’. Initially, the ‘thesis’ arrives by definition too soon to attain its proper identity, and it can only realise ‘itself’, become ‘itself’, after the fact, retroactively, by means of its repetition in the ‘synthesis’” (Žižek, 2005:27).*

In Žižek’s view, the error in the general approach to Hegelian dialectics lies within the notion that at the end of the dialectical process the individual will finally be able to attain that which he/she desires (Žižek, 2005:34). However, Žižek argues that the Hegelian solution does not lie within the individual obtaining that which they desire, but that the individual has already obtain that which he/she desires by its loss (Žižek, 2005:34). The difference between Marxism and psychoanalysis both narrows the gaps between Hegel and Marxism as well as highlights Marxism’s limitation to overcome the contradictions and complexities of reversing the dialectic as an analytic process (Žižek, 2005:34). Moreover, the general approach to Hegelian dialectics does not recognise that within the final moment of the dialectical process the obstacles of contradiction and antagonism cannot be overcome (Žižek, 2005:34). It is Žižek’s Lacanian approach to the dialectical process that highlights some shortcomings in Marcuse’s understanding of both true and false needs. To a further extent, the neo-liberal consumerist society. Žižek’s interpretation of Hegel shows that needs and how they relate to society is much more nuanced than first expected.

#### 4.1.1.3. Žižek’s Interpretation of Hegel and Marcuse’s Concept of False Needs

Žižek’s interpretation of Hegel and most of his critique of the standard approach to Hegelian dialectics focuses on the inevitable antagonisms and contradictions that go unnoticed (Žižek, 2005: 26-27). This focus of Žižek extends to how the interpretation of Hegelian dialectics has an

effect on the comprehensive understanding of reality, since the illusion of wholeness or oneness in the constructed social reality is also subject to disunity and antagonisms (Žižek, 2005: 26-27). Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs as a distinction between true needs and false needs does not escape the antagonisms and contradictions to which Žižek is referring. As mentioned in the previous chapter, throughout Marcuse's descriptions of both true needs and false needs certain tensions within his theories become apparent. Some of these tensions include the tension between the individual and the collective, idealism and materialism, historical and universal to name a few. These tensions within Marcuse's theories on true needs and false needs become problematic. However, a new perspective on needs would provide new insight and critique on consumerist culture by applying Žižek's interpretation of Hegelian dialectics to Marcuse's concept of false needs.

Marcuse's standard interpretations of Hegelian dialectics anticipate that the dialectical process would eventually be successful. In other words, Marcuse has realised the antagonisms and contradictions within society and he articulates and describes those antagonisms and contradictions in his concepts of false needs and one-dimensional thought and behaviour. Additionally, Marcuse has also succumbed to the illusion of wholeness and unity within a 'perfect' society. This is apparent in his conceptualisation of true needs and revolutionary rationalism. Marcuse argues that at the end of the dialectical process the individual will finally be able to satisfy his/her true needs and attain freedom and happiness for the individual and society as a whole (Marcuse, 1964:65-67). However, Žižek would argue that there is no overcoming the obstacles of antagonism and contradiction, since the social reality (true needs and a 'rational society') is not a perfectly unified whole and is also subject to these obstacles and are integral to the dialectical process (Žižek, 2005:34).

Subsequently, it is necessary to broaden Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs as a distinction between true needs and false needs. In order to do so, the antagonisms and contradictions in both the concepts of true needs and false needs should be taken into account. Doing so would create

individuals who act as political beings and who would be able to initiate political and social change (Žižek, 2005:26-27).

#### 4.2.2. Marx

As Marxist theories and philosophies matured it became more apparent to philosophers that Marx's theory was deceptive when presented as "a coherent tradition of work" (Parker, 2013:20). Marxist theory is not a sealed system and becomes subject to bureaucracy (Parker, 2013:21). Although Žižek's approach is labelled by most critics as Marxist, Žižek has never referred to himself as a Marxist (Žižek, 2002:310). Žižek argues that he is opposed to capitalism and in his approach of Marxism, does not claim that there is no truth in Marxist theory or no truth in resisting capitalism. Rather, Žižek introduces psychoanalysis, much like his predecessors at the Frankfurt School (Parker, 2013:21). However, Žižek utilises Marxist theory to uncover the fundamental antagonisms and deliver ideological critique thereby relating Marxist theories to contemporary society through Lacanian psychoanalytic theory (Parker, 2013:20).

##### 4.2.2.1. Commodity Fetishism

In Žižek's book entitled *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (2008), he makes an argument for the disconnected approach (illusion or ideological fantasy) individuals within contemporary consumerist society have with regard to their social activities. Žižek's new insights and interpretation of Marx through Lacanian psychoanalytic theories, centres mainly on the concept of 'commodity fetishism' (Wood, 2012:49; Žižek, 2008:18-22). According to Žižek, Marx's concept of commodity fetishism gives an explanation to the high valuing of commodities in social exchanges (Wood, 2012:49; Žižek, 2008:18-22). The term 'commodity fetishism' refers to the valuing of commodities in terms of social exchanges. The problem becomes when an individual becomes more and more disassociated in his/her social exchanges, meaning that the fetish object (commodity) fills the void of social exchange. According to Žižek's Lacanian appropriation; the fetish object fulfils a fundamental void and lack within the symbolic order (Wood, 2012:49; Žižek, 2008:18-22). In other words, commodity fetishism refers to the illusion surrounding an object as commodity which is created within consumerist culture as the process

and act of social exchanges within contemporary society together with the abstracted value of the object (Wood, 2012:49; Žižek, 2008:18-22).

The concept of commodity fetishism relates closely to the valuing of objects and to a further extent also to social relations, interactions and exchanges (for example labour) (Wood, 2012:49-50; Žižek, 2008:18-22). The abstract valuing and reasoning behind exchanges become thoughtless and perpetual and do not accurately reflect the social exchanges and relations that make up an integral part of the value exchange (Wood, 2012:49-50; Žižek, 2008:18-22, 31). According to Žižek the social relations and exchanges are concealed by commodity fetishism, since it creates the illusion that material things determine their own value within the global economic system (Wood, 2012:49-50; Žižek, 2008:18-22). The crucial concern that Žižek is attempting to highlight is that social reality, as it is perceived by individuals within consumerist culture, is guided by commodity fetishism (Wood, 2012:51; Žižek, 2008:31-33). In other words, Žižek argues that it is not that individuals have a skewed perspective of their social reality, but that their fantasy with regards to commodity fetishism constructs their reality (Wood, 2012:51; Žižek, 2008:31-33). In Žižek's view, the fantasy that constructs social reality proves to be effective, because the exchanges of commodities are external and does not reflect a metaphysical depth or essence (Wood, 2012:51; Žižek, 2008:33-37). According to Žižek, social reality that is perceived as a perfectly unified structure is the result of individuals' attempt to comprehend the antagonisms (Žižek, 2008:47-50). In other words, the illusion of a perfect society functions as an ideology. Ideologies function as constructions of social reality in an attempt to evade the antagonisms and not as an escape for social reality itself (Žižek, 2008:47- 50). It is the social reality that individuals construct through ideological fantasy that protects the individual from the antagonisms within reality (Žižek, 2008:47-50).

Žižek's description of commodity fetishism can be closely related to Taylor's concept of instrumental reason. Both the concepts of instrumental reason and commodity fetishism describe how the individual within consumerist culture values and reasons according to the global economic system. Additionally, both instrumental reason and commodity fetishism criticises the

valuing and reasoning of social exchanges in terms of economic value and contribution. Neither commodity fetishism nor instrumental reasoning provides an accurate interpretation of the social exchanges and other significant aspects that are important factors to consider. The concepts of instrumental reasoning and commodity fetishism reveal a concern for the influence of the type of reasoning and valuing have on the nature of the relationships and exchanges within contemporary consumerist society. These concerns on the exchanges and relations on individual, societal and environmental level have been discussed in a previous chapter of this study. Furthermore, Žižek describes how the social exchanges as commodity exchanges reveal a thoughtless and perpetual approach to these social exchanges. The thoughtless and perpetual approach to social exchanges as related to instrumental reason and commodity fetishism share some elements with Marcuse's notion of one-dimensional thought and behaviour. Žižek's interpretation of commodity fetishism resonates with the uncritical reflection of individuals in Marcuse's description of one-dimensional thought and behaviour. Additionally, both argue that the uncritical reflection of the individual within consumerist culture is largely due to the individual adhering to the ideological influence of the neo-liberal agenda.

Furthermore, Žižek argues that Marx's concept of commodity fetishism reveals something crucial of contemporary society as guided by neo-liberal motives and values (Wood, 2012:51). Individuals within society do not perceive commodities as mere things (due to commodity fetishism), since those commodities reflect the nature of the social relationship and identities implicit within those social exchanges (Wood, 2012:51; Žižek, 2008:33-35, 47-50). The relations of social exchanges are externalised by the exchanging of commodities and reveal a thoughtless and perpetual perspective on socially related practices (such as one-dimensional thought and behaviour which encourage the prevalence of false needs) (Žižek, 2008:47-50). Therefore, the rational (instrumental reasoning) individual is not guided by inner authentic selfhood (Wood, 2012:51; Žižek, 2008:33-35, 47-50). Rather, the individual within a society constructed by neo-liberal agendas is guided by the external relations of the exchanging of commodities (Žižek, 2008:33-35, 47-50).

Žižek's Lacanian appropriation of commodity fetishism reveals that the reasoning in terms of the exchange of commodities relies on the fantasy that constructs social reality, and the fantasy this

creates of attaining *jouissance* (Wood, 2012:51; Žižek, 2008:33-35, 47-50). Therefore, commodity fetishism reflects and highlights the antagonisms within Žižek's understanding of *jouissance* (Wood, 2012:51; Žižek, 2008:33-35, 47-50). The socially constructed fantasies create the desire and the illusion of attainment of the commodity, such as happiness, adventure etc. When the commodity does not fulfil the fantasy *jouissance*, as the enjoyment of the prohibition of fulfilment, the socially constructed fantasy or illusion surrounding the commodity still remains.

The socially constructed illusions and fantasies surrounding commodities are perpetuated and encouraged within neo-liberal society with the objective of sustaining the development of the global economic system. Thus, by definition false needs, as imposed by societal convention, are preserved and encouraged through the fantasy and illusion surrounding commodities with contemporary consumerist society.

#### 4.2.3. Lacan

According to Wood, Žižek has often refuted the fact that his (Žižek's) main focus is in political theory or ideology critique (Wood, 2012:32). Rather, Žižek articulates his academic focus as an interest in 'theory' (Wood, 2012:32). When referring to theory, Žižek specifically refers to the notion that Lacanian psychoanalytic theory provides new insights that enable him (Žižek) to elaborate on the theory of dialectics (Wood, 2012:32). Furthermore, Lacanian psychoanalytic theory also provides Žižek with new insights into the functioning of ideology that could possibly lead to the political and ethical acts of individuals and ultimately result in the creation of a new social (symbolic) reality (Wood, 2012:36). Žižek's Lacanian approach to theory might provide new insight into the ideological functioning consumerist culture by gaining a new perspective of needs.

##### 4.2.3.1. The Psychoanalytic Perspective

Žižek's Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective on the concept of commodity fetishism relates to the notion of the difficulty to fully realise desire (Žižek, 2000:21). The crucial factor in commodity fetishism is the Lacanian notion that the obstacles to fully realise desire is what makes a commodity desirable (Žižek, 2000:21). Žižek argues that Marx's mistake was to assume that the productivity (as the object of desire) would expand without an obstacle (the neo-liberal

comprehension of value) (Wood, 2012:158; Žižek, 2000:21). The connection between the libidinal economy<sup>33</sup> that is sustained by ‘enjoyment’ (*jouissance*), and the global economic system that is sustained by the valuation of goods, is of great importance (Žižek, 2000:24). The paradox of desire is that the more the profit, the greater is the desire to make more profit. The more objects and commodities the individual consumes, the more the desire continues to be unfulfilled or as Žižek states it ‘the more you possess it, the greater the lack’ (Wood, 2012:158; Žižek, 2000:24). The paradox of desire as a sort of lack (or at least that it exposes a lack or void) is incorporated in Žižek’s interpretation of dialectical materialism (Žižek, 2000:32). The paradox of desire and lack within the dialectic is reflected in the way in which social (symbolic) reality as presence is revealed in terms of non-presence (Wood, 2012:158; Žižek, 2000:32). In other words, individuals’ comprehension of social reality within consumerist culture is constructed from the concept of desire and the lack that desire reflects (Wood, 2012:158).

Žižek argues that the libidinal economy within contemporary society revolves around enjoyment (Žižek, 2000:43). The drive of the global economy is established and developing as long as the circulation of capital “becomes an end in itself” and the development of the global economy by increasing value only functions “in and through this constantly renewed movement” (Wood, 2012:159). To paraphrase Žižek, the libidinal elements within neo-liberalism’s global economic system, the goal of drive and the aim of drive should be understood as separate factors (Žižek, 2000:43). The goal of the neo-liberalist systems is to maximise profits, whereas the true aim is the sustaining of the global economy through the circulation of capital (Wood, 2012:159; Žižek, 2000:43). According to Žižek it is the circulation of capital within the global economic system that has led to the deformational effects within social interaction (Wood, 2012:159; Žižek, 2000:60).

Žižek’s psychoanalytic approach to analysing social structures has received a lot of critique (McMillan, 2013:19, 20, 23). Critics argue that Žižek’s Lacanian approach to contemporary

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<sup>33</sup> Libidinal economy is defined by Lyotard in his book *Libidinal Economy* (1993) an economy where currency cannot amount to the intimacy of social exchanges and the political and libidinal elements within such exchanges are overlooked (Lyotard, 1993:xvi).

consumer society calls for total transformation rather than seeking solutions within a neo-liberal society (McMillan, 2013:2, 19, 20, 23). Furthermore, Žižek in fact suggests a radical alternative structure of society by analysing the potential for halting the reproduction of the circuit of capital (McMillan, 2013:2, 19, 23). However, he does not give a detailed description of such an alternative society. Therefore, Žižek does not provide us with a definitive alternative to contemporary consumer society, but only gives critique of consumerist society.

Contrary to what these critics argue, Žižek states that his approach provides significant insight into how individuals operate within contemporary consumer society and that an alternative society is possible. It is only because we function within our current neo-liberal, consumerist ideology that we cannot see a solution beyond it. Žižek provides critique on a society driven by neo-liberal values, one that results in individuals demanding enjoyment and who become obsessed with obtaining desires (McMillan, 2013:103-105). Desire and enjoyment become consumerist ideological fantasies in contemporary consumerist society (McMillan, 2013:103-105).

It can be remarked that Žižek indeed focuses much of his attention on the possibility of an alternative society and social structure. However, as previously mentioned, social structures with preconditioning systems will always be in place. Any preconditioning system or social structure will promote and function in such a way that it benefits its own ideals, motives and values. While suggesting an alternative society and social structure may be a solution to consumerism, the perspectives of individuals may be sustaining a skewed social structure. Žižek's theories are thus limited, yet still provide valuable insight into consumerist behaviour.

In conclusion, Žižek's interpretation of Hegel's dialectical process as it relates to the social and political acts of individual's within society has been discussed and been contrasted with Marcuse's understanding of the dialectic process. Marcuse's understanding of the dialectic process as it would result in a rational society is at odds with Žižek's argumentation that the

dialectical process itself relies on the integral antagonisms within the dialectical process. Moreover, Žižek's interpretation of Hegelian dialectics reveals the illusion of wholeness or oneness as an ideological fantasy. Therefore, Marcuse's vision of a rational society where individuals' true needs of happiness and freedom are met within the social structure creates the illusion of wholeness. This illusion of wholeness is also reflected within Marcuse's conceptualisation and description of true needs.

Furthermore, Žižek's interpretation of Marx's concept of commodity fetishism gives an alternative perspective to Taylor's concept of instrumental reason and to the development of Marcuse's notion of one-dimensional thought and behaviour. As discussed previously, both the concepts of instrumental reason and commodity fetishism are concerned with the valuing and reasoning of individuals within consumerist society according to neo-liberal motives and agendas. Keeping in mind the concept of commodity fetishism, the valuing of social exchanges according to neo-liberal motives and agendas could encourage one-dimensional thought and behaviour<sup>34</sup>.

Žižek's Lacanian psychoanalytic approach and interpretation of Hegelian dialectics and Marx's concept of commodity fetishism bring new concepts and alternative perspectives to light. An attempt will be made to broaden Marcuse's concept of false needs by incorporating the Žižek's appropriation of the Lacanian notion of 'enjoyment' with the intent of giving critique on consumerist culture. A more detailed account of this integration of these concepts (false needs and enjoyment) will follow in the next section of this chapter.

#### **4.3. Žižek and the Concept of 'Enjoyment' (or *Jouissance*)**

'Enjoyment' is an accepted translation for the Lacanian term '*jouissance*' which Žižek appropriates within the context of consumerist culture arguing that it has become to play a vital role in the functioning of social life (Žižek, 2005:10, 38-39; Žižek, 2006a:26, 60, 89). Žižek's

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<sup>34</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter of this study, one-dimensional thought and behaviour is described by Marcuse as individuals thinking and behaving to develop and sustain the social structure that limits or suppresses their individual freedom and happiness (Marcuse, 1964:5-7, 241, 245).

concept of 'enjoyment' should not be confused with everyday enjoyment as pleasure. Žižek's concept or understanding of enjoyment refers specifically to a painful type of enjoyment (or surplus enjoyment) where a bizarre captivation could result in an individual acting against his/her self-interest (Žižek, 2005:10, 38-39; Žižek, 2006a:26, 89). Therefore, enjoyment as referred to by Žižek is a painful experience of an excessive stimulation in something bizarre and strange that one cannot turn away from (Wood, 2012:5; Žižek, 2005:10, 29, 38-39). An example would be, not being able to look away from a brutal car accident, because one finds it fascinating (Wood, 2012:5). Hence forth the concept of enjoyment will be used and refer specifically to Žižek's understanding thereof.

Žižek argues that the ideological manipulation of enjoyment is manifested as a structured fantasy that obscures important elements of society (Wood, 2012:55; Žižek, 2008:47-50). The structured ideological fantasy creates the illusion of a unified society that can overcome social antagonisms and the individual behaves according to that unified society (Wood, 2012:55; Žižek, 2008:47-50). The constructed social reality within an ideological fantasy makes it possible for individuals to function despite the social antagonisms, such as enjoyment (because enjoyment as Žižek describes it is a paradox in contemporary consumerist society) (Wood, 2012:55; Žižek, 2008:47-50). Although Žižek argues that individuals within society are usually not aware of this form of enjoyment, he also argues that the notion of enjoyment is being manipulated and has become fundamental to the functioning of contemporary society (Žižek 2005:10, 29, 38-39). In other words, there is an ideological function to the concept of enjoyment (Wood, 2012:57; Žižek, 2005:10, 29, 38-39).

The individual within society that functions within this ideological fantasy, within the context of contemporary society, specifically neo-liberalism, fantasises that he/she might attain full enjoyment (Žižek, 1991a:11-12). However, the fulfilment of the individual's enjoyment is threatened by some 'other' (keeping up with the Jones') and this excessive obsession to obtain full enjoyment ensures the individual's participation within the ideological fantasy as neo-liberalism (Žižek, 1991a:11-12). Žižek argues that within the economy, enjoyment is imposed or

commanded (Žižek, 1991a:10, 237). This description resonates with Marcuse's description of false needs, since false needs are imposed on the individual, just as enjoyment is imposed onto individuals within contemporary society. In other words, by arguing that enjoyment is imposed within contemporary society due to the ideological fantasy of neo-liberalism, the notion of enjoyment can be appropriated as another component to Marcuse's concept of false needs. The concept of enjoyment would therefore contribute to an alternative conceptualisation of false needs. The ideological fantasy as neo-liberalism creates the illusion of experiencing full enjoyment, but in order to obtain full enjoyment one *must* adhere to the social fantasy. This means supporting the development and sustaining of neo-liberal systems such as the global economic system and consumerist culture by buying false needs products. Enjoyment as imposed onto individuals within consumerist culture creates the illusion that by satisfying false needs they will experience full enjoyment. Furthermore, as long as individuals within society behave as if the ideological fantasy as neo-liberalism provides social unity, the proliferation of consumerist culture and false needs will continue.

The neo-liberal values act as the drive for enjoyment in consumerist culture, creating the continuous and escalating cycle of consumerism because individuals act as beings of desire rather than beings of need (Žižek, 2005:47, 70, 126; Žižek, 2006a:19, 24, 28, 40). Žižek critiques a society driven by neo-liberal values, one that results in individuals demanding and forced to attain enjoyment and who become obsessed with obtaining desires, not as false needs products but as the existential satisfaction that these products promise to provide. Desire and enjoyment as a characteristic of false needs, becomes a consumerist ideological fantasy within society.

#### 4.3.1. The Imaginary, the Real and the Symbolic

Žižek uses Lacanian psychoanalysis to better understand the allure and flourishing of neo-liberal values on an individual level rather than focusing on the structures of society (McMillan, 2013:48, 49; Žižek, 2005:47, 70; Žižek, 2006a:22, 26, 36). Žižek's underlying analysis of consumerist society draws on Lacan's three interacting orders, the *imaginary*, the *Real* and the *symbolic* (McMillan, 2013:20, 53; Wright & Wright, 1999:3, 4, 7, 22-28; Žižek, 2006a:267-271).

The Lacanian concepts of the *imaginary*, the *Real* and the *symbolic*, come together in cohesion to criticise and expose that which is inherently acknowledged as ‘real’ or ‘true’ (Wood, 2012:29).

The *imaginary* order refers specifically to the development of an infant’s ego as a fragmented character through interacting and imitating those around the infant. The imaginary also refers to the illusion of unity as opposition to disunity within the concept of the *Real* (McMillan, 2013:20, 53; Wright & Wright, 1999:3, 4, 7, 22-28; Žižek, 2006a:267-271). In other words, the imaginary register is established within the fantasy of wholeness that obscures the disunity within the *Real*. The origin of the fantasy of unity and wholeness is described as “the narcissistic identification with the visual image of one’s body” (Wood, 2012:116-117). Since the self-identity within the imaginary register are encountered are external, the identification of identity will always be an alienated concept (Wood, 2012:116-117). Throughout life the fantasy of unity, wholeness and consistency would originate within the imaginary register of the individual (Wood, 2012:116-117). Unlike the imaginary, the *symbolic* order refers to how individuals react and relate to things in society (McMillan, 2013:20, 53; Wright & Wright, 1999:3, 4, 7, 22-28; Žižek, 2006a:267-271). The symbolic identity of the individual are comprised of social elements such as language and “the social prohibitions which regulate desire” (Wood, 2012:116-117). The symbolic register includes the intersubjective practices of society as it relates to other individuals, such as rule-governed practices (Wood, 2012:116-117). The individual’s constructed reality is a functioning between the imaginary and the symbolic order, since the illusion or fantasy of wholeness is necessary for the functioning of the symbolic reality (Žižek, 2008:33-35).

The *Real* order refers to the unknown aspects of life (McMillan, 2013:20, 53; Wright & Wright, 1999:3, 4, 7, 22-28; Žižek, 2006a:267-271). Some would argue that it is Žižek’s implementation of the notion of the *Real* which is his greatest contribution to philosophy (Wood, 2012:29). Žižek continually states that the *Real* cannot be understood as an objective reality, since the *Real* does not exist. The *Real* is in each case different for each individual, because the *Real* is constantly defined as the lack and inconsistency which obstructs social reality (Wood, 2012:31). Žižek

concerns himself with the dialectic between the symbolic order and the Real order, which generates the concept of enjoyment (McMillan, 2013:52-55). The generation of enjoyment as a result of the dialectic between the symbolic order and the Real order can be seen within the concept of desire that will be explored within the next section.

#### 4.3.2. Desire

Enjoyment (or *jouissance*) is a paradoxical state of suffering and desire (McMillan, 2013:52). Žižek's understanding of the theory of enjoyment (or *jouissance*) describes the human condition as a constant and complex dialectic between the symbolic order and the Real Order (McMillan, 2013:45, 49; Žižek, 2005:38-40; Žižek, 2006a:26, 60, 83, 89). The object of desire (or false need product) causes 'lack' which describes the separation from 'enjoyment'. 'Excess' describes the abundance of 'enjoyment' in the object cause of desire (McMillan, 2013:49). An individual within contemporary consumer society is driven to live and enjoy life in excess, almost obsessed with attaining abundance (Žižek, 2006a:26, 60).

##### 4.3.3.1. Desire as Ideological Fantasy

Both Žižek and Lacan describe desire, not as a function of biology, but as a function of imaginative projection or rather, of fantasy (Wood, 2012:23). Desire is a function of fantasy within the imaginative order, since there is the illusion of attaining whatever is desired by the other (Žižek, 2006b:40). This implies that individuals have to learn to desire, since desire is reliant upon fantasising about what others might desire (Žižek, 2006b:40). These fantasies of the individual about what others might desire assume that there is a collective wholeness within others' desires (all other individual desires the same thing), which is impossible (Žižek, 2006b:40). This description of desire broadens Marcuse's concept of false needs, because the concept of desire gives an explanation as to why individuals within consumerist culture *want* to satisfy false needs. Individuals within consumerist culture aren't necessarily forced to consume false needs products, yet it is the ideological fantasy that gives the illusion of a void or a lack.

The void or lack that is experienced by the individual originates from the fantasy of wholeness within the imaginary order. Žižek states desire as fantasy within the imaginary as such:

*“Fantasy mediates between the formal symbolic structure and the positivity of the objects we encounter in reality: it provides a scheme according to which certain positive objects in reality can function as objects of desire, filling in the empty spaces opened up by the formal symbolic structure”* (Žižek, 2006b:40).

In other words, it is the individual’s capacity to fantasise that instils him/her with the notion of desire and the inclination to consume false needs products (Žižek, 2006b:40). The problem becomes when those fantasies of the individual are inconsistent or when the individual’s true needs aren’t being satisfied because of the obsession of attaining wholeness from commodities (Žižek, 1991b:168). The main objective is to be able to perceive beyond the distortions and inconsistencies of the imaginary-symbolic reality and fully realise desire within the Real, which are what Marcuse would describe as the true needs of individual happiness and freedom (Wood, 2012:23; Žižek, 1991b:168). The question is if this is even possible. However, individuals in a consumerist society should not accept their fate within society. Rather, individuals should focus on how make those true needs of freedom and happiness more attainable within their social reality (imaginary-symbolic reality).

Individuals are caught up in imaginary-symbolic reality that constructs the ideological fantasy as neo-liberalism (Žižek, 2006a:26). It is the ideological fantasy which creates the illusion of social unity, the ‘a way of life’ is constituted by the notion that enjoyment is imposed on the individuals of society (Žižek, 2006a:26). It is within this illusion of social unity (the development and sustaining of the global economic system) that which individuals as a collective desire are unavoidably linked to another individual’s desire (Žižek, 2006a:26). In other words, what is collectively desired within the ideological fantasy can never be “translated back into” our true desires and needs, since desire is always linked with others’ desires (Žižek, 2006a:26).

With all things considered, desire as it relates to enjoyment is described by Žižek as the wanting to obtain an object, yet this desire (the fantasy of wholeness) can never be fulfilled because then it ceases to be desire (Žižek, 2005:10, 29, 38-39; Žižek, 2006a:26, 60, 83, 89). Žižek describes 'drive' as repeating the failed attempt of obtaining the object (Žižek, 2005:10, 29, 38-39; Žižek, 2006a:26, 60, 83, 89). Enjoyment is therefore not only an attempt to attain excess, but also enjoying the drive (or suffering) behind trying and failing to attain excess (Žižek 2005:10, 29, 38-39; 2006a:26, 60, 83, 89). The neo-liberal values act as the drive for enjoyment in contemporary consumer society, creating the continuous and escalating cycle of consumerism, because individuals act as beings of desire rather than need (McMillan, 2013:2, 15, 45, 103-105, 143, 149; Wright & Wright, 1999:11-14, 33, 108; Žižek, 2005:47, 70, 126; Žižek, 2006a:19, 24, 28, 40).

In summary, Žižek's appropriation of the Lacanian concept of 'enjoyment' (or *jouissance*) ensures the individuals' participation within the ideological fantasy as neo-liberalism. The illusion created within the ideological fantasy that enjoyment can be fulfilled within the global economic system. Additionally, Žižek argues that enjoyment within the economy; especially within neo-liberal society is imposed onto individuals in order to sustain the illusion or fantasy of social unity. It is this description of enjoyment by Žižek that provides a clear connection between the concept of enjoyment and the concept of false needs. In this description that Žižek gives of enjoyment, enjoyment becomes an element of false needs and thus broadens the perspective of false needs as it functions within the ideological fantasy.

Furthermore, enjoyment as it originates within the dialectic between the symbolic order and the Real reveals the concept of desire. It is the concept of desire that provides a nuanced perspective of enjoyment on an individual and societal level. Desire functions within the imaginary, since desire is the illusion of collective fantasy (or shared desire) of individuals within society. The concept of desire as appropriated by Žižek also provides an alternative approach to Marcuse's concept of false needs. The concept of desire provides an explanation as to why individuals

within society feel the necessity to satisfy false needs. The individual finds it necessary to satisfy false needs, because it sustains the ideological fantasy of social unity within consumerist culture as a neo-liberal system.

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

Marcuse's conceptualisation of needs as a distinction between true needs and false needs provided salient insights and critique of consumerist culture. Marcuse did so by arguing that the imposing of false needs onto individuals within consumerist culture limited or suppressed the satisfaction of true needs. Marcuse also argued that the proliferation of false needs and consumerist culture is largely due to individuals conforming to a collective rationality of society (i.e. what Charles Taylor calls instrumental reason). Additionally, Marcuse argued that in order to be liberated from false needs, a new perspective of needs is necessary. Marcuse's theory on how exactly to be liberated from false needs is limited.

Therefore, in this chapter Žižek's appropriation of the Lacanian concept of 'enjoyment' (or *jouissance*) was introduced in an attempt to broaden Marcuse's concept of false needs. The concept of enjoyment was introduced with the ultimate intent of gaining new insight and critique on consumerist culture by gaining a new perspective of needs within consumerist culture. Within this chapter, a short description of Žižek's unique methodology as an amalgamation of Hegel, Marx and Lacan was given. Žižek's unique interpretation of Hegelian dialectics emphasises the inevitable antagonisms within the dialectical process as opposed to Marcuse's general approach to the Hegelians dialectics that overlooks these tensions. Additionally, Žižek's analysis of Marx's concept of commodity fetishism provides an amalgamated insight into the development of Taylor's concept of instrumental reasoning and Marcuse's notion of one-dimensional thought and behaviour. Finally, Žižek's appropriation of the Lacanian concept of enjoyment as a concept that originates within the dialectic between the symbolic and the Real was explored in an attempt to broaden Marcuse's concept of false needs.

Ultimately, in the attempt to incorporate Žižek's concept of enjoyment to Marcuse's concept of false needs provided an integrated perspective on consumerist culture within the neo-liberal ideology. In doing so a synthesised explanation for the proliferation of the satisfaction of false needs and consumerist culture, on an individual and societal level, was given through the concept of desire as a constituent of enjoyment. In combination the concept of instrumental reason, one-dimensional thought and behaviour and enjoyment offers a nuanced perspective on the proliferation of consumerist culture and the satisfaction of false needs.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this study was to give a philosophical critique of consumerist culture with special attention to the notions of ‘false needs’ and ‘enjoyment’. It was postulated that within the context of contemporary society the neo-liberal agenda of developing and sustaining the global economic system is the forceful motivation behind consumerist culture. The links between the deformational effects of consumerist culture on an individual, societal and environmental level as largely influenced by Taylor’s concept of instrumental reason were discussed. Marcuse’s insight and critique on consumerist culture through the concept of false needs and Žižek’s insights and critique on consumerist culture through the concept of enjoyment, were explored. An attempt was made to broaden Marcuse’s concept of false needs by exploring Žižek’s appropriation of the Lacanian concept of enjoyment alongside Marcuse’s concept of false needs. These final remarks provide an overview of the study and specifically inquire if the attempt of gaining new insight and critique of consumerist culture was successful. This study’s attempt to address the concern of consumerist culture can be articulated in the study’s research question: how can a philosophical critique of consumerist culture be developed through the concepts of ‘false needs’ and ‘enjoyment’?

### **5.1. Overview of the study**

The second chapter described some of the deformation effects of consumerist culture on an individual, societal and environmental level. The main focus of this chapter was to indicate the relevance of this discussion on consumerist culture by naming some of the prominent deformational effects of consumerist culture. The central question of this chapter asked: what are the deformational effects of consumerist culture and how do these deformation effects manifest on an individual, societal and environmental level? An approach to this discussion of the manifestation of the deformational effects on an individual, societal and environmental level was made through Taylor’s concept of instrumental reason. Some of these deformation effects included narcissism (individual level), cultural imperialism (social level) as well as human influenced climate change (environmental level).

The next chapter detailed the issues with regards to consumerist culture as researched and understood by Marcuse through his concept of false needs. The main focus of this chapter was what Marcuse's concept of false needs entailed, how it developed and how it can be critiqued. The influences on Marcuse, the development of his concept of false needs and the factors and circumstances that contributed to his conceptualisation of false needs were explored in this chapter. Some of the thinkers and philosophers explored within this chapter who influenced Marcuse include, Heidegger, Marx, Freud and Hegel. The development of Marcuse's philosophies, with special attention to the development of his concept of false needs, included phenomenological Marxism and Critical Theory. Marcuse's concept of false needs was described as imposed needs from external forces which limit or suppress individual freedom and happiness. Additionally, the notion of one-dimensional thought and behaviour was described and brought into close association with Taylor's concept of instrumental reason. Furthermore, from Marcuse's concept of false needs a salient critique on consumerist culture was provided. A final remark is that Marcuse's concept of 'false needs' gives a clear indication of the structural violence that consumerist culture brings within the socio-political level.

The next chapter was an attempt to firstly, give a description of what Žižek's concept of enjoyment entails, how it developed and how it can be critiqued. A description of Žižek's unique dialectical methodology as an amalgamation between Hegel, Marx and Lacan was discussed. Žižek's alternative approach to Hegelian dialectics provides an interesting interpretation of Marcuse's notion of revolutionary rationalism, one-dimensional thought and behaviour as well as his concepts of true and false needs. Žižek's aim is not to address or solve these tensions. Rather, Žižek focuses on creating a new understanding of society with those tensions in mind, since those tensions are inherently part of society. Additionally, Žižek's interpretation of Marx's concept of commodity fetishism as it relates to social exchanges offers a different perspective on Taylor's concept of instrumental reason and Marcuse's notion of one-dimensional thought and behaviour. Žižek's understanding of concepts in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory was also briefly explored. Enjoyment as the accepted alternative term for *jouissance* is defined by Žižek as a pleasure that is inhabiting of desire itself. Enjoyment is found in the dialectic between the symbolic order and the Real order and is later appropriated by Žižek within the context of

contemporary society as an ideological fantasy. Moreover, desire functions as the element of enjoyment that functions within the imaginary order. Desire as an integral part of enjoyment was described as that which encourages the proliferation of the satisfaction of false needs and the proliferation of consumerist culture on an individual and societal level.

On reviewing Marcuse's concept of false needs alongside Žižek's concept of enjoyment it was argued that Žižek's concept of enjoyment as it functions within the global economic system as something that is forced or imposed on the individual. Since Žižek's concept of enjoyment was described as something that is imposed onto the individual, that limits the satisfaction of true needs and desires that would lead to individual freedom and happiness, the argument was made that enjoyment could be perceived as an element of false needs. Therefore, the concept of enjoyment was used to broaden Marcuse's concepts of false needs. In doing so, new insight into the functioning of the individual within society on consumerist culture was given. Secondly, the attempt was made to expand upon Marcuse's concept of false needs by exploring Žižek's appropriation of the Lacanian concept of enjoyment. An argument was made that new insight and critique into consumerist culture could be given through Žižek's Lacanian appropriation of enjoyment to Marcuse's concept of false needs.

How to overcome the concerns with consumerist culture is not easy since needs are so entangled into society, neo-liberalist ideology and the individual's constant searching for perfection in consumerist culture. The thesis's focus on a critique of consumerist culture is a much needed beginning in the process to overcoming the limitations and deformational effects of a consumerist culture.

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