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Masters of Arts in Cultural Sustainability Thesis

Rites of Passage:

Exposing Neoliberalism, Performing Self, and Acting Change

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Chapter One: Introduction

This is not a normal ethnography in that its structure is as fluid as the group, Couchsurfing, studied. In trying to organize and communicate what was experienced through participant-observation, it is nearly impossible to separate and define all the social components[1] that make up Couchsurfing. This, however, was a most propitious mishap; in lieu of seeking particularities as a tool for separating groups, overarching social mechanisms were made apparent in the nuances that connected them (Wolford: 2010). This paper tries to communicate what a study of Couchsurfing has exposed: a relationship between the ideology of self, capitalism, and material origins (Marx: 1867).

This paper flows like a rhizome: much like a wave – sometimes chaotic sometimes calm- but all its parts are numerously connected (Deleuze and Guattari: 1976). The study begins by exploring what Couchsurfing means to privileged youth who are grappling with a faltering economy. Through this horizontal ethnographic exploration, rites of passage demand to be addressed: through observing the normalizing effects placed upon cultural key holders during the time of study (Turner: 1964). By reviewing and adding to current bodies of theory, addressing rites of passage, neoliberal globalization, and fetishes, anecdotal evidence is extrapolated to explore the idea that self is a fetish of capitalism, and that the privileged are granted temporary cathartic juxtaposition to societal norms in liminal stages of rites of passage (Brosses: 1760, Marx: 1867, Turner: 1964, Deleuze and Guattari: 1976).

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[1] For example, different cultural and social groups.

The majority of primary data was obtained through participation in the subculture group Couchsurfing, which is a group that fosters inter-cultural exchanges by requesting and inviting global travelers to stay in one's living room. It is here in the realm of the privileged[2] that a horizontal ethnography takes place. The time spent with this group has led to a symptom beyond and vastly different than "going native." In becoming a part of this group my social and cultural standing has not shrunk, but has expanded[3]. As a researcher this has provided advantages and disadvantages. It has opened up the community to such a degree that I was able to move around freely: unbounded by the effects of social fears and stereotypes of an anthropologist. I was able to conduct a deep ethnographic study, which is essential to qualitative research (Ortner: 2006). The proximity to this community has meant that an extra dose of critical thinking had to be applied. Many times throughout this paper my own friends and support group are critiqued. Oddly, this may have led to an academic overcompensation, which takes the form of pessimism. This pessimism placed in the position of the studier and the studied, the researcher doesn't have to deal with the ethics of representing the group as an outsider, but must deal with representing the group as an insider. It is my belief that this is a needed option in ethnographic research: to share the process of knowledge production beyond informant and to empower "local" voices.

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[2] Those who can afford global travel, higher education, and a luxury of confusion of career path.
[3] The idea of an anthropologist going native as living in a far off remote land, and shunning the culture they came from is antiquated in a globalized world. A topic for further research.

Building from Foucault's (1974) critique of the repressive hypothesis, where traditional understandings of repression are called into question, I explore the discourse around the formation and sustaining of a fetishized self through alternative travel[4], and connect it to larger societal mechanism – neoliberal capitalism, which acts as the impetus for this process: as a normalizing force on ideas of self. Acting much like a rhizome, (e.g. a social group interconnected with various other groups, ideas, and equally legitimate interpretations of reality, as described in *1000 Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari: 1976)) Couchsurfing connects to and branches off into many different avenues and levels of a vast array of subcultures, such as the Occupy movement, Reddit.com participants, and hitchhiking enthusiasts. Constantly the lines between Couchsurfing and other groups are blurred. It is in these blurred lines – liminal phases - that rites of passage are seen to take place into enacting capitalism, which normalizes what self is in Western society (Turner: 1964).

Fieldwork with members of Couchsurfing showed that this group propagates cultural identities, helps promote culture sustainability in the globalized arena - through providing spaces for expression, and traverses through many social and cultural groups fostering intercultural experiences. Ironically, however, it has become clear that Couchsurfing supports neoliberal globalization, and acts as a space where self is further fetishized: by providing a space for rites of passage that helps group members come to

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[4] As viewed as a form of resistance to capitalism by operating in the informal market place.

terms with enacting capitalist ideologies through cathartic juxtaposition, i.e. rites of passage into the workforce and consumption (Marx: 1867, Turner: 1967) .

While alternative travel promotes cultural sustainability, the experiences produced by Couchsurfing spring from and are bounded by consumerism, and this ultimately leads group members back into normativity: a cathartic experience where social structures produce ideas in one's head. For example, Couchsurfing has grown exponentially over the last few years, and has opened up to investment by venture capitalists in 2011- a move made by the CEO, who controversially asserts the change was due to complications surrounding their nonprofit status. While this may or may not be true, the incorporation of Couchsurfing has led to a massive restructuring of the online community platform, which has resulted in changing the face-to-face interactions of the group. This has caused philosophical struggles for Couchsurfing members; it raises safety concerns and worries about the direction the community is going: as many members relish in the informal market. This topic is explored by looking through a lens of liminality at repressive practices of Couchsurfing's administration to silence protesters who have openly challenged these changes (Turner: 1964). Yet, repression is not cited for fetishizing self; rather, it is a serious game, which distracts one from larger social mechanisms (Ortner: 2006) I will consider the ways that this controversy relates to the propagation of neoliberalism, the formation of cultural identity, and overarching patterns in the globalized world.

The second part of this paper is concerned with taking a deeper look at the rituals that cause liminality to be liminal: in that it doesn't incite revolution (Turner: 1964). With the norm kept, it has been argued that Couchsurfing and alternative travel can be understood as fetishisms of self: generated through the consumption and labor production of otherness as an act of public reflexivity (Marx: 1884, Turner: 1974). By conducting ethnographic research on Couchsurfers in liminal phases, mainly between school and full time employment, this large topic is placed in the context of forming systems of thoughts and ideas that appear to be juxtaposed against capitalism, yet help form reifying semantics and practices of Capitalism through the discourse of self[5] (Turner: 1967).

Research was conducted by participating with the Couchsurfing subculture: in a trip through the ethereal imagined community of Couchsurfers across North America, Europe, and North Africa from 2010-2012 and through interviews between 2012-2013. The simplified and main question is "How does Couchsurfing fetishize self?" Largely within the group, it is seen as a lifestyle that offers a more enlightened, less hegemonic understanding of people and nations by providing a way to be immersed in the culture one is traveling to (Couchsurfing: 2012). It is seen as a tool to overcome various economic, intellectual, or emotional blocks that would stop one from traveling (Couchsurfing: 2012). It allows one to live as a local does, and this is a trend that has been steadily growing, yet which is seriously called into question. In a group so large, so vast, and with a disputed center of power one must wonder what meaning comes from

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[5] that is, a type of self that is a public reflexive product of capitalism.

"meaningful connections[6]," and what societal assemblages play a part in shaping this meaning?

Well before hands met keyboard, the study began. I was taking note from such academics as Gregory Bateson (1972) and Isabelle Stengers (2010) by letting what I learned sink in, connect, and exist in a variety of conversations with the studied groups members before putting it to formal use. A large tin box now holds dozens of field notebooks that chronicle the interactions and influences throughout my exploration of as many possibilities for explanations as I could handle. It is a chaotic time condensed into confused and muddled notes. It is also a cherished and stark reminder of a willingness to sort and order what I experienced. This is a point that couldn't be taken for more than it's worth. It is my hope that a blaring transparency will allow the authority to communicate this thought experiment based on ethnographic research through first and secondary sources. At the end of the paper an analogous novella will be used to illustrate the main points. By removing the jargon and technical terms I hope to make this available to all who are curious or care to read.

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[6] Part of Couchsurfing's mission statement is to foster meaningful connections (Couchsurfing.org: 2012)

Photo of a three hour flight delay, which was the first of many. This is a common theme

for Couchsurfers: being able to adapt to unstable circumstances.

Couchsurfing.org is an online-based group. In many ways it is a perfect example

of a globalized imagined community that splinters off into many separate and connected

subgroups (Couchsurfing.org: 2012, Anderson: 1983) Participation and

self-identification are the only requirements to belong, though being accepted is as

complex and diverse as the many members that comprise the group. The depth of

"belonging" could be measured in a number of ways, e.g. commitment to traveling, hosting travelers, or level of in depth involvement in the group: such as organizing community events. Frequency, however, of meeting other members of the community is commonly referred to as a point of reference of "belonging" as it is at the center of this community's ethos. This is literally called references, and is a visible marker that all other members can see via online. For example, after meeting another member of the group each member rates and judges the other publicly to affirm or deny their authenticity to Couchsurfing, in the form of leaving a reference. Many references that I received actually would state that I am an example of the Couchsurfing ethos[7]: this is a common occurrence amongst dedicated members, and is the basis, not the exemeplar, of membership amongst the group (Profile_Couchsurfing.org: 2013).

The structure of Couchsurfing is broken into two main groups. The two groups are Surfers, those who are traveling, and Hosts, those willing to take in Surfers. These are interchangeable status for users and about 46% of users are committed to hosting, a task deemed more serious by surfers because if one isn't pleasant it is much more difficult to deal with (Couchsurfing.org: 2012). However, an alternative to these options is the status "willing to meet up" and show a surfer around. This is exactly what it sounds like. Two or more people agree to meet each other and take it from there. Many times in a new city, I would find no one to host me, but would meet up with members and then later be invited to surf at their residence. This makes perfect sense, as you are able to meet a person before you let them in your house. However, I would most

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[7] See references in appendix. The ethos is described as being open minded, respectful, and adventurous. A wonderful comment, which is very heart felt coming from those I lived with.

frequently be accepted into a person's home without meeting them first. Largely, my hosts attributed this to nuances in my profile, again, pointing towards how important a non-shallow, i.e. personal profile, is to this community.

A key aspect to this group is that it is absolutely free to join, and costs nothing for its prolonged use. Any mention of money is quickly met with criticism, unless it is of generosity. To join, one simply goes to the website and creates a free profile. Many members will judge the content of another's profile based on how much is filled out. For example, having a profile that is filled out very briefly, known as a skeleton profile, will result in a lower success rate of getting accepted to stay at another Couchsurfer's place - according to members. A person's profile is of the utmost importance as it will serve as the primary contact one has with other surfers. It is supposed to be a comprehensive representation of one's self that others can judge, and is supposed to assure a certain level of safety.

The profile contains pictures, interest, information about living situation, and life style preferences. Many members I interview said they would not host a member without multiple photos or references. Building and editing a profile serves as a chance for the Couchsurfer to build and edit their identity. The profile is viewable to any member, and is used to judge if this person would make a suitable person to meet. See Appendix one for example of a profile.

After an interaction members are rated by a detailed description of the experience displayed on the user's profile under the large categories of positive, neutral, or negative. Members cannot delete references that others have left for them, but they

can delete references they have left. See appendix 2 for example of references. This allows members to weed out those who don't fit the social norm of Couchsurfing, i.e. the ethos of the community[8], promote safety, and better help like-minded people connect. A step further is to be "Vouched For," a status only attainable by receiving a single vouch from a vouched member who is allowed to vouch for others: a position attained after being vouched for by three previous vouched members. Further still, there are an endless number of subgroups one can join, and they span from pirate enthusiasts to family travel. This is a testimony to Couchsurfing's growing presence and diversity.

Data taken from the Couchsurfering website showed that in 2012 over 5.5 million Couchsurfers participated in 97,000 cities spanning 207 Countries speaking 366 languages (Couchsurfing.org: 2012). The largest concentrations of Couchsurfers are in North America, Europe, and followed by Asia (Couchsurfing.org: 2012). Gender differences are not drastic in participation with 53% of users being male and 47% being female, while age differences tend to average at 28 years old, but do go past 60 years of age. While the majority of Couchsurfers are in North America and Europe, the group has members in places as remote as Rapa Nui (Couchsurfing.org: 2012).

Couchsurfing is a global community with many subgroups. It quickly becomes clear that it would be erroneous to point to my experience and say this is Couchsurfing. Rather, my experience is one way to Couchsurf. The immediate bias is choice. I actively chose who I would stay with, who would stay with me, and the duration of each visit. Yet, this study is still valid and important as long as these limitations are remembered,

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[8] Meaning, members whom are viewed as exploiting the site are quickly identified and essential boycotted by members ignoring their presence.

and the data gather is kept in that context. It cannot be separated, yet we can extrapolate with theory off of the collected data. As I go on to explain the controversies in Couchsurfing, it is important to remember that those affected by these controversies are in their own right a subgroup of the majority of Couchsurfers. Couchsurfing is an extremely large and diverse group, and the members of this group have various views and opinions that are just as diverse.

The subgroup I will present first is that of Couchsurfing Ambassadors, highly dedicated members of Couchsurfing who are chosen to act to represent a city and the members in that area. It is a very visible position, and carries the baggage one could expect from said position, e.g. slander, jealousy, and controversy are all built into this position. To put this in context, while working with my main informant of the Couchsurfing Ambassadors, he experienced people hacking his account, people creating fake accounts in his name, controversial talk about his personality, and attacks on his character. The truth behind the talk of his character seems counter intuitive given the nature of Couchsurfing's references system, and the large number of positive references he received- in the hundreds. However, my the Ambassador I interviewed openly admits to speaking his mind at all times, which is his attested reason for being kicked out of Couchsurfing.

"...We are not the measure of all things, that there are wonders unimagined, that the Universe is not obliged to conform to what we consider comfortable or plausible..."

-Carl Sagan

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Chapter Two: In the Field

I was first intrigued by alternative travel after I graduated from Towson University when I met a friend who claimed to have traversed across North America with little more than $200 in his pocket. This sparked a myriad of curiosities, which lit dwindling embers in this American spirit. The main pull was conceived in the wake of the economic recession. My first reaction was that it was a means of travel that largely avoided capitalism by enabling anyone to travel, by evidence of the lack of use of monetary currency, i.e. money as money[9] (Marx: 1867, Ivanova: 2013).   One would assume this means a different economic ideology is operating in the globalized arena. However, this statement fails to incorporate money's three functions (money as money, money as a measure of value, and money as a means of transmission) into its analysis as highlighted by Marx in *Capital Volume 1*(1867) and recently critiqued in a wonderful article by Maria Ivanova (2013). Taking this a step further, I propose to ask what creates value in Couchsurfing in a world dominated by money. How does this global power-capital- operate and work when it flows through a cultural group, but when members do not have access to its power? The main point, as any impoverished person will attest to, is that money's absence is just as important as its inclusion: with this in mind can human agency and identity escape the confines of money in today's global world? Or, are we powerless to change the status of self as fetish? Yet, Marx (1867) points out that scarcity is a central feature of capital's power. So, what does scarcity mean when

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[9] This is not to be confused with the Cognitive Capitalism approach; rather, it is contrasting the three functions of money, and inherently assuming a shared value amongst cognitive commodities.

individuals come together as a group to bypass the labor needed for capital by providing its products for free? In the case of Couchsurfing it is shelter, tourism, and oftentimes, food and drink that appear to exist outside the traditional money-based exchange economy.

In Foucault's understanding of power, highlighted in *Introduction to Sexuality* (1974), resistance movements are critiqued as reifying the systems they have deviated from. Thus, while my friend appeared to travel across North America without physical money, he still propagated and worked within the ideology of money in three main ways: First, it reifies by providing a willing and necessary "other" for a culture based in money to measure itself against socially. Secondly, money's hegemony is reinforced by using the discourse of money to frame resistance. For example, an emphasis on the importance of saving money through the constant surveillance and regulations on the exchange of money, hording money (saving it), and by interpreting travel in the terminology and philosophy of money situates meaning making in relation to money as a dominant platform for articulating value. Yet, this points to something more devious, which rests behind the social curtain of alternative travel: inherent in its infrastructure.

The organization that my friend used to travel, Couchsurfing.org, has recently switched from a 501 c3 nonprofit status to a b-corporation status (Benefit Corporation) and has since been invested in by venture capitalists, mainly Benchmark Capital, receiving 7.6 million dollars (Couchsurfing: 2012, Forbes: 2011). The reason to invest in Couchsurfing from the venture capitalist vantage point was explained by Matt Cohler: who headed the Benchmark investment citing that, "Nobody else in the world has such a

strong vibrant community and such a deeply engaged active network of people."

(Forbes: 2011). What does this mean for investment? What does it mean for

Couchsurfing?

One could expect one of four things to happen when a community opens up to

corporate financing: First, that there is little to no change in the community. Second,

that there is a positive impact. For example, the influx of cash could be helping this

organization – which was previously a nonprofit - to survive hard economic times by

providing the needed funds to operate. Thirdly, that the money is the impetus to a

cultural calamity by acting as a corrupting force. Lastly, and this is the hypothesis, that a

mixture of the three previous points is happening. In a community as large as

Couchsurfing, it is reasonable to expect that community members will differ in their

opinions about what is happening due to corporate investment. For example, when

interviewing a Couchsurfer visiting from Qinhuangdao, China about what she thought of

Couchsurfing she stated that:

> "I started Couchsurfing in China to practice my English, and that has been
> great. I want to be a journalist so you know that was very important. But yeah, I
> have always had a great time meeting foreigners, and now that I'm traveling it has
> been a really a big help. "

This is in stark contrast with the various online groups protesting

Couchsurfing's recent changes, to be discussed later[10]. For example,

compare the last quote from a Couchsurfer from Berlin, Germany:

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[10] For an example see bewelcomed.org, which has been largely supported by old couchsurfing members to provide a spot for couchsurfing members who feel their community has been corrupted since couchsurfing changed its nonprofit status.

"Since CS switched, all you ever see any more are free loaders spamming the place page. I just got another request from a copy-and-paste skeleton, and I'm out surfing now how can I host? So, you know they didn't read my profile. It's sad really. I know it's silly, but it just isn't the same"

While switching to a b-corporation status doesn't seem like a major deal it has caused quite the commotion inside the community. The move to becoming a b-corporation is seen as a sign of the growing neglect that Couchsurfing's administration has for its members. It is seen as a move from the people's hands to investor's hands. This move has also created a faction in Couchsurfing amongst new members and veteran members, as acculturation in the culture of Couchsurfing is seen to be at risk. For example, new members who came in under the restructured Couchsurfing website have mixed experiences with veteran members ranging from being ignored to being openly criticized. This is due to how the website has been restructured as it is directing new members to take actions, such as making broad couch requests (asking for a place to sleep) in broad and depersonalized ways, which veteran members see as wrong and culturally harmful. The new website format is frequently described along the lines as "shallow," "opportunist," and as "destroying the culture of Couchsurfing," by older members for reasons that will be explained later on. However, this is in direct contrast to how veteran members describe what Couchsurfing is, e.g. as a valuable and in-depth cultural exchange and not just a website to find a place to sleep (Couchsurfing.org: 2012). The new website directs new members to engage in controversial issues, which they have no way of knowing about, amongst the Couchsurfing community, e.g. using

place pages for surfing[11], and induction into the community becomes that much harder for new members. Simplistically then, to sum up the crisis, new members are viewed to use Couchsurfing erroneously due to the difficulty of indoctrination into the community while veteran members use it to find new and interesting people. This of course is only but a fraction of Couchsurfers; many people I ran into simply didn't like any person who was considered shallow and felt no need to draw a line separating new and old members. Furthermore, a great deal of Couchsurfers ignored this debacle altogether. For example, while writing this paper I hosted numerous Couchsurfers and had very pleasurable and deep connections. I did, however, have to turn down the majority of requests I received as they came from people with no references, pictures, and with poorly filled out profiles. Those involved in protesting the new Couchsurfering are protesting this type of increasing contact and are extremely passionate about their experiences. From what I can discern veteran members typically are upset at the new format of the Couchsurfing website and new members suffer because of this. It is viewed to invite shallow connections, which many members have protested since the new website was launched.   The real question, however, is if this dichotomy is just a serious game distracting from larger societal structures: the processes in which self becomes a fetish. One must ask if how repression is being enacted.

There are many frustrated members who claim a repressive web host and administration that actively censor members by deleting posts, entire groups, and membership profiles (Couchsurfing. 0rg: 2012, Cslegacy.com: 2013). For example, in

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[11] This is extremely offensive to many Couchsurfers as it bypasses sending personal messages, yet members have been directed to do such by the Couchsurfing staff.

the Winter of 2013, in Chicago, IL, I watched the community react as a highly respected

member of the Chicago Couchsurfing community was quietly stripped of his social

position within Couchsurfing[12], by the Couchsurfing administration (Couchsurfing.org:

2013). Reactions to these problems have varied from online protest, in the form of letter

writing, blogging, nonparticipation in the group, and exporting surfers profiles to other

independent websites (Couchsurfing.org 2013, Cslegacy.com: 2013).

Example:

> "How about we follow CSHQ's lead and stop giving a rat's ass about how
> its changes to this website impact this community. I propose a change of
> attitude - a new approach - that calls for an end to beating our heads
> against the wall with every change that adversely affects this community.
> After all, CSHQ knows best...Why waste any more energy trying to help a
> company that has such disregard for you or anything you have to offer?
> Take your spirit of volunteerism and use it someplace where it is truly
> needed, but above all, appreciated" (KingofCouchsurfing: 2012).

These insights prompt one to look at simple but overlooked questions about how

contemporary Westerners interact with each other outside the uses of money as money;

begging the question what does money do to human relationships when it is not being

used to purchase goods or services or when it is not being used by the majority of a

social groups members, and can human relationships escape the influence of money

(Ivanova: 2013)? Clearly, in this case, while money is not used by group members and

actively protested against, it still has a large impact on members via a selected few, i.e.

administration, investors, and CEO (Couchsurfing.org: 2012).

At the start of my research into this group my hypothesis was that working in the

absence of money denotes a consciousness of and reification of the legitimacy money

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[12] This member was stripped of being the community ambassador of Chicago with no explanation.

has over our lives without having access to the power it gives. Largely influenced by post-structuralist theorists (such as Foucault and Deleuze) this has been criticized as overly pessimistic and as having circular logic by many of my peers. I feel that the criticism given here denotes a lack of acknowledgement of the many different layers that comprises a group and the many interconnections that group members have with other groups, ex. Occupy, WWOOFing, etc. However, during my research many surprising resistance movements surfaced, which vehemently challenged the underlying argument presented in this paper. The largest factors contributing to the criticism of this paper are human agency and that my initial hypothesis was over simplified. I will cover these concerns as the paper goes on, as they are valuable insights and must be addressed. Yet, the main questions remain, does capital act as a social normalizing mechanism, is it an overarching structure in cultural groups, and does this larger societal structure trump resistance: is self a fetish, and if so, can a person move beyond the self constructed and constrained by its objectification in capitalism? This is explored through Couchsurfing.org and their recent struggles, and by looking at the personal lives and experiences of members I met and lived with over the course of my research.

In my own personal adventures with alternative travel I was granted the chance to see lands far from the doorsteps of my university, and even further from my bank statement. In fact, while I felt it was incredibly irresponsible not to progress outside of school, meaning to secure fulltime employment, I was encouraged by peers, mentors, and family to take this opportunity and travel while I was "young" and "able." This directed my curiosity to learn more about 1.) Why one would feel like this and 2.) What importance did this liminal stage serve for society (Turner: 1975)? It was apparent that I had entered one of the acceptable stages in our culture to travel; the liminality between school and career, a sort of middle class rite of passage (Turner: 1975). This was the first introduction of my own socioeconomic class and gender bias into the study, i.e. having a "higher" education, a support network which allowed for travel, and cultural norms and expectations for exploration. With these considerations in mind, I sought to counter balance my own cultural assumptions by seeking out a number of ways to combat my ethnocentrism. First, I would adhere to spending as little money as possible as to stretch out the duration of trip, relying on alternative travel rather than a credit card. Second, I sought out a community member who could share perspectives, which otherwise would have escaped me. I sought out a female community member to highlight risks, which I was prone to ignore: risks involved in hitchhiking, sleeping on stranger's floors, and traveling in less than optimal standards. This statement is of course full of nuances, and while we certainly don't live in the Victorian era, I'm of course referencing my own ignorance to societal differences in the treatment of genders. This proved to be invaluable on many different levels, and in fact a main reason why my travels lasted so

long. Angel became my main source for cultural insight, and a dear friend; her strength and humor kept us both going at times and still continues to do so today.

It was a thrilling feeling not to be tied down by a lack of financial resources, temporarily, and encouraged not to worry about such things from friends and family; being told that I would figure it all out later. However, I was ushered into this subculture by misfortune. On Halloween night, no less, I was informed that a distant relative left just enough money for a ticket to Europe. I would have to take the redeye in Mid-February, which would be two months after my graduation, but who could turn down such a prospect once it was implanted in the mind? Leading up to my departure I took time to explore alternative travel in Pittsburgh, PA, researched countless blogs, journals, and forums on how to "best" travel alternatively safely, started graduate school, and failed to secure any prospect of employment after my return, which largely inspired the trip to be as long as possible.

Working part-time at a museum simply did not suffice in meeting what my bills demanded. This helped justify traveling. While the job was a dream, sadly, the pay was very real. It seemed that the main prospects from a B.S. in Anthropology was either to enroll in graduate school, which my advisors all warned me of, or to "live life and be young," a euphemism I heard countless times meaning to travel. I choose to do both. Luckily in our day in age it is more than possible to receive an outstanding education while putting theory to practice. In fact, there are those who see this as a necessity, myself included. This statement is in its own right a field of study with surprising results and mixed feelings (TedTalk: 2013). However, being accepted into traditional

M.A. programs for anthropology and oddly enough public administration I decided to enter into the Masters of Cultural Sustainability program (MACS) after talking with the program founder, Dr. Turner.

Dr. Turner, who has a large role in the formation of the paper, presented to all his prospective students the possibilities, both negative and positive, of entering into MACS. Needless to say I was sold. His guidance has been an intellectual and personal challenge, as our general outlooks on theory differ vastly, while our goals are the same. With a few newly formed gray hairs and graduate school decisions made I moved onto the issue of finding a way home once I had finished traveling.

I contemplated the risks of traveling to a foreign country on a one way ticket and came up with a compromise. Lacking the resources to purchase a round trip flight, and not wanting to place any expectations of duration, I saw fit to earn the money while abroad by "donation," through scholarships, and by selling my car. On a Couchsurfing forum, to be introduced later, I had heard about working part-time on farms through World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms, WWOOFing, for room and board. After messaging many WWOOFers, I was informed that it was quite normal to get rewarded with cash by a host and was than encouraged to travel. I even made plans to meet up with a fellow WWOOFer at a farm in March. I was hoping that the WWOOFer would be open to becoming an informant. So, while the job market crashed all through the Western world I was able to stay in motion, spending far less money than I ever thought possible. Yet, everything did not go as planned. In a rural town of Westerwarld Germany, where I was supposed to start my WWOOFing experience and to meet a

fellow WWOOFer, things turned sour. This was incredibly disheartening, as I feared my worst expectations were coming true.

I arrived at a horse farm late February and was promptly asked if I would be able to take care of the farm while the owner and their family went on a one-month vacation. This was not only a breach of our previously formed contract, 20 hours of work a week for room and board, but also, in my mind, a clear sign of exploitation. Needless to say I conjured up an excuse as to why this wasn't going to work out. I feared confronting my only form of transportation out of this small town was most unwise. Full of shame, I scrambled to find a way to survive until I could get a plane ticket home, a journey most unsuccessful. The stress of the situation along with the emotional disappointment caused insomnia and formed a great potential for culture shock. To this day, I am not fond of horses. However, I agreed to stay at the farm for two weeks, mostly so I could figure out what I was going to do, and then I would be taken to a train station. In the meantime I contacted the other WWOOFer I was supposed to meet with, and told her that unless she wanted to take care of the farm by herself for a month not to come. She decided to come anyways. Shortly after her arrival she sent word that she too was leaving, immediately, and asked for suggestions as where to go. Last I heard she found a bakery in Belgium, and was having a lovely experience.

As most people do when they feel defeated I called my family and asked for advice as I wanted to come back to the States. They would not allow for me to come home only after a week abroad, a sentiment my mother later regretted. Instead, they helped me adjust to my own fears of being alone and stranded in a foreign country. They

reminded me that illegal aliens are promptly kicked out of the European Union and Untied States all the time, and that I should be so lucky to be stuck in Europe. Luckily, I took their advice, to seek out new ways to travel, and remembered Couchsurfing.org, a form of alternative travel that this paper is mostly about. So it was from the unplanned shock of taking care of 20 horses in the depths of winter that my study took its roots.

After falling in my last pile of frozen horse manure, I went to Frankford and waited for my flight to sunny Madrid. I had come into contact with a few friends who were working on a farm in rural Spain near the Portuguese boarder. I planned to surf in Frankfurt, Madrid, and Cathares, Spain. This provided a great look into the unemployment epidemic effecting Spain's youth, especially in Cathares.

Once in Spain, I was welcomed with such warmth from my Couchsurfing hosts. Each host was full of excitement to have a Couchsurfer over despite the hard economic times. It seemed as if they had found a source of inspiration of which I was clueless. Despite a constant worry about finances, a joy of life – and even circumstances – pervaded their presence. They had tapped into a community, and by doing such found a way to mitigate the effects of the faltering economy. Through companionship and sharing resources, my hosts found ways to fully enjoy what they had. For example, when I had arrived to meet my host I had only five euros do to my banks security policies. In traveling away from Germany my bank thought my bankcard was stolen, and informed me that it would take three to five days to reactivate it. During that time, my hosts graciously offered shared what they had, and that I could stay with them till the debacle was taken care of. All this happened within the first hour of meeting them.

Sipping beer while sharing a blanket, which was thrown over an electrical wire spool used as a table, my host played the guitar and sang, in the form of traditional Spanish ballads, about the troubles facing the youth in his hometown. He was a recent law school graduate, so I asked where he had learned to play music. I was told that after graduation he was unable to find work so he had taken up singing in the streets for money. At first it was a sort of joke, but now it had become his primary source of income and form of open protest. It was a way of being actively vocal and a way to embrace and connect to his culture[13].

In my broken Spanish, we talked about Francisco Franco and the struggle of Spaniards today. With open transparency and trust, only after spending an evening together, I was collecting stories that I thought would take months of rapport to get. I was quickly learning that the culture of Couchsurfing was truly a rhizome in that it provided a way into many different layers of history, cultures, and experiences. Most of all, I was blown away by the simplicity of connecting to other people. I had read about how making a reliable key contact while doing fieldwork was as imperative as it was difficult. Yet, here I was openly welcomed because Couchsurfing provided a horizontal playing field. I was not the academic coming into someone's life to study it. Rather, I was a fellow community member before I ever met my host face-to-face. I had the feeling that we were in it together. This inherent dynamic sets up interesting questions about the ethics of conducting research. However, having made all my intentions clear, and by acting according to the culture I was in, I feel it this type of interaction is

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[13] http://tinyurl.com/ncax847 video of couchsurfer singing.

completely justified. Blurring the lines between research and community member is a tricky subject. Yet, I fully believe that this is a source of empowerment: as an active way to hear from a community. The real risk is not in being a community member, but in being a researcher. That if intentions are not made clear, and that if the role of research is not stressed, an undeserved credibility will accompany ones work. However, this is a topic far out of the reach of this paper. The next course of action is to compare this pastoralized version of Couchsurfing to events that happened upon my arrival in Chicago, IL.

Small section of the barn in Germany.

Controversy in Chicago

After living out of a backpack and surfing for over a year, I came to Chicago to put down roots, and to begin to host. The reciprocation of surfing is hosting, and many members who were traveling often spoke of their excitement to host when they were done traveling. In the words of my host in Madrid,

> "Hosting lets me travel the world, but all I have to do is stay in my living room. It's a great way to still feel connected while you are saving up for your next trip."

I was expecting something along these lines. However, you can imagine my surprise when In the winter of 2013 a Chicago based Couchsurfer, who we will call Mason, was stripped of his prestigious title of Community Ambassador, a hard-earned position that entails great reasonability and respect inside this community (Many community ambassadors have donated their own money to Couchsurfing along with countless volunteer hours).The decision came swiftly from the Couchsurfing web administration and was explained to Mason by simple stating that he violated the Community Agreements (KingofCouchsurfing.com: 2012, Couchsurfing.org: 2013). However, after participating in discussion boards, online groups, and in person interviewers many believe the decision was a reaction to Mason's online protest, which raised questions about a lack of safety and destruction of culture in the community due to new web designs. Couchsurfing.org is criticized by members as making decisions which harm the community since it was invested in by venture capitalist. The main concerns are that the group has become depersonalized and that the administration is

supporting policies to attain higher membership rates, this to please investors at the cost of Couchsurfers' culture and safety.

The depersonalization that many members have experienced largely stems from an influx of new members over the last couple years, mainly since the b-corporation switch in August 2011 (Couchsurfing.org: 2012). The way Couchsurfing is generating new membership is by and large seen as "shallow," and many members point to the new "Community Agreement" that was put into effect in the Fall of 2012 (Couchsurfing.org: 2012). The new "Community Agreement" has largely been the source cited for kicking members out of Couchsurfing, including Mason, with little to no explanation. The apparent "shallowness" member's use is a term to describe four main differences that happened to Couchsurfing after it was invested in, in 2011.

The first issue is that instead of sending personalized messages to members, to request a place to stay or to meet up, new members will post general inquires on a cities message board called place pages. A place page is an open forum where anyone can post, which was created in the last year in the face of great protest (Couchsurfing.org: 2013). This is seen as devastating as many veteran Couchsurfers believe new members are only interested in a free place to stay, rather than having a shared cultural experience ,which many insist begins with a genuine message sent to a potential host. In the past this was viewed as a measure of safety, comfort, excitement, and the ideological paradigm of

Couchsurfing. Here is a sarcastic message left in the public ambassadors group that largely ignited Couchsurfing member outcry:

> "After all, CSHQ (Couchsurfing Headquaters) knows best. Let the wise in San Francisco (referring to the administration) have it their way. Step back and watch the implosion: Place pages now a flood of spam, men seeking dates, and couch requests? Flag, shmag. Is anybody at CSHQ losing sleep about it? Why is it worth an ulcer to you?" (KingofCouchsurfing.org: 2013) [14]

The second issue is that many new members have what is considered skeleton profiles, that is, profiles that are hardly filled out giving little description as to who the person is, what they are interested in, missing photos, and references from friends or other Couchsurfers. The lack of detail in new member's profiles fuels the suspicion that new members only want a free place to stay. This is also seen as a huge safety risk. When I first started Couchsurfing in 2010 many members suggested that I only surf with or host members that have multiple photos, a long description of their self and interests, and most importantly positive references to ensure not only my safety but that the ethos of Couchsurfing will be sustained. The main point passed along was to find and surf with a person that I wanted to have a cultural exchange with. Without that, I was told, it was pointless and even offensive to surf.

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[14] All excerpts from KingofCouchsurfing.org are personal emails between Mason and the Couchsurfing staff and Couchsurfer's posts in the ambassador group. Mason chose to put these letters online via his blog, kingofcouchsurfing.org. As such, only Mason's and other couchsurfer's responses are shown to respect the privacy of the Couchsurfing staff.

The third issue is that when place pages were made by the Couchsurfing web administration it was without consulting the Couchsurfing community. Furthermore, once place pages were up and running the administration deleted sub-groups that were already established by community members. These sub-groups largely consisted of active city groups, e.g. Chicago group. The deletion of these tight knitted groups came as a saddening blow to many veteran Couchsurfers. It was a realization that Couchsurfing was changing and that their place in directing how it changed was questionable at best. The deletion of the city sub-groups was also viewed as a destruction of a historical archive. Many members used these groups not only to talk to other members but as a place to store the group's history by being able to view events and conversations that happen years ago. Here is an excerpt from a letter Mason wrote to Couchsurfing's administration:

> "By disbanding our communities, CS HQ has further eroded our trust that they have our best interests in mind. And the answers we get in return simply aren't good enough! For instance, when we asked why there wasn't Beta testing for the Place pages, we were told that the old code was so outdated that the only thing the programmers could do was overhaul it altogether and start anew. Okay . . . but how difficult would it really have been to create a separate folder on the servers, copy all the information/code of the major city groups and convert that into the Place page? I mean, we still have access to the sub-groups -- and groups to smaller communities that were swept up in various Place pages of bigger cities nearby. Would it really have been that difficult to build Places from scratch without the need to dismantle our communities?"
> (KingofCouchsurfing.org: 2013)

The last issue is that Couchsurfing.org switched to a b-corporation status. While this seems quite arbitrary it has had quite an effect on the community members. Many members proudly donated to Couchsurfing while it was a nonprofit investing their capital alongside their time. The switch to investments from the outside, rather than the inside, is rather quite a controversy as it sets up a dynamic of power struggles: money runs through Couchsurfing but its members have no access to the power it creates. Lastly, before the switch Couchsurfing administration was rather open to member criticism, now many members feel that criticism is not welcomed and is met with drastic responses, such as Mason's case and many others: Many forms of protest can be found on platforms such as, Facebook, Wordpress, and Twitter.

In response to these concerns Mason formed an online group to discuss and protest these new movements in the community. This is an action repeated by many former and current Couchsurfing members on online platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, Wordpress, etc (See references for examples on Facebook: 2013, Twitter: 2013, Reddit: 2013, and Wordpress: 2013). Largely fuelled by the issues listed above, Mason pressured the administration to do something about the depersonalization stemming from the new web design. This did not go over well. Prior to Mason's banishment the group he had formed had experienced posts that were deleted by the web administration, and they had seen members kicked out of Couchsurfing by the administration. The following is an excerpt from a letter sent from Mason to the Couchsurfing administration explaining

why he had started to protest the place pages. As the Chicago ambassador, this type of communication fell under his responsibilities: to communicate the community's voice to the administration. This email chain was cited for Mason's expulsion from the community:

> "It's simple: Instead of complain to the powers that be -- who in the beginning really didn't take much care to support the communities by way of scrapping years of valuable information and hard work altogether in the course of twelve hours -- I polled my community to see how we should proceed to keep our group from falling apart. And then I took the necessary steps to give them exactly what they demanded…Until you fix the Places page to suit our needs as well as the Old Group forum does -- and I have plenty of suggestions for you to do just that -- I will continue to direct people to the new and official (by consensus!) Chicago(land) group."

While Mason acknowledges that he was unabashed in his communications with the administration he was taken completely off guard at the responses he received from the Couchsurfing administration[15]. After Mason responded that he would not stop protesting to the administration he was stripped of his title, had his profile and group deleted, and his post were removed. This is seen as extremely harmful as many members use their Couchsurfing profile to chronicle their adventures, connections made, and experiences they have had in Couchsurfing through the personalized references left for them on their page. So important is this that Mason asked for this data to be transferred to him, off of the Couchsurfing platform, as he saw it as his personal property and personal right to have this information

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[15] See Appendix 4 for more information on email communication.

So what is happening here? We have subgroups which are calming destruction by the larger group they come from, which claims to promote diversity. I believe that both groups are correct in their claims. However, teasing this out more, I don't think that censorship is the main issue here, while it is certainly an important one. The economic system that has taken hold of Couchsurfing is viewed to be the impetus to the controversies that ensued.

Economic systems can change the ideas we hold about self and community, and this has powerful implications for the communities which embrace their economic policies. In Couchsurfing, one saw the destruction of online sub-city groups - which met in person regularly - after it was invested in by venture capitalist. After pleading with and then protesting to the Couchsurfing administration, little was accomplished. Rather, group members were expelled from the larger community of Couchsurfers. To these group members, this is an outrage. Not only have their groups been deleted, but so too have their groups' histories, which were stored online. To address the question, "What happens to a cultural group after it is invested in," the answer rests in ones belief in the authenticity of Couchsurfing as a culture. If anthropology and folklore have taught us anything we should resound with a firm yes: that online groups are real cultures as the members of these groups vehemently attest to.

In Couchsurfing, investments made by venture capitalist brought this group to a larger audience and secured its finances; however, it also brought the destruction of communities inside Couchsurfing. The issue is not that Couchsurfing was invested in[16]; rather, it is the ideology that came into effect after the fact. If corporations and private investors are able to profit off of cultures which see little to no percent of these profits, what protections are needed to sustain these cultures? Historically, cultural groups in the informal economy[17] are subjected to higher rates of exploitation (ilo.org: 2013). Knowing this, it is pertinent to make room in the discourse concerning power to include these types of interactions and their effects on society.

Shared dinners in Spain while Couchsurfing

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[16] That money is not inherently evil

[17] Informal in that profit is being derived from cultural performance, which is not being regulated as members are not employees of the culture, but are members.

Chapter Three: Multiple Worlds

While this paper critiques alternative travel as a measure of cultural value[18] propagating hegemonic neoliberal ideologies, no one can deny that it provides the *chance* to travel and that it is diverse (Ivanova: 2013, Couchsurfing.org: 2013). However, that is not the point. One would be mistaken to think that globalization is new and only nefarious; just as if one thought globalization was only benevolent and fair

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[18] This is referencing venture capitalists interests in Couchsurfing's culture as a potential source of profit. This was alluded to by Matt Cohler in his interview with Forbes (2011) and is expanded on in the Comaroff's work "Ethnicity Inc." (2009).

(Ellwood: 2001). The point isn't that you can travel far and wide to new cultures, this is actually quite splendid, and it isn't that in an increasing frequency we find familiar ideas lurking around the river bend dominating perspectives on reality (while this may or may not be true); rather it is that escaping the implementation of neoliberal economic policies is becoming more difficult. The point of this paper is to show that while diversity is seemingly celebrated and embraced, homogeneity is taking roots in the form of capital bias. This is not only an account of consumerism and its growing pull on our minds; the crucible of which is believed to be homogenous *ideas* of self based in neoliberal ideologies, but it is also an account of forgetting-, just as with Mason.

Mason fought vehemently against a web design born out of venture capitalism that literally changed the structure of the culture he was a part of. This actively changed how the group interacted an how identity was expressed: by replacing old forms, e.g. place pages taking over previously formed city groups and other personal groups. This is a web design that group members expressed as harming their community and jeopardizing their safety, and as such they implored their community leader to act. Ironically, a group that celebrates diversity and alternatives to the norm actively monitored, edited, and deleted voices that opposed it. Mason tried to reconcile with the Couchsurfing administration to make a space, for what many members considered their way, i.e. the old version, of Couchsurfing. However, it is my belief that Mason's experience, i.e. censorship and expulsion from Couchsurfing, does not constitute the norm. Rather, I believe it is an exception to the norm. That Mason posed a serious

threat to the Couchsurfing staff, as he would not move on and forget their transgression, and was hence banned from the group as an example.

As I traveled through the United States and the European Union I came across a number of identities based in resistance subculture groups[19], which I will ethnographically compare case by case later on. However, the discourse surrounding these many different types of identity are linked to Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis; in which people are constantly asked and seek out opportunities to demonstrate, speak, and write about who they are and what they do, rather than being openly repressed[20] (Foucault: 1975, 1978, Miah-ha: 1990). In the vehement discourse surrounding these identities social normality is better regulated by appearing to be free and diverse while being regulated by the powers that flow through our social institutions (Foucault: 1975, 1978). It is a social performance that acts as a ritual to release stress and work issues out (Turner: 1976, Ortner: 1978) That is, through open and vivid discourse an idea of self is better monitored, judged, and measured as it has a literal dialogue dictating how it should be perceived as a state of being rather than individual action. In Couchsurfing this would be the Terms of Use (Foucault: 1978, Couchsurfing: 2012). In the Couchsurfing example members actively post online their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs more than willingly. These are monitored and critiqued by community members on the place pages, by references on personal pages, and other group pages. Furthermore, the censorship of members comes off as passive and without

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[19] Examples include Couchsurfing, various Occupy movements and sister groups, e.g. train hoppers, Artists, Marxist, generally curious people, and my own experience being a member of many of these groups.

[20] Open repression happens, but according to History of Sexuality: An Introduction (1978) arguable on a lesser scale, especially since we are discussing Western middle class.

a careful eye or active protest to bring it to the spotlight one might hardly notice, and these issues could soon be forgotten, just as in Mason's case many new and veteran members are completely unaware of the controversy surrounding his banishment from the group. This is a phenomenon happening at all levels of society. For example, on a larger and more complicated scale, one can look at the issues surrounding the United States coverage of Bradley Manning's Nobel Peace Prize nomination- while he is being detained by the U.S. government- the initial turndown by mainstream U.S. press he faced while initially leaking information, and the controversy surrounding the coverage of his military trial[21] (New York Times: 2012, Huffington post: 2013, Al Jazeera: 2013). Even still larger implications of this thought are the geographic and political discrepancies amongst opinions about Hugo Chavez and his recent death (Al Jazeera: 2013, Washington Post: 2013, BBC: 2013).

Censorship and the directing of actions through discourse is prevalent in almost all appendages of social life—take into account the countless mission statements and diversity policies of corporations, nonprofits, government agencies, and subculture groups that actively define, decide, and regulate not what diversity is, but how to enact it correctly. These groups have polices on judging the correct measure of diversity and "being," which transforms actions into identity through discourse and sets acceptable limits on how much effort is needed (Foucault: 1978, 1975). In Mason's example, diversity is a key concept to Couchsurfing, yet the group did not tolerate activists presenting varied thoughts on sustaining Couchsurfing culture, which challenged the

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[21] This article surmises the claim
http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/18/us/court-declines-to-rule-in-wikileaks-complaint.html?ref=bradleyemanning

administration and the new web design. This was not the correct diversity. While, and rightly so, certain polices strive to ensure equality amongst all cultural groups, for example through hiring, protecting, or employing certain cultural groups, this does not mean that a company is embracing diversity: it can only prove that they are meeting the lowest level of societal expectation. Take for example Karen Ho's work in *Liquidated* (2009), where many Women and ethnically diverse people are hired for "back of house" operations, in prominent Wall Street investment banks, and placed in certain departments based on their gender and ethnicity (e.g. Karen Ho being placed in a computer department based on her ethnicity rather than her skill set.) Ho's ethnography showed that female and ethnically diverse employees frequently met growth ceilings based on their gender or cultural heritage (Ho: 2009). This brings up the point of forgetting, which institutionalized polices attribute to (Jacobs: 2004, Foucault: 1978). Forgetting in the sense that something of cultural value has been lost, e.g. that things were not always this way, which is an idea Jane Jacobs (2004) brings up when discussing cultural dark ages. It certainly does not mean that people have become racist recently or vice versa; the claim is that our way of thinking about and dealing with racism and cultural identity haven't always been this way. This is what many Couchsurfers feel in response to what has happened to Mason. New policies and framing devices[22] are being used against members who protest the damages being done to their community.

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[22] In letters exchanged with the Couchsurfing headquarters and protesters the latter group is seen at fault for being negative by not adapting to the new website format.

A perfect and far more extreme example of this is Bacon's Rebellion, 1676, in Colonial Virginia. The rebellion started off as a power struggle between the Governor of Virginia and Virginia Colonists pushed westward due to hard economic times (Morgan: 2005, Harpole: 2005). The rebellion was spear headed by Nathanial Bacon who lead attacks and raids on neighboring Native Americans, without the Governors permission, who had been raiding settlers as a response to their westward expansion (Morgan: 2005, Harpole: 2005). However, the rebellion born out of economic hardship quickly evolved to setting precedents for class and race issues in the United States (Morgan:2005, Harpole: 2005). Yet, in common discussion, Bacon's Rebellion is largely remembered and credited to have had a powerful affect on influencing the American Revolution and instilling ideas of democracy in Colonists by bringing them together (Morgan:2005, Harpole: 2005). Largely absent from scholarly and common talk of the events are the affects it had on intensifying racial issues and the horrible effects it had on Native Americans (Morgan: 2005, Harpole 2005). The affects of lower class and indentured colonists, both African American and White, attacking the Native Americans and rebelling against oppressive upper class is believed to have been the impetus of a more extreme version of white racism on African Americans and Native Americans (Morgan: 1975, Harpole: 2005). The upper class learned that existing racial tensions may be exacerbated to ease class tensions by "solidifying" the diverse socio-economic colonial whites against the other colonist and Native Americans (Morgan: 1975, Harpole: 2005). This was of high priority after Bacon's Rebellion as the power structure

of Virginia was seriously challenged (Morgan: 1975).

While progress in equality has certainly been made since Bacon's rebellion to Karen Ho's Wall Street ethnography (2009) the point is that cultural struggles are forgotten. This ties into Couchsurfing as it acts as a warning that diversity standards and polices, i.e. discourse, can often be used as tools against those they are meant to protect (Foucault: 1978). In History of Sexuality: An Introduction (1978) Foucault famously pivots sexual action against sexual identity showing that the latter through discourse replaced the former. This is how theory on sexual identity translates to Western culture and resistance movements and their perceived failure, i.e. through power. It is that *certain* actions have become identity through discourse and that one's voice is judged accordingly. Very simply, the logic behind Foucault's argument is the spring board from which the analysis of resistance movements and culture identity takes place. Take for example Marisol De La Cadena's (2010) call for recognition of a plurality of worlds, i.e. that there are numerous "socionatural formations" often unable to exist as a part of other worlds. For example, bringing in a socionatural formation, e.g. different cultural ideological formations and realities, from one world to another world can be harmful to the culture that recognizes the socionatural formation (Cadena: 2010). This is because it will be placed in a completely different context and ideological structure from which it is from (Cadena: 2010). Rather, Cadena (2010) alludes to what Gregory Batson (1972), Gilles Delezue and Felix Guattari (1987) refer to as a multiplicity to solve this issue of communication and cohabitation: allowing conflicting ideas and views to exist in what

has famously been termed a rhizome or as Cadena writes, "Loosely connected worlds" (Delezue and Guattari: 1987, Cadena: 2010). The idea of rhizomes and loosely connected worlds will be touched on at the end of the paper.

Up till now, I have tried to demonstrate how ideas about identity are tied to neoliberal influences, e.g. Couchsurfing example. I now wish to hone in on this point, clarify it, and explore how this has been *accepted* as a natural occurrence, rather than a choice, and how it is dominating other cultural forms of self primarily through fetishisms Westerns carry. This paper seeks not to deny or define self (which is viewed to be two sides of the same coin), but to open up how we think of others and ourselves. By leaving Mason's Couchsurfing experiences and exploring rites of passage I hope to identify key cultural symbols that are fueling Western ethnocentrism by pinning plural worlds to a single world. It is in these social transitions that my ethnographic and literary experience takes its roots.

So what is a self and what is meant by social transitions? The latter part of this question is quite nicely summed up as liminal phases (Gnnep: 1909, Turner: 1964) That is, in a simple fashion, the transitional period between two major life stages, e.g. the time between switching statuses such as married and widowed or student and graduate (Turner: 1964). In contrast to liminal phases, stages are defined as stable or continual circumstances culturally recognizable within a given community, such as the continued states mentioned above (Turner: 1964). Therefore, the liminal phase between student and graduate could be summed up as the time between the end of classes and the commencement of a rite of passage, e.g. walking the stage (Gnnep: 1909, Turner: 1964).

It is in the liminal phases that social hierarchy and predicted outcomes, such as actually graduating (e.g. How to interact with recent professors? Did I turn in my gradation form correctly? Will they call my name during commencement? Where do I fit in?) are called into question (Turner: 1964).

It is in this strange place where social structure is suspended that I wish to expand upon our understanding of the liminal period between student and professional (or even what may be viewed provocatively as child and adult) (Turner: 1978). In showing that a culture dominated by capitalistic symbology, the rite of passage consists of the steps one must take to gain full time employment (Turner: 1964, 1978). In some cases, this could be internships[23], and for others it is gaining the willingness to do so. It is equally important to address the connotations of the last sentence, which conjure negative emotions drawing to mind the hardships of entering the professional work place. However, following Victor Turner's model (1978) of rituals as societal performance, I believe alternative travel is a liminal phase: a playful period where the normal social structure, and the space we enact our stages is suspended. Yet, a dichotomy exists, and I will show how people in this period are marginalized, for it is in the liminal phase that social actors are "betwixt and between" the eyes of society (e.g. the student to professional gap and the lack of health care in the U.S.) and that organizations such as Couchsurfing, while seemingly a deterrent of the norm, actually help social actors accept the next stage by acting out the alternative (Turner: 1964). Simply put, alternatives are part of the norm.

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[23] Internships could easily be argued to be a liminal phase.

Yet, why the focus on rituals when many post-structuralist philosophers have been cited throughout the paper? For example, isn't ritual a form of structure? The reason for rituals inclusion is actually quite simple: it is because complicated social issues and frustrations have been shown to be worked out through rituals, which are structures of society (Turner: 1978). Take for example, Sherry Ortner's ethnography *Sherpa's and their Rituals* (1978), where diverse social issues are acted out in rituals as a means to diffuse social tensions that would otherwise cause violence and disharmony (Ortner: 1978). Ortner views these rituals as essential to sustaining the complicated Sherpa's social relations and culture (Ortner: 1978) I believe this observation holds true in Western culture as well. I like to keep in mind an opening quote when thinking of new ways to connect rituals to post-structuralist theory. When introducing the rhizome Deleuze and Guattari (1981) say:

> "Why have we kept our own names? Out of habit, purely out of habit. To make ourselves unrecognizable in turn. To render imperceptible, not ourselves, but what makes us act, feel, and think. Also, because it is nice to talk like everybody else, to say the sun rises, when everybody knows it's only a manner of speaking. To reach, not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance…" (Deleuze and Guattari: 1981, pg 3.)

This prompts one to look at rituals as Deleuze and Guattari look at themselves, and at self as we look at rituals: as changing interconnected levels of structure with, "movements of deterritorialization and destratification[24]," much like a collection of

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[24] These pseudo-scientific, e.g. geological, terms are used to describe the instability of defining self as a solid thing. It conjures the image of a wave in a large ocean. While a single wave may be identified, it is constantly shifting shape, size, and location with the waves around it.

Caden's (2010) multiple worlds (Deleuze and Guattari: 1987, pg 3). Using this idea, the liminal phase is would be, "betwixt and between" stratification and destratification (Turner: 1964). That is, the liminal phase is in-between the formation and destruction of different worlds. Now it is time to look at examples showcasing this point: that in Western culture there are rites of passage into accepting capitalism, which are structures that are actively changing and shifting less we dangerously forget their, "exteriority of their relations...To fabricate a beneficent God to explain geological movements" (Deleuze and Guattari: 1987, pg 3). This galvanizes the point that one should not be committed to a single perspective of events.

Still, what is meant by self in this paper? There is no escaping having to face it either directly or indirectly in life, or sadly, in this paper. Many great philosophers sought out the answer to this by dedicating their lives' to forming schools of thought, which tackled such basic, yet, complex questions. Ideas range from the existential nihilists' explanation that self is inherently nothing to the various answers popularized by Judeo-Christianity: These ideologies largely circumscribes the problem by denoting self as a soul. However, when one examines the question "What is self?" one can see that it sets one up to find design in chaos.

Carl Sagan speaks of humans tendency to "discover" designs in chaos as to give cultural narratives and meanings to scientific findings, in his books *Pale Blue Dot* (1994) and *The Demon-Haunted World: Science As A Candle in the Dark (*1995*)*. Dr. Sagan critiques culture's place (he speaks mostly of religion and supernatural beliefs that do not follow the scientific method, yet claim fact) in *science* as a bias to be considered and

prepared against. This begs the question, "what about the culture of science?" However, Dr, Sagan shows that when culture imbues scientific findings with their beliefs, presumptions, and realities, that great harm comes to the progress of man. An important realization it that this includes, and is mainly directed at, scientists who take their findings out of the context they come from: just as the anthropologist must be wary of ethnocentrism so too must the scientist.

This is not to say that culture is bad or useless or that there isn't room to respect a culture's beliefs. The point is quite the opposite. It is to show that culture is extremely powerful to a point that it has defied advancements in scientific knowledge throughout history to the present day and caused great harm, e.g. religion promoting creationism over evolution, and science justifying racism through eugenics and affecting law making by doing without cultural relativism. These examples show that culture is powerful, but also indifferent to those in the margins. We see how it can shift our perspective in erroneous ways, which affect generations to come. This is another perfect example of this is Marisol de la Cadena's (2010) article about indigenous belief systems in the political rhetoric of Ecuador and Bolivia, discussed earlier. Another example I would like to explore happened to me while reading about cultural calamities. It shows how hegemonic Western culture is used in science to further propagate capitalism and limit the forms of a legitimate self. That is, a self that can be respected by those whom have power.

Science's Connection to Self and to the Market:

Scientific knowledge separates us from other mammals, and emancipates us from the fears and limitations of our forefathers. No longer tied to archaic systems of beliefs, it has enabled us to go to the moon and to share ideas across the globe at lightening speeds. With the nomad still ever vibrant in our being, we are able to explore further than we had ever dreamed: By seeking out new worlds in the vast emptiness of space. Just this year, the Voyager 1 spacecraft traveled to the furthest edges of our solar system, which made it the first manmade object to enter the heliosheath, which is a region connecting the suns magnetic lines to interstellar magnetic lines[25]. Even more amazingly, the Voyager 1 is carrying a golden plated copper disc, through Dr. Sagan's recommendation, which serves as a representational cultural archive to whoever finds it. Howbeit, while these feats are truly fantastic, what have we laid asunder in science's wake? As science progress, who uses the power of knowledge production – rather than fact or learning - and for means do they use it?

Sadly, any adherent of history will attest that cultural calamities come and go. This seems to be a pattern easily defended against in our time through our insistent need to document, collect, and organize data. In fact, we have a plethora of sciences and

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[25] http://voyager.jpl.nasa.gov/news/voyager_update.html

subfields dedicated to obtaining cultural data sets. However, Jane Jacobs (2004) confronts this misconception, stating information alone is not sustaining culture; suggesting that documentation and analysis give a false sense of cultural security. Roughly put, culture is alive in humans, and our documents lack that unexplainable power of being in the midst of a culture. For example, we have documented countless ancient civilizations, but few would say that Ancient Babylonian or Ancient Roman cultures are alive. Jacob states this is why we have cooking classes alongside cookbooks, or internships partnered with training manuals. Much of culture is transmitted through living examples (Jacob: 2004). Yet, how do these examples have anything to do with science, and what does science have to do with societal structures that determine help sustain one's culture?

The *culture* of science is quite alive and well. In fact, Andrew Jamison (2000) says its exuberant strength can be traced through the globe by its cultural hegemonic dominance. Science[26] has the power to ebulliently galvanized mass amnesia of our cultural inheritance, yet it is the process outside of science which determine if this happens or not. Before we progress with this thought, recall that Jane Jacobs (2004) highlights mass forgetting as a sign of impending cultural dark ages: stating that cultural amnesia is a cultural calamity since human forgetting forces a culture out of experience and into documentation. Science, which is a lifesaving force, inherently has a culture surrounding it, since it is humans who enact science, and humans who enact culture.

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[26] Science henceforth is used as the culture of science.

This culture, as explained by Andrew Jamison, was born from imperialism – what some would term the predecessor to neoliberalism, and has since been influenced by neoliberal forces[27] to continue to have a monopoly knowledge production: included the production of knowing self (Foucault: 1978, Jamison: 2004). Yet, how could one of Western cultures prized paradigms, which has advanced man to the stars, pose a threat to cultural sustainability, and how do we know this is this not just social evolution?

We cannot simply say science has nothing to do with culture when it operates in the context of culture through its interaction with humanity. Both Jamison (2000) and Jacobs (2004) help provide examples of how science may effect cultural sustainability. Up to this point Jacobs (2004) has shown how cultural amnesia is a centerpiece in the implementation of calamities. Jamison puts this idea into context by discussing how science can be used to propagate the destruction, through forgetting, of traditional knowledge, and by limiting who has access to knowledge production. An apt metaphor to bridge these two authors would be to image the phrase: "use it or lose it," and apply it to culture: implying that if cultural perspectives are not actively allowed to be heard or used in legitimate ways they will begin to fade. This highlights the importance that experience has in sustaining culture, and preventing calamities.

Jamison provides the example of economics: indicating that for a few hundred years science has been used as a productive force (Jamison: 2000). This is where

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[27] Surrounding forces include corporations funding scientist, political forces directing research, e.g. weapons research, and the surrounding political-economy.

Jamison helps one to connect societal ideas about self to the market place. Take for example the types of science needed to extract wealth from historically colonized areas, e.g. Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe. To extract minerals is one thing, however, to do it exploitatively while propagating the very ideology that exploits a culture is another. This is where the importance of the bridge between culture and science comes in. Following Jamison's thought pattern, belittling traditional forms of knowledge empowers holders of science to belittle the people who hold traditional forms of knowledge, e.g. indigenous cultures. This is what leads to calamites. It is a dialect of disrespect set up by a hierarchical system of knowing the world: the same system which is influencing how science is used, and how self is perceived.

Since the days of nation-states enacting imperial colonialism, directly, imperialistic relationships between nation-states have taken refuge in the neoliberal global market; some corporations still use science as a mean to extract wealth, and to ignore and silence the situation of the indigenous cultures they exploit. The main point is, as Jamison (2000) says, science is infused with the agents of globalization, e.g. capitalism.

The idea here is to open a space that is beyond right and wrong in scientific discourse: it is about using different perspectives in science to come to a conclusion. Simply put, it is suggesting opening up a space that is concerned with equal listening. This is a simple, yet, powerful tool, as we all live in many different cultural groups. The

point is not that culture is dominating science or people, rather it is the inherent power in culture that is. For Jamison (2000) we see that power as economic systems: Neoliberal globalization needs science to expand and to keep a firm hold on the world. This is not a new idea. Foucault (1976) vehemently wrote about how scientific discourse shapes what self is in a society. This is an idea that will be expanded on later, however, for now let us look at other ways to view self in this paper.

The idea that a person is a part of a single culture, e.g. just a religious group, seems to be outdated, if it were ever true, especially in our globalized arena. Rather, culture in this paper, is seen as being the whole ideological belief system and forces comprising the parts of the cultures one is affected by. This idea is heavily influenced by the idea of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome (1987): Having a matrix of different cultural influences creating a person, i.e. self. For example, in a single moment there are numerous levels of understanding happening at once, interactions between groups, ways out of a culture, ways into a culture, and transformations going on. It is an idea that is as much alive and active as a human being. An ample metaphor would be to conjure the image of a rough sea. Picture the waves, symbolic for a culture or a movement, interacting and changing with the other waves in the ocean. It is hard to tell where one starts and the other ends, or to count all the movements in a single wave. For example, one wave may by chaotic at its very top, having a white tip, while the bottom is completely sturdy and opaque. The use of this allegory is to remind us that a single culture is influenced by its surroundings and differs throughout its structure. That our

understanding of things cannot be taken out of the context they come from as the context is a part of them.

Luckily, this means defining self is not the point of this paper. Rather, expanding on how we are thinking about self is. By looking at the liminal phase between societal stages, things become clear in the context of abnormality, because rites of passage introduce an actor to a new stage by first placing them in-between. (Turner: 1964) This helps us breech the limits of the rhetoric surrounding self by our lack of effort in defining self. However, one could ask, "How you can free what you don't understand?" That is to say, "how can you study what you can't fully see or know?" The author then could retort that this is a presumption, that understanding self is a goal unproven. The implication of this means that to seek to define self is to limit it, to place current societal expectations and limitations on it, and this is largely what is meant when discussing the discourse of self, i.e. the self as regulated by the ways we think and write about how self should be. A specific discourse of self is what this paper is critiquing, hence its fetishism, hence its apparent tragic futility. The approach is to focus on how capitalism effects and sways understandings, expectations, and definitions of self. However, the logic in this paper is not seen as circular, as one might suspect, but, as a multi-dimensional spiral, and as a line of flight escaping and ultimately destroying that from which it came (Deleuze and Guattari: 1987). For the sake of argument, capitalism's effect on self is critiqued as creating an allusion[28] of a norm: where self becomes a symbol of capitalism by mimicking the ideology's policies in public presentation as a reflexive action of a

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[28] Allusion is used purposely over illusion to stress the story telling formation surrounding ideas of self, and to infer the lack of magic.

society reifying the belief in the illusion of normality. The symbols of this system have become sacred fetishes to Western culture as they are inside the ritual rather than out, thus becoming the sacred rather than profane. (Turner: 1968). Self becomes the adorned "religious" emblem of the West and the body its vessel. I believe this is what was meant when Foucault stated, "The soul is the prison of the body." (Foucault: 1975) That the fetish of self imprisons within the confines of the vehicle that has led to its "fetishization," i.e. capitalism. It is a state of being, rather than individual actions, which skews our perspective into believing in one natural world around us, rather than Cadena's (2010) plural worlds.

The simplified explanation is to examine what one means when they ask, "What self really is." The first step is to ask what you mean by self. In that sentence, I'm sure a great number of people will be annoyed by what seems to be the post-structuralist and existential theoretical influences of this paper. However, this is simply the Socratic method, which helps make presumptions clear and opened up to discussion. That is, to ask what is self is to place it into some discourse. The point I'm trying to make is to place self in as many discourses as possible to help expand how we think about self. While some ways of expressing self go against science, I believe it is possible to travel to multiple worlds in one's mind, for example culture and science may exist without harming the other. This is what we are doing to Capitalistic-self, if you will. It is being compared to the infinite possibilities that self could be, including no self. Now, the point of departure from here is to further seek what is meant by fetish, for that will shed more

light upon what is meant by the term capitalistic self, and the role it plays in this analysis.

Fetishisms are not new to academia; prominent figures such as Charles de Brosses (1760), Karl Marx (1867), and Sigmund Freud (1927) have published on fetishisms, which brought it to the forefront of academia in their times. Rather, it is the revamping of the study of the Westerners' fetishism of him/her self as a fetish of capitalism, instead of studying the inanimate products or religious items one buys and adorns with their social being. The very idea of the symbols -that make up the phenomenon, and often case supernatural being, "self"- need to be analyzed: specifically in the contemporary neoliberal market post economic collapses. This is a pertinent topic as our livelihood and success in life are now more than ever closely linked to the health of imaginary systems through the abstraction of self, e.g. such as the market and employment occupation, rather than the physical systems of actual wealth including the eco-system, temporarily speaking of course (Marx: 1867). This suggests an extreme abstraction of an idea with an almost religious fervor, which resembles fetishisms as both Marx (1867) and Brosses (1760) spoke of.

When talking about fetishism of self, this paper is referencing an intersection of Marxism and symbology, the latter of which has been discussed through referencing the symbols used in the ending of the liminal phase in ritual rites of passage, which places self into the realm of sacred rather than the profane (Turner: 1964) That is, how we come to believe in and accept capitalism over other competing systems.

Marxism comes into the analysis as a contrasting view and to provide a theoretical background for how and why self is viewed as a commodity. By exploring Marxism I hope to further show that self is the edifice commodity of our culture, the crucifix of neoliberalism, the key symbol of capitalism, a human sentiment abstracted into the physical ideology of capitalism by labor, and traded under a neoliberal ideology (Ortner 1978). We will start with the idea that performative labor denotes the beginning of self as fetishism, in a Marxist sense, as it is labor that takes actual wealth and pools it into a limited system of capital, i.e. trade, which places the capitalistic ideologies into manifesting the idea, or "rather" the correct idea, of self (Marx: 1867). However, before fleshing out this idea any further and getting ahead of ourselves, by examining various examples experienced in the field, it would behoove ourselves to first take a look at the religious origins of the term fetishism from which Marx drew inspiration, and of which there is still a connection, e.g. the sacred and profane dichotomy. In this way one may keep in mind the understanding of a fetish while reviewing examples drawn from field experience.

Self as Fetish

In trying to show that self is a fetish, one might be dropped to their knees through falling prey to notions of simplicity. This is because the idea of self comes with all sorts of implicit complications, cultural and otherwise. For example, when connecting self to fetish, one would imagine it sufficient to read the definition of fetish, "an inanimate object worshiped for its supposed magical powers or because it is considered to be inhabited by a spirit," and to contrast this with how Americans think about self (Oxford:

2013). So, how do Americans think about self? One prominent way is through religion: when one compares the definition of fetish with statistics showing that 84% of Americans practice religions- which believe self to be a spirit[29]- it seems natural to connect the dots (Pew: 2007). That is, at least 84% of Americans see self as a spirit, while a mere 16% of Americans are simply unaffiliated with religion, and of that 16% only 1.6% are atheists (Pew: 2007). Therefore, it seems clear that self is fetishized – in the most basic sense - by at least 84% of Americans: through their belief in a spirit, which is self (Pew: 2007). So, why should this be complicated?[30]

Beyond the endless dialogue concerning the religious understandings of self and spirit, the difficulty rests in the word inanimate: it is a presumption. Neither humans nor their ideas are inanimate. While ideas - of self- are arguably inanimate, in that they don't exist save in one's mind, it seems to be in poor taste and unsound logic[31] to depart in this manner from such a heavily contested point; especially, considering the other, more robust, alternatives that exist. So, to gracefully circumscribe semantics, one should start at the beginning of fetish's history, and to seek what other connections may exist between the notion of self and fetish.

It was in the eighteenth century that a controversial writer from Dijon, France transformed the Portuguese sailors' term *feitiço,* which was used to describe objects in Western African religions, to *the French* Féitches (Brosses: 1760, Webster: 2012).

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[29] By looking at statements made in the Old Testament, which Christianity, Islam, and Judaism both use.

[30] A detailed study on Americans and religion, http://religions.pewforum.org/reports, and an updated study on the rise of the religiously unaffiliated, specifically amongst youths, http://www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx

[31] Again, harping upon Evan Pritchard's work with the Azande, and the contribution he made to understanding the reality of social phenomena with in Social Science.

Originally derived from the Latin term *"facticius,"* meaning factitious*,"* féitches was used by Charles de Brosses to help form a social-material origins theory of religion (Brosses: 1760, Webster: 2012). Charles de Brosses trail blazed this highly controversial materialistic theory: using science to further reaffirm a hierarchy amongst impearlist countries and their colonies. His theory demonstrated that man will imbue objects with power and value. This was done by contrasting West African religions, of the time, with the supernatural attributes of ancient Egyptian religion (Brosses: 1760). The implications of this showed that ideologies may take a physical form, and preside as innate and natural through the social (Brosses: 1760). This showed that humans place man-made ideas and powers into an object, and then accept them as natural occurrences void of humanities interaction for their sustained formation. The idea of self is of no exemption.

Yet, what do religious undertakings have to do with a contemporary society[32]? The process of accepting man-made ideas as natural or innate is, of course, still at work today. A perfect example which highlights this process happened recently (2013). In an interview with Aljazeera, Noam Chomsky criticizes neoliberalism for imbuing objectivism and laissez-faire capitalism as innate human laws, which magically works[33], rather than conscious decisions, **within the mind of Western society** (Chomsky and Aljazeera: 2013). Chomsky details how in the 1940's-1950's America went through unprecedented growth while banks were under New Deal regulations, hence disputing

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[32] The word contemporary was chosen to form diction of assumption, e.g. assumption of stature, of progressive history, of self.
[33] Hence deregulations and the powerful influence of the IMF and World Bank.

laissez-faire capitalism as a natural law, human behavior, or inherently better (Chomsky and Aljazeera:2013). Chomsky's point is that in the 1970's, during a storm of deregulations, that the ideas of Ann Rand's objectivism and ideas of the invisible hand guiding capitalism became accepted, as human nature and inherently better, rather than human choice (Chomsky and Aljazeera: 2013, Ellwood:2001). For example, Chomsky is quoted saying:

> "[In] the 1950s and the 1960s, which was the biggest growth period in American history, financial institutions were regulated. The New Deal regulations were in place and there were no financial crisis, none .... Starting in the 1970s it changed pretty radically. There were decisions made - not laws of nature - to reconstruct the economy." (Chomsky and Aljazeera: 2013).

The harmful effects that neoliberalism has had all over the world, is brought up as a final nail in the coffin to show that man's expectation and "understanding" of something as natural or good certainly does not mean it is true (Chomsky and Aljazeera: 2013, Ellwood: 2001). Instead, the common good has been put aside while the majority of wealth is put into fewer and fewer hands (Chomsky: 2013, Ellwood: 2001). Chomsky states that, "The destruction of the human species. And that's not a joke," is much worse than any worries about changing the current economic system (Chomsky and Aljazeera: 2013).

In a seemingly jovial, yet dead-serious manner, Chomsky connects the public relations departments of corporations with the task of molding perceptions as a form of social control (Chomsky and Aljazeera: 2013). What is interesting, is how these ideas

about capitalism became and still are being portrayed as natural and good despite the current global economic crisis, growing resistance movements, and increasing disparities between the elite, middle, and growing lower class(Census:2009, Table 694 in appendix 4). Take for example the following graphs from PEW research, which shows little change in perceptions of capitalism (See Appendix 4).

Clearly, the United States public is split on how to address these economic issues given the close presidential election, stalling in congress -which arguably lead to the sequester- and the formation of contrasting groups: such as the Occupy movement and the Tea Party. It raises questions about how a fetishism of self fits into a corporate paradigm of molding perceptions or how corporations fit into this. That is, has politics become identity, rather than intellectual disputes? While this question is beyond the scope of this paper, and distracts from the main points, it certainly presents an opportunity for further research. What is important for this paper is that the ideas of (wo)man become fetishes: in the sense that they are seen as innate, natural, benevolent, and beyond death. This happens so much so, that for some, to get rid of capitalism one would need the death of the culture based in capitalism, which is a dangerous and useless idea when so many alternatives are present.

The idea being critiqued in this section, capitalism, is dependent on the fetishism of self to work. That is, the central idea in capitalism, private ownership, depends on a strong idea of self as innate, natural, and that we are inherently born with the right to own land, animals, and status above our follow man. To challenge capitalism is to challenge this set of beliefs, and to call forth self from the realm of symbolism to a cold

indifferent rational. In a throwback to Brosses, one could picture the vehement loyalty to capitalism through the fervent consumption of individualized, yet mass produced, commodities[34] as acts that publicly proclaim an abstracted self: defining self by brand, style, etc. Yet, is this really relevant today? A fetish of self seems to be an outlandish statement using arcane and belligerent terminology far past its due date in the social sciences. Befuddled with imperialist ethnocentrism, what evidence is this claim based on and why should we entertain the idea of self as a fetish? Is it not just capitalism that is the fetish?

   While the original use of fetishisms happened to come from a place of ethnocentrism, there are still valuable insights residing in these early studies. Let us not be equally ethnocentric across chronology by throwing the baby, early anthropology, out with the dirty water, ethnocentrism. Rather, let us learn from our predecessors mistakes. For example, if one were to compare the Westerns idea of self with magically instilled religious objects, what would they want to improve upon in their analysis? Luckily, this question has been answered by the progression of the field. Participant-observation with a thick understanding of the studied culture should be applied (Ortner: 2006). But, why is the idea of self in Western society any different than any other culture throughout history? Are we not just talking about capitalism and globalization, rather than self?

  The idea of a-Western-self has traveled intensely alongside globalization, as self is inherent in neoliberalism: through concepts of personal ownership, privatization, and

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[34] Think of all the money spent on marketing research, PR, and advertisement to narrow in on a target market.

egotism[35] (Ellwood: 2000, Jacobs: 2004, Karen Ho: 2006). Furthermore, the scale, unequal intensity, enforcement, and mode of travel, i.e. neoliberalism, of which the Westerners' idea of self has traversed through globalization, can be argued to be a new precedent over the last fifty or so years[36] (Ellwood: 2001, IMF: 2000).

Cultural ideas have not been equally heard because the mechanics of globalization have not been equal (Jacobs: 2004). For example, Wayne Ellwood (2001) points out that since 1950 global economic output has increased by five-fold, and that we have since used more natural resources than the entirety of the human race did before us. However, this growth and share of resources and wealth is not equal among countries nor their members (Ellwood: 2001, IMF: 2000) For example, huge gaps in trade, wealth, and distribution of resources have occurred in Africa, Eastern Europe, South America, and in Asia, from colonial periods to today[37] (Ellwood: 2001, IMF:2000).

This evidence points to an old system, globalization, which has entered a new era. Besides ideas of self traveling through the mechanics of neoliberalism, the solidification of self as commodity is viewed to have taken place. The first indicator of this is that self is a cultural symbol, which is already an abstract by definition. This will be explained in full detail later on. Next, self is seen to be an apparition of the multi-faceted power given to the discourses that dictate our social realities, and

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[35] A perfect example was discussed before in Karen Ho's ethnography on Wall Street Bankers and their perceived Smartness. That is, smartness was a part of investment bankers identity.

[36] Not to say globalization is new, but that the intensity of it is.

[37] China has certainly come a long way in developing global trade, however China is still at a serious disadvantage (IMF: 2000). This article http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2000/wp0044.pdf breaks down the GDP/head disadvantage. Also, there have been ups and downs in these markets, yet averages over long periods of time have remained in the realm of unequal.

increasingly reality. The previous statement is an argument of perspective; that buying clothes, counseling, gaining the correct certifications, etc. can be seen beyond as the purchasing of products/services, but as a purchasing of ideas of self. Whether it is additional, improved, or new self that is being purchased is beside the point. The point is that these services/products are how you adorn and measure the fetish. Products and services provide contrast onto what we mean by self, and it is in that way that they are very much a part of self. They manifest self and set up societal expectations, and that is why self is just a symbol, rather than a tangible object like the body. It is a manifestation and it is the products and services of capitalism that are the active players. This is not to say that there isn't any agency, rather, it is to dive into the aspects of capitalism, which affect whom we are on a very deep level.

First, one must identify that self is indeed capable of being turned into a fetish. The process of thought follows as such, that capitalism is a key symbol in Western society, which leads self to become a fetish through its implications in the idea of capitalism. That is, self is inherent in the mechanics of capitalism. Through neoliberal globalization, self is influenced in a hegemonic fashion by unequal trade, discourse, popular rhetoric, and political economy. The ideology of capitalism also requires self to be a fetish; that self may be moved into the realm of the scared, adorned with the products and services of capitalism, and to be a product requiring labor in order to be traded and sold in performative rituals. Deviations from this cultural norm, which most certainly happens, and spaces are provided in liminal phases for socially acceptable deviations, e.g. alternative travel. While this sounds convoluted and abstract the body of

thought behind this movement is quite simple. The first step is to show that capitalism is indeed a key symbol in Western culture. This may seem redundant to some, yet to others a stretch, all in all let us hope it opens up a new conversation with new perspectives.

The key symbols of a culture are denoted by possessing a majority of five factors, which Sherry Ortner (1972) highlights in an extremely helpful article for any neophyte to qualitative research. Very simply, if members of a culture under study say something is a key theme to their culture, then it should be assumed as such (Ortner: 1972). The reality of the situation rests in the cultural reality of an informants mind: if they believe it is real it should be treated with respect (Ortner: 1972, Pritchards: 1937). This proves to be true for Capitalism in Western culture, in what some would term an extreme case. For example, in the wake of the economic recession one would be hard pressed to find a "native" to whom capitalism isn't a key factor to their livelihood. Never mind the basic necessities of life that are demanded through capitalism in monetary form (nearly all over the globe), e.g. purchasing of water, food, shelter, safety, health, repayment of debt, etc, all of which require a "native" to participate in capitalism. This holds true for members of countries that are not defined as capitalist. Take for example structural adjustments and international trading agreements demanded by the IMF, World Bank, World Trade Organization, and NAFTA, which regulate the global market place, and even enforce actions in sovereign nations (Ellwood: 2001).

Many social movements have been the subject of reclaiming basic necessities imposed by some of the before mentioned groups. Most recently, a new group has

sprung from the Occupy Movement: The "Rolling Jubilee" movement, which seeks to collectively buy up private debt and pay it off collectively. Topics such as this hit a nerve in Western culture. For example, it can even be a point of controversy amongst family members at annual feasts meant to celebrate and focus on gratitude, e.g. Thanksgiving Dinner. This leads us into the second indicator, which states that members of said culture are unable to be indifferent to the key symbol, which has clearly been demonstrated as capitalism demands that you take place in it simply by the fact that you live in an area that operates this economic system (Ortner: 1972). No one is asked if they wish to join in capitalism. It is assumed that one will join the ranks or perish. One cannot simply forego participating in capitalism. Yes, a person can own a co-op, but they still must buy items from and pays taxes to a system that helps feeds capitalism. This requires one to be a contributor.

The third identifying factor is that the symbol is persistently present in a variety of contexts, e.g. behavioral, systematic, and in discourse (Ortner: 1972). For example, capitalism is brought up daily, in referencing how to deal with the economic or social issues, in multiple news forums, personal political alignments, and beliefs, such as class mobility and the American dream. An example of behavioral context is when the phrase, "It's not personal, it's business" is used. This phrase is literally drawing a line as to where self should not cross, however, often times this is not the case. Another wonderful example of capitalism as a cultural symbol, and its intersection of self, is the debate about healthcare reform, popularly known as "Obama-Care". Many opponents to this policy have interesting views about the placement of the economy in regards to

providing healthcare at a lower out of pocket cost to its citizens. It has aroused strong

reactions ranging from Tea Party protests to Sen. Sheryl Nuxoll comparing the

healthcare amendment to the holocaust: For private insurance companies would be

devastated by income lost. (Huffington Post: 2013)[38]. Another response came from Sen.

Mitch McConnell:

> "Three years later, the President's health care law remains a job-killer that
> grows the government and slows the economy, which is why it's important
> to repeal the whole thing and replace it with commonsense reforms that
> lower costs and that Americans actually want," (Huffington Post: 2013)[39]

The point here isn't to arouse a political debate, rather, it is to look and see how

capitalism is influencing these reactions in a variety of contexts mentioned above. Many

opponents perceive this as a socialist move and as an attack on capitalism, which

hinders it as an attack on them. Capitalism and self are nearly inseparable.

We even see Capitalism brought up in our societal myths about success and

failure, of which the former example could be included. Take for example James

Ferguson ethnography *Global Shadows (2006)*, which shows that economic failures in

Africa are linked to perceptions of preconceived moral and economic failings of its

inhabitants. Ferguson shows that the rhetoric and discourse from organizations such as

the IMF and World Bank become self-fulfilled prophecies that demoralize a nation and

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[38]
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/31/sheryl-nuxoll-idaho-gop-state-senator-compares-obamacare-to-holocaust_n_2591351.html
[39] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/1013/03/22/ted-cruobamacare_n_2932740.html

its people (Ferguson: 2006). Investors change their behavior based on these institutions, which further affects how people are seen in said countries. In a vicious cycle, investors are told that the people in that area are flawed and unable to support business, which leads to further economic withdraw fueling investors' claims. In this way, capitalism is a perpetual concern in our lives. We see that it affects who we are able to be.

On to the fourth point, which states that there are expansions upon the vocabulary surrounding the key symbol, which also seeks to differentiate between itself and other cultural phenomena (Ortner; 1978). One could view this as the discourse which surrounds the key symbol, e.g. Investment banks, Wall Street, the Stock Market, and different upper level educational or continuing training programs, etc. All these institutions create a vocabulary unique to the market. In addition, capitalism, has countless euphuism for implementing its strategies unique to its' polices, e.g. downsizing, letting go, repossession, and even structural adjustment could be argued to fit in this category. Furthermore, there is a plethora of jargon and buzzwords that surround economics, business, and marketing, e.g. synergy, which ensures a person is up to date on the latest economic trends. A wonderful example of this is Wall Street's investments banks, which actively recruit promising mathematicians to create highly complex formulas for financial derivatives (Ho: 2006).

The last point is that there are heavier restrictions surrounding the use of the key symbol (Ortner: 1978). This is seen through the formation of rules, and the carrying out of punishment for breaking said rules (Ortner: 1978). A brief look into the rules and

sanctions imposed by the IMF, World Bank, NAFTA, and the WTO should suffice in providing a plethora of examples to describe how a nation breaking neoliberal ideologies succumbs to pantagruelian devastation; from structural adjustments to loan repayments, neoliberal capitalism can be devastating, like most things, when followed with illogical fealty (Ellwood: 2001).
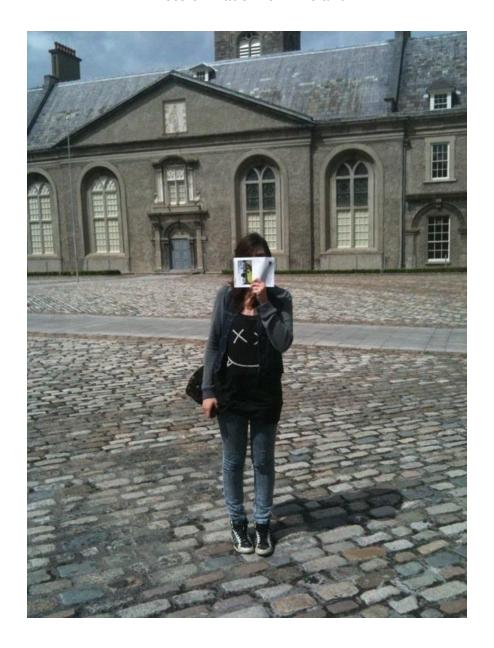
This is a perfect point to tie Mason and the Couchsurfing debacle back into our discussion, for the theory laid out can help explain what happened. Mason broke the restrictions of what the new definition of Couchsurfing meant, and for that he was kicked out of the group. By taking a deeper look into the events leading up to Mason's expulsion, one finds a concurrent series of meshing events. So to rephrase, venture capitalists invested into Couchsurfing, and by investing capital they inherently brought the ideas of self implicit in capitalism. This can be seen, in part, as the formation of Couchsurfing's new user agreement and new website design. This changed the culture of Couchsurfing as new ideas of what being a Couchsurfer meant where introduced: by how members interactions were altered through the new web design, which should be expected by the theory laid out. This was something Mason, and others, could not remain indifferent to because it literally changed how members spoke to each other, treated each other in person, and was self described as a devastatingly important issue by Mason. In public performance rituals, groups protested, and were either forgotten or removed. Censorship happened, as posts were deleted; yet, it remained a highly vocal process in the Couchsurfing community. Finally, Mason, a perceived line of flight, was kicked out. Yet, what further proof is there of this explanation, and what further

evidence do we have that points to performance rituals being acted out in Couchsurfing? How exactly does one become a line of flight, and what does that mean? Where do we start?

First, according to the method laid out, one can see that capitalism is a cultural symbol to Western society. This was made clear by using Sherry Ortner's methodology for determining key cultural symbols (1978). Extrapolating on this claim, it becomes clear that the Western ideas of self travels through the mechanics of capitalism. We saw examples of this by largely drawing off of Jamison (2000) and Jacobs (2004). One could also say that Western ideas of self travel through the mechanics of capitalism, because capitalism is a cultural symbol of the West, and this symbol includes socially defining what self is, for self is part of the symbol. Simply put, self is contained in the symbol because capitalism requires a certain idea of self, e.g. personal property rights is argued by Marx (1867) to be the central principle in capitalism, the consumption of a broad spectrum goods, and occupation, through type of labor, is used to induce value. We also talked about how self is moved from the profane to the sacred through rituals, which help diffuse social stresses, reaffirm what is important, and in turn, further turns self into a fetish (Turner: 1967, 1974, Ortner: 1978). Now that Capitalism can be seen as a key symbol in Western society, how does it relate to the idea of self as fetish or as sacred? These larger points may be drawn out through reviewing fieldwork conducted with Couchsurfers. By looking at more specific examples, I wish to further place this theory in a tangible context.

Chapter Four: A Cultural Key Holder

Photo of Madeline in Ireland

"An emotion is the transformation of the world"

- Jean-Paul Sartre (1965)

I met Madeline while working on a farm in western Ireland. I was staying in a lovely Victorian home near an abandon abbey, and could hardly believe the beauty and ease of it all. My job was to help out on the farm, and with day-to-day life of my gracious host family. This would typically include cooking a meal, tending to only two horses (a bittersweet reprieve at this point), and entertaining the children about my life as a young adult in Chicago, IL. I had heard about this brilliant farm through the recommendations of a few Couchsurfers.

A few weeks prior, in Madrid, while countless people asked how I felt about Osama Bin Laden being killed, I had my own worries to attend to. I was desperately looking for ways on how to avoid renewing my Schengen Area visa before time ran out. Luckily, through Couchsurfing I was made privy to the advantages of staying in the Republic of Ireland. Staying up all night to catch an early flight, and to take in the last of Spain, I arrived exhausted in a tiny airport near Croagh Patrick. After customs held me for three hours, to make certain I wasn't entering Ireland to leech off of their social services- which was a culture shock in its own right- I was released into the emerald green surroundings.

While the scenery and relaxed atmosphere were quite lovely, my research had hit a wall. In Spain, Couchsurfers constantly surrounded me, even in the rural countryside. Now, five children, two horses, and more sheep than I ever known existed made up my surroundings. In a sort of academic desperation, I went onto Couchsurfing, once again, to see if any members were nearby. I was in luck. I found one other person who was advertising, in a forum, about their keenness to meet others. They were French, and didn't speak English very well. It was all the same, I remember thinking I didn't speak French very well so we would be on equal footing.

It was a chance meeting that took place through messaging another random person on Couchsurfing. Both of us felt rather stranded in the rural regions, and were looking for ways to capitalize on our time abroad. For Madeline, this meant finding someone to help her work on her English. While she was an Au Pair for an Irish couple, fate had played a cruel trick on her. Madeline's hosts ran their own business, and were hardly home as a result. This meant that she was left on her own to take care of an infant, who, of course, couldn't speak English. The only other nearby inhabitant was the deaf care taker of the lot. This proved to be rather difficult for her. Also, Madeline could not simply walk or hitch a ride into town; her host's home was comically placed on a tiny island in a bay about a quarter mile from shore. This meant for the majority of her time she was stuck on an island with an extremely busy deaf man and an infant. I, on the other hand, was biding my time collecting local folklore, and looking for someone who was willing to Couchsurf, and to be studied doing so. The continuation of my research

was, at this point, not my main concern. However, unbeknownst to me, I ended up finding a great friend who opened up the culture of Couchsurfing.

We quickly built a good rapport by taking weekend trips into Dublin. On the long train ride across the country we would practice English, and Madeline proved to be an ample student. Through general conversation, I learned she was an Artist, who just graduated from art school in Brussels. Perfect, I was intent on studying this exact liminal phase. Furthermore, this provided a common background for us to bond over, since it was a pertinent topic for our age group. We, rather Madeline, found our first Couchsurfing hosts, whom we surfed with multiple times. We were to stay with two brothers who where both artists themselves, and whom became good friends as well. On our first trip from Heuston station to our host's flat, which was across the river Liffy, we ran into quite the spectacle. All the bridges across the river were blocked by policemen. We were told it would be at least an hour before we could cross. Confused, and being pushed out of the way by a large crowd, we decided to get a drink, and sit outside while we waited. We sat for some time, until the Queen of England came rolling by in a motorcade: being the first monarch to visit in over a hundred years. Such set the tone for our visits to Dublin. Over the next six months we made trips nearly every week. Traveling to Dublin and villages only 10km away, we built up a strong rapport. As my time in Ireland ended, Madeline decided to meet me in Chicago, and to Couchsurf across the United States. It is at the end of this trip across America, which I wish to detail the study. For, after being on the road continuously for three months, tension

made a rare appearance as we both ran out of time and money. This greatly opened up a new perspective to the people who Couchsurf.

Couchsurfing with a Parisian artist from Berlin proved to be quite amazing most of the time, and quite difficult at select times. While we never had an all-out fight, tension would make an appearance for a day or two towards the end of our journey. This was to be expected in my mind. When this happened, the remedy would be to take walk with the other, explain what was going on, and then disappear for an afternoon until it subsided. Usually some decent food would fix any ill feelings we had. Furthermore, I can only count on two occasions that we would look at the other with grimace, and both of us being very opinionated, these conversations were usually quite comical in hindsight. While these moments were far and few in-between, the moment I wish to start with is when this tension made a rare appearance after months of traveling together, and we were not granted the privilege of neither tiptoeing nor disappearing.

Here, in these moments of conflict, the banal and often overlooked "cultural stuff" is highlighted and opens the culture up to ethnography (Ortner: 1978). These heated moments serve as allegories for interpretation as a collision of realities play out allowing for a reorganization of meaning to occur forming a comprise of the parts (Ortner: 1978). However, this is not enough. As Wendy Wolford (2010: pg 11) points out we must also pay attention to the daily routines and the "subalterns among the subalterns," to understand the full breadth of a social group and how its movements move. That is, to take every group members experience as an important piece in

understanding the whole: while experiences may be subjective, they are nonetheless insightful.

It began when Madeline caught me with a bit of cliché French pessimism amidst our passage through the North Carolina section of the Appalachia around mid-October. This was quite unusual for her character, and it sparked curiosity from where it came from. A late fall storm had delayed our journey, and we were doing something out of the ordinary: staying in a motel for the very first time. We both felt beaten and worn from months of travel, lack of sleep, and lack of the normal amities we were used to. We had started in Chicago and were now headed back that way. But first, she was on her way to New York City, and I to Pittsburgh to visit a few old friends. However, for the moment we were stuck in Ashville, NC.

At the time, this reminded me of a state of affairs, which happened nine months pervious. I had witnessed a similar situation, in which the moods and relations where parallel to Madeline's. I would like to discuss these events in order to draw a loose connection, and highlight a theme I consistently encountered during my travels. This broad theme is a marker. The marker highlights the beginning of a performance ritual, which is used to call forth this subculture of youth out of a liminal phase, and into a new stage. In short, social pressure is enacted upon a person who may act out an alternative life style before returning to a state of social normality. In this way, the juxtaposition of lifestyles provides a cathartic experience. A sense of having done different while returning to the same. This is not to say that Madeline stopped traveling, or stopped making art. This is far beside the point. The theme is an acceptance of capitalism by

embracing it: the active seeking out and participation in it. This may seem like a trivial matter, but it is the under workings of a narration of self. This narration sets up a paradigm on what an individual should be, and should be doing. One can still travel, yet, it must be in the right way. This is merely an observation of the elite. It is also important to note that these events largely influenced my perspective of the ordeal with Madeline, and my course of action afterwards.

I had stayed with a married couple in Extremadura, Spain, on a rural farm by a eucalyptus forest. The warm weather helped the remaining winter months pass by with ease. It was a tranquil surrounding in a community, which was desperately struggling for an economic upswing. In a reaction to hard economic times, the rural community found WWOOFing to be an affordable option for employing people to work on their farms: by swapping room and board for part-time work. This also afforded the chance for travelers to have extended visits in the region at relatively low costs. My two friends had recently married and were traveling as part of their extended honeymoon. The money saved from WWOOFing and Couchsurfing had provided the chance for this extended vacation. Extended, in that it was an additional trip after their first vacation to the Caribbean. This is where the problem took its roots. Extended usually went past what family members and peers would deem acceptable. My own trip lasted further than I would have ever thought possible for the allotted budget.

My friend's plight echoed through Madeline's situation, which steered my interpretations of Madeline's predicament. The married couple experienced external pressures of a capitalist economy and culture through their family and peers. Succinctly

put, it was a call to get a job. Again, this seems trivial and elitist, most likely because it is. Yet, while the latter part of the pervious statement certainly holds truth to it, one must keep in mind the context of the situation. Both of my friends were debt free, at the cost of lacking a higher education. This meant that very few job prospects were available for them during the recession, and the jobs they could get would most likely hover around minimum wage. This lead to a negative self-reflection and perspective of what they were doing, and provided the chance to act out the life they would have without returning to United States and working.

To summarize, a lack of economic success was interpreted as a morality issue, as something wrong with "them," amongst their peers and their families (Ferguson: 2006). Simply put, they had been absent from the "real" world for too long. For example, their peers thought it was time they got real jobs. Following suit of Fergusons (2006) ethnography breaking away from middle class roots was viewed as a morality issue and became a depoliticized movement judged and viewed with in a capitalist mindset. The life style they wanted they had found yet,

"They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized. The conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided." (Freire 1970: pg 48).

Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) seems odd to conjure into analysis when speaking of a young married couple traveling internationally. In fact, one could criticize all of us for participating in WWOOFing, and taking away desperately needed jobs in the community. Yet, when a thick ethnographic understanding is applied

these façades of middle class fall by the wayside (Ortner: 2006). The use of WWOOfing was to prolong a trip before returning to working for slightly above minimum wage. It acted as a shelter from the global economic recession. This too, was my own experience, and for nearly two years after returning to the States I struggled to find entry level professional work. (On a side note, this too may be a liminal phase into entering the middle class, which further indicates that the middle class is a series of events rather than a steady position.) My friends "specialness" or privileged status that allowed for international travel was the same force that pulled them back into capitalism, despite their dreams and attempts not to be (Freire: 1970). While their leash is much longer than their counterparts, those who are economically worse off, it binds nonetheless.

In retrospect, I see that Couchsurfing came to life as a movement for my friends: it was always changing and moving. For some, it served as a ritual in the rite of passage to accept the flaws in a capitalistic society. By internalizing peer pressure and acting out another life style, disagreements are worked out. For example, the inherit difficulties, such as class differences and homogeneity, are juxtaposed against a life style, e.g. Couchsurfing or WWOOfing, and one comes to realize that the acted out alternative life style is not acceptable socially or fiscally. It helps cast aside notions that other economic systems and life styles can work, because one has experienced that they don't work; in return self fulfilling societal expectations. This mirrors Ferguson when he says that, "such perceptions don't just misunderstand social reality; they also shape it (2006: pg 7).

Talking to my friend's during this ordeal was very insightful. I learned that they wanted to keep traveling, but at the recommendation of their family and peers, needed to come home, and to find jobs. This is such a normal aspect of our society that it is taken for granted, and seems to be a simplified expectation of any adult. Banal as it is, this was a point they openly detested given the current economic situation: insinuating that they would be better off traveling, and staying put given the unlikelihood of being able to purchase another round of international tickets, for some time. They would use terms such as: powering through, putting their time in, and other colloquial forms that jovially describe their working situation, when referencing returning home. Again, a plethora of idioms exist in Western culture to allude to distaste in a career.   Ironically, their solution to all this was to quickly spend all their money they had saved, and then return home to get a job, and to save that money for another trip. They urged me to do the same; imploring that I joined. In this way, we could meet societal expectations while planning another trip. In one week they traveled to Amsterdam, met their spending goal, and flew home.

As it worked out, the married couple decided not to travel again, through Couchsurfing or WWOOFing, for the foreseeable future. Rather, they found a creative middle ground, which came as no surprise. After waiting tables, and doing other manual labor, their current jobs are located on a tiny island in the Caribbean. They are working at a luxury resort, which affords them a feeling of traveling while still being able to earn a livable income. It is, for them, a mesh of meeting societal expectations while satisfying

their need for adventure. Personally, I thought this is a wonderful solution, and seriously contemplated joining them, but for personal reasons stayed in Chicago.

The point to be made is that my friends haven't fully accepted an economic system they disagreed with. Rather, they used their agency to creatively embrace what was expected of them. This was a surprising observation, and raised more questions than it answered. For example, was this resistance, acceptance, or a mixture of both? Was this a creative solution only available to privileged socio-economic classes? What does it mean to be working at a luxury resort in improvised region? The only thing that became clear was the proliferation of capitalism; that much I knew, yet, I could not help but think that something else was happening too. It seemed far too simplistic to think that only my friends where being affected. I began to question how my friends where effecting capitalism, if at all.

Turning turf in County Mayo: This was the last year it was legal in Bella-Cara due to EU regulations.

The ladder leading to the dock to visit Madeline

Cautious barn kittens meeting a WWOOfer: Life and death on the farm, in Ireland, was

daily routine for the family. In the spring a fowl and two kittens died. This was not

hidden from the children (ages 3, 4, 6, 8, and 10) of my host family, but rather was

embraced poetically

Remote Easter celebration in Spain: No road lead to this destination.

Chapter Five: Creative Solutions

These creative solutions are extraordinary. They summarize a dialogue of compromise. Two ideas born in different ideological fashion are worked out in a ritual. The product of the ritual is a blend of the two ideas. Up till now, we have seen these rituals as agents for accepting capitalism, but an important factor has been missing from this analysis. One must consider how capitalism is changing due to these rituals. I believe that some of the strongest resistance movements to capitalism, I have studied, have been through accepting it. Next, I will continue with Madeline's predicament, which ends with her creative solution to accepting capitalism. Then, I will contrast it with groups, and an individual all of who openly resists and denies capitalism.

In a modest motel room, Madeline had started making negative comments about Couchsurfing, and our hopes of being successful in life. Truly shocked, as normally I was the pessimist in our friendship, I inquired what this was about. It was around this time that the thunderstorm picked up darkening the room with the sounds of heavy raindrops. The storm was nothing less than the personification of the atmosphere in room. I had the suspicion that the change in mood was a result of her Skype conversations she had with her family, and then with a few friends. Wanting to be kind, I thought the best option would be to give her some time to herself. Privacy had become a rare thing since our trip began. So I decided to give her some space, and left to walk to a nearby gas station to pick up soup for dinner. When I returned soaking wet, she was in tears.

I found out that my suspicion was correct. She, just like the married couple in Spain, had, for some time, been receiving pressure to come home and stop traveling. The emphasis was on getting job. However, the talks she had that night were particularly poignant. This too, led Madeline to have a negative perspective on what she was doing, and of her future. Her trip through the United States was to enhance her artwork and to take a grand trip one so often hears about. However, being an artist often requires patronage, which was a luxury not afforded to Madeline at this point, and there were no quick solutions to her state. She had already purchased a plane ticket home, and had a month to wait before returning. So all this pestering seemed to be insurance that she would indeed do what was expected when she got home. I watched as she sat with this anxiety, spurring my own, until she had gone through some transformation in her mind. After microwaving tomato soup, and having a glass of cheap wine, things calmed down. At the end of all this, Madeline decided to use her remaining time to follow up on an internship she was hoping to get, to find a place to stay in Berlin until she was able to get back on her feet, and to try to enjoy the remainder of the trip. What happened once she was back in Berlin was quite different.

Analyzing what happened to Madeline after her travels was quite important. It helped test the hypothesis laid out: that her travels were a liminal period serving as a rite of passage into accepting capitalism through the fetishism of self. The continued contact we have maintained has illuminated the importance of agency. For example, if after our trip I had not kept contact than a very different paper would have been written. Furthermore, at this point a strong friendship has emerged.

The last month passed by quickly, and soon Madeline was on a rickety plane back home, but not before it was delayed a full day due to mechanical errors. Once in Berlin, she faced numerous problems as anyone starting up in a city would experience. We kept in contact weekly; we maintained our rapport by talking on Skype for a few hours per session. This was also part of keeping up our friendship, and for planning for more trips, which is a sentiment still in the working more then two years later. However, before we could even worry about planning a trip, the first issue was finding the collection of jobs that would allow her to make a living wage, and to have some foot in the art world. Her internship didn't come close to covering her living expenses, so she picked up a second job. For two months, she Couchsurfed in the city while saving money for a flat. This is another amazing use of Couchsurfing, and goes to show how diverse this group truly is. My own experience returning to Chicago mimicked hers, and this meant I more fully understood the stress of my main informant. Finally, after months of hard work, she was able to find a marketing job, which paid the bills, yet was not art centric. This would seem to support my initial hypothesis: that Madeline had gone through a ritual and fully accepted capitalism. However, after about a year and a half passed she finally found her solution.

Collaborating with another Couchsurfer, Madeline decided to co-start a crowd funded project, which would be an infusion of art and traveling. This is a wonderful example of how one can use their agency to find creative solutions while working within capitalism. However, it is a controversial topic. The project, which I am a part of as a consultant and editor, is the selling of cultural capital. To put this further into context,

the project is a book for tourist to find odd museums, other local nuances, and to show that it is possible to travel on a tight budget. The central theme is to find the strange, and to spend as little money as possible. The effects of this project are far out of the scope of this paper. However, I will propose picking up where this paper has left off, and conduct more research. Frustratingly, it seems this paper has come full circle. I began with the example of my friend who took a trip across the United States with around $200, and became critical. Now, I have become critical of myself. However, a theory has been fleshed out. While a full analysis certainly has not been reached, progress has been made. The next step of this progress comes by contrasting those who work fully against capitalism and those with in it.

Moving towards the end of my study, I wish to introduce additional theory, in a true rhizomatic form, as a conclusion, and as a point of departure for future research. This theory will seek to interpret contrasting movements, those that publicly denounce capitalism, under a rhizomatic lens: by showing the complexity and overlapping layers of social movements (Delezue and Guattari: 1987). The hope is that by doing so these groups can help us understand the placement of this theory. The next two examples look at the city of Chicago, IL, while it was in its own liminal phase.

As the journey went on, my bag got smaller. This is after 7 months.

Example Two: NATO Protest Chicago, IL. May 20th 2012

By Chicago standards, it was an unusually hot day in May (20th, 2012). The sun was beating down, and I walked with Edda, a German Couchsurfer who had been staying with me for two months, down Michigan Avenue. The intricate skyline dwarfed us as we headed to Grant Park to participate in a rally before the highly anticipated protest of the 38th G-8 summit meeting. This, of course, had changed, and brought with it a tense atmosphere. Worrying about the large crowds in Chicago, the G-8 summit was quickly moved to a Camp David in Maryland. However, while the G-8 was moved, NATO announced that it would meet in Chicago a day after the G-8 was supposed to. Causing uproar, this meant that the marching permits that the Occupy movement had obtained were invalid for the days of the NATO meeting. In response to this, the Occupy movement applied for new permits, and was then denied marching permits for when NATO would be holding its meeting, which was only a day after their initial permit. This lead to strong bellicose rhetoric from both sides as the protestors promised they would march, and as the police promised they would not allow it. To make matters even tenser,

the Chicago police had conducted questionable undercover work, and brought in three terrorist suspects. In the Occupy movement, this was highly criticized as a conspiracy, and done without the proper legal documents, e.g. warrants. One of the main speeches of the rally addressed this issue[40].

At the rally, the visibility of the police was staggering. Around us we saw Homeland security vehicles, multiple helicopters hovering above, and what seemed like an endless supply of law enforcement dressed in black riot gear. It was a loud and intimidating scene. However, after a few minutes we became comfortable in the controlled chaos, and started to explore. We picked up free picket signs, which had multiple political messages, were given vinegar and bandanas as a defense against tear gas (a gesture I thought to be kind, but unnecessary), and cookies from Hare Krishna devotees. We were both stopped by international reporters, but brushed them off as we made our way to a shady grove, for a quick nap amidst the chaos.

After the nap, I emerged myself into the variety of different political subdivisions, messages, and causes present at the rally. There were easily twenty different activist groups present, and each was tweeting a live update of the rally. Entering these different groups, I wondered if there was a collective group at all let alone a *real* message. It seemed too diverse and spread out to act as a clear voice. Perhaps, all these protestors, estimated by Occupy to be 10,000-15,000, were an imagined community, and those who studied it are inventing and objectifying this movement: Ascribing a story and timeline to fit nicely into the unfolding events (Occupy

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Chicago, Noyes: 2006). Progressing this thought further, I recalled a few books I read by Dr. Ortner (1984, 2009), which attested to how social actors create society, and of how we play serious games in it. This march could easily be seen as such a serious game. Yet, then I stopped, and thought about the term *serious*. If it were a game, then it was a game where people's livelihoods have been taken away, where a disappearing middle class felt a need to speak out, and it was a game of risk, which was constantly called forth by the presences of Federal, State, and Local police forces.

This was a movement quite different from Madeline's. Open and direct opposition to capitalism was pronounced loudly, and many creative means were discussed before protesting, e.g. anti-arrests strategies, using complicated social media to avoid police blocking marching routes, and intricate publications on various causes. Yet, I saw how this opposition affected the surrounding community outside of the resistances movements. It was not an affect many inside Occupy would like to have. Rather, the open opposition to capitalism was viewed as silly, annoying, costly to the city, and as ineffective. As protesters were arrested many people didn't give it a second thought. Rather, the people I interviewed would chastise the protestor for going out their way to get arrested. It gave the notion that this was a large societal performance ritual, which followed the format laid out for alternative travel: it helped dissolve social tensions, and propagated through the community that capitalism was far better than these resistance movements.

While the protest received a great deal of criticism from locals, a simple question was not asked. For example, protesters whom had been beaten by police during the

march have been blamed as wanting to be the impetus to violence and disorder, and were written off as extremist,as deviants to the progression of society, and as children playing destructively. Yet, many I talked with didn't ask why? Why don't they get a job instead of occupying public spaces? Why did protesters want to break through police lines so badly, which is an action both dangerous and frightening? While many subjective answers have a place in this analysis, such as mental health, maturity level, and attitudes towards law enforcement, a rhizomatic lens provides a broad understanding (Delezue and Guattari: 1987).

Delezue and Guattari (1987) speak of the ridiculousness and simplistic fallacy when ascribing a linear, single, or "arborescent" story to explain social movements. For them, social movements are comprised of "various different levels, dates, and speeds," (Delezue and Guattari: 1987 pg 3). For example, the term rhizome is to allude and compare social movements to the rhizomes of plants. The simplified idea is that there are a number of influences creating a situation, which is constantly changing with time and perspective. This is important when thinking about creative solutions to capitalism because it helps account for strange reactions to open resistance. For example, these authors, and Foucault (1976) as well, state that any serious movement which openly threatens the norm, its authority, and seeks to validate its existence in defiance or by ideological differences that are incompatible are regarded as ridiculous, reify the power of the norm, and are themselves destroyed, ridiculed, or alienated. These authors use many examples, such as sexuality, mental health, and governance to draw out this point and to attest to this (Foucault: 1976, Delezue and Guattari: 1987).

By looking at how the NATO protesters were received by the Chicago public, one sees that they were largely mocked. Yet, this does not mean that this was the truth for everyone in Chicago; rather it is brought up to tie in Saul Alinsky's (1971) rules for radicals: That to embrace change one must start from a place that recognizes the world as it is instead of how they want it to be. This fits perfectly with the theory laid out. The NATO protesters sought to radically change capitalism, but they were talking from a different world. The NATO protester's cause was lost in the translation between galaxies making it a performative ritual, which reified the system they wished to stop. It was a matter of " different dates, speeds, and lines" (Delezue and Guattari: 1987 pg 3).

Yet, as half a dozen helicopters hovered around I paused, and these thoughts subsided. My attention was focused on the deafening roars of the crowd, which dominated the downtown landscape only to be sporadically pierced by shirks of sirens. It was surreal and intoxicating to be surrounded by a diverse crowd, packed in-between gargantuan skyscrapers, and outlined with rows and rows of law enforcement officers. One had the feeling that they stopped, just for that moment, the workings of this powerful city, and that all eyes were on them. It seemed these global "geological movements," had finally come to surface, if only temporarily, into a very real and very tense reality (Delezue and Guattari: 1976).

All these different worlds (or dates, lines, and speeds), all these social realities and subgroups, and all these movements and causes got to surface like a breaking wave; yet for a bystander, it was nothing but an annoyance and a mere disturbance to the normality of the city, which would return as soon as the wave broke and retracted back

into the ocean it came from. This is the idea of the rhizome: The wave must break, however, some waves are larger than others, and some last longer than others.

Looking at the NATO protesters, one can see they were amalgamated beyond individual group causes for that period of time, during the protest, and it should suffice to say that it could happen again. One should not analyze the NATO protesters from a place of authenticity, invention, affect, or tradition; rather, one should wonder what it is connecting such a multitude of people, of who[41] are multitudes to themselves (Deleuze and Guattari: 1976),aking Briggs (1996) warning, that it is neither our power nor right to validate a culture or assess its realness. This is an idea that builds off of Evan Pritchard's (1937) classical work with witchcraft among the Azande, that if it is real for the participant in their social reality, than it is simply that, real.

Near the end of the march, Edda and I decided to leave early. In part due to thirst, we were unable to refill our water bottles, and understandably out of caution, were not welcomed in any nearby shops.. Through the real time tweeting of the event, we had learned that the end of the protest could be a site for violence, this was later confirmed. Not being an American citizen, Edda decided it wouldn't be worth risking getting arrested, and then possibly sent home early on a negative note. So we headed to the nearest L stop (local train station), and received mixed looks while waiting for the west bound blue line train to arrive and take us to Wicker Park.

A memory that sticks out while we were waiting on the platform happened when a police officer came up to us. My first thought was that this wasn't going to be fun.

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[41] Highlights one being an object, rather than a subject by using whom instead of who.

Being the only easily identifiable protesters (we were still carrying our signs), many people on the platform turned to watch, and to see what would happen. We both had book bags, and I was certain the police officer was going to search them causing us to miss the next few trains. Instead, to my complete surprise, he came up and thanked us for protesting that day. He said that he wasn't allowed since every local cop was required to work that week. He then made remarks about investment banks and how they were destroying his kids' future. The trained entered the platform, and he then wished us both a pleasant day.

This experience profoundly reminded me of the complex nature of social relations: that visible social lines are often blurred and overlapping. In less than a couple hours I had experienced fear, intimidation, gratitude, and intimacy from the local police. I witnessed the same from the protesters. For example, there were protesters that openly harassed and verbal abused the police: one person went as far to tie a string around donut and connect it to a stick so that they could make pejorative commits about the police while maintaining a safe distance, and yet, others befriended the police. The image of the wave never seemed more fitting.

Concluding Example:

A week before the NATO protests, as the city prepared for riots that never would happen, I ran into a train hopper, or rather, they came into my home. I was walking back from work when I noticed a homeless person- of the same age as I- sitting under a tree near my block. This is quite common in my neighborhood during the summer time, and I didn't give it a second thought. We traded pleasantries, and then I went inside to take a nap and to play with my cats. About an hour later my roommate came in announcing that we had a Couchsurfer. It was the person whom I saw sitting under the tree. Slightly surprised, I decided to find out who this stranger was.

Milton, the train hopper, was preparing to leave town to avoid unwanted attention by the authorities. He feared that the heighten security in the city would mean

that he would be easily profiled and harassed. Fearing sleeping on the streets, because of the police, he needed a place to spend a couple nights before he would be able to catch the right kind of train headed in his direction. Not wanting to subject anyone to their own fears my roommate had agreed to let him stay. While I was not to keen on how this situation came about, it did provide a few days to interview and get to know Milton, and to learn more about his situation.

Through multiple talks I found out that Milton came from a middle class suburban town in the Deep South. Growing up, he had the kind of ambitions that one would expect most middle class Americans to have: being somewhat successful and to live a life of decency. His current lifestyle choices caught me by surprise after he explained his deeply religious upbringing. As we talked, he confessed that these Christian threads still rang true in his heart and played a major role in his life decisions, which had taken his from a small town to the heart of Chicago. Truly, this was a trait I didn't think to place in a train hopper, and my curiosity began to grow.

As Milton sat at my kitchen table, eating salsa and drinking a beer, we began to talk about many things. First, he directed the conversation; he talked about the modern day implications of Marxism—at which he was much better read than I. It was during this talk that I learned about his complete opposition to capitalism. Next, we talked about the current state of Chicago as the city prepared for NATO protesters to come to town, which was strangely an event he was planning to avoid by being out of town by then. When I asked why he didn't want to join the march he responded with his doubts in the protesters ability to cause change. Finally, he told me of his college career, which

had a significant impact on him. Milton took his time and then explained that it was in school where he began to notice a solidification of thought and class struggles. I could tell by the change of tone in his voice that this was something very important to him. Not wanting to pry, just yet, I let him continue his story.

As the story continued, I learned that Milton had dropped out of undergrad to pursue an alternative traveling life style. I was surprised to hear this given his intellect and scholarly passion in our previous discussions. I made a point to delicately find out why he left school. Luckily, Milton provided the answer on his own as if anticipating this question. I found out he had left school in an act of protest: he felt obligated not to participate in a system perpetuating the student debt crisis and socio-economic class divide, e.g. access to higher education. There was a reason, after all, why he was so well versed in Marxism. Despite leaving a promising education, Milton continued his own education by constantly reading, writing, and having conversations much like the ones we had been having. I found out that after leaving school he set off to find some new way to express his thoughts and to incite change, however small. Milton saw train hopping as a way to spread his ideas, and to live in a system outside capitalism.

As we examine Milton's situation, one must ask very bluntly if he is reifying our current societal norms by acting as, Gregory Bateson (1972) terms, "a cog" in this great machine. This is the question being addressed throughout the paper, and a problem that has haunted me throughout my own education and personal resistance struggles. For example, is Milton helping the continuation and successful running of this societal

machine through his opposition, is he resisting it, or is there an interaction affecting both parties involved?

To summarize, we have examined various examples where "lines of flight" are destroyed in liminal phases through performative rituals, which reify self as a fetish by accepting or compromising with capitalism (Deleuze and Guattari: 1987, Turner: 1967, 1974). This is important as the fetishization of self is at the same time a force that propagates capitalism and western normativity, and it is also an implicit part of capitalism's mechanics. If we are to believe this claim it insinuates a less than appealing power of agency. However, Milton is unique in this study. Milton was in a liminal phase, dropping out of school, yet his experience did not yield a compromise or acceptance with capitalism, like in the other examples. Rather, Milton was openly and passionately resisting capitalism in the margins of Western society. It would lead one to think that rituals, as we have discussed as working out societal issues, have failed in this case. Yet, intrinsic beliefs in personal agency aside, one notices that in this example, Milton's behavior is related to and caused by what he wants to change- capitalism (Bateson: 1972).

In *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972), Gregory Bateson provides an alternative way of conceptualizing our relationships to our actions, thoughts, and *self*. This is of the upmost importance, as it provides a new way of thinking about what Milton's resistance is doing. For example, in using the analytic strategy laid out by Bateson (1972), Milton is viewed to be confined to what he wants to change. That is, Milton is limited by, and in turn created by, what he wants to change (Bateson: 1972). For example, the more Milton

defines what it is *he* is doing, why *he* is doing it, and what *he* wants to change, then the more he limits his own self: definition is limitation (Bateson: 1972). To clarify, Milton becomes entangled with what he is trying to change. Milton's identity cannot survive without our society as it is. Without capitalism, this version of Milton-self- would not exist. Furthermore, if this societal system needs to procure an other, he is providing his own body to be abstracted into a self for societal reflection through his resistance and "non-participation," which is the other. In this situation, what could be more pious-and useless-than self-sacrifice? All of this depends on an idea of self.

One may view Milton's and Couchsurfing members' opposition as the opposite end of the thing they are resisting. However, others may insinuate that they are creating change through a creative solution: not participating or compromise. However, participation in the norm has never been a choice. A social actor is an actor, whether they move or not. For example, being absent and silent is still contribution. It is a voice most easily spoken over and molded to serve any function. Yet, this is not Milton's case; his participation is denoted by his striving for change, and by his vehement opposition, which better defines and oils the very thing he opposes.

In many ways Milton's struggle is an allegory. It is rendered through the examination of Couchsurfing's relationships to itself and the outside world. We begin to see that things are much more tangled, and perhaps hopelessly stuck together. However, this is clearly not the case. A plethora of lines of flight have been detailed through ethnographic examples. If truth holds to Couchsurfing's usage -and ever rising membership statistics- then we should be able to extrapolate these results: that

deviations from the norm are happening with such reoccurring regularity that they are, in fact, a part of the norm. As Foucault (1978) stated, censorship is not the main way power works. Rather, the open and performative acts of plebian resistance are met with nonchalance, dealt with inside the self of the resistor, and by the public at large as rites of passage out of liminal phases. These rites of passage help one work out any discontent that they may have had with the status quo: one can play out alternative lifestyles, which fall short of the norm, are compromised with the norm, or are accepted over the norm. No matter the choice, the irony is it is a part of the norm. The norm, a long leash made of discourse, various abstractions of self, and fetishism.

Coda: Final Line of Flight

It is only a sense of progression which will leads one to ask, "What is next in this endeavor?" We have traced the steps for how self becomes a fetish, yet the why and if it will remain is still unclear: will Madeline's art combat self as a fetish or support it? However, in thinking about the next steps, one should ponder deeper on the implications of a line of flight. The idea behind the line of flight, taken from Deleuze and Guattari (1976), is to expose larger societal mechanisms by its contrast to the norm, hence its movement as a line of flight - away from the norm: that which is weird,

strange, and laughable. In these overarching structures, self has been argued to be a fetish tied to and a part of capitalism, as it is inherent in our economic system.

Self is the bell we ring to call back those who have traversed dangerously far from the norm. It is not repression; rather it is a reminder and an awakening: when nature ascribes all too easily to our expectations. We have traced the steps from cathartic juxtaposition provided in liminal phases – lines of flights in their own right, which lead one out of liminal phases as a rite of passage, rather than revolution (Turner: 1964, Deleuze and Guattari: 1976). The rite of passage ushers us out of lines of flight, and provides an acceptable narrative of what happened, e.g. "I was young and stupid." It is a narrative written after the fact: reflection of the winning ideology, not documentation of facts: a rendering of Jacob's (2004) dark ages. However, is this truly the apex of our agency? Are we to be subjected to an abstracted paradigm, and what does that even mean?

Lines of flight may seem to be an abstracted term, but they are in fact a simple idea for a common occurrence. They are the whispers in your mind, and dreams for different reality, but are written off as silly, childish, strange, and undoable; they are the consequences of one world placed in another without context: the implications of Marisol De La Cadena's (2010) multiple worlds. Their function in society is to provide a dreamscape in which one may live out societal expectations outside the norm as a cathartic expression. This provides reasoning as to why self is abstracted: so it may be constricted. Removing self from its inherent position, one of human invention, all types of fantastic realities may come to fruition without being acted on. Following Foucault's

(1974) critique on repression, one should not expect hegemonic practices to be glaring; rather, it should be the invisible chains which we look for: that which shakes us, but is unclear.

In saying what is next, or in trying to define further what is meant by a line of flight, one commits a crime against this idea. It is this very definition – the setting up of dualities[42], which this paper is circumscribing[43]: a negation of ties, i.e. chains. Recall the multiple worlds (Marisol De La Cadena: 2010), how can we expect to operate on a progressive continuum when it is the continuum which is part of the problem: context removed or pastoralized in discourse (Deleuze and Guattari: 1976). The line of flight is a rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari: 1976). Asking what it is does not suffice as an applicable first question: as it brings its own set of expectations and conditions with it that are not parts of the process of a line of flight, for it exists far away from that which it came- thus a line in flight. Also, the line of flight is multiple. So, how then do we assess what is going on?

While this sounds abstracted an absurd one should not be surprised. Rather, one should ask, "Why this is strange, absurd, or silly, and what does this mean?" Yet, the main question remains, "What is next?" The only suitable way to extrapolate is to look at what has happened, the norm, and then to conclude that it will continue to happen until a new element is introduced. What is this lingering hope that clings to this study? Creative solutions, doubt, and unknowing all play a part in distracting from the obvious. We can only go as far as the data allows, which is to the norm. Madeline left the norm

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[42] E.g. this is and this is not.
[43] It is an idea from a different world in unsupported format.

and returned, Mason left the norm and was kicked out of the alternative, and the other Couchsurfers fall into this pattern of reifying the norm by returning to it, supporting it, or contrasting it within its discourse as the needed other. Is this circular logic? Of course not, that would be far too simplistic of a rebuttal. In essence, we would be saying this is not what I expected or like, yet the qualitative data remains. A continuation is not circular, rather it is singular, and that is why cultural sustainability is at risk. Till we make room for multiple worlds in our laws, discourse, and minds cultures will be at risk. However, to make a gesture from one world to another is powerful. With that in mind, one could say that the next step is to make contact with a different world, and to take it from there with an open mind.

Couch Information

Can you host?

🛋 Yes ▼

edit

Couch Available: Yes
Preferred Gender: Any
No smoking allowed
Has children: No
Can host children: Yes
Has pets: No
Can host pets: No
♿ **Wheelchair Accessible:** Yes

Max Surfers Per Night: 2

Shared Sleeping Surface: Depends
Shared Room: Depends
My place is open to all people! Only rule is don't cause any harm and you can crash. So LGBT, vagabonds, freegans, vegans, artists, students, grandmoms, corporate ceo's etc all are welcomed

Right in the heart of Lincoln Park/ Old town your bound to find something awesome. It's a city apartment so it is cozy. Our couch is brand new so please don't pee on it! We do have tons of other stuff as well. Just be prepared to enter an artistic and academic atmosphere. That means lots of painting and jargon jokes. Please type meow in the subject line so we know you are a human or talented cat.

Personal Description

Having a great time and learning are the essentials. At this point in my life I'm a grad student who has fallen in love with an artist and we are saving up for more travels. We are very happy eating cereal for dinner and enjoy, very much, strange and weird things.

How I Participate in CS

Spread good info and co-create awesomeness! I'm easy going letting the adventure of life happen. I listen to people and nature and have heard amazing things. I really am on a mission to spread love and to meet new people share some ideas and hopefully form new ones.

Couchsurfing Experience

Love it. People are awesome so this is a good way to really get some depth in a world full of surface interactions.

Interests

philosophy, nature, running, surfing, photography, anthropolgoy etc. Cooking has now entered the picture! So hopefully I will get a chance to cook you something healthy, natural, and delicious.

Philosophy

" Go dog, go and be dog" Thoughts on that? Woof

Personal Designations

edit

General Information

Kyle James has been vouched for	
Couch available	Yes
Couchsurf requests replied to	100%
Kyle James is online right now!	
last login	20 hrs ago
	Chicago, Illinois, United States ...
member since	May 20th, 2010
profile views	843
age	25
birthday	14 December
	Only you can see this.
gender	Male
membername	ORGANICSKILLZ
occupation	Graduate student
education	Grad school
grew up in	in the foothills of northern Virginia outside DC
ethnicity	white but different

Locations Traveled

TRAVELED: Canada, Czech Republic, England, Germany, Iceland, Morocco, Portugal, Scotland, United States
LIVED: Ireland (Republic of), Spain
IS GOING TO: China, Nepal

see map

References (24)

24 Positive	0 Neutral	0 Negative
10 From Hosts	7 From Surfers	3 Traveling

Appendix 2: References

From Angèle Meuble

Berlin, Germany

May 25, 2011

Positive

Kyle est probablement ma meilleure rencontre sur couchsurfing. Nous nous sommes rencontres au beau milieur de nulle part en terre sauvage Irlandaise. Je vivais sur une ile de la cote ouest et lui en pleine campagne. D'un commun accord nous nous sommes rencontres pres d'un pont a Westport. Nous avons tres souvent voyage ensemble et partage des histoires folles a Dublin avec Andy et Niall (NOTRE famille couchsurfing irlandaise) ... Un jour pour plaisanter je suppose, il m'a propose de venir le rejoindre aux Etats-Unis pour poursuivre cette aventure et realiser un documentaire sur notre road trip. J'ai immediatement accepte et realise une peinture immense dans la cuisine de mon patron pour financer mon voyage. Je voyage actuellement avec lui et profite de chaque moment ! J'ai rencontre sa famille et assiste au mariage de sa soeur a peine debarquee sur place et en plein jet lag ahah. C'est un excellent cuisinier et compagnon de voyage, altruiste, genereux, drole et intelligent.

For Angèle Meuble   edit

Berlin, Germany

May 24, 2011

Positive

Great person! We surfed in Dublin together for 5 days and had a blast. Shes the type of person you enjoy being around for that period of time. I truly enjoyed our adventures together. Defiantly take the time to host or surf with her. Look foreword to doing it again!

From Mary Shrom

Asheville, United States

Oct 19, 2011

Positive

Kyle is a great individual. I was happy to be a part of his documentary. Throughout our day adventure we encountered ego-driven world famous rock stars and pissed off truck drivers, but all was handled with comedic grace. I hope to see the final product! If you meet/host kyle, take a moment to talk to him he is polite & intelligent and creative!

For Mary Shrom

edit

Asheville, United States

Oct 20, 2011

Positive

This is an awesome couchsurfer and person! Super interesting and kind, she even took us out to lunch. I can't wait to get back to Asheville and do a follow up and of course to hang. If you go to Asheville do your self a favor and say hey to Mary.

Views of 'Capitalism' and 'Socialism'

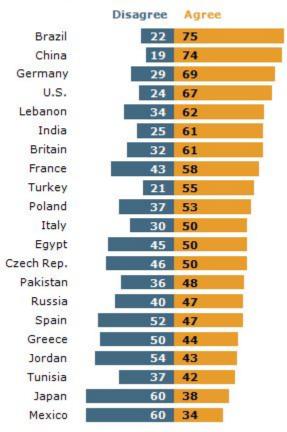| Reaction to ...	Capitalism		Socialism		Diff in % positive
	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg	
	%	%	%	%	
Total	50	40	31	60	+19
White	55	35	24	68	+31
Black	41	51	55	36	-14
Hispanic	32	55	44	49	-12
18-29	46	47	49	43	-3
30-49	50	40	34	58	+16
50-64	53	39	25	68	+28
65+	52	32	13	72	+39
Family income					
$75,000+	68	28	22	71	+46
$30,000-$74,999	52	43	27	68	+25
Less than $30,000	39	47	43	46	-4
Party and ideology					
Conserv Republican	66	29	6	90	+60
Mod/Lib Republican	54	40	25	66	+29
Independent	52	39	32	60	+20
Cons/Mod Democrat	42	49	37	51	+5
Liberal Democrat	46	47	59	33	-13
Occupy Wall Street					
Support (44%)	45	47	39	52	+6
Oppose (35%)	67	28	18	76	+49
Tea Party movement					
Agree (19%)	71	26	12	85	+59
Disagree (27%)	53	39	37	53	+16
No opinion (50%)	42	46	35	55	+7

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Dec. 7-11, 2011. Whites and Blacks are non-Hispanic only; Hispanics are of any race.

Views of Hard Work and Success

	Hard work no guarantee	Most succeed if work hard
U.S.	20	77
Britain	41	57
Spain	43	56
Czech Rep.	43	54
Germany	48	51
Poland	43	48
France	54	46
Italy	46	43
Greece	51	43
Russia	53	35
Pakistan	15	81
Tunisia	24	73
Jordan	37	57
Egypt	42	53
Turkey	39	50
Lebanon	64	32
India	27	67
China	33	45
Japan	59	40
Brazil	30	69
Mexico	31	65

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q84.

Are People Better Off in Free Market Economy?

	Disagree	Agree
Brazil	22	75
China	19	74
Germany	29	69
U.S.	24	67
Lebanon	34	62
India	25	61
Britain	32	61
France	43	58
Turkey	21	55
Poland	37	53
Italy	30	50
Egypt	45	50
Czech Rep.	46	50
Pakistan	36	48
Russia	40	47
Spain	52	47
Greece	50	44
Jordan	54	43
Tunisia	37	42
Japan	60	38
Mexico	60	34

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q26.

Table 694. Share of Aggregate Income Received by Each Fifth and Top 5 Percent of Households: 1970 to 2009

[Households as of March of the following year, (64,778 represents 64,778,000). Income in constant 2009 CPI-U-RS-adjusted dollars. The shares method ranks households from highest to lowest on the basis of income and then divides them into groups of equal population size, typically quintiles. The aggregate income of each group is then divided by the overall aggregate income to derive shares. Based on the Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC); see text, this section and Section 1, and Appendix III. For data collection changes over time, see <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/history.html>]

Year	Number of house- holds (1,000)	Income at selected positions in constant (2009) dollars					Percent distribution of aggregate income					
		Upper limit of each fifth				Top 5 percent	Lowest 5th	Second 5th	Third 5th	Fourth 5th	Highest 5th	Top 5 percent
		Lowest	Second	Third	Fourth							
1970......	64,778	18,180	34,827	50,656	72,273	114,243	4.1	10.8	17.4	24.5	43.3	16.6
1980......	82,368	18,533	34,757	53,285	78,019	125,556	4.2	10.2	16.8	24.7	44.1	16.5
1990......	94,312	19,886	37,644	57,591	87,826	150,735	3.8	9.6	15.9	24.0	46.6	18.5
1995 [1]	99,627	20,124	37,613	58,698	91,012	157,919	3.7	9.1	15.2	23.3	48.7	21.0
2000 [2, 3] ...	108,209	22,320	41,103	64,985	101,844	180,879	3.6	8.9	14.8	23.0	49.8	22.1
2002......	111,278	21,361	39,795	63,384	100,170	178,844	3.5	8.8	14.8	23.3	49.7	21.7
2003......	112,000	20,974	39,652	63,505	101,307	179,740	3.4	8.7	14.8	23.4	49.8	21.4
2004......	113,343	20,992	39,375	62,716	99,930	178,453	3.4	8.7	14.7	23.2	50.1	21.8
2005 [4]	114,384	21,071	39,554	63,352	100,757	182,386	3.4	8.6	14.6	23.0	50.4	22.2
2006......	116,011	21,314	40,185	63,830	103,226	185,119	3.4	8.6	14.5	22.9	50.5	22.3
2007......	116,783	20,991	40,448	64,138	103,448	183,103	3.4	8.7	14.8	23.4	49.7	21.2
2008......	117,181	20,633	38,852	62,487	99,860	179,317	3.4	8.6	14.7	23.3	50.0	21.5
2009......	117,538	20,453	38,550	61,801	100,000	180,001	3.4	8.6	14.6	23.2	50.3	21.7

[1] Data reflect full implementation of the 1990 census-based sample design and metropolitan definitions, 7,000 household sample reduction, and revised race edits. [2] Implementation of Census 2000-based population controls. [3] Implementation of a 28,000 household sample expansion. [4] Data have been revised to reflect a correction to the weights in the 2005 ASEC.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2009*, Current Population Reports, P60-238, and Historical Tables—Tables H1 and H2, September 2010. See also <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/income.html> and <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/household/index.html>.

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