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Corporate Economization of the Individual Through Emoji

On 19 September, 2009, Fred Benenson launched a Kickstarter campaign attempting to crowdfund the translation of the classic American novel *Moby Dick; or, the Whale* into *Emoji Dick; or, * with the help of Amazon Mechanical Turk, an Amazon Web Service that connects businesses, requesters, with workers, providers, to perform Human Intelligence Tasks currently beyond the capacity of technology. By the end of the month of funding, on 19 October, 2009, the Kickstarter campaign closed successfully with \$3,676 raised of the goal of \$3,500. Come 27 November, 2009, Fred sent the first five-hundred sentences to the Amazon Mechanical Turk for translation. Benenson explained the translation process on the Kickstarter campaign's "Updates" tab. Each sentence was translated once by three distinct Amazon Mechanical Turk workers. The results of each sentence were then voted on by a set of workers different from the set of workers who did the translating. The most popular emoji version of each sentence was selected for inclusion. This was done with each of the novel's approximately ten-thousand sentences. According to the book's website, over eight-hundred Amazon Mechanical Turk providers worked together for approximately 1,054.43888888889 hours to realize this project.





On 10 July, 2010, *Emoji Dick; or, 🐙* was officially announced as finished and ready to ship. About six months later, on 16 January, 2011, the website to sell the book went live. Non-backers were able to purchase the complete novel. Finally, on 19 February, 2013, Fred Benenson updated the Kickstarter campaign blog with the announcement that the emoji novel was selected for a gallery show at the Chelsea art institution Printed Matter. The book was also acquired by the Library of Congress as the first emoji novel in their collection. The popularity of the book as an artifact is indicative of the popularity of the concept of emoji and their various applications and communicative uses.

Emoji signal a shift in the language of the contemporary individual. Within the economic and linguistic system of previous generations, the linguistic norms of the modern generation is being normalized and popularized through the pervasiveness of social media. This essay will explore the formative function of emoji in the development of a distinct identity among users.



Jacques 🧐👤 Lacan's theory on the Mirror Stage will be used to understand the role that emoji play in increasing the efficiency of the function of social media and digital communication to shape the individual. Emoji are used to economize the individual by allowing corporate entities to maintain control over the social media realm and thereby oversee the formulation of individuals desirable for the Capitalist system.





Roland 🧐📚 Barthes was a semiotician who will play a significant role in the semiotic perspective of this essay. He was influenced by the French anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss. Barthes' book *Mythologies* presents discourse on the difference between natural and cultural influences. He asserts that much of what is considered natural is in fact cultural. He articulated, "Who does not feel how natural it is, in France, to be Catholic, married, and well qualified

academically?” (Thody 3). He ironically recognizes what is seen as natural and thus brings to light the fact that all of these “natural” identities are, in fact, cultural. There is a dissonance between what is understood as natural or cultural. Barthes can be used to understand how emoji developed in comparison to the development of a language. According to Barthes, language and supplements to language, such as emoji, are developments of the culture in which they are formulated.



Jacques   Derrida was influenced by the work of the father of structuralism, Ferdinand de   Saussure. Derrida, a French philosopher and major figure of post-structuralism and post-modernism, discussed the chain of signification, in his essay, *Différance*. The concept and meaning of *différance* is double-edged. The word *différance* refers to deferral and difference, according to Derrida. Difference or “espacement,” more applicable to the discussion of emoji, refers to the force that separates and differentiates elements from other elements, thereby allowing said elements to be defined within the chain of signification but also interpolating elements into binary oppositions and hierarchies which have an impact upon the meaning and understanding of the elements. The meaning is reliant upon additional elements. Meaning is, therefore, forever deferred through an infinite chain of signifiers which provide the context in which the signifiers are defined. Derrida also discusses his concept of trace. Trace is the “simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself” (Derrida 156). Derrida’s concept of espacement and trace serves to clarify how emoji function within language and communication. Without the context of signifiers surrounding them, whether words or other emoji, emoji will be defined based solely upon the context of the culture in which they are presented. For example, the use of the “Older Man + Emoji Modifier Fitzpatrick Type-1-2”

emoji standalone signifies a general older, white man; however, when presented as it is below, in the context of the “Baby” emoji, it signifies, to some, Lacan for his theory on the Mirror Stage.





Jacques   Lacan, French psychoanalyst, explains, in his speech “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” his theory of identity and understanding of the self as a baby. By using the example of a baby in a walker seeing and recognizing themselves, he explains that the sense of self-developed here came “before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other” and is therefore the child’s “Ideal-I” or *imago* (Lacan 1286). Upon exposure to language and societal ideology, the “Ideal-I” becomes the “Social-I,” the sense of self that is developed through experience with others. This “Social-I,” in the individual’s pursuit of paranoiac knowledge of the self - that is, the drive for validation by experience with the other (Lacan 1286). The emoji perform on social media to help develop the *imago*. The neutral appearance of default emoji, with “yellow (or other non-human) skin tone,” provides a universally relatable icon. This neutrality prevents any individual from explicitly being otherized by a user demographic. Thus, emoji take advantage of the Mirror Stage in order to present social media in a way that reinsures the human aspect after digitization. This Mirror Stage is achieved and therefore increases the efficiency of the social media system.

Jacques   Lacan, upon applying post-structuralists like Derrida to psychoanalysis as developed and influenced by Sigmund   Freud, concluded that “the unconscious is structured like a Language” (Phillips). He adopted Jacques Derrida’s concept of the chain of signification, which builds upon Saussure to clarify that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is dependent upon the place, or context, of the signifier within a chain of signification. Lacan refers to this as “the signifying chain” (Phillips). The unconscious has no

meaning, but rather only chains of signification - thus, the unconscious is language. Saussure claimed that the signified yields the signifier; however, Lacan inverts Saussure's conceptions of signs, presenting a Pascalian approach in claiming that it is in fact the opposite, that the signifier, the act of prayer, yields the signified, the belief in God (Phillips, Althusser 696). This inversion of the relationship between the signifier and signified presents a different way to understand emoji. By realizing that the performance precedes the meaning, emoji as signifiers are presented and then understood as they are presented culturally. Emoji additionally function within the Panoptic system that is social media.



Michel   Foucault, French philosopher and social theorist, explains the Panopticon and the Panoptic System in his essay "Discipline and Punish." Jeremy Bentham's original concept of the Panopticon was in the form of a prison system in which one watchman, whom the prisoners could never see, effectively monitored all prison inmates by occupying a central watchtower. Despite not being able to physically watch all inmates simultaneously, the inmates' uncertainty of the watchman forces them to internalize that they are constantly under surveillance and therefore police themselves. This effectively allows for a prison system which does not truly require a watchman because the inmates have become their own respective watchmen; the individual is "carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies" (Foucault 562). Foucault applies the Panopticon to the socio-political system by discussing how such a system develops the individual when the "watchman" is the state system. "It is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination" (Foucault 549). The individual is thus economized and made to perform for the betterment of the acting "watchman" with the illusion that it is for the betterment of themselves

and thus internalizes the morals the “watchman” imposes upon them. Foucault presents a concept that, when applied to emoji, reveals how they function to accelerate the economic function of the emoji participant. The illusion of service for the individual prisoner’s betterment is that the use of emoji, as a popular supplement to language, on social media increases the popularity, or validation, that the individual receives without necessarily thinking of the implications that this participation has within the Capitalist system and for the corporate entities.

A discourse in value and its presence in the Capitalist system can be found through the intersection of two sociological theorists: David   Graeber and Georg   Simmel. In his essay, “Three Ways of Talking About Value,” anthropologist David Graeber discusses the three ways in which anthropologists approach value. The first is desirability, explained as both what people want and what they should want; this discourse branches into moral and ethical values (Graeber 3). The value as seen by the maximizing individual, which is the functional value of a good or service. For example, the effort exerted by Trobriand men¹ is valued in its ability to maximize their social standing (Graeber 7-8). He concludes with the linguistic definition of value as set forth by Ferdinand de Saussure, Swiss structuralist. Value is assigned to the signifier (money) by the context in which it exists (Graeber 17), similar to Derrida’s concept of difference or “espacement.” Georg Simmel presents an argument within the context of Capitalism that asserts that value is “some expediency in the direction of our practical activities that leads us to regard an object as valuable, and... the possible subjective satisfaction that excites us” (Simmel 72). Simmel asserts that money is a social construct put in place to abstract or derealize, and make commensurable, subjective (perceived) value. Thus, with the help of




¹ A culture native to the Trobriand Islands, part of the nation-state Papua New Guinea

Graeber and Simmel, it can be understood how Capitalism creates value in a system of exchange. Emoji function within this system of exchange by reducing the disconnectedness within social media interaction, thereby making the social media experience more familiar for the participants and more profitable as corporate assets.

Karl   Marx, German socialist and philosopher, discusses the perils and evils of Capitalism in his essay “Wage Labor and Capital.” He discusses the commodification of goods and services, such as labor-power or mechanical function. The worker here, the provider of labor-power, is thereby commodified: derealized and reduced to an object for the continued function of the Capitalist machine and the profit of the Capitalist class (Marx 659). The value of this labor-power is determined by the price of subsistence, the cost of living. This commodified worker is therefore trapped as a member of the working class, without the opportunity to rise to the Capitalist class. This abstraction of the human, the derealization of the service provider can similarly be seen in the presence of emoji and those who use them within the digital Capitalist system of social media, wherein all individuals are commodified. Individual users of emoji and social media are performing the service, the mechanical function, of popularizing emoji and cinching their presence on social media. With millions, if not billions, of individual users “taking advantage” of the free services these corporations provide, are conforming to the order established by the Capitalist class and performing their roles of being derealized and valued based upon their value as social media performers.

Marx explains that conforming to the system and occupying the role of the working class, one cannot leave the Capitalist system “without renouncing his existence” (661). Similarly, in the world of social media and digital communication, to refuse to participate within the system is

to delete one's account. To delete one's account would be like sacrificing a valuable investment in a blue chip stock because of one's protest to the system. Deleting one's account means forcing one's social value to be gauged solely on personal interactions. No online presence means that one's standing on the social hierarchy is negatively affected because one does not have any "Likes" or "Followers" off of which to base value. The way that social media has grown to be a simulation of the reality of social interaction. This valuation system is similar to Graeber's example of the Trobriand men: members of social media do not provide these corporations with their services in exchange for money, but rather in exchange for social standing. To understand how emoji are valued in the Capitalist system, one must first understand how they function within language and discourse.

When the Unicode  Consortium centralized emoji, no one tried to establish a methodology for their use and function in common communication. Emoticons, and by extension, emoji, were developed as a consequence of the limitations imposed by technology on communication. Emoji are meant to take the place of customary visual signifiers that societies had developed and exercised before such jarring digitization of socialization and communication (Steinmetz). Therefore, they were meant to be applied freely and as they made sense to the individual users. It is this freedom, this lack of an established order, that allows emoji to societally function as they do. The lack of an emoji grammar system allow the users and participants within the system to influence emoji. The lack of governance over emoji use paired with mass influence upon them allowed the emergence of a method to the madness of emoji among the mass democracy of web users. Tyler   Schnoebelen, who wrote his doctoral thesis at Stanford University on emoticons, has shifted his gaze to emoji. He has observed that

when emoji are used standalone, they act similarly to punctuation, coming at the end of a thought and clarifying its tone (Steinmetz). This method of altering tone with a few keystrokes reduces the need for individuals to structure and formulate their messages and posts without much regard to the tone, but rather the content.

For example, the “Face With Tears of Joy” emoji, “😂,” by far the most popular emoji according to emojitracker.com, is meant to replace the facial features that one would perform in the event of laughing so hard that they started crying. What users have done, however, is influence the emoji, the signifiers, to eventually alter what they signify. Twitter user Ryan Sagers, @RSagers, tweeted, “Someone get Speith a snorkel 😂,”² referring to the performance of a golfer at the Masters tournament. The “Face With Tears of Joy” emoji is used to bring a light-hearted tone to an otherwise negative or insulting Tweet.

However, when an emoji phrase or sentence is used, the “stance,” the tone of the clause, is presented first. It acts as a precursor to the action expressed in the rest of the phrase. Emoji are also subject to the limitation of linear time and action. For example, a gun can be seen as shooting something if the barrel points towards what is being shot, otherwise the gun is presented as simply an object (Steinmetz). “👤🔫”

Languages, such as Spanish and French, developed from the degradation of a parent or proto-language, in this case Latin. According to Alex Gendler of TED-Ed, the development of these separate languages came from the isolation that divided the speakers of the proto-language, Latin. This isolation is partially due to the nomadic practices of these speakers. Different

² This tweet was retrieved using emojitracker.com, which live updates a list of tweets posted containing a selected emoji. The “Face With Tears of Joy” emoji feed updated so quickly that the only way to read the tweets was to take screenshots of the feed.




influences on the two then similar cultures yielded distinctly different dialects which ultimately developed into the languages as they exist today. This difference is also based upon class. Kate Gardoqui, also of TED-Ed, discusses the evolution of English beginning with the invasion of the British Isles by Anglo-Saxons who were then subject to additional invasion by the Vikings and the Normans. Due to the invasion of the Normans, French became the language of English royalty. Her TED-Ed talk culminates in the differences in language that were a symptom of these differences in class. The aristocracy spoke French or Latin while the peasants spoke English.

This class division within English contextualized the two languages economically. From Derrida's perspective, this hierarchical division of language underpinned the meaning itself. Kate Gardoqui opens her talk with two sentences: "a hearty welcome" and "a cordial reception." The hierarchical influences behind the terms themselves cause two synonymous phrases to be seen as very different due to the context in which their connotations were developed. "A hearty welcome," of the Germanic Anglo-Saxon influence, the language of the peasants, tends to invoke images of loud folks drinking beer and wearing flannel; on the other hand, "a cordial reception," of the French influence, the language of the aristocrats, tends to invoke a formal crowd drinking wine and speaking softly.

The division in the use of emoji, similar to the division between the use of French & Latin or English, is apparent on social media. This division is not necessarily by socio-economic class but rather by social niche, based upon which social media community one falls into online. On Twitter, the community referred to as "Black Twitter" consists of accounts that represent (and sometimes, but not always, belong to) Black people has made popular the use of the "Hundred Points Symbol" emoji, "

the slang they signify have been since appropriated by white cultures and can be seen used as such in media. In a commercial for the 2016 NBA Playoffs the “Fire” emoji, “🔥,” appears in a swarm around some score information; thereby commodifying a cultural concept to better serve corporate interests and increase viewership of the Playoffs.

Distinct from the development of English, emoji arose as an evolutionary stage in the function of emoticons: a combination of special keyboard characters meant to convey a certain emotion through the denotation of a face (Emoticon). For example, “:-)” or “:)” denotes a smiley face, meant to convey happiness, jest, or other similar tones. In 1963, the first smiley face appeared thanks to Harvey Ball; his design was that of the simple smiling emoji “😊,” but it went on to be popularized in the early 1970s by Bernard & Murray Spain on merchandise and by Franklin Loufrani in French newspapers “to highlight positive stories” (The Emoticon). It was not until 1982, at Carnegie Mellon University, that the smiley was used digitally by Scott Fahlman to signify jokey content in mass e-mails (The Emoticon).

The development of emoticons, and ultimately emoji, is in part due to the rise of digital communication. Emoji were introduced to the mobile platform in February 1990 by Japanese company NTT Docomo (Bonnington 2). “By 2010, the Unicode Consortium, a software industry body whose 10 full members include Google, Apple, Microsoft and Yahoo, had approved a set of internationally standardized emoji” (Clark 3). The induction of emoji into the Unicode  Consortium meant that a handful of massive digital corporations had control over them. Finally, in October 2011, Apple pushed iOS 5 to phones, making them the first mobile Operating System to natively support emoji functionality, that is, to allow the use of emoji without the need for additional software (Bonnington 2).

There are those who would argue that the emoji translations for *Emoji Dick*; or, 🐳 do not stand up to scrutiny. “I don't understand why the book's famous opening sentence, "Call me Ishmael", becomes, to my eyes at least, "telephone/man-with-moustache/yacht/whale/OK-sign". But I am undoubtedly missing something. Modernity, perhaps” (Clark 4). Clark opens discourse on the function of emoji as an alternative language. His confusion is due to the fact that emoji are not a definitive language inasmuch as they do not have an established grammar or syntax as languages, pictorial or otherwise, such as English, Arabic, or Mandarin-Chinese, do. Because of their rapid development and expansion, emoji cannot have a grammar or syntax without such rules immediately becoming obsolete (Steinmetz). Emoji are not a language themselves, but rather supplements to language. They function as trace as Derrida set forth. Emoji perform within chains of signifying rather than having any explicitly assigned definition. It is this trace function of emoji that allows them to be used so loosely and freely such that any one emoji, as Derrida put forth, performs differently with each iteration.



Apple's move to include emoji in iOS established and ensured the place of emoji within popular culture. Individuals undergo a Mirror Stage through their interaction with an infinite concentration of others on social media, whether these others are other individuals, corporate advertisements, or even bots. While browsing through any of the various social media, an individual is barraged with information about the lives of their friends and families. This Mirror Stage is constantly perpetuated and refreshed due to the frequency and sheer volume of social media interaction. It is through this collective and endless Mirror Stage that the individual develops an *imago* that fits the mould placed for them by the Panoptic system.

Unlike how someone may use either English or French in a message, emoji cannot be used to replace a language. This is partially due to the aforementioned lack of grammar within emoji, but is also attributable to the nature of language itself. According to Barthes, language is a compilation of signs, culturally developed and agreed upon; when analyzed from Foucault's perspective, it can be understood that language increases the efficiency of an economy. Within an economy, if all of the participants can engage in exchange using the same language, they can participate within the system more efficiently, thereby increasing the frequency, ease, and quantity of transactions.

In the contemporary Capitalist system, wherein the discourse occurs between the masses of individuals and corporations, the corporations benefit financially from all participants speaking the same or mutually understood languages. The universality of language functions to interpolate the user into the Capitalist system; without the ability to communicate, an individual cannot both successfully and legally acquire the means of survival. Similarly, emoji function to help interpolate the individual into social media. The individual interacts with friends, acquaintances, and even celebrities for the sake of the social value that this interaction has the potential to yield.

There is a popular hashtag on Instagram, #EmojiIRL, created by Brad Warsh, a Brooklyn-based art director (Cunningham). His project is to "show how seamless emojis have become in our world" by imposing various emoji, such as a camel, over an image taken in New York City, such as in the subway station. The statement he makes with this performance is a powerful one acknowledging the reign that corporations have over social discourse and digital communication. Brad Warsh does, however, benefit from this art project, he has been featured in

news articles, gained a larger Instagram following and popularity, and has seen his tag go viral. He has reaped benefits from his application of emoji, despite the art serving to expose the pervasiveness of the phenomena, Warsh has fallen victim to the corporate service of emoji. The popularity of the tag increases the use of emoji and gives rise to a new community that functions for itself and unknowingly for the corporate entities that helped to formulate it. The community, within its Panoptic system of social media, then proceeds to formulate the individual by its forces. The individual hereby produced then continues to serve the system.

Emoji function as a supplement to the language and aesthetic of the social media system by increasing the efficiency of the Mirror Stage and thereby perpetuating the Panoptic system at play. The representation of faces that emoji allows presents the social media with a more functional Mirror Stage interaction in text posts. According to Scott   McCloud, a comic theorist, the function of the abstract and unspecific appearance of characters in comic books is to make them more relatable to the reader. He refers to cartoons as icons and discusses how the simpler design, that of the stick figure, functions to appeal and connect to more readers, regardless of their skin tone, eye color, or hair color. Similarly, emoji act as icons in social media and communication. Their simplicity, by default, is meant to achieve this more efficient Mirror Stage - rather than having a white, middle-class nuclear family as the default - and increase the frequency and quantity of posts made.


In Foucault's Panoptic system, the individual, rather than being repressed, is shaped by the forces within the system (Foucault 562). Thus, the individual is, in the realm of social media, formed by the barrage of social influence that becomes internalized by their performance on social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. The internalization of these

shaping forces leads the individual to be bound by it and perform according to it, even when not actively engaged with social media, due to the all-seeing nature of the Panoptic psychology. This is due to the emphasis on social value that is placed upon one's performance both on social media and in real life. In a social media system, the Panoptic system is adapted to be more democratic: all relevant users can see and judge other users and have an equal hand in the governance of the system, all users learn to internalize the force that monitors them. Therefore, the function of the individual is developed by and for the economic purpose of the Panoptic system – that is, the social media community as a whole – and benefits the individual by allowing them to be a part of the community.



Much like how mobile phones have accelerated social interaction and communication, (Bignell 208), emoticons and emoji have amplified this further. They allow the user to convey their tone without additional effort, increasing their efficiency. This is seen most clearly in the use of emoji in the Twittersphere – when limited to only 140 characters, of which an emoji counts as only one, users adopt the more efficient expressive medium of emoji (Clark 3). As of 12:00 pm EST on 25 April, 2016, emojitracker.com had processed 14,413,811,450 tweets containing emoji, 1215168871 of which were tweets containing the “Face With Tears of Joy” emoji, “😂.” Ultimately, the popularization of emoji in clients such as SMS (Short Message System) and social media is to increase the expressive efficiency of the individual. Thus leading to more posts or Tweets or messages shared and sent. The increased efficiency of communication is just one of the ways in which the individual is economized.

The popularity of emoji has been used to further economize the individual by expanding on the idea of the Facebook “Like.” On 24 February, 2016, Facebook released their “reactions,”

additional options beyond “Liking” a post. The options are "Love," “❤️;” "Haha," “😂;” "Wow," “😮;” "Sad," “😭;” and "Angry," “😡.” Facebook claims to have introduced their reactions as a way of presenting more options than the classic “Like” for their users. The reality, however, is that Facebook will be monitoring the use of these reactions (Newton), and using them to further cater feeds, news, and sponsored posts. The more likely people are to see something to which they would react positively, the more likely they are to spend more time on Facebook. It is through this increased traffic that Facebook profits: the more traffic the company can boast in relation to other social networks, the more competitively they can sell their advertisement space (Honan).

Similar to the traffic of social media websites, the sheer quality of performance and quantity of emoji offered on each respective mobile operating system (Android, iOS, and Windows Phone) is itself a significant portion of their economization. Apple has the most popular emoji system, likely due to its smooth integration and the company’s user demographic. However, Windows boasts a series of six emoji featuring “Ninja Cat” that are only available on that operating system (Burge). This could be seen as an attempt to garner popularity among a younger market demographic, as a way of economically attracting the millennial generation. There is a risk to be considered in creating emoji exclusive to an operating system. The Unicode  Consortium ensures that the emoji seen on all devices are the same; however, there are user experiences where clocks that read 4:00 on Android read as 2:00 on iOS. This implies that, the “Ninja Cat” emoji will experience dissonance in the sending and receiving of the emoji across platforms.


Android, Google's mobile operating system, recently made the move to drop gender-neutrality in their next update, Android N, to make way for skin tone modifier support (Burge). This move could be seen as a political statement and be damaging towards Google's image and affect the popularity of the operating system, but Android is the only mobile operating system that had gender-neutral emoji as it stands. They were removed to ensure consistency across platforms - the emoji that appeared as gender-neutral on Android appear as gendered on iOS and Windows Phone (Burge). This move towards consistency on Android's part will likely prove favorable for the operating system compared to the novelty of the "Ninja Cat" emoji set on Windows Phone.

Emoji have been expanding ever since their centralization under the Unicode  Consortium. Since August 2014, there exist over 800 different emoji used for private communication and public exchange. Emoji, despite being a catalyst to the economization of the individual, have themselves have been economized. As in the aforementioned case of *Emoji Dick*; or, . The softcover black and white version costs \$40 while the hardcover color version costs \$200. The price of these books is the conversion of emoji from linguistic elements to commodities within the Capitalist system.

The book's translation process itself reeks of Capitalist exploit. According to the Kickstarter campaign page, the Amazon Mechanical Turk workers worked for \$0.05 per translation and \$0.02 per vote cast. These tedious tasks, ranging from the translation of 3 words to that of 427 words into emoji. This reduction of a human worker to the mere quantity of their tedious task, to their labor power, in exchange for a wage as was determined by the Capitalist class for a lifestyle situation with which the Capitalist class cannot necessarily sympathize, is the

epitome of Capitalist exploit. This exploitation digitizes the individual to function as might a computer in exchange for pennies and nickels of this service. Beyond the initial wage, however, the worker does not enjoy the fruits of their labor, in the form of the actual product or the profit the product makes.

Studio Lambert is currently in the works to produce a game show based upon emoji called “The Great Emoji Challenge” (Murphy). According to Refinery29, the game show will offer contestants the chance to win \$1 million, based upon their ability to translate emoji phrases. This confirms the linguistic ambiguity of the emoji and their inability to be translated explicitly. The economic system has found a way to commodify contemporary digital discourse in order to get ratings, viewers, and players, all of which implies more profit for the company through advertisement contracting alone.

Similarly, Sony Pictures won the bidding wars for the production rights to an emoji movie. The war involved multiple studios and ended in 2015 with Sony Pictures paying over \$1 million for the rights. Corporations outside of those in the Unicode  Consortium are beginning to commodify emoji, as well, exposing the individual to even more instances to experience the Mirror Stage. By following these connections, individuals are more likely to subconsciously focus on the presence of emoji in their individual interactions. This increased focus would lead to additional usage, popularity, and focus on emoji.

The movie itself will “also be co-marketed and sponsored by real-world app makers, including music streaming service Spotify and potentially Facebook” (Makuch). By the end of the first act, according to GameSpot, the characters realize they can enter and explore a world unique to each individual smartphone application. This idea opens the gates for additional

sponsorship and branding contracts for this movie. Even possibly a television series spin-off wherein the characters explore a different world in each episode. All of these options are likely avenues of pursuit for Sony Pictures, setting this movie, this corporate asset is set to make the company millions, if not billions, of dollars.

The social media and emoji system function for the benefit of two involved parties at the distinct expense and exploitation of lower one. The two parties are the social media users and the members of the Capitalist class. The Capitalist class uses their corporate power to develop social media which is offered as a free service to the expected user base. The free service allows individuals to catch up, reconnect, and keep track of friends, relatives, and celebrities. Thus, the users of social media are benefitting. The Capitalist class now benefits by abstracting the individual user and reducing them to an algorithmic abstraction that can be inputted to determine the type of feed that should be catered to them (Honan). They are also abstracted as one individual user, characterized by a number within the population of social media users. This mass of users, dehumanized and reduced to their quantity, upon which their value is determined so that they can be further commodified as the subjects of various advertising campaigns. This need for an individual corporate entity to function within a competitive market to secure a financially valuable advertising contract is clearly indicative of the issue with Capitalist motives, that they are for greed and profit, not the betterment of the underprivileged.













It is this illusion of self-service that the individual user internalizes. The user understands the systemic exchange dynamic in that the user posts or messages, interacts, on social media and receives a certain level of “Likes” or “❤️” which equate to a certain level of social validation for the individual. This is internalized and functions similar to work ethic. As a Capitalist

construction, work ethic is an internalization of the self-service illusion of the Capitalist structure; that is, if an individual of the working class works hard, they will be able to survive, thrive, and move between classes. Work ethic is also derived from arbitrary incentive like “Employee of the Month,” which just serve to further validate individual and garner competition within the working class; thus successfully preventing the exploited from banding together and revolting against the ruling class. This is similar to its function on social media, an illusion developed for the Capitalist system to maintain the compliance of those who are being exploited.

The community shapes the individual with such imperatives in mind for the betterment of the community, but it inadvertently does all of this on behalf of the systemic forces that shape the community. The community benefits in that it is allowed to survive and maintain occupancy in their niche. The community is constructed as a Panoptic prison by the corporate entities that provide social media, and now entertainment, services. The social media communities therefore unknowingly function in the service of the corporate social media providers, aiding them in economizing the individual through advertisements, sponsored posts, or traffic. These economic forces acting as a Panoptic system function to meticulously formulate the individual. This is in order to ensure that the individual performs as a good subject within the economic system.

The function of the individual as a good economic subject is due to the individual's interpolation into the economic ideology at increasingly. The individual participates in the economic system for themselves but it is in reality for the controlling Capitalist class consisting of corporations and companies that develop, release, and maintain emoji and social media platforms. To be a bad subject, that is, to realize the exploitative truth of the system and rebel against it, one would be sacrificing one's existence within the ideological system. Without this

presence, this ideological presence, one cannot challenge the system; however, by participating in this ideological system, regardless of intent, the individual is perpetuating it and being interpolated and their presence is immediately being exploited by the Capitalist class.

This essay has explored the implications of emoji as they exist and function in contemporary popular culture. They function linguistically as trace elements, defined by their presence in certain cultural contexts, as understood with the help of Roland   Barthes and Jacques   Derrida. They function to formulate the individual, as understood with the psychoanalytic help of Jacques   Lacan and the sociological help of Michel   Foucault. Finally, the function of emoji was understood economically. Emoji serve to condition users as good economic subjects on social media. The abstraction of value in the system was understood with the help of David   Graeber and Georg   Simmel. And how this abstraction of value plays a part in the exploitative nature of the Capitalist system. Ultimately, emoji function to serve the Capitalist class and the corporate entities that create them in order to formulate good economic subjects and, as future generations interact with emoji and social media and the two become more refined for the process, they will function to formulate better economic subjects³.



³ That is, of course, unless there a revolution were to occur.