

Radboud Universiteit

Reaffirming bourgeois gluttony

The (de)subjectification of hoarders in the
context of American consumerism

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Abstract

The television series *Hoarders* pathologizes and stigmatizes the hoarders that are represented in the series discursively and visually. By desubjectifying the hoarder, the series removes any kind of identification between the audience of the series and the hoarders. With techniques borrowed from horror films, the series presents the hoarders as grotesque spectacles which are in no way relatable. In doing so, the series stigmatizes the behavior of the hoarder while reaffirming the (consumption)behavior of the audience. By interpellating the hoarder subjects as patients, the series presents hoarding as an individual problem and fails to include any other interpretation of the hoarder's disease. Traumatic events are often presented to be the cause of the hoarding of the subjects. By presenting them as mentally unwell, the series implies hoarding affects only a small percentage of sick Americans. The series fails to contextualise hoarding in a culture where hyper consumption is the norm. By presenting the hoarders as deviant from the norm, it establishes the behaviour of the status quo. The excluding of the act of shopping makes it seem as if consumption is in no way related to the hoard that is in these people's homes. In the dominant hegemony of neoliberalism, individuals are first and foremost engaged as consumers. the ideology of consumerism compels its subjects to invest all their desire in commodities. Commodity fetishism, is at the heart of the hoarder's pathology as it is presented in the series but it is never addressed as such. The series reproduces the ideology of consumerism in an ambiguous way. On the one hand it shows the results of hyperconsumption. On the other hand it fails to contextualize the hoarder's disease in the context of American consumerism. Moreover by presenting the hoarder as a mental patient or a grotesque spectacle, the series prevents its audience from identifying oneself with the hoarder. Making the audience feel superior to the hoarder is another way in which *Hoarders* reaffirms the consumerist ideology. Stigmatizing the hoarder affirms the normalcy of bourgeois gluttony and consumption.

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Introduction

Mixing the genre-conventions of documentary and 'reality' has become a popular strategy for many recent television shows. On the one hand the shows are promoted as a giving the viewer a glimpse into the lives of its participants, on the other hand they are all about 'helping' the participants to change their behavior. *Hoarders* (2009) is just such a documentary series. It borrows much of its imagery from the popular American television series *Intervention* (2005), which follows the struggles of addicts on their way to recovery. *Hoarders* uses the same kind of recipe. Each episode introduces two people who are unable, and often unwilling, to part with any of their belongings, thus turning their homes into repositories of things. In the course of each episode, a professional team of mental health specialists and professional cleaners comes in to help clean out the hoarder's cluttered home. Often, there are consequences if they don't respond to the professional help. This may include eviction, children being taken away or even jail time. What is especially interesting about *Hoarders*, is the ideology that it conveys. The behavior of the hoarders has to be changed in order to avoid the subjects' punishment. Explicitly and implicitly, the show represents moral and social norms and values by which the participants and, by extension, the audience ought to live. The aesthetic representation of the hoarders is key in this. By representing the hoarder in a certain way, using particular visual and rhetorical strategies, the show creates an image of what is normal behavior and what is not.

Hoarding is the right disease for the right time, because contemporary American culture is characterized by hoarding. Boyle and Mrozowski note that what they coin as The Great Recession, which is the period that followed the 2008 financial crisis, is characterized by the hoarding of commodities by persons and the hoarding of money by giant corporations (Boyle & Mrozowski 2013: 192).

'Hoarders is a show about the hoarding of trash by real people too small to matter, in a time of the hoarding of money by corporate people too big to fail. One type of hoard registers as evidence of an illness and obsession; the other as a normal, even necessary function of capitalism(Boyle & Mrozowski 2012: 192).

The pathologization of hoarding evidently only affects certain individuals. In a sense, hoarders suffer from an excess of what financial systems are celebrated for: an ability to see possible value where others only see trash (Boyle & Mrozowski 2012: 198).

What is interesting is that the series tries to draw the line between what is normal and healthy consumption, and at what point consumption becomes erratic and unhealthy. Presenting the hoarding behavior of the subjects in the series as unhealthy, reaffirms the hoarding behavior of everyone else.

Most of the research done on compulsive hoarding analyses the phenomenon from a psychological point of view. One article that tries to bridge the gap between the disease from a medical point of view, and its manifestations in the realm of television is written in 2014 by Evans and Barton. Their article that appeared in 'The Journal of Popular Television', explores the current state of hoarding within the medical profession, how the disease is depicted through reality television programming (analyzing *Hoarders* as well as other similar reality shows), and the problems that result from the superficial and insensitive portrayals of hoarders and their lifestyles. According to the authors, these shows outwardly appear to be offering help to those who are featured on the series, as well as viewers at home. Nevertheless, the quick-fix solutions and pseudo-medical treatments exhibited may have serious negative consequences for participants and media consumers alike. (Evans & Barton 2014: 41-55).

This book is critical of the series and questions the legitimacy of the 'treatment' the participants receive from a medical stance. Moreover, the book draws parallels between the participants and the audience of the show, something I will do in this research as well. Evans and Barton's claim that this series might do more harm than good to the hoarders and their audience is something I recognize, although I am not interested nor qualified to speculate on the state of their actual medical wellbeing. I am interested however in the implied message of the show and the possible ways in which this show can be interpreted.

The book 'Hoarders, Doomsday Preppers and the Culture of Apocalypse', published in 2014, describes how end-of-the-world scenarios play a role in popular, sensational American television programming. It analyses and defines 'apocotainment' as a hybrid genre of reality television, and uses the show *Hoarders* as one of its case studies. According to Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, The culture of twenty-first century America largely revolves around narcissistic death, violence, and visions of doom. As people are bombarded with amoral metanarratives that display an almost complete lack of empathy for others on television, in films, and on the internet, their insatiable appetite for excessive pain and routine death reflects an embrace of an endlessly warring culture. Foster explores this culture of the apocalypse, from hoarding and gluttony to visions of the post-apocalyptic world (Foster, 2014: 2-43).

The lack of empathy that she notes in this particular genre of television, is something I recognize in my research as well. In my visual and discursive analysis of *Hoarders*, this general lack of empathy translates to the horror-like visuals and the discourse that distances the hoarders from 'normal' people. I will analyze how this mechanism that creates the lack of empathy Foster mentions works and what its implications are. Finally, the lack of empathy will turn out to be one of the key characteristics which robs *Hoarders* of the potential to be viewed as a critique on the practice of hyper-consuming, as I will show during this research.

Another approach to the subject, that emphasizes the theoretical and philosophical

framework surrounding these types of reality television is the essay 'Losing Sight of Ourselves: A Theoretical Analysis of Reality Television in the United States'. Collins uses a content analysis in combination with various theoretical perspectives in order to examine the effects of narcissism, consumerism and the emergence of the false self, in the case studies *Toddlers and Tiaras*, *Hoarders*, *Sister Wives* and *Catfish*. In one way or another, these shows all revolve around people who are hiding behind a mask. They are all pretending to be 'better' than they actually are. In the case of *Hoarders*, the contestants are hiding the abominable state of their house behind closed doors. According to her, consumer society along with an increased focus on the self, contributes to the development of what she calls 'the false self' within the individual. Her argument is that because of the ideology of greatness and 'being the best' is found in so many avenues of American daily life, this can be so overwhelming that people are encouraged to just fake it (Collins 2014: 9).

The American dream and the social pressure that comes with it is something that I will discuss in a later paragraph. The ideology of greatness, as Collins calls it, is something that is embedded in American culture so deeply that it is part of the dominant ideology. The American dream turns out to be part of the reason why there is a lack of empathy in *Hoarders* and many other similar American television show. This phenomenon plays a crucial role in my research. I will elaborate on this idea in a later paragraph when discussing the current American socio-cultural climate.

Moreover, 'The great recession in fiction, film, and television: twenty-first-century bust culture' links the same kinds of television shows to the great recession and its aftermath. Boyle and Mrozowski introduce the term 'bust culture' which refers to the emergence of 'post-crash mass cultural artifacts [...] inflected by diminishment, influenced by scarcity, and infused with anxiety' (Boyle & Mrozowski 2013: iv).

They discuss these television shows in relation to the ideological fantasies, social erasures and profound anxieties inspired by the Great Recession. The authors demonstrate how pervasive representations of consumerism post-Global Financial Crisis (GFC), are triggered by an insatiable drive for more. In the words of Boyle and Mrozowski themselves, '[...] this collection sheds light on how imaginary works of fiction, film and television reflect, refract, and respond to the recessionary times specific to the twenty-first century, a sustained period of economic crisis that we believe has earned the title the "Great Recession"' (Boyle & Mrozowski 2013: xi).

They connect the practice of hoarding to the corporate hoarding that characterizes America post economic crash. Mass cultural artifacts such as *Hoarders* and *American Pickers* literalize shared anxieties distinctive to this recession.

'Hoarders and American Pickers are shows about the hoarding of trash by real people too small to matter, in a time of the hoarding of money by corporate people too big to fail. One type of hoard registers as evidence of an illness and obsession; the other as a normal, even necessary function of capitalism. These reality programs both reveal a deep need to renew the sensual specificity of material commodities in a world of financial obfuscation, speculative abstraction, and destructive accumulation' (Boyle & Mrozowski 2013: 192).

To paraphrase them, it is interesting that the practice of hoarding is considered a disease when it is done by American citizens, while the same practice is hailed by big corporations. I wouldn't go as far as to say that hoarding is in fact a natural outcome of a certain social context and thereby denying its current medical status, but it is an interesting stance on the subject nevertheless. They notice that interestingly, one type of hoard is pathologized, while the hoarding of big corporations is deemed a normal aspect of capitalism. In my research I propose that the pathologization of the hoarders in fact reaffirms the social norm of capitalism. By pathologizing these individuals, the consumption of everyone else who does not have his or her home filled with trash is reaffirmed.

Finally, one author that cannot be overlooked in this brief summary of hoarding in scholarly literature, is Michelle Berman. She wrote her dissertation in 2013 on consumption norms and narratives in the television show *Hoarders*, the same television show as I will be analyzing. In her abstract, she states that:

While the program often depicts its subjects as grotesque spectacles, given the normative status of hyperconsumption in the United States and the economic precarity presently experienced by many Americans, the problems hoarders face mirror those encountered by many of the show's viewers (Berman 2013).

As a sociologist, she compares the problems the hoarders face, to the problems many of the show's viewers encounter in their everyday life. The link between the hyper-consumption that characterizes twenty first century American culture and the popping up of hoarding as a disease as Berman notes, is something that I feel is overlooked by the series itself. The documentary focuses on the hoarding subjects themselves, presenting struggles in their personal lives and their own personal characteristics as the cause of their hoarding. Moreover, presenting the hoarders as 'grotesque spectacles', as Berman says, robs the viewer of any kind of compassion towards the hoarder. Berman's argument is that by emphasizing on the hoarders individual problems, the collective problem of American culture is trivialized. The argument I am trying to make in this research is similar. I will try to analyze exactly how the discourse and the visuals of

the series construct this 'grotesque' representation of the hoarders, and moreover, how this representation relates to the dominant ideology of consumerism.

The relation between American contemporary culture which is characterized by hyper consumption, and the emergence of television shows like *Hoarders* is something that is recognized by all these writers. My goal is to add to their argument an analysis of the case *Hoarders* itself. I will use their conceptualizations about American consumerism and add to that a visual and discursive analysis of the series itself.

The theoretical framework that underpins my research is what sets it apart from the conceptualizations about hoarders and consumerism I have so far mentioned. I will use Louis Althusser's theory on ideology and ideological state apparatuses to determine in what ways consumerism works as an ideology. Derived from the same theoretical framework, I will use the terms 'interpellation', 'subjectification' and 'desubjectification' to explain how the hoarders are being represented visually and discursively, and what the implications of this representation are. I will elaborate on this theory and how it fits with the case *Hoarders* in the first chapter of this research. For now it is enough to note that by hailing the hoarders as a certain kind of subject, the dominant ideology of consumerism is reproduced by the series. *Hoarders* reproduces this ideology in an ambiguous way, as I will prove. On the one hand it shows the consequences of (extreme) hyper consumption, on the other hand the discourse and visual techniques frame the hoarder in such a way that it becomes hard to draw parallels between them and American consumer culture as a whole. In this thesis I want to find out how the ideology of the television show *Hoarders* is produced, by analyzing the visual and discursive representation of the hoarders in the show. This brings me to the following research question:

In what ways does the television series Hoarders (2009) produce the ideology of consumerism through visual and discursive means?

I hypothesize that the hoarders are being represented as deviant from the norm in different ways. Through the discourse of the show as well as through the visuals, the hoarders are either subjectified as mental health patients, or they are desubjectified completely. Their subjectification and desubjectification has implications for the interpretation of the show. The ideology that the series reproduces asks for the audience not to identify oneself with the hoarders. The identification with the hoarders is complicated by representing them as different from 'normal people'. By emphasizing the distinction between us (the audience) and them (the hoarders) the show prevents itself from becoming a critique on the one thing that precedes the hoarding: shopping. By presenting the hoarders as people who are not normal, the show fails to recognize the cultural context in which hoarding is becoming a phenomenon. Moreover it removes a critique on consumerism as one of the possible interpretations of the series.

In the first chapter I will give a short overview of contemporary American culture and consumerism as the dominant ideology. I will explain how this ideology is emitted through every part of the culture, including this particular television series. I will explain how people are interpellated into subjects and what the implications of their subjectification can be, focussing on the case study *Hoarders*.

In the second chapter I will analyse how the hoarders are being subjectified into patients. I will give examples of visual and discursive techniques that are used to pathologize the hoarder, I will explain the different ways in which the hoarder can react to his or her subjectification and I will discuss the implications the interpellation of the hoarder has on the interpretation of the show in its socio- cultural context.

In the third chapter I will analyse the desubjectification of the hoarders. Apparently there is a point where the subjectification of the hoarders into patients fails. Desubjectification means that the hoarders are no longer active subjects. They are represented as non-humans, lacking in human characteristics that might identify the audience with the hoarder. In the final chapter I will elaborate on the visual and discursive techniques that are used to desubjectify the hoarder, and what the implications of this are for the interpretation of the show in its particular socio- cultural context. Finally I will bring the arguments together to form an answer to my main research question. The three sub questions that are addressed are as follows.

-How does American consumerism work as an ideology?

- How are the hoarders subjectified through visual and discursive means?

-How are the hoarders desubjectified through visual and discursive means?

By answering these questions I hope to uncover the ways in which the show interpellates the hoarders into different discourses, and what this means for the interpretation of the show in the context of contemporary American culture.

In order to answer these questions, I will use critical discourse analysis to analyze the language of the hoarders, their friends and families and the professionals that are employed to help clean out the houses. Critical discourse analysis can be defined as ‘a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power, abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context’ (Schiffrin & Tannen 2008: 352). Discourse is inherently part of social processes. I will analyze the so called ‘microlevel’ of the social order, which consists of language use, discourse, verbal interaction, and communication. Through the analysis, I hope to distinguish the ‘macrolevel’ that underpins the discourse of the television series. Power, dominance and inequality between social groups are typically terms that belong to a macrolevel of analysis

(Schiffrin & Tannen 2008: 354).

I will differentiate between different discourses that the hoarding subjects are being placed in by themselves and by others: the mental health discourse, extraterrestrial, monstrous and animalistic discourses will prove to be recurring during the series. To conduct this discourse analysis I will analyse the language of the hoarders themselves, as well as their family, and the professional psychologists and cleaners. I will analyse what they say and what they don't say, how they express themselves and what metaphors they use.

The power of dominant groups is reproduced through rules, laws, habits or a general consensus, this is what Gramsci called 'hegemony' (Gramsci 1971).

I argue that the dominant ideology that the television show reproduces emphasizes the distinction between 'us' (the audience) and 'them' (the hoarders). By doing so, the hoarders are placed outside of the sphere of identification and in some ways outside of 'normal' society. They are subjectified as being different from the norm, by doing so the television series reproduces said norm.

However, text and talk do not always directly embody the overall power relations between groups. According to Schiffrin and Tannen: 'it is always the context that may interfere with, reinforce, or otherwise transform such relationships' (Schiffrin & Tannen 2008: 357). The context along with the language and the visuals work together to (re)produce a certain dominant ideology about hoarding in specific and consumerism in general. For this reason I will complement this discourse analysis with a visual analysis, because in my opinion, the two strengthen each other. A visual analysis of filming techniques such as camera angles, framing, lighting and music will pinpoint relevant choices the producers of the series made. 'The Sage Handbook of Visual Research Methods' will act as an important source because it pays attention to both still and moving images (Chapman 2011: 360).

The analytical framework of film analysis is usually employed to analyze the aesthetics of films. I believe it will be just as fruitful to use this framework for the analysis of a television series. The form of film is significant to analyze in the case of *Hoarders* because it conveys a certain image of the hoarders. By using different techniques a certain atmosphere is created, certain parallels are drawn and certain parallels are explicitly not drawn. This creates meaning and influences the possible interpretations of the show (Bordwell & Thompson 2012: 57).

The series consists of eight seasons, counting ninety-five episodes in total. The length of this research does not allow me to discuss every single episode. For this research I chose to analyze the first episode of every season. This leaves eight episodes that have been broadcasted over the course of four years, this is the time the series was on the air. By analysing an episode of every season, I hope to give a good sense of what the show *Hoarders* in its entirety emits. I will only mention the parts of the episode that are relevant for my research.

The first chapter will uncover in what ways American consumerism functions as an ideology. It will prove that *Hoarders* is an ideological state apparatus that governs the behavior of its subjects. The medicalization and/or pathologization of certain behaviors is another way to govern the behavior of subjects. In the dominant hegemony of neoliberalism, individuals are first and foremost engaged as consumers. the ideology of consumerism compels its subjects to invest all their desire in commodities. Commodity fetishism is at the heart of the hoarder's pathology as it is presented in the series. However, by deleting consumerism from the narrative of the series, the series deletes a critique on consumerism as one of its possible readings. Moreover, the American dream will turn out to be a dangerous ideology in the narrative of *Hoarders* because it can cause a lack of empathy for the ones who are at the bottom of the social ladder. This lack of empathy characterizes *Hoarders* and is another reason why the series fails to reflect upon the social realities of contemporary America.

Chapter two will elaborate on the subjectification of the hoarders that are presented in the television series. The medical discourse turns out to play a major role in the subjectification of these people. I will analyse the pathology of the hoarders as it is presented in the series by giving examples from the eight episodes I have mentioned. When a hoarder is interpellated into a patient, he or she has the agency to react to this subjectification. I will give an example of a hoarder who accepts her subjectification, an example of a hoarder who rejects it and finally I will give an example of a hoarder who seems to be indifferent to her subjectification. Indifference is another recurring theme I will analyse more thoroughly in the last chapter of this research. As it will turn out, the rejection of the hoarder's subjectification is never completely successful. This means that the hoarder can never fully escape it. To interpellate these individuals as patients has implications for the interpretation of the series. By presenting them as mentally unwell, the series implies hoarding affects only a small percentage of sick Americans. The series fails to contextualise hoarding in a culture where hyper consumption is the norm. Moreover, by presenting past trauma as the cause of the disease, the series removes any other interpretation of the hoarders pathology.

Finally the third and last chapter of this research will elaborate on the desubjectification of the hoarders. As it will turn out, at one point the subjectification of hoarders into mental patients fails. Animalistic, monstrous or extraterrestrial discourses are recurring in the representation of these hoarders. By presenting the hoarders as being non-human. The series gives its viewers no way to identify with the hoarders. Whereas a patient has the agency to change and be cured, an alien can never change. Music, camera movements and some special parts of the narrative structure of *Hoarders* are borrowed from horror movies. This draws a parallel between the hoarder and a monster. These visual techniques represent the hoarder as a grotesque spectacle that is only interesting for the viewer to look at and/or laugh at. By denying

any identification, the series prevents the series from holding up a mirror to its audience. Stigmatizing the hoarder affirms the normalcy of bourgeois gluttony and consumption

Finally in the conclusion I will bring all the findings from the three episodes together to connect the dots and give an answer to my research question: In what ways does the television series *Hoarders* (2009) produce the ideology of consumerism through visual and discursive means? As it will turn out, *Hoarders* produces the ideology of consumerism in an ambiguous way. On the one hand it shows the result of hyperconsumption. On the other hand it fails to recognize consumption in its narrative. Moreover by presenting the hoarder as a mental health patient or a grotesque spectacle, the series prevents its audience from identifying oneself with the hoarder. Horror film techniques are employed to stigmatize the hoarder. Making the audience feel superior to the hoarder is another way in which *Hoarders* reaffirms the consumerist ideology.

Chapter one: The ideology of consumerism

This chapter will explain the theoretical framework that underpins my research. I will explain The Foucauldian medicalization critique as well as Althusser's ideas on ideology. I will explain what an ideology is and how it functions using the terms 'ideological state apparatus', 'repressive state apparatus', 'interpellation' and 'subjectification'.

After I've explained what ideology is and how this relates to the case study *Hoarders*, I will elaborate on what I propose is the most dominant ideology of contemporary America: consumerism. I will use Karl Marx' critique on capitalism as well as other more recent conceptualizations of the problematic characteristics of capitalism and consumerism. I will prove that even though *Hoarders* provides its viewers with a glimpse into the lives of its contestants, at the same time it hides many of the social realities of lower class America.

Ideology

To understand exactly what ideology is and how it manifests itself, In this paragraph I will introduce the theoretical framework derived from Louis Althusser's essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'. He describes how different agencies act in order to confirm the ideology that is dominant. He describes a state apparatus as a body which is invoked in order to govern individual and collective behavior. He differentiates between repressive state apparatuses (RSA) and ideological state apparatuses (ISA).

The first is defined as an apparatus which is used by the ruling class as a tool to suppress and dominate the working class. An example of such an apparatus is the government or the police. The ideological state apparatuses on the other hand consist of a wide variety of institutions that propagate different ideologies. As opposed to the RSAs, ISAs such as churches, schools or families belong to the so called 'private sphere'. All state apparatuses function both by violence and ideology, the distinction between an RSA and an ISA lies within their dominant function, which is either repressive or ideological.

The television series *Hoarders* itself can be seen as an Ideological State Apparatus. Time and time again it is repeated in the show what is normal behavior and what is not. The pathologization of the hoarders confirms the preferred healthy behavior. The stigmatization of the hoarders confirms the status quo. The audience that is watching the show is implicitly told that their behavior is normal and healthy, as opposed to the "sick" behavior of the hoarder. Foster summed these voyeuristic pleasures that *Hoarders* emits up most eloquently:

But *Hoarders* is specifically designed to escape thinking about reality and replace our problems with the voyeuristic pleasures of feeling temporarily secure; secure in our knowledge that we are not ill, not hyper-consumers, and somehow not responsible for

our excessive spending. It is crucial that we feel superior to the out-of control hoarder who is repeatedly mired in fecal matter to the point that they are metaphorically fecal and they live in toilets. No matter how bad off we are, no matter how bad our credit, our compulsive spending, our fiscal status, above all *Hoarders* makes the viewer secure in the knowledge that they are most assuredly not fecal matter and not living in toilets (Foster 2014: 34).

This quote shows how the stigmatization of the hoarders confirms the status quo. Besides the fact that the series itself functions as an ISA, in the series there are different ISA's and RSA's that are either physically present or are mentioned. Almost every episode there are very serious threats made from Adult Protective Services (APS) or other agencies that threaten to force the individual to leave their home if he or she turns out to be unable to keep his or her house clean. APS is a repressive state apparatus, which ensures the correct behavior of the citizens, by force. The behavior that is most preferable: a perfectly neat and clean house, is propagated through ISAs such as schools, television, and neighbors. If an individual fails to keep their house respectably clean, an official repressive state apparatus, the APS, is deployed to intervene.

Althusser argues that it is not possible for a class to hold state power unless it exercises its hegemony over the ideological state apparatuses. Moreover, whereas the church used to be the main ISA to shape the behavior of the people, he argues that, in 1971 when he wrote his theory, the school had taken over that role. Schools reproduce the capitalist ideology and teach every generation how to become productive forces working for the capitalist agents of exploitation.

I believe that the Ideological State Apparatus which has been installed in the dominant position in mature capitalist social formations as a result of a violent political and ideological class struggle against the old dominant Ideological State Apparatus, is the educational ideological apparatus (Althusser 1971: 11).

According to Althusser, children learn the 'know how' as well as the rules of good behavior in school. He moreover states that no class can hold state power over a long period of time without at the same time also exercising its hegemony over and in the Ideological State Apparatuses.

[...]but also and above all, the State apparatus secures by repression (from the most brutal physical force, via mere administrative commands and interdictions, to open and tacit censorship) the political conditions for the action of the Ideological State Apparatuses (Althusser 1971: 9).

An interesting point of view regarding the current state of ideology in the United States, is to say that television has now replaced the school as the main ISA to shape the behavior of the citizens.

Benjamin Wright and Michael Roberts have published an analysis on the ways in which children's television programming functions as an ideological state apparatus in the context of neoliberal capitalism as a dominant ideological discourse. They concluded that children's television shows have undergone a change since the emergence of neoliberalism and that they play an important role in emitting the dominant ideology of neoliberalism (Wright & Roberts 2013: 566-591).

In the same way, *Hoarders* functions as an ISA to emit the dominant ideology of consumerism (in an ambiguous way) and to shape the behavior of the citizens. Even though *Hoarders* is listed as a documentary series, the focus on drama and sensation are arguably crossovers from reality television programming. This particular genre of television shows is especially interesting when looked at through an ideological lens. On the one hand, the viewer is offered a glimpse into the life of someone, while on the other hand the show revolves around helping someone change their behavior. The changing of their behavior is key, because this shows explicitly the behavior that is most and least preferred. The series acts as an ISA which tells not only its participants how to live, but by extension also its audience. An ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practices. ISAs and RSAs can therefore be seen as the materialization of ideologies.

What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live (Althusser 1971: 17).

With this statement, Althusser explains that an ideology is a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their actual conditions of existence. If someone believes in God, he explicates this belief by certain practices, such as going to church. Extended to the ideology of consumerism, this means that if someone believes in this ideology, he or she explicates this belief by the practice of buying consumer goods at a rapid pace. Althusser states that practices are always imbedded in ideology, and secondly, ideology is always by and for subjects. The process by which ideology constitutes the nature of individual subjects, is called 'interpellation'.

I say: the category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology, but at the same time and immediately I add that the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects. In the interaction of this double constitution exists the functioning of all ideology, ideology being nothing but its functioning in the material forms of existence of that functioning (Althusser 1971: 21).

In other words, ideology interpellates individuals and makes them into subjects of different sorts. In practice this means that everybody is always already a subject. Ideology functions in

such a way that it transforms the individuals into subjects, and these subjects in turn (re)produce ideology. As Althusser puts it, 'The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing'(Althusser 1971: 22).

Through interpellation, the hoarders are labeled as a certain kind of subject. This process of interpellating can be either direct or indirect. In season two for example, Susan calls her hoarding mother a pig in an emotional outburst. This places the hoarder into explicitly into an animalistic discourse. A few scenes before that, Jason who is the son of the hoarder in question, describes his mother in a different way. He explains that he does not understand his mother anymore, that he does not know what is 'in there'. His choice of words implies that his mother is somehow possessed by an unknown entity. Susan and Jason both desubjectify their mother and place her into a non-human discourse, but they do so in a different way. Moreover, visual aspects can contradict or contribute to the image of the hoarder that is presented.

Through the discourse and the visuals of the television show, the hoarders are represented as somehow different from normal people. During my research, I found two recurring ways in which the hoarders are being represented. Firstly they are interpellated as patients. When a hoarder is subjectified as a patient, it is for example stressed that they are sick. Their family and friends feel pity for them because of their mental health problems, because of their problematic past or any other possible reason for their hoarding.

Another way in which the hoarders are interpellated is as non-human. Many times the language will refer to the hoarders as being monstrous, animalistic or extraterrestrial. Where the interpellation of the hoarder as a patient creates a distance between the hoarders and the audience, this way of interpellating completely detaches the hoarder from any kind of identification as a member of society. A patient has agency to do something about his or her situation, whereas a monster is either completely passive or behaves in a way that is inhumane. When a hoarder is represented as something that isn't human, he or she is being desubjectified instead of subjectified. He or she is no longer an active subject.

There are numerous ways to interpellate a subject into one of the categories I have briefly mentioned here. Through the discourse or through filming techniques the hoarders are placed into one of the two categories. I will explain all these different techniques thoroughly in the following chapters.

Through ISA's, individuals are steered to behave in a way that confirms the dominant ideology. In schools, in the neighborhood and on television these rules of conduct are presented as the 'norm'. Moreover, Althusser states that the subjects 'work by themselves' to produce and reproduce the ideology that they are imbedded in. In the case of *Hoarders* however, the subject resents the dominant ideology and this is frowned upon by all the ISAs that are involved. The result is that these subjects provoke the intervention of one of the detachments of the repressive

state apparatus. Most of the time in the series this RSA is Adult Protective Services, but in some cases the hoarders even face jail time if they do not succeed in cleaning out their house. The first words spoken over the opening music of the series premiere of *Hoarders* come from a mother in Louisville who confesses that she is afraid of Protective Services stepping in. This dread of state intervention looms over the first season of A&E's voyeuristic psychodrama (Boyle & Mrozowski 2013: 193).

In other words, if the interpellated subjects fail to submit freely to the commandments that are bestowed upon him or her by the state and the state apparatuses, he or she will be forced to do so by Repressive State Apparatuses. This is what we see happening time and time again in the television series *Hoarders*.

Once again, the most important viewpoint to take from this short summary of Althusser's theory on ideology, is that the television show *Hoarders* itself can be seen as an Ideological State Apparatus. It shows unacceptable behavior, namely the hoarding, and the episodes are dedicated to 'fixing' the candidates. Interestingly, there is one aspect of the hoarding that is almost never shown in the series. The shopping that precedes the hoarding is mostly neglected. If this was shown, the show could be interpreted as a critique on consumerism. By not showing the act of shopping, the television series confirms the dominant ideology yet again. The subjectification and desubjectification of the hoarders reproduces the idea that consumption itself is harmless, and that these problems are based on individual flaws in people. In this way the series hides the structural, socio-economico-medical problems of hyper consumerism.

Medicalization critique

Secondly I will discuss the Foucauldian medicalization critique because this gives a clear overview of how the medicalization and pathologization of certain behaviors contribute to actively or passively exerting power over these behaviors. 'Governmentality' is one of the concepts that is particularly interesting in this light, because this explains how the subjects are being governed to behave in a way that is most preferable for the dominant ideology.

In his essay about ideology and ideological state apparatuses, Althusser mentions the school as the new, dominant ISA to regulate and exercise control over the population. The old school Marxist medicalisation critique arose around the same time that Althusser published his essay, and critically examines medicine as an ISA. Critics such as Irving Zola and Eliot Freidson noted that social life and social problems were becoming more and more 'medicalised' in the 60's and 70's. In other words, more and more problems were being labeled as a disease. They argued that medicine was beginning to take the role of the most dominant social regulation, dictating what is normal behavior and what is not normal and unhealthy behavior (Scull 2013: 502).

From their perspective, the act of becoming 'medicalised', means denying rational,

independent human action by allowing members of the authoritative group to dictate others how they should behave. The medical profession is exercising its power to determine what can and what cannot be labeled as a disease. Members of the working class become disadvantaged through their interactions with doctors who seek to maintain the social status quo, as seen from the Marxist medicalisation critique (Lupton 1997: 96).

The Foucauldian approach to medicalisation is a little milder. According to him, individuals are compared against an established norm, bringing them into a field of visibility. In practice this means that something is considered deviant always in relation to what is considered to be normal. Behavioral and physical abnormalities are recognized as such only in their relation to the norm. The central strategies of disciplinary power are observation, examination and measurement.

It is exercised not primarily through direct coercion or violence (although it must be emphasized that these strategies are still used from time to time), but rather through persuading its subjects that certain ways of behaving and thinking are appropriate for them. The power that doctors have in relation to patients therefore, might be thought of as a facilitating capacity or resource, a means of bringing into being the subjects 'doctor' and 'patient' and the phenomenon of the patients 'illness' (Lupton 1997: 99).

In this statement we can clearly recognize the influence of Althusser's theory on ideology and ideological state apparatuses. The power that he mentions which is exercised through direct coercion can be seen as the RSAs. The persuading of the subjects into making them believe that certain ways of behaving and thinking are appropriate for them, is the ideology that is passed through the ISAs. This phenomenon is what creates the interpellation of the subjects 'patient', 'doctor', and also in some form, the subject of the 'illness'.

The Foucauldian understanding of subjectivity entails that the body is constructed through medical discourses and practices. The medicalisation of society serves to monitor and administer the body of citizens in an effort to regulate and maintain social order as well as promoting good health and productivity (Lupton 1997: 100).

In other words, the recent medicalization of the practice of hoarding is the ultimate way in which individuals are made to not-ward. By giving hoarding the official status of a disease in 2013, people are incited to not-ward if they want to avoid being stigmatized with the label of being mentally ill. It should be noted at this point that before 2013, hoarding was not recognized as a disease in its own right. It wasn't until the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of mental disorders (DSM) in 2013 when hoarding was defined as a disease. Before recently it was defined as a symptom of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). (American Psychiatric Association 2013).

Introducing the problematic aspects of government and by extension of governmentality, Foucault underlines that power is mostly about governing the forms of self-government, and thereby structuring and shaping the field of possible action of subjects.

Governing people is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself. (Foucault 1993 lecture).

In other words, Foucault does not see governing as a direct way to force people into doing that which is expected of them. Rather, it is a complex system and a dialogue between the governor and governed. He is mostly interested in the 'problematization' of certain phenomena which have become a target for social regulation at a given moment.

How and why were very different things in the world gathered together, characterized, analysed, and treated as, for example, 'mental illness'? What are the elements which are relevant for a given 'problematization'? And even if I won't say that what is characterized as 'schizophrenia' corresponds to something real in the world, this has nothing to do with idealism. For I think there is a relation between the thing which is problematized and the process of problematization. The problematization is an 'answer' to a concrete situation which is real (Foucault 1993 lecture).

Translated to the phenomenon of hoarding, the behavior of the hoarders is problematized because it does not fit with the behavior that is expected of 'normal' citizens. As I have shown in the previous paragraph, capitalism promotes a culture of fast accumulation. Its entire mode of production is based on the fast pace of a system that compels you to buy and keep buying. The hoarders follow the dominant ideology as far as their accumulation goes. Most of them are fervent spenders and can't pass up a good deal. On the other hand, they fail to throw away all the stuff they have acquired after they have used it. The result is a house that is filled with garbage, literally. The concrete situation is that consumerism compels Americans to buy and discard their newly bought products at a very fast pace. If this wasn't the case, hoarding as a phenomenon would not exist. The problematization of the act of hoarding is telling about the current American culture. Foucault explains that the neoliberal hegemony tries to create responsible and rational subjects. These subjects are ought to govern themselves.

One key feature of the neoliberal rationality is the congruence it endeavors to achieve between a responsible and moral individual and an economic-rational individual. It aspires to construct responsible subjects whose moral quality is based on the fact that

they rationally assess the costs and benefits of a certain act as opposed to other alternative acts. As the choice of options for action is—or so the neoliberal notion of rationality would have it—the expression of free will on the basis of a self-determined decision, the consequences of the action are borne by the subject alone, who is also solely responsible for them. This strategy can be deployed in all sorts of areas and leads to areas of social responsibility becoming a matter of personal provisions (Lemke 2002: 59).

The ideology of neoliberalism emphasizes on the freedom of choice. This means that the consequence of every decision are only for the subject in question. In the case of the hoarders, they have failed to become a responsible subject in the sense of capitalism. They turn out to be unable to rationally weigh the costs and benefits of a certain act, that act being their hoarding. The consequences of this action is that they will be evicted or worse, if they do not succeed in cleaning out their house. The hoarder himself is being held responsible, in the Foucauldian theory as well as in the series itself. The fact that it is the hoarder him- or herself who has to bear all the responsibility, is mirrored in the lack of empathy for their situation. I will come back to this in the next chapter

What is most interesting however, is that in a sense the hoarders are being exceptionally good capitalist subjects. They cannot help their consumption up to the point where it has taken over their lives (Foster 2014: 31).

This is why it is so relevant that every trace on consuming is erased from the series itself. The denarration of compulsive consumption and excess shopping make it seem as if shoppers behavior have nothing to do with the pathology of the hoarder. By specifically excluding the act of shopping, the series forces us to feel as if we are not looking at a mirror, and therefore forces us to not see the similarities between our own behavior and that of the sick hoarder. (Foster 2014: 34).

Consumerism

In the next paragraphs I will elaborate on the implications of consumerism and capitalism according to Karl Marx and some more contemporary theorists. I propose that *Hoarders* has an ambiguous relation to consumerism. On the one hand it shows the effects of an extreme form of accumulation, on the other hand it conceals the parallels between the hoarders and the rest of America. In this way it reproduces the status quo. The series fails to address consumerism and thus fails to engage critically with it. Even though *Hoarders* shows the dark side of extreme consumerism, it fails to contextualize the phenomenon of hoarding in a society in which consumerism has become the dominant ideology.

To understand the origins of consumerism it is important to understand capitalism as a

system. One of the firsts who was interested in the capitalist system and its possible implications/downfalls was Karl Marx. According to him, the capitalist system has an underlying irrationality. In 'Das Kapital', he set forth his critique on it. The work is very lengthy and covers many areas, for this research I will briefly introduce and explain some of the concepts he uses. First of all I will discuss the relationship between production and consumption. In later paragraphs I will come back to this problematic relationship. I will also introduce and apply the terms 'alienation' and 'commodity fetishism', because they are key to understanding Marx's critique. These terms are also at the basis of our understanding of the value of commodities, something that lies at the heart of the hoarders pathology as will become clear in the next chapters.

At its core, capitalism is a commodity producing economic system. Capital accumulation requires a constant increase in the production and consumption of commodities. The unique relationship between consumption and production that underpins the capitalist mode of production is something Marx wrote about as early as in 1939. According to him,

Consumption produces production in a double way, (1) because a product becomes a real product only by being consumed [...] (2) because consumption creates the need for new production, that is it creates the ideal, internally compelling cause for production which is its presupposition. Consumption creates the motive for production; it also creates the object which is active in production as its determinant aim (Marx, 1993 [1939]: 91).

In other words, production is immediately consumption, as well as consumption is also immediately production. The nature of the system is self-sustainable. Consumption keeps the demand for production alive and vice versa. Thereby, the value of the commodity that is the result of this dialogue between production and consumption, is not based on an inherent natural quality. It is a socially constructed relation determined by its relation to other objects. In the words of Marx himself: 'Value does not stalk about with a label describing what it is. It is value, rather, that converts every product into a social hieroglyphic. [...] for to stamp an object of utility as a value, is just as much a social product as language' (Marx 1867: 85).

All in all, the value that is bestowed upon a commodity is socially constructed. 'Commodity fetishism' is the false belief in an inherent value of a commodity. Marx insists that to stamp an object of utility as a value, means inevitably to turn it into a social product. Value in this sense, converts every product into a social hieroglyphic (Marx, K 1967: 82).

[...] the existence of the things quâ commodities, and the value relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection

with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom. There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. [...] This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities (Marx, K. 1967: 83).

According to Marx, the value of a certain product of labour has nothing to do with their physical properties. Rather, its value is socially constructed between the producer and consumer. The term alienation captures the gap that exists between the production and the consumption of a product. Capitalism is founded on the separation of production from consumption, and producers from the means of production. Because consumers are so alienated from the actual production process, they are prone to attribute to the products themselves the power that in fact is caused by the labour which created the commodities.

Commodity fetishism describes the (false) belief that a commodity has certain inherent qualities or values. In the case of the hoarders, they seem to suffer from an extreme case of commodity fetishism. They see value literally everywhere, even when other people only see trash. The hoarders ascribe every product with an intense intrinsic value, this is part of their disease. However, according to Marx, everybody who lives in a capitalist society does the same thing albeit on a much smaller scale. This aspect of the pathology of hoarding is an enlargement of something that is a part of everyone's mundane life.

What is interesting is that in a sense, the hoarders are being exceptionally good capitalist subjects. Capitalist subjects are expected to invest all their desire into commodities. The ideology of consumerism produces the belief that products have mythical properties that can resolve emotional problems. The result is that material goods have become substitutes for deep and meaningful human desires. In the case of *Hoarders* we see exactly this happening everywhere. The stuff in their homes have become substitutes for desires. Often the hoarders in the series are being blamed for choosing the stuff over their family.

In the first episode of the fifth season for example, hoarder Linda is blamed for choosing garbage over her son. She has a hard time throwing her stuff away. At one point her son turns to her and says: 'choose me over the stuff'. Linda says nothing and stares in the distance. The camera cuts to the clinical psychologist who is employed to help Linda in the cleaning process. She explains: 'When her son begs her to choose him over the garbage and she cannot even respond, we know that we have a big problem.' This is just one example of where the hoarders are being blamed for caring more about their stuff than their family. In almost every episode it is mentioned at one point.

According to Boyle and Mrozowski, the definition of a hoarding disorder that the DSM provides, states that 'hoarding involves a short-circuiting of the social norms of circulation that

help define and defend value.' Under these official diagnostics, hoarding involves a fantasy of value, an attachment to things predicated upon imaginary assumptions of potential exchange. It is a distinctly social disease, embedded in the heart of our relationships to the materials of commodity culture' (Boyle & Mrozowski 2013: 190-191).

What this definition essentially does is defining the hoarders pathology as an extreme case of commodity fetishism. Commodity fetishism is inseparable from the capitalist ideology. Moreover, the hoarders from the television show are clearly a part of the lower incomes. A lot of them are in financial debt and/or are unemployed. Sometimes their financial status is briefly mentioned when they are introduced in the first few minutes of the series, sometimes their financial status becomes clear later in the episode. One way or another, the series does not waste a lot of time on it. For the observant viewer it becomes clear quickly that most if not all of the contestants are at their financial bottom.

Andrea Migone argues that large numbers of people are excluded from the market or marginalized in terms of their ability to consume by an increasingly skewed distribution of income. Post-Fordist nations are less egalitarian in their income distribution and in their patterns of consumption than they were during the Fordist period. According to Migone, the post-Fordist system produces a highly wasteful and discriminatory pattern of consumption. She notes that lower income families are becoming marginalized in society (Migone 2007: 177). I propose that this marginalization occurs in the television series *Hoarders* as well. 'They are looked at with contempt' as Migone noted, in society in general but also through the lens of the camera as I will show in the following chapters. The lack of empathy for the poor is reproduced by the series. The hoarders are looked at with contempt and disgust.

Migone furthermore notes that consumption is linked to status and social awareness. The possession or use of certain objects may change ones status. These extra-utilitarian values are always socially defined. Whatever the reason for consumption might be, society places consumer goods in the sphere of expressing individual choice, determining status, showcasing wealth and satisfying psychological compulsions. The rate of replacements for all types of commodities is becoming ever faster (Migone 2007: 183).

Probably for the first time in history, the economic sphere is on its way to become predominant in defining the tenets of human society. Its narrative is hegemonic in the Gramscian sense: some of its premises are so commonly accepted that the discourse they underpin not only is seldom challenged, but it often offers the only organizational and legitimizing basis for social structures. Notions like the primacy of the market, the need for nation-states to be "competitive," the relevance of participation in the market as an indicator of social participation, and the role of consumption in the assessment of self-worth, have become so widely diffused and are so ingrained in the subconscious and

conscious elements of the social and political organization of the market that very few of those who accept the validity of the market as an allocative mechanism dispute them on other levels (Migone 2007: 184).

With this statement, Migone explains the hegemony of consumerism. The ideology is so dominant in every tenet of human society, that its narrative is seldom challenged. The dominant hegemony is normalized to the point that we are not able to think of alternatives. Another important thing to distil from this quote is that consumption plays a role in the assessment of self-worth. Commodities have become the way to express ones individuality, which is in itself problematic because of the standardizing of production processes. Moreover consumption is linked to social status. In the case of *Hoarders*, the social status of the hoarders becomes clear immediately. They are often morbidly obese, toothless and dressed in old and dirty clothing. In shots that Foster calls 'gross-out shots' the viewer gets to gaze at the nastiness and the pain of the hoarders.

Gross-out shots include images of the hoarders, often morbidly obese, scantily clad, immobile, toothless, unclean, distresses, uncared for, alone, and in tremendous psychological and physical pain, deeply shamed and saddened, wandering hopelessly around their homes of *mis-en-merde*' (Foster 2014: 33).

The fact that the hoarders from the series are at the bottom of the social ladder and that they are represented as such, does not necessarily mean that they are also looked at with contempt. What makes the representation of the hoarders dangerous is the stark belief in the American dream.

According to Maria Ivanova, the American dream is a product of the dominant American ideology. She states that the American dream is being sold as an 'asset' in the biggest bubble of all the financial bubbles. She uses 'the great consumption bubble' as a metaphor for consumerism. Implicitly, the American dream is the main thing that was sold to every American through popular culture. The idea that anybody can become a millionaire, is engrained into the culture of the nation. This is the promise that consumerism sells. The stark belief in social mobility for everybody is therefore a dangerous thing in the ideology of consumerism, especially for lower incomes and even more so for those who are unemployed. They are blamed for their incapability of earning an acceptable amount of money, because 'everyone can become a CEO, as long as they work hard for it' (Martin, Rafferty & Bryan 2008: 122).

This is the narrative that is reproduced time and time again by the American dream. This leads to the stigmatization the poorest percentage of Americans, who are becoming more poor because of the system that favors the rich. The growing inequality between higher and lower

incomes and the decrease in overall earnings, do not make for a decrease in consumption. On the contrary, people are more and more activated to buy on credit, leading to even more debt. This closes the vicious circle of the capitalist mode of consumption.

The stigmatization of the poorest of Americans is visible in the series *Hoarders* as well. The camera subjectifies the hoarders either into mental health patients that are sick and need to be fixed, or they are desubjectified entirely. They are stripped from their human characteristics, leaving no room for empathy or identification from the audience's part.

Moreover, Ivanova describes the American dream as 'a hegemonic project that promoted the accumulation of commodities as a social norm, civic duty, display of individual achievement, and a key source of life-satisfaction' (Ivanova 2011: 1).

The particular framework set by the social norm of consumption stipulates the things every person should obtain to reach this life-satisfaction. According to her this has remained centered around housing, filled with a growing number of consumer durable and the automobile which she calls 'the hallmark of individual self-expression' (Ivanova 2011: 11).

The selling point of the American dream is that we can obtain life-satisfaction, it is within our reach. All we have to do is buy it. Peter Stormberg summarizes this perpetual and self driven pursuit of happiness as follows:

The central belief of consumerism is that the mundane existence that constitutes the day-to-day life of the believer is not the ultimate reality. Rather, there is a world beyond this one, a perfect world in which unfulfilled desire is unknown. It is to this second world that the believer is ultimately oriented, for it is believed that it is fully possible to enter the second world from the first one. The believer encounters evidence of the second world countless times in each day: it is present in advertisements, in movies, in television programs and in magazines. [...] It is a world close to this one, yet happier, more comprehensible, and more exciting. How does one enter the second world? One attempts to enter it first of all through consumption. After all, it is not possible to avoid the message that is relentlessly drummed into the consciousness of every sentient American, the message that by consuming product X one will become like those happy and beautiful people depicted in the advertisement (Stormberg, P. 1990: 11).

Through advertisements, people are unconsciously lead to believe that they will change after buying certain products. This idea of transforming yourself into a better version of you, is crucial in the ideology of consumerism. People do not need these products in the strict sense of the word; most of the products that are advertised are not targeted to provide for primal human needs. The demand for a lot of products is created by the system itself. Therefore the need of the consumer can never be fulfilled, he will always want more.

Postmodern consumers can never be fulfilled because the products they consume are only sham objects, or characteristic signs of happiness and do not have any real power to bestow happiness to the possessor. The empty, unhappy consumers have no choice but to consume more products with the hopes of finding fulfillment. This is the driving force behind the capitalist machine (Todd, D. 2011: 48).

Todd further qualifies consumerism as 'a self-propelling system of which there seems to be no way out.' Stormberg takes it one step further, arguing that consumerism is not only an ideology, but a kind of religion, depending on your definition of the word. Traditionally, religion is defined as a set of beliefs about supernatural beings. Instead, he proposes an alternative definition which states that religion is the process of placing one's experience in a larger framework, a framework that imparts to that experience some sort of supreme meaning.

From this point of view all human beings are religious because all human beings must, by their nature, work out some system for converting the flux of experience into something that transcends that flux and thereby gives it meaning. From this point of view a person's religion is whatever lends meaning to his or her everyday existence (Stormberg, P. 1990: 12).

Although Stormberg's idea is perhaps a bit too radical and generalizing, his point that all forms of meaning-making have some sort of religious characteristics is an interesting one. He compares the purchase of a commodity with the central sacrament of Christianity. He notes that advertising is nowadays dictating in the same way the bible used to dictate what to do and what not to do. Finally he mentions entertainment is transformed into a daily ritual that is followed by most of the population. This ritualistic nature of the economic activity is key to understanding its power. Through advertising, people learn what they could be if they consumed the product. This notion of the transformed self is what converts an economic activity into a religious one. Instead of satisfying immediate physical needs, people are rather oriented to consumption. Consumption itself becomes the ritual of meaning making.

According to Stormberg, Americans have come to believe that the existence they live from day to day can be transformed through the consumption of a wide variety of products (Stormberg, P. 1990: 18). This can be seen as an extreme form of the commodity fetishism already noted by Karl Marx.

However, the transformation of the consumer never fully takes place. The self-propelling nature of consumerism creates a never-ending sense of need. James Wallman even goes as far as to state that consumerism is making millions of us feel joyless, anxious and depressed. In his book *Stuffed and Starving, Living More With Less* (2015), he concludes that ultimately, mass production

and mass consumption, causes mass depression. Researcher Richard Easterlin for example has compared data on economic growth and happiness since the end of the Second World War. He found out that once people have enough to meet their basic needs, happiness does not increase with their national income. While people in the US started earning more and more after the war, their happiness has been declining since 1960. Among economists and sociologists, this phenomenon is known as the law of diminishing marginal utility amongst economists and sociologists (Wallman, J. 2015).

Wallman moreover argues that material goods have become substitutes for deep and meaningful human desires. The belief that these goods can resolve emotional problems is a false promise. It actually can make your problems worse by putting you in debt for example. Wallman also addresses the promise of the American Dream I've mentioned before. '[...] in today's meritocratic society having goods signifies success and equally, not having goods says failure. As a result, we are not only smugly or painfully aware of who is above or below us in the pecking order. We also know we can clamber up or slip down the rankings at any moment. [...] The end result is millions suffering from material-focused status anxiety' (Wallman 2015: 52).

One of the theorists he refers to is Hungarian-American economist Tibor Scitovsky, who argued that the so called 'joyless economy' is characterized by boredom of the idle rich and neglected the boredom of the idle and idled poor. He discusses the American way of life in his book *The Joyless Economy* (1976). He analyses American mass production and consumption and concludes that consumers are robbed of the satisfaction of their purchase, as soon as they have actually bought it. He uses the example of a new car to illustrate this process where the consumer loses interest after buying and is therefore never truly fulfilled.

'For one thing, the novelty and the consumer's enjoyment of the novelty of his new car wears off, partly with his increasing familiarity with his new possession, partly with that gradual accumulation of sameness which results from his encountering increasing numbers of the identical model on the road. He is more likely to expect and discount the first process than the second, which latter is a kind of external diseconomy thrust upon him after he has made his purchase. To the extent that the consumer is robbed of his car's novelty after he has bought it, his expenditure on it overstates its worth' (Scitovsky, T. 1976: 256).

The consumers lose their interest in the product as soon as it is purchased. The result is that they are rapidly searching for new ways to fulfill their desires, through more consumption. Their desires are never truly fulfilled however, creating an endless loop of accumulation.

The aim of this chapter was to answer the question in what ways consumerism works as an ideology in general and how this manifests in the series *Hoarders*. To answer this question I

started by explaining the terms ideology, subjectification and interpellation, and how they are at work in the case study. Secondly I have tried to give a broad overview of the socio- cultural context that the series emerged in to explain in what ways consumerism is reproduced as the dominant ideology.

Conclusion chapter one:

All in all, power that is exercised consciously or unconsciously by the state can have multiple forms. Repressive state apparatuses exercise power through coercion. Adult Protective Services is an example of an RSA that exercises power over individuals (in this case the hoarders) to make them behave in a certain way. Ideological state apparatuses also exercise power but do so in a less repressive way. They bestow their subject with implicit or explicit norms and values to live by. *Hoarders* is an example of an ISA that emits the dominant ideology by presenting deviations from the norm and trying to fix them. The act of interpellation describes the process which hails the individual into a certain kind of subject who is expected to behave in a certain way. There are two main categories in which the hoarders are being interpellated as somehow different from the social norm.

The medicalization of society is one way in which individuals can be interpellated, they are expected to behave in a certain way if they want to avoid the label of being 'sick'. The Foucaudian approach to medicalization describes the process by which individuals are activated by the system to behave in a certain way. With the term governmentality, Foucault describes the process by which an illness can be problematized. The fact that a certain illness or behavior is problematized and medicalized in the first place, tells you something about the society in question that problematizes the behavior. Governmentality is the product of a recoding of social mechanisms of exploitation and domination on the basis of a new topography of the social.

Compulsive hoarding was first defined as a mental disorder in the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* as in 2013. The recent emergence and medicalization of the phenomenon is telling about the society that it emerged in. The contextualization of the emergence of hoarding in contemporary American society is something that lacks in the television series. By neglecting to show the socio-cultural context of contemporary America in general and American consumerism in particular, the show places hoarding in the realm of personal problems. In this way it robs the series of the possibility to be seen as a critique on consumerism as a whole. Instead hoarding is presented as the disease of a few 'sick' Americans. The recent medicalization of the phenomenon confirms this general consensus.

Moreover, capitalism is in its core a commodity producing system. Individuals are engaged (morally by society, functionally by the social system) first and foremost as consumers.

The switch from the Fordist to the post-Fordist mode of production changed the pattern of consumption and vice versa. No longer was an egalitarian consumption pattern needed to sustain the growth of the system. The result is a growing gap between the rich and the poor, and the increasing marginalization of the poor. The lack of empathy for the poor is reflected in *Hoarders*, as I will show in the following chapters.

The American dream is a dangerous idea because it can cause a lack of empathy for the ones who are at the bottom of the social ladder. After all, they themselves are responsible for their misfortune. This is the narrative that neoliberalism repeats over and over again. As buying and owning commodities signifies success in a capitalist system, people are constantly aware of their place on the economical ladder. Along with a stern belief in social mobility, the selling point of the American dream is that life satisfaction is always within our reach. This results in a perpetual and self driven pursuit of happiness. People are told through advertisements that this happiness can be obtained by consuming a certain product. The idea of transforming yourself through the accumulation of products is crucial in the ideology of consumerism. The ritualistic nature of the economic activity is key, it is sometimes even compared to a religion.

The transformation that is promised never fully takes place. The self propelling nature of consumerism creates a never-ending sense of need. In affluent, capitalist societies, material goods have become substitutes for deep and meaningful human desires. The belief that products have mythical properties that can resolve emotional problems is a false promise. These aspects of the hoarder's pathology as they are presented in the series is a natural outcome of capitalist consumer society.

Chapter two

The subjectification of hoarders

In this chapter I will explain how some of the hoarders on the television show are being subjectified as being patients. As I've shown in previous paragraphs, there are multiple ways of interpellating individuals into a certain discourse; using language, visual techniques or both. I will give examples of instances where this is the case and elaborate on what the implications are when these people are being labeled 'patients'. Moreover these individuals have agency to either accept their subjectification, or resist it. I will give examples from the series to illustrate this. Finally I will end this chapter by concluding what the implications are of subjectifying these individuals into patients for the hoarders themselves and from a broader perspective, what the implications are for the television series in its totality.

I will start by giving a quick overview of what a typical episode of *Hoarders* looks like. The narrative structure of every episode is more or less the same. Every episode follows the clean out of two separate homes. Sometimes an episode follows the cleaning process of one single hoarder. These episodes are exceptions from the rule. In the first few minutes, the hoarders are introduced. Their family and friends and they themselves get the chance to tell the camera what they think the problem is in talking head shots. They talk about the hoarder's (usually problematic) past and the possible rationale behind their behavior.

After both hoarders have been introduced, two 'experts' visit their house. The expert team usually consists of someone who is active in the mental health profession and someone who is somehow specialized in 'organizing'. What the latter actually entails and how these people earned their so called 'certificate in organizing', is left to the audience's imagination. Finally a cleaning crew enters the house and the cleaning process starts.

An episode usually contains a lot of kicking and screaming on the hoarders part, when the cleaning crew tries to empty out the house. Moreover, usually the viewer is presented with a lot of emotional responses from family and friends. Often, the crew does not succeed in cleaning out the house, because the hoarder fails to cooperate. When they do, the series ends with shots of trucks driving away with an unbelievable amount of stuff, followed by before- and after-shots of the house. When they fail in cleaning out the house, the series often ends with text on screen about the progress of the hoarder in question.

Personal trauma

The first interesting scene in *Hoarders* unfolds early in each episode, when the family and friends of the hoarder and the hoarder him- or herself face the camera to verbalize what they think the problem is. This is especially interesting for my research regarding the interpellation of

hoarders into a medical discourse, given that these scenes bring to light the pathology of the hoarder in question. Often, the talking heads in the shots look back on traumatic events in the hoarder's past. The camera cuts to black and white family photo's while the family members reveal the misfortune that is said to have had an impact on the hoarding of the subject in question. Slow piano music is playing in the background the entire time.

An example of where past trauma is presented as being the cause of the subject's hoarding is the first episode of the third season. Penny is introduced as a hoarder who suffers from severe depression. Her husband Patrick explains that he thinks it all started when Penny's mother died. Penny admits: 'It was extremely traumatic for me at the age of 54. The depression got the best of me and I just gave up.'

Interestingly, a few scenes later dr. Suzanne Chabaud agrees that this must be the cause of the hoarding. 'Acquiring itself has become a way of coping with emotions she doesn't know how to cope with otherwise. It is a response to earlier events in her life where she lost objects that were very important to her', she explains to the camera in a talking head shot. In the example of Penny, past trauma is explicitly presented as being the cause of her hoarding by herself, her family and the hoarding specialist. In other cases it is not said explicitly but by presenting problematic events in their childhood or later in life, there is always a suggestion that this is somehow linked to their hoarding.

The implicit or explicit message that past trauma is linked to the hoarding behavior of the subjects has two implications. Firstly it presents the hoarder as different from the average American. They have had a hard time in life and hoarding is presented as their coping mechanism. Secondly it suggests hoarding is an unmistakably individual problem. By presenting personal trauma as the single cause, the show short-circuits any other reading of the hoarders' behavior. Moreover it discourages any critical reflection on the audience's part about their own way of life and their own behavior towards their stuff. It presents hoarding as a uniquely individual problem of a few people, denying every possible form of hoarding that is happening in America on a slightly smaller scale. Their explanation of the cause of hoarding neglects to show the disease in a broader context. It fails to recognize its existence and emerging in a particular culture that is built around hyper consumption.

Consumption narratives

Another aspect that should be explored further while discussing the causes of hoarding that are presented on screen, is the (almost) complete absence of the act of shopping. Almost never are the hoarders filmed while they are purchasing the stuff that is drowning out their houses. Foster proposes that the absence of the act of shopping is purposely deleted from the series.

I find it telling, however, that a significant and time-consuming aspect of the life of the gluttonous hoarder is carefully excised from these narratives. Absent is the most crushing and significant “work” of the consumer, that of gleaning, collecting, and hoarding. Off-screen and denarrated, oddly, are any shots of the hoarders actually shopping and spending or actively taking part in consumption (Foster 2014: 33).

It is true that there is little attention to the origins of the hoard. There are only a few instances however where shopping is shown on screen. In the very first episode of the first season, Jill is introduced as a food hoarder. She stacks up on sale items in the supermarket and forgets about them lying around her cluttered house. The result is that she has hoarded an enormous amount of rotten food. Even when the products have expired she has a hard time throwing them away.

Jill is one of the few hoarders who was followed by cameras during her shopping trips. She explains how she can never pass up a good deal and how shopping makes her feel good. Jill gains short term happiness from the act of shopping. In the first chapter I have shown that this characterizes (hyper)consumption patterns in contemporary capitalist societies. Jill invests her commodities with value that has no or little relation to their physical properties. A piece of rotten food has no intrinsic value anymore and yet she has difficulty with parting with it.

This is an instance where Marx’s commodity fetishism comes into play. Ascribing products with an imaginary value is not only a part of the pathology of the hoarder, it is a part of American consumer culture as a whole. In some ways, the behavior of the hoarder is an enlargement of a sensibility that is felt on a much larger scale. The link between the hoarder’s pathology and the consumption behavior of other non-sick Americans is never explored by the series however.

Moreover, it is significant that scenes where the hoarders are filmed while shopping, seem to disappear more and more in the later seasons. In the first seasons there are a few instances where the hoarder’s shopping habits are recorded by the cameras. In the later seasons they disappear entirely. Here and there throughout the seasons hoarders discuss their shopping habits, such as hoarder Debra from the sixth season. In her introduction she admits that shopping is her hobby. It makes her feel good and a little later her husband explains that she sees value in everything, another instance where commodity fetishism seems to be at the core of the hoarder’s pathology. Aside from the occasional mentioning of shopping in the discourse of the hoarder, it is ignored entirely in the later seasons. The hoarders are no longer actually shown while they are in the stores.

By leaving out these instances that are clearly linked to the hoarding, the series again fails to place its contestants disease in a broader context. By hardly ever presenting the origins of the hoard, the show fails to address hyper consumption as a problem. ‘It is extremely important to exclude shots of hyper-consumption, as these might be construed as a critique of

capitalism; but more importantly, such shots would allow us to identify us with the hoarders. Every capitalist subject consumes.' (Foster 2014: 34).

If the shopping of the hoarders would have been a part of the show, these scenes could have been seen as a critique on the consuming behavior of the hoarders and by extension of its audience. It would hold a mirror up to its viewer and invite them to critically engage in a debate about their shopping and spending habits. By not showing shopping as a part of the 'illness' or at least as part of the bigger picture, the series fails to recognize the influence shopping has on the hoarders and on America as a whole.

This is an example where television works as an ideological state apparatus. If the series would have presented shopping as part of the pathology of hoarding, it would hold up a mirror to its audience and invite them to critically discuss the hoarder's and their own (hyper)consumption. The implied ideology that is emitted could be interpreted in an entirely different way. Instead the series presents hoarding as the individual problem of a select few. The pathologization of the hoarders reaffirms the norm. The (consumption)behavior of the audience is not addressed as being possibly harmful or toxic, as opposed to the hoarder's behavior which is stigmatized. In the process, the behavior of the audience is confirmed as the status quo whereas the hoarder's behavior is presented as deviant from the norm and unhealthy. Even though there could have been drawn parallels between the behavior of the audience and the behavior of the hoarder, by not doing so the audience's behavior is confirmed as normal and healthy.

Interpellating the hoarders into patients

There are moments in the series where the hoarders are implicitly or explicitly being hailed as patients. I will give examples of these moments and explain what happens to a subject once he or she is placed into a medical discourse. There are different ways in which the subject can respond to his or her interpellation, as I will show. I will give an example of a hoarder who tries to resist his subjectification, an example of a hoarder who accepts it and a hoarder who seems to be indifferent to it all. The last example will prove to have similarities with the desubjectification of the hoarders, a different discourse I will discuss later in this research. The difference between the two is the language that the expert in this case uses to explain the behavior of the hoarder. By placing the hoarder into a medical discourse, the series presents hoarding as a strictly individual problem.

The TV series *Hoarders* emphasizes that hoarding is a mental illness supposedly suffered by only a small percentage of Americans. Also frequently espoused is the notion that hoarding can be "cured" by TV psychologists. These TV shows depend upon the exploitation of hoarders and their excessively filthy over-stuffed homes. Notably,

however, is the fact that the TV “psychiatrists and clutter experts” usually fail to cure anyone in the allotted TV timeslot, or the series (Foster 2014:30).

Foster brings to light an interesting idea that is at the core of my argument about the subjectification of the hoarders. She notes that by placing the hoarders into a mental health discourse, the disease is supposedly suffered by only a small percentage of Americans. I will explore this idea in the course of this chapter. Moreover she touches upon the fact that by interpellating the hoarders into the subject ‘patient’, simultaneously the series propagates that the hoarders can be cured. To achieve this, the show employs two experts in the field of hoarder per hoarder. Usually this team of specialist consists of someone with a psychology or psychiatry degree and someone who is specialized in organizing. The hoarder receives no on screen therapy however, these experts are only present at the time of the cleanup to help the hoarder if necessary.

The experts are not the only ones who can interpellate a hoarder as a patient. Their family and friends, the cleaning crew and sometimes even the hoarders themselves can do so. In the following paragraphs I will examine the different ways in which the hoarders can be interpellated into a mental health discourse. Moreover I will elaborate on the different ways in which the hoarder in question deals with his or her interpellation, and finally I will analyze what the implications are for the interpretation of *Hoarders* as a series. It will become evident that once the hoarder is being interpellated as a mental patient, there is no rejecting this interpellation. Visually and discursively the hoarders are placed into a mental health discourse, presenting hoarding as a disease for a few ‘sick’ Americans.

Accepting the subjectification

Phyllis from season four accepts and even reaffirms her own subjectification. She is a particular kind of hoarder: she only hoards dolls. As opposed to many of the other hoarders in the television series, Phyllis has no problems with throwing away garbage or other stuff in general. She collects the dolls because they make her happy. ‘I enjoy their company, they’re like friends. They make me feel happy and cozy and secure inside’, she says.

As her sons are discussing the severity of the situation in talking head shots, the camera cuts back and forth to Phyllis who is working in her so called ‘doll hospital’. She patches the dolls up and gives them ‘transplants’. Phyllis explains: ‘People wait for donors right? What’s the difference between that and my doll waiting for a hand donor? They need transplantations too you know!’

In her introduction, Phyllis is represented as someone who has delusions and cannot clearly make a distinction between what is real and what is not. She repeats multiple times that the dolls are like friends to her, implying that she doesn’t have any friends in real life. Phyllis has

a nervous laugh which is repeated to the point where it almost appears to be a sound effect. Even when Phyllis is not in the frame, her nervous laughter is almost always in the background. By repeating her laugh over and over again in the background, Phyllis' nervous character is enlarged.

Another interesting aspect that comes to light in Phyllis' introduction, is her behavior towards the dolls. She treats them as humans. She not only shows a fetishistic investment in her commodities, she also displays emotional connections to them. This complies with Wallman's idea that in affluent, capitalist societies, material goods have become substitutes for deep and meaningful human desires (Wallman, J 2015: 52).

Moreover it ties in with Marx's idea's about commodity fetishism, as I have mentioned earlier.

In the following scenes, Phyllis' mental instability is reaffirmed visually and discursively. Geraldine Thomas is leading the cleanout. She introduces herself as a professional organizer, specialized in chronic disorganization. When Mrs. Thomas asks Phyllis a question, she does not respond. Instead she giggles at the sight of her dolls. When she is asked what is so funny, she says she doesn't know and starts laughing even harder. The camera cuts to a talking head shot where psychotherapist Mark Pfeffer notes that her nervous laughter is due to anxiety and fear. The viewer keeps seeing small clips of Phyllis laughing in a quick montage along with clips of the cleaning crew doing their job. The fast cuts back and forth between a nervously laughing Phyllis and images of the cleanout amplify Phyllis' implied anxiety.

With cranking music in the background, we see the cleaning crew emptying out all the garbage bags filled with dolls on a big pile outside the house in fast motion. Phyllis is still nervously laughing. Shortly after she gets upset and starts making nasty comments about herself. 'I can't even enjoy life I might as well be dead. Maybe I'll just die.' This scene emphasizes Phyllis' emotional and mental instability. While dr. Pfeffer explains her anxiety in a voice over, we see Phyllis going from nervously laughing to an emotional outburst of anger and insecurity in a matter of seconds. In the background the horror-like music is cranking as a motif of insanity.

Finally Phyllis breaks down. She says she will just be a part of the junk that's in front of her. At this point, Phyllis unconsciously participates in her own subjectification. She is visually and discursively presented as someone who is mentally unstable and unwell. By verbally putting herself down, she accepts and confirms this interpretation of her behavior. The increasing rhythm of the montage emphasizes her mood swings and by proclaiming that she deserves to be thrown out she reaffirms her own mental instability.

When a person is being subjectified as a patient, this has implications for what is expected of him or her. In Phyllis' case this becomes evident halfway through the episode. At this point she has already donated two full truckloads of dolls. In film still 1.0 which can be found in

the Appendix, Phyllis and Mrs. Thomas are discussing the progress of the day with the couple hundred remaining dolls in the background. Phyllis explains how traumatic this day has been for her. Sarcastically, Mrs. Thomas proposes that they should get a gold medal for Phyllis, for getting rid of the dolls. Phyllis responds with more nervous laughter.

This scene shows the agency Phyllis has or is supposed to have. She is expected to be able to throw away the dolls, despite her pathology. Phyllis is represented as an individual who has mental issues and is 'sick' in a sense. However, she is expected to see the error of her ways and change in order to make 'healthy choices'. She is interpellated as a patient who can be cured.

Resisting the subjectification

An example where the hoarder tries to resist her subjectification happens in season three. Hoarder Penny has a depression which is so severe that at times she cannot even move. Her past trauma is explored and explicitly presented as the cause for her hoarding. According to dr. Suzanne Chabaud hoarding is her response to earlier life events where she lost objects that were very important to her, alluding to her mother's passing. Furthermore, the rest of the episode Penny is represented in the same way as Phyllis. Their interpellation is comparable except for one aspect: Phyllis accepts and reaffirms herself as a mental health patient, whereas Penny tries to resist her subjectification.

During the cleanout, the cleaning crew mistakes a family heirloom for a toy, and it gets placed in the wrong box. When Penny finds out she reacts distressed. Not long after she gets mad at the crew for accidentally throwing away some of her sons t-shirts. Then she and Patrick, her son, insist on going through the garbage bags to check if the crew has thrown away more stuff that was not supposed to be thrown out. When they find out that they did, Patrick turns to his mother and whispers: 'I think they did this on purpose'.

Penny agrees and confronts the crew. She feels that her family is being taken advantage of. Penny and her son propose that the crew is intentionally upsetting them for the purpose of sensationalizing. She implies that the crew is partially responsible for the drama. If the crew would have handled her heirloom more respectfully and if they had not thrown away her son's t-shirts, Penny would have been perfectly fine with the cleanout of her house. At least that is how Penny feels. She therefore rejects her pathology as the cause of her anger.

In this example comes forth the agency a subject has when he or she is being subjectified into a patient. He has the ability to accept or deny it. In the case of Penny, she obviously does not agree with the view of the experts who explain to her that chronic disappointment is a symptom of hoarding, and that this is the reason why she gets upset. They propose her trust issues are at the root of her acting out towards the crew. In Penny's eyes however, she is being made into a crazy person by a television crew who wants to push her buttons on purpose to show the viewers that she is indeed a mentally unstable person.

Of course, by acting out towards the crew, Penny makes herself look extremely paranoid. Her attempt to resist the subjectification into a mental health discourse backfires. Fully resisting the subjectification into a patient is never successful therefore, it only makes her look even more mentally unstable.

Indifference towards the subjectification

The very first episode of the first season features hoarder Jill. She introduces herself as a food hoarder. The camera moves around her house seeking out the rotting food that lies around. We follow Jill as she moves around her cluttered kitchen and tries to cook in the middle of the garbage. Jill's sister is talking about how shocked she was when she saw how Jill was living in a voiceover. 'There is not even a place to sit down, and none of it seems to bother her at all!'

Jill's sister's statement does two things. On the one hand it emphasizes the severity of Jill's living conditions, on the other hand it raises the audience's attention to the fact that Jill herself does not seem to care about it at all. In the next few shots the camera follows Jill as she goes about her normal business in her cluttered house, while in a voiceover, Jill's friends and family keep repeating how abominable her situation is and how they don't understand how she can live like this.

Film still 1.1 is an example of a shot where the camera follows Jill as she is roaming her house. In this particular moment she is looking for food she wants to cook. What is visually interesting about this shot is its framing. It is a medium shot; Jill's body takes up about a third of the space, while the rest is made up of surroundings. The surrounding in this case is trash, which fills up the room to the point that there is nothing other than trash. There is no perspective in the shot, implying the endlessness of the sea of debris. The onscreen space consists mostly of trash, this implies the off-screen space must also consist mostly of trash. The result is a haptic space in which it is hard to distinguish Jill from the trash. The camera is relatively close to the filmed objects, which gives the viewer a sense of being close to the scene in the shot, almost drowning in trash him- or herself. The camera is in a high angle position looking down on Jill partly disappearing in the trash. This higher vantage point visually diminishes Jill. Secondly, by filming Jill kneeling down while she is turning her face away from the camera, she is visually de-personalized. From a first glance, it is hard to distinguish Jill from the trash she is kneeling in, she has visually become one with the trash.

In this scene we see the framing of the shot reinforcing Jill's sister's statement. Her statement emphasized the nastiness of Jill's living condition while it also drew attention to Jill's total lack of caring about it. The framing of the shot also emphasizes the amount of trash in her home, while at the same time showing Jill as completely content with her situation.

Jill's sister is presented as the norm, she emphasizes how she cannot understand why Jill chooses to live like this. Jill does not seem to care at all. She goes about her business and does

not even seem to notice the trash that surrounds her. Later in the episode Jill's lack of caring will be labeled as part of her pathology.

When Jill is cleaning out her fridge she finds that it is filled with sludge from expired products. She is laughing at the sight of it while the professional cleaner in the background starts dry heaving and has to walk away from the scene. Figure 1.3 shows this scene. Once the professional organizer is outside, he speaks to the camera: 'I cannot believe that there is stuff in there that she is still saving! She is pretty sick'.

Dr. David Tolin explicates in a talking head shot that Jill's senses are different from 'normal peoples'. He explains that that is why she is fine with living in the middle of rotten food: she simply does not smell it. In this instance, the lack of caring Jill shows towards her expired products are presented as part of the disease. Jill's senses are different from normal people's because she is sick.

This entire scene emphasizes the difference between Jill and 'normal people', in this case the cleaners. Jill is laughing while the others have tears in their eyes from dry heaving at the sight of what is in Jill's fridge. Moreover, Jill is shown while she is talking to a rotting piece of food, while in the background one of the cleaners is looking at the scene full of disbelief. Afterwards, one of the cleaners literally calls her 'sick', verbally placing her into the mental health discourse. Jill's lack of caring is presented as part of the pathology of the hoarder.

She remains an active subject however. She participates in the cleaning process and engages in discussions with the experts and the cleaning crew. The expert keeps repeating how she needs to learn how to make healthier decisions. This implies two things. On the one hand it implies that Jill is sick and she needs to be taught how to behave in a correct way. On the other hand it implies that Jill is capable of change, she only needs to be 'fixed'.

By subjectifying Jill as a patient, there is not only a distance created between Jill and 'normal people' that are present such as the experts or the cleaning crew, there is also a distance created between Jill and the viewer. Through visual and discursive means Jill is placed outside of what is perceived to be normal. The experts draw attention to the ways in which Jill's senses are different from others, her denial and her total inability to care about the nastiness of the situation. This is doubled by the filming techniques which amplify the image of Jill as 'different' or 'sick'.

Failed subjectification

Interestingly enough, there seems to be a transition in the way the hoarders are being subjectified. All the examples I have given up until now show that the hoarders are being placed into a medical discourse. This implies that they are deviant from the norm but they can always be fixed. In the next episode I will elaborate on the desubjectification of the hoarders in the television show *Hoarders*. This means that they are stripped from their human characteristics

and capacities and are represented in a way that they are non-human.

In the second season, the transition of a hoarder to a non human is mentioned by one of her family members. There is a lot of blame and none of the family members of hoarder Augustine seems to have any compassion for her situation. According to Jason, her son, Augustine chose garbage over being able to take care of him. Jason was placed outside of his home and lived with his older sister for ten years until he was old enough to get a place of his own. Susan, Augustines daughter, noticed a big change in her mother's behavior. 'It is like there are two different people, the person I knew growing up, and the person Jason knows.' Later, it is Jason's turn to go into the house after all those years. He is climbing over the mountains of debris, not showing much emotion. The camera cuts to Jason in a talking head shot explaining: 'I hate to say it like this, but there was a time in my life where my mother had emotions and there was a human being inside. Now I just don't get my mother, I don't know what's in there.'

The language Jason uses suggest that his mother is not human anymore. She has no emotions and no understanding of what's going on. He says that he doesn't know what's *in there*, suggesting his mother is possessed somehow by an unknown entity. Even though he hasn't said it literally yet, Jason talks about his mother as if he was talking about an alien or a monster. The lack of emotion Jason mentions will become more clear in the analysis of the desubjectification of the hoarders in the next episode.

What this scene shows is that there is a point in time when hoarding individuals are not interpellated as medical subjects anymore. In this case, their interpellation has failed. They turned out to be unable to change their behavior and make healthy choices. Desubjectification is what follows after this failed interpellation, as I will show in the next chapter.

Conclusion chapter two

Each episode of hoarders starts out with mentioning past trauma that is explicitly or implicitly presented as the (partial) cause for the subject's hoarding behavior. By presenting past trauma as a part of the hoarder's disease, the show fails to address other possible interpretations of the show. Moreover, by not or hardly acknowledging the act of shopping as part of the pathology, the series fails to hold up a mirror to its audience and fails to encourage them to critically reflect on their own (consumption) behavior. In some ways, the behavior of the hoarder is an enlargement of a sensibility that is felt on a much larger scale. The link between the hoarder's pathology and the consumption behavior of other 'non-sick' Americans is never explored by the series however. By leaving out the act of shopping, the series fails to place its contestants disease in a broader context. By hardly ever presenting the origins of the hoard, the show fails to address hyper consumption as a problem. The hoarder's behavior is presented as deviant from the norm and unhealthy, as opposed to the behavior of the audience which is confirmed as the

status quo.

In the representation of the pathology of hoarding in the series, there are different ways in which hoarders are being interpellated into the subject 'patient'. This happens explicitly by mentioning that they are sick, and implicitly by placing them into a mental health discourse. Moreover there are multiple visual techniques that help construct this representation of mental illness. Phyllis' nervous laughter for example is used to show her anxiety. Even when she is not on screen, the sound of her laughter is always in the background. It is repeated again and again to create an atmosphere of insanity.

When a hoarder is interpellated into a patient, he or she has the agency to either accept or reject it. When the subject attempt to reject his or her interpellation however, he or she never fully succeeds. Moreover there are instances where the hoarder is represented as not caring at all about his or her own subjectification, in this case the not-caring is presented as a part of the hoarders pathology.

In any case the interpellation of a hoarder into a patient, proposes that they are somehow different from 'normal people'. They are expected to see the error of their ways after talks with the specialists, however. Their pathology sets them apart from the norm but at the same time they are expected to be able to be cured.

By representing the hoarders as being different, the show creates a distance between them and the audience. By presenting hoarding as a disease for a few 'sick' Americans, the socio cultural context of hoarding in a culture of hyper consuming is ignored. This robs *Hoarders* of the potential to be interpreted as a critique on hyper consumption.

Chapter three

The desubjectification of hoarders

In this chapter I will explain how some of the hoarders on the television show are being desubjectified. Through visual and discursive means, some of the hoarders are being hailed as some 'thing' that is not human. Every possible identification the viewer might have with these people is removed when they are represented as non-humans. Extraterrestrial discourses are a recurring theme in the series, as well as animal and monstrous discourses. This chapter will show that by stripping the hoarders from their humanity, any form of identification the viewer might have with the hoarder is deleted. Hoarders who are desubjectified have no agency. As opposed to medical patients, an alien cannot change or be cured. Their agency is removed leaving them as passive and seemingly emotionless objects. Moreover it differentiates the hoarders from the implied audience. It turns the hoarders into 'the other', who is interesting only to look at/laugh at. By doing so, the series reaffirms the behavior of the audience, making them feel superior because they are in no way comparable to the 'other' nasty hoarder.

Narrative structure

At the beginning of the previous chapter I have given a quick overview of the narrative structure of *Hoarders* to give a sense of what an actual episode looks like. One characteristic of the series that is especially interesting to look at from the perspective of desubjectification, is the fact that there are two different hoarders presented per episode. By presenting not one but two hoarders in the forty/forty-five minutes episodes, the viewer will easily feel overwhelmed by the cluttered homes. Boyle and Mrozowski describes the impact the overwhelming narrative structure has on the viewer of the series as follows:

The show produces a real friction between this standardized narrative and the disorderly patterns of consumptive behavior of the afflicted. The intractable hoarders manifest their suffering in idiosyncratic ways, almost as if they were explicitly resisting the generic conventions employed to tell their story and interpret their behavior. The hoarders are exhausted and exhausting, and their irascibility can wear on the viewer (Boyle & Mrozowski 2013: 193-194).

Moreover, by cutting back and forth between two separate hoarders in a fast pace, the identity of both individuals will start to melt together. The repetition the series produces is dangerous according to Boyle and Mrozowski because it accentuates the irrationality of the hoarders disease. '[...] this pairing accentuates the dangerous repetitions, every cheap commodity, every shopping trip, every refusal, every irrational desire, every dusty pile of unopened boxes start to

bleed into another' (Boyle & Mrozowski 2013: 194).

Almost every episode of hoarder uses the same narrative structure where two hoarders are presented per episode. There are a few exceptions from this rule, but in general each episode follows the separate stories of two hoarders simultaneously. The cutting back and forth between two stories has as an effect that both of the stories will start to look the same. It becomes more difficult for the viewer to distinguish one hoarder from the other. Their identities as well as their cluttered homes become one. This denies the audience any way to identify themselves with one of the hoarders. This is the first of the visual techniques that desubjectifies the hoarders.

Barfing

In the previous chapter I have already mentioned some instances where the family- or crewmember were dry heaving or barfing at the sight of the hoard. This is a recurring theme throughout the shows eight seasons. It emphasizes the disgust of the people involved, which is often contrasted by the lack of care from the hoarders part. I have already analyzed such an instance. Hoarder Jill was laughing at the sight of the decomposing sludge in her fridge while the crewmembers were dry heaving and had to walk away from the scene. I have shown that in this particular scene, Jill is visually and discursively presented as different from normal people. Throughout the eight seasons of the show, scenes like this one are omnipresent.

The effect of scenes like the one I described above is that it draws attention to the nastiness of what is inside these people's homes. Moreover they emphasize the lack of care the hoarders usually have towards living in the nastiness. Often it is reaffirmed by either the family members or the hoarders themselves, that they don't even notice the nastiness of the situation. They don't smell rotting food, they forget about messed diapers that are lying around etc. This causes these types of scenes to have a double effect on the viewer. They get to gaze at the nastiness of these people's lives, and more importantly, they get to feel superior to them in the process. The hoarders are presented as animalesque. They do not notice and/or do not care about their abominable situation. The viewer of the show feels no relation to these grotesque creatures, resulting in the show being seen as a kind of circus for the pain and suffering of others.

Smell

Another recurring theme is the continuous repeating of how unbearable the smell is. In almost every episode of every season, someone turns to the camera to tell the viewers about the apparent smell. Often the stench is explicated by one of the family members who enters the house of the hoarder for the first time after a considerable amount of time. Sometimes the role of concretizing the smell is carried out by one of the crewmembers. In any case, it is difficult to find

an episode of *Hoarders* where the smell of the house is not mentioned. Foster labels this phenomenon as the trope of disgust that is present in every episode of *Hoarders*.

There is also a formulaic off-screen olfactory trope of disgust, as workers and family members describe the stench of the rubble while they clamber around in piles of waste holding their noses. Often workers and family members throw up because of the smell. (Foster 2014: 36).

An example of this trope of disgust can be found in the first season, when dr. Tolin takes one step into the hoarded house and is taken back by the 'blast in his face' from the apparently unbearable smell. At the same time hoarder Jill is walking around as if nothing is wrong, she doesn't seem to smell what dr. Tolin is smelling. She is different from him, her condition causes her to not smell and not notice the trash. In her own words, she must be immune to it. This idea of Jill being oblivious to her surroundings is reinforced when dr. Tolin asks her if she can think of anything that might be rotting in the room. She promises him that there is no rotting food in this room. She admits to having some rotten food in the kitchen, but assures him that there is no rotting food whatsoever in the room that they are currently in. After asking if Jill is sure, dr. Tolin points to a rotting pumpkin in the corner of the room. 'Oh I'm sorry the pumpkin!', she says. 'Well it was a very nice pumpkin when it was fresh.'

Jill is represented as animalistic in some ways. She does not notice the smell and the rotting pumpkin in the same ways as 'normal' humans (like dr. Tolin) do. The emphasis of the smell of the house, plays the same role in othering the hoarders as the example of the barfing. Televisions do not transfer other senses such as smell, so the series uses people to explicate just how nasty the smell is to the camera. This is yet another way in which the attention is drawn to the particular nastiness of the hoarder's living situation and by extension of the hoarder him- or herself. By showing people who cannot stand to be in the house for a few minutes, the hoarder is represented as a vile and sick monster who does not notice or does not care about the things that make the other people present shiver.

Lack of emotion

When Augustine from season two talks about the trauma from her childhood in a talking head shot, she flinches. The camera captures this in extreme slow motion. These types of extreme slow motion are usually employed to draw attention to a person's facial expression. Shifting the speed of movement very smoothly and rapidly in the course of a shot, is called 'ramping'. This often becomes a way of dwelling on a moment of spectacle or high drama, such as is the case in this particular shot (Bordwell & Thompson jaartal: 171).

Dwelling on the hoarder's past trauma is nothing new, as I have noted it is one of the

ways in which the problem of hoarding is represented as an individual problem of a few Americans who are nothing like 'you and me'. What is interesting about this scene in this particular episode however, is that it is one of the very few instances in which we see Augustine showing any emotion. As she is talking about her problematic past, the ramping creates a sense of drama and emotion. It emphasizes Augustine 'caring' about something. Interestingly, this is the only instance in which Augustine is filmed in such a way. This has implications for the way in which Augustine is represented and the ways in which her representation can be interpreted.

When the cleaning crew arrives, cleaning specialist Dorothy explains to them that Augustine has dropped a part of her denture somewhere in the garbage. The team's job is to find it and return it to her. One of the workers finally finds the top of Augustine's teeth amongst the rubble on the floor. When they are returned to her, Dorothy reminds Augustine to say 'thank you' in a situation like this. In a voice-over, Jason gets annoyed because he feels that Augustine is acting entitled. In the next shot we see Augustine in her rocking chair.

The manner in which Dorothy talks to Augustine, urging her to thank the cleaning crew, is almost childlike. Augustine is portrayed as not being grateful for the help she receives. This idea is reinforced by Jason who explains that he feels that Augustine is acting entitled. After these shots which frame Augustine as being ungrateful, the camera cuts straight to another scene where Augustine is sitting outside in her rocking chair. The montage suggests that she is sitting there at the same time as the cleaning crew is cleaning and Jason is complaining. This strengthens the image of Augustine being lazy, entitled, and not taking responsibility for the mess. By pasting the two scenes together, the montage reinforces the unhelpfulness of Augustine that is mentioned by Jason.

Later in the episode the lack of emotion on Augustine's part becomes undeniable when she and her daughter are fighting about an object. Dr. Chaubaud tries to mediate in their bickering and asks if Augustine still loves her daughter. She nods no. She then asks if Augustine can at least say 'thank you' to her daughter for helping her. Finally she agrees and mumbles a thank you to her daughter.

This is another example of where Augustine is being presented as a horrible person who is not capable of showing any emotion. When she is asked if she loves her daughter she nods no. During all this emotional drama and bickering between the family members, nowhere do we get to see Augustine upset. She doesn't cry, she doesn't get angry, she is not happy or grateful for the help she is receiving. All the characteristics and emotions that make a person human are stripped from her. This causes Augustine to be desubjectified completely.

At the end of this episode Susan and Jason are both crying out of gratitude. Augustine's eyes remain dry. The lack of emotion confirms the claims that Augustine is non-human in a sense. She is passive not only in the sense that she does not take action to help clean out the

hoard, she is also passive in the sense that she shows no emotion whatsoever.

Another example of a hoarder who is presented as someone who is emotionless is Janet. In season four she is introduced as an old lady who likes living in trash more than being around people. When she takes Dr. Zasio on a tour through the house the latter is baffled by the mountains of trash in the inhabitable house. Dr. Zasio asks Janet how she feels about her grandchildren not being able to visit her. She responds frigidly, showing no emotion whatsoever. The camera cuts to Dr. Zasio in a talking head shot explaining that Janet might feel safe in the trash. As long as she is in there, no one can bother her.

This implies that Janet places more interest in her things than in her grandchildren. She doesn't care that they are not able to visit her. Dr. Zasio even implies that she wants to keep people away and hoarding might be one of the ways in which she attempts to do that. Janet is shown as someone who shows no emotion. She is presented as liking trash rather than people, even her family members.

For the next phase of the cleanup, Corey Chalmers who introduces himself as an extreme hoarding cleanup specialist, and his team of professional cleaners come in to help clean out the house. The first thing one of the crewmembers says as he walks in the house for the first time, is that it smells so bad in there that he almost threw up. This is followed by more close-ups of the bottles of urine. When her children enter the house for the first time after many years, some of them start crying. The camera makes sure to record the tears in a close up. While the children are crying and making promises that they 'won't let her live like this another day', Janet shows no emotion.

This is another scene where Janet is represented as someone who doesn't care. She didn't care about living in the trash, she even liked it. She doesn't care that her grandchildren are unable to visit her. Now she doesn't care about her crying children who are wanting to help her. Throughout the episode Janet has not shown emotion once. It is even literalized by Dr. Zasio that she wants to keep people away through the hoarding. Janet is visually and discursively subjectified into a person without feelings.

Lack of care

I have already briefly mentioned the lack of care some hoarders seem to emit in the scene where Jill does not care about the smell of a rotting pumpkin. The lack of care from the hoarders part towards multiple things is another recurring theme. In the previous paragraph we have seen that Janet is represented as someone who does not care about her own children. Her carelessness about being close to her family members is mirrored by her carelessness towards her own abominable living situation. This becomes best clear visually and discursively in the following scene.

Usually the hoarder would take the expert on a tour around the cluttered house. They

would normally meet in front of the house while the expert in question introduces him- or herself in a talking head shot. Janet's episode proceeds a little differently. Dr Zasio introduces herself as a clinical psychologist specialized in OCD and compulsive hoarding in a talking head shot. Afterwards the camera cuts to Janet's place, where dr. Zasio approaches the house on her own and knocks on the door. There is no response. She opens the door and squeezes through the crack. Cautiously she enters the house and climbs through some of the trash. Suddenly she is startled. The camera uses a quick zoom in to a pile of trash where Janet is lying in, she is laughing. Figure 2.0 shows Janet while she is lying in the midst of the trash. The *mis en scène* in this shot consist almost exclusively of trash. It isn't until she suddenly starts laughing, that we notice Janet's head in the middle of the rubble. The rest of her body is hiding under layers of trash. This keeps her warm in a house without heating, we know this from the introduction.

By positioning Janet under a blanket with trash overlapping her on each side, she almost disappears. In the shot before this one, we saw dr. Zasio climbing through the door. For the next shot, the camera has taken her place and shows the viewer what dr. Zasio is implied to see after she has entered the house. The camera has a slightly higher vantage point, looking down on Janet. The shot is filled up with trash to the point that there is nothing other than trash, there is no perspective visible. Each of the four edges of the frame show only trash, this suggests that the sea of trash continues infinitely. The two remaining zones of so called 'off-screen space' are behind the camera and behind the filmed object. By framing the shot in such a way that the entirety of the onscreen space is trash, the suggestion is made that everywhere around the camera, the off-screen space consists of trash as well.

The grayish colors accentuate the dreary atmosphere and make Janet disappear in the trash even more. Except for the hints of blue and red, everything else is the same pale color. This strengthens the visual unity between Janet and the trash.

Finally, the camera creates extra dramatic effect by using a fast zoom in to the pile of trash. Given that the framing of the shot positions the camera in the middle of a sea of trash, the quick zoom in suggests almost a dive into it. According to Bordwell and Thompson: '[...] since the framing orients us to the material in the image, we often see ourselves as moving along with the frame. Through such framing, we may approach the object or retreat from it, circle it, or move past it' (Bordwell & Thompson 2012: 199).

When the camera approached the sea of debris, the viewer gets the feeling of diving into it. It is at this point that Janet suddenly starts laughing, and we are able to distinguish her head in the middle of the rubble. This creates yet another shock effect.

To interpret this scene there are two things important. On the one hand the visuals emphasize the size of the hoard, on the other hand, Janet is visually unified with the hoard. This kind of framing of the hoarder in the middle of their trash is not uncommon for the series

Hoarders. I have analyzed a similar shot in chapter one when writing about hoarder Jill.

What makes the scene of Janet unique however, is the presence of dr. Zasio. She walks into the room and is shocked to find Janet lying there (even though this scene is obviously staged). She lets out a sharp shriek and thus explicates her shock and disbelief about Janet's situation. This has two effects. On the one hand it works as a sign to the viewer. Dr. Zasio being visibly shocked is an indirect queue for the viewer to be shocked as well. Right after the shot where dr. Zasio is visibly affected of something in the room, the camera takes her place and it is the viewer's turn to be affected by what is presented: Janet in her hoard. On the other hand it creates yet again a distance between Janet and everybody else. The shot presents what is normal: dr. Zasio who is shocked to see Janet lying there buried in trash, and what is definitely not normal: Janet in the middle of the debris while she is laughing.

Dr. Zasio's shock emphasizes the total lack of caring on Janet's part. She is even laughing, showing that she doesn't find it shocking at all. This confirms the statement her children made in the introduction of Janet: she is perfectly happy living in the trash and would continue to do so if she wasn't forced to change. Her lack of caring also signals that she will probably not be the most active to see the problem or help fix it.

Lack of caring is a theme throughout more episodes of hoarders. In the second season for example, Jason talks about his mother's health problems: 'one day she is going to die, if the house is like this when she dies, we are going to be the ones stuck with this mess'. This statement brutally exposes the problematic relationship between Augustine and her children. Jason's first and foremost concern about his mother's death is that they will be stuck with the mess that is her hoarded house. Her children seem to not care about her just as much as she does not care about the garbage in her house. Augustine is portrayed as someone who chose garbage over her children and is in denial about it. This idea of caring for stuff rather than for people, is another recurring theme in the representation of hoarders.

Lack of agency

When a subject is desubjectified, he or she is stripped from his or her human characteristics and capacities. A monster or an alien is not only unidentifiable with from the audience's perspective, it will also not be very likely to change, or be cured like the patient subjects were or were supposed to in the previous episode. When a hoarder fails to take action and/or responsibility for their hoard, they are undoubtedly placed into a monstrous discourse.

An example of this phenomenon is when dr. Suzanne Chabaud visits Augustine. Like every other episode, the hoarder takes the expert on a tour around the cluttered house. Dr. Chabaud is introduced a clinical psychologist who specializes in Obsessive Compulsive Disorders (OCD). When they walk around, Augustine has a lot of excuses and blames other people for the state of her house. In the mean time the camera cuts to dr. Chabaud who explains Augustine's

pathology in a talking head shot. According to her, Augustine will not see why she has to do anything about her cluttered home, because she tends to externalize the problem. In other words, she blames other people and fails to take responsibility.

This scene and more importantly dr. Chabaud's interpretation of this scene explicates what the viewer should think of Augustine's behavior. The talking head shot of the expert can be seen as a guideline on how to interpret Augustine's pathology. Dr. Chabaud repeats that Augustine isn't capable of taking responsibility for the hoarding. In extension this means that Augustine is also not capable of changing her behavior. This robs Augustine of the potential to be 'fixed' like the hoarders in the first chapter. Dr. Chabaud's particular interpellation of Augustine leaves her as a passive object who is not capable of change.

Another instance where Augustine is presented as very passive is a little later during the cleanout, Susan finds a picture of her grandmother and she decides to keep it. She states that her mother doesn't deserve to have it. This lack of sympathy summarizes the general attitude towards Augustine. The camera cuts between Susan and Jason who are cleaning, and Augustine who is sitting on her rocking chair on the porch. She talks about the stuff that she occasionally finds at the side of the road and brings home, while her children are frantically cleaning her house. In figure 2.1 Augustine is filmed in her rocking chair, while one of the crew members comes to her to ask for her permission to throw something away. The cuts between Susan and Jason cleaning, and Augustine in the rocking chair, are a stark contrast. The montage enhances the contrast between Susan and Jason, who are working hard, and Augustine who is doing nothing and sitting in her chair.

This scene painfully shows Augustine's lack of agency. The things that have been repeated throughout this episode: she is lazy, she is entitled, she takes no responsibility etc. are visually proven by showing Augustine doing nothing while her children clean her house. To top it off, Susan calls her mother a pig.

This scene shows the lack of agency Augustine has. He cannot or does not want to help in any way. Moreover the experts, family members and cleaning crew do not seem to be very motivated to help her either. As opposed to the examples I gave in the previous chapter, Augustine cannot be cured or fixed. Instead of being subjectified into a mental health patient she is desubjectified.

Camera movement

One technique I have mentioned briefly in the first and second chapter I would like to expand on in this chapter is the camera movement. In particular the sudden zoom-ins that are paired with a recurring musical theme. In the previous chapters I have mentioned scenes where the television show uses these techniques. Throughout the series they are used to create dramatic effect during particular moments.

Typically, somewhere in the beginning of the episode, the camera takes a tour around the cluttered house. The camera moves through the corridors and films inside every room of the hoarded home. So called tracking- or dolly shots have as an effect that the viewer sees themselves as moving along with the frame. The camera moves as a person would, climbing through the filled up house. These tracking shots are usually shown in fast-motion. The shot is exposed at fewer frames per second than the projection, this makes the screen action look speeded up (Bordwell & Thompson 2012: 172).

The effect this has it that it gives the viewer an indication of the size of the hoard in a relatively short amount of time. What is most interesting about these scene's is that usually, the camera will move through the house until it suddenly stops. It will seek out the most vile object in the hoard and zoom in quickly to an extreme close-up shot of whatever item is the nastiest amongst the rubble. This creates a sense of shock on the viewers part. Not only is the item filmed in extreme detail, the quick zoom-in makes it seem as if the item is coming at the spectator.

An interesting scene where this is the case happens in season two, when the cleaners find a dead cat in the hoarder's home. Figure 2.2 shows the cat that is found amongst the rubble. It has been dead for quite some time and it is crushed by the weight of the rubble that has accumulated on top of it in the course of the years. A crewmember holds it up while the camera zooms in quickly. In the background we hear the ominous horror-like motif cranking up while the camera zooms in. In this case the same technique is used to zoom in on the dead cat the crew member is holding, but mostly the sudden zoom ins are mostly used to seek out exceptionally vile objects while the camera tours around the house. These items are used to give the viewer a sense of the hoarder's house and the hoarder's psyche. '[The camera] seeks out particular commodities that might explain the chaos. [...] Amidst an ocean of indistinguishable garbage, the cameras find some discrete and vivid object that might help map out the hoarded house and the hoarding psyche' (Boyle & Mrozowski 2013: 194).

A perfect illustration for this phenomenon can be found in season two. Hoarder Jill explains how she has experienced extreme hunger and poverty in her childhood. As a result she has started to hoard food. When the camera moves around her cluttered home, it zooms in on particular items that help explain her anxiety. Figure 2.3 Is a still from the shot where the camera zooms in on the rotting food around Jill's house. In the middle of the garbage and unidentifiable objects that are scattered around the house, the camera zooms in on rotting food that drips out from the layers of debris.

To conclude the fast camera movements create a sense of shock. In the example of the dead cat it makes him seem like he is coming at the camera. Strengthened by the cranking music we have seen throughout all the seasons of *Hoarders*, the filming techniques create a sense of shock and disgust of the viewer. Moreover by seeking out particular items throughout the trash,

the camera gives the viewer an glimpse into the psyche of the hoarder. The objects that the camera zooms in on are usually objects that help map out the particular anxiety of the hoarder in question.

Music

The same musical theme is recurring in each episode of hoarders. Every time a particularly nasty item is sought out and examined thoroughly by the camera, the same musical motif will be playing in the background. Moreover, every time a hoarder does something out of the ordinary, such as laughing at the sludge in the fridge, the music cranks up. The music increases in volume quickly and abruptly stops, creating a horror-like atmosphere. By using the same kind of music every time a hoarder does something 'disgusting' it creates a motif that continues throughout the series. The musical motif starts out discretely and when the camera finds the object it wants to accentuate, the music will crank up. There is no melody or rhythm to it, only some strings that are playing the same tone in minor.

In *Hoarders*, we are repeatedly subjected to images of cat feces, rat feces, human feces, skeletons of dead cats, and even the tears on the faces of broken family members, underscored by downbeat and frightening music leitmotifs borrowed from horror films. (Foster 2014: 31).

Foster compares the musical motifs along with the shocking imagery to horror films. In horror films, teeth grinding musical motifs are used to create suspense and a feeling of discomfort for the viewer. They usually announce something bad is about to happen. The shock effect of the camera who seeks out the most vile items in the hoard, is enhanced by the suspense that is created by the recurring musical theme of the series.

The analogy of the horror film fits well with the representation of the hoarders as being grotesque monsters. I propose that the music and the camera movements are yet another way to create a distance between the viewer and the hoarder. They make sure that the hoarder is in no way relatable or identifiable. Instead they strengthen the image of the hoarder as the nasty 'other' who lives in garbage and is by extension garbage him- of herself.

A night in the hoarder's den

Finally there is one scene that occurs a couple of times throughout the series that I haven't described yet that also fits very well with the analogy between *Hoarders* and horror films. A couple of times throughout the series, Cory Chalmers decides to stay the night in the house of a hoarder. This happens more so in the later seasons of hoarders. The scene I will be analyzing is from the sixth season of hoarders. In the first episode of the season, Doug is one of the hoarders that is introduced. Chalmers is a self proclaimed hoarding expert and will lead the team of

cleaners the day after his sleepover. The purpose of the sleepover is to get a feeling what it is actually like to live like a hoarder.

In the case of Doug, the scene proceeds as follows. Chalmers introduces himself as an extreme cleaner who is specialized in biohazard and extreme hoarding. He joins Doug for the night while he is going about his normal activities. They go through the trash of the local supermarket together to find lottery tickets. This is part of Doug's daily routine. Afterwards, Doug leaves Chalmers alone in his house, so he can experience firsthand what it is like to sleep in a hoarder's home. Chalmers explores the house with a flashlight and a night vision camera. It seeks out giant spiders, lizards and other bugs, while the same horror-like music I have described in the previous paragraph is cranking in the background. Chalmers uses the night camera to keep a diary of his experiences of the night. He emphasizes that he doesn't understand how Doug is able to sleep like this. 'This is just no way to live', he says while the night camera is alternating between shots of giant spiders and lizards that are crawling around, and extreme close-ups of Chalmers face. Chalmers keeps mentioning the noise that the insects make is everywhere.

In these types of scenes the horror-effect is exaggerated. The entering of an abandoned house, asylum or other 'haunted' place to spend the night, is a recurring theme in innumerable horror films. The equation between a hoarders home and a haunted place, implies yet again that the hoarder is some kind of monster. Even more so, not only does the series use horror-like musical motifs and camera movements such as the ones I have mentioned before, the entire imagery of these scenes is borrowed from horror movies. The handheld camera or 'shaky cam' that is pointed at the face of the person undergoing the horrific event is something that is frequently used in horror films. So called 'found footage horror films' is an entire genre in itself. The effect is that it makes the horror film appear as if the person holding the camera is not an actor but a real person undergoing the horror. This makes the film more 'real' and therefore more scary. In the case of *Hoarders*, Chalmers is not playing a role. Nevertheless the imagery of the handheld shaky camera is a reference to horror movies. The camera alternates between shots of the insects and close-ups of Chalmers face. By pointing the camera at his face his facial expression is shown in detail. His words strengthen the dramatic visuals, he describes the noise of the bugs and keeps repeating that 'this is no way to live'. The night vision camera limits the scope of the camera even more, creating more suspense and contrast in the image.

In scenes like these the hoarder are placed in a monstrous discourse without them even being present. Their house is presented as some sort of haunted house. Discursively Chalmers reaffirms how hard it is to not run away from the scene. Scenes like these create parallels between *Hoarders*, which is a documentary *series* and horror films, particularly found footage horror films.

Conclusion chapter three

Techniques borrowed from horror movies are used to create an atmosphere of sensation and suspense. The analogy of the horror film fits well with the representation of the hoarders as being grotesque monsters. I propose that the music and the camera movements are yet another way to create a distance between the viewer and the hoarder.

The horror-like atmosphere is exaggerated in scenes where one of the hoarding experts visits the house of the hoarder for the night. The imagery of these shots exaggerate the nastiness and the shock effect of the house, as well as it presents the hoarders as grotesque monsters with a haunted den for a house. The narrative structure of the episodes contribute to this sense of shock. Moreover by cutting back and forth between the stories of two hoarders, it becomes more difficult to distinguish one hoarder from the other. This depersonalizes them

Secondly, by drawing attention to particularly vile items in the hoard, and repeating how nasty it is to even be around the place the hoarder calls home, the hoarder is presented as the 'other'. The camera seeks out exceptionally nasty items while the cleaning crew and family members are dry heaving or in other ways expressing their discomfort. This creates a sense of shock as well as it eliminates all possible ways for the audience to identify with the hoarder.

The hoarders are hardly ever shown while showing emotion. This has implications for the interpretation of this episode. Where other hoarders are represented as being 'sick' and have the ability to be 'cured', Desubjectified hoarders have little or no agency to change their behavior. They are presented as a passive object rather than an active subject.

Desubjectified hoarders are typically placed into a animalistic, extraterrestrial or monstrous discourse. The audience is robbed of any form of identification with the hoarder by presenting the hoarder as something that is not human. The discourse as well as the filming techniques contribute to the desubjectification. Through visual and discursive means, they are represented as monstrous. They don't care about their situation, their family or anything else for that matter. They are continuously presented as people who chose their hoard over their family and/or friends. Visually they become one with the trash and it is accentuated how they feel comfortable being one with the trash. This makes that the hoarders I've discussed in this chapter have little or no agency to change their behavior, as opposed to the hoarders I've presented in the first chapter.

What both representations of the different 'types' of hoarders have in common, is that they create a distance between the viewer and the hoarding subject. This way, the television series presents to its viewers what is 'normal' and what is not. By creating a distance between them (the hoarders) and us ('normal people'), hoarding is presented as an individual problem of a few Americans who are in no way shape or form identifiable with its audience.

Finally *Hoarders* uses all these different techniques to desubjectify the hoarders. By

stripping the hoarders from their human characteristics, the audience is less prone to identify oneself with the hoarder. The series depicts these people as a spectacle for its audience to watch and judge, no doubt making them feel superior in the process. By doing so, the series fails to hold a mirror up to its audience. It fails to encourage America to critically contemplate and discuss their own (consumption)behavior.

Conclusion

The first chapter uncovered in what ways American consumerism functions as an ideology. *Hoarders* is an ideological state apparatus that governs the behavior of its subjects. The medicalization and/or pathologization of certain behaviors is another way to govern the behavior of subjects. In the dominant hegemony of neoliberalism, individuals are first and foremost engaged as consumers. the ideology of consumerism compels its subjects to invest all their desire in commodities. In some sense, the hoarders that are depicted in the television series *Hoarders*, are only being extremely good consumers. They invest their commodities with so much value and emotional attachment that often, the stuff is more important to them than anything else in their life including their family members. Commodity fetishism is at the heart of the hoarder's pathology as it is presented in the series. However, by deleting consumerism from the narrative of the series, the series deletes a critique on consumerism as one of its possible readings

The emergence of hoarding as a disease in a culture that is obsessed with consuming is something that is never explored by the series. In the first season there are some links to consumption behavior, in later seasons this is completely left out. Instead past trauma is presented as the reason for the hoarding behavior of the show's participants. In doing so, the series presents hoarding as a strictly individual problem. The American dream is dangerous ideology in the narrative of *Hoarders* because it can cause a lack of empathy for the ones who are at the bottom of the social ladder. This lack of empathy characterizes *Hoarders* and is another reason why the series fails to reflect upon the social realities of contemporary America.

Chapter two showed that the medical discourse plays a major role in the subjectification of these people. When a hoarder is interpellated into a patient, he or she has the agency to react to this subjectification. Phyllis is an example of a hoarder who accepts and reaffirms her subjectification. Her own discourse as well as the discourse of the experts that are present represent her as mental health patient. This representation is enlarged by the visuals of the series, for example through the continuous repetition of her nervous laughter. Hoarder Penny and her son try to reject the subjectification, the result however is that Penny's status as a mental health patient is reaffirmed. The rejection of the hoarder's subjectification is never completely successful. The analysis of hoarder Augustine showed that there is a point where subjectification fails. After this failed subjectification follows desubjectification, a concept I explored in the third and final chapter of this research. Indifference is a recurring theme in the pathologization of the hoarders. To interpellate these individuals as patients has implications for the interpretation of the series. By presenting them as mentally unwell, the series implies hoarding affects only a small percentage of sick Americans. The series fails to contextualise

hoarding in a culture where hyper consumption is the norm. By presenting the hoarders as deviant from the norm, it establishes the status quo.

The third and last chapter of this research contains an analysis of the desubjectification of the hoarders. After the failing of the subjectification of some of the hoarders, follows desubjectification. Animalistic, monstrous or extraterrestrial discourses are recurring in the representation of these hoarders. By presenting the hoarders as being non-human. The series gives its viewers no way to identify with the hoarders. Whereas a patient has the agency to change and be cured, an alien has no power to ever change. Music, camera movements and some special parts of the narrative structure of *Hoarders* are borrowed from horror movies. This draws a parallel between the hoarder and a monster. These visual techniques represent the hoarder as a grotesque spectacle that is only interesting for the viewer to look at and/or laugh at. By denying any identification, the series prevents the series from holding up a mirror to its audience.

To answer my research question: the television series *Hoarders* produces the ideology of consumerism in an ambiguous way. On the one hand it shows the result of hyper consumption. On the other hand it fails to recognize consumption in its narrative. Moreover by presenting the hoarder as a mental health patient or a grotesque spectacle, the series prevents its audience from identifying oneself with the hoarder. Making the audience feel superior to the hoarder is another way in which *Hoarders* reaffirms the consumerist ideology.

In my hypothesis I suspected the representation of the hoarders would be done in such a way that it would create a distance between the hoarder and the audience. I predicted that the hoarder would be subjectified into being somehow 'different', reducing the possibilities for identification and therefore critical reflection of one's own behavior. After the completion of this research I note that the series does create a distance between its audience and the hoarder through visual and discursive means. The emphasis on personal drama and the removal of consumption narratives in the series presents hoarding as an individual problem of a few sick Americans. If the hoarders are subjectified as mental patients, there is no way they can resist this subjectification. I should add to this that the visual techniques that are most successful in framing the hoarder in such a way are borrowed from horror films. Camera movements and musical motifs create a sense of shock and suspension, while at the same time drawing parallels between the hoarder and a monster. The analogy between the hoarder and the monster from a scary movie is significant. Moreover by a repeating emphasis on the smell, the hoarder is desubjectified even more. By representing the hoarders as lacking in care and emotion, they are presented as non-human and therefore unidentifiable. This particular way of framing the hoarders has as an effect that the viewer is prone to feeling superior to the filthy hoarder. This again removes any kind of critical reflection on the act of hoarding on a broader scale,

reaffirming the status quo.

In a culture where we are constantly bombarded with advertisements telling us to consume in order to be happy, I think it is important for everyone to critically engage in a debate about our own personal consumption. The belief that commodities somehow have the power to change our lives is omnipresent. It is important that we are able to draw parallels between the behavior of the hoarder and our own behavior. I am not saying that the disease of hoarding is made up somehow, I am only noting that it is significant that it is popping up in this moment in time. The pathology of the hoarder is in many ways relatable to many of our own personal shopping habits. If one would draw the parallels between the hoarder and oneself, then this might lead to a critical debate about the underlying irrationality of the consumerist ideology. Moreover this might lead to more understanding and more empathy for the hoarders as well as for other people who are at the bottom of the social ladder.

The hegemony of neoliberalism does not limit itself to the United States. Many countries, particularly in the west of Europe, have the same dominant ideology. It would be interesting to compare the analysis of *Hoarders* which is produced in the United States, to an analysis of a similar program that is produced in Europe. The format of *Hoarders* is widely adapted throughout different countries and continents. Especially because I am linking *Hoarders* with the particular consumer culture that characterizes America, it would be interesting to see if these links can also be found in other parts of the world. Even though consumer culture is wide spread, no country is exactly the same and it would be interesting to compare it to for example The Dutch version which is called *Mijn Leven In Puin*.

Moreover another interesting aspect of the series that remains untouched after this research is the potential change that might occur in the representation of the hoarders after the official pathologization of the act of hoarding. As I've mentioned before, hoarding was not considered as disease in its own right until 2013. At this point *Hoarders* was already in its seventh season. The official status of disease might change the way in which these hoarders are represented. In this research I have many times mentioned the lack of empathy that the series shows to the hoarders. The official medicalization of hoarding as a medical condition might change the way the experts and the family members of the sufferer talk about the hoarding subject.

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Television series

Hoarders. Bryant, Butts, Chan, Kelly, Mckillop, Morgan, Severson (2009-2016) United States: the Arts & Entertainment network.

Appendix

Film still 1.0



Hoarders. Bryant, Butts, Chan, Kelly, Mckillop, Morgan, Severson (2011) United States: the Arts & Entertainment network. Season 4. Episode 1.

Film still 1.1



Hoarders. Bryant, Butts, Chan, Kelly, Mckillop, Morgan, Severson (2009) United States: the Arts & Entertainment network. Season 1. Episode 1.

Film still 1.2



Hoarders. Bryant, Butts, Chan, Kelly, Mckillop, Morgan, Severson (2011) United States: the Arts & Entertainment network. Season four. Episode 1.

Film still 2.0



Hoarders. Bryant, Butts, Chan, Kelly, Mckillop, Morgan, Severson (2011) United States: the Arts & Entertainment network. Season 4. Episode 1.

Film still 2.1



Hoarders. Bryant, Butts, Chan, Kelly, Mckillop, Morgan, Severson (2009) United States: the Arts & Entertainment network. Season 2. Episode 1.

Film still 2.2



Hoarders. Bryant, Butts, Chan, Kelly, Mckillop, Morgan, Severson (2009) United States: the Arts & Entertainment network. Season 2. Episode 1.

Film still 2.3



Hoarders. Bryant, Butts, Chan, Kelly, Mckillop, Morgan, Severson (2011) United States: the Arts & Entertainment network. Season four. Episode 1.