

An Analysis of Marxist Culture in Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom* (2010): The Spectacle of Reification

Mohammed Taqi Jabbar AbdulAmeer (Corresponded Author) ⁽¹⁾

Asst. Prof. Asmaa Mukaram Saeed ⁽²⁾

⁽¹⁾ Department of English Language, College of Education (IBN RUSHD) For Human Sciences, University of Baghdad, Iraq mohammed.abd2307m@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq

⁽²⁾ Department of English Language, College of Education (IBN RUSHD) For Human Sciences, University of Baghdad, Iraq asmaa.alsadon@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq

Copyright (c) 2026 Mohammed Taqi Jabbar AbdulAmeer. Asst. Prof. Asmaa Mukaram Saeed

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31973/nzjajj49>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Publication Dates

(Received 2025-05-21) (Revised 2025-06-11) (Accepted 2025-06-12) (Published 2026-09-15)

Abstract:

This paper deals with Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Freedom* (2010) through a Marxist perspective. Marxism is a literary theory that deals with many aspects of life, cultures, or ideologies, such as reification, which was coined by György Lukács (1885-1971). Reification is a Marxist perspective, which means human values like friendship, morality, and ethics are changed to valueless things by imposing materialistic consciousness on the middle class. György Lukács's theory of reification applies to the novel *Freedom* (2010) in many parts, such as social and moral dilemmas of reification, environmental reification, and consumerism as the negative perspective of reification. The final part elaborates on technological reification, which is when the capitalists employ technology as a means of increasing their materialistic profits.

Keywords: Marxist reification, materialistic consciousness, and *Freedom*

تحليل الثقافة الماركسية في كتاب جوناثان فرانزن "الحرية" (2010): مشهد التشيؤ

محمد تقي جبار عبد الأمير (المؤلف المراسل) أ.م.د. أسماء مكرم سعيد
قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية التربية (ابن رشد) كلية العلوم الإنسانية (ابن رشد) للعلوم
للعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة بغداد، العراق الإنسانية، جامعة بغداد، العراق

تواريخ المنشور

الإستلام	النسخة النهائية	الموافقة	النشر الإلكتروني
(2025/5/21)	(2025/6/11)	(2025/6/12)	(2026/9/15)

(مُلَخَّصُ البَحْث)

تتناول هذه الدراسة رواية جوناثان فرانزن "الحرية" (2010) من منظور ماركسي. الماركسية نظرية أدبية تتناول جوانب عديدة من الحياة والثقافات والأيدولوجيات، مثل التشيؤ الذي صاغه جيورجي لوكاش (1885-1971). التشيؤ منظور ماركسي، يعني تحويل القيم الإنسانية كالصداقة والأخلاق إلى أشياء لا قيمة لها بفرض وعي مادي على الطبقة الوسطى. تنطبق نظرية جيورجي لوكاش في التشيؤ على رواية "الحرية" (2010) في جوانب عديدة، مثل العضلات الاجتماعية والأخلاقية للتشيؤ، والتشيؤ البيئي، والاستهلاكية كمنظور سلبي للتشيؤ. يتناول الجزء الأخير التشيؤ التكنولوجي، وهو عندما يستخدم الرأسماليون التكنولوجيا كوسيلة لزيادة أرباحهم المادية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التشيؤ الماركسي، الوعي المادي، والحرية

Introduction

Freedom (2010), written by American author Jonathan Franzen, was published on August 31, 2010, and it adapted for television in 2020. Franzen shows to reader how individuals extricate themselves from capitalistic restrictions in the material world; however, this novel deals with social issues, which are the primary cause of writing this novel. In “Jonathan Franzen Will Go Down Swinging” (2010), Benjamin Alsup deals with the idea that this novel has been hailed as a masterpiece of American fiction by some critics, while others call it a great American novel. It is the best-selling novel of 2010 because it discusses important events that occurred in the United States. Some critics view it as worth reading because Franzen concentrates on truth; however, it covers genuine and vivid events that occurred in America (Hidalga, 2015, pp. 12-13).

Jonathan Franzen uses the story of marriage in *Freedom* (2010) to critique many facets of modern materialistic American life, which are both

tragic and humorous. Franzen's desire to attract readers to his novel is the primary motivator for his use of satire in tackling societal problems. *Freedom* deals with enigmatic or ridiculous situations, such as when someone swallows his wedding ring and then uses his fingers to find it in his ordure, or when a stunning woman who is not his wife arrives at his door and he has an emotional affair with her. Due to the ambiguous events of contemporary materialistic times, *Freedom* (2010) is a postmodern tale with numerous ugly elements, which are described with absurdity (Dolińska, 2014, p. 181).

2. Synopsis

Freedom, Jonathan Franzen deals with the Berglund family, which consists of Walter Berglund, his wife Patty Berglund, and their children Joey and Jessica. They live in St. Paul, Minnesota. Walter, a lawyer, politician, and environmental activist, founded the “Cerulean Mountain Trust” (Franzen, 2010, p. 186) to stop the warblers from becoming extinct. He suffers from the impact of the capitalistic world

since he represents hypocrisy, because he supports the environment on one side, and he works with a coal company that destroys the natural environment to serve their financial benefits. Walter's environmental enterprise collapses when it's revealed that Vin Haven, owner of Cerulean Mountain Trust, was secretly planning to exploit the land for coal mining. Patty, a former basketball player, battles her unfulfilled objectives and her responsibilities as a housewife. She also dates Richard Katz, Walter's friend, but she breaks up with him and returns to her husband to spend the rest of her life with Walter. Joey is the son of the Berglund family, who travels to Iraq with "Restore Iraqi Secular Enterprise Now" (Franzen, 2010, p. 388), which is the business unit he works for. This corporation in Iraq is in charge of the industry, and he uses oligopolistic trade to obtain money; however, he marries Connie, who is older, and this marriage goes against the will of his parents. After Joey engages in many romantic affairs with many women, he lives his life with his wife

Connie. Jessica is the daughter of the Berglund family, who is rebellious and opposes her brother. She lives a successful and independent life in New York, away from the Berglund family conflicts. Walter's close friend and musician Richard Katz supports environmental activities, and Walter leaves him after he engages in romantic affairs with Patty. Lalitha, who works as Walter's assistant at the "Cerulean Mountain Trust" (Franzen, 2010, p. 186), has intimate relations with Walter before being murdered in an automobile accident.

3. Social and moral dilemma of reification

The process of turning interpersonal relationships, morality, behavior, and possessions into materialistic qualities or commodities is known as reification (Bottomore, 2001, p. 463). The first aspect of social and moral reification is the reification of the environment, because if there is a good environment, social and moral aspects will be saved. The suburban and agricultural area where the Berglund family lives is one of the many instances of social

and moral reification in this novel. This explanation indicates that the upper class shapes the public's perception of the place, in addition to sharing everything, including food and place, the agrarian community also has close relationships and warm feelings. The suburban community also knows each other well, so they save their viewpoints, assessments, and remarks about each other, which shape the perception and reputation of the Berglund family. The individual's consciousness is shaped by society's consciousness, which means a person should behave in a way that society considers him, as György Lukács claims (Cherrier and Ponnor, 2010, pp. 9-10).

Walter as an environmental activist, protects nature from devastation by the capitalists which means the capitalist system restricts the freedom of humans since nature is the source of freedom and relief for all individuals to obtain materialistic profits to obtain materialistic benefits. Franzen demonstrates reification intertwined with moral hypocrisy in the material world

through Walter, who supports nature from one side and works for a "coal company" (Franzen, 2010, p. 341) that destroys the environment from another side. Walter's work with the coal company means he views nature as a valueless commodity since this company cuts trees to make roads for vehicles, also burning trees to change to coal (Katari, 2022, p. 4216). The materialistic characters attribute their material success to happiness, so for this reason, he works with a coal company (Nelson, 2013, p. 5-8). Walter is associated with social and moral reification, due to his romantic relationship with his co-worker Lalitha, who shares Walter's conservative views, which means the capitalists impose capitalistic consciousness on Walter in a way that restricts his freedom to live with his wife, since he has romantic affairs with Lalitha. The social consciousness is against Walter because materialistic self-perception makes Walter reify humanism, ethics, morality, and identity into valueless things. In *Negative Dialectics*, Theodore Adorno discusses the idea that

people are more concerned with their bodily desires and materialistic possessions than with their spirits and metaphysical side (Adorno, 2004, pp. 92-93). Walter is an excellent example of this critical viewpoint because he has romantic affairs while he is married (Hashem, 2022, p. 550). He interacts with Lalitha romantically, when he is alone with her

She put her tongue to his lips, and he opened them to let her in [...] Her shoulders, as he gripped them through her nylon shell, seemed to be all bone and baby fat and no muscle, all eager pliability. She straightened her back and bore down on him, pushing her hips into his chest (Franzen, 2010, p. 336).

Patty is a famous basketball player who meets Walter at the University of Minnesota. She is also egotistical and envious of the materialistic world, and he tries to appear content in her role as a housewife, but she is picky. When her son starts dating the neighbor's girl next door, the situation becomes clear that Patty's competitive attitude corrupts her moral and human

qualities because she thinks she deserves more emotional care from her son than Connie. She has awful memories of being a victim because she was raped as a teenager by a materialistic boy, and no one showed concern for her feelings after the incident. Patty emotionally cares about her son since she recognizes the negative impact results on an individual when no one cares about him. Patty tries to advise her son because he has had numerous failed romantic connections with women. She considers her son's predicament a threat to her. Patty is upset because her handsome child disobeys her orders, and she also hates her neighbor Carol Monaghan for not owning a big house like Patty's and for not living in New York, thus, she does not have the same materialistic possessions as Patty (Zinkel, 2012, pp. 24-26). Walter reifies Patty, which means he treats her as a valueless commodity or unimportant thing, not as a human being with emotions, because he leaves her to engage with Lalitha in a romantic liaison. Walter leaves Patty for his romantic affairs with Lalitha, but the intimate

relationship between Walter and Patty rekindled after Lalitha's death. Richard Katz has pleased his physical desire, and then he left her, and Joey reifies Patty, which means he views her not as a sentimental individual, but as an insignificant object in the family, so for this reason, he disobeys her. Patty's culture is affected by social awareness since she wants to be ideal in the minds of people in her community (Hidalga, 2015, p. 244).

Characters make choices that go against their moral values; notwithstanding, the Berglunds struggle to balance between their private desires and social obligations. For example, Patty, who suffers from mental illness due to depression and childhood sexual assault. As she was raped in her childhood by Ethan who is the son of a powerful, political and materialistic family of "the Posts" (Franzen, 2010, p. 38), when she was swimming with him in the same pool during the party of Patty's family with other families. Patty inadvertently accepted Ethan's offer to engage in a romantic relationship with her

when she was drunk, some critics believe that Patty chose to violate their moral principles, which means the capitalist boy, Ethan restricts freedom of Patty from being a sane individual because he rapes her and this action makes Patty psychologically unusable (Zinkel, 2012, p. 28). Franzen describes first experience of Patty to have intimate relationship with male:

As far as actual sex goes, Patty's first experience of it was being raped at a party when she was seventeen by a boarding-school senior named Ethan Post (Franzen, 2010, p. 35).

Joey reifies his morality when he becomes materialistic. He does not obey his parents; however, Walter tells Joey how children should obey their parents because parents have money, and they spend it on their children; moreover, the main reason behind that is that parents are mature, so they have money. A capitalistic system disregards authority and maturity because, according to Walter Berglund, money is synonymous with maturity. In addition, this issue makes Joey demand more money, which

leads him to rebel against his parents to fulfill his ambition of becoming financially independent (Zinkel, 2012, pp. 25-27). Until he achieves enormous financial wealth, Joey's identity is diminished to money, and he looks at himself without value until he gets huge economic wealth; moreover, he claims, "I am taxidermist to the ruling class" (Franzen, 2010, p. 12). Joey's focus is on fiscal possessions for marriage; however, Joey's marriage to Connie Monaghan distances him from his parents, and he does not emotionally respond to them (Nelson, 2013, pp. 5-6).

Although Connie betrays Joey, and she reifies herself by eliminating her humanity and morals, yet, reification is harmful because it is linked to materialism. Connie loves Joey, and he appreciates her warm love, but later on, she changes because she has a romantic affair with her manager, which means Connie's capitalist manager restricts her freedom to marry and start a family because he engages with her in unreal romantic affairs to satisfy his physical desire. Connie becomes estranged from Joey, which negatively

affects her because it leads to psychological problems (Hashem, 2022, p. 550).

Jessica is the daughter of Walter and Patty, and she rebels against her parents. She also dehumanizes herself by losing her ethics, morals, and humanity, which makes her a less respectable member of her family; however, she is the complete opposite of Joey. Jessica aspires to be the leader of her family, and she has a rivalry with her brother. She is compared to a commodity in the Berglund family because no one cares about her emotions. She pursues education for materialistic success, which means she commodifies her knowledge to obtain valueless money; however, anything compared to money loses its value, according to Georg Simmel (Gram, 2015, p. 301). Jessica's reification of her mother, which entails reducing her to nothing of worth, is linked to both social and moral reification. Patty emotionally attempts to associate with her daughter, but Jessica is adamant about avoiding her mother, and she wants to be free from familial control. When Patty visits Philadelphia, she sees her

daughter and her boyfriend William together. Patty attempts to spend time with Jessica as a family, but Jessica refuses because she wants to be independent to boost her materialistic wealth. At the end of the novel, Jessica accepts the complexities of her family relationships and lives away from her family (Hashem, 2022, p. et al. 549).

Richard is a friend of both Walter and Patty. His music embodies freedom, revolt, and the intricacies of interpersonal relationships. He rejects Patty's temptations because he respects his friend Walter. Richard Katz initiates a romantic relationship with Patty; nonetheless, this illustrates his reification of morals, as he regards friendship with Walter as inconsequential (Zinkel, 2012, p. 25). One of the reasons Patty leaves Richard Katz is because of the reification of racism, which is associated with his dark complexion. Materialistic people impose a consciousness on the middle class that distinguishes between white and black complexions because the upper class believes that white people are superior to black people; moreover, this

capitalistic consciousness restricts the freedom of black people to live normal lives with whites without oppression. Similar circumstances with Lalitha, who has dark skin, and Richard Katz despises her due to her black complexion (Hidalga, 2015, p. 85).

According to Jonathan Franzen, people find happiness and freedom through materialistic and physical benefits, but he finds it by upholding human values. In contemporary storytelling, characters who have faced hardships eventually find happiness. Patty, Walter, Joey, and Jessica will not be free or happy until they can escape the negative effects of social and moral reification (ibid).

4. Environmental Reification

Environmental reification means that the environment is being reduced to an unimportant thing, which indicates that this kind of reification deals with the devastation of the environment (Honneth 98). Walter Berglund deals with several issues that affect the environment, such as overpopulation and damaging habits. Walter commodifies the environment because the coal

firm destroys the mountains to obtain materialistic benefits. Trees are also less valuable than money, and anything that is compared with money loses its worth. The “coal company” (Franzen, 2010, p. 341) does not consider trees living creatures; instead, they consider them worthless commodities to satisfy materialistic demands. The coal corporation turns thousands of green spaces into bare spaces, and it ruins nature by removing mountaintops, especially “Appalachian” (Franzen, 2010, p. 210) mountaintops, where birds construct nests. The main connection between Marxism and environmental elements such as birds and trees is that the capitalists view these natural elements, which are living creatures, like the middle class because the capitalists can exploit all of these living creatures to obtain materialistic profits. The birds stand for freedom that is restricted by the capitalists, who exploit nature in a way that forces birds to immigrate from America to other places like the Americans who live in the suburbs, they leave the countryside since they lose their plantations and they

go to a city that is filled with capitalists who prevent the suburban people from living freely (Gonzalez, 2015, pp. 11-15) Franzen describes the capitalistic exploitation of the natural environment through a materialistic organization that is a coal company:

A coal company can exercise its mineral rights and tear down a mountain, it has to put up a bond that doesn't get refunded until the land's been restored. And the problem is, these owners keep settling for these barren, flat, subsidence-prone pastures, in the hope that some developer will come along and build luxury condos on them [...] biodiverse forest if you do the reclamation right (Franzen, 2010, p. 214).

Rebecca K. Smith refers to individuals who reify or commercialize nature as “eco-terrorists,” which means those who look to nature without importance because she considers terror comes from systemic environmental devastation, since nature is a reason for human survival in the materialistic world. The executive director of “Cerulean Mountain Trust” (Franzen, 2010, p. 186), Walter Berglund

works with the capitalists such as Vin Haven, whose wife, Kiki, loves birds and she is friends with George and Laura Bush, the ruling This idea means that the capitalists use politics as a facility to exploit nature because the capitalist politicians impose their political laws and rules on the middle class in a way that restricts the freedom of the middle class who loses their land since it is destroyed to build factories and make roads, as a result, the capitalists gain materialistic benefits like what happened with Coyle Mathias, who has a large plantation in West Virginia, which is exploited by the capitalists like Vin Haven. Franzen demonstrates that the materialistic upper class pretends to preserve the environment, while they contribute to its ruin (Hidalga, 2015, p. 33). The capitalists lack concern for defending the environment, and the fact that materialistic people reify birds that stand for freedom because they look to birds as unimportant objects, which means the capitalists restrict freedom of the American society (Hidalga, 2015, p. 365).

Franzen describes human ignorance of environmental biodiversity:

Most people aren't aware of the degree to which free-roaming outdoor cats are a problem in this country. At least a million birds a day are killed by them, so we're talking about a minimum of 365 million birds in America alone in the course of a year — perhaps as many as a billion (Franzen, 2010, p. 545).

Richard Katz criticizes capitalism for its influence on nature. He explains why he believes politics is against development because upper-class people use everything to satisfy their materialistic cravings. As a conservative who opposes liberal, materialistic politics and ethics, Richard Katz engages in romantic relationships with many women like Patty, Herrera, Elli Posada, and Eliza, for mating or physical gratification, which indicates he believes in pointless or unproductive coitus (Gram, 2015, p. 297). Katz's political consciousness diverges from the futurist imperative, and his view supports the futuristic materialistic worldview that

portrays death because he does not believe in creating something for the future. The capitalists shape the consciousness of Richard and his grandmother in way they oppose reproduction or having children, also they are driven to death because they believe that population growth destroys the environment and leads to international war, as a result, Katz spends the rest of his life alone, which means the capitalists shapes the consciousness of Katz in a way that prevents him from being free to marry and start a family (Nandhini and Saburnnisa, 2022, pp. 4402-4403).

Richard is impacted by his professor Adelman, his mentor and lecturer, who discusses the detrimental influence on government, such as the issue of population growth. Jonathan Franzen deals with population growth, which was a major topic of public discussion in the 1970s with Paul Ehrlich, the Club of Rome, and ZPG (zero population growth). Starvation is one of the negative effects of population growth, even though it is a component of the green revolution (Zinkel, 2012, p. 63).

Franzen focuses on the problem of overpopulation:

And then population control got a terrible name politically. Totalitarian China with its one-child policy, Indira Gandhi doing forced sterilizations, American ZPG getting painted as nativist and racist (Franzen, 2010, p. 220).

Jonathan Franzen discusses the environmental reification of nature, but not in such a way as to give people the impression that environmental reification poses a threat to the planet. Franzen likes to take care of the environment, birds, and the beauty of nature; moreover, it is like taking care of children. Therefore, when someone is passionate about something, it inspires them to take action (Zinkel, 2012, p. 27).

5. Consumerism as a Negative Perspective of Reification

A Marxist component of reification is consumerism, which maintains that individuals cannot be content or feel good until they consume stuff. It is a basic feature of human nature since it asserts that "I am only as good as what I buy" (qtd. Tyson, 2015, p. 60). In *Freedom* (2010), Jonathan Franzen illustrates

how consumerism is a detrimental effect of reification. Patty, a middle-class woman, for instance, has materialistic items and possessions interwoven with her human identity. Patty wants to make her house the most attractive in all of St. Paul because she is interested in materialistic features. Her identity is reduced to a consumptive object: her home, and she finds happiness in having a beautiful home. Basketball star Patty aspires to be the greatest lady in her community and hopes to marry the most attractive man, have the best children, and buy a fancy car, like she said, "I'll buy a Lexus SUV with my first big commission" (Franzen, 2010, p. 331). All of these things show her interest in shallow materialistic concerns that make her identity dependent on her possessions. The materialistic American system forces people to buy things under the pretense of pursuing the American dream, which means the capitalists restrict the freedom of Americans because the upper class convinces them, they can be happy only if they have materialistic things, so they

restrict their freedom to pursue happiness in material objects (Hashem, 2022, p. et al. 549).

Walter is also associated with consumerism as a negative aspect of reification because of his consumptive behaviour, which is demonstrated by his transactional relationship with the coal company for economic gains. He reifies himself as a worthless commodity, even though he uses deceit or pretext to justify his habit by creating bird sanctuaries. Walter's consumptive drive also reifies the environment, which means he looks at it without value, especially because he works for the coal business that removes the mountaintops, that means Walter limits the freedom of birds since the coal company destroys nests of birds that are on mountaintops. The sanctuaries of the birds stand for the houses and plantations of the suburban people that are destroyed by the capitalists to obtain materialistic benefits. Franzen portrays Walter as an idealistic individual, but his humanity and morals are reified by consumptive desire, which also destroys his idealism (Gram, 2015, p. 300). Many "Cerulean Mountain Trust"

(Franzen, 2010, p. 186) members have ambiguity in their environmental activities; moreover, many supporters of this organization are discontent with cooperation with the coal company because this organization engages with a materialistic coal corporation that devastates the natural environment (Gram, 2015, p. 305).

Joey is associated with consumerism as a pessimistic perspective of reification since he is comparable to the capitalists who exploit everything to make money, in a way that limits the freedom of the middle class by murdering them to obtain financial benefits. Joey supports the “right-wing” (Franzen, 2010, p. 236) political movement that advocates for war against Iraq, pointing out the defense of wealthy people and commercial interests of the Arabic Peninsula’s upper class as the primary justification for this repressive international conflict that is being waged for consumption to enable materialistic capitalists to profit from Iraq. The American capitalists reify the lives of thousands of innocent Iraqis for

their material consumption because they are interested in consumptive needs. The Iraqis are regarded as commodities by the American economic system, as if they were not human. Joey visits Iraq on behalf of RISEN (Restore Iraqi Secular Enterprise Now), a fake business unit to obtain materialistic benefits (Zinkel, 2012, p. 64).

Franzen castigates Richard Katz, a musician, for materialistic culture, which is intertwined with consumerism as a detrimental component of reification. Richard Katz consumes music, a component of American art, to obtain financial gain because he composes poetry and songs to support his political inclinations, which oppose the prevailing political trend. Richard Katz turns American art, culture, and legacy into worthless commodities and money, since he reifies these things. Jonathan Franzen is not only a novelist, but also a poet, so for this reason, he creates the character of Richard Katz to spotlight his skill of rhyming songs that belong to like “TCBY” (Franzen, 2010, p. 143), “I Hate Sunshine”

(Franzen, 2010, p. 144), and “Dark Side of the Bar” (ibid) to convey his feelings about materialistic consumerism. Antonio Gramsci discusses the concept that the art of the middle class is used to obtain materialistic benefits (Zinkel, 2012, p. 29).

Lalitha, Walter’s co-worker at Cerulean Mountain Trust, supports the devastating activities funded by a coal company that involve destroying nature for everyday advantages. Lalitha’s personality becomes complicated and morally ambiguous due to consumptive concerns, since she supports environmental activities and she supports cooperation with a coal company (Gram, 2015, p. 297).

According to Jonathan Franzen, consumerism is a detrimental component of reification that affects everyone; yet, both reification and consumerism are instruments used by capitalists to maintain their control of the working class through various forms of exploitation (Gram, 2015, pp. 310-311).

6. Technological Reification

Materialism and technological reification are linked because middle-class individuals frequently have a materialistic outlook on life, and technology is one facet of reification (Lukács, 2021, p. 112). In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1989), Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno argue that technology undermines human metaphysics and spirituality since it is entwined with materialism, which devalues human values (pp. 5-6). In *Freedom* Jonathan Franzen discusses his ideas about technology and shows how he recognizes its danger to human nature. According to James Wood, technology reifies human connections and feelings by turning people and their emotions into worthless commodities, as in the case of Patty. Patty reduces the human identity of Richard Katz to a worthless commodity rather than meeting him in person, by tracking or tracing his personal life through digital websites, since the capitalists shape the consciousness of the middle class in a way that limits their freedom like Patty that technology become part of her

human life and individual can not live without technology to obtain financial profits from technological productions (Zinkel, 2012, p. 28).

Walter reifies nature through technology by dealing with it as a worthless commodity because he tracks bird conglomeration by using digital data or technological tools, which restricts the freedom of birds by turning these birds into digital numbers or data. Franzen deals with the idea that birds are changed to digital numbers like the people who are also changed to digital numbers since the capitalists enumerate them for the purpose of tackling the problem of overpopulation, so both birds and people lose freedom because of the capitalistic exploitation. Walter uses another aspect of technology that reifies nature, turning it into a commodity by installing a camera in the wild to live-stream birds. This issue indicates that instead of promoting in-person nature visits, he turns wildlife into digital entertainment by promoting viewing it through technological tools. Since the camera transforms nature into a

consumable image (Enderson, 2014, pp. 179-181). The reification of technology occurs when it transforms humans into digital statistical or digital number threats instead of human beings with feelings and ideals of their own, so the technique is reified. Through the use of PowerPoint, Walter reifies nature, reducing the environmental disaster's challenges and complexity to a simplified slide of PowerPoint that is presented to illustrate his concepts (Gram, 2015, pp. 295-596).

There came to her, with curious vividness, a kind of PowerPoint list of names in descending order of their owners' goodness, topped naturally by Walter's, which was followed closely by Jessica's (Franzen, 2010, p. 168).

The loss of morality and ethics is a result of technological reification, and Franzen criticizes capitalists for commodifying human morality as something of little value through the use of technology for watching pornography, such as Joey's addiction to pornography, which is a result of technology's impact because

he uses technology a lot and can't live without it, such as when he uses his friend Jonathan's computer to watch pornography to satisfy his physical desire. Joey uses the phone as part of technology to satisfy his bodily wants by engaging in an intimate relationship with Connie by indulging in "phone sex" (Franzen, 2010, p. 256), which means Joey's technological addiction turns his human emotion into an insignificant thing. In *Carnal Resource: Affect and Online Pornography* (2011), Susanna Paasonen discusses the notion that pornography is emotionless since the middle class watches pornography to satisfy their temporary physical desires without intending to marry to start a family, so there are no real or true human emotions because romantic affairs in pornography are unreal. The capitalists use pornography as a facility to obtain financial benefits without caring about the human emotions of the middle class; moreover, the capitalists restrict the freedom of individuals because pornography prevents them from establishing a real

emotional relationship. Franzen blames people for the overuse of technology that leads to the commercialization of romantic relationships because, rather than getting married and forming close relationships, people today utilize technology to watch pornography to satiate their sexual cravings; moreover, this situation is clear with Joey who later makes amends with his wife Connie and prioritizes a humanistic existence above a financial one (Bingham, 2019, p. 162).

Connie, who spends her free time listening to MP3s, is associated with technical reification, which means she reifies her human identity as a useless commodity. She spends her free time watching television and using the internet, which means technological and materialistic consciousness shapes her consciousness (DeToy, 2015, p. 119).

The technological reification is intertwined with Richard Katz, who produced a digital album of music to sell and obtain money. Franzen blames people for the overuse of technology since it commodifies art and its

subsequent degradation which means technology limits the freedom to create insightful art. The technological reification also exposes Katz's hypocrisy because he claims that he does not intend to use technology to obtain money, but selling albums brings him fame and financial gain. Richard Katz reified his human emotions, which means he changed his emotions into valueless things, when he created physical mixtapes for her by turning them into things. Katz becomes socially and emotionally estranged as a result of utilizing technology, which reveals the boundaries of unqualified art under capitalism. He is another example of technical reification; by creating a digital profile of himself, Katz reduces human identity to a useless digital identity (Gram, 2015, p. 297).

Jonathan Franzen criticizes the detrimental effects of technological reification due to its potentially harmful effects on people. He elaborates on various facets of reification in his upcoming novel. People are reduced to emotionless, human-less robots by technology. People's interactions with

technology have a lot of negative and catastrophic effects (Gram, 2015, p. 551).

CONCLUSION

Since Jonathan Franzen addresses many Marxist topics, such as the effects of materialism on social interactions, familial ties, mental health, and other issues, Franzen's literary works could be interpreted from a Marxist lens. Jonathan Franzen's novel *Freedom* (2010) demonstrates the negative impact of reification in all of its facets.

In *Freedom* familial ties are devastated because the capitalists restrict the freedom of The Berglund family. Patty Berglund struggles in the materialistic world since she loses her morals and social connections because she is interested in materialistic issues like engaging in romantic affairs with Richard Katz and she wants to make her family materialistically ideal. Patty's husband, environmental activist Walter Berglund, has a contradictory personality since he opposes the reification of the environment and he works with the coal firm that destroys the natural environment. Walter has a sexual relationship with his

co-worker, which limits his freedom to live close to his family. Richard Katz engages in many romantic relationships with many women like Patty, which means the capitalistic system limits freedom of Katz to start a family and he spends the rest of his life alone. Joey travels to Iraq to sell military hardware, which means the capitalistic system restricts Joey's freedom to live with his wife. The capitalists impose capitalistic awareness on Jessica, which restricts her freedom to live with her parents.

Characters in this novel struggle with materialistic and capitalistic impacts that restrict their freedom since they can not live a normal life and people live in the capitalistic world against their human innateness, so for this reason, they suffer a lot in their lives. Patty, Walter, and Joey are dissatisfied with their financial benefits, and they risk their lives to get more.

Franzen deals with the idea that capitalists devastate all signs of life from human beings, animals and plants to obtain materialistic benefits.

References

- Adorno, Theodore W (2004). *Negative Dialectics*. Published in the Taylor and Francis Group Print.
- Bingham, Richard William (2019). *Digital Natives: Imagining the Millennial in Contemporary Fiction*. Birmingham University. December. Print.
- Bottomore, Tom (2001). *A Dictionary Marxist Thought*. Second Edition. Blackwell Publishers Ltd. Print.
- Cherrie, Helene and Tresa Ponnor (2010). "A Study of Hoarding Behavior and Attachment to Material Possessions". Skema Business School. Qualitative Market Research an International Journal. January. Print.
- DeToy, Terence (2015). It's All in the Family-Metamodernism and the Contemporary (Anglo-) "American" Novel. ProQuest .Tuft University. August. Print.
- Dolińska, Jagoda (2014). "Autofiction and New Realist Prose: Jonathan Franzen's Freedom". Polish Journal for American Studies. Vol 8. Print.
- Enderson, Thorun Gullaksen (2014). "The Paradox of Freedom in Jonathan Franzen's Freedom". Print.
- Franzen, Jonathan (2010). *Freedom*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. New York. Print.
- Gonzalez, Jesus Angel (2015). *Eastern and Western Promises in Jonathan Franzen's Freedom*. University of Cantabria. June. Print.
- Gram, Margaret Hunt (2015). "Freedom's Limits: Jonathan Franzen, the Realist Novel, and the Problem of Growth". Auckland University. 21, April. Print.
- Hashem, Wahad Khalil, et al (2022). "The Difficulty of Coping in Jonathan Franzen's Freedom". Journal of College of Education. Published: 1 August, 2022. Received: 27 April. Accepted: 23 June, 2022. Print.
- Hidalga, Jesus Blanco (2015). *The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Jonathan Franzen's Fiction*. Print.
- Horkheimer, Max and Theodore Adorno (2002). *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Cultural Memory in the present. Edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Stanford University press. California. Print.
- Katari, Jyothi and P. Rajendra Karmarkar (2022). "Realism and Socialism in the Novels of Jonathan Franzen's Freedom and the Corrections". International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education. Vol 14. Print.
- Lukács, György (2021). *History and Class Consciousness*. Lukacs Archive. Print.
- Nandhini, T and A. Saburnnisa (2022). "A Study of Economic Growth and Environmental Injustice in Jonathan Franzen's Freedom". Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirapalli. Print.
- Nelson, Camillan (2013). "Life, Liberty, Happiness, and Jonathan Franzen's Freedom". Australiasian Journal of American Studies. Notre Dame Australia University. Print.
- Tyson, Lois (2015). *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. Second Edition. London. Print.
- Zinkel, Anna (2012). *Jonathan Franzen and the Future of the Novel: Embracing Change to Hold onto Tradition*. Michigan University. Spring. Print.