

# **Alienation: Identity Crisis under Capitalism**

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## **Abstract**

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This paper analyzes the identity of the alienated worker under capitalism. I claim identity is the coherent understanding of self which is to say the individual recognizes her goals and understands they provide meaning for her life (actions, perceptions, and projects) in a unifying manner. Framing identity in this way, I uncover there are two necessary interacting elements to its appropriate development (meaning and coherence) which I argue can be developed through complete and creative work (non-alienated work). Non-alienated work situates the individual within a context wherein she can articulate self-expression, understand unifying narrative, achieve goals, and cooperate with others to achieve these goals. The inherent features of capitalism (wage labour as exploitation, private property accumulation, and the division of labour) alienate work which makes it difficult for the individual to appropriately identify herself in the manner stated above. These inherent features are manifested in different socio-economic and workplace dynamics complemented by societal responses respective to the stage of capitalism: industrial, monopoly, or flexible capitalism. Since this is the case, I examine how and why the state of alienation differs in each stage of capitalism. Ultimately, I show alienation takes on a deeper and disorienting form under flexible capitalism (1980s to present) because society expresses that the workplace uses liberating practices, while the individual experiences adverse consequences due to the maintenance and intensified invisibility of alienated labour; I assert these conditions are a main contributing factor to contemporary identity crisis (the prevalence of certain psychological illnesses, particularly depression).

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## Introduction

In this paper, I analyze the identity of the alienated worker under capitalism via a theory accounting for the formation of identity through complete and creative work (non-alienated work). I argue non-alienated work enables the individual to develop identity, or the recognition of her personally valuable goals and the understanding that these goals provide meaning for her life in a unifying manner. Under capitalism, work, as a complete process by and through which the individual can develop her abilities and skills, is disrupted. Rather, it is a method by which the individual can satisfy basic needs and desires external to work and the capitalist can generate profit; this is due to capitalism's inherent features of wage-labour as exploitation, accumulation of private property, and the division of labour. Under these conditions, the individual cannot engage with her work in an appropriate or complete way. Consequently, it is difficult for the individual to develop meaningful relations between herself and the world, understand her life as a coherent and unifying narrative, return to herself as a guiding relation in moments of disorientation, or recognize others as necessary and valuable both in relation to herself and in their own right.

Alienation, or the inability to identify oneself as possessing a valuable set of goals that give her life meaning and coherence, embodies itself in different ways according to socio-economic and workplace dynamics complemented by societal justification and response; these factors change in industrial, monopoly, and flexible capitalism<sup>1</sup> producing different consequences for the individual situated in each. With this in mind, I investigate the alienated condition in each stage of capitalism. I determine the industrial worker had an incomplete identity; she could formulate coherent narrative but lacked *personally valuable* teloi. The monopoly worker was presented with education and career opportunities allowing the development of a complete identity; if she could not or did not grasp these opportunities, she was positioned in such a way that she became *identity-less*, forming neither meaning nor coherence. Under flexible capitalism, identity-lessness is prevalent (identity crisis); this is because society expresses that society and the workplace employs liberative practices while the worker suffers the adverse consequences of the intensified invisibility of alienated labour.

My work is divided into three sections. In the first section, I address the components of identity. I, additionally, discuss how non-alienated work facilitates identity development by allowing for the process of objectification, whereby the individual is able to recognize her creation as a reflection of herself. Specifically, the ability to enact the unique aspects of maintained existence, present and future existence, creativity and skill, and cooperation in the transformation of an object allows for the individual to realize her personal purposes, self-expression, others' importance in goal achievement, and life as a coherent unity; these all contribute to the flourishing of identity. The second and third section explain how the development of identity, in this manner, is hindered under capitalism. The second section explains the inherent features of capitalism and how they thwart the process of identity development. The third section relays how identity is constituted in each stage of capitalism due to respective workplace dynamics and how society maneuvers in relation to them.

### **Contributions**

My discussion contributes to social and political philosophy in two main ways. First, it furthers contemporary alienation critique by focusing upon objective alienation and lending insights into the subjective experience of alienation. My project analyzes the modern factors which constitute alienation. This is particularly important because flexible capitalism introduces positive features into the workforce. However, these features attempt to fix the consequences of alienated labour rather than the objective condition of alienation. This worsens the experience of alienation because society upholds the idea that flexible capitalism is positive while the individual suffers a confusing contradiction. Second, this work offers a foundation for further analysis into the psychology of the alienated worker. It explains one of the constituting factors behind the phenomenon of identity crisis, evidenced by the rise in psychological illness (particularly depression) since the 1950s (monopoly capitalism).<sup>2</sup>

Regarding my contributions, it is necessary to further clarify how my theory is positioned in relation to contemporary alienation work by pointing to how it remains significant amongst methods of conceptualizing alienation and how it seeks to improve the discussion. First, as my work is inspired by Marx's analysis of alienation under capitalism, I account for my theory's contributions in light of relevant Marxist theorists: Erich

Fromm, Jon Elster, and Allen Wood. Second, I discuss how my work stands in relation to what contemporary alienation theory, particularly that examined by Rahel Jaeggi, seeks to eliminate from prior theory and accomplish in its own right.

Fromm draws from Marx and Freud to analyze how the individual's psychological state is affected under capitalism. Fromm considers the alienated individual as one who cannot be her own acting agent, resulting in insanity or neurosis.<sup>3</sup> He argues the human being possesses a drive to be free (from domination of external forces). However, she becomes aware that this independence may mean isolation. For this reason, she attempts to escape freedom by submitting herself to powerful ideologies and systems. Under dominating and exploitative power, human development is interrupted and sanity deteriorates because these systems deny productive activity and self-actualization.<sup>4</sup> I contribute to this discussion by focusing on the role of identity; I establish the disruption of identity development is that which results in the previously indicated 'sick' individual. Identity is a core process by and through which the individual relates herself to her life and her world in a personally meaningful and coherent way. If the development of identity becomes interrupted, as it is under capitalism, she cannot appropriately control and direct these relations. In this manner, I additionally reject Fromm's argument that the individual can turn away from her freedom willingly; she cannot surrender that which she cannot develop objectively or she does not have control over. Rather, the individual is complicit in her own inability to articulate herself only because she must sacrifice herself in order to physically survive and reproduce.

Elster and Wood clarify concepts in Marx's work to reformulate his theory of alienation. They identify two main factors constituting alienation under capitalism: lack of self-realization and lack of freedom. Non-alienated self-realization is the conscious understanding that one is both unique and a social-being. To achieve this awareness, one must have the freedom to self-realize which is to say she must have control over her creative activities. As Elster determines, self-realization involves the individual's development and deployment of abilities and that the individual's powers become observable to others. Alienation occurs because the individual lacks control over the process of self-realization, she does not have a desire for this process and achievement, and

capitalism does not provide the opportunities for self-realization.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Wood defines alienation as the inability to actualize one's essential powers.<sup>6</sup>

Each theorist discerns that social consciousness plays a significant role in one's self-development such that it *is* oneself (it is her essential being). Unlike Marx and traditional Marxist theorists, I do not argue social consciousness is a specific human nature that can be actualized through non-alienated work. It is, rather, an element of non-alienated work that contributes to the appropriate formation and flourishing of identity (it is an element of work which leads to the development of identity overall; it is not an element of work which reveals itself as one's essence).

Work is socially cooperative insofar as others add to a *project*, a lengthy (more than one step) process that involves purposeful activity, the object to be transformed and the materials and tools being used to work upon the object. In this definition of a project, we can see how other people are involved even if they are not working on it in an immediate sense; for instance, they may have created the tools or refined the raw materials. If the individual can realize this, she understands the achievement of the project is impossible without others. Likewise, as she understands that she has personal goals, she realizes others are involved in the formations and achievements of her goals. In this manner, I claim one's awareness of others as necessary, rather than accidental, contributes to the complete development of identity. Additionally, the individual understands she affects others' lives in a similar way and she can consciously decide how she wishes to do so. This presentation of social necessity accounts for the flourishing of personal relationships in a way that suits the individual and accordingly, benefits a community (multiple connections). In this way, my theory accounts for individual freedom (to develop her personal interests, goals, and values as well as decide what paths are ideal for her to accomplish these) and mutual freedom. Of course, one's individual freedom is limited by her recognition of others' freedom. Although this is true, it is based in one's ability to articulate and utilize her own freedom; her freedom would be impossible without cooperation. Thus, if others are considered necessary and recognized as having their own goals and identities, then a commitment to establishing an environment that fosters identity development (for oneself and others) becomes imperative.

My theory's denial of an essence (of social or species-being) is deliberate; I will explain this choice by drawing from contemporary alienation study which finds the use of essentialism, in general, problematic. Axel Honneth (on behalf of Rahel Jaeggi's work on alienation) claims "we now know that even if we do not doubt the existence of certain universal features of human nature, we can no longer speak objectively of a human "essence," of our "species powers," or of humankind's defining and fundamental aims."<sup>7</sup> Essentialism, or the idea that a human being possesses an inherent nature or human powers that can be uncovered, is problematic because in such a declaration, it attempts to establish an *absolute* account of justice and well-being and it rejects pluralism.<sup>8</sup> My theory, inspired by Marx's analysis of activity in the process of actualizing one's *species-being* (*Gattungswesen*) and influenced by Aristotle's account of a teleologically guided life, appears open to these attacks. However, in the following few paragraphs and as illuminated further in the rest of this paper, I show that by using weak essentialism, my theory becomes defensible against these attacks which are more accurately directed towards strong essentialism. *Strong essentialism* asserts that there is a particular, natural mode of being. *Weak essentialism* embraces that there can be a particular, heuristic process whereby the individual can reach her own version of 'full potential'. In this way, weak essentialism allows for complexities and changes in human lives and it recognizes individual, personal freedom.<sup>9</sup> Even so, it can still establish what kind of environment would provide the necessary conditions for the development of individual and mutual flourishing.

My theory of identity, and the ability to develop identity through work, rests upon the concept of *objectification* found in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.<sup>10</sup> I claim the process of objectification is crucial to the development of identity because the individual can recognize her abilities, energies, and skills as expressions of herself. Certainly, while I maintain this process is the fundamental way by which the individual can come to know herself and how she relates to the world, work is not a way by which the individual *discovers* or *uncovers* a particular set of aspects or properties. Rather, she *develops* and *sophisticates* herself in a way that suits her own abilities and inclinations such that she can relate to her life and the world in a personally meaningful manner. Furthermore, work is not an essential aspect of self; on the contrary, it is a process that she can successfully relate to and use to relate to other things in more than one meaningful way. For instance, when a



person learns to play the guitar, she puts energy, time, and dedication into the process. Thus, she can learn both the rhythms and rules of music; she also learns her own expressions and styles. In her practice, she will come to realize qualities and values about herself; perhaps, she will recognize that she is hard-working, she values her ability to craft harmonious songs, and she achieved the goal of learning to play an instrument. Subsequently, these realizations about herself will play an important role in her life such as pursuing new goals and new experiences, cultivating certain demeanors or dispositions, reflecting on experiences, relating to other things with newfound meanings, etc.

Additionally, I incorporate the concept of a teleologically guided identity which was inspired by Aristotle<sup>11</sup> and Alasdair MacIntyre<sup>12</sup>. Aristotle claims every existent “is (a) comprised of a natural set of intrinsic properties which (b) constitute generative mechanisms for particularised morphological development” towards a telos; for instance, an acorn is naturally inclined to grow into a blossoming, reproducing tree.<sup>13</sup> This ultimate goal directs the acorn in its present and future moments towards becoming a tree. Likewise, “human beings... have a specific nature...such that they have certain aims and goals, such that they move by nature towards a specific telos.”<sup>14</sup> However, the human being is unique because she possesses a rational principle: the ability to develop rationally formulated projects and carry them out. In this way, the individual can direct herself or project her own teloi.<sup>15</sup> If I were to maintain this conception of teleology, I would ignore evolution theory and the problems indicated in (strong) essentialism.<sup>16</sup> Rather than postulating that the human being is innately driven towards a particular set of teloi or that the inclination to develop teloi is based on an inherent trait then, I claim the human being *develops* goals through working upon objects. The foundation for this claim is rooted in the fact that work is conceptualized before it is carried out and completed. Through objectification then, the worker realizes she can create goals and actualize them. If she can create ultimate goals, then they can provide meaning for the projects she has already accomplished (in the past) and for future projects and decisions she undertakes. As such, I present a weak essentialist claim arguing that teloi and narrative are a *developed* way of directing one’s actions, yet necessitating certain conditions are both appropriate and available in order for the individual to develop them.

This conception of identity development does not invoke the same issues as strong essentialist claims; whereas strong essentialism indicates an idealistic state of being, weak essentialism makes claims about the best ways an individual can achieve her personal goals. Thus, “where strong essentialism struggles to account for the sheer nuance and complexity of... reality, weak essentialism attempts to allow for greater flexibility while still retaining the basic essentialist premise that human...life exhibits certain core features.”<sup>17</sup> In light of this, by using weak essentialism, I can assert there are appropriate conditions under which the individual can develop an understanding of herself and her life. Additionally, this allows for analysis concerning the conditions that are inappropriate for the individual's development. It makes way for a social justice theory to be formulated, particularly regarding the creation of environments which foster the development of personal meaning and coherence and the removal of conditions which hinder the development of these aspects.

In this manner, I also contribute to contemporary discussion. To highlight this, I draw, again, from Rahel Jaeggi who argues alienation is the inability to hold oneself at one's command and additionally, positively relate oneself to this will; it is “an impairment of acts of appropriation (or as a deficit praxis of appropriation).”<sup>18</sup> While her work provides an excellent “treatment of self-alienation, appropriative subjectivity and other attendant concepts and phenomena,” it lacks in its ability to

afford any systematic attention to the objective component of alienation...In view of Jaeggi's insistence that an ineliminable structural connection exists between self and society, one might have expected her monograph to say much more about alienated intersubjective and social relations and practices within contemporary societies, or at any rate the embeddedness of self-alienation within such relations and practices.<sup>19</sup>

Since this is the case, my work aims to fulfill said criteria by pointing to the objective constituting factors of alienation, capitalism's inherent features and society's way of responding to changes in capitalism's dynamics. Moreover, my theory incorporates the idea of ideological coercion: that one is threatened by external powers such that she changes her attitudes, beliefs, and activities in order to accept and support the external power and their dominance over her. I claim the appropriate development of identity is hindered due to capitalism's inherent

features and the social justifications and critiques that give way to new changes in capitalism's dynamics inciting positive social spirit and intensifying the invisibility of capitalism's power over the individual. Since the individual is positioned in such a way that it is necessary for her to work under a capitalist dynamic, she becomes complicit in her own inability to form an identity. In this manner, alienation is not illustrated as something that can be overcome by changes in beliefs or dispositions; rather, this concept of alienation calls for "a long course of political action."<sup>20</sup>

I, also, further the project that Jaeggi sought to accomplish: a concept of alienation that "makes it possible to arrive at standards for diagnosing social pathologies."<sup>20</sup> My theory of identity development presents an evaluative standard by which to compare a 'healthy' non-alienated individual (one who possesses teloi and narrative) from a 'sick' alienated individual (one who possesses only one or neither of these criteria). From this, I am able to present how identity development is twisted and thwarted under different stages of capitalism. I lend insight into the constituting factors behind (relatively new) psychological disorders that contemporary society faces and individuals experience: namely depression, but additionally this analysis can apply to anxiety and other general mood or stress disorders which refer to an inappropriate functioning of identity.

### **Work and Developing Identity**

In this section, I explain identity and how non-alienated work allows for its development. Specifically, I argue complete and creative work (non-alienated work) enables the individual to identify herself within a valuable set of goals that give her life meaning and coherence. I begin by articulating the significance of identity and address how teloi and narrative are constitutive of identity. I, then, discuss how the individual can develop identity. As my argument is grounded in the concept of objectification, I explain how the individual objectifies herself in her work. From this base, I detail how unique aspects of non-alienated work enable the individual to develop valuable teloi and a coherent narrative allowing for identity to flourish.

My discussion of identity development offers many original arguments towards alienation theory. First, I identify teloi (meaning) and narrative (coherence) as the two critical aspects that must be developed for social and psychological well-being; these two aspects enable the individual to relate herself to herself and the world,

understand and find meaning in these components and relations, and navigate them appropriately. Second, I remove a need for a strong essentialist claim by maintaining that an individual's identity is not that which she uncovers, but that which she develops, herself. In this manner, I endorse weak essentialism allowing for a discussion of the objective working conditions under which the individual can personally develop value and coherence rather than relying on an inherent human nature. Moreover, I assert that identity is a constantly developing system; the structure functions as that from which the individual can understand herself and her world yet additionally, incorporate new information and experiences which can change her ultimate values and goals, and narrative. Thus, identity involves both a concept of stability and a concept of transformation; if one can understand her life meaningfully and coherently, she can use these aspects of self as a base for interpreting new information and either incorporate it or cope with it appropriately. Third, I indicate the development of social cooperation takes root as an element of non-alienated work. In this way, I articulate that social cooperation aids in the development of identity, allowing for relationships to flourish in a way that suits the individual and benefits the community. Comparatively, as alienated work removes a conscious understanding of social cooperation in its process, it makes it difficult to develop mutual flourishing.

## **Identity**

Identity is unique to the human being because she can distinguish her own self (and what she is composed of vis-à-vis abilities, ideas, skills, and traits) from other people while entertaining how she is similar. Identity, then, becomes an important concept to discuss with regards to realizing both one's individuality and one's part in a community or society. Identity is not only how one maneuvers within the world but additionally, how one understands her life and projects as meaningful and acknowledges others' lives and projects as valuable. Ultimately, appropriate identity formation is critical for one to achieve psychological and social well-being. In contrast, those who cannot completely develop identity suffer from ailments such as depression which involves disorientation, instability, isolation, and meaninglessness.

I define identity as the coherent understanding of self which is to say the individual realizes her goals and understands they provide a meaningful narrative for her life, unifying her experiences, interactions, and

perceptions. Identity is constituted by developing *telois*, ultimate goals that a being is driven by and towards. *Telois* are formulated by completing projects which inform the individual (of interests, knowledge, skills, and values). Since *telois* are developed over time, the individual will reflect upon what she has learned in different contexts and situations; these reflections allow the individual to see how her *telois* relate to her lived experience. She can understand how her *telois* provide meaning for her past projects in the sense that the goals were the reason she accomplished the project or the projects helped her to figure out what her goals were; further, she can direct herself towards strengthening or changing her goals through her chosen future projects. This understanding of how *telois* unify one's past, present, and future projects is called coherent narrative. Thus, meaning leads to coherence and both lead to the formation of identity.

One may find this definition of identity impractical if it is postulated the unity of identity is fixed or unchanging. A unity, while necessitating that all the elements are joined in a whole, does not require these characteristics. Rather, it can point to the idea that an individual understands herself as an actively developing system; the content (*telois*) works to create the system as that which maneuvers and relates her to her life/world in a coherent way, and in turn, also maintains itself as something that can continuously work to understand those movements and relations and in some contexts, direct them. To illustrate, one's childhood shapes how she relates to herself and the world but this does not necessitate a fixed state of being; on the contrary, she can realize these relations and understand how she can change according to new experiences and knowledge. In this way, identity is fluid according to the content and how the content is interpreted by the existing identity

That said, this concept of identity does imply a harmonious relationship between things insofar as it strives to reconcile or integrate new experiences and events; this includes positive events that allow one to flourish and negative events that may shake one's identity at first. It, however, does not imply a harmonious relationship in the sense of perfection or idealism, as it is true the individual will be affected by moments of tension. Understanding oneself as a unity does not remove these moments from the narrative of life; however, if one does understand herself as a unity directed towards certain purposes, she will engage these moments as challenges to surmount.

Thus, identity reveals itself as a constant work in progress, although it has stability in the sense it already has a foundation (that which has already been created).

The development of identity is contingent upon the establishment of *teloi* and subsequently, the cultivation of intelligible narrative. *Teloi*, as stated prior, are ultimate goals that a being is driven by and towards. When an individual possesses *teloi*, she gives meaning to her projects. Life is comprised of various but continuous projects; these projects allow the individual to learn or develop knowledge about herself and the world. As such, projects lead to the development of *teloi*. These *teloi* reflect back upon all the projects and provide meaning for them but additionally, they provide direction for future projects. In this way, *teloi* provide positive value to one's active existence. As Alasdair MacIntyre writes, "when someone complains - as do some of those who attempt or commit suicide - that his or her life is meaningless, he or she is often and perhaps characteristically complaining that the narrative of their life has become unintelligible to them that it lacks any point, any movement towards a climax or a *telos*."<sup>21</sup> The assertion, here, indicates the reason behind why formulating *teloi* is so necessary to living a life that the individual can both understand the purpose of as a whole and the greater meaning in present and future projects. Without *teloi*, the individual is unable to direct herself forward in any significant manner which is to say she cannot formulate meaning for projects beyond satisfying basic desires or needs. If this is the case, the individual fails to have a personally meaningful life; she cannot create purposeful maneuvers or relations between herself and the world.

Furthermore, this assertion reveals *teloi* are crucial to the development of narrative. A *narrative*, in this context, is understanding life as unified insofar as experiences are all connected and informing towards how she acts and perceives herself and the world. In other words, all actions, experiences, and projects are intelligible because of the narrative form which she can view them in; this is because they have a connection with each other and with *teloi*.<sup>22</sup> Narrative is directed by the framework of teleology and unpredictability. It is teleological because the story moves towards some goals. In this way, the individual who is acting within the narrative framework is guided by a goal; she is working towards the realization of this goal.<sup>23</sup> There are connections she can make, regarding decisions, experiences, and projects that will drive her closer to her goals. Equally important, she

understands her narrative informs her identity because the past, the present, and the future are all connected. For instance, when an individual tells a story about her past or expresses her aspirations or hopes for the future, she can apprehend important aspects about herself. Further, unpredictability is also a condition of narrative because an individual cannot predict what will happen next or if her goal will actually be achieved. That said, if the individual can form identity, she can understand unpredictability is not a threat of annihilation of coherency of self. The individual can understand she has a purpose and what this purpose is; so willing, she can re-stabilize in the midst of unpredictability.<sup>24</sup>

### **Identity Development through Work**

The development and flourishing of identity requires the individual can both conceive of meaning for her life and understand this meaning unifies her life; indeed, identity *is* this realization and understanding because it is a fluid system involving continuous interpretation and reinterpretation, incorporation and rejection due to new experiences and knowledge. I claim non-alienated work enables the development of appropriate identity (valuable *telois* and coherent narrative). Specifically, in non-alienated work, the individual can engage in a complete project wherein she exacts unique aspects into her work allowing her to realize *telois*; these aspects are maintained existence, present and future existence, creativity and skill, and cooperation.

First, it is necessary to define work and briefly articulate the difference between alienated and non-alienated work. *Work* is a process involving three criteria: the purposeful activity (the act of working towards the creation of a product), the object being worked upon and the tools used to work upon the object (the means of production). The worker actively and purposefully transforms passive raw material using passive tools to create a product; the aim of this process is to create use-value for oneself or for a community.<sup>25</sup> It is important to note the worker must expend physical and psychological energy to carry out *activity*, thus, the worker possesses *labour power* or the ability and willingness to work.<sup>26</sup> I claim that this conception of work expands beyond what we conventionally think of as work; it can include the arts, academia, and social or community work. As long as the individual is undertaking a process involving transformation of material (not only in the tangible sense) into

something of use value, this is considered work. Correspondingly, I define *projects* as lengthy (involving more than one ‘step’) processes that involve the criteria of work stated above.

Under capitalism, work is under the control of the capitalist who (in collaboration with system constraints) determines the logistics of work (how work is carried out, when it is carried out, what the purpose of it is, and how the worker is compensated for it). The purpose of work under capitalism is to perform *surplus labour*, or more work than the individual would carry out to maintain and reproduce herself, and produce *surplus value*, or value above and beyond what the worker is compensated for her work.<sup>27</sup> In order to do this, the capitalist determines ways to extract the most value from work at the least expense. Consequently, the worker must perform *alienated work* or incomplete and unengaging work; the work is divided up amongst many individuals and departments, the creative process is considerably denied (due to efficiency), the worker is insufficiently compensated for the amount of labour she expends and the value she produces, and the purpose of work serves as a way for the capitalist to maintain and garner control.<sup>28</sup> Thus, alienated work is a means to an end; the individual works to satisfy basic needs and desires external to work and the capitalist uses work as a means to accumulate surplus value, acquire more workers and means of production, and compete on the market.

In contrast, *non-alienated work* is the engagement of a complete, creative process (from the constructed project in the imagination to the finished product). The purpose of non-alienated work is to create use-value, and additionally, it allows the individual to understand and develop herself. This latter aspect of non-alienated work occurs through a process of objectification; the worker invests her abilities, ideas, energy, and skills into her work and thus, these components are infused into the product itself<sup>29</sup> “living labour must seize upon things, awaken them from the dead, change them from merely possible into real and effective use-values. Bathed in the fire of labor, appropriated as part of its organism, and infused with vital energy.”<sup>30</sup> The worker can perceive the product as a reflection of herself and thus, she can realize she is (in part) self-creating. I will, now, detail how the individual recognizes herself within the product and how this allows for self-development.

Before the individual develops identity, her consciousness can be likened to that of an animal, one who only acts to maintain her physical self and satisfy her basic desires.<sup>31</sup> A human being, in this stage of



consciousness, does possess the abilities to work in order to develop a sophisticated recognition of herself and others. The objects of these abilities “exist outside him, as objects independent of him; yet these objects are objects that he needs - essential objects, indispensable to the manifestation and confirmation of his... powers.”<sup>32</sup> It may seem evident that one’s desires can only be satisfied by independent objects; for example, one may think of hunger which is fulfilled by the consumption of an apple. Additionally, it is relevant towards a preliminary analysis of work and human development. The individual’s abilities are within her, existing as potential. They can only be actualized in external objects. Since the individual’s abilities manifest themselves in and through objects, these objects are necessary for self-expression and the development thereof.

The process by which powers or abilities are realized in objects occurs through three interconnecting processes of perception, orientation, and appropriation.<sup>33</sup> The fulfilment of all three results in the ability of the individual to see herself in the object and ultimately, recognize herself as simultaneously unique and a part of society.<sup>34</sup> As an individual encounters an object, she *perceives* the object. Simultaneously, she *orients* herself in some way towards the object, and therefore she perceives the object in relation to her desires or needs; orientation constitutes “an entire framework for action vis-a-vis the rest of the world.”<sup>35</sup> Next, the individual *appropriates* the object which is to say she actualizes her powers in the object in order to satisfy her goals.<sup>36</sup> The process by which actualization is achieved is not meant to simply indicate the summit of appropriation, it implicates all three activities. Through perception and orientation, the individual can determine her possible achievements towards the object; in appropriation, she accomplishes them.

In the actualization of the three aspects towards the object, the individual manifests herself in the object. In this way, she begins to understand herself as an active agent of transformation; she can not only transform the material world but also herself (because she has recognized herself as a material object). Considering that the reflection the individual sees in the object is of a creative nature, it is of interest to look at the aspects which the individual expresses in her creation and how these aspects lead to identity. The most important features are maintained existence, present and future existence, creativity and skill, and social cooperation.

One aspect the individual gives the object is *maintained existence*; she does not immediately consume or annihilate the raw materials for the satisfaction of animal instincts. In the context of work, the individual must repress her natural desires in order to put time and energy into a satisfaction that will only occur when the work is completed. Thus, because the individual grants the object the opportunity to be transformed rather than destroyed immediately, the individual recognizes she can direct her life to certain ends apart from satisfying instinctual desires and needs.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, the individual can focus upon and develop her own goals (teloi).

Along the same lines, the object is granted both *present and future existence*. The present condition represents the raw materials in their current form but additionally, any current vision the individual has with regards to the potential of the raw materials (i.e. what the raw materials could turn into). The future existence refers to the actualization of this vision and the purpose the object will serve in its creation. When the materials have actually been transformed into a new object, the future vision regarding the object's potentiality is actualized. In this way, the project has a telos that the individual has either provided or will realize (during or after the project); each aspect and step of the actual work process can be given a meaning in respect to this goal. Correspondingly, the individual understands she has teloi as well. She possesses a present existence (both of actual and active existence and of potential existence) and a future existence. Furthermore, the individual understands she created an object she had a vision of, an object she gave a telos to; likewise, she understands that she can have goals that drive her and give meaning to each decision and endeavor in her life. Additionally, because she actually accomplished her project, she realizes she can achieve her teloi.

It is important to note that the project fits into the individual's coherent narrative but it, while aiding in the development of teloi, does not directly provide narrative for life (the teloi constitute narrative). Likewise, projects may appear to have a similar narrative to life but this is not necessarily always the case (some projects have their goal conceptualized beforehand, some have their goal realized only upon completion of the project and some have their goal unfold in the midst of the project). Thus, the case cannot be made that a general *project* and life have the same narrative. Additionally, to push this conception of life would be to state that there is a certain plan to life or a specific way life unfolds (that there could be particular times and situations where individuals would understand

their *telo*i and see their lives as a narratives). On the contrary, people develop their *telo*i and understand their narratives in individualized ways, with different environmental conditions and other people as contributing factors.

Another essential feature the individual articulates is development of *skill* and *creativity/artistry*. Often, the individual does not only work upon an object once; she usually puts time and energy into mastering the craft so that the objects she creates will become more precise/accurate, beautiful/aesthetically pleasing, or more suitable to necessity/demand. In effect, the more the individual develops her skill, the greater her awareness of her abilities and interests. It allows her to express herself in a developed or sophisticated fashion and to discover what is important in terms of her purpose.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, the product reflects the aspect of *social cooperation*. The recognition of social cooperation is twofold: in material realization and in work process collaboration. First, in the process of objectification, the individual becomes aware she is a material object. Thus, she understands that she is connected to other material beings, namely human beings. Second, work is not an isolated activity; for instance, tools or materials may have been developed and created by other people such that she can use them to finish her own project. Accordingly, the individual realizes that others engage in similar work processes to herself; hence, they can develop their own identities. Furthermore, the individual understands that other people are necessary to the completion of her immediate project; likewise, the individual recognizes that her creations are incorporated into others' projects in a similar way. In the sense she can recognize human beings cooperate to complete work, she also understands people cooperate to achieve *telo*i (which become shared *telo*i as soon as another engages in the pursuit).<sup>39</sup> Since this is the case, the individual's awareness of others as *necessary* contributes to the development of her identity (because they *actually do* contribute to her *telo*i and her narrative as she contributes to theirs).

In order for one to recognize that others' *telo*i are important to pursue, or to share in desiring to work towards *telo*i mutually, she must be able to cultivate her own understanding of meaning and coherence. In the same vein, meaning and coherence are partly developed by recognizing that others are necessary to the process. In this sense, the development of identity and others' identities are reliant on each other; from this understanding, a natural commitment to uphold an environment that promotes the mutual flourishing of identity arises.

## **The Inherent Features of Capitalism and Identity**

In *Manuscripts of 1844 and Capital Volume I*, Marx argues that under capitalism, human beings are alienated due to certain features of capitalism that interrupt the process of work. He maintains this is due to the inherent features of wage-labour, private property, and the division of labour. These features are built into the fabric of capitalism in order to maintain itself; they create the state of alienation for the worker while the worker, who must take part in the system out of necessity, perpetuates their existence. I hold these aspects of capitalism thwart the individual's ability to cultivate her own telos and narrative which prevents her from being able to develop an identity appropriately. I contend this remains true in each stage of capitalism (industrial, monopoly, and flexible capitalism respectively)<sup>40</sup> because these features have been maintained.

In this section, I explain the inherent features of capitalism using Marx's work. Additionally, I depart from Marx's theory to articulate how each feature prevents the individual from developing identity appropriately. In this manner, I begin to explain precisely what causes the objective condition of alienation, or the inability to develop meaning and coherence in one's life, and the subjective experience of alienation, or the result of inadequate meaning and coherence (psychological illness). In the following section, this explanation will become further clarified as I investigate the different manifestations of alienation in each stage of capitalism (changing due to intensified invisibility of the inherent features, differences in workplace dynamics, and societal responses in each stage).

### **Wage Labour as Exploitation**

Wage-labour, in its common emergence under capitalism as a form of exploitation, changes the purpose of work to be a means by which the capitalist can generate profit *rather* than a way through which the individual can develop herself. It is important to note that work can take on a profiting role without it being inherently problematic; that said, if the *sole purpose* of work is to generate profit for an *external force* then the work is alienating. This is emphasized in the definition of exploitation itself: when one uses people as commodities of value that can create more value *at their own expense*.<sup>41</sup> Let us, now, turn to an explanation of wage-labour as exploitation and the specific consequences of its implementation.

The clearest way to explain wage-labour and its function under capitalism is to present the labour theory of value.<sup>42</sup> The labour theory of value is an economic formula expressing: *the value of the commodity = constant capital + variable capital + surplus value*. For the purpose of describing wage-labour, it is only necessary to explain *variable capital* and *surplus value*. *Variable capital* is the wage that the worker is paid equal to the reproduction of the worker's labour-power; this is identical to that which is necessary to reproduce the worker. It includes the cost of food, shelter, clothing, raising a family, etc.<sup>43</sup> *Surplus value*, on the other hand, is the new or additional value, above the value represented by variable capital, created in the production process.<sup>44</sup> In the context of exploitation, *surplus value* is the new and *unpaid* labour time that is dedicated to produce value above and beyond what is necessary to reproduce the worker.<sup>45</sup> However, the capitalist only pays the worker what is required to maintain herself and reproduce her labour-power.<sup>46</sup> The cost of labour-power becomes independent of the actual value that is produced by the worker. Exploitation, then, occurs when the worker produces over and above what is represented by her wages.

Under capitalism, labour-power is a commodity the worker must sell to the capitalist because she does not own the means of production. Considering that the capitalist buys the individual's labour-power, the capitalist owns it. Thus, the capitalist controls both the variable capital (the introduction of unions and social movements that fight for fair wages has lessened the capitalist's authority in this regard)<sup>47</sup> and how the labour-power is directed insofar as the individual cannot direct her own time, energy, or abilities. The capitalist dictates the only purpose of labour-power is to generate profit for herself, and that the value that the individual generates will not be reflected in her compensation. The individual only receives a value that is part of what she actually creates and reflects only part of the working day; the rest of the energy and time she invests is worth nothing to her (besides the fact it is necessary to receive her wages). Thus, she lacks control over her own work and she lacks value to associate with her work beyond meeting her survival needs.

Wage-labour under capitalism hinders the development of identity by inhibiting the cultivation of *telois*. First, since the worker is forced to sell her labour-power to an external force who controls the purpose and value of her work, it is difficult to perceive that her project may have a purpose other than creating profit for the capitalist

or being a means by which the individual can survive physically. In this way, the individual essentially remains an animalistic being who can only direct herself towards satisfying basic desires and needs. One of the aspects the individual puts into her creation is that of maintained existence; however, in alienated work, even if the worker is suppressing her natural desires in the moment to receive a satisfaction that only occurs after work, this satisfaction is her wage. Since her wage only reflects survival rather than the work she actually completes, the only ‘goal’ she can develop is the goal to maintain and reproduce herself: “work [is] a means to stay alive rather than life being an opportunity to do work. Living, mere existence, has always been a necessary pre-condition for engaging to productive activity, but in capitalism it becomes the operative motive.”<sup>48</sup> In other words, wage labour obstructs the individual’s realization that she can develop her own *teloi*. Perhaps, it may be argued, the individual can use her leisure time to engage in projects that allow her to cultivate *teloi*; however, it is often the case that she cannot (financially or physically) afford to involve herself in intensive creative projects outside work.

### **Private Property**

*Private property* is the means by which one (the capitalist) can control the other (the worker).<sup>49</sup> Private property constitutes alienated labour because corporate private property, existing in the form of exclusive corporate claims to the means of production and the goods in production, is owned by an elite few. When the worker sells her labour power to the capitalist, the worker must surrender rights to the process of production and the products to the capitalist. The means of production, the materials she uses, and the product she creates are all *separated* from her in the sense they operate under the capitalist’s control.

Moreover, the process of production and the product become *antagonistic* to the worker because they become external to her, and she is fundamentally controlled by them. Since they are owned by the capitalist, the worker can only respond to her materials, process of labour, and the product as things that already exist, already given. Consequently, she relates to her product as something that has its own requirements, not those she imposes upon it.<sup>50</sup>

Since this is the case, the individual cannot understand that the change the product undergoes and the final actualization of the product are expressions of herself. Specifically, she does not carry out a ‘vision’ to completion

and she does not develop creative activity (she merely puts in the energy and time required to shape the product). Therefore, she cannot discover what is important to her or develop her own *telo*, let alone understand that she could achieve her own *telo*.

Furthermore, it is important to consider the role the individual plays in the preservation of private property. As aforementioned, the worker does not own the means of production so she must sell her labour-power and the products of her labour to the capitalist. The capitalist appropriates profit based on the worker's surplus-labour which allows for the purchase of additional means of production and labour-power. The capitalist, thus, obtains an increasing power over the worker in the form of ever-accumulating private property. The worker, by producing surplus-value, strengthens the capitalist's control over her because the wealth she produces (that is appropriated by the capitalist) is the power by which the capitalist can continue to exert power over her.<sup>51</sup> This intensifies alienation for the worker because it is not only that an external force can control her, but that she is complicit in her own oppression. In effect, she becomes antagonistic to herself; she *must* sacrifice her identity and her own desires to physically survive. Consequently, her narrative is incoherent.

### **Division of Labour**

The division of labour is the breakdown of a complete project, such that the worker is only assigned to one or a few specific steps of the work process. It is implemented in the form of specialized, repetitive tasks and it increases the number of workers. By enforcing specialized activity, there is an "increase of productivity...due either to an increased expenditure of labour-power in a given time - i.e. increased intensity of labour - or... a decrease in the amount of labour-power unproductively consumed."<sup>52</sup>

The division of labour restricts the development of identity in three main ways: it prevents the realization that life can be unified by *telo*, it hinders development of *telo*, and it changes the role others play. First, the worker is prevented from engaging in a complete project. Accordingly, the individual cannot express the aspect of *present and future existence* in the object (because she is not engaging in a process, rather just a part of an externally dictated process); she does not articulate a goal for a project and carry it out. Likewise, she cannot perceive her life as being shaped or directed by her own goals.

Second, considering that the division of labour forces the worker to solely focus on one or a few tasks, she can only develop certain aspects of herself in relation to the particular work she is accomplishing. If this is the case, the individual is forced to neglect other faculties, meaning her ability to develop self-expression is limited.<sup>53</sup> In other words, she cannot develop teloi that are personally valuable; yet, she may be able to develop teloi reflective of the particular task she was designated (limited teloi). Although this does not lead to the development of a complete and appropriate identity, it provides the individual with a coherent narrative (she lacks personally-valuable teloi but she understands her life).

Third, although work is still a process wherein social cooperation is important to the achievement of the finished product, the division of labour creates an antagonistic atmosphere between workers. The division of labour allows for the increase in the amount of workers involved in the labour process and a decrease in the amount of skill necessary.<sup>54</sup> This contributes to the idea that others, as individuals, are irrelevant (they are easily replaceable) and the idea that she, herself, is irrelevant (others can easily replace her). If workers can replace each-other, and work's purpose is to survive, then others become threatening to the individual. The workplace becomes an environment that breeds competition, rather than cooperation. Thus, the individual begins to think of her work as an isolated activity rather than a process involving many others; if this is the case, she cannot understand how others contribute to her teloi and vice versa.

### **The Failure of Identity**

In this section, I will present a further investigation of my theory of alienation, showing how socio-economic dynamics and workplace practices cause alienation to manifest in different ways. Let us recall that I argue the individual is alienated when she cannot appropriately identify herself as possessing a valuable set of life goals and understanding that these goals provide coherence for her life. Alienation occurs by hindering the development of teloi and narrative, which thwarts the individual's ability to cultivate identity. The workplace plays an important role in alienation because it is the actual context where the individual is confronted and affected by the inherent features of capitalism; the goals of capitalism (infinite accumulation of wealth and private property as a form of power and control) realize themselves in workplace aspects and practices. Of course, socio-economic



dynamics and workplaces change over time and this affects how the individual is alienated. I argue, in line with Eve Chiapello and Luc Boltanski, that there are three stages of capitalism: industrial capitalism lasting until the end of the 19th century, monopoly capitalism showing its roots in the early 1900s and ending in the 1970s, and flexible capitalism starting in the 1980s.<sup>55</sup> Dynamics change significantly in each stage of capitalism, affecting the state of alienation for the individual.

Before beginning, it is important to briefly discuss the social reasons behind the historical shifts in capitalism, namely social justification and critiques.<sup>56</sup> This discussion will lend greater insight into the reason alienation is a transformable force rather than a fixed state of being in a capitalist society. It will, additionally, allow us to understand why flexible capitalism produces a unique manifestation of alienation insofar as it generates a substantial identity crisis (a rise of the inability to develop identity indicated by prevalent psychological illness).

Each stage is characterized by a *spirit of capitalism* or society's ideology justifying a commitment to capitalism.<sup>57</sup> It is "precisely the set of beliefs associated with the capitalist order that helps to justify this order and by legitimating them, to sustain the forms of action and predispositions compatible with it."<sup>58</sup> There are three factors that constitute the spirit of capitalism: excitement, security, and fairness. These are the aspects that an individual will evaluate to confirm or oppose the stage of capitalism, and accordingly its workplace dynamics. *Excitement* refers to how the system can aid in the flourishing of individuals or society; *Security* signifies its ability to help individuals and their families maintain themselves in regards to wellbeing, jobs, wages, etc; *Fairness* pertains to how it aligns itself with justice and the common good.<sup>59</sup>

Certainly, criticisms that stem from negative evaluations of these aspects spark the desire for change in the dynamics of capitalism. Criticisms are the crucial element behind the historical shifts because capitalism implements them into its structure in aims to ensure a positive spirit: "it needs its enemies, people whom it outrages and who are opposed to it, to find the moral supports it lacks and to incorporate mechanisms of justice it would otherwise have no reason to acknowledge...It has discovered routes to its survival in critiques of it."<sup>60</sup> Based on the analyses of Eve Chiapello and Luc Boltanski, there are two forms of criticism that emerge: social criticism and artistic criticism. Social critique focuses upon poverty and inequality, exploitation, immorality, individualism, and

egoism. On the other hand, artistic critique reflects upon “disenchantment and inauthenticity...oppression...loss of meaning, and in particular, the loss of the sense of what is beautiful and valuable.”<sup>61</sup>

These methods of criticism, and their effects which are detailed according to each stage of capitalism in the following sections, provide a justification for the changes in the workplace. From here, I depart from Boltanski and Chiapello’s analysis; I show how socio-economic contexts and workplace dynamics in each stage provoke different manifestations of alienation. It must be noted that since the inherent features of capitalism are maintained, the changes in their expression, however positively evaluated by the spirit of capitalism, are still meant to uphold capitalism’s goals. Thus, while the workplace dynamics integrate the criticisms of the prior stages, the average individual will only suffer a deeper form of alienation due to the charge that she should feel a positive spirit of capitalism but cannot. In turn, this causes a more severe subjective experience of alienation leading to chronic psychological illnesses (depression, anxiety, stress, etc).

### **Industrial Capitalism**

In industrial capitalism, beginning approximately in the 17th century and ending in the late 19th century, the individual faced a shift away from feudal and merchant societies where she worked either in a home-business or cottage-factory; she, now, was to work as an artisan or a factory-worker who earned wages. Under wage-labour in the factory, the individual was introduced to such workplace innovations as the division of labour, enduring monotonous, repetitive work and long hours.<sup>62</sup> Under these conditions, the worker could not develop her own *telo* because she could not develop self-expression and sophistication by working on complete projects. If one cannot develop her *telo*, then her identity cannot be adequately formed. That said, society began to change in relation to the new economy; the accumulation of private property in the hands of the few caused the formation of new classes; the bourgeois who exercised their control over the proletariat or the working class. Since this was the case, the working-class individual was limited in her options regarding values, social roles, jobs, and education. In effect, her *telo* were imposed on her by society and state. Thus, she could form a coherent identity and narrative because she understood who she was in relation to the world she was given. However, she remained alienated

because this only fulfilled one part of the formulation of identity: coherence. She, additionally, needed to possess personally created values and goals.

Industrial capitalism was marked by the bourgeois spirit of capitalism. The individual was excited by new freedom from “local communities, from being enslaved to the land and rooted in the family.”<sup>63</sup> Indeed, escaping from “the village, the ghetto, and traditional forms of personal dependence” granted the individual a sense of autonomy and hope for the future in terms of creating a new life for herself and her family.<sup>64</sup> The fairness and security aspect of this stage of capitalism, a combination of new economic inclinations with traditional domestic morals, reflected the values that the individual sought to achieve: financial security for herself and her family. This could be achieved through saving money, calculating, and predicting economic benefit in the future, maintaining personal property, passing down inheritance, and trusting in the bourgeois’ responsibility of charity and paternalism.<sup>65</sup> That said, these aspects were more beneficial to the bourgeois’ given their social status. The reality of the typical proletariat’s life was characterized by struggle to obtain sustenance.

The spirit of capitalism, as relayed here, relates to the way by which society and the state upheld bourgeois values and verily, the status of the bourgeois over the proletariat. The working class, then, were subjected to the way society maneuvered around the bourgeois. For that reason, the individual was limited by social prospects regarding roles, jobs, and education such that her *teloi* were imposed by society.<sup>66</sup> For instance, the factory-worker remained a factory-worker because she did not have the social status, or social mobility, to become anything more or other than this: “very few laborers could enter higher education; upward mobility was rare. And even the most enlightened reformers did not believe the bulk of the masses could otherwise, at work, become usefully skilled.<sup>67</sup> Thus, the individual took on the *teloi* that were given to her; her values and goals reflected the roles she was designated.

While this is the case, merely possessing *teloi* is not enough to form identity appropriately (to one’s psychological and social benefit); in fact, this would be similar to the *telos* held by an animal or plant in the Aristotelian sense. The *teloi* granted by society allows one to relate herself to the world and to maneuver accordingly. It does not, however, allow the individual to develop significant value beyond fulfilling the social

roles allotted to her and meeting basic desires and needs. In the industrial workplace, the individual was affected by the division of labour meaning that her work was repetitive and incomplete. It did not allow for self-expression or sophistication. It was only meaningful in the sense that she could relate it to her values; long-term commitment, loyalty, and self-discipline in order to achieve sustenance.<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, the working environment and market, disconnected the individual from meaningful, cooperative relationships with other people. Under industrial capitalism, relationships to other people were realized through market-exchange insofar as products were distributed on market principles. Since products were reduced to market-exchange, it was difficult to perceive products as being the expression of whomever put in the labour. Thus, relationships between workers, even those relations that extend past the immediate workplace, appear to be coincidental instead of necessary.<sup>69</sup>

Moreover, the worker must sell her labour power on the free market, meaning she is forced into competition with others to obtain and maintain employment.<sup>70</sup> Under industrial capitalism, there was a mass movement of workers coming in from rural areas and “businesses themselves were often poorly structured and so liable to sudden collapse” such that employment remained largely competitive in this manner.<sup>71</sup> Under these conditions, the worker focused on her own self-interest. Consequently, the individual lost sight of others as being helpful to her own development.

### **Monopoly Capitalism**

Monopoly capitalism saw its roots in the early 1900s; social critiques regarding industrial capitalism were becoming realized in social and political movements and in response, the socio-economic world began to shift. These criticisms concerned societal and laboural injustices: unemployment, poverty, lack of workplace rights, long working days, lack of legislation and laws protecting women and children, and social and racial divides.<sup>72</sup> One of the main ways monopoly capitalism responded to social critique was by facilitating liberations from both lower socioeconomic statuses and limited roles for much of the population; some of the most impactful decisions to this effect were the increase in accessibility of education and career opportunities and security concerning careers. I argue that the experience of higher education or technical education allowed for the cultivation of identity. In

academic studies, the individual could develop and sophisticate her skills in respect to her chosen field. This context facilitated the cultivation of *telois* and narrative, thus, the development of identity.

That said, this positive formation of identity was eclipsed by the fact that those who could not or did not pursue a rewarding education were forced into a relatively similar situation as an individual under industrial capitalism. The intervention of the state into the economy to protect large companies in competitive circumstances furthered the ability of these companies to accumulate capital and garner control; the goal of effective mass production maintained a need for divisible, repetitive labour. Effectively, she who was positioned such that she needed to work in this manner, could not develop her own *telois*. Unlike under industrial society, however, society no longer imposed *telois* upon the individual; this was due to the concept that the individual was no longer limited in her options (because of the rise in opportunity for upward mobility concerning social and economic positioning).

First, I will explain the role of education and careers in the development of identity. Under monopoly capitalism, governments increased public spending for education <sup>73</sup> as well as introduced incentives such as scholarships and student loans.<sup>74</sup> As a result, there was a steady rise in enrollment after the end of World War II, symbolizing how education was becoming more accessible to a large majority. The excitement of education occurred by virtue of “opportunities offered by organizations for attaining positions of power from which one could change the world, and for a large majority, liberation from need, the fulfillment of desires thanks to mass production and its corollary: mass consumption.”<sup>75</sup> In other words, upon completion, an education offered security in the form of a long-term career where one could obtain a privileged position. In this way, it illustrated liberation as upward socioeconomic mobility and further, that once achieved, the position would remain stable.

Furthermore, this excitement was reflected in the spirit of fairness which validated meritocracy; if an individual was judged to be worthy, then she would receive reward in the form of job positioning, job benefits, and wages.<sup>76</sup> As this suggests, one’s qualities and skills became important in securing a career: “individuals believed in a personal remedy for uselessness which transcended any government nostrum: their children should get an education and a special skill which would make the young always needed, always employed.”<sup>77</sup> Correspondingly, development, and sophistication of valuable qualities and skills were made possible by education. Granted this, the

development of one's own teloi was made possible not only because she could engage in her own projects and develop her skills but additionally because the purposes of undertaking these tasks were the individual's own: to advance oneself, to explore one's abilities, to improve life, to secure wellbeing. Furthermore, it allowed her to perceive a purpose beyond mere reproduction of self: the fulfilment of desires. In this way, the individual could develop her own teloi and by understanding the value in her projects and accomplishments, a coherent narrative wherein she could identify herself.

The values that were generated with education and employment, namely that of meaningful work and long-term commitment, contributed to one's ability to identify herself within a coherent narrative that involved others as valuable and necessary to goal achievement. As the individual was able to recognize the purpose of her own work, she, likewise, could recognize other human beings as performing work that was important to them. Furthermore, through the ability to work meaningfully in the long-term assured by meritocracy and by an increase in workers unions, one could develop social relationships: "a life narrative in which the individual matters to others requires an institution with lifetime longevity."<sup>78</sup> A long-term commitment, involving recognition and employment of one's skill, implies that one achieves a valuable "personal presence in institutions" which can be illustrated in the following example: "A nurse in New York told me that this is why she stayed in an impoverished public hospital rather than did more lucrative work as a temporary nurse. Both ways of nursing are useful, but in the hospital she "made a difference."<sup>79</sup> If the nurse's goal was only to carry out labour in order to maintain and reproduce herself, she would have found alternative employment. However, her reasoning for staying displays that she understands herself in relation to the world and others and that she recognizes the value of others to her own identity and goals. Indeed, this was the positive situation reflected by many under monopoly capitalism.

In contrast to this illustration, monopoly capitalism also favoured the development of the industrial sectors. Workers in these divisions still faced de-skilled, repetitive labour for the purpose of mass-production.<sup>80</sup> A similar narrative to industrial capitalism, the worker could not perform creative labour, participate in complete projects, nor exert control over her work. The latter aspect was amplified by those who took advantage of educational and employment opportunities; they could obtain power and privilege over those who did not. In like manner, the

meritocracy failed regarding industrial workers; it “disempowers the larger majority who fall under its rule... a society in which a small number of skilled people can control an entire society. Foucault made a more detailed picture of this domination; the elite would get under the skin of the masses by making them feel that they did not understand themselves, that they were inadequate interpreters of their own experience of life.”<sup>81</sup> In other words, the individual was forced into de-skilled work and in addition, was made to feel as though she was unworthy and unvaluable. Consequently, she could not develop her own *telois* and her work did not create *telois* for her (because it could only offer the value of maintenance and reproduction, or the physical survival of oneself and her family). Furthermore, monopoly capitalism did not impose *telois* because it had 'offered' or 'given' the individual a chance to pursue more opportunities and options.

### **Flexible Capitalism**

Flexible capitalism, arising in the 1980s, introduced autonomous and creative principles into the workplace which theoretically, could fix the consequences of alienated labour in general; relevantly, recall that artistic critique focuses upon meaning and sense of meaning which is similar to the *telois* and narrative of this analysis. These new features are centered on the concept of flexibility, or the ability to quickly change in relation to economic and social factors; they include the implementation of flexible employment and work schedules, decentralization of control, teamwork <sup>82</sup> and enjoyment of creative and autonomous projects.<sup>83</sup> These principles appear to encourage non-alienated work insofar as they account (to some extent) for the individual's power, performance of creativity and skill, and emphasize the importance of social relationships and cooperation. However, the inherent features of capitalism maintaining alienated work still exist, pervading these (currently) positively viewed features and breeding negative consequences; the individual is made to feel as though she should develop identity, but she cannot, constituting a deep form of disorientation. Thus, flexible capitalism produces a unique manifestation of alienation insofar as it generates a substantial rise in chronic psychological illness.

It should be understood that these specific changes to the workplace took place as a response to social critique, and more significantly, artistic critique in the late 1960s and early 1970s: “the artistic critique was to have its revenge in the second half of the 1970s, when the social critique seemed to be exhausted. This period was in fact

marked by the flowering of ‘new social movements’ (feminist, homosexual, ecological, and anti-nuclear).”<sup>85</sup> The acknowledgment of artistic concern was generated from the fact that ‘strikes and open conflicts’ possessed the potential to generate crisis by disrupting production.<sup>86</sup> For my purposes, it is most noteworthy that these concerns were taken into account and produced changes because as indicated prior, capitalism incorporates the moral concerns of those who oppose its system for its own survival and progress.<sup>87</sup> In this manner, flexible capitalism sought to reinvigorate itself by establishing new practices which appear to comply to society’s desires but actually, still serve the purpose of upholding its inherent features.

The first aspect of flexible capitalism concerns the restructuring of time; temporary employment, short-term projects, flexible work schedules<sup>88</sup> and positive assessments of adaptability and mobility.<sup>88</sup> These features remove the aspects of routine and rigidity identified with long-term commitments; they grant the individual an ability to work in dynamic scenarios for short-periods of time according to her own availability.<sup>89</sup> That said, work characterized in this manner cannot contribute positively to the development of identity. Short-term projects, framed by short-lived stability, do not create a secure environment in which the individual can develop an intelligible vision of the future. Likewise, as the past is construed as irrelevant by the need to adapt to constant, rapid changes, the individual loses a way to understand herself, partly, through her history. When the individual can only focus upon the present, she cannot see herself as a unity that incorporates meaningful goals and values, projects, and relationships with the world and others. In other words, she cannot create a stable identity or narrative; she is constantly shaken by the insecurity of the present and future: “In this state, people will turn over and over again their immediate circumstances in which they are caught, aware that something needs to be done even though they do nothing. Suspended focal attention is a traumatic reaction found in all higher animals; the rabbit’s eyes dwell on the fox’s paws.”<sup>90</sup>

Second, flexible capitalism decentralizes power in the workplace, giving control to the lower ranks of workers in organizations, by “delegitimizing hierarchy, planning, formal authority” and “reintroducing criteria of personality and the use of personal relations that had been eliminated from firms.”<sup>91</sup> One of the ways this was accomplished was by removing hierarchical control by managers and introducing coaches, leaders, and visionaries



who direct and inspire creative and autonomous teams.<sup>92</sup> Teamwork, individuals who work together to accomplish projects and make decisions, should allow for individuals to create social relationships insofar as the worker should be able to see others as being helpful and necessary to achieving goals. However, short-term commitments and quickly changing environments do not provide the stability needed to perceive other workers as necessary, rather than coincidental.<sup>93</sup> Although trust is highlighted as being an important skill regarding teamwork<sup>94</sup>, it is at best, superficially generated out of a mutual need to cooperate to accomplish the project at hand. Moreover, competition plays an important role in the flexible environment, not only generated from job availability and qualification but additionally, from the internal dynamics of the workplace. Often, in order to mobilize efficient and productive teamwork, businesses will set up competitions between teams to see who can create the best project.<sup>95</sup> Thus, there is a certain level of hostility in the social relationships: “the line between competitor and colleague becomes unclear.”<sup>96</sup>

Third, flexible capitalism emphasizes creativity in the workplace. As established previously, the individual’s ability to explore her creative skills and develop them over time is crucial to the development of identity. In other words, it allows her to know who she is and what her goals and values are. The acknowledgment of creativity and skill in the workplace is most evident at businesses such as Google. Their work principles allow individuals the freedom to passionately work upon their own projects for 20% of work-time, uphold challenging work without enforcing that individual goals are actually met, and implement the standard of flexible time while maintaining long term job commitments. Additionally, the wages and working conditions for the individual are above average. Google’s workplace is one of the best examples available in terms of providing a positive illustration of flexible capitalism (holding it is not representative of what most businesses can afford to implement in terms of dynamic or environment). However, it is not without its flaws; indeed, creative endeavours are the way in which Google can maintain its presence and growth in relation to economic and societal changes, and even create these changes itself. It limits the creativity of their employees, in the sense that their projects must fall under Google’s realms of interests: “creativity is encouraged, but only within certain predetermined and fairly rigid confines.”<sup>97</sup> Additionally, when an individual is struck with an idea or creates a project, whether in the office or at

home, Google owns it as intellectual property. Thus, in accordance with the inherent features of capitalism, companies still accumulate private property and use it as a form of control over the worker. The worker does not have control over her own creativity or skill, and the products she produces.

Moreover, it is important to note that under flexible capitalism, contexts in which the individual can engage in complete and creative work are limited. For instance, educational institutions and departments (with the exception of some disciplines) have been reformed, either completely or in particular ways, to mimic the workplace. The focus or the purpose of schoolwork is no longer to develop knowledge, self-expression, and skill but rather, to produce a quality product or grade. Furthermore, contemporary education promotes financial instability and anxiety (causing individuals to go into large amounts of debt) with only the potential of securing a career afterward (lack of security). That said, there *are* contexts in which the individual can develop valuable *telo*i and coherence; these include intimate intellectual circles and social groups. However, these groups can only be beneficial if the members engage in complete and creative projects which can cultivate understanding and meaning; they become dangerous if they only impose *telo*i (it is relatively easy to convince an individual who cannot develop her own *telo*i and coherence, is experiencing psychological and physical effects of this lack, and already engages in a system where the features that hinder her development are increasingly invisible).

The implementation of short-term commitments, insecurity of the future, the superficiality of teamwork, control of creative labour, and lack of opportunity to engage in complete and creative projects all contribute to the disoriented state of the individual. Under these conditions, the individual cannot appropriately develop her own goals or understand these goals provide unification and meaning for her projects. She, additionally, cannot recognize others' value insofar as they contribute necessarily to her own narrative. Furthermore, external control over her work is becoming more invisible due to the incorporations of critiques that seek to make the worker comfortable with following capitalism's main goal of infinite accumulation. Ultimately, the individual becomes confused because she is made to feel that the aspects of the workplace are liberating and positive to her development. Yet, she finds herself lost and devoid of meaning.

This constitution of the alienated individual is further illustrated by the unique appearance of depression after the 1950s.<sup>98</sup> Depression symbolizes a long-term lack of valuable relations between oneself and the world. It, additionally, shows that an individual has lost an ability to position herself within a narrative that is both understandable and has a purposeful, unified unfolding. Moreover, the rise in the diagnosis of identity-related mental illness from the 1950s to today is staggering enough, that a claim of increasing accessibility for diagnosis does not provide a substantial explanation: “In 1955, the government reported 1,675,352 patient care episodes, or 1,028 episodes per 100,000 population. In 2000, patient-care episodes totaled 10,741,243, or 3,806 per 100,000 population. That is, nearly a fourfold per capita increase in 50 years.”<sup>99</sup> It is noteworthy that the rise in mental illness began in monopoly capitalism and significantly increased under flexible capitalism. As analyzed, under monopoly capitalism, lower-class individuals were both unable to create *teloï* and did not have *teloï* imposed upon them. Under flexible capitalism, a lack of *teloï* development affects the majority of the working-population (and society upholds the idea that individuals have even more opportunity today than they did in prior stages of capitalism). The intensified contradiction, coupled with the distinct and severely limited ability to create *teloï*, indicates why these rates have increased dramatically.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, first, I summarize my theory explaining how work allows for the individual to identify herself as possessing a valuable set of life goals that provide coherence for her life. I, then, briefly rearticulate how capitalism’s inherent features, manifested in different workplace principles complemented by societal responses, hinders identity development.

I have argued identity is the coherent understanding of self which is to say the individual recognizes her goals and understands they provide meaning for her life actions, perceptions, and projects in a unifying manner. Identity is important for the development of psychological well-being because it allows one to develop *teloï* (meaning) and understand her life in terms of this meaning (coherence). Non-alienated work facilitates the development of identity through a process of objectification wherein the individual can recognize her abilities and energies as material expressions of herself; the final product is a representation of *who she is*. The specific

development of one's identity is made possible through those aspects that she gives to the object: maintained existence, present and future existence, creativity and skill, and cooperation.

However, the inherent features of capitalism interrupt this process of work by introducing wage-labour as exploitation, the division of labour into incomplete and repetitive tasks, and the mass accumulation of private property as a means of domination. These features maintain their existence throughout every stage of capitalism although their manifestations change over time in relation to the spirit of capitalism and critiques that arise in opposition to capitalism. Consequently, alienation changes in each stage of capitalism depending on the social positioning and conditioning of the individual.

In industrial capitalism, while the working-class individual is subject to the most apparent forms of the inherent features of capitalism (exploitation, the division of labour, and direct accumulation of private property), the individual is granted *teloi* by society and the state. As a result, she can understand this *teloi* and develop an intelligible narrative accordingly. However, the lack of personal content and creativity is evident, meaning that her identity is incomplete. In monopoly capitalism, the individual could achieve upward social mobility because education became more accessible. In her education, the individual could engage in complete and creative projects which enabled her to develop an appropriate identity. If the individual could not or did not pursue an education, she remained in a similar situation as the industrial worker only society did not impose *teloi* upon her; she could not develop meaning nor coherence, leaving her effectively identity-less. Under flexible capitalism, this form of alienation became intensified due to the increasing invisibility of the inherent features of capitalism and the incorporation of artistic critique. Thus, while the individual is made to feel as though she can flourish and develop identity, she is unable; this produces a deeper state of alienation (leading to psychological illnesses such as depression). Effectively, flexible capitalism has produced an identity crisis insofar as an increasing number of people cannot develop identity and are confused as to what precisely is hindering the ability to find meaning and coherence in life.

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